

[R931 : page 4]

HE REASONED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, TEMPERANCE AND JUDGMENT TO COME.

(Acts 24:25.)

It was not often that Paul turned aside from what he considered the work of first importance – viz., the care and teaching of the church – to exhort those of the world to righteousness and temperance. But whenever a favorable opportunity offered, to instruct those of the world without interfering with his *special* work, Paul was quick to see and to improve it, and did it with all the fervor of his earnest soul. The rule which he gave to us – "Do good unto all men *as you have opportunity*, ESPECIALLY to the household of faith" – he strictly observed in his own course. His care and labor *for the church* were constant and untiring, literally wearing out his life.

Seeing the breadth and scope of God's plan, Paul realized that the church developed during this age, is to be the instrumentality for the conversion and blessing of the world in the next age, and that therefore the great and all-important work of the present time is the teaching, training and developing of the *meek* of the earth, who gladly receive the truth and constitute [R932 : page 4] the church of God. It was this same knowledge of the order and arrangement of God's great plan of the ages, which enabled our Lord to devote his attention almost entirely to *the meek*, to whom he said he was called to preach. (Luke 4:18.) Though he loved the balance of the world still enveloped in darkness and steeped in sin, he also knew that his Father so loved the world, while they were yet sinners, as to devise a plan broad enough to bless every son and daughter of Adam with a full opportunity to regain the right and title to everlasting life, in his own due time.

Both Paul and Jesus worked in harmony with that plan, and the results of the labors of each during his lifetime looked small. Jesus had gathered about him and spent the greater part of his time, in instructing

a few disciples, all of whom forsook him and fled in the hour of his sorest trial. And Paul's labors for the church were often misunderstood even by those for whom he was sacrificing every earthly good. And so with the labors of all the [R932 : page 5] saints: the glorious fruitage of their sacrifice and toil will only be manifested, when the rich harvests of both the Gospel and Millennial ages have been gathered in.

But we want here to notice particularly Paul's preaching to Felix, a Roman Governor before whom he stood to be judged. Felix was not a Christian in any sense and therefore Paul had nothing to say of the Christian's higher hopes and privileges, nor did he even present the foundation truth of the gospel – Redemption through the crucified Christ. For none of these things was Felix yet prepared. Paul realized this, and concluded to give only such truths as he was prepared to understand and appreciate. There was no attempt on this or any other occasion to scare the unbeliever with threats of eternal torment, if he did not embrace the doctrine of Christianity; for this was not true. This base blasphemy against God found no place in the theology of Paul's day; he knew nothing about it.

Paul took the most sensible and proper course with Felix. He took his standpoint of observation, and showed how even from his standpoint righteousness and temperance was the wisest course for any man to pursue. He took what truth Felix already admitted and showed the reasonable deductions which should be drawn therefrom by every *thinking* man. For instance, any man, whether he believes in Christ or not, unless he is a fool (Psa. 14:1), which probably Felix was not, believes there is a God, wise and good and powerful, the Creator of all things. This much nature alone teaches. And if this be true it follows that he is the rightful Sovereign over all his works, and that all beings are subject to his control. These being the plain inferences even from the light of nature, it follows that at some time, God will call men to account for their present course of action; and a *righteous God* will surely punish evil deeds. And therefore righteousness, and temperance

in all things, at the present time, is the wisest course even if the future be but very vaguely and indefinitely seen.

But Paul had something more than mere reasonings from the light of nature on this subject: he had positive proof of a coming judgment, when all of the wrongs of the present time must be accounted for and righted, and fearful, he knew, would be the penalty of those who heaped iniquity upon iniquity and added crime to crime; for every man must receive a *just recompence* of reward for his deeds, whether they be good or evil.

Paul was acquainted with God's plan and spoke as one who understood it, and who had full faith in it. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good."

