

CEASE TO DO EVIL, LEARN TO DO WELL.

– ISA. 1:1-9,16-20. – *NOVEMBER 20.* –

ISAIAH was one of the grandest of the Lord's prophets. Not only is his message couched in kindly, sympathetic terms, but it is most comprehensive, including, with the rebukes and exhortations appropriate to his own day and nation, sublime glimpses of the glorious future which the Lord in his own due time will bring to pass for the blessing not only of Israel, but of all the families of the earth. This variation in the style of the prophets teaches us that although all the holy prophets spoke and wrote as they were moved by the holy Spirit, nevertheless the Lord was pleased to permit his messengers to throw into their words a certain amount of their own personality. We may assume, too, that the Lord in choosing his messengers had in view their personal characteristics as well as their willingness to be used as his mouthpieces. While, therefore, we appreciate all the prophets and all their messages as being from the Lord, we may properly enough discriminate amongst them, loving most those who most abundantly manifested the Spirit of the Lord. So today, while loving all the Lord's people and appreciating all whom he uses as servants of the Truth for its public and private ministry, we are bound to appreciate most those who with greatest constancy and fullest measure illustrate the teachings of the divine Word – who manifest most the Spirit of the Lord and the wisdom which cometh from above, which is "first pure, then peaceable, easy of entreatment, full of mercy and good fruits."

The first verse of our lesson simply informs us that the book of Isaiah, the prophecy of Isaiah and what he saw and foresaw, was prepared during the times of certain kings – altogether a period of about forty years.

His prophecy opens with a stirring appeal, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken." The message was not to be considered as the wisdom or exhortation of Isaiah, but as the Lord's message through the Prophet. It is the Lord who declares, "I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me." The original signifies, "I have caused children to grow up and have lifted them high in greatness and they have rebelled." All familiar with the history of natural Israel can appreciate the truth of this statement. From the little obscure beginning the Lord brought that people forward to the most prominent place in the world's history and gave them much advantage every way, chiefly in that he communicated to them his will through Moses and the prophets, promising them additional greatness in the future. Notwithstanding all these favors of God they were a rebellious people, as both the Old and New Testaments agree. In saying this we do not wish it to be understood that the Israelites were worse than the other nations, to whom God extended no such favors and privileges: we have no reason for so thinking. Quite probably the other nations under the same circumstances would have followed a similar course; but it was a wrong course, an ungrateful course, a sinful course, nevertheless.

A FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT ITS POWER.

In Israel was illustrated the natural tendency of humanity towards sin – the downward tendency resulting from the fall. In that nation was illustrated the fact that if God had not imposed the death penalty and separation [R3452 : page 328] from his favor, the result anyway would have been downward, and more seriously so because of the continuance of life and the increasing opportunities for delving into sin. In other words, we can readily see that had God not interposed with the death sentence, the condition of the world would today probably have been much more terrible than it now is. Even with the brevity of life staring the world in the face, and disease blighting every pleasure and comfort, and fear clouding every hope, the tendency is to forget God and to go every one after his own

schemes and selfish plans: how terrible would have been the condition without this constraining influence, with perfection of health, with the fruits of the garden and perpetual life. As it is we see that even the part of the penalty which refers to sorrows and labor with sweating of face, incidental to present "cursed" conditions, is a great blessing, a great restraint to the downward tendency of sin. Those who must labor here and have much of tribulation are thereby led to look away from present conditions to the Lord and to the relief which he offers.

God proposed to adopt the children of Abraham according to the flesh for his children, and the nation of Israel was hoping to attain this glorious station, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." Since they were "cast off" when they rejected Messiah, this same hope has still been before all of their nation who believe in Jesus and the gracious things of the Kingdom which he has promised to all called and found faithful to him. (Acts 26:6,7.) We are to distinguish between the few and the many. There was a remnant in natural Israel who did not rebel against the Lord, but who, like the prophet Isaiah, sought to walk in his ways. And so likewise in nominal spiritual Israel, there are two classes in both cases. The masses, however, now as then, are in an attitude of rebellion against the Lord. Not that they rebel openly, but while outwardly affecting obedience and reverence, in their hearts they are far from the Lord and his requirements.

