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John 9.

C. H. Mackintosh.

The moral effect of the mission of Christ is strikingly presented in John 9: 39 in this deeply interesting chapter. "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." The work which He had just performed upon the blind man may be regarded as a very beautiful illustration of this statement, inasmuch as it was an illustration of the work of the Cross. The remedy which was applied to the blind man was one which the human judgment would at once pronounce to be the most likely to deprive a man of sight. "He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." This mode of acting was well calculated to confound human wisdom, and hence it leads one naturally to contemplate the great work of the Cross, in which we may behold the entire overthrow of all man's wisdom, and the full establishment of the wisdom of God upon its ruins. That a man crucified in weakness should be God's great ordinance of salvation to the believing soul — that this same man should, by death, destroy him that had the power of death — that He should, by being nailed to an accursed tree, become the foundation of eternal life to His Church, — all this involves a display of wisdom which, while it opens the eyes of poor blind sinners, and pours in the light of heavenly wisdom upon the dark understanding, only dazzles and confounds the learned and the wise of this world. "The foolishness of God is wiser than man."

But where are we to look for a manifestation of this "foolishness," which at once excels and confounds the wisdom of man? Assuredly to the Cross. "The preaching of the Cross is to the Greek foolishness." The proud sages of Greece, wrapped up in their schemes of philosophy, were but little prepared to understand or appreciate the preaching of the Cross, which called upon them to come down from their heights of fancied wisdom — to lay aside their philosophy as a vain and cumbrous mass of folly, and, as "poor and miserable and blind and naked" sinners, betake themselves to Him who had been nailed to the tree, between two malefactors.

Then, again, "the preaching of the Cross is to the Jew, a stumbling-block." The Jew would despise or stumble over the Cross, just as much as the Greek, though he looked at it from a totally different point of view. The Greek looked at the doctrine of the Cross from the fancied elevation of "science falsely so called." The Jew looked at it from amid the dark and bewildering mists of a traditional religion. In both alike we behold the blinding power of the god of this age. Both alike were moving in a sphere which owned not "Christ crucified" as its centre.

Now, the Lord Jesus expressly tells the Pharisees in this chapter, that their sin was not their *real* blindness, but their *fancied* sight. "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now *ye say*, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." A blind man could have his eyes opened; but for one who professed to see, no remedy was needed. A sick man may be made whole, but one who professes to be whole needs neither balm nor physician. The most hopeless feature in the condition of the Jews was their imagining that all was right. So far had they gone in their fancied soundness and rectitude, that they "had agreed already that if any man did confess that He (Jesus) was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." This was going very far. It was not that they had taken the trouble of investigating the claims of that blessed One who stood in their midst. No; without a question, they had made up their minds that no

confessor of Christ should remain within the pale of *their* Church. *How* could they learn? What hope was there. left for men, who, when called upon to look at an object and own its merits, would rise up, and in blind obstinacy close the window-shutters, or put a bandage across their eyes? None whatever. "Now ye say, *We see; therefore* your sin remaineth." This is truly solemn. The permanence of sin is connected with a mere profession to see. What a principle for an age of religious knowledge!

But let us trace in the person of the blind man the progress of an honest soul upon whom the light of heaven had dawned.

From the moment that this man became the subject of the work of Christ, he was a marked man. "The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?" The marked change that had taken place was manifest to all who had known aught of his previous state. It was an important case, and one which needed to be submitted to the judgment of the Church. "They brought to the Pharisees him that aforesaid was blind." Nothing could be accredited which wanted the stamp of the Church's approval. It was in vain, that a blind man had had his eyes opened to see the light of heaven. If the matter met not the approval of the Pharisees, it must go for nought. Now let us see how the Pharisees deal with the case. They were, we feel assured, ready to bear with anything save a clear, simple, emphatic testimony to the work of Christ; but this was the very thing which the man was about to lay before them. "How were thine eyes opened?" Mark the reply, "*He* put clay on mine eyes." How little the Pharisees knew, or cared to know, of this! They, no doubt, regarded the matter as an insult to common sense. It certainly was, in its way, "a stone of stumbling" to them.

But who did the man mean by "*He*?" Who was "*He*?" This was the point. The poor man was ignorant of this himself, though he was on the highway to intelligence about it. He knew the *work*, but not the *Person* of Christ. Yet how highly distinguished was he, in being led to a knowledge of the work of Christ; yea, in being himself the subject of it; for this is the true way in which to arrive at a knowledge of it. Intellectual accuracy in reference to the plan of salvation is but a poor, cold, unimportant thing, when not accompanied with the personal experience of its efficacy. We shall certainly never be able thereby to confound the logic of such as stand up merely for the defence of systematic religion, apart from, or in opposition to, Christ. We must be able to show, in our own persons, our character, our ways, the practical results of the work of Christ, or else all our accuracy will be little worth. "*He* put clay on mine eyes, and I washed, and do *see*." Here was the presentation of a living fact which was calculated to bear down with greater weight upon a Pharisee's conscience, than all the arguments that could be used. What could gainsay it? Men might reason as they pleased; they might even talk about giving glory to God; but this man could prove in his own person, that the work of Christ had done that for him which the Jewish system, with its priesthood and its rites, never could. This was enough for him, and it would have been enough, too, for any who were not blinded by the power of system.

