

"Holy Brethren"

C. H. Mackintosh.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, *consider* the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus" (Heb. 3: 1).

"And let us *consider* one another, to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10: 24).

The two passages we have just penned, are very intimately connected. Indeed, they are bound together by the simple fact, that the inspired writer makes use of the same word in each; and, further, that this word occurs only in these two places throughout the whole of this marvellous treatise.

[The English word, "consider," occurs four times throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews: but it represents three different Greek words. In Hebrews 7: 4, "Consider how great this man was." Here the word is *theoreite*, which occurs in its various inflections about 56 times in the Greek Testament, but only in this one instance is it rendered by the word "consider." Its simple and general meaning is to "see" and "perceive."

Again, in Hebrews 12: 3, we have, "Consider Him who endured such contradiction," etc. Here the word is *analogisasthe* which occurs only in this place throughout the entire New Testament, and expresses the idea of comparison or analogy.

But in the two verses which stand at the head of this paper, the word is *katanoeo*, which has an intensive force, and signifies an earnest application of the mind.]

We are to consider Jesus; and we are to consider all those who belong to Him, wherever they are. These are the two grand departments of our work. We are to apply our minds diligently to Him and to His interests on the earth, and thus be blessedly delivered from the miserable business of thinking about ourselves or our own interests: a morally glorious deliverance, most surely, for which we may well praise our glorious Deliverer.

However, before proceeding to the great subjects which we are called to consider, we must dwell, for a little, on the wonderful title bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon all believers — all true Christians. He calls them, "holy brethren." This, truly, is a title of great moral dignity. He does not say, we *ought to be* holy. No; he says we *are*. It is a question of the title or standing of every child of God on the face of the earth. No doubt, having through sovereign grace this holy standing, we ought to be holy in our walk; our moral condition ought ever to answer to our title. We should never allow a thought, word, or act, in the smallest degree inconsistent with our high position as "holy brethren." Holy thoughts, holy words, holy actings are alone suited to those upon whom infinite grace has bestowed the title of "holy brethren. "

Let us never forget this. Let us never say, never think, that we cannot maintain such a dignity, or live up to such a standard. The very same grace which has bestowed upon us the dignity, will ever enable us to support it; and we shall see, in the progress of this paper, how this grace acts — the mighty moral means used to produce a practical walk in accordance with our holy calling.

But let us inquire on what does the apostle ground the title of "holy brethren"? It is of all possible importance to be clear as to this. If we do not see that it is wholly independent of our state, our walk, or our attainments, we can neither understand the position nor its practical results. We may assert with all confidence, that the very holiest walk that ever was exhibited in this world, the highest spiritual state

that ever was attained, could never form the basis of such a position as is set forth in the title of which we speak. Nay, more; we are bold to affirm that not even the work of the Spirit in us, blessedly essential as it is in every stage of the divine life, could entitle us to enter upon such a dignity. Nothing in us, nothing of us, nothing about us, could ever form the foundation of such a standing as is set forth in the title "holy brethren. "

On what then is it grounded? Hebrews 2:11 furnishes the reply. "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are *ad of one: for which cause He is not ashamed* to call them brethren." Here we have one of the most profound and comprehensive statements of truth contained within the covers of the divine volume. Here we see how we become "holy brethren"; even by association with that blessed One who went down into death for us, and who, in resurrection, has become the foundation of that new order of things in which we have our place; the Head of that new creation to which we belong; the Firstborn among the many brethren of whom He is not ashamed, inasmuch as He has placed them on the same platform with Himself, and brought them to God not only in the perfect efficacy of His work, but in all His own perfect acceptability and infinite preciousness. "The Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one."

[It is a fact of deepest interest, that, to "Mary Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils," was granted the privilege of announcing to the disciples the glad tidings of the new and wondrous relationship into which they were introduced. "Go to *My brethren*," said the risen Saviour, "and say unto them, I ascend unto *My Father* and *your Father*; and to *My God* and *your God* ." It is John who, by the Holy Ghost, records this profoundly interesting fact.

Never before had such an announcement been made. But now the great work was done, the battle over, the victory gained, the foundation of the new edifice laid; and Mary Magdalene was made the herald of the most glorious tidings that ever fell on mortal ears.]

Wonderful words! let the reader ponder them. Let him specially note the vast, yea, the immeasurable difference between these two words "Sanctifier and sanctified." Such was our blessed Lord, personally, intrinsically, in His humanity, that He was capable of being the Sanctifier. Such were we personally, in our moral condition, in our nature, that we needed to be sanctified. But — eternal and universal homage to His name! — such is the perfection of His work, such the "riches" and the "glory of His grace" that it can be said, "As He is so are we in this world" — "the Sanctifier and the sanctified are all of one" — all on one common ground, and that for ever.

Nothing can exceed this as to title and standing. We stand in all the glorious results of His accomplished work, and in all the acceptance of His Person. He has linked us with Himself, in resurrection-life, and made us sharers of all He has and all He is as man — His deity, of course is incommunicable.

But let us note very particularly all that is involved in the fact that we *needed to* be "sanctified." It sets forth in the clearest and most forcible manner the total, hopeless, absolute ruin of every one of us. It matters not, so far as this aspect of the truth is concerned, who we were or what we were in our personal history or our practical life. We may have been refined, cultivated, amiable, moral, and, after a human fashion, religious; or we may have been degraded, demoralised, depraved, the very scum of society. In a word, we may have been morally and socially as far apart as the poles; but inasmuch as all needed to be sanctified, the highest as well as the lowest, ere we could be addressed as "holy brethren," there is evidently "no difference." The very worst needed nothing more, and the very best could do with nothing less. Each and all were involved in one common ruin, and needed to be sanctified, or set apart, ere we could take our place amongst the "holy brethren."

And now, being set apart, we are all on one common ground; so that the very feeblest child of God on the face of the earth belongs as really and truly to the "holy brethren" as the blessed apostle Paul himself. It is not a question of progress or attainment, precious and important as it most surely is to make progress, but simply of our common standing before God, of which the "Firstborn" is the blessed and eternal definition.

But we must here remind the reader of the vast importance of being clear and well grounded as to the relationship of the "First-born" with the "many brethren." This is a grand foundation-truth, as to which there must be no vagueness or indecision. Scripture is clear and emphatic on this great cardinal point. But there are many who will not listen to Scripture. They are so full of their own thoughts that they will not take the trouble to search and see what Scripture says on the subject. Hence you find many maintaining the fatal error that incarnation is the ground of our relationship with the First-born. They look upon the Incarnate One as our "Elder Brother," who, in taking human nature upon Him, took us into union with Himself, or linked Himself on to us.

Now such an error involves most frightful consequences. In the first place, it involves a positive blasphemy against the Person of the Son of God — a denial of His absolutely spotless, sinless, perfect manhood. He blessed be His name, was such in His humanity that the angel could say to the virgin of Him, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." His human nature was absolutely holy. As a man He knew no sin. He was the only man that ever lived of whom this could be said. He was unique. He stood absolutely alone. There was, there could be, no union with Him in incarnation. How could the Holy and the unholy, the Pure and the impure, the Spotless and the spotted ever be united? Utterly impossible! Those who think or say they could, do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures or the Son of God.

Further: those who speak of union in incarnation are most manifestly the enemies of the cross of Christ; for what need was there of the cross, the death or the blood of Christ, if sinners could be united to Him in incarnation? Surely none whatever. There was no need of atonement, no need of propitiation, no need of the substitutionary sufferings and death of Christ, if sinners could be united to Him without them.

Hence we see how entirely this system of doctrine is of Satan. It dishonours the Person of Christ, and sets aside His precious atonement. And in addition to all this, it overthrows the teaching of the entire Bible on the subject of man's guilt and ruin. In short, it completely sweeps away the great foundation truths of our glorious Christianity, and gives us instead a Christless, infidel system. This is what the devil has ever been aiming at; it is what he is aiming at still; and thousands of so-called Christian teachers are acting as his agents in the terrible business of seeking to abolish Christianity. Tremendous fact for all whom it may concern!

Let us reverently harken to the teaching of Holy Scripture on this great subject. What mean those words which fell from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are repeated for us by God the Holy Ghost, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die*, it abideth alone"? Who was this corn of wheat? Himself, blessed be His holy name. He had to die in order to "bring forth much fruit." If He was to surround Himself with His "many brethren," He had to go down into death in order to take out of the way every hindrance to their eternal association on the new ground of resurrection. He, the true David, had to go forth single-handed to meet the terrible foe, in order that He might have the deep joy of sharing with His brethren the spoils of His glorious victory. Eternal hallelujahs to His peerless name!

There is a very beautiful passage bearing upon our subject in Mark 8. We shall quote it for the reader: "And He began to teach them, that the Son of man must *suffer* many things, and be rejected of

the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him." In another Gospel we are told what Peter said: "Pity Thyself, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee." Mark the Lord's reply; mark His attitude: "But when He had turned about and *looked on His disciples*, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind Me, Satan, for thou savest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

This is perfectly beautiful. It not only presents a truth to the understanding, but lets in upon the heart a bright ray of the moral glory of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, eminently calculated to bow the soul in worship before Him. "He turned and looked upon His disciples." It is as though He would say to His erring servant, "If I adopt your suggestion, if I pity myself, what will become of these?" Blessed Saviour! He did not think of Himself.

"He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," well knowing what awaited Him there. He went to the cross, and there endured the wrath of God, the judgement of sin, all the terrible consequences of our condition, in order to glorify God with respect to our sins, and that He might have the ineffable and eternal joy of surrounding Himself with the "many brethren" to whom He could, on resurrection ground, declare the Father's name. "*I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.*" He looked forward to this from amid the awful shadows of Calvary, where He was enduring for us what no created intelligence can ever fathom. If ever He was to call us "brethren," He must *all alone* meet death and judgement on our behalf.

Now why all this if incarnation was the basis of our union or association? Is it not perfectly plain that there could be no link between Christ and us save on the ground of accomplished atonement? How could there be a link with sin unatoned for, guilt uncanceled, the claims of God unanswered? Utterly impossible. To maintain such a thought is to fly in the face of divine revelation and sweep away the very foundations of Christianity; and this, as we very well know, is precisely what the devil is ever aiming at.

[*We do not mean that union with Christ as Head of the body is taught in Heb. 2:11. For the unfolding of that glorious truth we must look elsewhere. It comes not within the range of the Epistle to the Hebrews. See Eph. 1: 22-23; Eph. 5: 30. But whether we view Him as Head of the body, or as the First-born among many brethren, Scripture most distinctly and emphatically teaches us that His death on the cross was absolutely essential to our union, or association, with Christ. No *death no union*. The corn of wheat had to fall into the ground and die, in order to bring forth much fruit. Stupendous fact! Glorious truth! Profound mystery.]

However, we shall not pursue the subject further here. It may be that the great majority of our readers are thoroughly clear and settled on the point, and that they hold it as a great cardinal and essential truth. Still, we feel it of importance just now to bear a very distinct testimony to the whole Church of God on this most blessed subject. We feel persuaded that the error which we have been combating — the notion of union with Christ in incarnation — forms an integral part of a vast infidel and antichristian system which holds sway over thousands of professing Christians, and is making fearful progress throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. It is the deep and solemn conviction of this that leads us to call the attention of the beloved flock of Christ to one of the most precious and glorious subjects that could possibly occupy their hearts, namely, their title to be called "holy brethren."

We shall now turn for a few moments to the exhortation addressed to the "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling." As we have already observed, we are not exhorted *to be* holy brethren: we are *made* such. The place and the portion are ours through infinite grace, and it is on this blessed fact that the inspired apostle grounds his exhortation, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of

the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Jesus."

The titles bestowed on our blessed Lord in this passage present Him to our hearts in a very wonderful manner. They take in the wide range of His history from the bosom of the Father down to the dust of death; and from the dust of death back to the throne of God. As the Apostle, He came from God to us; and as the High Priest, He has gone back to God for us. He came from Heaven to reveal God to us, to unfold to us the very heart of God, to make us know the precious secrets of His bosom.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

What a marvellous privilege to have God revealed to us in the Person of Christ! God has spoken to us in the Son. Our blessed Apostle has given us the full and perfect revelation of God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (John 1; 2 Cor. 4).

All this is unspeakably precious. Jesus has revealed God to our souls. We could know absolutely nothing of God if the Son had not come and spoken to us. But — thanks and praise to our God! — we can say with all possible certainty, "*We know* that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true: and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

We can now turn to the four Gospels; and as we gaze upon that blessed One who is there presented to us by the Holy Ghost, in all that lovely grace which shone out in all His words, and works, and ways, we can say, That is God. We see Him going about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; we see Him healing the sick cleansing the leper, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, feeding the hungry, drying the widow's tears, weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, and say That is God. Every ray of moral glory that shone in the life and ministry of the Apostle of our confession was the expression of God. He was the brightness of the divine glory, and the exact impression of the divine essence.

Thou art the everlasting Word,
The Father's only Son
God manifest, God seen and heard
The Heavens' beloved One.
In Thee most perfectly expressed
The Father's self doth shine
Fullness of Godhead too; the Blest
Eternally Divine.

How precious is all this to our souls! To have God revealed in the Person of Christ, so that we can know Him, delight in Him, find all our springs in Him, call Him Abba Father walk in the light of His blessed countenance have fellowship with Him and with His Son Jesus Christ, know the love of His heart, the very love wherewith He loves the Son — what deep blessedness! what fullness of joy! How

can we ever sufficiently praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for His marvellous grace in having introduced us into such a sphere of blessing and privilege, and set us in such a wondrous relationship with Himself in the Son of His love! Oh, may our *hearts* praise Him! May our *lives* praise Him! May it be the one grand aim and object of our whole moral being to magnify His name!

We must now turn for a little to another great branch of our subject. We have to "consider the High Priest of our confession." This, too, is fraught with richest blessing for every one of the "holy brethren." The same blessed One who, as the Apostle, came to make Him known to our souls, has gone back to God for us. He came to speak to us about God; and He is gone to speak to God about us. He appears in the presence of God for us; He bears us upon His heart continually; He represents us before God to maintain us in the integrity of the position into which His precious atoning work has introduced us. His blessed priesthood is the divine provision for our wilderness path. Were it merely a question of our standing or title, there would be no need of priesthood; but inasmuch as it is a question of our actual state and practical walk, we could not get on for one moment if we had not our great High Priest ever living for us in the presence of God.

Now there are three most precious departments of our Lord's priestly service presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the first place we read, in chap. 4, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, except sin."

Christian reader, only think of the deep blessedness of having One at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens who is *touched* with the feeling of your infirmities, who enters into all your sorrows, who feels for you and with you in all your exercises, trials, and difficulties! Think of having a Man on the throne of God — a perfect human heart, One on whom you can count in all your weakness, heaviness, and conflict; in everything, in short, except sin! With this, blessed be His name, He can have no sympathy.

But oh, what pen, what human tongue, can adequately set forth the deep, deep blessedness of having a Man in the glory whose heart is with us in all the trials and sorrows of our wilderness path! What a precious provision! What a divine reality! The One who has all power in Heaven and on earth now lives for us in Heaven. We can count on Him at all times. He enters into all our feelings in a way that no earthly friend could possibly do. We can go to Him and tell him things which we could not name to our dearest friend on earth, inasmuch as none but He can fully understand us.

Our great High Priest understands all about us. He has passed through every trial and sorrow that a perfect human heart could know. Hence He can perfectly sympathise with us, and He delights to minister to us in all our seasons of sorrow and affliction, when the heart is crushed and bowed beneath a weight of anguish which only He can fully enter into. Precious Saviour! Most merciful High Priest! May our hearts delight in Thee! May we draw more largely upon the exhaustless springs of comfort and consolation that are found in Thy large and loving heart for all Thy tried, tempted, sorrowing, suffering brethren here below!

In Hebrews 7:25 we have another very precious branch of our Lord's priestly work, and that is His intercession — His active intervention on our behalf, in the presence of God. "Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

What comfort is here for all the "holy brethren"! What strong consolation! What blessed assurance! Our great High Priest bears us upon His heart continually before the throne. All our affairs

are in His blessed hands, and can never fall through. He lives for us, and we live in Him. He will carry us right through to the end. Men speak about "the final perseverance of the saints." Scripture speaks of the final perseverance of our divine and adorable High Priest. Here we rest. He says to us, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

"If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by *the death of His Son.*," (the only possible way in which we could be reconciled) "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" — that is, His life up in Heaven. He has made Himself responsible for every one of the "holy brethren," to bring them through all the difficulties, trials, snares, and temptations of the wilderness, right home to glory. Universal and everlasting homage to His blessed name!

We cannot, of course, attempt to go elaborately into the great subject of priesthood in a paper like this; we can do little more than touch upon the three salient points indicated above, and quote for the reader the passages of Scripture in which those points are presented.

In Hebrews 13: 15 we have the third branch of our Lord's service for us in the heavenly sanctuary. "By *Him*, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

What a comfort to know that we have One in the presence of God to present our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving! How sweetly it encourages us to bring such sacrifices at all times! True, they may seem very poor, very meagre, very imperfect; but our great High Priest knows how to separate the precious from the vile; He takes our sacrifices, and presents them to God in all the perfect fragrance of His own Person and ministry. Every little breathing of the heart, every utterance, every little act of service, goes up to God, not only divested of all our infirmity and imperfection, but adorned with all the excellency of the One who ever liveth in the presence of God, not only to sympathise and intercede, but also to present our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise.

All this is full of comfort and encouragement. How often have we to mourn over our coldness, barrenness, and deadness, both in private and in public! We seem unable to do more than utter a groan or a sigh. Well, Jesus — it is the fruit of His grace — takes that groan or that sigh, and presents it to God in all His own preciousness. This is part of His present ministry for us in the presence of our God, a ministry which He delights to discharge — blessed be His name! It is His joy to bear us upon His heart before the Throne. He thinks of each one in particular, as if He had but that one to think of.

It is wonderful; but so it is. He enters into all our little trials and sorrows, conflicts and exercises, as though He had nothing else to think of. Each one has the undivided attention and sympathy of that large, loving heart, in all that may rise in our passage through this scene of trial and sorrow. He has gone through it all. He knows, as we say, every step of the road. We can discern His blessed footprints all across the desert; and look up through the opened heavens and see Him on the throne, a glorified Man, but the same Jesus who was down here upon earth — His circumstances changed, but not His tender, loving, sympathising heart: "The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Such then, beloved Christian, is the great High Priest, whom we are exhorted to "consider." Truly we have all we want in Him. His sympathy, perfect; His intercession, all-prevailing; His presentation of our sacrifices, ever acceptable. Well may we say, "We have all, and abound."

In conclusion, let us glance for a moment at the precious exhortation in Hebrews 10:24: "Let us *consider* one another, to provoke unto love and good works."

How morally lovely is the connection! The more attentively we consider Him, the more we shall be fitted and disposed to consider all who belong to Him, whoever and wherever they may be. Show us

a man full of Christ, and we will show you a man full of love, and care, and interest for every member of the body of Christ. It must be so. It is simply impossible to be near Christ, and not have the heart filled with the sweetest affections for all that belong to Him. We cannot consider Him without being reminded of them, and led out in service, prayer, and sympathy, according to our little measure.

If you hear a person talking loudly of his love for Christ, his attachment to Him and delight in Him, and, all the while, having no love for His people — no readiness to spend and be spent for them, no self-sacrifice on their behalf — you may be sure it is all hollow, worthless profession. "Hereby perceive we the love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth." And again, "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also" (1 John 3: 16-18; 1 John 4: 21).

These are wholesome words for all of us. May we apply our hearts most diligently to them! May we, by the powerful ministry of the Holy Ghost, be enabled to respond with all our hearts, to these two weighty and needed exhortations, to "Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession," and to "Consider one another!" And let us bear in mind, that the proper consideration of one another will never take the form of prying curiosity, or unwarrantable *espionage* — things which can only be regarded as the curse and bane of all Christian society. No; it is the very reverse of all this. It is a loving, tender care, expressing itself in every form of refined, delicate, and seasonable service — the lovely fruit of true communion with the heart of Christ.