NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

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XIII.

WORDS OF WARNING,

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*2d Thessalonians, Chapter II.*

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HIS chapter contains a most remarkable prophecy of the rise, progress, and final destruc­tion of Antichrist; and we now desire to direct your attention to what prepared the world and the professing church in the first ages for being deluded by Antichrist, and to that which should also pre­pare the world in the end of time for receiving its delusions afresh. The apostle begins by warning the Thessalonian church of the danger they were in, of misunderstanding the directions which he had previously given them. They had been told that the Lord was *at hand;* and *this was true, as the apostle meant it;* but they had misunderstood him: they had been taking the times and the seasons out of the Father’s hand, and begun to set times for the accomplishment of prophecy. This was their error; and this epistle was written to entreat them not to be shaken or moved, as though the day of Christ were at hand. This warning equally applies to us in these days; for we are too apt to bring the fulfilment of prophecy down to the times in which we live. True, we are nearer to the end of time than the Thessalonians were; the coming of Christ is eighteen hundred years nearer than it was then. But still we have great need of warning regarding it. This is a time of trial in the church of God; a time when we cannot expect much outward peace or comfort; and there­fore there is a great danger of men’s groping about for consolation,—laying hold of anything in that shape that comes within their reach, and often­times holding fast what is *unreal:* and then, again, it often happens, that when those things which they had taken up as certain, do not come to pass, they are more and more discouraged.

The apostle begins by telling the Thessalonians about the Roman heresy, which should corrupt the professing church, until she should apostatise, and finally be made drunk with the blood of the saints. The character given here of this mystery of ini­quity is very awful, and evidently applies to the Roman Antichrist. There are, doubtless, *many* Antichrists to which this description may have reference; but that it emphatically applies to Rome in the first instance, there can be no doubt. Notice what is set before us in the 10th, 11th, and 12th verses And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” This teaches us that God in righteous judgment would allow, and did allow Satan to put forth his power to deceive and ruin souls. Nothing is more remarkable than the *place* in which the abomination that maketh deso­late was to be set up: it was not among the idolatrous heathen, nor among the open enemies of Christ, but in the *temple of God,* in the midst of the professing church itself; which teaches us clearly, that the judgments of the professing church are more awful than any other, *because* the sin of hearing the gospel without obeying it, is *greater* than any other. The deceitfulness of Rome is tenfold greater than any of the abominations of the heathen, and her judgments will be more tre­mendous. Why? To show that there is no place where God so hates sin as in His own church. “You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.”

We may be preparing ourselves for that—remembering that, when judgment does begin at the house of God, it will be the most awful of all. There is *no* place where men will be more readily given over to delusion, and to the belief of a lie. There were few churches more honoured in early days than the Church of Rome; and so now, be­cause it has fallen from Christ, it has become a golden cup in the hand of Satan, by which he maketh the nations drunk: that cup is going the round of the nations *now,* to the great amazement of many of the world’s wise children. Many pro­fessors wonder at it too, and cannot comprehend how men, in the nineteenth century, should be drinking of all the delusions of the dark ages—they think they can easily, by their own natural powers and intellect, avoid all those deceits, and that it is a simple thing for men to judge, by na­tural wisdom, between truth and error. My dear friends, those who think so will be taught some­thing else ere very long: nothing will save a man from being carried away by the deceivableness of unrighteousness, but the simple receiving of the love of the truth; and let it be remembered that none but those who have received the truth in the love of its most humbling—most Christ-glorifying—sinner-abasing, God-exalting parts, are in the least secure from being carried away by the mys­tery of iniquity, which seems threatening to over­flow the whole land, and to take possession of the temple of God.

It is by the *truth* alone that men are saved; and a heart new created in them, to love, embrace, and keep close to the truth, is the only defence against error of every kind. It is not a *wise head,* but a *sanctified heart,* that will save a man from the most awful delusions, and from the most deep and wily deceits that Satan ever devised. See that *ye* love the truth for its own sake, for the danger of being carried aside by error, is never greater, than in a place where the work of God has been extensively carried on. When the Spirit ceases to work there, those people who have not the genuine love of the truth, lose their appetite for the plain preaching of it altogether. They are driven back and forward, as the chaff before the wind, and then, when the hour and power of dark­ness is, and when temptation rushes in, they are quickly carried away by Satan’s devices, and by the lying wonders which he has received power to per­form on the earth. The devil’s power has been, is now, and will yet be so great, and the manifes­tations of it are so new and numerous, that the time appears to be drawing nigh when they will deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.

