THE CHURCH & THE KINGDOM

AN URGENT DANGER

COVETOUSNESS—not only the desire of what we have not got, but the refusal to part with what we have—God ranks among the blackest of sins. It is one of the supreme Prohibitions of Jehovah (Ex. xx. 17); it is defined by God as 'idolatry' (Col. iii. 5), a sin, under the Law, reserved for capital punishment; it renders a believer so unholy that he is to be excommunicated from the Church on earth (1 Cor. v. 11); and twice (1 Cor. vi. 10; Eph. v. 5) it is stated as involving a disciple in the loss of the Millennial Kingdom. "The peril of the Church is not so much an unorthodox creed as an orthodox greed" (Dr. A. J. Gordon). Love of money brought us the first awful discipline of the Holy Ghost (Acts. v. 5): love of money is the absorbing passion of the last Church named in the Word of God—Laodicea.

It is extraordinarily significant that The Money Chest, the last thing on which our Lord's eyes rested in the Temple was the Money Chest. Twice He had cleansed the Temple, the great type of the Church, from merchandise: once in His life, and once only. He used violence—when, in hot indignation, He drove money out of God's holy things (John ii. 15): on leaving the Temple for the last time, He sits down deliberately to behold "how the multitude cast
money into the treasury" (Mark xii. 41). Nor is it less significant that the only donor on the subscription-list of the Temple whom He has not buried in oblivion is an anonymous one—"this poor widow." Matt. vi. 3.

"Verily I say unto you"—our Lord God's Audit. pledges Himself to the most startling of all revelations on money—"this poor widow cast in more than all": that is, more than any other donor, or else, more than all put together. Those who give most often gives least, and those that give least often give most. Why? Because God judges what we give by what we keep. "For they all did cast in of their superfluity; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." The widow had all she had to live on for that day; and was so walking with God that she could trust Him for to-morrow's meat. 1 Kings xvii. 15; Heb. xiii. 5. God's scales, in weighing gifts, also weigh what is not given: so, quite literally, the poorest can give more than the wealthiest, and all can give immense gifts: for the amount withheld exactly determines the value of the amount given.

We now arrive at the peril. "The Our Danger. love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. vi. 10). It can enslave friends, divide families, and harden hearts; nurse extravagance, pamper appetite, and foster pride; "sweat" labour, freeze up charity, and indulge every lust—"foolish and hurtful lusts, such as dream men in destruction and perdition." Every year increases our peril. "In the last days men shall be lovers of money" (2 Tim. iii. 2): "ye have laid up treasure in the last days" (Jas. v. 3): "because thou sayest, I am rich, . . . thou art miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. iii. 17): "thus shall Babylon be cast down, for thy merchants were the princes of the earth" (Rev. xviii. 23). "Of all the temptations none has so struck at the work of God as the deceitfulness of riches; a thousand melanchooly proofs of which I have seen since these last fifty years. By riches I mean not thousands of pounds; but any more than will procure the conveniences of life. Money-losers are the pest of every Christian society. They have been the main cause of the destruction of every revival. They will destroy us, if we do not put them away" (John Wesley). 1 Cor. v. 11; Mark x. 23.

How is the peril met? "Sell that Indestructible ye have, and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Luke xii. 33). No warnings on wealth are severer than Christ's: so there is no greater tribute to the power of money over the human heart than the startling silence of the Church on these warnings of her Lord. "With such words [as I Tim. vi. 6-10] before him, one would think that any Christian man who is laying up money, or is planning to do so, would at once abandon his project. But how many such cases have ever been heard of? I cannot remember one" (Dr. J. P. Geddes). O beloved, the indestructible purses must be manufactured now! "Hearken, my beloved brethren; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which
He promised to them that love Him?" (Jas. ii. 5). "The most sensitive part of the civilised man is his pocket" (Sir W. Ramsay): so grace is supreme when it is the biggest jewel in the purse. Heaven's purses are filled by emptying those on earth.

"But thou, O man of God, flee these things!" What things? "They that desire to be rich"—flee even the desire! The man who has nothing to gain is the man who can never be bought: so if you would be the man of God—a man who belongs to God, who is devoted to God, whose wealth is in God, who lives for God—then flee these things. "I make no purse. What I have I give away. 'Poor, yet making many rich,' shall be my motto still." (Whitefield). Prov. xi. 24. The costliness of the gift is the measure of the love behind it: God did not keep back His Son when He loved the world: what God did not keep back was the measure of the love that He felt. So we! One of the Lord's people, who had once been rich, was asked how he bore his poverty so happily. "When I was rich," he replied, "I had God in all my wealth: now, I have all my wealth in God." How much more he who has deliberately lodged it there! "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. FOR WHERE THY TREASURE IS, THERE WILL THY HEART BE ALSO" (Matt. vi. 20).

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THE PRIZE OF OUR CALLING.

