

DECISION IN CHARACTER BUILDING.

How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God follow him, but, if Baal, follow him." – I Kings 18:21.

MULTITUDES are in an undecided condition of mind, not only as respects the worship of God, and as respects their faith, but also in regard to the common affairs of life. They are not devoid of good intentions, good resolutions, hopes and ambitions; but these are rather vague and shapeless. Their thoughts, their intentions, have not crystalized. As a result they are making little progress and accomplishing little good, either in or for themselves or others. Even worldly people who manifest great decision in business and social and moral matters lack decision in religious affairs.

The poet has truly said, "Life is real, life is earnest; and the grave is not the goal;" but the difficulty with many is that they have not even so good a goal as the grave would be. If they could even have that before their mind as an end; if they could even think of how they would wish to terminate their lives eventually, and leave some luminous foot prints in the sands of time that would be helpful to others and an honor to themselves, it would be very much better, indeed, than to pass through life with no aim, no wish, no thought, except to eat, to drink, to sleep, to gratify earthly tastes. We believe that it is even much better that men set their ambition upon money or fame or some other object, than to have no fixed purpose before them in life; yet money and fame and such matters end with the grave, and the Lord's consecrated people, inspired by new hopes, new aims, new ambitions, beyond the grave, have much advantage every way over all others.

Nevertheless, even those who have been so highly favored of God that the eyes of their understanding have been opened, – that they have caught glimpses of the glorious things in reservation for the Lord's faithful, are frequently lax and measurably indifferent to these

wonderful things which should induce them to zeal and inspire them with courage and strength. What is the difficulty? Why do they not accomplish more? The answer frequently should be that it is because of indecision. They should decide promptly, but they hesitate, – holding important questions in abeyance, and continuing to balance and to weigh matters which they already determined are *right*. They halt between two opinions; they hesitate to take the Lord's Word fully and entirely, and to walk boldly forward in the right direction, even when they clearly discern the footsteps of Jesus and the proper course for them as his followers. As one point after another comes up and is thus set aside indefinitely, the whole Christian course of that individual is stagnated and fresh duties and privileges as they appear, are stopped in the way by the muddle of mind which unsettled questions of years produce; thus indecision has more or less hindered them all their lives. By and by there is such an accumulation of undecided points and matters that they feel the case is almost hopeless, become discouraged, grow cold, indifferent, and perhaps fall completely away from the faith and its service.

For all such our text is specially appropriate. We want to decide, first of all, who is our Master, who is our God; then, having concluded, we want to decide promptly that his servants we should and will be. The Master warned us of the impossibility of any other course being satisfactory, saying, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Attempt to do so will make us and all with whom we are particularly identified unhappy. Almost everyone will acknowledge that there is a Supreme Being, and that it is the duty of his creatures, to serve and obey him. The whole question then should be, not as to obedience and service, but merely, Who is our God? We see many of the worshipers of Baal, Mammon, energetic in their service, and we should feel ashamed if we who, by the grace of God, know the true God and his gracious plan, are not as zealous, as persevering, as energetic, as are the servants of error. "What manner of persons ought we to be?" We ought most positively to be committed to that which we believe to be the truth, and we ought to be most zealous in its service.

A part of the mistake is in the exercise of a wrong kind of caution; – proper enough in respect to earthly affairs, in which we have to guard our interests against unscrupulous fellows; but out of place, impedimenta, in our dealings with God. This wrong caution says, – Do nothing, until you see how it will all end; – I must walk by mental sight at least. But this kind of worldly wisdom will not do, in dealing with God. He makes the rules by which we may approach him and progress in his favor. One of his rules is, that every item of truth we learn must be accepted and acted upon before we are ready for more. They that receive the truth in the love of it, will surely serve it with all the decision they can command and acquire; – piece by piece, as they receive it. They who on receiving truth balance it and ponder long whether it will not ultimately cost too much, thus give evidence that their love for the *truth* is not great enough, – that it is mixed with selfishness. Such must [R2950 : page 42] cultivate love of the truth until it outweighs all other things, else they will not be fit for the Kingdom. The Lord's charge against those who are about to fall in the present testing time, is that, – They received not the truth in the *love of it*. – 2 Thes. 2:10-12.

"CHOOSE YE THIS DAY."

After Israel had reached the promised land, Joshua sought to bring them to such a point of decision. He called them together, recited to them the Lord's favor and blessing enjoyed thus far, and expressed himself in noble language, saying, "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve;...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15.) So, dear friends, we who realize that the Lord has been blessing, guiding and sustaining us in the past, should come to a full, positive *decision* as respects our course of life. We should not be content for one moment longer to go along indefinitely, serving whiles the Lord, and whiles Mammon (selfishness). We should settle the matter at once, and for all time, that we will be the Lord's.

The very fact of coming to a positive decision is a great blessing, and a great help in the formation of character. Every time we come to a

decision, on any question, it strengthens mind and character and makes us that much more ready for another test – along some other line, perhaps. One decision for the right prepares the way for others in the same direction, just as hesitancy, indecision upon one point prepares us for hesitancy upon all points, and more or less stops our Christian progress and character-building.

We are not advocating rashness – the doing of something without a reasonable, proper amount of consideration. But we are urging upon the Lord's people the cultivation of promptness, decision of mind, in respect to questions we have sufficiently examined. Some things may of necessity require pondering, but many things in life require no such delay to reach a proper decision. The majority of the questions which present themselves before the bar of our minds could be decided in a moment; and the less time we take in reaching a decision on such problems the better for us, and for the upbuilding of proper character in this regard.

