

THE CHRISTIAN.

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD."—Paul.

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The Christian.

CHRIST AND HIS PEOPLE.

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In Matt. xxv. 31-46, we have a startling and significant representation of the judgment of the world by Christ. Mankind is to be divided into two great parties: and all are to be judged and rewarded according to the attitude which they have sustained toward the followers of Christ on earth.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it, or have not done it, unto one of these my brethren," is to be the test. And according as they have done, or have not done, their duty in this respect will be their reward.

This presents a thought which is emphasized repeatedly in the Scriptures; and which is full of wholesome instruction for all who heed it. It is—The complete identity of Christ with his people. Startling as it may seem at first thought, that he who sits in the heavens, far above all rule and authority and power; crowned with glory and honor; surrounded by seraphs and worshipped by all the heavenly host, should identify himself with mortal creatures on this footstool, many of them among the humblest of earth; should make their interests his own and pledge himself to vindicate their honor before an assembled universe, yet the Scriptures give the most undoubted evidence of this fact. It grows out of the relations which Christ sustains to his people represented in so many ways in the word of God. They are his property. "Who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, etc." Tit. ii. 14. "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price, etc." 1 Cor. vi. 19-20. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Pet. i. 18-19. As the purchaser and owner of a property is supposed to have an interest in his property, so Christ has an interest in that possession which he has purchased with his own blood.

Again, Christians are represented as members of a body of which Christ is the head, and as there must be the most intimate union and sympathy between the body and its head, so the interests of the disciple are bound up with the interests of his Lord.

Again, Christ is represented as the High Priest of the Christian Profession, and as under the old economy the High Priest entered the most holy place, carrying the names of the twelve tribes engraven on his breastplate, so Christ has entered into the Holy Place not made with hands, "now to appear before the face of God for us." He has gone there "with all our names engraven on his breast;" and while he reaches out one hand to the Ruler of heaven, he

reaches out the other to the weak and oppressed of earth.

Again Christ is said to be the "Advocate" of his people before God, 1. Jno. ii. 1. Now as an advocate identifies himself with his client, and makes his client's interest his interest; so Christ identifies himself with his people and makes their interests his.

This identity of Christ with his people results naturally from what he is to them. It is also a natural consequence of what they are to him. They constitute the body that is to execute his plans. He has committed his work into their hands. While he sits in the heavens, he says to them, "go ye and preach the gospel in all the earth and to every creature." The Saviour who gave himself a ransom for sin has an abiding interest in the world's redemption. His people are his instruments in carrying out the work begun in his life and death and resurrection while here. And he who yearns over lost souls whom he died to redeem, makes himself one with those through whom he is effecting their redemption. What a blessed, comforting thought to every Christian. His Master, though unseen, is ever near. The hosts of hell may oppose his way; but the mighty power of the throne of God is behind him and he conquers in the strength of him who sits thereon.

This identity of Christ with his people suggests some important lessons which are forcibly presented in the Scripture cited at the beginning of this article and which we would do well to heed.

1. Our attitude towards the people of Christ is practically an attitude towards him. What we do to them we do to him. How forcibly this thought is emphasized in many of the recorded utterances of Christ. He said to the people concerning his disciples—"He that offends one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and that he be cast into the depths of the sea." He said to his disciples when sending them out on their first mission to the world—"He that receives you receives me, etc." and when Saul of Tarsus was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christ's followers, Christ peremptorily stopped him and demanded, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"

2. Christ esteems kindness shown to his people as shown to himself, and will reward it just as though he had himself been the object of it. When we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, minister to the sick, and relieve the distressed among the "brethren" of Christ it is as pleasing and acceptable in his sight as though he were here, hungry, and naked, and sick, and distressed, and we ministered to him.

How careful should we then be in our treatment of our Lord's children. Remember my brother when Christ's poor and afflicted ones cry out to you for help and sympathy it is as though their Master stood before you wayworn and weary and solicited your aid. You would not turn away the Saviour of the world; then don't turn away the treasures of his heart. Here are opportunities for you to treat the Master well. How many times you have wished

you had been in the woman's place at the well when the Saviour asked for a drink. How readily you would have supplied him. How often have you almost envied Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus; their privilege of extending the hospitalities of their home to the world's Redeemer. How you would throw open your best room and give him your best treatment. But have you ever powdered the Saviour's words, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these ye did it unto me?" Do you realize that the Saviour will esteem it just as highly when you befriend one of his as though it were himself? Do you know that there is as much joy for you in showing kindness to a disciple, no matter how humble; as there was for the family at Bethany in befriending the Master? And that there will be as rich a reward hereafter?

3. Our neglect of his people wounds Christ as sorely as though we neglected him in person.

"Inasmuch as ye did it, not unto one of these least ye did it not unto me." How many persons will be sadly surprised at their sentence in the great day. How many will be astonished to find that every unkindness done to Christians, on earth has been keenly felt by the Christ in heaven, and that their neglect of their brethren has cost them their crown.

4. Opposition to Christ's people is warfare against himself. They constitute the army of which he is the Captain. They are marching under his orders and behind his ensign. Their "weapons of warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Hence opposition to them is rebellion against God and Christ, and must eventually prove abortive, and meet the retribution it deserves. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh, and he who fills the throne shall finally overthrow the unrighteous opponents of his people and consign them to a merited destruction. What encouragement there is here for the people of God to fight the good fight of faith.

5. No man can ignore Christ's people and hope to be recognized and received by Christ himself. The moralist who hopes by his morality to attain to eternal life, and ignores the church and its institutions, the people of God and their work, is casting an insult in the face of him who holds eternal life in his hand and can give it to whomsoever he will. It is by this "we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." Christ has placed his people in the midst of their fellows for the grandest of all purposes. He makes known to men that his people are his dearest treasures, and he that touches them "touches the apple of his eye." And when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory and the nations of the earth shall be gathered before him, he will hold every man responsible for his attitude towards them. May we do good even to the least of these his brethren.

The bread of life is love; the salt of life is work; the sweetness of life is poverty; the water of life is faith.