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider." The brute recognizes an obligation to the one who cares for him, while often those gifted with bright intellects, as, for instance, the masses of Christendom today – like the masses of the Jews in Isaiah's day – seem not to realize their responsibility to the Lord, their dependence upon him and their proper obligations to him. A "remnant," a handful as it were, appreciate the situation. The Apostle Paul refers to this class saying, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price," "even

the precious blood of Christ" – therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits which are his. The masses do not consider, they have no time to consider; they are too busy with their own plans and schemes – honest and dishonest; selfishness and pride have full control of them.

The Prophet addresses Israel as sin-laden and corrupt through having forsaken the Lord. He tells them that their course implies that they have despised the Lord – his promises of blessing to the obedient and his threats of retribution to evil doers; then he inquires what would be the use of any more stripes or chastisements, what hope would there be of effecting a reformation? – "Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." This picture probably referred to the people as a whole and to their land, which had been desolated by their enemies from the north and from the south. These chastisements had not wrought reformation, and apparently the only thing to do with the nation was to wipe it out, and this the Lord did about a century later, permitting their enemies to lay waste and make utterly desolate the land, without inhabitants for seventy years. The Prophet Isaiah was probably looking down into the future rather than describing events of his own day when he said, "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it...and the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in the vineyard, as a lodge in the garden." The booth and lodge were very unsafe, unsatisfactory, temporary shelters, a dwelling whose occupant was continually on the alert against depredators, spoilers. Thus the Prophet pictures the condition of the Jewish nation – thus he shows to what their course would lead unless they turned from it.

NOMINAL SPIRITUAL ISRAEL ASTRAY.

We may draw a lesson applicable to Christendom, the civilized world, and see that so far as spirituality is concerned Christendom is

in a deplorable condition. The enemies of the Truth, boastful higher critics and powerful evolutionists, have invaded all the territory of faith and hope and are laying waste the heritage of the Lord's people, and the majority are going into captivity to these enemies. Those who remain loyal to the Lord are in straits, and, like those who dwell in the booths and lodges watching against depredators, merely on the defensive, and that in unfavorable quarters in many respects.

As for the Lord's dealing with Christendom as a whole, it would be useless to prosecute the matter, as the increased knowledge and opportunities and blessings are seen to bring more of worldliness, selfishness and corruption: Why should they be stricken any more? Why should they be dealt with a view to correction? As a matter of fact we know that Christendom will not be much longer dealt with under present conditions: already we are in the time of the fall of Babylon, already the message is being proclaimed in every quarter of the spiritual heavens that the harvest of the age is come, that great Babylon is no longer to be esteemed God's representative in the earth, and that his people should all come out of her. (Rev. 18:3.) The light of Present Truth showing us the errors of Babylon is the divine voice to all who are of the Truth, to all who love the Truth. Such will hear and will obey. **[R3452 : page 329]**

In verse 9 the Prophet declares that, except for the small remnant left to the Lord, the nation and its hopes would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah – would have been utterly destroyed. Because of this faithful remnant in natural Israel to whom God's promises and favors belonged, he specially cared for that nation even after he permitted the full overthrow and desolation of their land to come upon them. His providences were with them still even in their captivity in Babylon, and he brought them back again, in due time, to their own land and perpetuated in that remnant the promises of which the nation as a whole had proven themselves unworthy. So it was again with natural Israel in the end of their age when Messiah appeared. He found only a remnant worthy of the Kingdom, and the great mass

were cast off and the time of trouble destroyed them nationally. The faithful remnant, however, were accepted of the Lord to be the nucleus of the house of spiritual Israel, and to this number he has since been adding out of every nation, kindred and tongue.