We need to have some touchstone, as it were, some matter which will help us to decide, which will enable the mind to reach a decision quickly. This touchstone should be *God's will*; so that to perceive the Lord's will in respect to any question would be to settle it – as quickly as discerned. There should be no thought of opposing the divine will. There should be no temporizing, no haggling to see what a thing would cost, once we discern that it is the Lord's will. There should be no further question about the rejection of any matter which we discern to be contrary to the Lord's will; no matter how enticing, no matter how much of profit or of advantage there may be connected therewith.

Ability to decide quickly, and to decide always on the right side, what the Lord's will is, requires some experience and discipline; but the sooner we begin the sooner we will become proficient; the more energetically we set ourselves to know the Lord's will and to do it, and to show him by our promptness that we delight to do his will, the better and the quicker will we find our characters established on proper lines.

There are many gods presenting their claims to us, and seeking our reverence. To some, perhaps to the vast majority, self is the most prominent idol and false god; to others it is fame; to others the family; to others wealth. But all these false gods are more or less related, and the one name, Mammon, selfishness, is appropriate to them all. It requires not a great deal of discernment to decide that none of these ambitions is worthy of us, and that the worship of our hearts and the sacrifices of life should all be to the true God.

TO-DAY IF YOU SHOULD HEAR HIS VOICE, OBEY!

The Scriptures appeal to us along these lines of prompt decision, and it is because these appeals are neglected, not obeyed, that many of the Lord's people are so lean and so undeveloped, both in knowledge and in character. Mark the appeal, "Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." The suggestion is that the matter be not put off for another day. We cannot tell how distinctly we will hear the voice of the Lord's providence speaking to us tomorrow. On the contrary, we know that even as we may become accustomed to an earthly call, or an earthly alarm, so that by and by it would cease to awaken us, so our spiritual ears become accustomed to the important messages reaching them from the Lord's Word. They will have less and less weight and influence, and will become less and less helpful to us in proportion as we neglect them and fail to act upon them. Does not this explain the fact that some who **[R2951 : page 42]** have newly come into the truth, are farther along both in faith and good works than some whose ears were blest long ago?

We are still in the beginning of a new year and a new century, and now is a favorable time for us to make good resolutions. One of these should surely be that henceforth we will cultivate decision of character; – that when we hear the voice of the Lord we will respond promptly. So that when we see a work of the Lord, which we have the privilege of attending to, it will be performed not only willingly and well, but also

speedily. "The Lord loveth a *cheerful* giver" – a prompt giver; – not merely as respects money matters, as this text is generally applied, but in respect to all of our little offerings and sacrifices to him and for his cause' sake. If we would be pleasing to the Lord and grow in his favor and in nearness to him, we must bring our hearts more and more into the condition that he approves, that he loves, viz., heartiness, cheerfulness, promptness in every service we may render. The trouble with many Christians is, that they have not thoroughly learned what a great privilege we of this Gospel age enjoy, – in being permitted to present our little sacrifices and self-denials to the Lord, under the assurance that our imperfect works shall be acceptable through Christ to God.

We have all noted with pleasure the wonderful success of that wonderful Apostle Paul. It is well, therefore, that we shall note that one of the chief elements contributing to the success of his apostleship [R2951 : page 43] was this element of character – decision. Mark how this quality of his shines out in the statement, "This one thing I do," etc. He had only one real aim or purpose in life, toward which he was bending all his energies. He had cast aside all others as weights and hindrances, and as not being worthy to be compared with this one service, so high in its point of privilege. The one thing he did was to serve the Lord, to serve the brethren, to serve the truth. All other matters were secondary to this. If he could accomplish this one thing the results would be so blessed, so happifying, both now and everlastingly, that he could afford to count all other things and objects and aims as loss and dross and not worthy of comparison. – Phil. 3:7,8,13,14.

This is the spirit that all of the Lord's overcoming people should have. All do not have this character or quality of disposition by nature; but in proportion as we lack, the Lord will reckon to us of his own merit to compensate, if he finds in us the spirit, the will, the disposition, to thus follow the example of Jesus and the apostles and all the faithful. If we are weak in this respect, lacking in this quality of decision and firmness of character, we need to be more alert, and to go the more

frequently to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and to find grace to help. But those who are naturally weak, and who yet have tried this matter according to the lines here laid down, – who have sought to cultivate this principle of character and decision and firmness for the right, give abundant testimony that the Lord is their helper and that in thus following the directions of his Word and the examples of faithfulness, they have become strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. May this be a blessed year for all the faithful in Christ Jesus, along the lines of character-building, energy and firmness for the right and for the truth, as God grants us to see these.

Let us not forget that it is just such a class that the Lord is seeking, to be the Bride and joint-heir of his Son. He is not looking for those who are perfect in this respect; for there is weakness along this line throughout the whole human family; there is none perfect in this or in other respects, none fit for the Kingdom by nature. It will encourage us, perhaps, to remember that the Lord is taking the weak things of the world and making them strong, and that in proportion as we submit our wills to his will we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, and that he thus works in us to will and to do his good pleasure in the establishment of strong, decisive characters, through the promises of his Word. To it, as represented in Jesus, he exhorts us to look, while we endeavor to run with patience the race set before us, trusting in him who has redeemed us and called us, and who has promised to be our ever-present helper in every time of need.

