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"Bearing reproach for Christ"



"The Prince of Preachers" — C. H. Spurgeon

Following a recent combined youth rally, I was answering a question posed by a young lady and her boyfriend. During our conversation, the topic of "bearing the reproach of Christ" was touched upon. I was asked just what that meant and I sought to give an answer. However, as I thought on the matter, I felt that others may well be in need of instruction on this vital topic. Consequently, I decided to reprint some passages from a sermon by the great C H Spurgeon on the subject. I hope that young people in particular read and meditate upon this message, for if there is one thing that Ulster needs today it is young men and women who are prepared to bear reproach for our Lord Jesus Christ.

(The Editor.)

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach, Hebrews 13:13.

Modern professors (of religion) have discovered a very easy way of religion. There is a method by which a man may attain to great reputation as a Christian, and yet avoid all the trials of the believer's estate. He may go through the world finding his path as smoothly turfed as the flesh could desire. Blessed with the smiles of friendly formalists, and with the admiration of the ungodly, he may pass from his first entrance into the church to his grave without experiencing so much as a single shower to damp his delight; but, on the contrary, the sun may smile sweetly upon him all the way, the birds may sing, not a raven may dare to croak, not a single owl may hoot; his road to glory and immortality shall be all that ease could wish. Let him adopt the modern theory of universal charity; let him believe that a lie is a truth, and that whether it be a lie or a truth is of no consequence at all; let him be complacent towards every man; and with a smooth and oily tongue, chime in with every other man's principles, having none of his own worth mentioning; let him trim his sails whenever the wind changes; let him in all things do in Rome as Rome does; let him yield at all times to the current and float gently with the stream, and he shall come to the haven - though I fear not the desired one - he shall come to some sort of haven at last, without any storm or tempest by the way. But a daring thought comes across one's mind.

Is this the kind of religion which we read of in the Bible? Is this the way in which Scriptural saints went to heaven? It would be a very pleasant thing if we could please men and please God too; if we could really make the best of both worlds, and have the sweets of this and of the next also: but a warning cry arises from the pages of holy Scripture, for the Word of God talks very differently from this. It talks about a strait and narrow way, and about few that find it; it speaks of persecution, suffering, reproach, and contending even



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unto blood, striving against sin; it talks about wrestling and fighting, struggling and witnessing. I hear the Saviour say not, "I send you forth as sheep into the midst of green pastures," but, "as sheep in the midst of wolves." I hear him prophesy that we should be hated of all men for his name's sake. Truly these things are enough to startle those good, easy souls who go so delicately onward; surely they may at once enquire, Can it be that this smooth-faced godliness, this very delightful way of getting to heaven, can be the right one? Is it not all a delusion? Are we not buoyed up with a false hope, if that hope is never assailed by trouble and persecution? All is not gold that glitters: may not the glittering religion of the many be, after all, only a pretence and a sham? O ye lovers of carnal ease, woe unto you. Inasmuch as ye take not up the cross, ye shall never win the crown. The disciples of Christ must expect to follow their Master, not merely in obedience to his doctrines, but also in the reproach which gathers about his cross. I do not find Christ carried on flowery beds of ease to his throne; I do not find him applauded with universal acclamations; on the contrary, wherever he goes he is a protester against things established by human wisdom, and in return the things established vow his destruction, and are not satisfied until at last they gloat their cruel eyes with his martyrdom upon the cross. Jesus Christ has no life of pleasure and of ease; he is despised and rejected of men — a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and let us rest assured that if we bear faithfully our testimony, we shall discover that the servant is not above his Master, nor the disciple above his Lord: if they have called the Master of the house "Beelzebub," much more shall they call them of his household by titles as ignominious and shameful. We must expect, if the Christian soldier be really a soldier, and not a mere pretender to the art of war, that he will have to fight until he joins the host triumphant. If the Church be properly imaged by a ship, she must expect to have storms; and every man on board her must look to bear his share. From the first day, when Cain and Abel divided the first family into two camps, even until now, the flesh lusteth against the Spirit; the evil contendeth with the good, and the good wrestleth with the evil. Wherever the true and the good have pitched their tents, there the enemy have gathered to attack them.

Righteousness courts no peace or truce with sin. Our peaceful Saviour came not to form an alliance so unhallowed. Hear his own words — "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. Turning to Scripture, then, I find nothing about this pretty bypath meadow, and its quiet, respectable walk to heaven. I find nothing about riding in the gilded chariots of ease, or walking in silver slippers; but I do find contention, and strife, and rebuke, and suffering, and cross-bearing, and if need be, resistance unto blood, striving against sin. Our text seems to convey that thought to us most powerfully. Let us take it up; and may the Holy Ghost lead us to its true meaning.

