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THE GOSPEL CONFRONTS THE NATION

I.—THE HOME.

“SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE.”

By W. LESLIE LAND, ESQ., M.A.

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WHEN I first came to meditate upon this subject there came to my mind the many types of homes represented by the boys in a school. I thought of those favoured souls of whom it might be said, “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Thank God for those homes! A sentence written by one of God’s saints many years ago comes back to me: “Merciful God, what a city of refuge hast Thou ordained in the Christian home.” I thought, too, of those others, alas the majority, splendid fellows humanly speaking, who come from homes where religion of a kind is administered as an indispensable factor of respectability—“having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. iii. 5). I thought also of those fellows whose background and home life is seemingly Christless and pagan. Two verses of Scripture came to my mind; one is in Romans x.: “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?” The other is in Galatians i.: “But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

I will deal with our subject under three headings:

1. The Authority of the Gospel Confronts the Home.

There has come into my experience and into my soul during the last year or two an increasing sense of the responsibility of preaching. I speak as a layman, true, but a layman with a pulpit—a School Chapel—a pulpit, need I assure you, with one of the world’s most critical audiences. I believe there is a crying need to-day for a return to powerful preaching—preaching with authority. Surely if we really grasp the greatness of the Gospel—“the power of God unto salvation”—we shall preach it fearlessly, with all the authority of the Word of Almighty God. If people reject it, presenting it apologetically and diluting it will not help matters. Sensible people will never love what they

cannot respect. There is no respect in a home—and certainly none in a School—where authority of the right kind is lacking. I have often tried to analyse the admiration sometimes shown by modern youth for the dictatorships of the world. The fact is, they despise the shilly-shallier. They like something with a bite. A famous Viennese psychiatrist ventures to account for the rapid rise of dictatorships since the Great War by the fact that authority has left the home, and the “authority complex” has been satisfied in a new centre outside the home, viz. under a would-be dictator. Young people to-day are longing to touch the “absolute scale” of things, and that is surely the unique glory of the Everlasting Gospel. We have a commission which has the sovereignty of God behind it. We have a Word which is an impregnable rock, or, to change the metaphor again for one of Spurgeon’s, we have a lion which only needs letting loose. I am reminded of those words in Matthew x., “These twelve Jesus sent forth”; and of the strong injunctions in the Divine commission which followed. I think of the God-inspired assurance of Peter at Pentecost: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” And when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts and cried, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” And some three thousand new names were inscribed in the Lamb’s Book of Life. And you will remember how that, a little later on, when those hide-bound scribes and Sadducees saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. And although we do not read that those religious humbugs found the way of life, we note that another few thousand souls left the authority of darkness for the Kingdom of God. And so on right down through the history of the Church of Christ, where the preaching of the Gospel has been with assurance and power, bearing the hallmark of the authority and sovereignty of God, there has come conviction and conversion, and human hearts and human homes have been transformed and transfigured by being born into a family relationship with God the Father. Things have changed? Yes, very much so—but not *sin*—not *human nature*—not the *Holy Spirit*—and not the *Word of God*. I am absolutely convinced that where the everlasting Gospel of Christ is proclaimed to-day with that same unflinching boldness and authority (a thing only possible, surely, when the one who preaches it is full of the Holy Spirit), it still breaks through into modern lives and homes, where apathy and moral laxity have reigned. As a magnet brings into alignment the molecules of the iron under its sway, so the Gospel of Christ brings a human heart and home into line with the will of God. It brings parents face to face with a new responsibility, not only Godwards, but manwards and childwards. It brings a holy discipline into all the relationships of husband and wife; it brings the child into an atmosphere of the fear and admonition of the Lord; a city of refuge indeed—a veritable cradle of eternal life! One thing is certain—if any man preach any other Gospel, he will never behold Satan as lightning fall from heaven; he will never witness the fall of the strongholds of Satan in human lives.

2. The Narrowness of the Gospel Confronts the Home.

Of all the adjectives which our Lord might have applied to the way of life, he chose the one most dreaded—most despised—narrow is the way ; “ strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it ” (Matt. vii. 14). It is common experience that in the home circle especially we do not mind being labelled a great many things, but we do shrink from being called narrow. And yet, on the authority of the Christ of the Gospel Himself, the way of life is narrow, and with the sad result that, apparently, few find it. And if we are commissioned to preach a Gospel which can transform personal life and home life, how dare we broaden the way to meet the exigencies of modern soul traffic? The Lord changed the life to fit the way. The Gospel is narrow, for we know it has only one theme—the relationship of the soul to Almighty God. Nay, it is narrower, for it deals with the relationship of *your* soul and *my* soul to God, and, narrower still, it deals with the individual soul through one Person, and Him crucified. As one has said : “ It is as narrow as the holiness of Almighty God.” That is the kind of Gospel which confronts us, and our home life, to-day, as ever. And let the holy seeds of it be sown in our personal life and home life, then under the unchanged power of the Holy Spirit it can still bring forth the fruits of the Christ-transfigured life.

