

THE PRESENT TRUTH

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The Exalted Character of the Professed Believer

"Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever." The Lord made a special covenant with ancient Israel: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." He addresses his commandment keeping people in these last days, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

The followers of Christ are required to come out from the world, and be separate, and touch not the unclean, and they have the promise of being the sons and daughters of the Most High, members of the royal family. But if the conditions are not complied with on their part, they will not, cannot realize the fulfillment of the promise. A profession of Christianity is nothing in the sight of God; but true, humble, willing obedience to his requirements designates the children of his adoption, the recipients of his grace, the partakers of his great salvation. Such will be peculiar, a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Their peculiar, holy character will be discernible, and will distinctly separate them from the world, with its affections and lusts. Those who are living branches of the heavenly Vine will partake of the sap and nourishment of the Vine. They will not be withered and fruitless branches, but will show life and vigor, and will flourish and bear fruit to the glory of God. They will be careful to depart from all iniquity, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

There are few among us who answer to this description. Many love God in word, not in deed and in truth. Their course of action, their works, testify of them that they are not children of the light, but of darkness. Their works have not been wrought in God, but in selfishness, in unrighteousness. Their hearts are strangers to his renewing grace. They have not experienced the transforming power which leads them to walk even as Christ walked.

Like ancient Israel, the church has dishonored her God by departing from the light, neglecting her duties, and abusing her high and exalted privilege of being peculiar and holy in character. Her members have violated their covenant to live for God and him only. They have joined with the selfish and world-loving. Pride, the love of pleasure, and sin have been cherished, and Christ has departed. His Spirit has been quenched in the church. Satan works side by side with professed Christians; yet they are so destitute of spiritual discernment that they do not detect him. They have not the burden of the work. The solemn truths they profess to believe are not a reality to them. They have not genuine faith. Men and women will act out all the faith which they in reality possess. By their fruits ye shall know them. Not their profession, but the fruit they bear, shows the character of the tree. Many who have a form of godliness, whose names are on church books, have a spotted record in heaven. The recording angel has faithfully written their deeds. Every selfish act, every wrong word, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling, is faithfully chronicled in the book of records kept by the recording angel.

The words of Christ are plain: "Strive [agonize] to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Not all professed Christians are Christians at heart. There are sinners in Zion now, as there were anciently. Isaiah speaks of them in referring to the day of God: "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks; bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure."

There are hypocrites now who will tremble when they obtain a view of themselves. Their own vileness will terrify them in that day which is soon to come upon us,--a day when "the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." Oh that terror might now lay hold upon them, that they might have a vivid sense of their condition, and arouse while there is mercy and hope, confess their sins, and humble their souls greatly before God, that he might pardon their transgressions and heal their backslidings! The people of God are unready for the fearful, trying scenes before us, unready to stand pure from evil and lust amid the perils and corruptions of this degenerate age. They have not on the armor of righteousness, and are unprepared to war against the prevailing iniquity. Many are not obeying the commandments of God; yet they profess so to do. If they would be faithful to obey all the statutes of God, they would have a power which would carry conviction to the hearts of the unbelieving.

All have sufficient light to see their sins and errors, if they desired to do so, and earnestly wished to put them away, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Lord. God is too pure to behold iniquity. A sin is just as grievous in his sight in one case as in another. No

exception will be made by an impartial God. If individuals pass over and cover up their sins, they will not be prospered of God. They cannot advance in the divine life, but will become darker and darker until the light of heaven will be entirely withdrawn.

Those who profess godliness, yet are not sanctified by the truth which they profess, may become quite bold because they are able to conceal their sins from others, and because the judgments of God do not come in a visible manner upon them. They may appear to prosper in this world. They may deceive poor, short-sighted mortals, and be regarded as patterns of piety, while in their sins. But God cannot be deceived. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." Although the life of a sinner may be prolonged upon the earth, yet he shall have no place in the earth made new. He shall be of that number whom David mentions in his psalm: "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth."

Mercy and truth are promised to the humble and penitent, but judgments are prepared for the sinful and rebellious. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne." A wicked and adulterous people will not escape the wrath of God, and the punishment they have justly earned. Man has fallen; and it will be the work of a lifetime, be it longer or shorter, to recover from that fall, and regain, through Christ, the image of the divine, which he lost by sin and continued transgression. God requires a thorough transformation of soul, body, and spirit, in order to regain the estate lost through Adam. The Lord mercifully sends rays of light to show man his true condition. If he will not walk in the light, he manifests a pleasure in darkness. He will not come to the light, lest his deeds shall be reprov'd.

"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Very many who profess to be servants of Christ are none of his. They are deceiving their souls to their own destruction. While they profess to be servants of Christ, they are not living in obedience to his will; they are obeying another master, working daily against the Master whom they profess to serve. "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Earthly and selfish interests engage the soul, mind, and strength of God's professed followers. To all intents and purposes, they are servants of mammon. They have not experienced a crucifixion to the world. But few among the many who profess to be Christ's followers can say in the language of the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." If willing obedience and true love characterize the lives of the people of God, their light will shine to the world with a holy brightness.

The words which Christ addressed to his disciples were designed for all who should believe on his name: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." A profession of godliness without the living principle is as utterly valueless as salt without its saving properties. An unprincipled professed Christian is a by-word, a reproach to Christ, a dishonor to his name. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The good works of God's people have a more powerful influence than words. By their virtuous life and unselfish acts, the beholder is led to desire the same righteousness which produced so good fruit. He is charmed with that power from God which transforms selfish human beings into the divine image, and God is honored, his name glorified. But the Lord is dishonored and his cause reproached, when his people are brought into bondage to the world. Their only hope of salvation is to separate from the world, and zealously maintain their separate, holy, and peculiar character. Oh! why will not God's people comply with the conditions laid down in his word? If they would do this, they would not fail to realize the excellent blessings freely given of God to the humble and obedient.

Perfection, holiness, nothing short of this, would give them success in carrying out the principles he has given them. Without this holiness, the human heart is selfish, sinful, and vicious. Holiness will lead its possessor to be fruitful and abound in all good works. He will never become weary in well-doing, neither will he look for promotion in this world. He will look forward for promotion to the time when the Majesty of heaven shall exalt the sanctified ones to his throne. Then shall he say unto them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The Lord then enumerates the works of self-denial and mercy, compassion and righteousness, which they had wrought. Holiness of heart will produce right actions. It is the absence of spirituality, of holiness, which leads to unrighteous acts, to envy, hatred, jealousy, evil surmisings, and every hateful and abominable sin. {Review & Herald May 5, 1885 }