

XXXVI.

The Apostolic Love.

“He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts.” — *John xii. 40.*

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It is singular that the hardening, in its most awful manifestation, finds its exponent not in Jeremiah, the stern preacher of repentance, nor in St. Paul, the logic confessor and witness of the divine sovereignty, but in St. John, the *apostle of love*. St. John knows men whom he designates as “children of the devil,” who as such are the opposite of the children of God.

Jesus had entered the holy city amid the hosannas of the enthusiastic multitudes. All Jerusalem apparently came out to hail Him. Even the resident Greeks asked for Him. It was the hour of triumph and glory. And yet, in the midst of this popular applause, Jesus knows that He is the “Man of Sorrows,” and declares to His disciples that He is like the grain of wheat which, “except it fall into the ground and die, abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.” (*John xii. 12*) Then He cried out: “Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.” (*John xii. 27, 28*) And immediately there came a voice from heaven, saying: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” (*John xii. 28*) The people that surrounded Him “thought that it had thundered, and others said that an angel had spoken to Him.” (*John xii. 29*) It was one of the most solemn and impressive signs that ever have attended the preaching of the Word—an event like that of Carmel; a direct answer from heaven.

Still under its impression, Jesus continues His words to the multitude, saying: “While ye have the light believe in the light, that ye may be the children of the light.” (*John xii. 36*) And what was the answer? Another hosanna like that when Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and which was honestly meant by some? Indeed not. When, instead of promising them that He would raise up the kingdom and deliver it from Roman bondage, Jesus presented to them the claims of faith, then they resisted Him, and the evil in their eyes betrayed the opposite of peace in their hearts. The same Nazarene whom a moment ago they had hailed with the waving of palms, they now are ready to bury under showers of stones. Jesus, seeing this, departed and hid Himself from them. And thus, on that public square of Jerusalem, the multitude was left alone. They had rejected the King whom they should have adored. A voice had spoken from heaven, but they had stopped their ears.

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Deluded people! You know not whom ye have rejected, and that your rejection of today must lead to His crucifixion tomorrow. You rejected Him, and, with Him, yourselves forever. For this is what St. John, the witness of peace and love, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, writes concerning them: “Tho He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him, that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

Therefore they *could not believe*, because Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” (John xii. 37-40)

“They *could not believe*.” No judgment could be keener, more direct, more fearful! Who can hear these words without an aching heart? Who trembles not when the holy apostle declares, that such are the ordinances of the Kingdom? Who does not bow the head in the presence of such blinding mysteries? Oh, that we might erase these words from the Gospel! But we may not. Tho they most painfully affect us, tho we can not sufficiently admonish one another never to speak of these fearful mysteries but with a loving and sorrowing heart, yet they may not be taken from the Gospel. Without them even St. John’s Evangel would not be intact, rich, and complete. The Scripture may not be emasculated.

It was Jesus who discovered that these wretchedly sinful men of Jerusalem were hardened and stiffnecked. This comes, not to men in Rome or Athens, but to men in the Jewish capital. It is remarkable that when the Greeks came to Philip naively asking for Jesus, these children of Abraham should be manifested as hardened in their hearts. There had been such men in Jericho, Bethany, and Jerusalem twenty years ago; but the apostle declares that this somber prophecy of the completed hardening was fulfilled to its fullest extent only in the men who were then the leaders of public opinion in Jerusalem, who were hardened by their contact, not with John the Baptist, but *with Jesus*.

The effect of contact with Jesus is so decisive that it determines the whole subsequent course of a man’s life and being forever. There is no one greater and more glorious than Jesus. Whom Jesus does not save can not be saved. He who sees no light in Jesus must forever wander in darkness. He is *the* touchstone. Tested by Him, the soul stands revealed.

From this narrative, and from all that the Scripture reveals on this subject, it is therefore piteously evident that our greatest glory, viz., our Christian assurance and the most awful misery which the soul can conceive, *the hardening of a human being*, stand side by side, belong together in causal connection. Rock of offense; fall and rising again for many in Israel; a sign that shall be spoken against; savor of life, but also savor of death—we wonder how it is possible that He who is the Savior of the soul can also cause its deadly corruption to become manifest!

