

They that Feared the Lord

Ephesians 4: 1-7, 2 Timothy 2: 19-22; Revelation 3: 7-14.

Notes of an address by J. A. Trench, Edinburgh, 1891.

(from "An Outline of Sound Words" No. 6, p. 15)

It is of deep importance for our souls that we should be in the intelligence of what God is doing. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. That surely involves the intelligence of His mind. Twice, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle is arrested to betake, himself to prayer; first, for intelligence to show us the path, and secondly for power to take the path; and this preparatory to the exhortations of the three last chapters. Do we know, indeed, that our path is set in the light of the glory of God. Our failing walk does not alter it. We find two things that are traceable all through God's Word, His unchangeable principles, and His grace that always keeps a feeble remnant true to Himself to the end of a dispensation.

First, as to His principles; in Ephesians 4: 1 to 7, we find the path set before us; lowliness and meekness are to characterise it. Was there ever a day that such a spirit was more called for? If at the beginning, when all was at its brightest, there was the greatest need for this, how much more now. "Endeavouring" (verse 3) has not the sense here that it has acquired; it does not convey the thought of the possibility of failure, but is more "using diligence" — throwing, all our energies into seeking to realise that wonderful unity formed with all those that are Christ's. Are we really walking in the sense of being united by the Holy Ghost to a risen Man in glory, even our risen Saviour? Are we living in the fresh sense of this, so as to have the consciousness of the relationship through Christ with all those belonging to Him? It is one thing to assent to the truth, and another thing to realise it in our own souls.

But, it may be said, it is difficult to act upon the truth; things are changed since this Epistle was written. Yes, but the principles of God do not change; we are not left to modify Scripture to suit the changed state of things. All the elements of failure were already at work in the Apostle's times. They have received a terrible development since, but we have the Word of God still to guide.

Blessed be God, no ruin has touched His principles. Look at the verses in the Second chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy. There we read, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. And, let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." Blessed word, He knoweth them that are His. You and I may not be able to pick them out — this is His responsibility, I say it reverently; but then comes our responsibility in the verses that follow. These verses apply to the state of a ruined church. First a man is to *purge* himself from vessels to dishonour; a very full word in the original, implying separating himself.

The second step in the path is, "Flee also youthful lusts." Watch your own heart lest the enemy get in and mock the so-called path of separation. Then, thirdly, we are to seek out those that are similarly separated. Here, again, we are met by another of God's unchanging principles. From Matthew 11 to 19, the Lord was educating and training His disciples for the path in which He was about to leave them. He says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). There the church was to be found, and it abides in a day of ruin, although not in view of it. It was the richest resource of God from the beginning, and it remains to the end.

I want now to look at another thing — the ways of God in His grace in keeping a few cleaving to His

Name in the end of the dispensation. Look at Ezra 3. A day of ruin. but a day of God's grace that opens the way for those who had been in captivity to return to Jerusalem. A very broken company, indeed, but they were there in faith, and set up the altar of the God of Israel, with the most scrupulous adherence to the Word of God, no innovations, no altering to suit altered circumstances. Then, in Nehemiah, when the people wept, they were told, "The joy of the lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8: 9, 10). What a moment for that principle to be first enunciated in Scripture! The Lord comes in to encourage faith, though sad days were before that remnant during the lapse of centuries.

We have nothing to look forward to but the Lord. We must remember, in referring to these types, that we have nothing to reconstruct, the Holy Ghost having formed the unity of the body of Christ at Pentecost, maintains it in that unity ever since, even if there was but one on earth walking according to it.

Now I refer to the Book of Malachi when there existed a deplorable state of things, for while the Lord can say to Israel, "I have loved you," they reply, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" and everything that the Lord says is met in the same way, with scoffing. Yet we find a remnant in the midst of this appalling state of things. There were those who, in the face of everything, "feared the Lord" and "spake often one to another" (Mal. 3: 16). The fear of the Lord became a bond to those that loved Him in the midst of the darkest conceivable state of things. It was so sweet to the Lord that He kept a book of remembrance, even when they did not say anything, but only "thought upon His name." The Lord says, they shall be my peculiar treasure.

Again, in Luke 2, after the lapse of centuries we still find the remnant. Look at Anna, in Luke 2: 36 to 38, what cleaving to the Lord was there, even in her great age! Her heart was in the centre of God's interests on earth; and so we find the grace of the Lord still preserving a remnant, for bad as was the state of things in Malachi it was worse here. Pass on to Luke 21, and in verses 1 to 5, we see a beloved woman, in all her desolation, adhering to the centre of God's interests on earth, even at the last moments of the dispensation, for in the next verse we find that the days were coming when not one stone would be left upon another. Here was faith, lovely faith, adhering to God's unchangeable principles to the end.

Now comes the earnest question for us. Is there anything to answer to this in Christendom? This is where the Address to Philadelphia, in Revelation 3, comes in prophetically. As we come near to the close we find the Lord indicating what suits Him in the last state of things on earth. He presents Himself, not now in His official glory, but in His own essential nature, "The holy" and "The true." There are two words used for "true;" it is not here, he that speaks the truth, but He that is true, genuine. Holiness must be the first thing, and then genuineness, reality, unfeigned reality. He uses His power to open the door, and we have the assurance that this open door will continue to the end. Then we have the character of those who are to occupy the open door, "Thou . . . hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name." They are not characterised by strength, but by keeping His word. Oh, for obedience that having got a word from the Lord acts upon it. Those that do so will find an open door before them. In the presence of the ruin of these last days, nothing but uncompromising obedience will do. Adhering to the unchanged principles of His word to the end, holding fast the precious revelation of Christ in a day when the enemy with all his power will seek to get it from us. He gives us His attitude, and His path, and He looks for the reflection of that attitude. He says "I come quickly." It is not "Behold" here. He is only addressing Himself to those who are awake. He adds, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Then the Lord addresses the overcomer — the one true and faithful to this position upon whom He puts

His seal, as with the remnant in Malachi 3. We cannot fail to observe in this verse (Mal. 3: 12) the constant repetition of the little word "My," the sweet association with Him. There can be no addition to that "Hold that fast," and there will be the richest reward in the glory. I feel that the question is unsolved as to who the persons are. Once in the path does not ensure our being there always, even as the remnant lapse back. It does not need centuries for us to do so. What need of girding up of the loins. Out of the brightest state for Christ we may fail, but He will raise up others to the end. He will find what answers to Him until He comes. May we not be satisfied with anything short of this.