

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

24. AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF

"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2 Cor. 4:3-4

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Hebrews 3:12

Truly, a heart of unbelief is an evil heart. Out of such a heart every EVIL proceeds. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet water. An unbelieving heart is the laboratory of Satan! "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Unbelievers are the slaves of Satan; they "are taken captive by him at his will." When the glorious gospel of our God and Savior shines around them, they see it not. As the meridian sun is hidden from the naturally blind, so is the gospel hidden to those who are lost, through the blinding influence of unbelief. "Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them. They don't understand the message we preach about the glory of Christ."

Contradictory as it may seem, many virtues approved by men, may be exhibited by those that are lost. Generosity, sympathy for the afflicted, elegance of manners, patriotic displays of courage in defense of his country, and such like popular virtues, may form a wreath around the brow, or emblazon the tomb, of the unbeliever. But, what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God, if faith working by love is lacking in the heart. The trumpet of fame has sounded the praises of many, even to the ends of the earth, who, at the last trumpet, shall hear these words sounded out before an assembled world; "Depart from me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

How empty is the breath of human praise! And yet, how many pant after it, and even risk the salvation of their souls to obtain it. Oh! that men were wise, that they would consider their latter end! Lord teach me heavenly wisdom. Give me to see and feel, that all true honor comes from you. To be your child, to form a part of your redeemed church, to know and serve you in the gospel of your Son, to esteem Christ precious, and to love him with all the heart, is infinitely above the smile of monarchs, or the plaudits of the world.

What a DESTRUCTIVE sin is unbelief. It is like a dungeon in which the prisoner is enclosed without any possibility of escape. Nothing but the mighty power of God can "bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness out from the prison house." Unbelief is the root of all evil. Its effects in the soul are of the most deadly nature. The whole human race is tainted with it, yes, is become radically corrupted by it. From Adam to the present time, and from this period to the last hour of man's existence upon earth, multitudes have been, are, and will be defiled and destroyed, through the subtle poison of unbelief. "When the Son of Man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?" We read indeed of brighter days and purer times, when Satan shall be bound for a thousand years; blissful period! when Christ shall reign in the hearts of his people, as the Universal King; when he shall reign before his ancients gloriously; but soon, alas! does this happy period draw to its close. Satan shall be again loosed out of his prison. He shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth. The enemies of Christ, innumerable like the sand of the sea, shall compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, when fire shall come down from God out of heaven, and devour them. Wickedness will therefore once more deluge the earth.

But He, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, shall come with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who know not God, and that obey not the gospel of his Son. Then will the heavens pass away with a great roar, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Then will be seen the great white throne and him who sits on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven will flee away. Before the King of Glory will then be gathered all nations. The dead, small and great, shall stand before God. The books shall be opened; and the dead will be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works; and whoever is not found written in the Book of Life, will be cast into the lake of fire.

How consoling to the tempest-tossed believer are the words of Paul; "For since we believe that Jesus died and

was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died. I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever." "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years." "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along—the day when God will set the heavens on fire and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world where everyone is right with God. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to live a pure and blameless life."

This future glory is of necessity encompassed with clouds. But enough is revealed to animate our hopes, to stimulate our exertions, to inflame our love, to strengthen our faith, though we cannot chronologically arrange the glorious events which shall follow each other until the final consummation of all things. Different views are taken, but every view should lead us to the conclusion of Peter; "Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives you should be living!"

Oh! that I may have grace with deep humility to contemplate this dreadful, yet, to every believer, delightful period, when Jesus shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, when he shall be surrounded by all those who love his appearing, on whom he will then pronounce the sentence of blessedness, and receive them into the joy of their Lord.

Infidelity is the enemy of man. It robs him of his support, of his consolation, of his hope. It presents before him a dreary waste-land, at the end of which is nothing but darkness and despair. Though all are not infidels, properly so called, rejecting the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and scoffing at the revealed plan of salvation through Jesus Christ; yet, all are by nature under the power of unbelief. Thousands, who profess to receive the Bible as the word of God, and who would take offence at being called infidels, act as though they did not believe it. While they profess that they know God, they in works deny him; while they call him Lord, Lord, they do not practice the things which he commands. It is sad to think how much practical infidelity is concealed under the garb of a religious profession. "They say, and do not."

Unbelief, like a mighty stream, runs through the whole territory of our fallen world. Its spring is found in Paradise, where our deceived parents ate of the forbidden fruit. As their posterity increased, this river of death grew wider and wider. Wherever a human being is to be found, whatever be his country, language, or color, there we shall find a portion of this stream, whose pestiferous exhalations destroy the fair beauty of the moral world, and convert the whole earth into a waste howling wilderness.

Blessed be God! there is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God, the Church of the Most High. This river, pure as crystal, proceeds from the fountain of Eternal Love, and flows down to earth, through the adorable Redeemer of mankind. When the dreadful flood of unbelief burst forth in Paradise, threatening to overwhelm the new creation, this life-giving stream of Sovereign Love began to flow. A spiritual Eden was graciously commenced. Trees of righteousness were planted and nourished. A people was formed who should show forth the Redeemer's praise. The eleventh chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, most beautifully describes this garden of the Lord. Thousands in every age have borne witness to the truth, by faith and love, by patience and hope; exhibiting in their lives the fruits of the Spirit, and the grace and power of the adorable Savior.

Oh! that I may become one of these highly-favored plants, that all who are near and dear to me may be trees of righteousness of the Lord's planting, that he may be glorified; yes, that all mankind may bear fruit to the glory of God. If I am a child of God, I shall implicitly believe his holy word. If I truly believe his revealed will, I shall labor through grace to obey it. If I obey it from the heart, my whole walk and conversation will evidence my obedience. I shall then hate what God hates, and love what he loves. I shall not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of my mind. I shall not set my affections on earthly, but on heavenly things. I shall willingly take up my cross and follow Christ, though the path lie through the reproach of men, and tribulation for the gospel's sake.

Knowing that circumcision avails nothing, nor uncircumcision, but a New Creature, I shall be mainly anxious to experience the power of godliness, while maintaining the form. I shall dread the state of those who rest in a

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dead formality, who substitute the shadow for the substance, the sign for the thing signified. "The kingdom of God 'is not food and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

Lord, enable me to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, that I may have a clear and undoubted evidence that I am born from above, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and made a temple of the Holy Spirit. Perform in mercy, this work of love on my soul, through your own rich grace, and for the sake of that beloved Savior who died for the chief of sinners, to whom I may look with hope and confidence for pardoning, purifying, and glorifying grace. Oh! how great is your unspeakable, unsearchable love. Like yourself, it is infinite and eternal! "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name."