



Corporate Defilement.



WHENCE comes the difficulty to understand the simple but solemn truth of corporate defilement? Every consistent Christian understands that evil ways, or even thoughts, disturb communion with God; and that communion can only be restored by the exercise of self-judgment on his part. He must, in fact, "go to confession" (1 John i. 9.) If this is neglected a dull and feeble state ensues, and if God does not in some way intervene, compelling the soul to come to close quarters with itself in His presence, a terrible fall, or perhaps blindness (moral of course) follows; and one who might have been a power for good becomes a weight and a hindrance, and too often a bitter opponent of the truth of God.

We have headed this paper with the words "Corporate Defilement." Is there such a thing? Most assuredly there is. That there was in olden days few would dare to deny. A striking instance is recorded in Joshua vii. Jehovah had been with His people during

their wanderings in the wilderness. He had rolled back the waters of Jordan by His power, and His people had crossed over on dry ground. He had been with them in the taking of Jericho, the walls of which, at a given signal, had fallen down flat, so that each man could go up straight before him. It was not their valour but God's power that put them in possession. God was with them. And yet how soon do they experience defeat, and that, too, from a single small city. Thirty-six men of w.r fell dead in the conflict ; and Joshua, God's chosen captain, who had been thrice assured that Jehovah would be with him and whose courage was never to fail, now falls on his face before God. In dire distress he questions God : “ And Joshua said, Alas ! O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to cause us to perish ? Oh that we had been content and had remained beyond Jordon ! Ah Lord ! what shall I say after Israel have turned their backs before their enemies ? ” (verses 7, 8, new translation).

We will not dwell upon Joshua's failure but pass on to hear Jehovah speak to him. “ And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up ; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face ? ” Action, not prayer, was now called for. God had said enough and done enough to leave no room for unbelieving questions. He had not failed on His part.

“ Israel hath sinned,”

explains the whole. Jehovah defines the nature of the sin and dissects it into five parts—(1) They have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them ; (2) they have even taken of the devoted or accursed thing ; (3) and have also stolen ; (4) and dissembled also ;

(5) and have even put it among their own stuff. Such is the grave and awfully solemn charge made by Jehovah against the whole company of His people, Joshua included. Did they know of it? Had each one taken part in it? No. One man alone had actually done the deed. But it had been done. It was not an ordinary trespass which affected the individual alone, but a sin involving the whole assembly of God's people. Jericho, with all that was in it, was devoted or accursed. God had strictly commanded the people to keep themselves from it, telling them plainly that if they took of the devoted thing they would make the camp of Israel devoted, and trouble it. So we see that it was no hard or unjust charge that had been made (see ver. 18, chap. vi.) Israel was now accursed. No wonder they had been beaten. God was not with them. Nor would He be. Jericho was devoted; Israel had become the same; only for the latter there was mercy, for they could get clear by finding out the sinner and dealing with him, but by no other way. All had become guilty by the sin of one. All must share in the judgment to be executed against the trespasser. *Independence?* No, not a shred of it. The disobedience of one had affected them all, and now obedience is called for on the part of each and all in dealing with the offender; for by this, and this alone, could they clear themselves before God and obtain His presence and blessing. Sentimental softness there was no room for. Stern duty lay before them, from which none dare turn away.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," wrote the Apostle; hence there must be some lessons for us to learn in what we have been occupied with. How often has it been ques-

tioned whether anything of the same kind exists now. We are living in another dispensation and are not under law but under grace. True, and we cannot be too thankful that it is so. But all the same Christians alone can fulfil the righteousness of the law, as Rom. viii. 4 teaches us. We are brought to God. He has not changed but is now fully revealed. What was ceremonially required in Israel is now morally to be made good in God's redeemed people of this day. God's glory was to be thought of in that day, and ceremonial cleanliness was demanded in view of the fact that He dwelt in their midst. Now, surely, His glory is to be thought of and suitably cared for by each one who forms a part of His present dwelling place. All is deeper, richer, fuller now than then. Holy He was, holy He still is. Grace has not made Him to think lightly of sin, nor be less exacting in His requirements of those privileged to be near Him. But grace known and enjoyed, and the Holy Spirit possessed, with Christ before the soul, power is found to answer to all that God's holy nature looks for from His people—both individually and collectively. He will not accommodate Himself to our level, but graciously raises us to His.