Similarly also in the end of this Gospel age, at the second advent of Christ. The Scriptures assure us that only a remnant will be found Israelites indeed, while the majority, the great mass of Christendom, will be rejected. To these remnants the oppositions of their evil surroundings serve as polishing instruments to prove them, to test them, to prepare them for future services and honors. Otherwise, had there been no faithful ones found, all hopes of Kingdom privileges and blessings, so far as the people are concerned, would have failed, and Messiah alone, without his Church, would have been the King of the Millennial age. Had God not foreseen these remnants, Israel and Christendom would have received no more consideration than did the other nations of the earth.

To be as Sodom and Gomorrah, therefore, does not signify to be in an utterly hopeless condition as respects the future, though it would have implied hopelessness as respected the Kingdom opportunities of the Jewish and Gospel ages; because even to the Sodomites a blessing shall yet come through the glorified Christ Jesus, the Head, and the remnant Church, the little flock, his body. Our Lord mentioned this future hope of the Sodomites in one of his discourses, and the Prophet Ezekiel has stated it further in considerable detail, showing that as natural Israel will be reclaimed in due time from her cast-off condition and be dealt with by the great Messiah during the Millennial age, so also will the Sodomites come back to their "former estate," and if obedient they as well as others may yet return to all that was lost in Adam and redeemed, bought back, by the precious blood of Christ. – Ezek. 16:48-63; Matt. 10:15.

"WASH YOU, MAKE YOU CLEAN."

The latter part of our lesson was addressed primarily to the well-intentioned Israelite of Isaiah's time. As an exhortation it reminds us of the words of John the Baptist and his disciples and of Jesus and his disciples when appearing to the Jewish nation in the harvest time of their age. It is a plea for reform to a people already justified, consecrated. We are to remember that the whole nation of Israel was baptized into Moses in the sea and in the cloud, and that, as the mediator, Moses, by divine arrangement instituted a covenant between God and Israel by which that nation was recognized as under special divine care, and by which their sins were typically atoned for every year in advance on the Day of Atonement with the blood of bulls and goats. These sacrifices, as the Apostle points out, could never really cleanse them from sins; they were merely temporary coverings of those sins, and typical lessons respecting the necessity of blood atonement for the sins of the whole world, into which they were precipitated by Adam's transgression. It was for the Israelites to learn later in God's due time, about the better Mediator than Moses, about his better sacrifices for sins, and concerning the eternal redemption effected thereby.

Meantime they were to recognize their responsibility for such sins as they could have avoided, and they were to cleanse themselves from these and to seek the Lord with their whole hearts. The exhortation, therefore, of verse sixteen does not mean a washing away of original sin, which they could not effect, which was only figuratively **[R3453 : page 329]** done on the Day of Atonement and will only be actually accomplished by the Lord Jesus' work.

Hence this entire exhortation is as appropriate to spiritual Israel as it was to natural Israel. As they had their typical cleansings in their typical atonement sacrifices, we have our real cleansing in the better sacrifice of Christ. It is appropriate, however, that we remember that if we would be of those who will constitute his elect, if we would be

of those who would be used of him as kings for the blessing of all the families of the earth, we must not only be justified from all the evils of the past but we must develop character by putting forth effort against evils which are natural to us, by overcoming those evils. The command is, "Cease to do evil." We can keep this command so far as our hearts, our intentions, are concerned. To be acceptable to God our wills must be firmly established in opposition to sin of every kind, and this will mean that to the extent of our ability all our words and conduct will be free from evil, free from sin; but since our new wills must operate through imperfect bodies, we cannot hope to be absolutely free from sin, from blemishes, from imperfection.

