

The Christian.

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EDITORIAL.

A WARNING AND AN EXHORTATION.

"Beware, lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." II. Peter, iii. 17, 18.

This true ambassador who had with the keys of Christ opened his kingdom, or church, first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, manifested in this, his farewell address, a deep anxiety that all who were in the church on earth should be kept from falling and gain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of the Saviour. He well knew that the way to that kingdom lay through much tribulation, that many opposing obstacles blocked the way, and hence this faithful warning and urgent exhortation. Let us consider *First*, The warning; *Second*, The exhortation.

1st. The warning. Beware, lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked fall, etc. The error of the wicked, embraces numerous mistakes. Two of these are especially treated in this chapter. One is the scoffing denial of the Lord's coming. The other is the *wresting* of what Paul said on that subject, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction. *Denying* and *wresting* important truths are the two fatal mistakes here pointed out as dangerous in contact and ruinous in result. (a) Scoffers walking after their own lusts are not the persons who love the appearing of Christ, nor the ones who will with Paul be crowned by the Lord, the righteous Judge, when he appears. Jesus says of the man left to watch for his Lord to come, "He began to unite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken, and to say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming." But what he dreaded and denied came suddenly upon him. One of the most precious promises Jesus made to his disciples is that he will come again to receive them to himself. But the selfish scoffer hates his coming, and will try to persuade Christians that he is not coming, which they cannot accept without falling from their own steadfastness. If Jesus will not come, all is lost. So the apostle says to all Christians, "Beware of all such scoffing teachers." (b) The other errorist here mentioned is the *wresting* teacher. The former denies the scriptures to suit his purpose, the other with equal danger twists or wrests the scriptures to suit his purpose. Although he may claim superior knowledge as the reason of such teaching, and others may applaud him and feed his vanity, yet it proves him unlearned and unstable, as well as suicidal. Who can tell all the speculations that have been introduced in connection with the Lord's second coming? Although he has positively told us that neither man nor angel knows that day, and insists that on that very account his servants shall watch for his coming as a man watches for a thief who comes at an unknown hour at night to rob his house, yet in the face of it all, time after time, men step out and declare that they do know the year and day, and denounce as the very enemies of Christ all who will not accept their testimony. How do they prove their doctrine? Simply by *wresting* the scriptures.

How much talk and vain jangling has arisen about Abraham and his fleshly seed being raised at the coming of Christ to inherit the land of Palestine, plant vineyards and eat their fruit, and rise to greater glory than that enjoyed under the reign of David and Solomon? All this and a hundred speculations are taught under the mistaken idea that they are Bible

teaching, and to reject them is to deny the scriptures, and so they wrest them.

Peter does not even hint that Paul, as a writer, is hard to be understood. Paul was a most logical and clear writer. But Paul's writing on the Lord's coming had things in it hard to be understood. Why so? Because it was *PROPHECY*. When the inspired prophets spoke before of the (first) coming of Christ, they were anxious to know what time the spirit in them meant, but were informed that they wrote for those who should live when these things would be fulfilled. Instead of explaining or even understanding their own prophecy, they were taught to wait till men would see them fulfilled, and be thereby convinced of the glorious wisdom and knowledge of God (I. Pet. i. 10, 11, 12). Although the Jewish prophets were thus taught the proper use of prophecy, the scribes and doctors of the law wrested the scriptures. They claimed to understand all about these prophecies, but were the first to reject the Messiah when he came down and remained with his most determined enemies, because the fulfilment of these prophecies was so entirely different from what they expected. No wonder that Peter so earnestly warned us against those who wrest the prophecy respecting Christ's second coming, or that Paul so constantly charged Timothy to avoid foolish and unlearned questions that do gender strife rather than godly edifying. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it was the power of God unto salvation, but these speculative questions have neither godly life or power. Like the Spartan's wooden man, which he could get neither to walk nor stand, they "lack the principle within." While the Christian is to shun the error of the wicked, as he would the certain road to ruin, he is not to remain inactive. But is

2nd. To grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. A Christian is a new creature born of God, who has forgiven him all trespasses. He bears the image of Christ and is to grow more and more like Christ in his nature and whole life. This exhortation is fitted to awaken a whole cluster of blessed emotions. Can it be, asks the Christian, that I, an heir of wrath and ruin, am saved from it all by the blood of his cross and stand united to Jesus? Am I exhorted to cleave closer to him and to enjoy a constantly increasing measure of his favor?

