



Truth, Holiness,

Liberty, Love.

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CHRIST NOT OF THE WORLD.

Jesus was not of the world; but see how he treated the world. There was one of its great ones came to him by night; and he rebuked that 'ruler of the Jews,' and censured his timidity, and disregarded his patronage, and admonished him to learn, and demanded of him manliness and consistency, if he would see the kingdom of heaven. See how he treated the world: there was one of its outcasts, who sought him not, but whose path he crossed, and whose penitence he marked, and whose soul he saved; and when she blessed him he did not frown; and when her gratitude, with trembling boldness, followed him to the rich man's table, and she anointed his feet with ointment and wiped them with her hair, amid a throng of scandalized and sneering hypocrites, he rolled back the tide of reproach and contempt with which the Pharisees thought to overwhelm him, his convert, and his cause, upon their own heads, leaving them prostrate and confounded before the insulted dignity of his pure and beneficent character.

The people sought to take him by force and make him a king. He fed their hunger, healed their sick, and retired from their solicitations to hold communion with his God in the mountain solitude. The Pharisees possessed public veneration, guided public opinion, wielded public fury. He arraigned them on their spiritual thrones, where they judged the tribes of Israel, that awful sanhedrim; he denounced their ostentatious devotions: he spoke at once of the long prayers they made, and the widows' houses they plundered; he laid bare their hidden iniquity, and he prophesied their coming destruction. He stood, defenceless and alone, before the corrupt and time-serving Pilate, the wantonly tyrannical Herod, the malignant and vindictive Caiaphas: amid a relentless priesthood, an insolent soldiery, and an infuriated multitude; alone and defenceless, but neither raging nor cringing; calm in the uncompromising majesty of innocence; and when they led him away as a lamb to the slaughter, it was evident that they were shedding the blood of 'the lamb of God.'

We may take another view of this contrast between the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ, and turn our attention from the particular facts of his history which have been cited, to the dispositions which are implied in those and other facts of the gospel narrative. Thus the mere worldling is selfish, essentially and grossly selfish, seeking only personal enjoyment or personal aggrandizement. Christ gave his life for the world, not only in the act of parting with that life, but in its previous and entire devotion to the universal good of mankind. His existence in the world was one great act of disinterested sacrifice for the world's salvation. The worldling contracts a certain callousness of heart; his feelings lose their native quickness, purity, and delicacy. In Christ there was all the tenderness and sympathy of the unsophisticated child. He evinced the acutest susceptibility of all that acts upon humanity.

The worldling has an external smoothness and polish of manners, which is but external, and but manner; too often a mask. In the manners of Christ we trace nothing conventional, nothing artificial; but that 'grace was on his lips,' and in his looks, of which art never produced more than a feeble imitation, and which is the soul of benevolence within, manifesting itself by the bodily organs; beaming or melting in the eye; softening the voice to music; giving expression to the features; and regulating every gesture by its pervading and harmonizing influence. The worldling makes men his tools. He plays upon them, and he works with them. He thinks basely of them, and basely does he use them. With Christ every human being was a holy thing, not to be profaned, not to be sported with. If they were lost, he would recover them: if polluted, he would cleanse them; if desecrated, he would sanctify them afresh to their God: but still, in all its forms, he loved and venerated humanity. The worldling partakes

of the world's impurities. If he have not walled in wickedness, not shown himself in the loathsomeness of iniquity; yet its stains are on him; the gold of his nature is become dim; he has not escaped the contagious leprosy of vice. Christ was the friend of publicans and sinners; nor did he shun the intercourse of Scribes and Pharisees; he moved among them all; but the foul atmosphere of profligacy and hypocrisy became pure when he breathed it, purified by his presence; and when he penetrated earth's foulest mists, there was a light and a glory around him which they could neither defile nor obscure. The worldling is absorbed in the things of time and sense. The invisible to him is the non-existent. His morality is, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' He walks by sight and not by faith. All his desires and hopes crawl upon the earth; none mount upwards towards heaven, none fly onwards towards futurity. But while Christ trod the earth, he lived in heaven. By devout communion and spiritual perception, he was even then in the bosom of his Father. He had meat to eat which his disciples knew not of, living not by bread alone, but on the word of God. Invisible realities were not the less realities to him; they were ever present in his mind. God, and Providence, and immortality, and heaven, rose as distinctly on his soul, as the towers of Jerusalem and the hills of Judaea on his bodily sight. They entered into all his thoughts, feelings, motives, anticipations. The visible and the unseen were to him but parts of one whole; and death and resurrection but a slumbering and an awaking, to pursue the same objects, and go on in the same course. This world was ever in his view; but how small a portion of the whole that he contemplated! God and man, time and eternity, made up the moral universe in which he lived, moved, and had his being.

