Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

The Pilgrim's Progress.

By the Rev. John Kelman, M.A., D.D., Edinburgh.

Ignorance.

It is a clever literary stroke which at this point relieves a long conversation—always difficult to sustain with unflagging interest—by an incident. In this second interview with Ignorance, Bunyan unquestionably has in his mind that chapter from the *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* entitled 'The Sin and Danger of Ignorance.' As a sample of that exceedingly lively chapter the following page may be quoted:—

Theologus. Who was Christ's mother?

Asunetus. Mary, sir; that was our blessed lady.

Theol. Who was Pontius Pilate?

Asun. I am somewhat ignorant, I am not book-learned; but if you will have my simple opinion, I think it was the devil; for none but the devil would put our sweet Saviour to death.

Theol. What is the holy catholic church, which you say you do believe?

Asun. The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.

Theol. What do you pray for when you say 'Thy Kingdom come'?

Asun. I do pray that God would send us all of His grace, that we may serve Him and do as we ought to do, and keep us in a good mind to God-ward, and to have Him much in our minds; for some, God bless us, have nothing but the devil in their mind; they do nothing in God's name.

Theol. What is a sacrament?

Asun. The Lord's Supper.

Theol. How many sacraments be there?

Asun. Two.

Theol. Which be they?

Asun. Bread and wine.

Theol. What is the principal end of your coming to receive the sacrament?

Asun. To receive my Maker.

Theol. What is the principal use of a sacrament?

Asun. The body and blood of Christ.

Theol. What profit and comfort have you by a sacrament?

Asun. In token that Christ died for us.

Theol. I can but pity you for your ignorance; for it is exceeding gross and palpable. Your answers are to no purpose, and bewray a wonderful blindness and senselessness in matters of religion, etc.

It is true that Asunetus differs from Ignorance in his ingeniousness, and yet they have much in common. Neither is ignorant in the sense of general boorishness, for both are in a certain sense well-informed. Yet both are shallow in mental faculty and slender in information. They are well-versed in the language of theology, and have both built out of its current phrases a system satisfactory to themselves. But, like all private systems which are founded upon words rather than upon thoughts and knowledge, there is a continual sense of aloofness from the facts of the case, which is less tolerable in self-made systems than in those at least accredited by historical theology.

Bunyan's Ignorance has been contrasted with the family of Valiant-for-Truth, who lived in Darkland. Valiant's family were ignorant about facts; Ignorance was ignorant about principles. And it is this that accounts for the elaborate and somewhat bitter treatment which Ignorance receives. There is a moral quality in this man's ignorance, which is difficult to define in any one statement; but, nevertheless, perfectly obvious as we consider the case in detail. The subtle influences that combine to make up this character remind us of Coleridge's happy phrase, 'The impudence of ignorance,' and justify Kerr Bain's remark that here we have 'Obstinate at the other end of the pilgrimage.'

1. The fact which is apparent at the outset is that he likes his own company better than that of others. This is a splendid piece of analysis, and it reveals a quite familiar type of character in every generation. There are men whose greatness makes them solitary, and there are men whose littleness makes them solitary; some whose thoughts are too far-reaching and too deep to be shared with others, and some whose thoughts are so little founded on common knowledge that they at once betray their poverty when brought out into the open. Every one has met with half-educated men who are fascinated with a few fine ideas, held apart from their relations with other ideas, and liable to topple over in conversation. Such men prefer anything to the ordinary honest

labour of study, and imagine themselves heaven-born geniuses, because their intellectual sloth has deprived them of all standards for judging the worth and originality of such ideas. Montaigne has said that 'A dog we know is better company than a man whose language we do not understand'; and such men as Ignorance, understanding no man's language but their own, find every man bad company who has any real grasp of truth.

2. A curious consequence of this solitary habit, and a very significant one, is that Ignorance has had no experiences by the way. We hear nothing of encounters either with enemies like Atheist and Flatterer, or with friends like Evangelist and Faithful. With smooth advance he has gone on and on, till here we find him half-way through the enchanted ground without drowsiness. Travelled men who are self-absorbed have wasted both their money and their time in travel. The love of adventure, the companionable spirit, the quick eye for new impressions, are absolutely indispensable if travel is to do its proper work of educating the mind. In such men the lack of perspective and proportion becomes intensified by chronic neglect of that which should have corrected it, and they become incurably provincial in intellect and imagination.

