

## **MEAN CHRISTIANS AND NOBLE UNBELIEVERS.**

SURELY none will dispute the statement that there are noble characters amongst unbelievers as well as amongst Christians; neither will anyone of experience dispute that there are mean people amongst Christians as well as amongst worldly. But how shall we account for this? Should we not reasonably expect that the noble principles of true Christianity would attract all of the best minds of the world, and rather repel the meaner dispositions? Should we not expect that the doctrines of Christ, the spirit of his teachings, namely, meekness, gentleness, brotherly kindness, love, would attract all who have sympathy with these qualities, hence all of the noble-minded of the world? And should we not likewise expect that since the Scriptures and the spirit of the Lord condemn all anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, backbitings, evil speakings, impurities, etc., that all those who have sympathy with such works of the flesh and of the devil would be repelled by the Gospel of Christ?

Whatever the tendency of our mental philosophy on the subject, the facts of the case prove to us that proportionately a larger number of the world's noble-minded children reject the Lord and his Gospel, and that a larger proportion of the world's ignoble children accept the Gospel of Christ. The still more interesting and perplexing question therefore is, how shall we account for this very peculiar condition which seems contrary to all and every expectation.

We account for it along the lines of our Lord's statement, that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. True, there is none righteous, no, not one; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; the fall of father Adam involved every member of his posterity; hence all are sinners and all need the grace of God in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins: but those who find themselves morally and intellectually less fallen than some of their neighbors are inclined to a self righteous feeling, even tho they would disclaim perfection.

They are therefore the less inclined to acknowledge themselves to be nothing, unworthy of divine favor, and to bow themselves in the dust at the foot of the cross, and to receive, as an unmerited gift of God, the boon of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **THE NEED OF THE GOOD PHYSICIAN NOT REALIZED.**

They feel that some of the more degraded of the race do need divine pity and forgiveness, and they feel glad that God has compassion for these, and will help them; but somehow they feel that they do not need the imputed robes of Christ's righteousness to cover them; they feel as tho they are so respectable that if God accepts anyone to a future life he will surely not exclude them. They look about them and compare themselves with Christians, and often with a large degree of complacency assure themselves that their ideas of right and wrong and of moral responsibility, and of benevolence etc., are higher, nobler, better than those of professed Christians: and say to themselves, God is just, and while I am not perfect I am a great deal better than the majority of Christians, and I am sure, therefore, that God in *justice* will take as much care of me as he will of others who I see are inferior to me in some of the good qualities of heart and mind. Like the Pharisee of old, they thank God that they are not as other men and [R2319 : page 180] neglect "the only name given under heaven or among men whereby we must be saved."

The class we are describing is a numerous class, more numerous than many persons would suppose until they reflect on the subject. And it includes many far from hypocritical who have never understood the gospel. Several of the presidents of the United States, have been men of this class, – reverent toward religion, moral in their course of life, just in their dealings – for instance, Lincoln and Grant; and we merely mention these as ensamples of a class. Besides, many properly of this class are either Church attendants or Church members. They appreciate the fact that directly or indirectly the moral uplift of civilization is associated with Christianity and are pleased to take their

stand on the moral and popular side, tho they have never accepted at the hands of divine grace the forgiveness of sins through faith in the precious blood of Christ.

We see their difficulty: it is that they do not recognize that the Lord is dealing upon principles of strict justice and law. Divine law and justice declare that all imperfection is contrary to God, that God's work was perfect originally in Adam, and that he [R2320 : page 180] never can accept to harmony with himself anything that is imperfect. They fail to see that under this law, whoever is guilty in that which is least, is nevertheless *guilty*; and comes under the same death penalty with him who is guilty of many and more serious offences. Since, then, all men are imperfect – none absolutely righteous – the one sentence of death grasps every member of the human family. And there is no door of escape from death, no door of entrance into life except the one which God has provided – Christ Jesus, the righteous, who became man's Redeemer by the sacrifice of himself. He who fails to go through the door never attains to life, however much he may strive against sin, and however closely he may approach to the door. Only passage *through the door* can mean an entrance into eternal life. "He that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [the sentence of death] abideth upon him." – John 3:36.

The same philosophy of the subject shows to us why it is that a proportionately larger number of the world's ignoble than of its noble children come to Christ. Only those who feel that they are sinners, who feel that they need relief from sin, appreciate the offer of forgiveness. Only the sick, who realize that they are sick, feel their need of the Great Physician. Many indeed seek the Lord's grace because they realize to some extent their own fallen, degraded condition, and that they are *meaner people than others*; – only this seems to awaken them to a realization of their position; only this leads them to cry out, "Have *mercy* upon me, thou Son of David." And this attitude of the realization of personal *unworthiness* of the divine favor is necessary

to all who would accept the grace of God on the only conditions upon which it is offered.