The believer's path is "Let us go forth without the camp." The divine command is not, "Let us stop in the camp and try to reform it — things are not anywhere quite perfect, let us therefore stop and make matters right;" but the Christian's watch cry is, "Let us go forth." Luther caught this note. Many there were who said, "The Church of Rome has in it good and true men: let us try and reform her. Her cloisters are not without piety, her priests are not without sanctified lives — let us try and restore her purity;" — but Luther heard the



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voice of God, "Come ye out from among her, lest ye be partakers of her plagues;" and therefore he led the van, taking for his watchword, "Let us go forth without the camp." To this day the Christian's place is not to tarry in the camp of worldly conformity, hoping, "Perhaps I may aid the movement for reform:" it is not the believer's duty to conform to the world and to the world's ways, and say, "Perhaps by so doing I may gain a foothold, and men's hearts may be the more ready to receive the truth." No, from the first to the last day of the Church of God, the place of witness is not inside, but outside the camp; and the true position of the Christian is to go forth without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach. In this respect Abraham becomes an example to us. The Lord's first word to Abraham is, that he should leave his father and his kinsfolk, and the idolatrous house in which he lived, and go to a land which God should show to him. Away he must go; faith must be his guide; providence his provision, and the living God his only keeper. The separate life of Abraham, in the midst of the sons of Canaan, is a type of the separated walk of the Church of God.

Again, when Israel had gone down to Egypt, they were not commanded to stay there and subdue their oppressors by force of arms, or petition the legislature that they might obtain gentler usage - no, but with a high hand and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought forth his people out of Egypt, for Egypt was no place for the seed of Israel; and while they wandered in the wilderness, and afterwards when they settled in isolation in the midst of the promised land, God's Word was fulfilled, "The people shall dwell alone: they shall not be numbered amongst the nations." As if to keep up the type, the Jewish people at this very period, though mingled with all the nations of the world, are as distinct as men can be; and you cannot pass by a Jew without remarking at once in his very face that he is distinct and separate from all mankind. This, I say, is but a type of the Church of God: the Church of God is to be distinct and separate from all other corporations or communities; her laws come from no human legislator; her officers claim no royal appointment; her endowments are not from the coffers of the State; her subjects are a peculiar people, and her spirit is not of this world. What is meant then, dear friends, by this "going forth without the camp"?

I understand it to mean, first of all, that every Christian is to go forth by an open profession of his faith. You that love the Lord are to say so.

You must come out and avow yourselves on his side. You may be Christians and make no profession, but I cannot be sure of that, nor can any other man. While you make no profession, we must, to a great extent, judge you by the non-profession; and, since you do not acknowledge yourselves to be a part of Christ's Church, we are compelled to adjudge you as not a part of that Church. We cannot suppose you to be better than you profess to be, for the most of men are not half so good as their professions.

Usually, as a rule, no man is so good as his religion, and certainly no man is ever better than his religion: if you do not profess to be on Christ's side, with all charity we are forced to accept your own confession of having no interest in Jesus. Come out, Christians, your Master commands you, and warns you that if you are ashamed of him in this generation, of you will he be ashamed in the day of his glory. He bids you acknowledge him; for if you confess him before men, he will confess you when he comes in the glory of his holy angels. I pray you, then, come out from among them, by taking up the name of a Christian. Why, what is there to shudder at? Are you a soldier, and will you not wear your Captain's livery?



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What! do you love Christ, and blush to own it? Why stand ye back? Let not fear or shame restrain you. If ye be Christians, there is really nothing discreditable in it. Up, and stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of God, and say, "I will go with you because the Lord is with you."

This done, the Christian is to be separate from the world as to his company.

He must buy, and sell, and trade, like other men in the world, but yet he is not to find his bosom friends in it. He is not to go out of society and shut himself up in a monastery; he is to be in the world, but not of it; and his choice company is not to be among the loose, the immoral, the profane; no, not even among the merely moral — his choice company is to be the saints of God. He is to select for his associates those who shall be his companions in the world to come. As birds of a feather flock together, so the birds of paradise are gregarious. Like the speckled birds, they are pecked at by the common flock. As idle boys were wont to mock at foreigners in the streets, so do worldings jeer at Christians; therefore the believer flies away to his own company when he wants good fellowship.

The Christian must come out of the world as to his company.

I know that this rule will break many a fond connection; but "be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers." I know it will snap ties which are almost as dear as life, but it must be done. We must not be overruled even by our own brother when the things of God and conscience are concerned. You must follow Christ, whatever may be the enmity you may excite, remembering that unless you love Christ better than husband, or father, or mother, yea, and your own life also, you cannot be his disciple. If these be hard terms, turn your backs, and perish in your sins! Count the cost; and if you cannot bear such a cost as this, do not undertake to be a follower of Christ.

The follower of Jesus must go without the camp with regards to his pleasures.

