

THE OFFICE OF REASON IN THE FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER AND FAITH.

IN these days, when rampant Infidelity and stolid Conservatism are each striving for the mastery among professed Christians, it would be well for all to carefully observe the divinely appointed metes and bounds of human reason, especially in its relationship to divine truth.

The reason is the noblest faculty of the human mind. It is the prominent mark of the divine likeness in humanity: it is this which gives to man his superiority over the brute creation: it is this which makes him a creature worthy of eternal life: it is this which also makes him capable of communion with God, and capable of knowing and loving and serving him. "Come, let us reason together," says the Lord, because we are thus created in his own likeness.

To ignore or depreciate the human reason is, therefore, to greatly undervalue God's gift – our greatest blessing and highest endowment. That God would not have us do so is very manifest from his constant appeals to the human reason in the presentation of his truth. Divine truth is set before us as a complete and philosophical system, consistent with itself and with the divine character in every element and feature; and when God would reveal it to his people, he inspired his specially chosen and prepared Apostle (Paul – Gal. 1:15; Acts 9:15) to present it to us with all the power and force of logical deduction, so that our faith in his plan might be a *reasonable faith*, and that we might be able to give to our fellow-men a *reason* for the hope that is in us.

The Apostle Paul, it will be noticed, was an acute logician. From the text books of the law and the prophets, and the histories of God's typical people, Israel; and from the teachings and the life and death of Christ, and the special revelations made to himself as an apostle, he reasons out the whole plan of redemption, and shows how, step by step, its various features logically follow. He points to the original perfection of man and to his fall into sin; and shows how, by the law of heredity, all the race were involved in the fall and in the sentence. (1 Cor. 15:21,22; Rom. 5:17-19.) He then vindicates the justice and wisdom of God in instituting such a law for the propagation of the race as would involve all in the Adamic fall and penalty and all the present distresses, pointing out the final and glorious outcome by means of the redemption of all by the one offering of Christ, and the wisdom whereby the blessed results of redemption and restitution are secured for all. – Rom. 11:32,33.

He shows how necessary was the death of Christ to this grand scheme of salvation. (Heb. 9:15-28), and, by logical deductions, how far-reaching will be its results (1 Tim. 2:3-6); and how, on philosophical principles, those results are as sure to follow that cause as the results of mathematical propositions follow their antecedents. (Rom. 3:10,21-26,29. See also 1 John 1:9.) Then he forestalls any charge of injustice on God's part in permitting the **[R1566 : page 247]** sacrifice of his Son, by pointing to the fact that the Son of God undertook the heavy task of his own free will, and "*for the joy set before him*" by the Father, who in consequence highly exalted and abundantly rewarded him. – Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:9.

He then sets forth the high calling of the Gospel Church, to follow in the Lord's footsteps of humiliation and sacrifice, with the prize in view of being joint-heirs of his glorious inheritance. (1 Cor. 1:26,27; 2 Tim. 2:11,12; Rom. 8:17.) He shows that their consecration to the Lord's service is "reasonable" (Rom. 12:1),

and how the glorious end will more than compensate for the present comparatively "light afflictions." (2 Cor. 4:17.) Thus reason is continually appealed to and satisfied with reference to divine truth; and law and prophecy and type and history are all brought forward to minister to the same end; for, for this very purpose they were given – that in due time for the instruction of the Church, all should bear their parts in confirming the faith of God's elect, the bride of his dear Son.

Thus we see that the faith which God expects [R1566 : page 248] his people to exercise is a *reasonable* faith: it is drawn by logical deductions from established premises, and there is no cause for uncertainty or superstition in it. It is a reasonable confidence in that which God has done, or offered, or promised, backed by a knowledge of his general character and grand plan, which inspires a full reliance upon his promised providence and leading, even when our short-sighted judgment cannot trace all his doings.

It is further noteworthy that when the Lord Jesus opened his mouth in parables and dark sayings, and even when he gave a special revelation to his Church in strange and difficult symbols, he left it for reason to discern their deep significance, when in due time they should be made manifest.

Thus we see how the Lord honors the human reason, and that while it is true that without *faith* we cannot please God, it is none the less true that without *reason* we cannot please him. Jesus expected his disciples to draw the reasonable inference from his parables, and on one occasion, when they asked for the interpretation, he reprovably inquired, "And how then will ye know [understand] all parables?" (Mark 4:13.) And to some of the Jews who accused him of performing his miracles by the power of the devil, instead of by the power of God, which was so manifest in their good and benevolent character, he administered

a severe rebuke for so unreasonable and therefore unjustifiable a conclusion. (Matt. 12:24-34.) Again says the Lord by the mouth of the Psalmist (Psa. 32:8,9), "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will counsel thee; mine eye shall be upon thee. [But] be ye not as the horse or as the mule, ***which have no understanding***, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle," – *i.e.* God would have his reasoning creatures serve intelligently and without force.

Since God thus honors the human reason, this likeness to himself which he has bestowed upon his human creatures, who are we that we should despise it, ignore it, or degrade it, or teach others to do so? Rather let us give it its appointed place, and thus honor our Maker; for we are awe-fully and wonderfully made (Psa. 139:14): we are noble creatures, in the image of our God, except as marred by sin. We cannot, therefore, despise or degrade these human faculties without dishonoring our Maker, whose workmanship we are, or were originally, the defects resulting from the fall being no part of his work, but a marring of it.

