

The Lordship of Christ

Notes of an Address at the Believers' Meetings, Dublin, January 5th, 1865 by J. A. Trench.

CBA6103(2).

The Word of God to which I will refer you, beloved friends, is in 1 Cor. 12: 3. "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

May God write upon our hearts, at the close of these blessed meetings, the solemn words, that "*no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*" But you say, "we constantly say that Jesus is the Lord; why we are always talking about 'the Lord Jesus Christ.'" That is just what I want to call your attention to. We do not enter into the solemn truth we are uttering, when we say "our Lord Jesus." By His Word to us tonight, God would bid us pause, and ask ourselves if we fully understand all their significance. Oh, if there is one child of the living God here, that has been able to say "the LORD Jesus," as He would have that word said, it has only been by the direct teaching of the Holy Ghost. The flesh rebels against His Lordship over us. We have hearts that are not willingly subject to His authority. We are fonder of choosing our own path, than of walking in the one He has marked out for us. Are we not disobedient children? But God would remind us that *Jesus is our Lord*. And it we are able duly to confess that He is, then it is not of the natural heart, but by the Holy Ghost, and by Him alone.

Let me read a passage from the Acts of the Apostles, that will enable us to understand the import God attaches to the name "Lord." In Acts 2: 36, Peter preaches to the men of Israel, that "God has raised up" Jesus of Nazareth, whom "ye took, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; and" (according to Psalm 110, "Jehovah hath said unto my *Lord*, sit Thou on my right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool,") "hath made that same *Jesus both Lord and Christ.*" Here, then, this name is given Him in special reference to Israel's subjection to Him; but we read in Psalm 8, "Thou hast put *all* things in subjection under His feet," and though "we see not yet *all* things put under Him," (according to the Word of God, in Heb. 2: 8) — "but we see *Jesus* who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, *crowned with glory and honour.*" Yea, "hath God highly exalted Him, and given Him a *name* which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD*, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2: 9-11). Thus, then, this name belongs of right to Jesus, *as raised from the dead* by God, to the place of power and authority — an authority which must yet be owned by all.

For this, His undisputed Lordship, the time has not fully come: but the time has come for the *Church's* subjection to Him as its Head. Hence we have a special application of Psalm 8 to our own time, by the Holy Ghost, in Eph. 1: 22. "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the *Church*, which is His body, the fulness of Him which filleth all in all." In fact, Jesus waits to enter upon His universal sway, until His Church shall be associated with Himself in it. Meanwhile each one of us, who have been "quicken'd" from our death in sins, and "raised up together with Him," have been also baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body (1 Cor. 12: 13), of which Christ is the Head and constituted Lord. So, we find ourselves, beloved, in the blessed and solemnly responsible place of subjection to Him. He is the Lord of His *Church's* heart, as the *first-fruits* of his

universal sway. Oh, that each one of us, as members of that body, may be enabled by the Holy Ghost to say that He is Lord, and to give Him His rightful place in our hearts and consciences! Therefore, we see that He is not "our Lord" merely as our Saviour; it is not simply a title for Jesus, as we say in the world, "lord so and so," marking special rank and distinction, but this title is His *because of the relationship*, in which He stands in resurrection to us, as Head of His body, the Church. And the Holy Ghost would keep us in mind, by every use of it, that we are responsible to obey Him. Yes, beloved, to *obey* the precious One, who has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us one with Himself, "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" — in all that He is. Oh, I am persuaded, that in the comfort and peace and blessing of our salvation, we think too little of the unreserved obedience which now becomes due to our *Lord* Jesus!