Similarly we are to strive continually to "learn to do well." Perfection must be our aim, and in our hearts it must be continually the criterion. But experience corroborates what the Scriptures set forth on the subject, namely, that in our imperfect condition and unfavorable surroundings we cannot do the things that we would – we cannot live fully up to the grand standard which our hearts appreciate and desire to meet. This reminds us of our Lord's words, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in **[R3453 : page 330]** heaven is perfect." The Lord knew that this would be impossible except in our minds, in our hearts, in our intentions; we cannot be his and be anything else than pure in heart, pure in intention. But he knew that we could not under present conditions measure up to the heavenly Father's perfection, nor could he set for us a lower standard than that. There is only the one standard, and we must attain to that as nearly as we can in our conduct and approve it fully in our hearts.

JUSTICE, EQUITY, A CHRISTIAN QUALITY.

But we should explain what is meant by "doing well." We are exhorted to "seek judgment [always be on the side of right and justice, desiring to do justice to all with whom we have dealings]; relieve the oppressed [be of generous spirit, be willing and anxious to lift some of the burdens from the groaning creation to the extent of our ability];

judge the fatherless [see that the orphans and those not properly capable of looking out for their own welfare shall suffer no loss at our hands, but on the contrary we shall do what we can to secure to them their just and reasonable rights]; plead for the widow [feel a sympathy for the helpless and plead their cause with others, which would imply generosity on our part as well as justice to them]."

It would appear that Christian people spend a good many years of their experiences as New Creatures without making great progress. One difficulty leading up to this condition is a failure to recognize the basic principles underlying the divine laws, which apply to us from the moment we are adopted into the Lord's family. The first of these basic principles is justice. We need to learn more and more clearly what are our own rights and the rights of our fellow creatures in the Church and out of the Church. We need to learn how to measure the affairs of ourselves and of others with the plummet of justice, and to realize that we must not under any circumstances or conditions infract the rights, interests or liberties of others – that to do so would be wrong, sinful, contrary to the divine will, and a hindrance to our growth in grace. Secondly, we must learn to esteem love as next to justice in importance in the divine code. By love we mean not amativeness nor soft sentimentality, but that principle of kindness, sympathy, consideration and benevolence which we see manifested in our heavenly Father and in our Lord Jesus.

In proportion as we grow up in the Lord, strong in him, it must be along the lines of these elements of his character. More and more we must appreciate and sympathize with others in their trials and difficulties and afflictions; more and more we must become gentle, patient, kind toward all, but especially toward the household of faith. All the graces of the Spirit are elements of love. God is love, and whoever, therefore, receives of his Spirit receives the spirit of love.

These two basic principles must cover all of our conduct in life. Justice tells us that we must cease to do evil – that we must not speak

a word or do an act that would work injustice to another, nor even by look imply such injustice; we must be as careful of his or her interests and welfare as of our own. Justice must cover all of our dealings with others. Love may permit us to give them more than justice would require, but justice demands that we must never give them less than due, no matter if they do not require justice at our hands, no matter if they are willing to take less than justice, no matter if they would say nothing if we should take advantage of them, no matter if they would not appreciate our degree of justice – no matter, our course is the same. We have received of the Lord's Spirit, and must act from this standpoint and not from the standpoint of others who have not his Spirit or who are more or less blinded and disabled thereby from dealing justly.

If justice must mark our conduct toward others, so love must be used by us in measuring the conduct of others toward us. We may not apply to others the strict rules of justice which we acknowledge as our responsibility to them. Love, generosity, demand that we accept from others less than justice, because we realize that they are fallen, imperfect, not only in their flesh but also in their judgments. Furthermore, we see that the great mass of the world has not received the Spirit of the Lord at all, and therefore cannot fully appreciate these basic principles of justice and love as we appreciate them. We must in love look sympathetically upon their condition, as we would upon the condition of a sick neighbor or friend, parent or child. We must make allowance for their disordered condition, and think as charitably as possible of their words, conduct, etc.

LOVE AND JUSTICE BOTH CONTROL.