DENUNCIATION AND EXCLUSION.

It is truly astonishing that Christians are not more impressed with the unbecoming spirit, the arrogant style of those who deny the Christian character to professed and exemplary followers of Jesus Christ, because they differ in opinion on some of the most subtle and difficult subjects of theology. A stranger at hearing the language of these denouncers, would conclude, without a doubt, that they were clothed with infallibility, and were appointed to sit in judgment on their brethren. But for myself, I know not a shadow of pretence for the language of superiority assumed by our adversaries. Are they exempted from the common frailty of our nature? Has God given them superior intelligence? Were they educated under circumstances more favorable to improvement than those whom they condemn? Have they brought to the Scriptures more serious, anxious, and unwearied attention? Or do their lives express a deeper reverence for God and for his Son? No. They are fallible, imperfect men, possessing no higher means, and no stronger motives for studying the word of God, than their Unitarian brethren. And yet their language to them is virtually this:—'We pronounce you to be in error, and in most dangerous error. We know that we are right, and that you are wrong, in regard to the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. You are unworthy the Christian name, and unfit to sit with us at the table of Christ. We offer you the truth, and you reject it at the peril of your souls.' Such is the language of humble Christians to men, who in capacity and apparent piety are not inferior to themselves. This language has spread from the leaders through a considerable part of the community. Men in those walks of life which leave them without leisure or opportunities for improvement, are heard to decide on the most intricate points, and to pass sentence on men whose lives have been devoted to the study of the scriptures. The female, forgetting the tenderness of her sex, and the limited advantages which her education affords for a critical study of the scriptures, inveighs with bitterness against the damnable errors of such men as Newton, Locke, Clarke and Price! The young, too, forget the mo-

desty which belongs to their age, and hurl condemnation on the head which has grown grey in the service of God and mankind. Need I ask, whether this spirit of denunciation for supposed error becomes the humble and fallible disciples of Jesus Christ?

In vindication of this system of exclusion and denunciation, it is often urged, that the 'honor of religion,' the 'purity of the Church,' and the 'cause of truth,' forbid those who hold the true gospel, to maintain fellowship with those who support corrupt and injurious opinions. Without stopping to notice the modesty of those who claim an exclusive knowledge of the true gospel, I would answer, that the 'honor of religion' can never suffer by admitting to Christian fellowship men of irreproachable lives, whilst it has suffered most severely from that narrow and uncharitable spirit which has excluded such men for imagined errors. I answer again, that 'the cause of truth' can never suffer by admitting to Christian fellowship men who honestly profess to make the scriptures their rule of faith and practice, whilst it has suffered most severely by substituting for this standard conformity to human creeds and formularies. It is truly wonderful, if excommunication for supposed error be the method of purifying the church, that the church has been so long and so woefully corrupted. Whatever may have been the deficiencies of Christians in other respects, they have certainly discovered no criminal reluctance in applying this instrument of purification. Could the thunders and lightnings of excommunication have corrected the atmosphere of the church not one pestilential vapor would have loaded it for ages. The air of Paradise would not have been more pure, more refreshing. But what does history tell us? It tells us, that the spirit of exclusion and denunciation has contributed more than all other causes to the corruption of the church, to the diffusion of error: and has rendered the records of the Christian community as black, as bloody, as revolting to humanity, as the records of empires founded on conquest and guilt.

But it is said, Did not the apostle denounce the erroneous, and pronounce a curse on the 'abettors of another gospel?' This is the strong hold of the friends of denunciation. But let us never forget, that the apostles were inspired men, capable of marking out with unerring certainty those who substituted 'another gospel' for the true. Show us their successors, and we will cheerfully obey them.