After Judas had gone out to betray the Saviour, and he and the eleven were left alone, the welled up feelings of his heart seemed to find a gushing outlet, which makes the 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th chapters of John a rich banquet house for his earnest disciples in all ages. Here he tells them that he was about to change worlds, but would never leave them—that every change of his would improve their condition. Tells them that their relation to him was that of the branch of the vine, that his life was their life, his love their enjoyment, and that by obedience to him they would abide in his love, as he had abode by obedience to his Father in his love.

He shows that every branch in him that bears fruit his Father purges to increase the fruit, but he takes away every fruitless branch. To abide in Christ means to grow in grace and bear the fruits of righteousness. Such the Father purifies and prepares for increasing usefulness. It is well that the commands of Christ are not grievous, for in keeping of them there is great reward. He who keeps them abides in his love, and shall finally enter through the gates into the city of God. (John xv. 10. Rev. xxii. 14).

Jesus says, "A new commandment I give unto you—THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER." He attaches such importance to this, his new commandment, that it is ever to stand in the centre as a sun, around which all his other command-

ments revolve. This is patent to every careful reader of those chapters. As the Father loved Jesus, so Jesus loves his disciples; and as Jesus loved his disciples, so they are to love one another. (John xv. 9, 12). How rich is the love that has its model in and is kindled by such a divine flame! Jesus prays for its fulfilment. (John xvii. 26).

When the children of God love one another, the new commandment is fulfilled and Jesus' earnest prayer answered. All men know them to be the disciples of Christ. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another (John xiii. 35) and the gospel they preach will bring many to Christ." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. (I. John ii. 10 and iii. 14). The same apostle shows the terrible state of him who hates his brother. He is in darkness, abides in death. He is a murderer, etc., etc. When he says he loves God, he is a liar, for how can he who loves not his brother, whom he has seen, love God, whom he has not seen?

If Christ and his apostles have made that new commandment so essential to our happiness and growth in grace, he who was a murderer from the beginning will ever go about to oppose it, and combine his malice and skill to stir up unkind feeling among Christ's disciples. We all have our imperfections, and if the great enemy can keep these out of our sight and magnify the imperfections of our brethren and keep them before us and hide their virtues, he will gain his murderous ends. How much better to reverse this order and defeat our enemy. To think of our own faults and by God's grace overcome them. To think of the good qualities of our brethren, to encourage what is good in them, to pray for them and help them, also to overcome through the blood of the Lamb. May the Lord help us all to study more faithfully the dear Saviour's new commandment and to heartily respond, "Let brotherly love continue."

Original Contributions.

OPEN LETTER.

NO. IV.

"Should a person be allowed to hold church membership who will not devote a portion of his income to the support of the gospel?" This is a hard question, viewing it from the standpoint of modern church life; but not so hard perhaps, from a scriptural stand-point. Bro. McGarvey was asked this question, and he said: "That such persons should not be allowed fellowship, unless they were ignorant of what the Bible taught on the subject, and if so, they should be taught their duty, and if they refused to be taught, they should be dealt with the same as any other wilfully disobedient person." We are aware, however, that the impression is so settled on the minds of many, that giving is no part of Christianity, that the scriptures bearing on the subject seem to have very little weight with them. It is very hard for the mind to get out of the rut of well established pre-conceived notions; and this is more especially true when it touches this question of finance. We know there are devoted spiritual minded people, who are honest in their convictions, who think that the subject of giving should not be mentioned in connection with Christianity, that it is as foreign to the subject as the house in which we worship. We suppose it is because of this false impression on the minds of so many, that we strike a begging attitude when we are soliciting funds for some Christian work, and set before our would-be donors,