Having thus found the philosophical basis of our subject, we proceed to inquire concerning the result. What is the legitimate result of acceptance of Christ? We answer, the inevitable result of a proper acceptance of Christ, under the terms of the New Covenant must be moral uplifting; because the condition upon which Christ receives anyone is, that he desires not only to be forgiven the sins that are past, but he desires also to forsake sin for the future. The lower he may be in the scale of morality the more radical will the change eventually be, but the less proportionately will he realize at the beginning of his conversion all the steps of purification, of word and thought and act, which lie before him in the Christian pathway. He will at first think merely of the reform of the grosser manifestations of sin, but step by step and lesson by lesson he will be instructed by the great Teacher, and brought onward in knowledge and in appreciation, and in character upbuilding, if he continue in the school of Christ.

The requirement of the great Teacher, through the Apostle, is that those who come unto him, in full consecration, after being accepted on the ground of faith, must at once begin to "put away all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the reverence of the Lord." Whoever will not make the attempt to do this will not be continued in the school of Christ, because he has not his spirit, and not having his spirit he is "none of his." "Whosoever practices sin [knowingly, willingly] is of the devil." (1 John 3:8.) Nevertheless it may require years of schooling and discipline under the Great Teacher before some of those who were deeply sunken in the mire of sin and selfishness, and many consequent meannesses of disposition, become even moderately or passably good, noble characters. Character is more like the oak than like the mushroom; it requires time for its development. Yet, as the oak might be quickly killed with an axe, so even a strong character might be quickly undermined, prostrated, overthrown by sin. In other words, upward development is slow, but

downward tendencies may take effect rapidly, if permitted. Consequently many Christians can see that while the religion of Christ has done much to help them and their friends out of the miry clay of sin, and to put them on the Rock, Christ Jesus, and has cleansed them from many of the defilements of the flesh, and many of its meannesses of disposition, yet perhaps after ten, twenty or forty years of such discipline and perseverance, they may with surprise behold some unbeliever whom they [R2320 : page 181] must acknowledge to be their equal in moral probity, uprightness or generosity.

### **THE LAW OF HEREDITY INVOLVED.**

The question arises, How is this? We answer that as moral deflection affects the children to the third and fourth generation, so moral attainments may affect the children to several generations. Hence parents who have been upright and Godfearing, who have endeavored to cultivate in themselves the graces of the spirit, not only benefit themselves, and approach more nearly than at first to the grand standard of perfection, but their children will be born with *better natural* qualifications as well as under conditions more favorable to righteousness and nobility of soul. For the *heart* attainments of the parents are reflected in the physical conditions of their children.

And this, by the way, proves conclusively that many professedly pious parents are less noble at heart than we could have hoped; for if, during the period of conception and gestation, parental thoughts, feelings, sentiments have been cultivated along the lines of nobility, purity, holiness, reverence, benevolence, justice and love, their children would show it; and results would be blessed both to the children and the parents. The *natural* qualities of the child were *willed* to it before its birth, chiefly by the mother, and the mother's ideals were considerably those of the father if they were well mated. Christian parents should awake to their responsibilities in the exercise of their procreative powers entrusted to them by the Almighty. It is a disgrace to our civilization that so many in civilized

lands are *low-born*, even amongst those who recognize the laws of heredity and who carefully guard the breeding of their cattle and sheep and dogs and horses: it must be that the influence of the parental *mind* upon posterity is not recognized. Let these thoughts not only guard parents in respect to future offspring, but also make them very patient and painstaking with present children when attempting to train out of them blemishes of character which they helped to implant. The first duty of a parent to his child is to give him the most favorable start in life within his power.

The children of Christian parents, favorably bred, if they also become Christians and begin a warfare in their own hearts against moral uncleanness and sin, and against all the mean and selfish propensities of the fallen nature, may, by the grace of God, attain to a moral position higher than that attained by their parents, – through putting into practice the instructions of the great Teacher. But here comes in another side of the question: God does not accept the children of believers on account of parental faith beyond the period of their minority. So soon as years of accountability have been reached, a personal covenant with the Lord is required, if they would be his in any special sense; otherwise they are reckoned as being of the world and under its condemnation, and not under the justification which extends only to believers and their minor children. (1 Cor. 7:14.) God makes the entrance into his family and school an individual matter.

And here we find the secret of how it comes that some of the noblest men of the world are not the Lord's people. They are the children of some whose feet have been lifted out of the miry clay of sin; they have inherited through their parents a share in the uplifting which the teaching of Christ brought into the world, amongst those who follow his teaching. Thus we see that Infidelity has nothing to boast of in its noblest sons, for what they have that is noble and great came generally through the belief, the faith, of their ancestors. On the contrary, the tendency of unbelief is toward sin and its degradation. It may not come in one generation, or it may. The son of noble Christian

parents who has inherited a more noble mind than the masses, may maintain that mind to some extent through life, and if he take pride in his morality he may, at least on the surface, keep up a good appearance, and may transmit some of it to his posterity. But eventually selfishness will undermine and destroy nobility, and we may as surely expect a *degradation* in the posterity of such who do not receive Christ, as we may expect an *advancement* on the part of all who do accept Christ.

