

## **MEAN CHRISTIANS AND NOBLE UNBELIEVERS**

**"Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." – 1 Cor. 1:26.**

SURELY NONE will dispute the statement that there are noble characters amongst unbelievers as well as amongst Christians; neither will any one of experience dispute that there are mean people amongst Christians as well as amongst the 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 disposition? Should we not expect that the doctrines of Christ, the spirit of His teachings – 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., 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. (Matt. 9:13.) True, "There is none righteous, no, not one...All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10,23); the fall of Father Adam involved every one 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 though they would disclaim perfection. They are, therefore, less inclined to acknowledge themselves to be *nothing*, unworthy of Divine favor, 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**

This class feel that some of the more degraded of the race need Divine pity and forgiveness, and are glad that God has compassion for these, and will help them; but somehow they feel that they do not need the imputed Robe of Christ's Righteousness to cover them; that they are so respectable that if God accepts any one 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. They 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 they neglect the only "name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." – Acts 4:12.

The class which we are describing is a numerous class, more numerous than many persons would suppose until they reflect upon 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, whom we mention merely as examples 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, though 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 can never 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 [R5135 : page 352] the same death penalty with him who is guilty of many and more serious offenses.

Since, then, all men are imperfect – none absolutely righteous – the one sentence of death includes *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 this door never attains to life, however much he may strive against sin, and however closely he may approach the door. Only passage *through the door* can gain an entrance into eternal life. "*I am the door; by Me if any man enter in*, he shall be saved." "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God [the sentence of death] abideth on him." – John 10:9; 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 the 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 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.

### **CONTINUANCE IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST CONDITIONAL**

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 must be *moral uplifting*; for the condition upon which Christ receives any one is, that he desires not only to be forgiven the sins that are *past*, but also to forsake sin for the *future*.

The lower one 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 of the reform of merely 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." (2 Cor. 7:1.) Whoever will not make the attempt to do this will not be continued in the School of Christ; for he has not Christ's Spirit,

and not having His Spirit he is "*none of His.*" "Whosoever practices sin [knowingly, willingly] is of the devil." (I 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 of many of the defilements of the flesh, and 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 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 not only do parents who have been upright and God-fearing, who have endeavored to cultivate in themselves the graces of the Spirit, 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 condition 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 had 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 young 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.

If children of Christian parents, favorably bred, 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, they may, by the grace of God, attain to a moral position higher than that attained by their parents, through putting into practise 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*. As 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 recognized [R5135 : page 353] as being of the world and under its condemnation, and not under the justification which extends only to believers and their minor children. (I 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 those 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 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 accept the Savior.

## ILLUSTRATED IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

The general operation of this law can be appreciated only 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 was laid hold upon by the very class that we have here described – *the publicans and sinners, the lower classes* – while it was rejected by the worldly-wise, the hypocritical and the pharisaical, who were morally and intellectually the superior class, and who 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 became the standard among His followers. They learned that, as the Lord's people, they should not only love one another, but should sympathetically love even those who hated them, who maligned them and who persecuted them, saying all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake; and that Divine blessing rested upon the meek, the patient, the humble, the peacemakers; and that the sum of all the graces is love. We find the very same teaching coming from the humble fishermen and publicans who accepted Him, and whom He sent forth as the Apostles of His grace.

For instance, we find the Apostle Peter saying, "Add to your faith knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love." (2 Pet. 1:5-8.) 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*?" (I John 4:20.) We find the Apostle James saying that all who are taught of the Lord should "show out of a good conversation [life, conduct] 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 will 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?" – James 3:13,14; 4:7,10,11; 2:5.

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.*" (Rom. 3:10.) He explains that only as we accept Christ have we the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation with the Father; 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 henceforth 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, but in harmony with truth, goodness, purity, benevolence and love.

And the Apostle 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 provision 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." – Rom. 13:10,12-14; 12:17-20.

St. Paul explained in particular the love which is the essence of the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and which all followers of the Lord must have if they would 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; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth." – I Cor. 13:4-8.

### **"THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD IS SURE, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE"**

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 even in the first century, 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." – Acts 4:13.

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 [R5135 : page 354] 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 the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of Truth, the spirit of righteousness from the Word of the Lord, is the civilizing, enlightening and ennobling influence which has wrought the marvelous 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 on the *lower classes* of society, and lifts them up; and the tendency is still observable, that those who are already lifted up 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 shall we be able to sympathize with those of our brethren in Christ who by nature are mean, ignoble, selfish, lacking in benevolence of thought, 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 shall view others from the Divine standpoint of sympathy for their weaknesses and ignoble qualities; and instead of condemning them, spurning them, and cutting their acquaintance because they do not come up to the noblest standards, we shall desire all the more to help them up, and shall seek kindly to point out to them the matters which they do not clearly see. We shall be patient with them as we see them striving to overcome. We shall realize that they contend against a mental disease which they have to some extent inherited, and which can only gradually be eradicated.

From this standpoint we shall 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. – 2 Cor. 5:16.

Each one who has accepted God's grace, 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 profess 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, 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 it also cover a multitude of imperfections in the 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 still cling to us as members of the fallen race, 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 our 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 into good nature in a day. Transformation of mind, speech and conduct requires patience and perseverance; but it can be accomplished by those who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit and who are obedient to the commands of the Great Teacher. "See that ye refuse not [obedience to] Him that speaketh" from Heaven. (Heb. 12:25.) Whoever neglects His teachings, neglects the great salvation offered during this Gospel Age; for none will be among 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 co-operate with the inspired prayer – "Create in me a *clean* heart [will], O God; and renew a right spirit [disposition] within me...Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee." – Psa. 51:10,13.

May the love of God be more and more shed abroad in our hearts, and our consciences be always tender, and may we ever abstain from the appearance of evil. May we be enabled at all times to be circumspect in our conversation, and to scrutinize our thoughts and words and doings, to the intent that we may ever be ready and able to serve our Heavenly Father and His dear flock, the "Feet" members of the Body of Christ!

Grudge no loving word, my brother,  
As along through life you go,  
To the ones who journey with you;

*If you love them, tell them so.*