This does not mean that we must be blind and oblivious to true conditions, and permit ourselves to be deprived of all that we possess or earn; but it does mean that we should take a kind, sympathetic view of the unrighteousness and injustice of those with whom we have dealings – that we should remember that they are fallen and that they

have not received the grace of God as we have received it, and that they are not, therefore, to be measured by the line of strict justice, but rather that their imperfections are to be allowed for reasonably by the elastic cord of love. It is our own conduct that we are to measure by the rule of justice, the Golden Rule.

How clearly the Master sets forth these conditions, urging upon us the Golden Rule as the measure for our conduct toward others, and that in measuring their conduct toward us we shall be as generous as we shall wish our Lord to be in his judgment of ourselves, in harmony with his statement, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." A right appreciation of these basic principles, justice and love, by the Lord's people, and worked out in the daily affairs of life, would lift them above the world. It would save many an altercation, [R3453 : page 331] many a law suit, many a quarrel, and would make of the Lord's people shining examples of kindness, generosity, love, and at the same time examples of justice, right living, sterling honesty, etc.

Verses 18-20 apply specially to natural Israel, though we shall see that an application is also possible to spiritual Israel. Without telling the Israelites how he would accomplish the complete cancellation of their sins in due time through the great antitypical sacrifice, the Lord merely assures them of the fact that such a result would come, and that if they would accept this by faith they would see how reasonable were the Lord's requirements in every particular. If they would thus seek to walk in the Lord's ways they would eat the good of the land, they would have blessings upon their herds and flocks and crops, for this was the Lord's covenant with that nation; while on the contrary it was equally a part of the covenant that if they would be disobedient to him they would go into captivity, fall by the sword, have famine, pestilences, etc. – See our Lord's statement of this matter in Leviticus 26:3-33.

The application to spiritual Israel is that we should continually remember that we were bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ, and that his sacrifice and not any works that we could do are the basis of our acceptance with God – that by his stripes we are healed. Another lesson is that no matter how gross or dark our condition was before we thus came to the Lord, no matter how sinful we had been in ignorance and darkness, the merit of the great Atonement Sacrifice covers all these blemishes and makes us from the moment it is applied absolutely clean, "whiter than snow." We are to remember that those sins do not cling to us afterward, that we will not be held responsible for them even though some weakness of the flesh resulting from sin may be with us even until the day of death. The New Creature accepted in Christ is counted as being without spot or blemish. We are to appreciate this standing granted to us as sons of God, and not, like the prodigal, eat the swinish husks nor walk carelessly in life, so as to have the robes of our justification sullied by contact with the world and the flesh. We are, as the Apostle declares, to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world." **[R3454 : page 331]**

Thus appreciating our standing, relationship and favors, we are to enter willingly and obediently into all the good will of God, seeking to cultivate in ourselves the principles of his righteousness – justice and love. The assurance is that under these conditions we shall "eat the good of the land." To us this would not refer to natural good things, but to spiritual good things, for have we not exchanged our interest in all earthly things for the heavenly, the spiritual? Thus it is fulfilled: the Lord's true followers have the best there is so far as heart and mind, peace and rest and joy are concerned – the "peace of God which passeth all understanding," and a realization that "all things are ours, for we are Christ's and Christ is God's."

If, on the contrary, the spiritual Israelites of today refuse to walk in harmony with the Lord's direction and rebel against him, they would surely bring upon themselves the "destruction," the Second Death which the Scriptures indicate as the proper portion of those

who, after having tasted the good Word of God, the powers of the world to come, and have been made partakers of the holy Spirit, fall away in unappreciation – unthankfulness.

We might remark, too, that amongst those who maintain their relationship to God as willing and obedient, there is a difference: Some are willing and obedient when the matter comes to a crisis and they must decide as between the Lord and the world, as between the Lord and the Adversary. They are loyal to the Lord to the extent that they would never oppose him. Such will be overcomers, but will constitute the "Great Company" class. Others of this class, more zealous, more faithful, more willing and more obedient, will be brought off more than conquerors and get more than the spiritual new nature. Their reward will be the glory, honor and immortality, joint-heirship in the Kingdom, as the Bride, the Lamb's Wife.

