

## **THE DECAY OF BELIEF**

PRESIDENT CYRUS NORTHROP, of the Minnesota State University, recently delivered an address before the Chicago Baptist Social Union. In it he made the following reference to the present religious conditions. He said in part: –

It seems to me that in looking at the religious condition of the country – I do not mean the statistics of the churches, nor the amount of gifts to missions and philanthropy, nor the general condition of the church as an organization – but I do mean the state of thought in the church itself in reference to its own faith; it seems to me that we are confronted by four marked changes which have grown into prominence in the last few years. If I am wrong I shall be glad to know it, and if I am right I shall be grateful, as I am sure you all will be, to any Biblical scholar who will show us the truth. These changes stated briefly are: First – A decay of belief in the supernatural. Second – What I may call the disintegration of the Bible. Third – New views respecting inspiration. Fourth – Loss of the sense of accountability.

These four changes are essentially one. They are at least shoots from a common root – and that root is doubt as to whether God ever has had any communication with men. Under this doubt Christianity ceases to be the religion which God intended for men to cherish, and becomes simply one of the religions of the world – a purely human device, like Confucianism or Mohammedanism, of no more authority than these and to be preferred to these only as its teachings are more reasonable and uplifting. There is a world of difference between saying this thing is true because God said it and God said this because it is true. The former carries with it the certainty of "Thus saith the Lord." The latter is of no validity, because many things may be true which God never said. And if God never said anything to men inspiration becomes so attenuated that it is hardly discoverable under the more or less theory which grants inspiration of some degree to every one who

voices a noble truth, and grants no higher inspiration, though perhaps a greater degree of inspiration, to any one else. Under this arrangement a man must first get his idea of God and then determine whether anything is the product of divine inspiration according as it meets or does not meet that idea. There is in this no possibility of revelation in the usual sense. The order is inverted – God does not reveal truth to men; the truth on the contrary, reveals God. Now this may or may not be satisfactory to some. But it is, to say the least, very unsettling to human faith and very depressing to the ordinary Christian who does not know enough about God's style to determine whether he said a thing or not, [R2939 : page 20] and who is not sufficiently familiar with the internal signs of inspiration to determine whether any particular writing reveals God truly or not. And this condition of things is the darkest part of the outlook at the opening of the twentieth century.

### **SOME SUGGESTED REMEDIES.**

#### **FOR THE PULPIT:**

a. "Preach the Word." Restore the Bible to its rightful place as the Word of God divinely inspired and supremely authoritative. Use the Old Testament Scriptures as our Lord used them; freely and without apology. He never explained them away. You need not. To discredit your text book is to discount your message. Eliminate the "ifs" and "perhapses," and proclaim the Word in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. [R2939 : page 21]

b. Remember your calling; it is not to exploit shifting philosophies and passing fads; sociology, evolution or even higher criticism; but to declare the gospel of the grace of God. The former never edified a church or saved a sinner or comforted a human heart. The latter is the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.

"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word let him speak my word faithfully."

c. If the Bible doctrine is true that the one sufficient remedy for man's sin is the sacrificial death of the Divine \*Substitute – not his teaching or his example – then the popular teaching of "salvation by character," is manifestly unscriptural and unwarranted. "He suffered for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

\*We must understand this to mean, – the substitute which God furnished: otherwise it would be out of accord with the Scripture testimony, and the meaning of the word *ransom*, – "a corresponding price."

d. "The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," as so often indiscriminately and universally applied to saint and sinner alike, is equally unscriptural and misleading.

There is no spiritual Fatherhood without spiritual birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." "Ye must be born again."

### **FOR THE PEW:**

a. "Take heed what ye hear." "Let no man deceive you with vain words." "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." "Examine *yourselves* whether ye be in the faith." "Be ye ready at all times to give...an answer for the hope that is in you."

b. "Be not *conformed* to this world, but be ye *transformed* by the renewing of your mind." "Be ye blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life."

c. Live and walk habitually in the light of Titus 2:11-14.

### **A PASTOR'S TESTIMONY.**

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Joseph Parker, of London, on the 40th anniversary of his pastorate of the City Temple, said: "Looking back upon all the chequered way, I

have to say that the only preaching that has done me good is the preaching of a Savior who bore my sins in his own body on the tree, and the only preaching by which God has enabled me to do good to others is the preaching in which I have held up my Savior, not as a sublime example, but as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