Men often think they will be saved from error by belonging to a particular congregation, asso­ciation, or church, pure as they call it. They cry out, as Satan cries within them, “The Church, the Church!” Not, perhaps, the Church of Rome, or even the Church of England, but still it comes much to the same thing—it is always *the church,* just as of old, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these!” Ah, brethren, beware, beware! No class is, perhaps, for this cause, so near to the strong delusion of Satan as those among whom great things have been done, and who have passed through glorious times of the Lord’s right hand without receiving the truth. Look at the Jews, whom God singled out to be the object of His chief blessing. A remnant was indeed, saved, according to the election of grace; but, as a nation, it was not so. Because they hardened their hearts, God sent them strong delusions, and Paul declares that their ears were dull of hearing, and their eyes they had closed, so that they could not see Him to be very God, who was the only begotten of the Father. That delusion is not broken after eighteen hundred years, except in a very few cases comparatively,—and shall the righteous Judge of all the earth act upon a different principle towards us now? He will not, He does not, as we have too fearful proof around us. Brethren, I warn you. We see not yet the end of these things: “God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie.” It is awful to be deluded in matters of eternal consequence, in things of the soul, where heaven and hell, life and death, are in the question; but how far more awful when God Him­self sends the delusion, for then, alas! it comes with the power of a divine commission; it comes over the soul without the opposition of a check or restraining power of any kind. It is the work of Satan as all the works of darkness are; it cannot proceed from the Father of lights, for in Him is no darkness at all. Its cause and origin is far removed from Him who is the fountain of life, and yet it is an act unopposed by Him as the God of providence.

It was long a common delusion, that either no man could be really sincere in a bad cause, or in a false doctrine, or that, if he could be proved to be sincere, this was enough. Do you think that this passage would lead us to say that none can conscientiously hold a false doctrine? No; for it is said “that they should *believe* a lie;” showing that men may be deceived in their belief, while it proves that their belief of a lie cannot save them from being condemned by it. While the termina­tion of their sin is clearly pointed out, the fruitful cause of it is not hidden. It is declared to be twofold—the believing not the truth, and the having pleasure in unrighteousness. These sins in­volve many fearful consequences unimagined when they are committed. You may be safe, as you think, in a godly congregation, and yet commit these sins; you may belong to a pure church, and yet commit them; you may have the gospel sound ringing in your ears, and love to hear it, and yet commit them. You have never *yet* believed Immanuel’s testimony, and when He Himself drew near, and appeared in His glory in this place, and when His voice of majesty was heard, and His glorious power seen in the sanctuary, you never bowed to Him, you never put the crown upon His head; multitudes of professing Christians rejected Himself, and denied His work, or thought you did a great deal when you did not oppose it. And now you are twice dead, plucked up by the roots; no sermon touches you, no minister awakens your conscience, no warning ever gets near you. Awake or Satan will rob you of your day of grace alto­gether, and ruin your precious souls.

Ver. 13. “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Chosen to salvation! Oh, that blessed word! The apostle thanked God; he did not thank *himself,* he did not thank *them* that they were faithful to their high calling; but he thanked God, who had chosen them from the beginning, and called them to Him­self. This eternal purpose of God is your only security: and how precious what follows!—they were not only chosen to faith and repentance, but chosen to complete salvation. The means used—the belief of the truth. The agent—Jehovah the Spirit. Yes, the living God takes a lump of the fallen Adam, quickens it, creates it anew, works faith in it, and brings it on to the end in view—the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet for this glorious salvation the unregene­rate have no taste, though eternal life or eternal death is at stake. They look to things seen; their eye rests on present obstacles, and they LET SALVA­TION GO! they let it slip, and they are undone! Let the children of God also beware.

The devil is too cunning for you to withstand single-handed and alone. Hold fast by Christ, or he will lead you to the pit yet: he will take our life —he will lead us captive, and take our crown! He would take our *Saviour* from us if he could, and thus take our all.

Many of us seem to be as it were leaving Satan’s artifices out of account; we seem to be thinking that somehow or other we shall slip into heaven, we know not well how. That was not Paul’s expectation, and he knew well that it is far other­wise with God’s people; and be very sure that *you* will also have to encounter many an obstacle and many a difficulty more than you calculate on. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.” Are there any here who have got the spirit to overcome? any who are following the Lord fully? Or, are we not constrained to say, What a contrast to past days!—some becoming cold in their service,—some leaving their first love,—some falling into sin,—some apostatising altogether,—many losing their love of the truth, and going after new doctrines.

