

ADORN THE DOCTRINE

YOU HAVE TO SHOW IT!



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CHRISTIANS MAKING THE GOSPEL BEAUTIFUL

Titus 2:10, "That they may ADORN the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

Here is a wonderful hope to hold forth before anyone, that he may add beauty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is still more wonderful and amazing when we remember that these words were written originally to a handful of slaves, the lowest of the population, whose lives were passed in sordid squalor, whose duties were narrow and often repulsive, and yet they in their limited sphere and lowly lot might make fairer the Truth which is already beautiful with all the beauty of the Lord.

First, let us think for a moment of this wonderful possibility that is opened out here before every Christian, that he or she may add beauty to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He may paint the lily and gild the refined gold, for me to quite rightly and legitimately judge systems by their followers. It would not be a fair thing to test a philosophy or a body of political or scientific truth by the conduct and character of the men who professed it, but it is a perfectly fair thing, under certain conditions, and in certain limits, to test a system of practical morality, which professes to do certain things with peoples' character and conduct, by its professors.

It is just as fair, when a creed comes before our notice which assumes to influence men's conduct, to say, "Well, I should like to see it working," as it is for any of you mill-owners to say, when a man comes to you with a fine invention upon paper, "Have you got a working model of it? Has it ever been tried? What have been the results that have been secured by it?" Or as it would be to say to anybody that claimed to have gotten a "medicine that will cure consumption," to say, "Have you any cases? Can you quote any cures?"

So when we Christians stand up and say we have a faith which is able to deaden

men's minds to the world, which is able to make them unselfish, which is able to lift them up above cares and sorrows, which is able to take men and transform their whole nature, and put new desires and hopes and joys into them, it is quite fair for the world to say, "Have you? Does it? Does it do so with you?" Can you produce your lives as working models of Christianity? Can you produce your cure as a proof of the curative power of the Gospel that you profess?

So, this possibility does lie before all Christians, that they may by their lives conciliate prejudices, prepare people to listen favorably to the message of God's love, and win over men from their antagonism, and make them say, "Well, after all, there is something in that Christianity."

It is not altogether and without limitation a fair thing to do to argue back from the lives of disciples to the Truth of the creed, because all men are worse than their principles, and because, too, **though a Christian man's goodness ought to be put down to the credit of his creed, a Christian's badness ought to be put down to the debit of himself.**

But somehow or other the world, when it sees Christians that do not live up to the level of their profession, does say, however illogically, both of two things, both of which cannot be true. First of all, "A pretty kind of Christians these are." And second, "There cannot be much in the system that produces such." One or two of these things they ought to say. They ought to either say, "You are a hypocrite," or they ought to say, "Your Christianity is not worth much." But, illogically enough, they generally say both. **And so you both damage yourselves in their eyes, and damage the Christianity you profess, by your inconsistencies and your faults.**

Our lives ought to be like the mirror of a reflecting telescope. The astronomer does not look directly up into the sky when he

wants to watch the heavenly bodies, but down into the mirror on which their reflection is cast. And so our little, low lives down here upon Earth should so give back the starry bodies and infinitudes above us that some dim eyes, which peradventure could not gaze into the violet abysses with their lustrous points, may behold them reflected in the beauty of our life.

The doctrines of Christianity, when they are only in words, are less fair than the same truths when they are embodied in a life. It is beautiful to say, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," but the beauty of the words is less than when they are illustrated in a life. Our lives should be like the old missals, where you find the loving care of the monastic scribe has illuminated and illustrated the Holy Text, or has rubricated and gilded some of the letters. **The best illustrated Bible is the conduct of the people who profess to take it for their guide and law.**

Secondly, so much then, for the first point, the wondrous possibility that is opened in this text. Now let us say a word about the other side, the solemn alternative.

If you look at the context you will see that a set of exhortations preceding these to the slaves, which are addressed to the wives, and end with urging as the great motive to be conduct enjoined, "That the Word of God be not blasphemed." That is the other side of the same thought as in this text.

The issues of the conduct of professing Christians are the one or other of these two, either to add beauty to the Gospel, or to cause the Word of God to blasphemed. If you do not the one you will be doing the other. If my life is not throwing back honor upon the Gospel from which it manifestly flows, and by which it is manifestly molded, it will be throwing back discredit.

Your lives, professing Christians, are not neutral in their effect upon men's estimate of your creed. Either you attract or repel. The one pole of the magnet or the other you do present. Either you make men

think better of God's Truth, or you make them think worse of it.

There are no worse enemies of the Gospel than its inconsistent friends. That is especially true in lands where the Christian Church is a little band amongst heathens, as was the case with the churches of which Titus had charge.

Who is it that thwarted missionary work in India? Englishmen. Who is it that, wherever they go with their ships, they put a taunt into the lips of the enemy which Christian workers find it hard to meet? English soldiers. The notorious dissipation and immorality amongst the representatives of English commerce in the various eastern centers of trade put a taunt into the mouth of the abstemious Hindu and of the Chinaman. "These are your Christians, are they?"

England, that sends out missionaries in the cabin, and Bibles, and rum side by side amongst the cargo, has to listen, and her people have to take to themselves the awful words with which the ancient Jewish inconsistencies were rebuked. "Through you the Name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles."

And in less solemn manner perhaps, but just as truly, here, is a so-called Christian land, the inconsistencies, the selfishness, the worldliness of professing Christians, the absolute absence of all apparent differences between them and the most godless men in the same circumstances, are the things which perhaps more than anything else counteract the evangelistic efforts of the body of Christ.

