

Devotional Thoughts :: 1865 Thoughts

1865 Thoughts - posted by MaryJane, on: 2010/1/14 17:54

1865 Thoughts - Important Reading in This Present Age

Persecutors always justify themselves by misrepresenting and calumniating the men they would persecute. They malign ed the ancient prophets thus as enemies of the State; Christ as a blasphemer; the apostles as those who had turned the world upside down. So it will ever be. Very few indeed will allow themselves to believe that they are persecuting men for their righteousness' sake. But they do allow themselves to be deceived. Nay they may unconsciously court deception. When men love to have it so, the wish is father to the thought. In our own times men allow themselves to jeer and taunt religious men and religion itself, as if this were not persecution. They allow themselves to be deceived in regard to the character of those whom they persecute. They would be shocked if told—"you persecute Christ in His people." So they first make it appear that Christ is not in such people, and then give loose to their malignity.

Probably there is no community or church in the world in which uncompromising righteousness would not be persecuted in some form, and by some individuals. Sometimes church members are specially inclined to this. It was so in the time of our Savior's earthly life.

Spiritual pride may lead to this persecution. Proud men resent even tacit rebuke. Impenitent sinners are, not unfrequently, more ready to receive rebuke than proud Christians. The sinner will say—"your rebukes are deserved; but the proud professor replies—"thus saying, thou reproachest us also."

Rarely in the entire history of the church has persecution shown itself openly, except when it has had the countenance or authority of some professed Christians. The wicked are emboldened to vent the venom they feel by the sympathy, real or supposed, of some who are regarded as Christians. I am sorry to say that ministers of the gospel sometimes lead in this. It was so in Christ's time. The professed religious teachers of that age led off.

It is in the very nature of apostasy and backsliding to persecute. Such are its legitimate tendencies. Christ understood this well and implied it when He said—"They will put you to death and think they are doing God service. He meant by this remark to forewarn them against being stumbled by finding professed Christians against them.

No true wisdom and discretion can altogether avoid persecution. No true wisdom, I say—for false wisdom and a false discretion may. If men are ready to sacrifice righteousness, they will very probably escape persecution. But let all men know—the world is still unchanged—being as much and as truly the enemy of God as ever. Many seem to suppose that the age of persecution is past—that the world is greatly advanced. So prevalent has this idea become that some at once assume a young minister to be indiscreet if he experiences persecution. But the Bible assumes that this persecution will be one of the results of faith and righteousness. Even Jesus Christ could not avoid it. They said He had a denunciatory spirit and was censorious. In prophetic vision, Isaiah said of Him—"We did esteem Him stricken and smitten of God. But Christ did not court opposition, nor say or do anything that should justly excite it. He knew His position and His danger. They were very trying to His human nature, yet He could not shrink from duty.

It is remarkable that Christ took the greatest pains to guard His people against assuming that, by prudence, they could avoid persecution. He told them distinctly that God pronounced a woe on them of whom all men spake well, and left them to assume that if they pleased the wicked, they did not please God. It is impossible that true uprightness should be everywhere tolerated.

In fact, this truth lies deep in man's intuitive convictions and assumptions. No one can suppose that faithful dealings will escape persecution. Not that every man will persecute; for the word and Spirit of God may break down some and turn their hearts. When Nathan came to David and said "Thou art the man!" his first word was—"I have sinned." This was quite unlike the spirit of some of the later kings—one of whom said of a prophet—"Take this fellow away and feed him with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, till I return to this place in peace.

Alas for poor weak human nature! If anybody speaks against anything they do, oh, it is such a blow! How can they live so! Let them read from Jeremiah 20. I used to read it often and make it the man of my counsel.

"O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed. I am in derision daily, everyone mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried of violence and spoil; because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, peradventure he will be enticed and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One; therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper; their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten." Under this strong temptation, if young converts fail to be faithful, they will lose their faith and their communion with God.

Often in such cases they are not aware of the cause, and say—What have I done? Oh! have you not neglected to stand up for Jesus?”

Churches also assume that, if thoroughly faithful to righteousness, they must suffer persecution and therefore they temporize and conform to the world. They know that if they are thoroughly honest, they must lose the sympathy of outsiders. Ungodly men will not help them build meeting houses and support ministers. They are afraid. I seldom meet a church really independent, daring to do its whole duty. I never saw one in which all the members were thus bold and firm. Hence in seeking ministers, they look for men who will temporize. Most churches do this. They are afraid to stand by a faithful minister, and face all the consequences. Ministers know this; they know the church will not sustain them in absolute righteousness. Hence they fall into the policy of preaching about sin in a way which does not show who and what they mean. They always assume that they shall suffer persecution if they do, and they assume this, not without reason. I say this not of all; for there are some, I am happy to say, who would take their lives in their hands and face even death.

Ministers who do trim their ways thus, lose God’s presence and their own usefulness. They calculate that it will not do to stand up boldly for Jesus. They think to gain influence, but in fact they lose it—lose it by the very means they use to save it. Let us next look at the blessedness of the faithful. On this point the language of Christ is very strong. He enlarges, saying more than simply that they are blessed. “Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” He would have us understand that those who endure persecution for Christ’s sake become exceedingly dear to Him. The fact that they suffer shame for His name endears them to His heart. He sympathizes so deeply with none others.

REMARKS

Christ was persecuted unto death for our sakes. It was for us—that “by His stripes, we might be healed.” Then He stood up for us, when there was no other eye that would pity, and no arm but His that could save. So great was His love that He enjoyed it. We are told it was “for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame.” This was not the joy of a personal salvation, but the joy of saving others. So far as the same sort of love animates our service for Him and His people now, so far we shall certainly enjoy this life.

The life of one who endures persecution for Christ’s sake, is not unhappy, but eminently happy. The apostles were not unhappy men, even when they were hunted from city to city, and made the offscouring of all things. I have been struck to see that many assume persecuted Christians to be unhappy and try to console them. Indeed they make a great mistake in that assumption. For such Christians have joys unspeakable that the world knows not.

Those who really stand up for Christ are blessed in it. Persecution cannot make them unhappy. In the midst of gainsaying and calumnies, their peace and joy abound. A Christian in this state is indefinitely more happy than he who has all the popularity in the world. Joy of soul does not depend on human popularity. Holy men could walk unscathed in a burning furnace.

Therefore let no one bless himself that he is not a subject of persecution—that he has been wise enough or pious enough to escape it. If you were to take such a man and examine thoroughly his life and character, you would probably find him a temporizing man, not faithful and honest in reproving sin. By a kind of suppleness, he tries to make everybody his friend. The fact that he meets with no opposition does not prove him to be faithful to Christ. It rather proves in him some defect. He does not reprove sin as he ought to.

The amiability that avoids persecution is not to be confounded with piety. Generally this is the absence of piety. You see many who scarcely ever reprove sin. They allow those around them to sin unreprieved. When they come upon their death-bed, they will have to say—I never was faithful to my neighbors and friends. I let many things pass which never should have passed.

It is very common for compromisers to take credit to themselves for their success in escaping persecution, while they attribute the persecutions of others to their blunders. I do not deny that some are unwise. But as you find men in our age, a thousand are too conservative where one is excessively sharp in his rebukes of sin. Whoever will be faithful will learn the truth of the inspired words—“If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution.”

Let no man expect to make real friends by compromises. Those who attempt this never increase their real popularity. The fact is, the masses have some conscience—too much to ensure the popularity of the compromiser. The men who trim to every breeze are sure to forfeit respect and confidence. If you turn away from righteousness to go with the wicked, you surely lose their confidence. They will not send for you on their death-beds. No, they will then wish to see somebody more honest and righteous than you.

There is true and real joy in being allowed to suffer for Christ’s sake. It lives in the inner soul, and no stranger intermeddles therewith. No man need fear being reproached for Christ’s sake. What if you are? Many think—if we should become Christians and should have to endure reproach for Christ, it would be past endurance! We cannot afford it. All wrong. You cannot afford to forfeit God’s favor and blessings. Your real joy depends on your popularity, not with men, but with Jesus Christ. You need nothing more to ensure your blessedness. A wife can say—If I only have the approval of my husband, it is enough for me. I can bear the loss of anything else. I can go with him anywhere. So should the Christian feel as to Jesus Christ. “It is Christ that justifies us; who is he that condemns?” One smile from Christ makes earth a heaven. Suppose you are persecuted, and you go home, and there the presence of Jesus is so sweet, His smile so rich, it is all but heaven itself. You look out from under His shadow as from a pavilion of glory! I have often heard Christians sa

y they never were so happy as when most unpopular and most reproached for Christ. I have heard them say—Those were most blessed seasons. I have seen persons excommunicated for their piety (as was generally thought afterward) who said they never were so happy as then. But persons in those circumstances need to take great care of their own spirit, lest they lose the meekness of Christ and His presence.

