

Christ a Reprover

Proverbs 25: 12.

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Christian Friend vol. 17, 1890, p. 216.

(From hitherto unpublished notes.)

It is blessed as well as happy to mark the characteristics of the Lord's ministry, for His ministry is the witness of what He Himself is, and He is the witness of what God is, and we thus reach God through the paths of the Lord's walk or ministry here. Every step of that way becomes important to us. All that He did and said was but a real, truthful expression of something of Himself; as He Himself was nothing less than a real, truthful expression of God. He that saw Him saw the Father; and he that understands the character of His ministry, or can reach the moral glory that attaches to each moment of His walk and service here, learns what He is, and thus learns what God is.

Among other moral glories which shine in Him, look at that which marks Him as a rebuker or reprover.

When He was exposing the Pharisees, whom *worldliness* had set in opposition to Him, He speaks solemnly and peremptorily — "He that is not with me is against me." But when He alludes to those who were owning Him in their affections and in their testimony, but had not, perhaps, that *strength of faith* that set them in full company with Him, He speaks in other terms — "He that is not against us is for us." (See Matthew 12 and Luke 9.)

When Peter was moved by the spirit of the world (though he was full of amiable feelings and care touching the Lord Himself) the Lord exposes him on the moment with unsparing decision: "Get thee behind me, Satan." But when John Baptist sent a message to Him which was a reproach to Him, and betrayed the wrong, injurious thoughts which he had respecting Him, the Lord rebukes him, it is true, but with marked consideration. He returns a message to him which none but John himself could estimate, none other could feel the point and pungency of it: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Even John's disciples who carried the messages between them could not have understood this. They were not aware, I may say, how their master had been feeling, and Jesus would not expose their master to them. He would expose John to himself, but not to them, any more than to the multitude afterwards, in whose eye He strikingly sets off John, by — painting, as it were, several dark grounds on which to present John in very lively and beautiful light under their eye. (Matt. 11.) Again, the disciples going to Emmaus He rebukes in a very peculiar way. He addresses a sharp word to them: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe." For unbelief in the fact of the resurrection was a high offence against God in several ways. But in spite of their unbelief, these disciples personally desired Christ. Their hearts affected Him, and He valued that, though connected with their unbelief. And therefore while He rebuked, He warmed and blessed them. He spoke sharply to their ear, but He kindled their hearts.

And how duly and rightly does He measure out different rebukes to Thomas and to other disciples after the resurrection! Thomas exceeded. It was no common character of unbelief which he betrayed, and accordingly it must be no common style of rebuking that he must listen to. But with others it is in softer terms. Again we see the Lord as a rebuker, as between the two and the ten in Matthew 20. But how does He conduct the rebuke there? He tempers it because of the good and the right that was in them whom He had to rebuke, and in this He distinguishes Himself from His disciples.

The ten brethren were ministering unqualified condemnation on the two, but the Lord evidently takes knowledge of a something that was right in them, and accordingly tempers or measures His rebuke, and takes a place apart from His heated disciples, who would not have spared their brethren in anywise, and indeed puts the ten and the two on the same level at last.

See the Lord again as a rebuker of John in the case of his forbidding those who were casting out devils in Christ's name, and yet not following with Christ's disciples. At that moment John's spirit had been chastening him. In the light of the Lord's preceding words he had been making some 'discovery of the mistake he had before committed, and he refers to that mistake, though the Lord had not in the least alluded to it. We may say, after the manner of men, He had not known it. But this being so, John having already a sense of his mistake, and artlessly letting out the vanities of it under force of the light that had revealed it to him, the Lord deals with it in the greatest gentleness. (See Luke 9: 46-50.) There is something very admirable in this, as I judge and feel. And, indeed, when we consider all this moral variety in the action and way of Christ as a rebuker, there is something of excellence and glory in it that is beautiful. Whether His style be peremptory or gentle, sharp or considerate, whether rebuke be so reduced as to be scarcely a rebuke at all, or so heightened as almost to be a kind of repulse and disclaimer, still, when the occasion is duly weighed, all this variety will be found to be but perfection.

I speak here of the Lord's dealing with *His own*; but with *the adversaries or the world*, His rebuke of such was not properly for *correction*, but in judgment. I scarcely call these instances rebukes, they are exposure and condemnation, and I am not looking at them here. Other instances of the Lord's actions in this character will, of course, be found in the narratives of the four gospels. But these may put us on the enquiry, and the enquiry may put us in contact with some fresh power and light of that moral glory, as we speak, which in its divers rays and shinings constitutes the character of this stainless, perfect Son of man. All these His rebukes or reproofs were "earrings of gold" and "ornaments of fine gold" of themselves, and commonly we may hope hung upon "obedient ears." (Prov. 25: 12.) J. G. B.