The better to enter into our Lord's mind, about this, our confession of His name, and the responsibility that attaches to it, let me remind you of those words of His, in Matt. 7: 21; "Not every one that *saieth* unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that *doeth the will of My Father*." Often to take the name "Lord" upon our lips is nothing, but to yield ourselves in everything to be subject to His will, as revealed in His Word, this is indeed to acknowledge that He is Lord. Do we not then begin to see more clearly, why "no one can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost"? By that name, we are bound in responsibility to keep His commandments. I would not use that word, as if it were *bondage* to obey Jesus — God forbid. Far be it from us to think so! Bondage to obey Jesus! No, no, He has revealed Himself to us as our precious Saviour, our peace, our joy, our hope, our heaven, our all, that He may win our *hearts* for Himself. He does not want the cold service of the apprentice or the slave. He wants the loving heart-service of His chosen friends; and so he says expressly — "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends." Then as His friends He comes to us and makes known to us His counsels, His will; and now His own word to us is, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And here, beloved, shall we not say, that our self-willed hearts need the warning of Luke 12: 47, as well as the previous exhortation, "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes"? There was a time in the history of Israel, recorded for us in Judges 17: 6, when "there was no king, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This is what the flesh would like — the self-willed flesh that is still present with each of us: Yes, we need to be on our guard, lest the natural man should rise up in revolt within us, against the authority and Lordship of Jesus, as Head of His Body, and we should be found, each one acting as seemed best to himself, instead of giving Jesus His rightful sovereignty in our hearts. Then should we let the Word act as a sharp two-edged sword, in judgment, to cut at the root of the slightest insubordination, in thought, or ways, to Him. I speak as one who has proved in some little measure the desperate insubjection and self-will of my own heart. All I say is for myself, as well as you, beloved. What I desire is — is it not what we all desire? — that henceforward Jesus shall be *our Lord*, not in name only, but in deed. Oh, for an eye single to Him, a heart so occupied with Him, to the exclusion of all others, that not by effort or constraint, but spontaneously, our question at every step may be — What will Jesus have me to do? Then could we be found each one following his own inclination, or guided by the world's "needs be," or walking in a brother's path, be he ever such a "good man," liable to be crooked and perverse as our own? — and not rather, so that we might say with one of old "The *Lord* before whom I walk," and, "He that judgeth me is the *Lord*."

Here I am met with the cry, "Be all this as it may, let us at least love one another, we cannot see eye to eye in all things; let us give each other all freedom of action, and be found, it may be, ranged under distinct banners, walking in separated paths; but let us love — love — love!" There is no heart that is subject to the Lordship and commandments of Jesus, that does not own, after all that Jesus has said about it, our blessed responsibility, to "love one another;" and we have had many precious words

of exhortation on this mutual duty, during our meeting. Still we must not forget that the paths of love and obedience are not distinct, but identical. "And this is love," said one who lived very near the heart of Jesus, speaking by the Holy Ghost, "that we walk after His commandments" (2 John 6). Love may be met with in paths of disobedience; but this is not the holy love, which has its spring in God, and to which Jesus commands His people. Jesus Himself is the first object of all true love — the centre of that love, that takes into the circle of its affections all who are His; so that the closer our hearts are drawn to His, the closer they will be drawn to one another. But do not let us forget that a scrupulous obedience to the Word He has given us, as the all-sufficient, unerring guide for our path while He is absent, is the way He has appointed us, to prove that our hearts are His in more than name. Entire consecration to Jesus is the most precious bond that can unite hearts in this wilderness; and, certainly, in proportion as we are attracted to Him as our one object in life, His people, once separated, will become united in their path.

Hence it is, beloved, that the bond of unity between the Churches of the Saints, scattered over the earth, is found to be, according to the Holy Ghost, in 1 Cor. 1: 2, the *acknowledged Lordship of Jesus*. "Unto the Church of God at Corinth," He says, "*with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our LORD, both theirs and ours.*" Mark the emphatic place given to His title, meant as it is, to awake the Church throughout the earth, and specially at that time, the assembly at Corinth, to its responsibility of obedience to its Head and Lord. And the responsibility is later enforced, in every little matter of detail, by the solemn words of 1 Cor. 14: 37: "If any man think himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the *commandments of the Lord.*" To meet the condition of the Church at Corinth, in which already "the leaven" was working, which has now well-nigh leavened the whole lump, the Holy Ghost will sound again and again in their ears, with a frequency that has only its parallel in 2 Timothy, the name of "the Lord;" so that, at each mention of it, their conscience may be stirred up to the path of obedience, to the holy and separate walk that becomes the Church of God. Thus provision was made for a unity of path throughout the scattered Churches, by their common obedience to the one Lord — a unity such as even the world might recognize, and be forced to "believe," as Jesus said, "that Thou hast sent me" (John 17: 21). But from this glorious place of testimony for God in the world, the Church, once "a city set upon a hill," has fallen. Already, in 2 Timothy, the general apostacy and departure of the Church from Christ had set in; and instruction is given us, for our *individual* path of *faithfulness* in the midst of it. Here again the *Lordship* of Jesus is pressed upon our consciences by that often-repeated title, needful to correct the constant tendency of our hearts to stray from the straight path of following Jesus. A word from *the Lord* is enough for a mind subject to Him: and "this is love, that we walk after His commandments." Divine love and obedience are principles of action linked hand in hand. God's truth will never, never, be sacrificed to love, in the heart that *truly* loves. In the path of faithfulness to Christ Jesus the Lord, hearts will be drawn closest together; and though there be but two or three found that have courage for it, the precious promise is as good for us today, as when first it fell from His lips — "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." If He is there, what more do we need for blessing? Beloved, we have prayed much that the glory of God may be increasingly the object of our lives; let us remember how He has bound it up with our confession of Jesus as *the Lord*, (Phil. 2: 11), and cry to Him for more *obedient* hearts.

