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Which is the True Gospel and What Must Our Creeds Sacrifice In Order to Christian Union?



London, April 2.—Pastor Russell addressed the huge Convention at Royal Albert Hall tonight.

Few preachers are so well known in Great Britain as he. Many of the leading newspapers, both here and in America, publish his weekly discourses.

Let us approach our subject reverently! With reverence, because many of our creeds are white with centuries. They were the creeds of our fathers and mothers.

Now we see more clearly that some of our creeds are without flaw. Now we are willing—yes, glad, to take the Truth wherever we find it and to acknowledge the error, though it be our own.

Are We Not All Christians? Our topic must be, What is the Gospel of which St. Paul was not ashamed—the faith once delivered unto the saints?

The speaker showed that the Roman Catholic Church, in order to unite with others, would need to cut out of her creed everything not found in the Bible—prayers to saints, homage to pictures and images, the sacrifice of the mass, holy candles, holy water, Purgatory, the infallibility of the Pope and the general theory that the clergy alone are the Church and brethren of Christ.

Election—Foreordination—Predestination.

The Westminster Confession, the foundation of the majority of Protestant creeds, distinctly emphasizes the teachings of Brother John Calvin. We can all agree that the words elect and election, predestinated and fore-ordained are Scriptural terms and that a truth must underlie and pervade them.

Baptists and Disciples, Pastor Russell declared, have something further to surrender. Surely they may keep water immersion. Surely they may claim that, more fully than sprinkling, it represents the underlying thought expressed in the symbol.

Christ. They must admit that Cornelius, at least, was accepted of the Lord, and begotten of the Spirit before his baptism in water (Acts 10:47). The Pastor could not think that the Baptist and Disciple brethren would have much difficulty in rejecting water immersion as a test of Christian fellowship, if once they saw, the matter in its true light, thus: The matter is for the remission of sins, in water is for the remission of sins, are claiming, in fact, that all not thus immersed are lost—doomed to eternal torment, according to their theory. Baptists should see the absurdity of claiming that only the water immersed are members of the Church of Christ, for thus, according to their theory, they doom to eternal torture, as unsaved, all of their Christian brethren who have not been immersed. Surely Baptists and Disciples, therefore, may be expected to promptly and heartily repudiate these test features of their theories.

The Methodist Creed was next examined. It was commended for the prominence it gives to the Love of God and His forbearance with the misrepresentations of those who honestly seek to be His children. The speaker asked the Methodist brethren to forego the worshiping of His Church and to give the more homage to the Lord. He admitted the masterfulness of their organization, but reminded them that their Episcopacy is not modeled after anything shown in the New Testament. It does not even pretend to be an authority along the lines of Apostolic Succession. They must admit that the establishment of its Bishopric was, at least, semi-fraudulent—a supposed emergency, born of the error that an Episcopal ordination was necessary to an authority to preach.

Hell and Purgatory Must Go. Untidily we must all acknowledge that we grossly misunderstood the teaching of our Bible when we believed and taught that our Almighty Creator prepared a great hell, manned with fire-proof demons, with the foreknowledge that all of our race would go thither except as a certain few would be specially rescued by the Savior, after His coming, when He was not sent for over four thousand years after the fall.

As we have learned that Purgatory is not taught in the Bible, so also we have learned that this hell of our forefathers is unscriptural—that the Bible hell is the grave, the tomb, the state of death. This just penalty for sin is what the Bible everywhere teaches. We now know that the Hebrew word sheol of the Old Testament, and the Greek word hades of the New Testament refer to the grave, the state of death, the tomb; and that they are so translated more times than they are rendered hell.

The Divine Plan of the Ages. With our hearts and heads agreed to discard those features of our creeds not found in the Bible and, as far as possible, to harmonize what we do find therein, what is the result? Is it the Gospel of which St. Paul was not ashamed? The speaker submitted that it is, and believes that all Christians could heartily unite and fellowship upon its broad basis.

John Calvin and our forefathers were right in declaring that the Scriptures teach the "election" of a "little flock"; but they were wrong in claiming that the great mass of humanity, the non-elect, are "passed by," routed for eternal torture. On the contrary they all go to the Bible hell, the grave. They are all unconscious there. The Divine promise guarantees the resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust, by One Who gave His life for their redemption—"Who died, the Just for the unjust" (1 Peter III, 18).

In a word, merely the "called of God" are being dealt with in the present time, although the remainder of mankind are having a "witness" and are learning lessons which will be valuable to them when their trial time shall come. We have not in the past sufficiently noted the difference between the Church and the world. The Church is invited to walk the "narrow way" in the footsteps of the Redeemer, bearing the cross with him. The faithful are promised a share with Him in His heavenly glory, honor and immortality.

But nothing is said about tormenting the world. The entire race of Adam has been under condemnation for six thousand years. The coming of Jesus and His death were not intended to increase man's condemnation, but, by providing for their resurrection, to set them free from Adamic condemnation—to give to each and to all a full, fair opportunity to demonstrate their love of sin or love of righteousness, when the latter shall be fully as easy as the former—during Messiah's glorious reign of righteousness—the thousand years. The reward for well-doing will then be human perfection in a sinless Paradise restored.

