

sent position, and that the first verse of ch. viii. has been corrupted in consequence.

The consideration of Ezr. iv. 6-23 is reserved to the next number.

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## HEBREWS VI. 4-6.

### II.

“For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”

IN a previous paper on the above passage it was our aim to establish three propositions: (1) That the picture contained in it is not an imaginary one, but that it sets before us what had been the actual condition of the Hebrew Christians addressed. If it be not so, it is difficult to see how the argument of the sacred writer is to attain its end. His reasoning might have been at once met with the reply, “We have not yet reached that stage of Christian life and experience which you have just described; and, although therefore those who have reached it and have fallen away from it may be chargeable with the terrible sin of which you speak, may crucify the Son of God afresh, and may put Him to an open shame, no such sin can at least as yet lie at our door. Your warning does not apply to us. (2) Attention was called to the special nature of the sacred writer’s appeal. It is an exhortation to advance, to hasten forward in the Divine life, to be ashamed, not of apostacy, but of a wilful neglect of great principles to which the Hebrew Christians had given their adhesion, but which they were not carrying out to their legitimate result.

(3) We had to speak of the participles in the sixth verse, and to show that they indicate, not a sin which, once for all completed, had drawn down the just judgment of God, making future repentance impossible, but a continuance in sinning. The language of the writer is not that they *had crucified* the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame, and that therefore an irrevocable decree of doom had gone forth against them, but that they were continuing to do so, and that thus they could not comply with what was required of them, "the while" they persisted in repeating "for themselves" the sin of their fathers,—crucifying and holding up to scorn the "Son of God." We have still, before turning to the general meaning of the passage to make one or two observations on words or phrases in it which must be taken into account.

(4) ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν. Is it perfectly certain, we may ask, that the μετάνοια now alluded to is thought of as operating in the same field, as concerned with precisely the same objects, as μετάνοια of verse 1? That genuine repentance is always formally the same is no doubt true. It is a change of mind, a different attitude of soul alike towards that which we forsake and that to which we turn. But the contents of the μετάνοια may be different; and it seems not unlikely that that is the case here. In verse 1 it is a repentance "from dead works,"—from a state of life which was not real life, which was separated from God, and the actions of which therefore could only, like all death, be spoken of as making the doer of them unclean both in his own eyes, when he awakened to a sense of religion, and in the eyes of God. In verse 6 the reference is wholly different. The repentance there can be no other than [repentance from that sin of neglecting and substantially rejecting the Son of God of which the Hebrew Christians were guilty. It is true that the word πάλιν is used, but that word belongs closely to ἀνακαινίζειν, and connects itself with the

thought, not of a second repentance from dead works but with a second renewal, which indeed starts with repentance, but that a repentance of the particular nature just alluded to. It does not therefore follow that the persons of whom it is said that they could not be renewed to this repentance, were apostates who had fallen back to a state worse than that in which they had been before they first believed. The renewal to repentance, which they could not find because they were continuing in the sin of which they were guilty, may have been of a different kind.

This conclusion is strengthened when we turn to the word *ἀδύνατον*. That word can only mean "impossible"; and, that it cannot be resolved into "very difficult" is so generally admitted that nothing further need be said upon the point. But where does the impossibility lie? Is it, as many think, in the human agency alone? The answer can only be No. This weakness always belongs to human agency. "God," not man, "worketh in us both to will and to do" (Phil. ii. 13). The nerve of the passage too is destroyed by such an interpretation. Yet how can it be said to be impossible to God, when our Lord Himself says in a passage, the context of which has some leading points of resemblance to the context of this passage, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God" (Mark x. 27)? The only answer given is that God's *decree* does not permit repentance in the case supposed. There is, however, no word of Divine decrees in the passage. There is only moral action on the part of God commending itself to the conscience upon moral grounds. One supposition alone brings the impossibility within this field,—that the sin condemned is continuously committed. They who persist in crucifying the Son of God cannot, in the nature of things, be renewed to the higher life to which there is no admission except by faith in the Son of God. God cannot lie. He cannot deny

Himself. He cannot reverse a divine order which is the expression of His own perfection.