The Epistle of Jude is a solemn one, as bearing upon these last days. It opens with an exhortation "that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints " — needful, in consequence of principles already at work in men's minds, whose tendency was to subvert everything. These principles are found by v. 4 to be twofold - *the grace of our God is turned* into every kind of ungodly license, *and the only Master and Lord is denied*. Men, finding that salvation was through the

grace of God, would begin to assert their liberty to act in everything as they thought best, and hence to turn Jesus out of His place in their hearts as Master and Lord (for both words are found in the Greek original¹). Insubjection to lawful authority, this was the principle at work, described again in v. 8 as lordship² despised. And, oh! beloved, are not the seeds of it found in each heart? It begins to manifest itself in the disobedience to parental authority of the child's earliest years, and betrays its presence still in the desperate waywardness, and self-will, and rebellion of our hearts, even as the Lord's children. Oh! as we look back over the past for a moment, is it not a fearful retrospect of self-pleasing insubjection to the only Lord? And do we not still find ourselves ever disputing within, the paramount authority of our Lord Jesus? Shall we not then cry, to Him for "the casting down of every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and that *every thought* may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"? Never was there a day, I am persuaded, in which more humble watchfulness in this matter was needful for the Church of God. We live in an atmosphere "of despising dominion;" and one of the most popular papers of the day has its very popularity in that it holds up all who are in power to contempt, "speaking evil of dignities." How solemn the example of respect for authority given us in the Epistle before us, when it is said — "Michael the Archangel, in contending with the *devil*, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." Even "the prince of this world," "the ruler of the darkness of this world," "the prince of the power of the air," is to be owned in the region of his brief authority — a very important guide, I may say in passing, to the Church of God, as to its connexion with worldly power in the present age. And shall we be unsubject to Jesus our Lord? Oh, for grace to enable us to give Him no longer that name without the submission of heart in all things to His obedience, which is alone to own His Lordship.

Here let me say, that while we set a guard upon our unsubject minds, we need to watch against a very insidious form of insubjection to the Lord, to which we are often tempted; it is as real as open rebellion against Him, but not so patent, and therefore, if possible, more dangerous for our souls. That is, to own and be subject to authority which is not the Lord's, which is in truth to say, that *Jesus* is not the Lord. If it be required of us to be subject to authority, we must ask if it come from Jesus, for to own authority which is not from Him as its source, is really to *disown His*. The question, then, is not whether our hearts are subject to any lordship, but whether *Jesus* is *the Lord*, to whom they *alone* are subject. "Every tongue shall confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, to the glory of God the Father." Bear with me, beloved, in all that I have said, if it be according to the Word of the Lord, as to the responsibility connected with the name, that by the Holy Ghost we are taught to ascribe to Jesus.

