

REMEMBRANCE

A too constant and exclusive dwelling in the circumstances of our present life is certain to disqualify us for viewing it properly and using it rightly in relation to the objects for which we have been separated for Christ by the Gospel. The time and the state we live in are but part of a mighty programme which reaches backwards and forwards in long distances. And if we are not familiar with this programme, we cannot rightly estimate the relation of our individual parts to it, and are, therefore, liable to live after a wrong plan. Of course, the remark applies only to those who have professedly made Christ their portion. As regards others, their lives are lives of vanity, beginning and ending in darkness. From the cradle to the grave, they are **without God and have no hope** (Eph. 2:12), and cannot be expected to be influenced by any consideration outside the circle of mortal requirements and experiences. But as to those who are Christ's, they neither live for themselves nor die unto themselves. They are separated for a great purpose and a mighty plan, reaching back to historic ages, up to the throne of the Almighty Power, and forward to the *aion* of blessedness in Abraham. This is the spirit or genius of their calling. But are they equal to it? Do they rise to it? Are they walking worthy of it? Do their minds, and purposes, and principles expand to the height, and breadth, and depth of the calling of God in Christ Jesus?

The upshot will show that in some cases it is so, and in many cases not so, which, of course, will mean that all who are called to this calling will not be chosen. Now about this matter there is no mystery, as to the principle by which the choice will be regulated, or its relation to our own present control. There is no more exact relation between seedtime and harvest than there is between the result to a saint of the course pursued in this present time, as regards those attainments which will determine his standing before the Lord at his coming. Cause and effect are the universal rule of divine procedure, no more in the operations of Nature than in the causing every man to find according to his ways. There will be nothing arbitrary or capricious in the acceptance of some who profess Christ and the rejection of others. "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

Now in the particular matter in question, the appointment of this weekly celebration of the sufferings of Christ touches the root of it. What is the object of this breaking of bread? To **bring to remembrance**. To bring to remembrance what? The things involved in the symbols. What are these? The answer to this opens out, you see, on all sides, like the spokes of a wheel from the hub. "The sufferings of Christ and the glory to be revealed" are a compendious summary of really most high and mighty matters, which branch out in all directions, and to which the mind requires to be continuously applied to obtain that due degree of familiarity required. In this respect, the result will be in accordance with a man's degree of diligence. If he give but a scant attention, he will have but a small acquaintance and a weak faith. How can it be otherwise? How can a man become acquainted with God, and in actual, practical, earnest love with Christ, and at home with all the divine purposes and ways, who comes but occasionally to the breaking of bread, who reads the scriptures in a haphazard sort of way, or perhaps not at all, while he is all the while very diligent in his attention to all business concerns and domestic matters? As God has constituted things, it is impossible. The brain takes all its impressions from without, and it can only receive so much—each day a little. It may be compared to a book of blank pages, on which

each day writes something on each page. The character of the writing depends upon the holder of the pen. If a man's whole strength is each day spent, from sunrise to the evening shade, in attending to mortal matters, the natural man holds the pen all the time, and a natural man's record is the result. The brain is filled with images of natural perishing life, which profit nothing for the time to come. But let God have the pen some part of the day; let the word be diligently read, let the soul ascend frequently to God in prayer, let the thoughts rest sometimes on the promises, let the business of God have some share of the day's counsel and strength, something then is written for God; and this process continued from day to day will fill up a good account. The mind will be in-lettered with the ideas of God. It will be assimilated to the affairs of God, and the man brought into a state of increasing ripeness for the calling to which we are called by the Gospel.

The breaking of bread is but a central point in this spiritual activity. We shall use it unwisely if we are content with the formality of attending to it. Its object is to keep us alive to every good word and work. The table is a radiating point for those influences that help us to overcome in the battle between the natural and spiritual. Chief among those influences is that "memory" which stands so prominently forward in the original institution. The Gospel is only saving to us "*if we keep in memory*" what is delivered therein (1 Cor. 15:3). This phrase "keep in memory," points to the principal difficulty and the principal danger which we have to encounter in the race set before us in the Gospel. The things of the natural man require no effort of memory. They are present; they are before our eyes; they appeal to powerful instincts that spontaneously work in our bosoms. Home, friends, family, comfort, property, honour, and the other things that go to make up the circle of the present life, require no memory and no effort at attention. They are with us and in us, and sweet to us as natural men. But the things of Christ are out of the sight of the natural man: they are past and future. We learn of them from the word apostolically delivered eighteen centuries ago, and, prophetically, before then. We know them not otherwise. Consequently it requires an effort to keep them in memory, the more particularly because of the clamour for attention the other things are constantly making. We do not learn of God's matters in the clouds. There is nothing in the sky, or sea, or landscape, or town, or business, or home, or body, or blood, to tell us of them: quite the contrary. We know of them only through the word preached and read: and as faith cometh by hearing, so faith continueth by the same instrumentality. Consequently, before the things of Christ can become a power in our minds at all able to compete with the things of the natural man, they must be diligently and constantly renewed by special culture, in reading the Word of God, and prayer, and meeting, and the various other ways in which the memory may be refreshed and the knowledge strengthened and increased. This is the more true, because the things of Christ, in many points, are distasteful to the natural man.