What is the good of one voice teaching the Word? If so many believers live in diametrical opposition to that which has been taught? One man pulls one way for 25 minutes, and hundreds pull the other way for a week. Which will pull the most? **If the local church which we are members of, were living as we ought to do, and as we might do, far more than all eloquent teaching would be the result of our simple lives of transparent godliness.**

So, does the Gospel according to you repel or attract? What is the Gospel according to you? You have children. Are they favorably disposed to Christianity because of what they see in the lives of their father and mother? Or do your inconsistencies, which the sharp eyes that see you in your easy moments at home cannot but notice however loving they may be, drive them away and disgust them with a profession of religion, and with religion itself?

You have friends and acquaintances, and a circle whom you influence. **Do you influence them to look with favor upon that Word which has made you what you are? Or do you turn them away from the Word?** Remember, remember, either you beautify or you blaspheme the Gospel by your conduct?

Thirdly, we once more consider the sort of life that we live that will thus commend and adorn the Gospel. First of all, **it must be a life conspicuously and uniformly under the influence of Christian principles.** And emphasis must be put on "conspicuously and uniformly." **You will be of very little use if your Christian principle is so buried in your life, embedded beneath a mass of selfishness and worldliness and indifference as that it takes a microscope, and a week's looking for to find it.** And you will be of very little use, either, if your life is by fits and starts under the influence of Christian principle, a minute guided by that and ten minutes guided by the other things of here and there, sprinkled thinly over the rotting mass, there be a handful of saving salt. **We want uniformity and we want conspicuousness of Christian principle in our lives if they are to be a power to witness for our Lord.**

And remember too, as the context teaches us here, that the lives which commend and adorn the doctrine **must be such as manifest Christian principle in the smallest details.** These are slaves, in their smoky huts, with their little tasks, and by the exercise of very homely virtues, were to "Adorn the doctrine."

Here is the list of adorning the doctrine: "Obedient to their masters, not answering again, not purloining but showing all good fidelity." Very homely virtues, there is nothing at all lofty or transcendent or above the pedestrian level of a prosaic life in that. Obedience, keeping a civil tongue in their heads in the midst of provocation, not indulging in petty pilfering, being true to the trust that was given to them.

Now you may say to yourself, that is no great thing. You may say that, but in these little things they were to adorn the great doctrine of God their Saviour. **The smallest duties are in some sense the largest sphere for the operation of great principles.** FOR IT IS THE LITTLE DUTIES WHICH BY THEIR MINUTENESS TEMPT MEN TO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO THEM WITHOUT CALLING IN THE GREAT PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT, THAT GIVE COLOR TO EVERY LIFE AFTER ALL.

You can write the so-called Lord's prayer and the Ten Commandments in the space of a penny. You can make all the beauty and all the sanctifying power of the Gospel visible and manifest within the narrow circle of the smallest duties that the lowest station has to perform. The little banks of mud in the wheel tracks in the road are shaped upon the same slopes, and molded by the same law that carves the mountains and lifts the precipices of the Himalayas.

A handful of snow in the hedge in the winter time will fall into the same curves, and be obedient to the same physical laws which shape the glaciers that lie on the side of the Alps. **The smallest duties, distinctly done for Christ's sake, will adorn the doctrine.** "A servant with this cause, makes drudgery Divine." "Who sweeps a house as by Thy laws, makes that and the calling fine." "ADORN THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN 'ALL' THINGS."

The manner of life which commends the Gospel will be one conspicuously above the level of the morality of the class to which you belong. These slaves were warned not to fall into the vices that

were proper to their class, in order that by not falling into them, and so being unlike their fellows, they might glorify the Gospel.

For the things that Paul warns them not to do are exactly the faults which all history and experience tell us are exactly the vices of the slave; petty, pilfering, a rank tongue blossoming into insolent speech, a disregard of the master's interests, sulky disobedience or sly evasion of the command.

These are the kind of things that the devilish institution of slavery makes almost necessary on the part of the slave, unless some higher motive and loftier principle comes in to counteract the effects.

In like manner all of us have, in the class to which we belong, and the sort of life which we have to live, certain evils natural to our position, and unless you are unlike the non-Christian men of your own profession and the people that are under the same worldly influence as you are, unless you are unlike them in that your righteousness exceeds their righteousness, "Ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

If you and the unbeliever whose warehouse is up the same staircase, pursue your business on the same maxims, have the same ideas as to what is desirable, press towards the same end, take the same short cuts through some morality in order to reach it, **what is the good of your saying you are a Christian?** If there is no difference between you and them, to your advantage and to the advantage of the Gospel that you profess, say no more about your being dead to the world by the cross of Christ, and living for higher and other motives.

If you are to adorn the doctrine, you must conspicuously and uniformly, in great things and in small things, be living by other laws than those obey who "BELIEVE NOT THE DOCTRINE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR, IN ALL THINGS." Unless it can be said of us, "There is a people here whose laws are different from all people that be on the Earth," we shall never beautify the Gospel of Christ.

And one last word. How is such a manner of life to be attained? I know of only one way, and **that is by continually living in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ as a believer in Christ. If we are to beautify Him, He must first beautify us. If we are to adorn the doctrine, the doctrine must adorn us.** That is to say, it is only when we live in fellowship with Him, in communion with Him, and are in constant touch of His hand, and in communion with the Holy Spirit, it is only then that His beauty shall pass into our faces, and that "Beholding the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory."

We must be on the mountain like Moses, in fellowship with our Lord, if we are to come down and walk amongst men with radiance streaming from our countenance, so as that all that look upon us shall behold our face, "AS IT HAD BEEN THE FACE OF AN ANGEL."

"Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord. This people have I formed for Myself. They shall show forth My praise."

We produce the character of Jesus Christ when we are in fellowship through the principle of 1 John 1:9, and that results in Galatians 5:22, 23. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." That is the character of Christ and that is how we adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

"Ye are our epistles written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

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