

ILLUSTRATIONS OF BIBLE TRUTH

by

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CHAPTER THREE

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DISCERNING LOVE

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Philippians 1:9).

Lack of discernment often accounts for the failure of those in the pew to realize the full import of unsound teaching from the pulpit.

A brilliant modernistic preacher, who had pleased his audience with flowery oratory and beautiful perorations, as he discoursed glibly of the importance of breadth of view and the danger of bigoted opinions, was bidding farewell to his congregation as he was about to leave them for a new parish.

One of his young men approached him and said, “Pastor, I am sorry we are losing we are losing you. Before you came I was one who did not care for God, man, or the devil, but through your delightful sermons, I have learned to love them all!” This is mere sentimentality – not discerning love.

DOUBTFUL THINGS

“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Sandy was a thrifty Scot who objected to needless laundry expense, so when he wore a dress shirt to a banquet, he put it away carefully for future use. On one occasion when dressing for such an event, he took a used shirt out of the drawer and examined it with care, hoping to be able to wear it that evening. Not being quite sure of its strict cleanliness, he took it to a window, where he was looking it over under a better light than the room afforded. His wife, Jean, noticed him shaking his head as though fearful that it would not pass careful scrutiny.

“Remember, Sandy,” she called to him, “if it’s doubtful, it’s dirty.”

That settled it. The shirt went into the discard and another – a fresh one – took its place. Jean’s words may well speak to every believer concerning things about which conscience raises any question whatsoever.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22).

A number of years ago it was my privilege to attend a Bible conference at which the late Dr. D. M. Stearns was the main speaker. On one particular occasion he had a question hour, and, among the questions there was one that I never forgot. It read something like this:

“If you had prayed all your life for the salvation of a loved one, and then you got word that that person had died without giving any evidence of repentance after having lived a sinful life, what would you think, both of prayer itself and of the love of God and His promises to answer?”

It was a very striking question and I know that everyone in the room sat up and wondered what the doctor would have to say in reply to it.

He said, “Well, dear sister, I should expect to meet that loved one in heaven, for I believe in a God who answers prayer, and if He put that exercise upon your heart to pray for that dear one, it was because He, doubtless, intended to answer it.”

Then he told a story. Many years ago there was a dear old lady living in Philadelphia who had a very wayward son. This young man had been brought up in church and Sunday school, but he had drifted away from everything holy. He had gone to sea and had become a very rough, careless, godless sailor.

One night his mother was awakened with a very deep sense of need upon her heart. When fully awake, she thought of her son and she was impressed that he was in great danger; as a result, she got up, threw on a dressing gown, knelt by her bedside, and prayed earnestly that God would undertake for the boy, whatever his need was. She didn’t understand it, but after praying for perhaps two or three hours there came to her a sense of rest and peace, and she felt sure in her heart that God had answered. She got back into bed and slept soundly until the morning. Day after day she kept wondering to herself why she was thus awakened and moved to prayer, but somehow or other she could not feel the need to pray for that boy anymore; rather she praised God for something which she felt sure He had done for her son.

Several weeks passed. One day there was a knock at the Door. When she went to the door – there stood her boy! As soon as he entered the room, he said, “Mother, I’m saved!” Then he told her a

wonderful story.

He told how a few weeks earlier, his ship had been tossed in mid-Atlantic by a terrific storm; and it looked as though there were no hope of riding it through. One of the masts had snapped; the captain called the men to come and cut it away. They stepped out, he among them, cursing and reviling God because they had to be out in such an awful night. They were cutting away this mast when suddenly the ship gave a lurch, and a great wave caught this young man and carried him overboard.

As he struggled almost helplessly with the great waves of the sea, the awful thought came to him, "I'm lost forever!" Suddenly, he remembered a hymn that he had often heard sung in his boyhood days,

"There is life in a look at the crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved;
Unto Him who was nailed to the tree."

He cried out in agony of heart, "Oh, God, I look, I look to Jesus." Then he was carried to the top of the waves and lost consciousness.

Hours afterwards when the storm had ceased and the men came out to clear the deck, they found him lying unconscious, crowded up against a bulwark. Evidently, while one wave had carried him off the deck, another had carried him back again. The sailors took him into the cabin and gave him restoratives. When he came to, the first words from his lips were, "Thank God, I'm saved!"

From that time on he had an assurance of God's salvation that meant everything to him.

Then his mother told him how she had prayed for him that night. They realized that it was just at the time when he was in such desperate circumstances, and God had heard and answered.

Now suppose that that young man's body had never been brought back to the ship. Suppose he had sunk down into the depths. People might have thought he was lost forever in his sin, but he would have been as truly saved as he actually was. God had permitted him to come back in testimony of His wonderful grace, just like Jonah.

EVIL COMMUNICATIONS

"Evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Corinthians 15:33).