3. The source of all this evil is the complacency of Ignorance's good opinion of himself and of his heart. Bunyan himself knew something about that. There was a time when he had said, 'Now I was become godly; now I was become a right honest man' (*Grace Abounding*). But on after reflexion, Bunyan had seen that all this was but the work of those indiscreet neighbours of his—his first models for the picture of Flatterer—who had begun 'to praise, to commend, and to speak well of me, both to my face and behind my back,' upon one of his early reformations. Ignorance is his own Flatterer. And, little dreaming how deeply he was entangled in the nets, he had seen Christian and Hopeful entangled, and thanked God he was not as they. Thus this man's ignorance is centred in ignorance of himself. Instead of knowing himself, he loves himself and believes in himself. His self-examination is accordingly a sorry business. Robert Browning's well-known line is curiously and ironically relevant:

> Be love your light and trust your guide, with these explore my heart.

But when a man explores his own heart by the lamp of self-love and under the guidance of trust in himself, the result is strange and pitiful. Three notes sum up this examination, viz.:—

(1) *Comfort*, which is mentioned twice on one page, is his main demand in religion. But comfort never was nor can be the first matter in dealing with Jesus Christ. To those who come only for this, He offers 'not peace but a sword.' Comfort there is indeed in Him, but it is the comfort of the Truth, and before that can be reached there are many discomforting questions to be settled.

(2) *Desire*, the well-spring of comfort, and the substitute for character in such souls. There is, indeed, a wonderful virtue in desire. 'Rabbi ben Ezra' assures us that

> What I aspired to be,
> And was not, comforts me;

and in 'Saul' we have the even bolder assurance that

> 'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do.

Our own Larger Catechism, in still plainer language, asserts that 'One who doubteth of his being in Christ . . . may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity.' It is easy to see how such views as these may be perverted into the fallacy that 'the desire for grace is grace.' Their truth or falsity depends entirely upon the attitude of the will. Desire, accompanied by strenuous endeavour, counts as attainment whether the endeavour succeed or fail; desire without action is mere sentiment, which may be the worst enemy of character.

(3) *Leaving all*, a phrase which shows that the author had here the rich young ruler in his mind. 'How very hard a thing it is to be a Christian!' But it is not a hard thing to adopt the language of Christianity and to adapt it to one's own moral and emotional conditions. The one outstanding fact about Ignorance is that he has not left all. For Christ's demand is 'Let him deny *himself*,' and Ignorance clings to himself, in an unbounded love and trust. As for other renunciations, such as money, or land, or details of property, or habits that he may have surrendered, they have no value except as parts of the great central renunciation—

the giving up of oneself. It is us, not ours, that Christ asks for and will have.

The Word of God.

Christian, tired of the constant reference to his own heart upon which Ignorance falls back, insists on bringing all disputed matters to the test of the Divine Word. This was the characteristic fashion of Puritan Theology, and to it the Word of God meant simply the Scriptures.

1. *Regarding thoughts*, especially thoughts about ourselves. Here Christian quotes three texts, two from the Book of Genesis and one from the Epistle to the Romans, to show that there are no good thoughts in man's mind at all except the conviction of this his total depravity. It may be said, and truly, that this is not the complete testimony of Scripture, and that many passages might be found which acknowledge natural virtue in man. And, indeed, the 'proof-text' method is always precarious in this respect; that selections of texts isolated from the context may be constructed so as to prove the most astounding paradoxes. In the case before us, there is an inner witness, and, as Martineau has it, an inner 'seat of authority,' which must inevitably be the final court of appeal, and whose authority is necessarily paramount, over that of both Church and written Scripture. When reformation theology forgot that, it fell into the same error as the Catholicism it opposed, substituting one external authority for another, and doing less than justice to the witness of the Spirit. On the other hand, the validity of such inward witness depends entirely upon the state of mind and character in him who claims it. Ignorance, like Kipling's 'Tomlinson,' is one whose thoughts count for nothing because of his inveterate self-satisfaction and his incurable slightness. It is such thinking as his that made the Psalmist break out into his famous epigram, 'I hate thoughts' (Ps 119^{113}). But when a man's spirit is humble and sincere, his desire towards the will of God, and his thoughts therefore deep and worthy, he may trust his judgment, and even when he makes mistakes he need not blame himself too bitterly. The Pope, in *The Ring and the Book*, carries conviction when he says regarding his judgment, that even it should be proved mistaken:

> What other should I say than 'God so willed:
> Mankind is ignorant, a man am I,
> Call ignorance my sorrow, not my sin'?

