

[\[Home\]](#) -- [\[Jukes\]](#)

Pharisaism & Self-Sacrifice:

BEING

SOME THOUGHTS ON SCHISM AND ITS REMEDY.

John 17:15-19; 20:21-23; Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 9:19-23.

BY

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Pharisaism and Self-Sacrifice.

WHAT is the real hindrance to Christian union at the present day? Why is there so much schism and so little fellowship? Because, spite of abounding profession, there is so little love and real self-sacrifice. It is not that there is no self-sacrifice; nor do I mean that the very people who I think are nursing schism are unwilling to make sacrifices, and large ones too, both of time and money, to further what are commonly accounted good objects. Were I to make such an absurd statement, the simple fact of the sums given, and the toil expended every day in religious works, would of itself answer me sufficiently. What I mean is rather this, that numbers, of those who are now popularly regarded as the most religious people, object, and, further, object *on principle*, to what appears to me to be true Christian self-sacrifice; that therefore *on principle*, and thinking to do God service, they are necessarily upholding and perpetuating schism; because, whether as individuals or in the theory of their different churches or gatherings, instead of the stronger and wiser sacrificing themselves or that peculiarity which is their special boast and glory,—generally some form or truth which they suppose they hold more fully or correctly than their brethren,—instead of coming down from this for the sake of weaker and less instructed brethren, they think each Christian and each church should take what is called the "right ground;" that is, as high a platform as possible; giving up nothing, which they call truth, for the sake of those who through spiritual infancy or ignorance cannot yet receive it, and to whom therefore such truth or such a standing is not only at present unattainable, but may even be most unsuitable; therefore never coming down in their church forms for weaker souls, or, like Paul, becoming a Jew to gain the Jews; but, on the contrary, all getting up

as near to heaven as they can, for their own spiritual profit, and, as they say, for God's glory; with little thought for those who still are carnal, and who therefore cannot yet accept or use the so-called right thing.

Is this indeed the Christian path? Protestantism says it is. But popular Protestantism has yet some things both to learn and to unlearn. Popular Protestant orthodoxy teaches that we may give up certain non-essential points for brethren, but that the truth is never to be given up. Surely the words are good; but what is meant here by "the truth," and what is meant by "not giving it up"? By "the truth" is meant certain views or propositions, which at the time express the measure of spiritual understanding, or perhaps misunderstanding, which we have attained to. By "not giving it up" is meant the assertion of it in such a way that our present measure of intelligence is practically made the term of communion; and thus those who cannot see with us or accept our view are excluded from our fellowship. In this way brethren, whose true Christian life and spirit no one doubts, must be cut off, from what is called Christ's table and church communion, because with their views of Scripture they cannot receive the interpretation which other brethren put on certain passages.

Protestantism is full of endless illustrations of this principle, of giving up so-called non-essentials, but of contending for what is called the truth, even though such a course exclude God's true children. The necessary result is, people meet, in smaller or greater knots, with those who in the main see with them in what they have agreed to call essential; *in the main* I say, for even the staunchest separator and "dissenter on principle" must yield something, or before he has done he will find his church consist only of himself, or perhaps only of part of himself, his heart not wholly going with what his head receives, or his head not by any means consenting to what his heart yields to. I have known one or two dear souls, who in their zeal for "the truth" have come to this, and who are, to use a famous expression, attributed to Mr. Darby, at last "*outside of everything*." Is this, or anything like this, Christ's way? Is this the lesson taught by His sacrifice? Is He not the Truth? And did He not as the Truth give up Himself for an untruthful world, that so by coming into it, and taking on Him its darkness, He might be its Saviour? My view is, that Christ's sacrifice is the key to all self-sacrifice; that as by the sacrifice of Himself, coming into our place, He met and overcame the great schism or separation from God in which we all were; not sanctioning the schism or separation by coming into it, but stooping to it, and to its burdens and darkness, to lift us in Himself out of it; so we are to meet and conquer all schism, in Him and with Him, by self-sacrifice; and that as in His sacrifice, which was most sweet to God, not some little thing, but the Truth Himself, was the sacrifice, so the sacrifice we are called to is not of non-essentials, but of ourselves; that even yet the just must die and suffer for the unjust, the pure for the impure, Christ's members, who by grace live in His life, for those who are yet without that life, or in whom it is yet weak, who are therefore living in self-hood and ignorance; in a word, that the higher must stoop to the lower, the stronger to the weaker brethren, and must bear their weakness and blindness with and for them; that this is their calling, which, though judged by men, is sweet to God, and which has its own reward, which is Christ's own; namely, not only of getting to heaven at last with a few good ones, but of bringing many poor, lost, and weak ones, by their humiliation, to glory with them.