Finally, the illustration by which the teaching of our passage is enforced may be noticed for a moment, especially that part contained in verse 8. When it is there said, "If it beareth briars and thorns," the meaning surely is, "if it continues" to do this. The land is not rejected and nigh unto a curse simply because it has borne these weeds, but because it persists in bearing them (again a parallel to the continuous sense of the present participles in verse 6). Let it be improved, let it be wrought and softened till it drink in the rain that cometh oft upon it; let it bring forth herbs meet for them by whom it is tilled, and it will receive a blessing from God. Its condition is not hopeless.<sup>1</sup>

We have now examined at some length the leading particulars of this interesting and important passage. It remains for us to devote a little space to its teaching as a whole, and to inquire as to the class of persons who have most need to take it home to themselves. In doing this it is quite impossible to discuss the various opinions which have been entertained regarding it, or the various controversies to which it has given rise. Our object is only to look at the view generally entertained regarding it,—that it teaches the impossibility of a recovery from apostacy, and to suggest for the consideration of our readers whether there is not another view of the words exegetically correct, having a far larger width of application to the Christian Church, and, we venture to think, greatly more solemn in its warnings.

<sup>1</sup> The view now taken of the second part of the illustration is greatly confirmed if we adopt the idea, lying, it may almost be said, in the very structure of the Greek, of Dr. Bruce (in *EXPOSITIO*, third series, vol. ix. p. 431) and also Weiss (*in loc.*), that the land now spoken of is "the same land" as before, not barren rock or hopeless sand. Note the abruptness on any other supposition of the first clause of ver. 8, *ἐκφέρουσα δὲ*; and observe that what is to be supplied to fill up the sentence is not merely *γῆ* but *γῆ . . . ὑερών*. *Ἀδόκιμος* also does not mean "reprobate" or "apostate" (comp. 1 Cor. ix. 27).

Is it apostacy, is it a turning round upon the Redeemer whom we had once loved and honoured, and treating Him with malignity and scorn, that the sacred writer has in view? Not so. He is not speaking to apostates. He is addressing a Christian Church, and professedly Christian men. He is not warning against any complete departure from the faith of Christ, which he supposes already to have taken place. He is warning against pausing in the Christian course, and want of zeal in pressing on to those higher and nobler aspects of the truth as it is in Christ, which he felt so anxious to communicate, but of which, owing to the now sluggish and low state of these Hebrew Christians, he feared that it would be vain to speak. At this point, the importance of the words in verse 6, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, appears, and a consideration of them for a moment may help us to see more clearly both what these higher and nobler aspects of the truth are, and how firmly our passage, instead of being a digression, is welded into the main contents of the Epistle. As commonly understood, these words are supposed simply to bring out the heinousness of the sin referred to (Davidson, Weiss, etc.). If it was a sin to crucify and scorn the Son of man, is it not a greater and more dreadful sin to crucify the Son of God? That this effect is gained by them it would be foolish to deny: yet we cannot resist the conviction that the chief reason why they are used lies far deeper. The references either to the "Son," or to "the Son of God," in the Epistle are frequent, and it will, we believe, be found in every instance in which the expression is used that it is the object of the writer not merely to bring out the dignity of the Redeemer in Himself, but to set Him before us as the Divine and Heavenly Redeemer in whom the New Testament dispensation is summed up, in contrast with those lower and more earthly forms in which God had previously manifested His grace to man. Thus Christ is spoken of as the Son in contrast with the prophets