He is not without his joys nor his recreations either; but he does not seek them where the wicked find them. The mirth which cheers the worldly makes the Christian sad: the carrion which delights the crow, would disgust the dove and so, those things which are delightful and full of pleasure to unrenewed men, shock and grieve the hearts of the regenerate. If thou hast no separation from the world, as to thy pleasures, since thy heart is generally in thy pleasures, thy heart therefore is with the wicked, and with them shall thy doom be when God comes to judge mankind.

Furthermore, the true follower of Christ is divided from the world as to his maxims; he does not subscribe to the laws which rule most men in their families and their business.

Men generally say, "Everyone for himself, and God for us all." That is not the Christian's maxim. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others," is the Christian's rule. Some men will sail very near the wind; they would not absolutely cheat, but still they use very sharp practice; they would not lie, but their puffs and recommendations are not quite the truth; the Christian scorns all this questionable dealing, and in all matters keeps to the rule of uprightness.

If the believer is true to his Master, and goes without the camp to follow him, his actions are as the noonday clear, his word is his bond, and in his trade he would as soon think of



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becoming absolutely a thief; as to condescend to the common tricks of trade. From my soul I loathe those men, who, under the pretence and profession of religion, use the very respectability of their position to gain credit among others, that they may defraud by obtaining credit which they do not deserve; such persons are the greatest possible disgrace to the Christian Church. The bankruptcy courts may whitewash them, but the devil has blackened them beyond all power of bankruptcy to cleanse them; their black deceitfulness shows through, after all. Men may escape censure when standing at the easy bar of the commissioner, and get a certificate, but they will find it very difficult to get a certificate when God comes to judge them in the last great day. Our laws in England really seem to me to be made on purpose that men may steal and rob with impunity, so long as they do it under colour of commerce. Well, if man's law will not touch such men, God's law shall; and the Church should see that she cleanses herself as much as possible from them. If we be followers of Christ, we must go forth without this camp of pettifogging and thieving, ours must be a downright and honest religion that will not let us swerve a hair's breadth from the straight line of integrity and uprightness.

The Christian's burden is to bear the Lord's reproach.

The reproach of Christ, in these days, takes this shape. "Oh," say they, "the man is too precise. He is right; but still, truth is not always to be spoken. The thing is wrong, no doubt, which he denounces, but still the time has not come yet; we must be lenient towards these things. The man is right in what he says, but we must not be too precise nowadays. We must give and take a little — there must be charity." God's Word, in this age, is a small affair; some do not even believe it to be inspired; and those who profess to revere it, set up other books in a sort of rivalry with it. Why, there are great Church dignitaries nowadays who write against the Bible. Some believe in Popery; but here, again, the plea will be, "They are our dear brethren." Some believe in nothing at all; but still they are all safely housed in one Church, like the beasts, clean and unclean, in Noah's ark.

Those who come out with Christ, get this reproach: they are too precise; in fact, they are "bigots." That is how the world brings it out at last, "bigots" "a set of bigots!" I have heard say that the word "bigot" took its rise from this; that a certain Protestant nobleman being commanded, in order to gain his lands, to kneel down, and in some way or other commit the act of idolatry towards the host, said, when he came at last to the point, "By God, I will not;" and they called him henceforth a "By-God." If this be the meaning of the word "bigot," we cheerfully adopt the title. All the filth in earth's kennels was thrown at Christ by sacrilegious hands. No epithet was thought coarse enough; no terms hard enough: he was the song of the drunkard, and they that sat in the gate spake against him. This was the reproach of

Christ; and we are not to marvel if we bear as much. "Well," says one, "I will not be a Christian if I am to bear that." Skulk back, then, thou coward, to thine own damnation; but oh! men that love God, and who seek after the eternal reward, I pray you do not shrink from this cross. You must bear it. I know you may live without it if you will fawn and cringe, and keep back part of the price; but do not this, it is unworthy of your manhood, much more is unworthy of your Christianity. For God and for Christ be so holy and so truthful that you compel the world to give its best acknowledgment of your goodness by railing at you. It can do no more, it will do no less. Be content to take this shame, for there



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is no heaven for you if you will not - no crown without the cross, no jewels without the mine. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach," Hebrews 13:13.

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The challenge that faces many young people today is that of refusing to conform to the way of the world, even when it is being advocated by other Christians.

For a young woman to refuse to wear trousers or jeans, dye her hair or use make-up, because it is contrary to the call to holiness set down in Romans 12:1-2, may bring the sneers of her companions upon her head, but she is only bearing the reproach of Christ.

When a young man refuses to engage in conversations of a questionable character, when he steadfastly supports the services in his own church in company with his family and refuses to accompany others on a province-wide tour of "after-church rallies" on a Sabbath evening, he may well meet with the disapproval of others, but he is only bearing the reproach of Christ.

The Editor.