It is an awful sin to persecute the righteous, or to fail to stand up for them and identify yourself with their cause. How often have I heard Dr. Cheever spoken of in such terms as showed that men really approved his course in the denunciation of slavery and its abettors, while yet they dared not say so. I heard him preach on the influence of slavery on the great revival—a sermon full of solemn and just denunciations of that great sin. When asked what I thought of that, I said—“The men who will not stand by that ought to have their names blotted out of the Book of Life.”

Do you say, “I cannot do this—cannot face such reproach for Christ; it costs too much?” If you cannot pay this cost, you may as well give up all your religion. It will do you no good.

To persecute Christians is to persecute Christ. He said to Saul—“Why persecute thou Me?” Yet since Christ was already in heaven, Saul could have persecuted Christ only in the sense of persecuting His friends and followers. It is so now. And the usual form of persecution is gainsaying—speaking against God’s people. I have seldom found a faithful Christian who is not spoken against by his brethren in the church. When I hear certain things said of Christian people, I say—let me see them before I believe anything good or bad. I have known even ministers to gainsay really honest Christian members. This brother, they say, is a little peculiar, a little eccentric—a little shattered, crazy, &c. So it was said long ago—“He that forsaketh iniquity maketh himself a prey.” The fact reveals the low state of religion.

And now, let me come near to you and ask—Are you suffering persecution for Christ’s sake? Where? From whom? Let the question be pressed till you reach the true answer. Observe, I do not ask whether you are persecuted for your faults; but whether the world hates you for being like Christ. This is the question, and it is a very important one. Are we really persecuted for Christ’s sake? If you are not persecuted, is it because there are none about you to resist and repel your efforts to reform and to save them? Or is it not rather because you have not piety enough to annoy the ungodly? Are you so worldly that they do not feel annoyed at your influence? Certainly you will not suppose that you are wiser than Christ and His apostles that you should by your superior wisdom escape all persecution when they did not. If you fail of being persecuted, is not this the reason—ungodly men are not rebuked by your piety?

Young men, prospective ministers, you need not expect that you are going through life without persecution; nor on the other hand, need you fear it. You may even see cases where you will have to take your life in your hands. When that hour shall come, pray; keep quiet; trust God and fear not. There may be violent ebullitions of wrath, but be patient. I have heard men scold and fret, declaring—I shall never go to that meeting again; but they were followed up with prayer; and by and by they broke down and became as little children. When this change is wrought, they will stand by you as Paul stood by Jesus Christ after his conversion.

Ye converts, did you count the cost and are you patient to meet it now? Do you give up your religion when you go away from Oberlin? If men cast out your name as evil, do you bear it in meekness and patience? Years ago, we used often to hear of the persecutions of students who went out from this place. Some were mobbed, and some were persecuted in other forms. I am afraid of the feeling that we have been too ultra and must compromise the matter a little—that if Oberlin views are unpopular, we must and may drop them—suppress them and say nothing about them. This is no way to serve Jesus Christ.

Can you not well afford to make up your minds now to be for Christ? What are you afraid of? Of those who can harm the body and after they have no more that they can do? Let me forewarn you whom ye shall fear—even Him who after the body dies, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him! O that we had among us more men like young Tyngh! God grant to me to have a son who could say thus to me—“Stand up, father, for Jesus!” How his words ring and echo all around the borders of the churches! That fearless man; God bless his memory! Turned out from one church because he would speak true and earnest words against American Slavery, he went into another, and still his voice rung clear and strong for righteousness. When such a man came suddenly, to death, his dying words—“Stand up for Jesus,” went forth like the peal of a trumpet. Men caught up those words and have placarded them in all the great cities of the land. His death was honored above any other man’s in that city for a whole generation. While the names of those who trim to the popular breeze shall rot, his name shall live in honor; and even when the heavens and this earth shall pass away, Jesus will honor him still. Say, young man, do you aspire to real and enduring honor? There it is—“Stand up for Jesus!”