2. *Regarding ways*, and God's judgment of our ways, the same plan is followed, and a selection of texts made to prove the badness of man's ways apart from grace. This passage owes something to *The Plain Man's Pathway*, and the concluding sentences of it may be compared with this of Theologus, 'If a man could see into their souls as he doth into their bodies, he would stop his nose at the stink of them; for they smell rank of sin in the nostrils of God, His angels, and all good men.'

The language is strong, and the mood severe. But the fact is that to be ignorant is to be dangerous. This light-hearted, feather-headed way of dealing with morals is one of the most dangerous things in the world, both for the man himself and for all with whom he comes in contact. Ignorance does not know what he is talking about when he discourses upon sin and righteousness. He has never been there at all, and the words are but words to him. Sin and righteousness are to him negotiable assets, pawns in the game of life. It is no wonder if those great men the Puritans, whose greatness was founded upon an uncompromising thoroughness in their dealings with moral truth, feeling the awfulness of the danger, were unsparing in their handling of such lightness. The whole passage reminds us of Pascal's saying, that 'There are two kinds of men; the righteous, who believe themselves sinners, and the sinners, who believe themselves righteous.'

The Faith of Ignorance.

'Do you think,' Ignorance answers to Christian's scathing words, 'that I am such a fool as to think that God can see no further than I?' In what follows he goes on to give an account of the central matter, saving faith in Christ, as he conceived it. How many readers of this passage see at the first hasty glance what is wrong or defective in such faith? Does not the rebuking passage seem fantastic and hair-splitting on matters where an elaborate theological system of doctrine is presupposed? Yet on closer scrutiny the crucial error becomes apparent. The man is willing to admit his sinfulness in general but not in particular, in platitude but not in conscience. Similarly he utters a generality about faith—'I must believe in Christ for justification'—but comes to utter confusion in details. This is the deadliest danger of all shallow natures. Generalities are

cheap, delusive, and worthless. The whole business of the soul is done where it comes to personal and detailed considerations. That is the drift of all Christian's questions, to force him from the general to the particular. In no passage has Mr. J. M. Barrie displayed a truer insight into the heart of Scottish religion than when, in his *Tommy and Grizel*, he shows up the sentimentalist by forcing him up against the direct thought of God.

Two notes to this passage may be of interest.

1. Christian's answer, 'How! Think thou must believe in Christ when thou seest not thy need of Him!'—a sentence which leads us again to *The Plain Man's Pathway*:—

Theologus. I see you need no Saviour.

Asun. You say not well in that: I need a Saviour, and it is my Lord Jesus that must save me, for He made me.

Theol. What! need you a Saviour, since you are no sinner?

Asun. Yes, believe me, I am a sinner; we are all sinners; there is no man but he sinneth.

In this quotation, as indeed in the whole extract given at the beginning of this article, we see the same confused dealing with generalities and conventional phrases which is the very mark of Bunyan's Ignorance.

2. It is also interesting to notice that in the end Ignorance falls headlong into Roman Catholic theology. His doctrine of justification is that 'Christ makes my duties, that are religious, acceptable to His Father by virtue of His merits, and so I shall be justified'—a statement in which there is a suggestion not only of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Justification, but of the transference of the merits of saints. Of that doctrine of justification, which is essentially concerned with a man's own good deeds, and not with the free grace of God in Christ, Luther's words on Gal $1^{15.\ 16.\ 17}$ were known to Bunyan, and were doubtless not without their effect on the conversation of Christian here: 'I crucified Christ daily in my monkish life, and blasphemed God through my false faith wherein I then continually lived. Outwardly I was not as other men, extortioners, unjust, whoremongers; but I kept chastity, poverty, and obedience. . . . Notwithstanding in the meantime I fostered under this cloaked holiness and trust in mine own righteousness, continual mistrust, doubtfulness, fear, hatred, and blasphemy against God. And this my righteousness was nothing else but a filthy puddle, and the very kingdom of the devil. For Satan loveth such saints, and accounteth them his dear darlings who destroy their own bodies and souls and deprive themselves of all the blessings of God's gifts. . . . The more holy we were, the more were we blinded, and the more did we worship the devil.'

Christian's answer to this confession of faith begins with the direct assertion that the faith is fantastical—*i.e.* constructed by fantasy, or fancy, instead of being drawn from and founded on 'the Word.' The argument is really directed against a greater than this poor pilgrim. As we have seen, this faith was constructed by the fantasy of a great Church, which notoriously denied to its members the right of direct access to the Word. In another respect also was Roman Catholic theology fantastical. It was as remote from the actual facts of life and experience as it was from the Scriptures themselves.

