

Pastor Russell's Sermon

"WILL BE SAVED SO AS BY FIRE"

Threads of Truth in the Purgatorial Theory.

CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT.

Pastor Russell Explains How Creeds Were Formulated During the Dark Ages—Bible Truths Distorted—Early Church Teachers Sincere, but Many of Conclusions Were False—Dissents From the Theory That Creeds Are of Greater Weight Than the Scriptures.



Kansas City, Mo., June 9.—Pastor Russell spent Sunday in our city and delivered two addresses, which were well attended. One of these, from the text, "Saved so as by fire" (I Corinthians III, 15), we report in part. He said:—

Some of my Catholic friends declare that I am more Catholic than Protestant, but I have never acknowledged this. I do say, however, that if compelled to choose between the Protestant thought that all except the elect, saintly few will experience eternal torment, and the Catholic proposition that many besides the saints will be saved, by passing through purgatorial experiences, I would sooner believe the latter. And while I cannot accept the Catholic Purgatory as Biblical, I do find certain threads of Bible truth in the purgatorial theory. I can even fancy how those Bible truths gradually became distorted during the many centuries styled "The Dark Ages."

During that time, not only were the common people illiterate, but printing had not been invented, and Bibles were costly. That was the period during which Councils of bishops from time to time met and decided for the people what should and what should not be believed. In other words, they formulated the creeds. We do not question the sincerity of those spiritual leaders of the darker days, but we do challenge their conclusions and, comparing them with the Bible now in the hands of the masses, we know, accepting the Bible as true, that we must necessarily condemn many of their conclusions as false, and when we speak of the Bible, we include the Catholic as well as the Protestant translations of it in various languages.

The Voice of the Church.
Many, both Catholics and Protestants, tell us that we should receive the message of Councils—the creeds which they formulated—as of equal inspiration with the Bible because, say they, these Councils were composed of bishops of the Church and, under the law of Apostolic succession, these bishops had equal authority with and Divine inspiration equal to the twelve Apostles. Hence the theory says that if any conflict exists between the Bible and the creeds the latter should have the greater weight in our minds, as being a later production.

From this I dissent, and am glad to note that I am in better accord with the views of the present Pope, Pius X., whose recent proclamation urges upon all Catholics loyalty to the Bible and its study. If all Christians, Catholics as well as Protestants, would accept this suggestion, I believe that the resultant, untrammeled study would soon bring to Christendom in general the one unity and harmony which all desire and are striving for.

Whatever the Pope may have once believed respecting the doctrine of Apostolic succession, and the equal inspiration of the bishops of today with the twelve Apostles appointed by our Lord, he sees that the people have not full confidence that the living bishops are inspired to the degree of infallibility, as were the twelve Apostles. And I would say that to my understanding this is the right thought. The Scriptures everywhere recognize the twelve Apostles of the Lamb—no more, no less. They recognize the fall of one of these, and that another took his place—St. Paul. But there were to be no more additions.

The choice of Matthias by the Apostles, before they themselves received the Holy Spirit, was invalid and without authority. Jesus, in His last message to the Church, pictured her as a "woman," having "a crown of twelve stars." And again He symbolically represents her future glory as the New Jerusalem with twelve foundation stones, and in those the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb—no more.

The more thoroughly this Scriptural fact is discerned the more surely will God's people turn reverentially to the inspired words and interpretations of the Divinely appointed Twelve, respecting whose teachings Jesus said, "Whoever ye shall bind on earth (as necessary, obligatory) will be bound in heaven." No other teachers are to be the oracles of God; and their testimony is one—harmonious

Not Present but Future.
We remarked a moment ago that there is a thread of truth in the doctrine of purgatory. That thread connects up with our text of today. In deed, our Catholic friends acknowledge that there is no positive statement in the Bible respecting purgatory; they merely infer it from certain texts, which do not use the word, and our text, which says, "Saved so as by fire." This is one of their strong texts supporting the theory of purgatory. It certainly does imply that fiery experiences of some kind will come to some of God's people, and that these will be designed to have a purging effect.

Nothing in the text, however, gives a single suggestion to the effect that such purgatorial trials are now in operation. On the contrary, the Apostle points down to the future saying, "The fire of that day shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Those who have built with the wood, hay and stubble, even though upon the good foundation of Christ's redemptive work, will suffer loss. Only those who shall build with the precious Divine promises, the gold, silver and precious stones of the Divine Word, will pass unscathed through the fiery experiences of that day.

Nevertheless, says the Apostle, those who will suffer the loss of their entire faith structure of wood, hay and stubble—false doctrines and theories of their own and of other men—will themselves be saved, because they built upon the Rock Christ Jesus. But, he adds, "They will be saved so as by fire"—saved through fiery experiences. Search as we will we find no reference to any such sufferings after death and before the resurrection. Thus we see that the Apostle is in full harmony with what the Bible everywhere teaches, that the dead are not consciously alive to experience either joy or suffering between the time of death and the resurrection. But, on the contrary, they all "sleep in the dust of the earth," awaiting the awakening of their souls in the glorious morning of the New Age.

St. Peter's remarks to the faithful in his day have been applicable throughout the Age, and are still applicable to us. He says, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." (I Peter IV, 12.) Here again he is not speaking of a purgatorial experience after death, but of a purgatorial experience in the present life. God could protect His children from every foe, from every trouble, from every sorrow, from every one of Satan's darts, but instead of doing so He permits these fiery trials to test their faith, their loyalty to Him, to the Truth, to the brethren.

Purgatory in the Present Life.
Did not Jesus thus have purgatorial experiences?—not to purge away sin, for He had none—being "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners"—but to demonstrate His loyalty to God; as the Apostle said, "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And did not the Apostles have purgatorial experiences, which were needed, and which we all need? Is it not in respect to these purgatorial experiences that the Apostle urges us to remember that God is faithful and will not suffer us to be tempted, tried, more than we are able to bear, but with every temptation, trial, provides also a way of escape?