I have thus roughly sketched what appears to me to be the true principle and law of Christian self-sacrifice, as contrasted with the popular view, which I believe is at the bottom of the confessed and lamentable divisions of Protestantism. But the question deserves a closer treatment; for on the answer we give it, right or wrong, depends the correctness or incorrectness of our idea of the

whole Christian life. In other words, our life will depend upon our view of what is or what is not Christian self-sacrifice.

Let us then ask more closely, *What is Christian self-sacrifice? What are we really called to as Christ's members?* I answer, simply to Christ's life—that is all. Our calling is, not only to bear witness of, but even to shew, that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us. The Christian is one in whom Christ lives; who therefore can say, "It is not I that live, but Christ liveth in me;" one therefore who, according to our Lord's own words, must do Christ's works, not by the force of any outward commandment, but because the same eternal life is in him, and because this life, which is "Christ in us the hope of glory," must, simply because Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, still and always work His proper works in us. Therefore "he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

What then was Christ's life? for it is what we have to shew. Christ's life was just God's life in human nature: therefore a life of light and love, instead of darkness and self-love. For God is light; therefore He shews things as they are: but God is love also, and therefore He gives Himself and suffers for His enemies. Christ's life did this. As light it shewed that man in self-hood is not, as the serpent said, like God, but a poor ruined creature. As love it told out the heart of God, and that man is dear to God, and shall be for ever united to Him. Christ's Incarnation told it all,—that wondrous coming down, by which He who was in the form of God took on Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man; not helping us afar off, but actually coming into contact with us, where we were, taking our nature, and our form, and our place, and our curse, sharing our birth and death, our sleeping and waking, our eating and drinking, our hunger and thirst and suffering; loving us so well, that where we were He Himself would come for us, and be made one with us and like us, that He might bring us His life, and make us again like Him; and yet never hiding from us what we really are, shewing it all even in Himself, but bringing of His fulness grace to meet our every necessity.

And in all this Christ was doing nothing new. He was only doing what God had always been doing, that is, stooping to meet men where they were, in such forms, even carnal forms, as they could receive. Think of the God we worship, who is a Spirit, for two thousand years, not only accepting but appointing the outward carnal Jewish worship, the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, and the outward washings and raiment, which the law tells of. But He did it because man was where he was, and because in no other way could He have reached him. Therefore He stooped to where His creatures were. God, more than any of His most loving servants, became a Jew to gain the Jews, and weak to gain the weak, and under law to gain those under law, because He is love, and love must sacrifice itself, if by any means it can save and bless others. If, therefore, men were in the flesh, He came to them in the flesh; if they were in darkness and shadows, He came for them into the shadows, because they could not yet bear or comprehend the light, and because the darkness and light are both alike to Him.

Here is the reason for all the different dispensations. Here is the reason for the Incarnation. God only can reach us by coming where we are; and He does this by "coming in the flesh," to make us in due time like Him for ever.