Roaming in the woods, some boys found a nest containing two linnet fledglings, which they managed to capture and take home. Securing some plain, wooden birdcages, they put one of the linnets in each and hung them on either side of a canary. They explained to their mother that they

hoped the linnets, being so young, would learn to imitate the canary, instead of cheeping as linnets ordinarily do. The mother smilingly questioned the likelihood of the plan succeeding.

The next days the boys entered the room, and exclaimed, “Mother, come here, our canary is cheeping like a linnet!”

And so it was. The canary had to be separated from the wild birds of the wood and kept unto cover for a time before he regained his song. Surely there is a lesson here for all Christians. Fellowship with the world does not lead the godless to take the way of the Lord, but generally results in the believer losing his joyous song and taking on the speech and manners of the world.

EXAMPLE OF NEW BIRTH

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1:18).

The folly of supposing that anyone can be saved by the power of a great example comes out clearly in an incident related on one occasion by Dr. Joseph Parker, then pastor of the City Temple, London, England.

Paderewski, the great Polish pianist, had given a concert that day in the city, and at night, addressing a large congregation, Dr. Parker spoke somewhat as follows:

“I have had today most forcibly presented to me the folly of trusting in the power of a great example. Many of you know that I have always been a lover of music and some of my friends have been kind enough to try to make me believe that I had some talent as a pianist. It has often been my delight, when weary of other things, to sit down at my piano and play some of the classical selections, or improvise, according to my mood.

“But today a friend took me to hear that great master of the piano – Paderewski. For two hours I sat enthralled, listening to music such as I had never heard in all my life before. When the last lovely note was struck and the applause had died away, I felt I wanted to slip out quietly, speaking to no one, with the thrill of it still stirring my soul.

“An hour or so later, I was standing before my piano, when I was summoned for dinner. At first I did not hear the summons and when my wife came to me, I turned on her and said, almost savagely, I am afraid, ‘Bring me an ax.’

She looked at me anxiously and asked, ‘My dear, what do you mean?’

“I said, ‘You know I have always thought I was something of a pianist, but I have heard real music today for the first time and I realize now that what I thought was musical talent amounts to nothing. I feel like chopping my piano all to pieces. I never want to touch it again.’

“That was the effect of a great example upon my mind. I know that I shall overcome this and I

shall soon enjoy my piano as I did in the past, but I realized then, and I realize now, that no example, such as that of Paderewski, could ever make a great musician of me.

“In order to play as he played, one must have the soul of a Paderewski. To try to imitate him would be folly. And so it is in regard to the matter of our salvation. It is true that Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps, but before we can do that, we need to receive the Spirit of Christ – we must be born again. There must be the very life of Christ communicated to us.”

Dr. Parker was right. No one can ever be saved by attempting to follow Christ’s example. It is absolutely fundamental that we first be born again.

GOD’S BLESSED MAN

**“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly,
nor standeth in the way of sinners,
nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psalm 1:1).**

I was very much impressed, a number of years ago, as I listened to Joseph Flacks tell of his visit to Palestine. When he was in the city of Jerusalem he was given the opportunity of addressing quite a gathering of Jews and Arabs, all of whom were presumably unconverted. For his text, Mr. Flacks took the first Psalm. Of course, he could repeat it to them in the Hebrew. He dwelt upon the tenses, “Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful.”

He said to them, “Now, by brethren, who is this blessed man of whom the psalmist speaks? Notice, this happy man is a man who never walked in the counsel of the ungodly, he never stood in the way of sinners, he never sat in the seat of the scornful. He was a absolutely sinless man. Who is this blessed man?” When no one answered, Joseph Flacks said, “Shall we say he is our great Father Abraham? Is it Father Abraham that the psalmist is speaking of here?”

One old Jew said, “No, no, it cannot be Abraham, for he denied his wife; he told a lie about her.”

“Ah,” said Joseph Flacks, “it does not fit, does it? Abraham, although he was the father of the faithful, yet was a sinner who needed to be justified by faith. But my brethren, this refers to somebody; who is this man? Can it be our great lawgiver, Moses?”

“No, no,” they said, “it cannot be Moses. He killed a man and hid him in the sand.” Another added, “And he lost his temper by the water of Meribah.”

“Well,” Joseph Flacks said, “my brethren, who is it? There is some man here that the Spirit of God is bringing before us. Could it be our great King David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, who perhaps wrote this Psalm?”

“No, no,” they cried, “it cannot be David. He committed adultery and had Uriah slain.”

“Well,” he said, “who is it; to whom do these words refer?”

“They were quiet for some little time and then one Jew arose and said, “My brethren, I have a little book here; it is called the New Testament. I have been reading it. If I believed this book, if I could be sure that it is true, I would say that the man of the first Psalm was Jesus of Nazareth.”

An old Jew got right up and said, “My brethren, the man of the first Psalm is Jesus of Nazareth. He is the only one who ever went through this world who never walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners.”

Then the old man told how he had been brought to believe in Christ, and he took that occasion to openly confess his faith. He had been searching for a long time and had found out sometime before that Jesus was the One, but he had not had the courage to tell others.

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