Doubtless it is this wider reference that explains the severity of Christian's speech—this, and also his memory of his handling by the Flatterer, who had said in effect the same thing to him as Ignorance. And John Bunyan himself, with his tremendous conviction of sin, and his pitiless far insight into it, had no point in common with a man like this, whose conceit or self-complacency rendered all true sense of sin impossible to him.

These were the days, it may be frankly admitted, when it took some knowledge of theology to make an accredited believer. The theology was complicated and exact, and (as we see plainly from *Cromwell's Letters*) all believers had to be theologians. Nowadays we do not demand, and very few of us could profess, such an elaborately scientific groundwork of theology for our faith. Yet the whole matter is summed up in one distinction, and that is permanent, and as vital to-day as then. The question, in the last analysis, is between self and Christ, works and grace. That is the evangelical crux of faith. It is quite true that 'character is salvation,' and that goodness is goodness all the world over. Yet the fact remains that the more character and goodness we have, the less we are satisfied with it, and the more surely we are driven back on the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ. For every advance in character only reveals more surely the infinite stretch of moral height and depth. And the more hopelessly we realize this, the more urgently do we feel our need of One to

cast ourselves out on, good and evil alike, that we may lose all, and so find all in His redeeming love. Thus we may still assent to Cheever's exposition: 'Christ will be our only Saviour, or none at all. But there are many who, like Ignorance, profess to rest upon Christ, but make Him only half their Saviour, relying on their own holiness also for acceptance before God. This is a very dangerous error, as in the instance of Ignorance, for it proceeds from self-conceit; and even while under its influence men still think that they hold to the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith. . . . But who does not see that such a faith as this makes Christ not a Saviour of ourselves but of our duties?' Coleridge wrote the satirical label over a collection of tracts advocating such doctrine, 'Redemption made easy; or, Every man his own Saviour.' Kerr Bain wittily says of it, 'He does not profess to make out the £1, but 15s. is tolerably good money, while the 5s., at the least, is systematically furnished by One who has abundance . . . and there is an end of all trouble.' Mason's note on the passage, referring to the question between self or Christ, is, 'Reader, for thy soul's sake, look to thy foundation.'

Antinomianism.

Ignorance at once seizes on the obvious danger besetting all doctrines of free grace. 'If we are to trust simply in what Christ has done, we shall grow careless as to what we ourselves are doing.' The furious onslaught of Christian is very natural, but is not happy. For once Bunyan's righteous indignation has lost him a chance. For the danger is a real one, and the question is (unfortunately in the light of many instances) both natural and proper. After all, character *is* salvation, and there is a very real danger in any way of presenting Christianity that would seem even to the most ignorant kind of man to disparage character. There is a popular hymn which contains the lines:

> Doing is a deadly thing,
> Doing ends in death.

And Joannes Agricola's Calvinism leads him to the confident assurance that—

> I have God's warrant, could I blend
> All hideous sins, as in a cup,
> To drink the mingled venoms up;
> Secure my nature will convert
> The draught to blossoming gladness fast.

It is easy to see how dangerous such ideas may be in ill-balanced natures and untrained consciences. And it was not unnatural, nor in the least degree discreditable, that Ignorance should have found a difficulty here. Christian might have explained, as he was very well qualified to do, how the sense of sin grows with growing character; how compelling is the point of honour to Christ involved in faith, how love is the strongest of all safeguards against temptation. But Christian was tired of Ignorance by this time, and Bunyan was growing impatient. It is not easy to suffer fools gladly, nor to suffer them long. And, after all is said, it takes a bigger mind, and a more sincere conscience, than those of Ignorance to discuss such subjects. Christian, by his direct assault, was trying in a last endeavour to frighten or to anger him into a state of mind wherein he might hope to see plain truths and deal with them.

Contributions and Comments.

The Tone of Galatians ii. 1–10.

These verses, even as compared with their context, give the impression of having been written under peculiar excitement. It is as if Paul feared that certain historical facts, which he has to recall and admit, put him in the wrong, or at any rate exposed him to be misunderstood. The very fantastic suggestion has been heard of, that v.[3] implies the circumcision of Titus by St. Paul! Assuredly such a 'fact' as that is inconceivable. But is there not a more obvious explanation of the Apostle's uneasiness? May not the mere act of consulting the Church at Jerusalem have seemed to him, both at the time and in retrospect, like a dangerous compromising of his own independence and of what hung thereon—the freedom of the Gentile gospel? We might conjecture the sequence of events to have been: (1) A proposal made by others, that a deputation should visit Jerusalem (Ac 15[2]). (2) Refusal on St. Paul's part. (3) Possibly an argument—say, by Barnabas—that the