This brings us to notice, in verses 15th and 16th, first, an exhortation given, and then a prayer. “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” What tradition does he mean? you will ask. There are two kinds of traditions. One kind of *man’s* making, all of which are to be *abhorred and cast away;* and another kind of traditions, which are God’s tra­ditions, and are to be held fast through life, and unto death, be the consequences what they may. The word “tradition” has no mysterious or difficult signification; it means something delivered from one to another,—something handed down, whether from God to man, or from man to man. To the first of these we may ever safely cling; on the second many are now beginning to lean, and they will lean on them till they fall through them into destruction. Hold fast then the traditions which ye have been taught; not the traditions of men,—not the traditions of Rome,—not the tradi­tions of your fathers, Christ’s faithful martyrs though they were. No; leave that to Rome, leave that to English Puseyism. Your faith lies *here,* within the boards of this Bible. Your life is in that book, and especially in such parts of it as search deepest into your heart, and pierce furthest through your corruptions. The closer you keep to it, the further will you be from error.

“For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made mani­fest among you.” You will see these spreading in different parts of the land, They will come, perhaps, into your own congregation, even amongst yourselves. I fear there may be something akin to this among you already. Hold God’s truth, believer; take not up what is new either *readily* or *strongly.* Its novelty may for a time give it a charm; but novelty, novelty! is the cry of an Athenian fickle people, not that of the humbled, tried believer. He does not need this; he finds constant newness in the oldest truths; he finds a fresh and ever-flowing spring of life in the Lord Himself. He looks to Christ, and seeks to know and obey His will, and he has not time for more.

Beware of all doctrines which make you high-minded and puffed up, great talkers and expert reasoners, but which yet leave the soul as a dry and withered thing. Plain doctrines once satisfied you. I remember the time when they were your choicest portions in all the Word of God, but now I fear that *salvation, heaven, hell, judgment, eternity,* are not such weighty words as they used to be in your ears. Plain things have worn out of fashion; you have got beyond them; they are too simple and tasteless for you now. In those days the only thing that satisfied you was to hear old simple truths, and plain sermons about regeneration, or man’s lost and ruined condition, or, perhaps, even more about Immanuel’s righteousness, or the new heart, and the work of grace, whereby all old things pass away.

Listen to Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonian Church: “Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work.” If that prayer were offered by your minister for you, and by you for yourselves, *and answered,* what a rich congregation would this be! I know that some of you don’t *wish to receive* all that this prayer contains; some would like to settle down upon their lees, some would shrink from the testi­mony they are called on to make for Christ, and some would like to avoid the labour and fatigue of hard, every-day work; and some would spend their strength in controversy, because that warfare is so much more palatable and easy to the flesh, than the good fight of faith. Brethren! be not hoodwinked out of your salvation, by thinking that you have found out a softer and an easier path to heaven, than the old path, and the King’s highway. There is no softer path to heaven, than that which still bears the foot-prints of the Man of sorrows. There has been no wider gate invented since the days when the Lord preachedconcerning it, in the land of Judea. It is the strait gate still,—it is the narrow way still; and it must be trod barefoot, to be trod at all. We must agonise in order to enter it at all; it takes many a conflict before the gate yields to our hand, for it is strait, or rather it takes many a conflict with the sin that we would fain be allowed to carry with us. Do you say you find the way hard? Oh! don’t stop short of eternal glory, for the sake of a hard road to it. The Lord Himself will put you on it. The Lord will give you ever­lasting comforts in it. Think not of making a bed of ease, on the road which Immanuel strewed with groans, and sighs, and prayers, and tears! Think it enough if you have the Three-one God to meet with by the way, and *besides that seek nothing,* but be thankful now and then to be meeting with some weary pilgrim like yourself, who can tell, from a deeply-taught and deeply-humbled soul, of the goodness and loving-kindness of your covenant God.

Trust not much for your soul’s profit to the constant talking about matters connected with religion, which we now hear so much of. You cannot go into a steamboat or a coach now-a-days without hearing something of that kind, and yet, my dear friends, we do not find that true religious conversation is more common: on the contrary, it is much more *uncommon* than it was. It is always the Church, the Church! that we hear of. There is more Puseyism in that cry than we think; and, meanwhile, our need of grace in the heart is forgotten. There is little about us of that which puts men in mind that there is still a heaven, and a hell, and a glorious, living, reigning Christ. There seems at present to be a blight lying on ministers and people; little good is done; eternity is not brought near to our own souls, and how can we bring it near to the souls of others?

Wait then on the Lord, in this time of dead­ness and desertion; for, though multitudes are perishing, and though the world is fast asleep, yet there are still some, if not many, precious souls quietly and silently creeping into the king­dom of God, by the strait gate. And though noisy professors may be abusing the present outward circumstances of the church, to their own hin­drance, and though the crowd of worldly men may sink yet deeper in their forgetfulness of God, use you this season lawfully, and do not make a curse of what God intends for a blessing; hide for a little moment safe under His wings from the fear of evil. Seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.