### **ILLUSTRATED IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.**

The general operation of this law can only be appreciated as we look out over a grand scope of territory and over centuries of time. As we look back to the days of our Lord and the Apostles, we find that the Gospel laid hold upon the very class that we have here described, the publicans and sinners, the lower classes, while it was rejected by the worldlywise, the hypocritical and the pharisaical, who were morally and intellectually the superior class, and on this very account rejected Christ; – not feeling their need of a Savior. Looking intently at the Gospel Church, with its lowly beginning, in the poorest class, we find that whoever entered the school of Christ and was taught of him was uplifted by obedience to that Teacher. This higher teaching of the Master, to the effect that we should love not only one another, but should sympathetically love even those who hate us, who malign us and who persecute us, saying all manner of evil against us falsely, for his sake; and that divine blessing rests upon the meek, the patient, the humble, the peacemakers; and that the sum of all graces is love; became the standard among his followers. We find the [R2320 : page 182] very same teaching coming from the humble fishermen and publicans who accepted him, and whom he sent forth as the Apostles of his grace. [R2321 : page 182]

For instance, we find the Apostle Peter saying, "Add to your faith patience, experience, brotherly kindness, love." We find the Apostle John saying, "He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how

can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" We find the Apostle James saying that all who are taught of the Lord should "show out of a good conversation [life] his works with meekness of wisdom, but if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not...Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren." "Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"

We hear the Apostle Paul, who once was of the nobler, the Pharisee class, giving utterance to the same truth, and in all humility acknowledging that "there is none righteous, no, not one," and explaining that only as we accept Christ have we the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation with the Father; and explaining further that having put on Christ we should be new creatures in him; that old things should be past and gone, forever, and that we should walk thenceforth in newness of life, not according to the will of the flesh but according to the purpose of the Lord. Hear him exhorting those who have taken the *name* of Christ, assuring them that they must also take his *spirit* or disposition, and have the same mind [disposition] which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord, a mind in opposition to sin and meanness and selfishness, a mind in harmony with truth and goodness and purity and benevolence, love.

And he explains this, saying: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; love is the fulfilling of the law. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light; let us walk honestly. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provisions for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. Recompense no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine,



I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink."

He explained in particular the love which is the essence of the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ, which all followers of the Lord must have if they would be and continue to be his, saying: "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth."

**"THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD IS SURE, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE." - PSA. 19:7-14.**

It would be impossible for any class of people, however mentally and morally degraded they might be, to receive such instructions into good and honest hearts, without being uplifted by them, made more noble, more Christlike, more Godlike. It does not surprise us, therefore, to find that in the first century even, the Lord's people became noted for their high principles and morality, insomuch that the masses of the people "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus and learned of him." Then we see how the adversary corrupted the truth from the simplicity in which it was presented by the Lord and the Apostles. We see forms and ceremonies, genuflections and masses, bondage to creeds and theories of men, taking the place of the pure gospel of Christ, and we note the result, that in proportion as the teachings of Christ were ignored, in the same proportion superstition came in, and the spirit of Christ was lacking.

Nevertheless, with all the corruption which came into the world with the second century, there was a sufficiency of the true spirit intermixed with the error to work a vast reformation in the savages of Europe, and to bring them into a condition of civilization higher than that of the rest of the world. And when in the divine providence the Reformation movement was inaugurated it lifted the same class of

people immeasurably higher in moral tone. It restored much of the primitive purity of Christianity and of the spirit of Christ; and in proportion as the Word of God has been free amongst the people, and in proportion as they have received it gladly and have permitted its ennobling sentiments to germinate in their hearts and bring forth its fruitage, in this proportion we have seen the peoples which came under the direct influence of the Reformation lifted still higher than the remainder of the world.

### **THE WASHED SOW STILL CRAVES THE MIRE.**

In all of this we observe the principle at first set forth; namely, that it is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of truth, the spirit of righteousness from the Word of the Lord, which is the civilizing, enlightening and ennobling influence which has wrought the marvelous **[R2321 : page 183]** changes of this Christian era and especially of this last century. Papacy and sectarianism hindered but could not thwart its influence. It still continues to take hold of the *lower classes* of society, and lifts them up; and the tendency is still observable, that when they are lifted up they are the less likely to be appreciative of the divine goodness. Thus it is that not many great, not many learned, not many wise according to the course of this world, hath God chosen; but the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the Kingdom.

