

BIBLE LESSON XVII.

John 16:2

YOUR IDEA OF GOD

The swift summary of text for our notice is Jesus Christ's prophecy: "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service, because they have not known the Father nor Me. It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away the Comforter will not come. He will reprove the world and guide you into all truth.

When one is speaking of nature or the nature of man he either means the carnal nature, with its blind force, whose operations bring earthquakes and cyclones, bloodshed and bondages, or he means that deep sense of righteousness implanted in every creature which John called "the Light that lighteth every man."

Two people speaking of the nature of man will greatly differ, and one will grossly misunderstand the other simply because the other is speaking from the standpoint of the spiritual nature while he is making conclusions from physical experiences.

One says it is the nature of man to think thoughts whose outcome will be corporations and whose intentions shall be to make your daily bread impossible and your meat a thing of memory.

They insist that it is nature's exercise of itself in men which make them unjust toward women. It is natural, they tell us, to connive against the weaker when the stronger is pitted against it. Man is but following out his inherent nature when he makes sex distinctions, and laughs in his sleeve at the deserted wife, the hungry bird, the drowning baby, for does not nature's sun shine and her rivers run smiling on, indifferent to the welfare of men or angels?

Sweet and low the west winds blow,
Careless sing as they careless know,
How hearts were broken long ago.

Nature connives against the helpless,
against women, against minorities.
"Therefore," says the English Lionel Beale,
what is wanted is something to upset natural law."

It is well he puts into conscious expression the unconscious wish of the world. It is the stir of the bird's wing for the air it was made to fly in, for truly they who would choose to see every creature on the planet glad and protected and powerful, stand ready to put their hand on the main spring of sorrow and say "Broken!" and their fingers to the clock of time of pain and say "Stop!" so soon as they shall know this law, so plainly taught in this lesson by Jesus. "He shall reprove the world and send the Comforter."

Another says, "There is no such nature to stop. The only nature there is that is real is the principle of righteousness stirring within all men and all creatures. The savages know

what it is right to do. The hordes in the slums of London choose that the brave young men and the good young girl in the play shall come off victorious when trickery is pitted against them, else they will hiss the play." "This is nature," says one whose face is set that way till he sees nothing else. Pythagoras called it the salt of men in all ages. Plutarch called it the unerring guide; Socrates called it the Divine sign; John said it lighted every man that ever came into the world.

So One Man, determined to let this nature speak its own way with all its might, through Him, said in triumph, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Then the rest seized upon Him because He, being a man like themselves, made Himself God. He carefully taught them the mortal shall not say, I am God. Only the immortal shall speak of its Godhood. But, looking at the flesh as the truth of themselves, they fought against the speech of the Spirit. The flesh warreth against the Spirit to this day when you two are speaking together. One of you insists that God does not send the cyclone and earthquake, the famine and the survival of the stronger. The other says; "He must, because He made all things, and surely we see that these things exist."

One of you says, "There is but one side of this question, viz., the God side." The other says, "There is the side of the law which sends evil as good." These disciples of Jesus were here being prepared to speak only from the standpoint of the Spirit of Good, when in

aftertime men assail them with the claim of the power of evil. They could not speak entirely from that standpoint while a Man with infinite powers to protect and feed them stood near them, upon Whom they might lean.

He showed how by speaking and thinking entirely from the standpoint of the principle of right He could increase loaves and fishes and gold at their call. He did what the whole body of Jews did not dare to do with the money-changers who, having got hold of all the Hebrew coins, made the people pay heavy premiums for half-shekel pieces. He put them out bodily and made them respect Him as a force He could demonstrate when He pleased. His disciples forgot the principle He announced in their admiration of its feats. So He went away to throw them on their own understanding of Truth. They were beset by those who verily thought they were doing their God service by opposing them.

And truly if it was the God they believed in who ruled the world, they were right pleasing unto Him, for the god of the external world as described by those who see it, is glad when a Lisbon lies low and a Johnstown swims in tears.

But the true God is mercy, tenderness, and loving kindness. This is the God of Jesus Christ.

God is love. His mercy brightens

All the path in which we rove.

Bliss He wakes, and woe He lightens,

God is wisdom, God is love.

In Jonah's time "every man prayed unto his God." It makes all the difference in the creation to your powers and experiences what God you believe in and what you believe your God does.

Elijah had supposed God sent the cyclone and earthquake and famine, but being a sincere man his heart was in ashes of despair, just as every heart is that is mistaken in its suppositions about God; so he became silent, and found that the still small Voice counseling mercy and tenderness and freedom was the true God. Thus he had not been true to the true God in slaying the prophets of Baal at the brook Kishon.