And yet it is a fact; the Word of God leaves no room for doubt. And what is still more wonderful, this fearful operation of being a savor of death proceeds from Christ in one of the most glorious moments of His life: in the moment when He shines in all the greatness of His majesty. The hour had come when, like a grain of mustard-seed, He should fall into the ground. The Galileans saw their Lord. The Greeks asked after Him. The voice from heaven was still vibrating in their ears. With touching entreaty He called them to repentance. And it is in that moment that the enmity of the human heart shows Him its deadly hatred,



and in its base resistance compels Him to hide Himself. And then their hardening of heart becomes manifest.

There is no escape from this critical moment. Every man *must* be drawn to Christ. And he that has come to Him must see more and more of His greatness and holiness, and become more intimately acquainted with Him. And by this very entrance into the inner sanctuary the lost soul discovers its own true inwardness, and whether it will ever come to a rending of the veil.

But from this we should never draw the wrong inference, that it is then the safest course never to bring our children to Jesus. This is not left to our decision. The Lord of Hosts is He who commands us: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." (Mark x. 14) But what this deep mystery ought to teach us is, not to throw holy things to the dogs, nor to make an ostentatious display of divine truth. Altho we do not judge others, but rather let their zeal in spreading the Gospel rebuke our luke-warmness, yet we must remind them of the fact that *they deal with fire*. Surely no other than the sharp two-edged sword of the Spirit can reach the inward seat of corruption; but remember, carelessly handled, it may wound some vital part. And therefore; in the spirit of love, we must ever admonish the brethren never to preach the awful Gospel in a thoughtless and careless manner, but always with greatest caution and holy earnestness. For the work of preaching the Gospel is exceedingly delicate.

As to the question, How does the hardening occur? we simply say that every effort to be wise above that which is written must be opposed; being conscious of our own limitations, we prefer to watch lest our own soul fall under this terrible judgment, rather than to lose ourselves in the vain effort to analyze what we can not conceive of but in the unity of the holy mystery.

But this we may say: that in nature God offers us many illustrations of the fact that in its highest activity the same power can have opposite effects. Without rain the field parches and vegetation burns; but the same rain that elsewhere makes the grain to grow, in the ill-drained field causes the crop to decay. The same sun that warms the ground and matures the grain in one acre, will harden the ground and scorch the crop in another. The same food that nourishes and strengthens the healthful, burdens the weak and endangers the life of the sick. Knowledge is glorious, and at its fountain man loves to quench his thirst; but how appalling the corruption caused, either by its one-sided application or by an ill-proportioned estimate of its value! Holy and tender is the bond between husband and wife, mother and child; but is there any passion that has added more to the pollution and desecration of human life than this very desire for the married state and this longing to become a mother?

The law is universal that the highest excellency, failing to accomplish its purpose, reverses its action and causes destruction, pollution, and often hopeless ruin, in much greater



measure than if it were less excellent. And knowing this; is it strange that the same law prevails in the highest domain, viz., the Love of God?

Hardening is but the effect of the divine Love turned in the opposite direction. It cherishes or it consumes. It draws to heaven or it blights in hell.



XXXVII.

The Sin Against the Holy Ghost.

“The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”— *Matt. xii.*
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Altho the love of God, failing of its purpose, always causes hardening of heart, yet at times it has a still more terrible effect, for it may lead to *the sin against the Holy Ghost*.

The results of this sin are especially crushing and terrible. Christ’s words concerning it are startling and penetrating, casting the guilty soul into everlasting despair:

“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (*Matt. xii. 30-32*).

St. Mark puts it still more harshly: “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (*Mark iii. 28, 29, R. V.*).

St. John writes concerning it: “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for him that sins not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (*1 John v. 16-18*).

And St. Paul writes: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to, be burned” (*Heb. vi. 4-8*). Such cutting words would perplex the soul, if he had not added: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, tho we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name” (*vs. 9, 10*).

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They are words of comfort, which, however, do not detract from the dead earnestness with which he speaks in the tenth chapter: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful