

What Manner of Persons?

Notes of an Address on Hebrews 12: 25; Hebrews 13: 1; and 2 Peter 3: 7-18.

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Careful comparison of these passages will, I think, show that in many points there is a striking likeness. If, as is commonly supposed, the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by Paul, we can see at once that the apostle Peter referred to it as corroborating that which the Spirit of God was giving by inspiration through His own pen. We get in both cases the heavens and the earth; the heavens referring particularly to the atmospheric heavens, which have been the seat of Satan's power, and are corrupted by sin, just as the earth has become the seat of man's power under the leadership of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the children of disobedience. The heavens have been defiled by Satanic iniquity, and the earth by human iniquity Both are going to be removed. Peter tells us plainly that the heavens are going to be dissolved, and the very earth is going to be burnt up. The Epistle to the Hebrews is no less explicit. It tells us that the one whose voice shook the earth, in connection with the giving of the law, is going to speak again, and he promises, "Yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." Yet once more so it is the last time. It signifies the removing of the things that are shaken. We can see how God is shaking the order of things which prevails amongst men, but the word looks on, and heaven is also going to be shaken.

Now I understand this to mean the final thing: the removal of those things which are shaken, so that the things which cannot be shaken will remain. God may give what I would call preliminary shakings. When an earthquake smites some part of the earth's surface it comes like a bolt from the blue. Suddenly people are whirled off their feet by the fearful convulsion of nature which takes place, and then for weeks and months there are subsequent shakings. The earth has had its great fall, and it has a number of little jolts before it settles down to its new position. That is the way in creation, but God's way seems to be the reverse. It was so in connection with His overturning of Egypt. Nine times He shook them by providential circumstances, increasing in intensity. The minor earthquakes came first, up to the point when the blow like a great earthquake fell and God Himself by the destroyer came down, and death passed upon the firstborn. God's ways now are the same. He shakes and warns, but the great shaking is coming, when the things that are shaken will be removed. Thanks be to God, the Christian has things which cannot be shaken! When God puts forth His hand, and shakes man's systems and man's organisations, there are things that cannot be shaken. There are all those things in connection with Mount Zion which cannot be shaken. They cannot be shaken because they have a divinely wrought foundation. Creation may be shaken if it pleases God to shake it, but these things are founded upon redemption. There you have something which cannot be shaken.

So he says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be removed, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." Then comes that striking little word, "Let brotherly love abide." I think we often miss the connection. I should like to go through the Bible, and read on from the end of every chapter to the beginning of the next. We so often stop when the chapters stop. It is most convenient, obviously, and easy to remember, but we frequently miss striking connections. Here is an instance: he speaks of things being shaken, and then of those which cannot be shaken, so as to "remain" or "abide," and then adds, "Let brotherly love abide."

We must not speak disparagingly of brotherly love. It does not rise to the supreme height of love,

the Divine nature. It is the Divine nature working itself out through the saints, therefore it must be inferior to the Divine nature itself. Anything which comes out in human expression has not that absoluteness which Divine things have. You remember that passage in 2 Peter 1, where we are told to add virtue to our faith. We are taken through a list of those excellent characteristics, beginning with faith, and working up till we come to verse 7, which speaks of godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. There is an ascending scale, and you come to that which God is, and which crowns everything. When you come to Divine love you come to that which is absolutely perfect in every respect. Brotherly love is a very wonderful thing. It is the love of God flowing out through His people. It is the family love. "He that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him." It is a love that springs from the divine nature. Even the apostle Paul was a human vessel, and therefore brotherly love, even in a Paul or a Peter, and certainly in ourselves, is not equal to the thing itself — love. But "Let brotherly love abide." That comes home to my soul with very considerable force. You know that when things are shaken around them, the people of God naturally and instinctively are drawn together. We are linked up with an eternal order of things. We are born of God, and redeemed. We are put into new and heavenly relationships which abide. We have a portion outside this earth which man has corrupted, and outside the air which the devil has corrupted. Our place in the Divine economy, in the new age and for eternity, lies outside the scene which is going to be shaken by God in judgment. "Let brotherly love abide." Let us see to it that it does abide in our own hearts. It may be fairly easy to love in the abstract saints a thousand miles away, but the test comes with the **Christians whom we know**, since the more we know them the more conscious we shall be of their defects, and the more easily brotherly love can take its flight from our hearts.

Then the apostle goes on to speak of the One who is ever the same. I believe the contrast is between Hebrews 13: 8 and 9. "Jesus Christ, the same; yesterday, and today, and for ever." Then he turns to the saints and says, "Be not carried about by divers and strange doctrines." The One who is immutably and eternally the same, and you, who believe on His name, are not going to be blown about by every wind of doctrine.. No, the stability and changelessness which marks the Lord Jesus is the character which is to be seen and followed in His people.

Now, with reference to the Scripture in Peter's second epistle, the Apostle tells us very plainly what the end of things, as we know them, is going to be. It is a very humiliating thing. It is very certain that the men of the world will not believe this, and it is a very serious question for us as to how fully we believe it. "The heavens and the earth **which are now**." Evidently the flood marked a tremendous cataclysm which altered the whole order of things in this world physically. The heavens and the earth, which are now, are by the same word kept in store, **reserved unto fire**. I wonder how much we really do in our own minds write those three words on all the things that we see and come in contact with every day. If a Christian is living in the light of eternity, as he looks at the great works of man he sees written across them, "Reserved unto fire." As he looks at all man's great schemes, their great organisations, their great trusts, their great unions, they are all covered by those three words. Men are most diligent about their schemes all the world over — like a great ant heap, where the ants are running in all directions in the most frantic fashion. Let a tractor come through, and the ant-world is hurled all over the place. So with all the schemes of men. What is to be the end of them? If you ask what the ultimate end of them is going to be, it is as certain as anything can be in the Word of God — they are all reserved unto fire. Fire is the symbol of God's judgment. They are reserved unto judgment. Men are building up their schemes to be destroyed by the fire of God's wrath. Do we believe it? I think we need not go far to seek an answer to the question. The apostle immediately indicates the conduct which will mark the one who does believe it. "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." Clearly if I walk through the world

believing that the judgment of God rests on it, it will have upon me a very separating effect, both internally and personally, and also in all one's associations. It would make us walk in holy ways.

Well now, that is negative. The very fact that you know the judgment of God is resting upon things will make you a separate person, but then, we are filled with positive expectations. We hasten unto the coming of the day of God. We are like people with our hands out to the dawning of a new day. Nothing we can do will make the clock go faster, but we haste towards it in our hearts and affections. People are eagerly reaching forward to the new day that is coming. Men are talking about the new day which they think is going to be brought about by new schemes, but we Christians are hastening unto the coming of the day of God. We hasten to it, not merely because all that which is obnoxious and tainted with sin is going to come under the action of the fire, but we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Righteousness is going to have its abiding home, with nothing to disturb. It will not have to be upon a throne, casting its judicial eye around continually in case there be an uprising of that which it must condemn. That is the position in the millennial age, when you reach the new heavens and the new earth, righteousness will be able to descend from the throne — its work being done — and come down abidingly amongst men, without any thought of there ever arising again that which will be a challenge. It will dwell unhinderedly in the new heavens and the new earth.

"Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace." Peace, as you know, is the fruit of righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace." Thank God, we are established in righteousness already. That which is going to be brought about in the coming age has been brought in with ourselves. You and I have been by the work of Christ put into the standing of righteousness already, so that we can be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. But these are very searching exhortations. If we are people who really do look for such a blessed condition of things, you find the conduct which will instantly mark us; we shall not be led away with error, and fall from our own steadfastness. I see a great likeness to what we were looking at in Hebrews 13: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today and for ever"; "Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines." You and I are put into touch with Jesus Christ, who is the same. We have absolute righteousness in Him. Men invent and reason, because they have not anything that is absolute. It is only good as far as it goes, if it is good at all; but when you have Jesus Christ, you have One who is eternally the same. Absolute perfection marks Him yesterday, today and for ever. You and I are not going to be carried about by all these new ideas if we know Jesus in that way. We are not going to be led away with the power of the wicked, and fall from our own steadfastness.