To New Testament teaching let us now turn. In the Corinthian Assembly there was much that was wrong, both in doctrine and in practice, and this the Apostle seeks to correct; but there was a wicked person in their midst, and for him no words of exhortation or admonition are addressed. His condition was past that. One thing alone was called for, and that was contained in the words: "Wherefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Paul had al-

ready decided in his case, although at a distance, and he seeks to link the Assembly with him ; for he would, by virtue of the power with which he had been entrusted, " deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Paul reproaches them for their indifference. " And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." Why should they mourn ? Was it only because one of their number had fallen so low ? Did Paul write to them on account of the one who had done the wrong or for his sake who suffered the wrong ? He says no. But why should they have mourned ? Because they themselves were defiled. With irony he asks the question, " Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump ?" According to the teaching of some Paul should have said, " A little leaven will leaven the whole lump if you let it remain long enough." But that was not what he said, nor what he meant. Neither can sound reasoning evolve such a meaning from his words when taken in their connection. " Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump." Then they were not a new lump ; for they could only become so by purging out the leaven. They were a defiled company. Israel cleared themselves by dealing with the guilty one, Achan, according to God's command on that day ; and the Corinthian Assembly could only clear itself by obedience to the divine command in its day. It is distressing to see how many will reason and argue against the plain teaching of 1 Cor. v., and why ? If this view be the correct one, then the path of the faithful must be narrow indeed. We dare not pretend to be gathered to Christ's name on true assembly ground and refuse to obey the

word as to the putting away of a wicked person. Nor can we countenance those persons or companies of saints who are disobedient. "Oh ! but so many are ignorant and don't know," etc. "Yes," we reply, "but we do, and we cannot allow others' ignorance as an excuse for our having fellowship with what we know is wrong." We must obey. Purge out. Suppose we cannot get this done. What then ? Paul tells Timothy to purge himself—put out or go out, one or the other ; there is no middle course. "Oh ! that will cause a division, and divisions are always wrong, no matter what causes them." "Depart from unrighteousness," says the Spirit of God. If that causes division, with whom lies the cause of it ? He who obeys God is no schismatic. He is a *true unionist*, if *one may use such a phrase*. All are schismatics and non-unionists who disobey God's word and tolerate in their fellowship what He commands them to exclude. A circle of fellowship is thus formed,—"Those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." "But," says one, "surely you do not set yourself up to judge people's hearts ?" No, God alone can do that ; but this we do know that no one can call on the Lord out of a pure heart and remain in fellowship with sin. If we find a man departing from unrighteousness we can have fellowship with that one and assume that his heart is pure. But to return for a moment to the subject of "Corporate Defilement." How did the Corinthians understand the Apostle's words ? "They were made sorry, . . . and their sorrow was after a godly sort, . . . which worketh repentance." Is it not clear that they understood they were defiled, that they were guilty and responsible ? So deep was their self-judgment, so genuine their sorrow, they won the approval

of the Apostle and gave him great joy. If any one will read carefully 2 Cor. vii. 9-12, we think he must own that corporate defilement is as much a New Testament truth as an Old Testament one.

It is a lame story to say that brethren (so-called) at a certain period changed their principles. We do not believe it. They were not called on to deal with certain evils until such came in amongst them. But suppose there was a change, then the question is, What is right? It is right to exclude a wicked person (1 Cor. v.), and those who bring not the doctrine of Christ (2 John ver. 9, 10). It may be asked, "Can nothing be done?" We reply, "Nothing in the nature of palliating moral evil or fundamental error; but something can be done, thank God, if we seek grace from Him to do it, for it is no easy thing to do." The Apostle Jude furnishes the needed instruction. We quote from the Revised Version, "And on some have mercy, who are in doubt: and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (verses 22, 23.) Three classes are here brought before us, and guidance given in relation to each. In the first we have some who are in doubt, or who dispute, not wholly committed. To these mercy should be shewn. Second, "And some save, snatching them out of the fire." These are evidently committed, yet true saints of God.

Snatching out of the fire.

Then they are in it, and those who attempt their rescue must be extremely careful lest they themselves get burned. No one is fitted for such work who is in doubt as to the character or gravity of the evil from which, in true loving service, he is seeking to rescue any. One

must know it, deeply feel it, have a conscience really in exercise before God about it, ere one can be fitted to extricate another from evil—whether it be moral, doctrinal or ecclesiastical. Such an one must be with God, know something of His mind. And as the heart of a true evangelist yearns over unsaved sinners, so must the one who would be instrumental in saving saints from the false and corrupting influences which surround them.

And last of all, “ And on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” These, we take it, are sunk lower still ; they are not in doubt, nor merely in the fire, but the spots of defilement are in their garments. If such are to be rescued, fear of the deadening and defiling influence of the evil must fill the soul of the rescuer, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Let him lose fear and cease to hate, and his well meaning efforts end in disaster to himself. He will be like a man who goes into a bog to lift another out of it. The times are difficult, but God is with His word, and will be with those who seek to be obedient thereto. Surely the careful reader must see that to allow persons associated with evil to come and go back again into it finds no countenance in what Jude exhorts us to do. Complete deliverance is the object in each case. “ And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not” (Gal. vi. 9.)