It strips the personal life of that thing which often passes for broadness and which is a cloak for spiritual coldness and moral laxity. It hallows every relationship in the home : of husband to wife ; of parents to children ; of mistress to maid ; it sanctifies the marriage bond, for no man shall put asunder what God has really joined. It enables him and her who took the oath to fulfil it. And when the real thing perfumes the atmosphere of the home—and not a legalistic imitation—it so clearly defines the pathway of holy living, holy thinking, and holy speaking, that the young child of slender and impressionable years may learn to walk in the narrow way. What a background !—what a send-off in life for such a favoured child ! That way becomes the way of peace, and out in the maze and wilderness of life, that child’s heart—like the trembling compass needle—will find no rest outside the narrow way. If, in the mystery of iniquity, he leaves the narrow way, God forbid there should ever have been times when, to those keen and watchful young eyes, we, who preach the narrow way, were not to be seen there ourselves.

I am well aware that the “ Gospel of the narrow way ” will provoke criticism and much opposition in the world and in the professing Church. Such a Gospel, many would say, cannot make its impact on the modern home. True, of course, if we reckon without Christ ; “ Apart from Me ye can do nothing.” Perhaps we need to return to a very elementary but fundamental point : The Christ of God did not come to this world and die, and all to make men happy. He came to save them ; not to bring *palliation*, but *salvation*. “ Think not that I am come to send peace on earth ; I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father ; and the

daughter against her mother ; and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. x. 34-37).

It is not the *happiness* of the home—not the *peace* of the home that is the issue ; it is *the saving of human souls*. The malady of sin is dreadful and fatal, and the only remedy is the Gospel of the narrow way. This Gospel—in all its holy narrowness—confronts the home to be received or rejected. The issue is *life*—or *death*. The destiny is *heaven*—or *hell*.

We were all of us, no doubt, very interested not long ago in a number of letters written to *The Times* by well-known people, and dealing with the question of Moral Rearmament. Later these letters were edited in book form by a prominent sportsman. You may remember some of the Editor's words in the Preface as he reviews his successful and brilliant career. He writes : " Underneath it all, lurked a baffling sense of futility which I could not explain. The crisis came : we were all faced with the possible end of civilization. War threatened my wife, my daughter, my parents, and all I cared about, with destruction. It seemed uncanny to think of putting my baby daughter in a gas proof tent. Tennis did not help much now." There were references in the book to " the four standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love."

To my mind it was all as though I had been looking out upon a beautiful, tranquil, sunlit lake—in the foreground a sailing boat. To the artistic eye, a pretty sight in a lovely setting ; to the man in the boat, a bitter disappointment, for that sailing boat is a useless, powerless thing without the wind of heaven in its sails. My dear Mr. Editor—if you want the ethic, you will need the dynamic ; if you want your home, your wife, your parents, your child, yourself to have an anchor that will neither give nor drag in the storms of life, it must be within the veil. The Gospel in all its narrowness confronts you. It will take you to a Cross and lead you out along a narrow—and often steep and rugged way—to life. Moral rearmament can only come through spiritual rearmament. Sin is a reproach to any people, and the Gospel of Christ, or rather the Christ of the Gospel, is the double cure.

3. The Divine Ethic of the Gospel Confronts the Home.

The supremest quality which the Gospel brings into the human heart is Grace—or—in the apostle's words : " Grace upon grace." And a right concept of redeeming grace—grace first received and then passed on—transforms personal life and home life. I have used the adjective " divine," for the simple, yet profound, reason that " flesh and blood cannot reveal " this thing to us—only our Father which is in heaven. We know that the Gospel does not *end* with the fact that we are saved by grace. If it ends there, then the Christian life and walk fall back on a naturalistic legalism. It does not *end* there : it *begins* there. For God was in Christ on the Cross, not merely rescuing the sinner from the ruins of sin—not merely sheltering him from judicial

doom—but that He might turn the very tables on sin and its ruler : for in the counsels of God it was foreordained before the foundation of the world that He would reconstruct being—recreate us in Christ—that Christ might be the Head of a new creation, accomplishing an end in the second Adam far transcending in glory that which was lost in the first Adam. “ That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” And the whole conception of the New Testament of the new life is that it shall be lived as a response to divine grace—grace received—grace passed on ; walking in it—growing in it. Let the Holy Spirit be free to inspire this concept of redeeming grace into the heart and mind of a believer and it will transform his personal life and the life of the home in which he lives. Nay, it would soon transform our national life and the life of the world ; for the brotherhood for which the race is pining and often making frantic effort can never spring from treaty, or flesh and blood. It must spring out of a common sense of grace—grace first received and then passed on. We read : “ And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul ; neither said any that aught of the things which he possessed was his own ; neither was there any among them that lacked ” (Acts iv. 32). Just a flash of this redeeming grace ethic in operation. What a glorious Gospel that can do that !

To illustrate the point still further : you will remember, in 1 Corinthians viii., that Paul raises the question of our personal relationships in life by a nice question of conscience. He asks : “ May a Christian eat meat which has previously been offered to an idol in some heathen temple ? ” In one sense, “ Yes ” ; for the meat is not contaminated, and the idol is “ nothing.” But suppose a weak brother should see Paul eating such meat. That alters the whole case, said Paul, and sooner than injure this brother—“ for whose sake Christ died—I will never eat flesh as long as I live, never ! ” Again, in Romans xiv., Paul considers another Christian who is inclined to look down on the weaker brother, and say : “ Why should I be ruled by your silly scruples and weak conscience ? ” And Paul gives the answer : “ Destroy not him with thy meat *for whom Christ died.*” *Christ died* for that weak brother : *that* alters everything, controls all your conduct ! It is the redeeming grace ethic shining out in all its radiance. There is no ethic like it to affect moral action : it is the tenderest and the deepest in the universe. No socialism that fails to rise to this height can ever meet the deep need of humanity.

We know well enough that there are times—especially in the circle of family relationships—when things seem to go wrong—when it is especially difficult to live out this great grace principle. In seeking to justify our failure to do so we stand upon our so-called “ rights,” and appeal to conscience. We need to recall the example of our Redeemer on the way to Calvary. Why did He not allow his conscience to resist that evil mob in the garden—the mock court in Pilate’s Hall—the tormentors as they nailed Him to the tree ? Why not summon those twelve legions of the heavenly host who might justifiably have shot lightning into the breasts of those Roman soldiers ? There is only

one answer : His was a redeeming conscience ; it had the burden of the redemptive will and purpose of the grace of God upon it ; and even the blackest sin of all time—that of killing the Lord of Glory—was there and then placed not under a thunder cloud of judicial wrath, but under the radiance of a rainbow throne.

And if the disciple's conscience is a truly redeemed conscience, it will be "all in" with His redeeming purpose, acting and prompting in line with the grace of God.

With such a Gospel confronting us, we cannot destroy our fellow man with our meat, our drink, our conversation, our money, our pride, our position, our so-called rights, or our anything—for the all transcending reason that Christ died for him ! Nothing matters more ; and nothing less can shape our outlook and our acting. The sanction of atonement is upon everything. Christ died for me : that must control all my personal life. Christ died for one's wife, for one's children : that hallows all family relationships. He died, too, for the maid and the charwoman in the kitchen : in the light of that, the disparity between the scullery and the study may remain a desirable convention for time, but it ceases to be a judicial assessment for eternity ! Christ died for the gardener, the postman and the telephone operator. And when things go wrong, that glorious reality of grace shall surely over-rule all our speaking—shall sanctify all our doings—the Holy Spirit of God keeping alive in our hearts that response to grace received.

The everlasting Gospel, with all its abiding authority, in all its holy narrowness, and with all its unchanged and unchanging plenitude of grace upon grace, confronts the home, and it still has its old-time power to make that home a type and pledge of that heavenly home which our redeeming, risen, and returning Lord has gone to prepare for all who love Him.

Professor Emil Brunner is already well known to English readers as the author of *The Mediator* and *The Word and The Ordinances*. He was associated with Barth but has parted from his leader on certain important points which are explained by the Rev. David Cairns in his Introduction to his translation of Brunner's *God and Man* (Student Christian Movement Press, 5s. net). The volume contains four Essays on the nature of personality. In these, various types of philosophical thought are considered. First "The Philosopher's Idea of God," and "The Creator God of Faith." Having noted the essential differences he deals with "Faith in Justification and the Problem of Ethics." This is followed by the consideration of "Church and Revelation," and the last chapter deals with "Biblical Psychology." Mr. Cairns has written an Introduction in which he gives a clear exposition of Professor Brunner's teaching in these lectures, and the reader will be grateful to him for the insight which he gives to the Professor's line of thought and his mode of expression, for while the dialectical theology is among the most important influences to-day in theological thought it presents many difficulties to English readers, very largely due to the German mental outlook.