Such was Christ's life—a "coming in the flesh"—that so, by making Himself like us, at the cost of

bearing our burden, He might reach us, and so might give us His spirit. Such therefore should be, such in measure must be, our life, if to us to live is Christ, for He is changeless. If "to us to live is Christ,"—words which express far more than even the blessed truth that "Christ liveth in us;" for Christ may live in us, and be our life, while we are yet living rather in the flesh than in the Spirit,—if "to us to live is Christ," we cannot help self-sacrifice, with all its accompanying "coming in the flesh," to reach and to save others. And we shall do this, not because some law commands, but simply because the life in us, if we will yield to it, must so manifest itself. For the righteousness of God is without the law. God is not righteous, because any law says, "Thou shalt," to Him; but because He is what He is, that is love. And so His sons must love, not through any command, but in the power of the same divine nature. For just as the old man in us works old Adam's works, listening to the tempter, hiding from God, laying the blame on others, without an effort to copy the 3rd of Genesis, simply because the same old Adam by nature lives in us; so if "to us to live is Christ," Christ in us yet does Christ's works, and the sum and substance of His works is self-sacrifice.

Now I might illustrate and enforce my subject in many ways; but when I have shewn that such or such is Christ's life, it seems almost superfluous to say that such also must be the life of His members, just in proportion as they grow up in Him. I may however remind you how the Epistles put this truth, and how our participation in God's life through His sacrifice for us is urged as the sufficient ground and reason of the whole Christian life of love and self-sacrifice. Take only the Epistle to the Romans as an example. As you know, it has two parts, first doctrine, then practice. The first tells us of "the mercies of God,"—what we all were, and what God has freely given for us:—"God commendeth His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." The second tells us to shew the like mercy, "beseeching" us, as those who share God's life, "by the mercies of God, to present our bodies a living sacrifice." The doctrine is,—You were lost; God has sacrificed for you. The practice is,—In His life, as His sons, you must sacrifice yourselves for others. This one word, "sacrifice," contains it all. And you cannot obey the precepts of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth chapters, unless you are prepared and content "to present your bodies a living sacrifice." Whether in teaching, or in shewing mercy, or in giving, or in condescending to men of low estate, or in paying tribute and custom, or in, what is much harder, receiving weak brethren and bearing their infirmities,—unless in all we yield ourselves a living sacrifice, the precept may be admired, but will not really be fulfilled in us. But let us be, and see that we are, sons in Christ, the Son, through Him partakers of God's own life, and that Christ sends us as He was sent, according to the words, "As my Father hath sent Me, so send I you,"—not, As my Father sent Moses, saying, "Thou shalt," that is with law; but "As my Father hath sent Me," that is to be a sacrifice:—let us not only possess His life, but be possessed by it, and then, like Him, and like His servant, who could truly say, "To me to live is Christ," we too, though free from all, shall be servants unto all, to gain the more; to the Jews becoming as Jews, to gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law; stooping to fleshly forms, not to make or keep men Jews, but by sharing their burden to bring them a better life, which shall in due time lift them with us to God's right hand. Only by self-sacrifice can this be done. Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground, it abides alone. It is by dying to its own separate life, for others' good, that it brings forth much fruit.

And the two great characteristic titles, "salt" and "light," which our Lord applies to those who, because they endeavour to follow and learn of Him, are called disciples, only confirm the same teaching. "Ye are light," and "Ye are salt." How does light work? From its source, the sun, it comes from heaven to earth, with wondrous treasures to change all things. It comes on all alike, not spoilt

by the vilest thing it falls on; and sooner or later, more or less, it changes all it comes in contact with. It comes on the young plant, and gives it new colour. It comes on the sour fruit, and both hue and taste at once begin to change gradually. It gets into the very earth. Science tells us that our gas is nothing else but long-buried sun-light, which sinking into the trees, long turned to coal, has there remained light still, shut up, but waiting to come forth again when wanted to serve and lighten us. And so of salt. How does it work? It does no good, till it comes into contact with something and sinks into it. In doing this it may seem lost. But is it lost? No; the meat is thereby preserved from corruption. And the salt, though unseen, is yet not lost. The proof is that it keeps that which it seems lost in from corruption. This, if I understand it, is our calling, even as it was Christ's; not to stay in our own joy, but like Him and in His life to take the place of others for them; by our light and life, which is not ours but His, to change them while we bear their weakness, and darkness, and bondage, with them. But this we cannot do if our notion of religion is to be right ourselves, whatever becomes of other sinners; or if in our church position we take as high a standard as we can, instead of stooping in Christ's life for weaker souls, assured that we cannot serve them without being served ourselves, and that in everything it is more blessed to give than to receive.

