

"They be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Matthew xv,14

Isaiah xxxv

Matthew xv,1-14

Psalms 31

New Book of Worship, Psalm 31, pp.50, 51.

The Bible is written in terms of natural life which are familiar to us. But within this natural symbolism the Lord is telling us about things of the spirit. That it was not natural blindness of which the Lord was speaking is evident, as the words of our text were addressed to the Pharisees. They had falsified the Scriptures, and by their false teachings had led both themselves and their people astray. It is selfishness that blinds the mind to truth and leads both teacher and pupil astray. And when the Lord came upon the earth, these blind teachers could not recognize Him.

We are told that when the angels read the Word, they do not read the names of persons - such as Abraham, Jacob, and others - but they understand by these names principles - principles that are within all men. The will is one such principle. The unregenerate will of man is a blind leader if the blind. If given free rein, it leads us to destruction.

But there is another faculty or principle - the understanding. This is the faculty by which the will is enabled to carry out its purposes. "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Truth is to the mind what natural light is to the body. Ignorance, error, falsity are the darkness which envelops the mind.

Like the man born blind, we spiritually are all born blind, for we are born without knowledge. Ignorance is the simplest form of mental blindness. While ignorance may or may not be a sin, it leaves the faculty of understanding uninstructed, and the will without the means of correcting and directing its impulses.

The only state of absolute ignorance is that of infancy, and it is this which makes the child capable of innocence, for there is then no truth or falsity in the mind through which the unregenerate will can express itself. But as we advance in life and the intellect becomes developed, the will can manifest itself and, unless the mind is instructed in truths and trained in right action, the will breaks out into disorders and evils.

The ignorance that is most prevalent today is ignorance concerning the truths of faith, in consequence of which even those well-disposed and wanting to do right may do just the wrong things.

By nature everyone has the love of self and the world. It is the spring from which most of our actions have their source, and we cannot see what these motives really are except through instruction in the truths of the Word. When men are without this knowledge, they are in the condition of the blind leading the blind.

Then there is a more serious type of blindness than the blindness which comes from fundamental ignorance. It is the blindness that comes from believing what is false to be true and what is true to be false. Every falsity is the denial of some truth and just as every truth, when believed and lived, leads to good, so every falsity, when believed and lived, leads to some evil. If there is the recognition of the Lord and of the necessity of following Him and of keeping the commandments, having a wrong idea of what the Scriptures teach - though it is a kind of blindness - is not destructive of spiritual life, because it is ignorance in another form, and wrongs done in ignorance are in the other life put away and forgiven.

Still another type of blindness results from the falsification of truth. Falsification of the truth is twisting the truth to make it have the opposite of its genuine significance - to turn the truth against itself. For example, it is a truth that no one can do good from himself. But when this truth is interpreted to mean that nothing which we do is good, and that for our salvation we must trust in righteousness not done by us but imputed to us, then this truth is falsified and destroyed. It makes a practical religious life of no use, teaching that any good we may do is of no value toward our salvation. It makes religion a thing of the mind alone and not of the heart. It really makes religion a sham, a disguise.

All these different kinds of blindness are of the understanding. There are different sources of evil and one is falsity in the understanding, of which we have been speaking. But there is another source - that is from evil in the will. In other words, evils may have their origin in our thoughts or in our affections.

The affections are the real man. Our thoughts are from without; we get them from our parents and teachers, and we have seen that so long as falsities are only in the thought, they do not defile the man; it is only when they are confirmed and break forth into evils of life that they defile; then they have passed from the understanding into the heart, and thence into the act.

But there is a state distinct from this in which evil and falsity both have their first origin in the heart. The evil and falsity that come through education and through the state of the society in which we are may not be directly opposed to love of God and to His government in the world, and to the love of the neighbor. But when the will is interiorly evil, the understanding will be false even though

it may be filled with the knowledges of the Lord and the Word and of goodness and truth, and though the outward life may be undeformed by actual evils. For evil in the heart blinds the understanding to the perception of truth. Evil cannot do otherwise than hate truth, and therefore cannot believe it. By education and by conformity to the general usages of society a semblance of belief in the truth may be put on, but this is only the outer man; it is not part of his inner life. It belongs to the society in which the man lives rather than to the man himself.

The false principle which flows spontaneously from an evil heart is not so much a perversion of truth as a perversion of goodness; and in its operation upon others it seeks to turn their good into evil rather than their truth into falsity. Thus the Pharisees did not deny the Lord's miracles or - like some modern infidels - seek to ascribe them to natural causes, but they ascribed them to an evil agency. Thus the truth may be hated and rejected even though it cannot be denied.

This blindness is willful. Truth is not rejected because of any obscurity or apparent inconsistency in itself - though these may be made the pretext - but the rejection arises from a predetermined opposition to the truth. The more simply and clearly the truth is stated the more the hatred of it is increased.

The blindness of the Pharisees, of which our text speaks, is not the blindness of ignorance nor that of mistaken ideas, but the blindness of deliberate falsification of the truth. This is the Pharisaic blindness of which it is written, "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

The warning is that we should examine our own hearts and minds. We may not only deceive others; we may deceive ourselves. The warning is given us for our own good. We should not be governed by blind impulses that spring from our unregenerate heart. The Lord has given us an understanding by which we can receive the light of heaven, and by that light look into our hearts and see what our natural tendencies are; and as we see and resist them, the Lord builds up within us a habitation for Himself and establishes within us the kingdom of His own goodness and truth.

The Lord promised that the eyes of the blind should be opened. By His own truth He rules the affections and guides the thoughts, leading us gradually out of error into goodness and truth. When we walk in the light of truth, we are able to avoid the stumbling blocks with which evil besets our path and to escape the snares and pits which self-intelligence prepares for our feet.

The Lord says to us as to the Apostles, "While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

Amen