

Legality and Levity

C. H. Mackintosh.

Feeling, as we trust we do, in some little measure our responsibility to the souls of our readers, as well as to the truth of God, we desire to offer a brief but pointed word of warning against two opposite evils which we can plainly see working among Christians at the present moment. These are legality on the one hand, and levity on the other.

As to the first of these evils, we have sought in many of our former papers to deliver precious souls out of a legal state, as being, at once, dishonouring to God and utterly subversive of their own peace and liberty. We have endeavoured to set forth the free grace of God, the value of the blood of Christ, the standing of the believer before God in perfect righteousness and acceptance in Christ. These precious truths, when applied to the heart in the power of the Holy Ghost, must deliver it from all legal influences.

But then it frequently happens that persons, when apparently delivered from legality, run into the opposite evil of levity. This may arise from the fact that the doctrines of grace are only taken up intellectually, instead of being wrought into the soul by the power of the Spirit of God. A great amount of evangelical truth may be taken up in a very light way, in cases where there has been no deep work of conscience, no real breaking down of nature, no thorough subjugation of the flesh in the presence of God. When this is the case there is sure to be levity of spirit in some form or another. There will be a very wide margin allowed for worldliness of various kinds — a liberty given to nature wholly incompatible with practical Christianity. In addition to these things, there will be exhibited a very deplorable want of conscience in the practical details of daily life — duties neglected, work badly done, engagements not faithfully observed, sacred obligations trifled with, debts contracted, extravagant habits indulged. All these things we place under the head of levity, and they are, alas! too common amongst the very highest professors of what is termed evangelical truth.

Now we deeply deplore this, and would desire to have our own souls, as well as the souls of all our Christian readers, really exercised before God about it. We fear there is a great deal of hollow profession amongst us, a great want of earnestness, truthfulness and reality in our ways. We are not sufficiently permeated by the spirit of genuine Christianity, or governed in all things by the Word of God. We do not give sufficient attention to "the girdle of truth," or "the breastplate of righteousness." In this way the soul gets into a very bad state indeed; conscience does not act. The moral sensibilities become blunted. The claims of truth are not duly responded to. Positive evil is trifled with. Moral relaxation is allowed. So far from there being the constraining power of the love of Christ, leading forth in the activities of goodness, there is not even the restraining power of the fear of God keeping back from the activities of evil.

We appeal solemnly to the consciences of our readers as to these things. The present is a deeply solemn time for Christians. There is a demand for earnest, deep-toned devotedness to Christ, but this cannot possibly exist where the common claims of practical righteousness are neglected. We must ever remember that the self-same grace which effectually delivers the soul from legality is the only safeguard against all levity. We have done very little for a man, if anything at all, if we bring him out of a legal state into a light, easy-going, careless, unconscientious condition of heart. And yet we have frequently marked the history of souls, and noticed this sad fact respecting them, that when they were delivered out of darkness and bondage they became far less tender and sensitive. The flesh is ever

ready to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and therefore it must be subdued. It needs that the power of the Cross be applied to all that is of the flesh. We want to mingle the "bitter herbs" with our paschal feast. In other words, we want those deep spiritual exercises which result from positive entrance into the power of the sufferings of Christ. We need to meditate more profoundly upon the death of Christ — His death as a victim under the hand of God, His death as a martyr under the hand of man.

This, beloved reader, is at once the cure for legality and levity. The Cross, in its double aspect, delivers from both. Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1: 4). By the Cross the believer is as completely delivered from this present evil world as he is forgiven his sins. He is not saved in order that he may enjoy the world, but that he may get done with it entirely. We know few things more dangerous for the soul than the combination of evangelical truth with worldliness, ease and self-indulgence — the adoption of a certain phraseology of truth where the conscience is not in the presence of God — a merely intellectual apprehension of standing without any earnest dealing with the practical state — clearness in doctrine as to title, without any conscientious reference to the moral condition.

We trust our reader will suffer the word of exhortation. We should deem ourselves deficient in faithfulness were we to withhold it. True, it is not an agreeable task to call attention to practical evils — to urge the solemn duty of self-judgement — to press upon the conscience the claims of practical godliness. It were far more grateful to the heart to unfold abstract truth, to dwell upon free grace and what it has done for us, to expatiate upon the moral glories of the inspired volume, in a word, to dwell upon the privileges which are ours in Christ. But there are times when the true, practical condition of things among Christians weighs heavily upon the heart and rouses the soul to make an urgent appeal to conscience in reference to matters of walk and conduct; and we believe the present to be such a time. The devil is ever busy, and on the alert. The Lord has granted much light upon His Word for some years past. The gospel has been brought out with peculiar clearness and power. Thousands have been delivered from a legal state; and now the enemy is seeking to hinder the testimony by leading souls into a light, careless, carnal condition — leading them to neglect the wholesome and indispensable exercise of self-judgement. It is the deep sense of this that has suggested a word of warning on "*Legality and Levity*."

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2: 11-14).