Realizing Wesley's Ideal. Brother John Wesley lived in a time when practically all Christians had accepted Brother Calvin's theory that God had foreordained the great mass of humanity to eternal misery. Brother Wesley's heart was tender and sympathetic. He could not believe that his gracious Creator and loving Redeemer could possibly have been guilty of originating such a diabolical Plan. Wesley's heart and tongue re-

belled. Let others preach foreordination to torment for non-elect infants, as well as the gray-haired, in a they hell. He could not do so. He must preach a God of Love who would not condemn His creatures to torture—at least not without some opportunity. But, handicapped by the error respecting the poor Brother Wesley was in a sad dilemma. He knew not how any could get to the awful place without Divine foreknowledge. And he knew not how to harmonize such Divine foreknowledge with Divine Love. Why should such a mass of Divine grace could not save from eternal torture be created at all?

Noble Christian Brother, he preached to the best of his light. Now with the clearer light upon God's Word, we can see that Brother Wesley and Brother Calvin both contended for Bible truths which they knew not how to harmonize. Now we see that this Gospel Age is the time in which God is calling and drawing and sealing with His Spirit and with the Truth His "very elect," the Bride of Christ, the members of the Body of Christ, the Royal Priesthood. Now we can see also that the Free Grace, which Brother Wesley realized must be a part of the coming Age-Program, belongs to the coming Age. Then all the blind eyes shall be opened. Then all the deaf ears shall be unstopped. Then the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep. Then "whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii, 17).

The Gospel Age Harvest. Pastor Russell declares that the signs of the times, in conjunction with the prophecies of the Scriptures, clearly indicate to him that we are living in the "harvest time" of this Age, which is drawing to a close—in the dawning time of the New Dispensation, which will soon be ushered in. He wished his hearers to clearly distinguish between this teaching and the common teaching represented in all of our creeds. Our hymn books, like our creeds, tell of the End of this Age as the end of hope—"the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds," in a huge bonfire. The Bible, on the contrary, shows that the most blessed days of the world's experiences are about to be ushered in. The election of the Church completed, the saints, glorified with the Redeemer on the spirit plane, invisible to men, will take control of earth's affairs. God's Kingdom under the whole heavens will be established. Satan, the present spirit Prince, will be dethroned and deceive the nations no more for a thousand years.

The reign of Messiah in the glory of Divine power will constitute the Sun of Righteousness, Light and Truth and blessing to refresh the poor, death-stricken world. Healing will be in the beams of this Sun of Righteousness—Restitution, uplifting from sin, degradation and death. As the reign of Sin and Death terminates, the reign of Righteousness unto life everlasting will begin. The wonderful inventions and blessings of our day are but the forerunners of still greater blessings. Verily "the night is far spent and the day is at hand"—the great Day of which Jesus and the Apostles and the Prophets continually spoke. It will be doomsday only for all the systems of iniquity and unrighteousness.

"Not Ashamed of the Gospel." Have we not all felt more or less ashamed of the unsatisfactory presentations of our various creeds? said Pastor Russell. Is it not time that, from self-respect, as well as from respect for the Almighty, we repudiate them? Have I not presented to you this evening the Bible message which the angels proclaimed at the birth of Jesus—"Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people" (Luke II, 10). No Gospel message reached anybody before Jesus "brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel." This "great salvation" began to be spoken by our Lord, as the Apostle declares (Hebrews II, 3). None heard it during the first four thousand years, and not more than one-fourth of humanity have heard it during the last two thousand years. And the message which has been proclaimed for centuries past is certainly not "good tidings" as a whole, though it contains precious truths.

What I have expressed this evening is "good tidings of great joy" to the saintly few of the elect class now. And the lesser blessing of restitution will shortly be "good tidings" to all people. It will fulfill the Divine promise to our first parents that "the Seed of the woman" shall crush out evil, "shall bruise the Serpent's head." It will also fulfill the promise to Abraham, bound by God's oath—"In thee and in thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." It accounts for every text appertaining to Election, as well as to every text teaching Free Grace. It shows the Justice of God in permitting the death penalty. It shows the Love of God in providing the redemption for all, by a "Ransom for all." It shows the Wisdom of God in the ordering of all the various steps of the Divine Program. It will show the Power of God in bringing back the dead to life and in uplifting all the willing and obedient of earth to human perfection and an earthly Paradise. And surely the exceeding riches of God's grace, of His Wisdom, Love and Power are all demonstrated in His wonderful favor toward the saintly few now being developed as the Bride, the Lamb's Wife! (Ephesians II, 7.)

Let us, beloved brethren, lay aside every weight and hindrance. Let us come quickly into the "narrow way" and walk in the footsteps of the Redeemer and make our "calling and election sure" to a place with Him in His Throne, and in His great work of blessing and uplifting humanity.

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