GOD is calling sinners to the Cross: He is calling believers to the Crown. Paul presents this dual truth with crystal clearness. Phil. iii. 4-15. He opens this little masterpiece of revelation with A SUPREME HOPELESSNESS. What is it? The one man who came nearest to reaching God through his own goodness proved to be the chief of sinners. Ponder Paul's incomparable assets: no soul, before or since, ever held up to the face of God a hand filled with such exquisite pearls. Circumcised—stamped as God's from infancy; of the stock of Israel—with a blood-right to salvation; of the tribe of Benjamin—a tribe which never broke away; a Hebrew of Hebrews—a full-blooded Jew to the furthest generation back; a Pharisee—intensely orthodox; persecuting the Church—on fire for God's Law; in the Law blameless—obedient in jot and tittle. No man ever came so near to winning life through what he was and what he did. "If any other man"—of any age, or race, or clime—"thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more." Paul towers over all legalists for ever. But a sudden and awful discovery blasted his prospects. "I was alive [in my own eyes] apart from law once: but when the commandment ['thou shalt not lust'] came [home to my conscience], sin revived [sprang again into life], and I died [saw myself a dead man];
and the commandment, which was [in God’s design] unto life, this I found to be [in fact] unto death (Rom. vii. 9, 10). "If any man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more:", but what had inward vision revealed? — a corpse before God. With Paul’s failure, the whole world lapses into hopeless despair.

Next, a SUPREME RIGHTEOUSNESS. Whose? Not Paul’s; for he had discovered, with Isaiah, that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. lxiv. 6). He now discovers that what he could not do, Christ did; that what he could not be, Christ was; and that Christ had done it, and been it, in order to take his place. 2 Cor. v. 21. He instantly drops his own righteousness, and seizes Christ’s: he exchanges his own pearls for one priceless, flawless gem. “I do count them but dung, that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, . . . but that [righteousness] which is through faith in Christ.” Paul never afterwards doubted his salvation (Rom. viii. 38): for Christ has kept the Law, not with head, hands, and feet only, but with heart also (Ps. xl. 7): and this righteousness is now Paul’s. Rom. v. 19. The supreme hopelessness is replaced by a supreme salvation.

There yet remains a SUPREME UNCERTAINTY. Here are startling words. “Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but I press on.” Not apprehended what? “If by any means I may attain unto the [select] resurrection from among the dead.” Press on to what? “Toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling.” Salvation can never be insecure: the Prize can never be assumed until it is won. Why? (1) Because it is a prize. If the prize be given on faith without works, it is no more a prize. “Know ye not that they which run in a race all run, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run, that ye may attain” (1 Cor. ix. 24). 2 Tim. ii. 5. (2) No splendour of past service can guarantee immunity from backsliding. None so denounced, so suffered, so served as Paul; yet he assumes no prize. For backsliding forfeits the crown. Rev. iii. 11: 2 John 8. (3) False doctrines which rob God of His glory will rob us of ours: therefore “let no man rob you of your prize” (Col. ii. 18). 1 Cor. iii. 15. (4) Fleshly sins also disqualify. Eph. v. 5. Therefore “I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected [for the crown]” (1 Cor. ix. 24-27). The insecurity of the chief of apostles binds insecurity of reward for ever on the Church of God. “Not that I have already obtained, or already made perfect: but I press on, so that I may apprehend.”

All therefore culminates in a SUPREME EFFORT. “This one thing I do.” Is this for Paul only? “Let us therefore” — for he is our inspired example — “as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” How? (1) “Forgetting the things which are behind.” The immeasurable value of the prize may be computed by the immense sacrifices necessary to obtain it. Its cost is a crucified world. “Blessed is the man to whom the world, with all her rags of honour, is
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Our God, for He will stand up for the righteous, and He will hear the helpless; take notice of the afflicted and of the poor, who are of the house of His servants, and will frustrate the way of the uppriver, and give it into the hand of the wicked. The just will be maintained in His way; and the innocent will have comfort in His sight. Serve the Lord our God, and keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that it may go well with you this day.

crucified, and who holds her to be worth no more than a thief on the gallows.” Nothing makes the other world more real, or more blessed, than the renunciation of this. Luke xiv. 33. (2) “Stretching forward to the things that are before. It is a racer, as Professor Edie says, in his agony of struggle and hope: every muscle is strained, every vein starting, the chest heaves, and the big drops gather on the brow; the body is bent forward, as if the racer all but touched the goal. Luke ix. 23-26. (3) “This one thing I do.” All his missionary ardour, all his thirst for souls, all his toil for the churches, are bent before this overmastering passion of his soul; because the running-tracks for the prize God has laid through these channels of holy service; and to-day’s toil is the measure of to-morrow’s glory. 1 Cor. iii. 8; Matt. v. 11, 12. (4) It is a calling "upward," therefore it is God who is calling. “Walk worthily of God, who is calling you into His own kingdom and glory.” (1 Thess. ii. 22). God is calling us from all earthly glories up to the Throne: brother, will you come? The Cross is ours for ever: when we have been approved, we receive the Crown. Jas. i. 24. We honour God in proportion as we covet His immeasurable rewards. The apostle not only remonstrates, he forgets; he not only advances, he presses; he not only gazes, he stretches; he not only does it, but he does it only. “Let us, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.”

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