But while we honor the human reason as the workmanship of God, and recognize its present nobility and use, as did the Lord, even under the circumstances of our present lapsed condition, we show a great lack of both wisdom and humility if we do not recognize the manifest limitations of human reason; that it can only exercise its power within the range of human perception and conception, and that though it is an image of one of the attributes of God, it is of necessity vastly inferior in scope and power to his reason. This would be the reasonable inference of the creature in comparing himself with his Maker; but, in addition to this reasonable inference, we have the Lord's own statement – "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." – Isa. 55:9.

In view, therefore, of this superiority of the Creator over the creature, and also of the filial reverence and subserviency we owe to him as our benevolent and loving Father, it is right that we should always hold the deductions of our reason in abeyance to God's superior wisdom, as he may reveal it. Especially is this our proper attitude in our fallen condition, when we remember that all our faculties have suffered a decline of power.

In failing to recognize this limitation and subserviency of the human reason to the divine, many have gone to an opposite extreme of error from that of ignoring the human reason, to that of unduly glorifying it. The former error tends to superstition, and places its subjects at the mercy of the adversary's many deceptions, while the latter tends to egotism, pride and infidelity. A large class of the professed children of God are bound by the former error, and an increasingly large number are rapidly drifting to the latter extreme; among them **[R1566 : page 249]** recently some of the most prominent of the clergy of all branches of the nominal church.

This error, however, is the inevitable reaction which always follows in the wake of the error of ignoring reason. Thus, for instance, in France, when reason, long fettered by Papacy, had given place to wide-spread superstition, and superstition had reigned until its absurdities became palpable, a terrible reaction followed, in the French Revolution, which shook the domains of superstition from center to circumference, and led to an extreme glorification of the fallen human reason under the control of ignoble and selfish principles, finally enthroning a profligate woman as the Goddess of Reason and producing a reign of terror. Infidelity soon stamped out the hated superstitions with which the people had been surfeited, and with it reverence for God and religion. Poor human reason soon lost its balance; and insane results followed, when it forgot to recognize the superiority of the divine and to submit thereto.

The trend of the present times is in the same direction: the reaction from a state of lethargy and of blind superstitious reverence for religious teachers and their teachings, and for the Word of God from which all the various conflicting creeds of "Christendom" claim to emanate, has commenced, and is making rapid headway toward open and world-wide infidelity. The reason, so long divorced from faith, has come to be regarded as a separate and antagonistic element. And, vice versa, faith is regarded as antagonistic to reason. Many devout souls are striving to hold on to their blind faith, and to silence the protests of their reason against it, while others – a constantly increasing number – awakened to a sense of the absurdities of their professed faith, cast it away entire, and determine to follow reason. They then set about laying down certain principles which seem to them reasonable, and make these their standards in judging every thing, even the Word of God not excepted.

Miracles, say they, are absurd and unreasonable: therefore we cannot accept the miracles of the Bible as true. Prophecy, they regard as merely human judgment forecasting the future, sometimes correctly and sometimes erroneously. The Law of Moses, they esteem merely as the culmination of the human wisdom of that time, gained in the school of past experience. The teachings of the apostles, they regard as the counsel of well-intentioned men, to be heeded only in so far as seems to them reasonable. The doctrine of the atonement, through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, which the various creeds have taught, they regard as absurd and unreasonable, and therefore reject it. The doctrines of the fall of man, and of the necessity for an atonement, they reject as incompatible with their, to them, more reasonable theory of evolution; and so they proceed through the entire volume of the sacred Scriptures, expunging from it everything for which their untutored and short-sighted reason cannot account. And since the spiritual things therein revealed cannot be understood by those who have not the mind of the Spirit of God,

it is manifest that their inability to grasp and reasonably comprehend the deep things of God is an evidence, not of the unreasonableness of divine truth, but of the lack of the power to comprehend its reasonableness. Thus do these blind leaders of the blind arrogantly exalt human reason above the divine wisdom set forth in the Word of God.

Thus these two extremes, of underrating and of overrating human reason, are seen to be fraught with evil consequences – with the loss of the truth, of the divine favor, and of the blessings which can reach us only through the channels of inspired truth. Let us, therefore, heed well the counsel of the holy Scriptures on these two extremes – "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle;" but, "I [Paul] say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly." "See, then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." (Psa. 32:9; Rom. 12:3; Eph. 5:15.) The truth of God, when clearly understood, is seen to be in accord with the highest development of human reason; but let us not forget that human reason cannot attain full development except under [R1566 : page 250] the divine instruction; and only the meek can receive such instruction and be truly wise; [R1567 : page 250] and it is these wise that the Prophet Daniel said should understand. (Dan. 12:10.) Human reasoning which fails to recognize the metes and bounds of divine revelation is earthly, selfish, and eventually devilish, leading to envy, strife, confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above, that reasons on the basis of a proved divine revelation, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. – Jas. 3:15-17.