But all this is open to one objection. By such a course, it is said, we give up truth. The objection is as old as the days of Christ, when those who by outward separation were trying to be right, and who thought they were right, for they thanked God that they were not as other men, urged this very objection against the Lord, because He took the place of other men, and made Himself like them to bear their burden for them. What was it in Him that offended them so much as the great fact, that "this Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." This was His reproach; and those who like Him live for others must expect the same, even for and in their very sacrifice to be "numbered among the transgressors;" for Pharisaism lives yet, and will live to the end. What is Pharisaism? It is surprising to find what mistakes are current among Christians on this question. Pharisaism is supposed by most to be mainly a zealous adherence to legalism, and Jewish forms, and outward ceremonies. It is not thought that a converted Evangelical can be a Pharisee. Yet the real Pharisee of this dispensation must needs be evangelical. The word Pharisee simply means *separatist*—one who, when the church or congregation of his age is full of evil, separates from it with the idea of living more correctly according to the truth which has been given by God at the commencement of the dispensation. Of course, in the Jewish dispensation, which was law, the Pharisee or separatist, who tried to live more closely according to the truth of his dispensation, was necessarily a legalist, because the dispensation then was legal. But the Pharisee of this dispensation is the man who in the church's fall thinks to be right by his and others' outward separation, according to the exact rule or letter of the dispensation, which is not law but gospel; and his aim, often most true according to his light, is to bring back the church as far as he can to the pattern set up at the beginning of the dispensation. This he can only do by separation; and therefore he is a separatist, in other words, a Pharisee. And in all this he may honestly believe that he is serving God, just as Paul thought when he lived a Pharisee. I also thought it once; for I have been a Pharisee, and know how plausible the error is. I once thought that it was really according to God's mind to attempt to take what is called the "right ground," even though the mass of the church was left behind in bondage and ignorance. I now see that, however good the intention, this is not Christ's path. It has two mistakes—it is untrue and unloving. Untrue, because unconsciously it stands on a pretence, and assumes, that, though the church as a whole is wrong, some of its members can by outward separation, and by taking the original ground of the dispensation, as they say, stand clear of the common shame and failure, thus practically denying the church's real unity; and it is unloving, because it forsakes sick and erring

brethren, teaching men, under the guise of a zeal for God, to consider first their own interests,—in the next world I allow, still their own interest,—thinking only to be right themselves, and, if others are wrong, thank God they are not like other men.

Of course with those who take such ground and hold such views, Christ's life, if they ever see it, must be a great stumbling-block; for while in love it comes where sinners are, to serve and help them, it makes small account of outward forms, however right or good, or of any outward separation, asserting that it is the inward spirit that makes things clean or unclean, that "to the pure all is pure," and that "nothing from without a man can defile him." Such words must be hard indeed to some hearers. With them one mark of peculiar sanctity is to be a separatist, and in such a path of outward separation to judge as many earthly things as possible carnal and unclean. "This is unclean,"—"that is unclean,"—they must therefore leave it: and surely "to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." But these brethren do not see how such esteeming of things to be unclean, so far from proving high spirituality, proves the very opposite: they cannot believe that what to them is unclean, may, by faith and prayer, be clean to others; that it is the spirit in which a thing is done which makes it clean or unclean,—that to the pure all is pure. If such words are allowed, because Christ spoke them, any practice founded on them is judged as more or less unfaithfulness. In the things of the world they see how the spirit of an act justifies the act,—that it is no shame to stoop to wait on the blind, or those who suffer from the most loathsome diseases,—that it is no mark of folly for a father or elder brother to come down to wait in love on younger children. Only in the church is selfishness approved. In the church stooping to the weak is judged as unspiritual.

