

The Church at Thessalonica (extract)

At Thessalonica the coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus had been especially received through the apostle's ministry; and in the epistles to the church there he still feeds them with further light upon that great doctrine. But while he does that, he has also to correct a certain practical error which was peculiar to them.

Thus we clearly discern different conditions in the grace and knowledge of the different churches. And all these things happened unto them for ensamples, as much as the things that happened to Israel in the wilderness; and they are here in the same way written for our learning (I Cor. 10). And we may bless God that we have this His own inspired answer to so many anxieties and questions that might arise in our hearts while walking one with another.

In what I have said I may not have altogether rightly discerned the standings of the several churches; but I have no doubt of the fact that they were different. I speak of the churches as known by the epistles addressed to them severally. Into some of these lamps of the sanctuary more oil had been poured than into others.

That fact which I have already noticed so clearly shows us this- that the apostle withheld from the Corinthians the revelation of the mystery which he so fully makes known to the Ephesians. And this at once shows how impotent and unwarranted the requisition is, that the minds of all the disciples should be found exactly according to one measure and standing before the fellowship of the church can be allowed or administered. Nay, so far from this, I am free to believe that if a member of the church at Ephesus had visited Corinth, he would have found them so concerned with questions and strifes which had never troubled him or his brethren at home, as might have left him in doubt respecting them. And so one going from Corinth to Ephesus would have found them so occupied with such truth which he had never heard of at home, that he might have suspected, in modern language, that they were all in the clouds at Ephesus. I can thus suppose, from their different measures of light and attainment in Christ, that they might not well have known what to do.

Now, I believe we see among the saints at the present what we thus might have seen among the churches of old; we have our Ephesian and Corinthian difficulties still. The truths received by some disciples are treated as mere speculation by others, and the condition of some is low and doubtful. The large and blessed mind of God, which filled the apostle, could of old survey them all, and provide for them all, and feed them at Ephesus and trim them at Corinth. But we are weak and narrow hearted; and the only result commonly is, to walk in mutual distance and suspicion. Thus we do not understand one another's speech, and we are scattered. But better is it to be scattered than to be brought together on the terms of any bond short of God's own bond in the Holy Ghost. Whereto we have already attained, in that let us walk by the same rule, hoping for more. But let us not force beyond that by any fleshly compacts. The fear of God must not be taught by the commandment of men.

And in connection with this, I would notice the state of Job and his three friends; for I believe that it illustrates the same thing which this state of the churches does. Job could not understand the truth which was in their thoughts, nor could they allow that which he had of God's mind in his; they were but partially in the light, and, through the remainder of darkness that was in them, they mistook the way and jostled each other. And the correction lay only in God, and in the end He applied it. They were all accepted- God proved Himself the adequate Healer of all their divisions,

as He will, by and by, join the whole of the heavenly family in one body in the mansions on high, and unite the two sticks of Ephraim and Judah in the earth below.

The largeness of the mind of God contains the remedy, but nothing else does. That mind may express itself forth from the whirlwind, or by the ministry of an apostle; but however that be, it bears the remedy with it. The Lord who can with one hand separate the chaff from the wheat, with the other can gather up all the scattered grains that are now strewing His field in shameful disorder, and find room in His garner for them all.

And this comforts, while it admonishes. It is not that we are to confound the chaff with the wheat. It is as much of the Spirit of God to say, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema," as to say, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." It is as much of the testimony of God to say, "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life," as to say, "He that hath the Son hath life"- "If any man preach any other gospel... let him be accursed."

But still let us know there have been different measures of attainments among the saints, and let our personal and individual care be so to walk in light and grace ourselves as not to give occasion either to the enemy to speak reproachfully or to our brethren to speak doubtfully of us. And let us have our hearts and consciences in lively exercise before God with a purpose to follow our light, lead us where it may, in the grace and fear of the Lord. But when these are the springs of the personal movement and course of each of us, we have, though in many things differently minded, the materials of both safe and blessed communion.

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