And now a promise or two from Himself, and I have done. In John 15: 9, He has left us this precious word: "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; continue ye in My love." He gives us, as the *only* measure of the love wherewith He loves us, the Father's love for Himself, His well-beloved Son. Well may we say, "it passeth knowledge." And His is an *unchanging* love — "the same yesterday" — when first He set His heart upon us, dead in our sins - "today, and for ever." Our apprehension of it *may* change, but His love never can. Yet He wants that it should not be so with us. He desires that we should walk in the full enjoyment of it all our way in the wilderness — "Continue ye in My love;" and so He says, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love." Oh, beloved, what an incentive to obedience is here for us — *the unclouded enjoyment of His love!* Does His face seem hidden at times? Ah! it is not that He has changed, but there has been some departure of heart from Him on our part, some unfaithfulness. His will has lost its proper place in our terribly self-willed minds, and for the time we have been found in disobedience. Yes, it is in proportion as we walk in

1 *despotes* and *kurios*.

2 *kuriotes*.

subjection to Him, that we *enjoy that* love, and disobedience mars it all. The other passage is in John 14 "He that hath my commandments and *keepeth* them, he it is that loveth me." Observe the difference between *having* His commandments and *keeping* them — everybody with a New Testament, to be had for two pence, *has* the commandments of the Lord — but how have we *kept* them? He would speak to the heart of his disciples, troubled by the thought that their loved One was leaving them, and bid them prove their love, not so much by the tears of regret at His departure, as by practical obedience to His commandments while He was away — "he it is that loveth Me." Then the promise, "and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself unto him." And so, beloved, obedience to the Lord will lead into a wealthy place; Jesus will be with us in special manifestation of His love and presence, if few besides are found there. It will be a rough path, because of the fearful insubjection of our hearts: it will be a path of trial, because of the world, in the midst of which it lies. "I have chosen you out of the world; therefore, the world hateth you." You may be tempest-tossed, but there is a pillow in the storm for you, on the bosom of Jesus: lonely, shall I say? no, for the promise is, "I will manifest Myself unto him," and His presence is fulness of joy. The heart cannot be desolate, with Jesus for company, if it has learnt anything of His preciousness. Shall we hesitate one moment longer to yield up all in obedience to Him, though it be to tear from our heart the most cherished interests? At last, shall we surrender and be His alone? "Yes," you say, "if I only knew certainly what His will is." Then hear Him speak again, "If a man love Me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Mark His little words, His slightest wish; thus shall we know His will. "Nonessential" will then be an unknown word; it will be *essential* with us to find out His will in everything; and When we know it, to yield Him the joyful and implicit obedience of our hearts, if we have been taught by the Holy Ghost to say, that Jesus is the Lord. And what a promise! If all desert you, if you stand alone in a household, determined at all cost to follow the Lord; if you become a stranger to your dearest friends; if every cord that bound to earth is severed; "We will come unto him and *make our abode* with him." Oh, what fulness of blessing, verily "*His paths drop fatness.*" And now, beloved, we are about to separate, to return to our several spheres of service, while we still wait for Jesus, oh, may it be to enter into the deep, and solemn, and heart-judging significance of the name *Lord* Jesus! And every time we take it upon our lips, may it be to remember Him, to whom the *subjection of every thought is due!*

THAT I am Thine, my Lord and God,
Sprinkled and ransomed by Thy blood!
Repeat that word once more
With such an energy and light,
That this world's flattery nor spite
To shake me never may have power.
From various cares my heart retires,
Though deep and boundless its desires —
I'm now to please but One;
He before whom the elders bow —
With Him is all my business now,
And with the souls that are His own.

Indeed, if Jesus ne'er was slain,
Or aught can make His ransom vain,
That now it heals no more —
If His heart's tenderness is fled,
If of a Church He is not Head,
Nor Lord of all, as heretofore —
Then (so refer, my state to Him)
Unwarranted I must esteem,
And wretched, all I do.
Ah! my heart throbs, and seizes fast
The covenant that will ever last:
It knows — it knows these things are true.
No, my dear Lord, in following Thee,
And not in dark uncertainty,
This foot obedient moves.
'Tis with a Brother and a King,
Who many to His yoke will bring,
Who ever lives, and ever loves.
Let me my weary mind recline
On that Eternal Love of Thine,
And human thoughts forget;
Childlike, attend what Thou wilt say,
Go forth, and do it while 'tis day-
Yet never leave my sweet retreat
Thus all the sequel is well weighed,
I cast myself upon Thine aid —
A sea where none can sink.
Yea, in that sphere I stand, poor worm,
Where Thou wilt for Thy name perform
Beyond whate'er I ask or think.