

"WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?"

"For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." – 2 Cor. 2:15-17.

THIS ministry, which all the consecrated, as ambassadors for Christ, have received, is one of tremendous import. It greatly influences the final destiny of those to whom we preach this gospel of the Kingdom, the tendency being either to life or to death. The Apostle's language here is another of the solemn warnings of the inspired Word against the danger of the second death, and should wake up any who have been deluded into the idea that there is no such possibility, to a sense of their danger in permitting the great adversary to thus deceive them. There is an equal responsibility on the part both of those who undertake to preach the gospel and of those who hear it. The truth is God's truth, and the responsibility both of speaking and of hearing it is very great.

The Apostle's words show that many in his day, as in ours, failed to realize this responsibility, and, to answer their own selfish ends, corrupted the Word of God. To wilfully or recklessly corrupt the Word of God – to vitiate its pure and holy doctrines; to add to it the vain philosophies of ambitious men and seek to support their theories by perverting its truths; to underrate its exceeding great and precious promises and mystify the conditions upon which they may be realized; or to minimize or make void the solemn warnings of the Word of God – is indeed dangerous business, in which the faithful saints will never engage, but in

which those who fall away from the faith are usually most active – deceiving and being deceived.

To be faithful ambassadors for Christ – faithful representatives of the truth and faithful proclaimers of it – requires great humility and simplicity of heart. It necessitates the complete ignoring of all worldly ambitions and aims, and the cultivation of a brave spirit of endurance which will not shrink from any reproach which fidelity to the truth may bring. And such service, the Apostle here shows, is acceptable to God as sweet incense, no matter what may be the effect upon those to whom we minister, whether they accept or reject the message of divine grace. What God is looking for in us is loyalty to him and devotion to his cause; and this condition of heart he appreciates, regardless of our success or failure to secure large results. What a comfort it is amidst all discouragements to know that under all circumstances the spirit of Christ in us is as **[R1585 : page 298]** sweet incense to God. And the reward of his constant approval is richer than all the unwholesome sweets of ambition gained by corrupting the Word of God.

To the hearer of this gospel, the message must prove either a savor of life unto (or tending to) life, or a savor of death unto (or tending to) death. His responsibility is great: there is no neutral ground; he either receives it or rejects it. But observe that the statement is not that the rejection of any item of truth inevitably dooms the rejector to death, and vice versa, but that the *tendency* of such a course is to death, and of the opposite course to life, unless interrupted – changed.

Thus, for instance, the Lord, in reproving the Scribes and Pharisees, who rejected the gospel and yet claimed to be the children of God and leaders and examples of godliness to others, significantly inquired, "How can ye escape the condemnation of gehenna" – the everlasting destruction, the second death? (Matt.

23:33.) In rejecting the truth so plainly brought to their attention, and in pursuing the hypocritical course of claiming to be faithful and devoted children of God, they were forming and establishing such characters that, ere long, repentance would be impossible to them. Few, perhaps, clearly realize how serious a thing it is to be making character, and that every act and every thought leaves its impress upon the soul. Every right thought and act tends to establish the character in righteousness, while every wrong thought and act, and every self-deception tends to confirm and establish an unrighteous character. And when a wrong course is adopted and persistently followed – when conscience is stifled, and when reason and Scripture are perverted to selfish ends, until the heart is deceived and the judgment is overcome – who can predict the repentance of such a one?

Such construct characters or wills so out of harmony with God and righteousness as to be fit only for destruction. (Heb. 6:4-6.) How can such "escape the condemnation of Gehenna"? for God will not permit any one to live whose will is confirmed in unrighteousness. How responsible then is the position of those who are building character in themselves and in others! Remember that our characters are manifested by our habits of life; and each act, even the smallest, tends to form some new habit, or to confirm one already established. How important, then, that our thoughts and actions should not be aimless, but with a purpose (1 Cor. 10:31); and, above all, that our lives should be "transformed [re-formed] by the renewing of our minds;" that, putting aside the evil, and all influences which tend toward evil, we should receive of the Lord, through his Word, the "spirit of a sound mind," the "mind of Christ." In this view of the case, it is indeed a solemn thing to live, a solemn thing to think, and to act; and it behooves us to guard well our words, our thoughts and our actions, and to ever bear in mind our responsibility to God, both for ourselves and for others as ambassadors for Christ.

"And who is sufficient for these things?" Surely none of us in our own strength. We need first of all to give ourselves to the Lord without reserve, and then daily to drink in more and more of his spirit by communion with him through his Word and in prayer; and constantly to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

Let all the consecrated endeavor more and more to realize their responsibility, both in the matter of their own character-building and also in that of building up others in the most holy faith and in the character which is the legitimate result of that faith. The issues of eternal life and eternal death are before us, and before those to whom we present this gospel; and therefore it behooves us carefully and prayerfully to present the pure truth of God in all sincerity and in the spirit of Christ before God, ever bearing in mind that it is a savor either of life unto life or of death unto death.

"Grant skill each sacred theme to trace,
With loving voice and glowing tongue,
As when upon thy words of grace
The wondering crowds enraptured hung.

"Give strength, blest Savior, in thy might;
Illuminate our hearts, and we,
Transformed into thine image bright,
Shall teach, and love, and live, like thee."