by whom the will of God had been formerly revealed (i. 2) ; with the angels through whom the Old Testament Dispensation had been introduced (i. 13) ; with Moses who had been no more than a servant *in* God's house, while Christ was a Son *over* that house, whose house we are (iii. 6) ; with the High Priest who passed only through the outer apartment of the earthly tabernacle into the inner sanctuary, while our High Priest passes through the heavens to the very throne of God (iv. 14, v. 5) ; with Melchizedek, the greatness of whose heavenly priesthood was no more than a shadow of Christ's heavenly priesthood (vii. 3) ; with the sacrifices of the Law, which could give no more than an outward cleansing, instead of a true and spiritual consecration to the service of God (x. 29). In all these cases it is not the glory of the Son of God only in relation to the Father that is thought of ; it is His glory as the Centre of the new Dispensation, as the Bringer in of its heavenly life, and as the Fulfiller for His people of its heavenly promises. Thus then also here. When the sacred writer speaks of "the Son of God," the sin of crucifying Him is aggravated by the thought that by such an act the deepest and most essential characteristic of the Gospel age, of "the world to come," is extinguished, and that they who thus extinguish it are thereby forfeiting the very character and privileges which "the Son of God," not merely "the Son of man," died, and now lives to secure for them. Hence also the *ἐαυτοῖς*, a word which has occasioned no small measure of perplexity to commentators. Men could not really crucify the Son of God afresh, but they could reject Him in His heavenly character, and treat Him as if He were a mere pretender. And this is in conformity with the teaching of the whole Epistle, the most special aim of which is to lead us onward to a heavenly condition, instead of that condition "of this world" (ix. 1) in which all former revelations leave us.

If, accordingly, we ask, What class of persons in our Christian communities do the Hebrew Christians here reprimanded bring before us? the answer ought not to be difficult. They represent not what we understand by apostates, but that large body of professing Christians who have accepted not a few of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and have experienced no small measure of its power; but they have come to a pause. They have no quarrel with the foundation principles of the Christian faith, or, as it ought rather to be expressed, with the principles enforced by it at the beginning of the Christian course. They own its great doctrines of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, of baptism and the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment. They have tasted many of its privileges, and to some extent lived under the energies of the new life imparted by it. They have learned something of that blessed peace which flows from believing in Jesus; and, in looking either at the present or the past, they are able to fix upon many happy hours when they feel, or when they felt that, resting upon the Rock of Ages, they had made over to them the promise of the heavenly inheritance. But they will go no further. Satisfied with what has been done for them, they seek no more. In the hope that they have been delivered from the sentence of death, and that they have in some degree, however small, had the Divine life implanted in them, they have done. Into the full extent of that love of God, of which St. Paul declared, even while he prays that we may be filled with it, that it has a height, and a depth, and a length, and a breadth which pass our knowledge, they will penetrate no further. To the heights of that glory to which they might be brought, they will make no effort to ascend. With the boundless treasures that are before them, they do not care to be enriched. Him, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," they do not care to know. They

have passed, it may be, the boundary line which separates death from life and hell from heaven. They are out of the wilderness, they are delivered from its trials, and there, therefore, they will rest from their labours. Why cross the stream? Why enter upon new conflicts? Surely it were better to pitch their tents even on this side of Jordan, and to exclaim, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." That is the spiritual condition to which the text is spoken, and it need not be said that it is something far wider, more general, more common than apostacy.

It may, indeed, be objected that the language of our passage, "crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame," is much too strong for the sin now described. Let us look at the objection for a moment.

(1) May those who only refuse the higher lessons of the Christian faith, and who, with more or less consciousness of what they are doing, deliberately decline to make further progress, be justly said "to crucify for themselves the Son of God afresh?" Were Christianity no more than a doctrine, or a set of doctrines, it might not be possible to say so. But it is far more than a doctrine; it is the life of the Son of God in the soul of man. It is the life of One who was not merely a human teacher, however exalted, or a human example, however beautiful. It is the life of the Son of God become our life, of Him who came down from heaven to earth that we might behold in Him the perfect representation of the Father's life,—of Him who, amidst all His lowliness and humiliation and sufferings, was God manifest in the flesh, and who now lives, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (vii. 26). To have this Christ formed in the soul is the meaning of the Christian faith; according to the language of St. Paul, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live . . . by the faith (not of the Son of man, but) of

the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." The Son of God, God Himself, in us! What a thought is that! God in at least all the perfection of His moral attributes, the sum of all that is most true and beautiful and good. Is this Christ to be in us as our new life, where is the limit to growth? where the point at which men can cry, It is enough? Nay, is not language of that kind rather a crucifying of the Son of God afresh? We said that we believed in Him, that we took Him to be our life; and now it turns out that He whom we accepted is not the Christ at all. He is a Christ of our own making, a Christ imperfect instead of perfect, limited instead of illimitable, restrained by the weaknesses of earth instead of being higher than the heavens. Thus practically to deny Him is surely to crucify Him for ourselves afresh. And then, may it not be said that,—

