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THE CONTRAST OF HUMAN PERFECTION AND HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

"And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, 'They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.' And sitting down they watched him there." – Matt. 27:35,36.

HERE, in marked contrast, are seen the glory of moral perfection and the depth of human depravity. Here was the most sublime heroism, the most perfect self-abnegation, the most exalted benevolence, and the most devoted loyalty, in contrast with the vilest hypocrisy, the most cold-blooded hate, and the most abject cowardice. The meanest, vilest selfishness, pride and conceit delivered to ignominy and death the fairest flower of virtue that ever bloomed on earth, and wicked hands and fiendish hearts executed the dark designs of envy and hate, taking a morbid pleasure in the dying agonies of the Son of God, while he, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, opened not his mouth in self-defence, but meekly submitted to the terrible ordeal of suffering and death for the world of sinners, none of whom could then appreciate and understand his motives or his work. Truly, the contrast [R1964 : page 82] of such virtue, in comparison with such depravity, encircles the Cross of Christ with a halo of ineffable glory, the broken rays of which, falling upon us, express to us all there is of moral excellence and worth.

In the apprehension, arraignment and crucifixion of Christ three classes of criminals come to view. First, there were those who, *for envy*, delivered him to death. They were the proud, boastful, self-righteous hypocrites, who, realizing their own inferiority, and aware of their own unfitness to be the leaders and saviors of the people, yet so anxiously craved the honors and praises of men and the emoluments of office that they could not brook the appearance of a rival of superior talents and ability. These hated the Lord without a cause, save that which originated in their own depravity. These, the mighty men of the

Jewish nation, the rulers and religious teachers, the educated men of the nation, the expounders of the law of God, and the interpreters of the prophets, – these wickedly took counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed; and in their counsels among themselves they acknowledged the superiority of the victim of their hate and expressed the real animus of it – their envy of his rising fame and influence among the people, which tended to their own speedy displacement.

Second, there were those cringing, hireling menials, too basely selfish to spurn a bribe, or to appreciate a principle, [R1964 : page 83] and who are ever willing to sacrifice principle for a trifle of present advantage or gratification. Of this class was Judas, who sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and also all of that infuriated mob which, incited by the priests, cried "Away with him! Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar! His blood be upon us and upon our children!" Judas loved the money, and these loved the approval of the priests and rulers, and wanted to be on the popular side. How mean the bribe, how base the crime!

Third, there were those cold-blooded, cruel servants of the Roman state who, presuming to have no responsibility in the matter, cared nothing for the honor of justice or the vindication of right. It was their business to execute the mandates of their superiors, and they must do so at their own peril. Looking to their own interests, therefore, it was their *business* to drive the nails through the quivering flesh and to plant the thorny crown upon the victim's head. It was an awful business, but they were schooled to it, so that the groans of anguish failed to reach their hearts. So, regarding the horrid transaction in the light of *business*, they thought only of their booty, and, with frigid indifference, sat down and watched the agony of the Lord, while they cast lots upon his vesture. And some even endeavored to add to the sufferings by cruel taunts and fiendish exultation.

How strange it seems that humanity, originally in the likeness of God, can sink so low! and yet it is all too true. The depth of depravity

to which an intelligent being can sink can be measured only by the height of the original perfection and glory. Satan fell from a great height to a corresponding depth, and so likewise man falls to the very depths of iniquity, unless he repent and be converted from the error of his way, and voluntarily submit to the healing influences of divine grace. Sin, with accelerating speed, ever tends downward to more and more vile conditions, until it ends in the shipwreck of everything that is noble and pure; and "sin when it is finished bringeth forth death."

As we look at the various manifestations of wickedness on the part of those who crucified the Lord, it is a sad comment upon human depravity to notice that the very same elements have been in the world ever since; and alas! are present still. And the special victims of their hate have been, and still are, the meek of the earth, who have taken up their cross to follow in the footprints of the crucified One – the body of Christ which fills up the measure of his sufferings. (Col. 1:24.) All through the age there have been those anxious to deliver them to death, who, for envy, hypocritically assumed to be the representatives of God to condemn them, and to seek them out, and hunt them down, and kill their influence, and deliver them over to be crucified. This is the *Pharisaical class* – the class represented by the chief priests, the scribes and Pharisees. There has also always been the hireling class, ready to sell their services to such leaders for the paltry bribes they have to offer – for the favor of their leaders, for the convenience of being on the popular side, or for a trifle of financial or social advantage. This is the *Judas class* – a class which, like Judas and like the priests and scribes and Pharisees, know, and secretly recognize, the truth and righteousness exemplified in the body of Christ, yet who nevertheless dislike them, hate them, and are ever willing to make merchandise of them, – to deliver them over to scorn and contempt, if not, as in former times, to prison and to death, for the mean advantage of popular favor.

Then there are still the cruel *cold-blooded menials* who, with complacency and indifference, and yet with curiosity, sit down and watch the sufferings of the body, and wonder what will happen next.

They are surprised and puzzled by the fortitude which daily takes up the cross and follows after Christ; they cannot understand the motives that inspire it; they have no faith in the rewards to which the consecrated look, and they curiously watch them to see if, perchance, their God will interpose and deliver them. And when they see no miraculous interposition in their behalf, but that instead they bear the cross to the bitter end of sacrifice, they regard them, like their Head, as "smitten of God and afflicted," and to the sufferings are added their reproaches. And so every member of the anointed body can say with the Head, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."

The important concern to all who are thus suffering with Christ in any measure is that they bear it with the same humility, benevolence and fortitude that characterized him under the most crucial tests of endurance. He was not surprised by the exhibitions of human depravity: he knew that he was in an unfriendly world bound by sin and largely under the dominion of the prince of darkness, and therefore he expected reproaches, taunts and persecutions, all of which he endured patiently while his great loving heart, almost unmindful of its own sufferings, was full of pity and of loving concern for others. Have we indeed so much of the Master's spirit that we can thus suffer with Christ, meekly bearing reproach and trusting to heaven's vindication of us in due time? "If when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Therefore let us "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be wearied and faint in our minds." (1 Pet. 2:20-23; Heb. 12:3.) And let us also see to it that we bear the reproaches of Christ as he bore them, – with pity and prayer for the erring and depraved, if perchance God may grant unto them repentance; and with humble fortitude esteeming it a privilege to prove our devotion to the

Lord by enduring hardness in his service as good soldiers. [R1964 : page 84]

But what shall we say of those who hate the Lord's body without a cause, who for envy deliver them to persecution and death, or of those who for bribes betray the innocent, or of those who, with frigid indifference, but curious interest, calmly watch the sufferings of the body, as the Roman soldiers did of the Head, saying, "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him?" "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united." Their way is the way of death. When the noble spectacle of loyalty to God, to truth and righteousness, and of Christian fortitude in enduring hardness and persecution meekly and patiently, fails to move and win the hearts of men, what more remains to be done for them? The goodness of God exemplified in his children as well as in other ways should lead to repentance; but if it only hardens the heart and steels it against the further influences of divine grace, sad indeed is the condition of such a soul. It is not ours, however, to judge such to condemnation: but it is our part to shun the company and counsels of all such. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful: but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night....For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." – Psa. 1:1,2,6.