The broader and clearer our view of the situation, the more will we be able to sympathize with those of our brethren in Christ who by nature are mean, ignoble, selfish, lacking in benevolence of thought and word and conduct. When we realize that God has accepted them, – not because of their good and noble character, but because they admit its deficiencies and because they desire to become reformed, transformed, by the renewing of their minds – then all who have the Lord's mind or spirit will likewise receive them. In proportion as we have the mind of Christ, the holy mind, we will view them from the divine standpoint of sympathy for their weaknesses and ignoble

qualities; and instead of condemning them and spurning them and cutting their acquaintance, because they do not come up to the noblest standards, we will desire all the more to help them up and seek kindly to point out to them the matters which they do not clearly see. We will be patient with them as we see them striving to overcome. We will realize that they contend against a mental disease that they have to some extent inherited, and which can only be gradually eradicated.

From this standpoint we will learn to view them and to think of them not according to their flesh, not according to their natural tendencies and dispositions, but according to the spirit, according to the intentions of their minds, according to their covenant with the Lord. Thus, as the Apostle declares, we know each other no longer after the flesh, but after the spirit. Each one who has accepted God's grace under the New Covenant, and become a partaker of the spirit of holiness, and is striving against sin in all its forms, – in thought and word and conduct, – all such are striving for the grand perfection of character of which our dear Redeemer is the only perfect illustration. All such confess themselves imperfect copies of God's dear Son and seek to grow in his likeness. All such are seeking to put away all the works of the flesh and the devil, – not only the grosser evils (murder, theft, etc.), but also the more common elements of an ignoble, perverted nature, anger, malice, hatred, strife, etc. And all these are seeking to put on more and more the complete armor of God, and to resist sin; and to cultivate in themselves the same mind which was also in Christ Jesus, – meekness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love.

### **"SEE THAT YE LOVE ONE ANOTHER."**

Let us (Christians), then, take a broader view of matters, and especially of all who have named the name of Christ, and who give any evidence of seeking to walk in his footsteps. Let our love for them cover not only the little, trifling blemishes and differences from ourselves, but let our love cover also a multitude of imperfections in

their flesh, so long as we see that their hearts are loyal to the Lord, and that they are seeking to walk not after the flesh but after the spirit: so long as they profess to be seeking to get rid of the meanness and selfishness and littleness of the fallen nature and to cultivate in themselves the nobility of character which belongs to perfect manhood, the image of the divine nature.

And let each one who has taken the name of Christ be on the lookout to apprehend and eradicate every trace of the meanness, selfishness, rudeness, dishonesty, which as members of the fallen race still cling to us and are become so much a part of us that we are often disposed to call them *natural* traits. Let us remember that, even if our Lord and our brethren in Christ overlook these blemishes (rightly distinguishing between the "new creature in Christ" and these contrary elements of his old nature reckoned dead), yet the world cannot so distinguish and will charge to the cause of Christ all the faults and imperfections they see in his professed followers. Thus that holy name is profaned among the Gentiles, daily, by many.

Let us remember, too, that ill-nature cannot be transformed to good-nature in a day; the transformation of mind and speech and conduct requires patience and perseverance; but it can be accomplished by those who have made the New Covenant and who are obedient [R2322 : page 183] to the commands of the Great Teacher. "See that ye refuse not [obedience to] him that speaketh from heaven." Whoever neglects his teachings, neglects the great salvation offered during this Gospel age at very least; for none will be amongst the elect except those who in their hearts at least are noble, true and good, – conformed to the image of God's dear Son. – Rom. 8:29.

If all could fully realize the influence of our minds over our own bodies, as well as their less direct influence over the minds and bodies of others, a great *Thought-Reform Movement* would speedily begin in the world; and especially amongst God's consecrated people. Surely, such should cooperate with the inspired prayer – "Create in me

a *clean* heart [will], O God; and renew a right spirit [disposition]....Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." – Psa. 51:10,13. [R2334 : page 184]

### **"THE LIGHT OF THE WORD."**

"The light of the Word shines brighter and brighter,  
As wider and wider God opens my eyes;  
My trials and burdens seem lighter and lighter,  
And fairer and fairer the heavenly prize.

"The wealth of this world seems poorer and poorer,  
And farther and farther it fades from my sight;  
The prize of my calling seems surer and surer,  
As straighter and straighter I walk in the light.

"My waiting on Jesus is dearer and dearer,  
As longer and longer I lie on his breast;  
Without him I'm nothing seems clearer and clearer,  
And more and more sweetly in Jesus I rest.

"My joy in my Savior is growing and growing,  
As stronger and stronger I trust in his Word;  
My peace like a river is flowing and flowing,  
As harder and harder I lean on the Lord.

"My praise and thanksgiving are swelling and swelling,  
As broader and broader the promises prove;  
The wonderful story I'm telling and telling,  
And more and more sweetly I rest in his love."

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