But, observe, how the heart of this poor man lingers about the work of Jesus. He never allows himself to be drawn away from it, in order to follow the puzzling arguments of the Pharisees. To all their questionings and reasonings his reply is "*He* put clay on mine eyes, and I washed and do see." Here was his solid ground, from which no logic could shake him. He kept to the simple fact of Christ's work, and reasoned not upon it, and this was his security. Had he reasoned upon it, they would have confounded him, for they were subtle men; but they could make nothing of his simple testimony to the fact of what Christ had done for him. "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." The connection between the two statements is very marked. "*He* put clay on mine eyes," and "now I see." When we can connect the work of Christ with positive results in our own case, the testimony is

irresistible; but there is a feebleness and a shallowness in the testimony of such as merely apprehend intellectually the theory of the gospel, which, not being connected with any positive result in the character and conduct, is soon borne down by the enemies of truth. This is very perceptible in the case of the parents of the man. They, when questioned, could deliver but a poor cold testimony in the matter. So far as their son and his wretchedness were concerned, they could speak distinctly enough, "but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not." In other words, they neither knew nor cared to know Christ or His work. They valued their position in connection with the accredited religion of the day, and were not prepared to bear the reproach of throwing in their lot with Christ and His followers. This, alas! is but too common. It requires no ordinary depth of truth in the soul, to enable a man to "go without the camp" to Jesus. It must be a personal question. The Grace of God as manifested in the cross must be experimentally known, else we never shall be able to witness a good confession. The name of Jesus never was, nor is it now, popular in the world. Religiousness may be, and doubtless will. But religiousness is one thing, and the faithful confession of Christ is quite another. The Pharisees and chief priests had plenty of religion; yea, they were its guardians. They could say, "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath-day;" and again, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner." All this sounded very religiously; but, my reader, we must ever bear in mind, that, to talk of giving glory to God, or of honouring His institutions, while Jesus is rejected, is the merest delusion. Jesus is God's great institution, and the cross of Jesus is that which makes His Person and work available to the sinner; hence, if he be rejected, we are destitute of the only true and divinely recognised basis of religion. One divine thought about God's anointed Saviour is better far than all the devout expressions of fleshy pietism. Where Jesus is known, there is the preparedness of heart to suffer for His name, and also the true desire to be identified with Him, and conformed to Him. But the parents of the man had not this preparedness of heart, and hence their testimony was characterized by all that so-called prudent caution which is ever observable in mere worldly religionists. "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." This was a serious affair. The Jewish system had, of course, a large place in the affections of every pious Jew, nor would any one lightly give up his position as a member of it; still less would he think of attaching himself to the person of one who was manifestly outside of all that which the world deemed reputable or desirable.

However, the man whose eyes were opened, "Could not but speak the thing he had seen and heard," and the consequence was, that the religious guides of the people could not endure the edge of his simple testimony — a testimony based throughout upon the work of Christ. He had received light, and this light had come into collision with the darkness. There could be no harmony — no fellowship — no rest. The light must be put out. So long as he had been a blind member of their system, it was well. They never raised a question; but since he had received light, and was not disposed to put it under a bushel, nor yet to put his conscience into their keeping, they had only to seek to get rid of him as best they could. "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out." They were the great depositaries of knowledge, and he was but a poor ignorant man, and should not presume to think for himself, or set up his judgment in opposition to them. They, no doubt, regarded him as an obstinate heretic, for whom nothing was reserved save the thunders of the Church. "They cast him out." And why? Simply because he had had his eyes opened. How strange! But yet how like what we see around us! How often do we see, now, cases like this! Men go on living in vice and ignorance, yet tolerated by human religion; but the moment the holy light of Scripture dawns upon them, they are only deemed fit subjects for the rack and the stake. The vilest crimes are light, in the judgment of a corrupt religious system, when compared with the honest confession of the name of Christ.

We have already noticed the extent of this honest man's intelligence. It only extended to the work of Christ. He understood nothing of his Person as yet. This knowledge was reserved for him when cast forth without the pale of the synagogue. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered, *Who is He*, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Now there is something very instructive in this progress in intelligence. He had been cast, by reason of his faithfulness, into a position of decided sympathy with the Son of God.

The Good Shepherd had, in tender mercy, visited the fold, and was now calling this His sheep by name, that He might lead him forth into a wide and wealthy place, wherein he might taste the blessedness of fellowship with that "one flock" which was about to be placed in the Father's Land for ever. "Who is He?" Precious inquiry of an honest heart! An inquiry speedily answered indeed. "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped Him." Here, then, we may well leave this highly-favoured soul — favoured, though expelled from amid all that was highly esteemed amongst men. Truly happy was it for him to find himself outside a system which was rapidly crumbling to ruin, and to know his place as a worshipper at the feet of the Son of God. He had gone without the camp to Jesus, bearing His reproach, and is now seen offering the sacrifice of praise, even the fruit of his lips.

My reader, may we know and prove, in our own persons, the practical application of all this!