When we achieve the victory, in a constant application to the Word of Christ, our position is one of surpassing interest, even if of present pain. We realize where we are, what we are about, and what great things are ahead, by the power of which we can reconcile ourselves patiently to present disadvantages, and rightly look on the scene which is passing around us.

We stand on an elevation, so to speak, looking down on the busy world around. We see the crowd of fashion, resplendent in the varied beauties that wealth has generously lavished, cultured in all the superior mannerisms and intelligences of the natural man,

and mutually attentive and loving. It is a pretty picture, albeit we know it is mostly hollow; but the truth enables us to say, "We can afford to endure this picture. We are not of these people. We cannot be of them, because their gayness and their comforts are not touched with God." We may feel that we should like to share their amenities, the sociabilities, their pleasant company, their good graces; but it is not possible. There is a gulf between us. It is a pity; we feel it; we are sensible of the deprivation to which the truth subjects us in the isolation it imposes, but we know it is only for a season. This is the day of Sin's sons and daughters. The day of God is at hand, and, with it, such company will be brought to light as will make Fashion's ranks appear meagre and poor. This company is ours, if we are content, like the Head of it, to be, while in the world, not of it.

Then we look on the successful men of business. We behold the spectacle of their prosperity, whether in the full tide of well-managed thriving concerns, netting handsome profits put into the concern or laid securely by in investment; or the affluence of opulent retirement, adding yet house to house, and yet piling the increasing gold. The truth helps us to say, "Ye have laid up treasure for yourselves, and in a fashion ye are enjoying yourselves, but your life is ignoble; and noble or ignoble, there is a canker in it all; ye cannot keep what ye have; ye must depart; ye must flee as a shadow; and the plenty ye have scraped industriously together, and skilfully fenced from harm, will do nothing for you with Him who has the key of the future, and who will kill or save alive on His own principles only, which are not commercial principles."

On the busy political world, where high honour is reaped and rich prizes secured in the arena of intellectual prowess, we can calmly look with the recollection that it is destined shortly to pass away with a great noise, and the elements thereof to melt with fervent heat; and that the only enduring politics are those of Jesus of Nazareth, who, in his day, submitted to be a stranger and a pilgrim, but who, at his return in power and great glory, will look round for his faithful stewards to share with them the honour of universal empire, to be enjoyed in the unspeakable luxury of an incorruptible body. We can say to the whole throng of bustling aspirants and successful competitors, and established possessors, who, with great airs of self-consequence, divide among themselves the honours and fat things of the present *kosmos*, "We can wait. You have clutched a shadow. Your world passeth away; the kingdom of God which will be here in due season endureth for ever. He gives it to childlike believers in His Word. Ye cast His Word behind you. Woe unto you that are full now; for ye have received your consolation."

Or we turn and look into the swarming ranks of the Church. Bishops and parsons, sleek and well-favoured, educated to the highest pitch of culture, honoured of all men, secured in their temporalities by the most solid of human guarantees—what an exercise of patience to behold their pride, and their power, and their affluence, and their respectability! But even to these, the truth enables us to be calm, and in patience to possess our souls. To these it enables us to say, "Your position is desirable in some respects, but we are glad we share it not. A little like the cry of sour grapes, perhaps, but none the less a sober saying; for ye belong to a system accursed of God, and destined to vanish before the whirlwind of His anger in this culminating latter day. You are full now, and laugh now, and are spoken well of now, but it is your destiny to

be emptied of your greatness, and filled with weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

These consolations are very real where faith is strong enough, through the reading of the word and prayer, to lay hold of them. But, of course, our right to appropriate them depends upon our acceptance of the position of Christ in all other respects. In this evil time, this means the acceptance of the pilgrim's disagreeable part, and the obedience of commandments which are disagreeable to the natural man. If we merely have knowledge of Christ without obedience, we shall find when the time comes that the consolation of Christ does not belong to us. It is well, therefore, to try ourselves in the moments of our anticipations. It is well to ask ourselves the question, if we occupy the position entitling us to rejoice in hope of the coming glory. The position is plain; it is not attractive to the flesh; it involves self-denial as to worldly ways and honours. There is, therefore, a temptation to avoid it, or modify it to an extent, interfering with our acceptance. The consolation of Christ is for those who accept the sufferings of Christ; and every man will have his part of this suffering, even in this free country, who courageously and openly acts the part of a true disciple in obeying the commandments and taking part in the affairs of Christ, as existing at the present time in his truth and his brethren. The rewards of Christ are only for the faithful stewards; and faithful stewardship means the use of ourselves and our substance as the property of Christ and not as our own—a policy of life which interferes with all the ordinary aims and pursuits of men, but which brings with it a great present advantage of peace and joy, secures an inheritance which the wealth of the world could not purchase, on which no rules of human valuation can put a price, and with which no human glory can compare.

(“Seasons of Comfort” Volume 1 Pages 107-111 by Bro. R. Roberts.)