Thus supposition about God, and not God indeed, had stirred to earthquakes and hot winds of terror. The Roman governors and pro-consuls afterward hunted the Christians to please their imaginary God, viz., the sender of calamities. They tied them to wild beasts and set them for bonfires in Nero's gardens. But, -

Speak, Victory! Who are life's victors?

Unroll thy long annals and say!

Are they those whom the world called the victors,

Who won the success of a day?

The Spartans who fell at Thermopylae's tryst,

Or the Persians and Xerxes?

The martyrs or Nero?

Pilate or Christ?

I am my own idea of God. Nothing can be plainer than that I am my own idea of God, and you are your own idea of God.

The man who chases from the prize fight to the gambling hall believes in a God who chases him around seeing every evil thing he does and getting a punishment ready while he himself has things just as he pleases regardless of the feelings of others. Those who believe nearest in the true God are safest. Those whose idea of God is absolutely true are absolutely safe.

What God do you believe in? What is your idea of God? John Knox had been thinking what a mighty fortress is our God when he found himself rising from his place at the table. A bullet came crashing through the window, but he was safe. Mungo Park thought of his God as his unfailing provider. But he forgot to think so at one time and was utterly destitute in the wilds of Africa. A little cheery tuft of live moss reminded him of its happy trust of his own God and as soon as he took hold of the true God again he was amply provided with all things. "Do you think" asked a pious believer in the God who sends earthquakes and famines, "that you can make an impression on 4,000,000 Chinese?" "No," said the Doctor, "but my God can." This God was different from the God of Louis XIV, for he compelled the Huguenots at the point of the bayonet by fire to destroy 700 churches because they did not worship as he did.

Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, rose from the lowest position to the highest rank by taking for his motto, "God's good providence is my inheritance." A child living with a mother who had an idea that God sends poverty and want

took it into his mind that God would hear every time they scraped the bottom of the meal barrel. And the child's idea fed them.

I am my own idea of God. It was a step ahead for the child to have an idea of God that He would not let them actually starve, but it is a greater step to have the true idea, viz., that God never lets His children have any bottom to their barrels of plenty. If the idea of Good is the mainspring of human experience, you have the power to upset the apparent order of things.

If your idea of God swings the clock to the time of pain and poverty you may stop it when you please. Jesus Christ told you to keep that affirmation of His till you should strike down the idea of God that throttles the nations.

"All power is given unto Me."

Jesus Christ had the true idea of God. God is Love. John said: "If a man love God he will love his brother also." Whatever your idea of God is what you will treat your family with. A mother who had an idea that God sends sickness for some good purpose blew the simoon of this notion against her little girl and she had typhoid fever. Then she besought that God of hers to remove the fever that her own idea was plowing like a hot wind over the child. All to no purpose. Because she had an idea that God sometimes does and sometimes does not do as you want Him to. By and by she went into a room alone and took off her thought from the little girl and put up her thought entirely to the true God that His good

will might be done and that she should see that good will.

Then the child got well at once. The true God always wills well. Never anything else. Look out there at the mainspring of your world what you are doing! Do not let it be said of you as of Nero and that mother, "because they have not known the Father nor me."

Physicians sit in judgment on a man. They believe in nature's laws of waste and decay and death. "According to thy faith be it unto thee." So they blow their cold idea over the man. Yet when they should look away from him they would say that one with the true idea of God could restore him to health. While they are looking away he breathes better. Why do they not spend all their time and all their energies studying that law of the true idea of God that can always heal as Jesus healed? That idea that fills the mind touches other minds. Keeley the motor man has thought of force, we are told, till he can start a whole swing of machinery to working which the best mechanic cannot stir till Keeley touches him on the shoulder.

When the true idea of God fills the mind you shall touch shoulder to shoulder with all the universe of mankind till health and joy and peace reign supreme.

You must withdraw your ideas of mankind being subject to natural laws of fire and frost, death and sickness. The true idea of God gives you the true idea of mankind. They shall feel your touch on the mainspring of the universe. If the child of his generation can stir

the machinery of the factories by his idea of force you shall stir the nations by your idea of God.

Jesus Christ promised all things to them that should hold His Name in mind. His Name should forever stand for the true idea of God. The Comforter should come in His Name. The world should be reformed. Those who have held His Name in mind till it has gone away as man and has come in as the principle of righteousness, have seen those they meet change from foolish-appearing to wise; from unsteady to reliable. "Whoso findeth Me findeth life." "In Me shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." When we strike at the false idea of God and let the true idea live we are letting Jesus Christ live as He meant in us: not as flesh but as Truth. "And Christ lives on in His strength and glory. He lives and loves with a love divine. By the light of His Name I read life's story. And the key to the world is mine."

November 8th, 1891.