He also assures us, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And is not this the very picture the Scriptures give us respecting our present trials, namely, that our Lord sits as a Refiner and Purifier of silver to take from us the dross and to purify us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and to make us ready for the Kingdom?

perceive that the Church is to be dealt with first because it is the Divine declaration that the Church shall share with Jesus in judging the world—in disciplining the world, giving to the world purgatorial experiences, which will be helpful and uplifting. The Great Time of Trouble, which our Lord declared should be expected at about the time of the completion of the Church, will be a time of special discipline upon the world—the beginning of the world's purgatorial experience. Hearken to Jesus' words, "Watch ye (disciples), therefore, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things coming upon the world." Describing those things our Lord said, "Men's hearts will be failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth, for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Many of us believe that we are in that very time now.

The Churches Have Lost Their Power.
Surely men's hearts are failing them as they look about and see the surging of socialism and anarchism, and the threatening of these "waves of the sea," that they will ultimately swallow up the present social order of things. Many of the rich and great are looking to the Church at this time, hoping that as of yore ecclesiasticism will be able to control the masses. But ah, it will be different now; for, as the Master said, "The powers of the heavens will be shaken"—the ecclesiastical powers will be shaken. From every side the cry goes up that the churches are becoming more and more empty, that collections are falling off and retrenchment must be the order of the day or ruin will result.

St. Peter refers to the coming trouble, under the symbolism of fire, and declares that not only will it consume the "earth," the social fabric, but the "heavens" also will be on fire and "shall pass away with a great noise"—a great commotion. Not the physical earth will burn, but the social earth; not the physical heavens will burn, but the ecclesiastical heavens.

The great and the rich have been so busily engaged in amassing wealth that they have not noticed until recently that the churches of all denominations have lost their power over the masses, and now "their hearts fall them for fear" as they come to perceive the weakness, the nothingness of ecclesiastical power as compared with the strength of socialism and anarchy amongst the masses. No wonder their hearts fall them for fear. Poor people! How we wish we could make clear to all the glorious prospects which the Bible holds out—that out of this the most awful trouble of the world's history, God graciously intends to bring the greatest blessing imaginable, the one for which we have been praying so long.

We are sure that the present Pope, Pius X., who has taken such active measures to repulse the higher critical and evolutionary theories in the Catholic Church, would fully agree with our sentiment when we say that many of the great and rich of our day have been unwittingly helping forward in the overthrow of religious faith and in the awakening of socialistic infidelity. They have given freely of their millions to the great colleges of the land, which in turn have fostered unbelief in God's Word, and indirectly unbelief in a personal God. Their influence has extended to all the principal pulpits of Protestantism and is rapidly percolating through the various strata of Protestant church membership. Thus the churches and their treasures are being emptied and the number of unbelievers is being augmented daily, hourly.

The World's Purgatory Begins.
If time permitted we could marshal many texts of Scripture showing that the time of awful trouble now impending is in the nature of a Divine judgment upon the people of our day—because we have not more wisely and more generously used the present inventions and blessings that have come to us as foregleams of the Messianic Kingdom—because of our selfishness. In this trouble, according to the Bible, there will be a general reckoning and settlement of accounts between Justice and Humanity (aside from the weaknesses and imperfections of heredity, which will be excusable and forgiven through the merit of the Redeemer's sacrifice).

The settlement of accounts now will leave the slate clear for the New Dispensation. Furthermore, the plowshare of trouble will prepare men's hearts all over the world for the enlightenment and blessings which the glorified Redeemer will shed abroad. Since all human hearts are hard, selfish through the fall, it seems quite necessary that all should be broken, humbled, but the glorified Redeemer—both King and Priest of that New Age—will then say to the world, as He now says to the Church, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And "whoever will not obey that Prophet," that Great King of Glory, the antitype of Moses, "shall be destroyed from amongst the people." (Acts III, 23.) Again, Peter declares that all such shall perish like brute beasts—II Peter II, 12.

The glorious result of Christ's Reign of righteousness, and the purgatorial experiences which it will administer to those requiring them, will be to help all to rise eventually to perfection, so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God. But the Purgatory of the Bible is so very different from the Purgatory conjured up by good men in the Dark Ages, and pictured by Dante and Dore, that the latter are now seen to be gross travesties on the Divine arrangement, not only misinterpreting the time of the purgatorial experiences, but also their character.

The World's Condemnation.
In this statement, to the effect that the Church is now chastened that she may not come into judgment with the world, we should understand the word *world* to mean all outside of the Church—both Jews and Gentiles. The Church is composed, not of any sect or party, but of all those who have come into covenant-relationship with the Father through faith in the Lord Jesus, and a full consecration of their lives to walk in His steps. The reward of the Church will be joint-heirship with the Savior in His Kingdom, for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

The Bible teaches us that shortly the Kingdom will be established in the midst of a great "time of trouble," and that through its blessed reign of righteousness the whole world, of every nation and kindred and people and tongue, will be blessed with light, with knowledge, with opportunity. "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His beams," ushering in for earth the New Day, which all the Prophets of God have for so long foretold—the period which St. Peter styles, "Times of Restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets."—Acts III, 19-21.

Since we have learned that the Bible teaches that God has blessings in store for the world under Messiah's Kingdom, we are the better prepared to understand how and why the Messianic Kingdom is to usher in the "Times of Restitution" and blessing. And we learn at the same time that God has purposed, first of all, to deal with the Church, call, test, prove, discipline them with fiery trials, before He begins His dealings with the world. We

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