But what is spiritual? Is it spiritual to have more light than others, to read good books, to write good tracts, to make good prayers, and to take as high an outward standard of religion as possible,—so high, that few can walk with us? or is it spiritual to be like Christ, to "come in the flesh," in fleshly forms, and, instead of climbing up by some higher way which the poor sheep cannot follow, to walk where they can walk, and to go in for their sake by the same door with them? What says our Lord? If any one climbs up,—by so doing shewing that he is superior to the sheep, and can do what they cannot; if he goes by another higher way, in which the sheep, being only sheep, cannot follow him, he may prove that he can do what they cannot, but he proves also that he has not the shepherd's heart. The shepherd goes by the same way that the sheep can go. And his reward is, that even the lame and weak are brought with him into a place of safety.

Is there then to be no separation between the precious and the vile, between what God approves and what He disapproves? Surely there must and ever will be separation; for Jesus Christ was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," and as He is, so must His members be. The only question is, What His separateness was? Was it outward or inward? in the flesh or in the Spirit? Was He not, even while He sat and ate with the publicans and sinners, with whom the self-righteous Pharisees would have no fellowship, not only far more "holy," but even far more "separate from sinners," than the Pharisees who reproached Him for giving up what they considered holy separateness? The truth is, Christian separateness depends, not on outward position, but on inward state. And indeed the word *state* ought itself to teach us what our separateness should be; for *state* means simply *standing*, only it is our inward and spiritual, and therefore our real, standing, not our outward place. Those who have reached this spiritual *state* or standing are really separate from the carnal, even while they take their outward place to live and die for them. Those who know little or

nothing of this spiritual state are zealous for the only separateness they know, which is merely outward; but their real state, though they know it not, shews where they are; and they will discover it some day.

I have thus sketched the contrast between self-sacrifice and Pharisaism, between that path which puts an end to all division, and that which in its very zeal for truth only produces schism and separation. The one is the life of the true Christ of God, who, by coming into our division, overcomes the great schism between us and God, and between us and our brethren, and by His humiliation and self-sacrifice brings us out of it. The other is the life of all false Christs, of whom there are as many now, leading souls wrong, as ever there were in old time, who, not coming in the way of self-sacrifice, escape the true Christ's cross, but who, because they do not bear the burdens of the weak, can work no true deliverance. What Christ shall be our life—the true or false? God grant us all the Christ who lives and dies for others. And He may be in us while as yet we are very unlike Him; for, as I have said, we may possess Him before He possesses us; when therefore, though Christ is our life, we cannot truly say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ;" for Christ in us must be a babe before He is a strong man; and at such a stage Christ in us cannot do what He will do if we grow up into Him in all things. Only let us desire to know Him, and to be like Him, as we can bear it. Then step by step Christ's experience will be reached, even to the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Meanwhile, whereunto we have attained, let us walk by that; knowing that "the end of the commandment is love," and that the one great mark of all love is union, not division; even as one great mark of all self-love and of all false Christs is their schism or separation. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." And one fruit of schism is, and must be, blindness. A schismatic must be blind, because "he that loveth not his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." The Lamb is the light of God's elect, and the Lamb is the life of self-sacrifice.

One word more, and I have done. Self, we confess, is the root and end of all our unconverted fallen life. Let us not forget that self may no less underlie much that is regarded in the church as most spiritual; and that, when it does so, it is far worse and far more hardening than any amount of worldly selfishness. Selfishness is surely bad enough in a mere worldly life; but it is far more dreadful in a religious one. Yet in a religious life, as we see in the Pharisees, it may, though undiscovered and unconfessed, be most rampant. And bad as self is in the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, in seeking our own advantage in the world without regard to other men, it is far worse in a religious life, in holy forms and outward separation. As far as my observation goes, no indulgence of passion destroys the spiritual nature so much as respectable religious selfishness. It binds the soul in almost hopeless bonds; for men think that they are right, and even thank God that they are not as other men, while yet with all their gifts, and spite of all their knowledge, they are really poor, and blind, and naked, in wretched self-love. The one remedy is the life of Christ, the life of God, which is self-sacrificing love, and not self-love. May He give us all to know it more and more. Amen.

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[Home](#)

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