(2) As regards others, it is to "put Him to an open shame." If it be the first duty of a Christian man to see that the Son of God live within him, it is his second duty to see that by the life so lived he commend his Lord to others. Not by words and arguments, not by reasonings and entreaties only, are Christian men to win the world to the feet of that Redeemer who is yet to reign gloriously over it. These things are, in their own place, both good and necessary; but there is something better fitted to attain the end,—that the world shall see in the lives of Christians an amount of super-earthly life to be seen nowhere else, and a constant straining after a still higher perfection than has yet been reached. Words can be met with words, and arguments with arguments; reasonings can be answered with reasonings, and the heart can be steeled against entreaties; but there is a power which enters where nothing else can enter, which enters calmly, silently, irresistibly into the souls of others, making men wish that they themselves experienced it, and that is the power of a heavenly

life having its answer in the soul. Are there not moments in the life of almost every one when,—

“Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither”?

and never do these moments so readily come to us as when we behold, not great deeds of benevolence or martyr deaths, but the devout, gentle, loving spirit speaking of “Heaven which is our home.” He whose sullenness of disposition a thousand sermons will not break will not unfrequently yield to a touch, a voice, a tear, which tell him, not so much to be good on this earth, as that there must be somewhere a land of perfect tenderness and purity and peace. Whereas, on the other hand, do we not witness every day the disastrous effects upon the world of the worldly lives of professing Christians? Look at them, the world cries. They say that they are of heaven, and yet they are as earthly as ourselves, as hard, as uncharitable, as unloving, as greedy of gain, as censorious, as prone to speak evil of their brethren; we see nothing to attract us there. God is merciful, His judgment will be right, and we shall wait for it. It is a mistake to think that the depraved and the criminal around us are not saved to Christ, because we have too few ministers and missionaries. More than to anything else the failure is to be traced to the shortcomings and sins of those who call themselves followers of a Heavenly Lord. By not pressing onwards to His perfection they put Him, the Son of God, to an open shame.

So important is the subject with which we have been dealing, that we may be allowed a closing word on the use to be made of it in the pulpit. Every minister knows that he has in his congregation members of the class of which we have been speaking, and which, as we contend, the writer of the Epistle has in view. These persons are not apostates. They admit that the beginnings of Christianity

are good. They only urge that its deeper and higher lessons are beyond their reach. Why interfere, they say, with our business in the world? with the ordinary arrangements of society, or with common pleasures? It is good to hear of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, to listen to His call, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; to be assured of His pardoning mercy; and to be told that He "hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light." But why not be content with this? Why not be satisfied with that simple Gospel which has stilled so many pangs of conscience, wiped away so many tears, and shed its rays of heavenly light around so many death-beds? Men are often known to speak, they are still more frequently known to think thus. What is a minister to do? Can he do else than tell such persons that the lessons they profess to value are not all, that they are not even the highest lessons to be taught to the followers of Christ? that, if men rest in them, there is no small danger that they may be doing so because they hope thus to gain both this world and the next; because they think that they may thus serve two masters, and may escape the self-reproaches, the self-denials, the humiliations, and the crosses which we naturally shun? Ought he not to say that the Christianity thus cultivated is far from being the complete Christianity of the New Testament; that it is not the full obedience and submission to our Lord and Master that are required of us; that it is rather, in the secret of our hearts, to crucify for ourselves the Son of God afresh; that it is, in our lives, as these are read by others, to put Him to an open shame?

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