It is also important to recollect the character of those men, against whom the apostolic anathema was directed. They were men who knew distinctly what the apostles taught, and yet opposed it; and who endeavored to sow division, and to gain followers, in the churches which the apostles had planted. These men, resisting the known instructions of the authorised and inspired teachers of the gospel, and discovering a factious, selfish, mercenary spirit, were justly excluded as unworthy the Christian name. But what in common with these men have the Christians whom it is the custom of the 'Orthodox' to denounce? Do these oppose what they know to be the doctrine of Christ and his apostles? Do they not revere Jesus and his inspired messengers? Do they not dissent from their brethren simply because they believe that their brethren dissent from their Lord?—Let us not forget that the contest at the present day is not between the apostles themselves and men who oppose their known instructions, but between uninspired Christians, who equally receive the apostles as authorised teachers of the gospel, and who only differ in judgment as to the interpretations of their writings. How unjust, then, is it for any class of Christians, to confound their opponents with the factious and unprincipled sectarians of the primitive age. Mistake in judgment is the heaviest charge which one denomination has now a right to urge against another; and do we find that the apostles ever denounced mistake as 'awful and fatal hostility' to the gospel, that they pronounced anathemas on men who wished to obey, but who misapprehended their doctrines? The apostles well remembered that none ever mistook more widely than themselves. They remembered, too, the lenity of their Lord towards their errors, and this lenity they cherished and labored to diffuse.

But it is asked, Have not Christians a right to bear 'solemn testimony' against opinions which are 'utterly subversive of the gospel, and most dangerous to men's eternal interests?' To this I answer, that the opinions of men, who discover equal intelligence and piety with ourselves, are entitled to respectful consideration. If after inquiry they seem erroneous and injurious, we are authorised and bound, according to our ability, to expose, by fair and serious argument, their nature and tendency. But I maintain, that we have no right as individuals, or in any associated capacity, to bear our 'solemn testimony' against these opinions, by menacing with ruin the Christian who listens to them, or by branding them with the most terrifying epithets, for the purpose of preventing candid inquiry into their truth. This is the fashionable mode of 'bearing testimony,' and it is a weapon which will always be most successful in the hands of the proud, the positive, and overbearing, who are most impatient of contradiction, and have least regard to the rights of their brethren.

But whatever may be the right of Christians, as to bearing testimony against opinions which they deem injurious, I deny that they have any right to pass a condemning sentence, on account of these opinions, on the characters of men whose general deportment is conformed to the gospel of Christ. Both scripture and reason unite in teaching, that the best and only standard of character is the life; and he who overlooks the testimony of a Christian life, and grounds a sentence of condemnation on opinions, about which he as well as his brother may err, violates most flagrantly the duty of just and candid judgment, and opposes the peaceful and charitable spirit of the gospel. Jesus Christ says, 'by their fruits shall ye know them.' 'Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.' 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' 'He that heareth and doeth these my sayings,' i. e. the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, 'I will liken him to a man who built his house upon a rock.' It would be easy to multiply similar passages. The whole scriptures teach us, that he and he only is a Christian, whose life is governed by the precepts of the gospel, and that by this standard alone, the profession of this religion should be tried. We do not deny that our brethren have a right to form a judgment as to our Christian character. But we insist that we have a right to be judged by the fairest, the most approved, and the most settled rules, by which character can be tried; and when these are overlooked, and the most uncertain standard is applied, we are injured; and an assault on character, which rests on this ground, deserves no better name than defamation and persecution.—Dr. Channing.

A WORD AGAINST SCEPTICISM.

Because God is in some respects incomprehensible, do not suppose that he is in no others to be understood. Because you know not every thing, do not think that you know nothing respecting him. Because every thing cannot be explained, do not thence infer that nothing is to be believed; and because you cannot always describe the mode, you must not therefore deny the fact. Nothing would be more unwise or unjustifiable.

I am utterly unable to comprehend the eternal duration, the universal agency and the unlimited presence of God: The facts themselves I acknowledge: They are truths, which are susceptible of the strongest proof: My reason, my experience, the history of every age, the progress of every day and hour, every event and every object around me combine to declare and enforce them: I carry within myself an indelible record: The frame of my body and the powers of my mind indicate the existence, and display the agency and providence of God: They are depicted on the face of creation with a pencil of light: But the modes of the divine existence, or agency, or providence I confess myself unable to apprehend or explain. To do that would require universal knowledge and a capacity commensurate with the infinite subject: my