

CHAPTER IX

MEN, THE CATEGORY OF ABOMINATIONS

We are naturally inclined to look with tolerance on our own category. Consequently, we have acquired a mindset that facilitates overlooking the significance of Jesus' use of this word, men, and the category it defines. The fact is that when he used this word in the course of his teaching, he generally defined a category that is utterly hostile to him and to the Father.

- Beware of men (Matthew 10:17)!
- Woe to you when all men speak well of you (Luke 6:26)!
- What ever is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God (Luke 16:15)!
- I do not receive glory from men (John 5:41).
- Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets (Luke 6:22,23).

A consideration of these few selections from among his utterances quickly illustrates the point. He viewed men, the general category, as utterly hostile to himself and to God. As indicated by Luke 6:22 above, he viewed this hostility as inevitably directed at exceptional men and women, the disciples who took his name and bore witness to his gospel. He prophesied that his disciples would be cast out of the synagogue and, as one who was cast out of the church, I can vouch for the accuracy of this prophecy. I grieved at the time, for I did not understand how such a thing could happen when all I had done was to bear witness for him. Now, I understand and I rejoice!

The Parable of Salt

Sometimes, when the implication as to the nature of mankind is not obvious in a particular utterance of Jesus, supplying it brings clarity to and otherwise difficult passage. The Parable of Salt is an example from the Sermon on the Mount, immediately following his utterance about being blessed when men revile us:

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men (Matthew 5:13).

He identifies his disciples as the salt. But they are salt that, to men, has lost its taste. Or rather, they have become unacceptable to men and are good only for persecution – to be trod under foot by men.

The Hostility Explained

The innate hostility of men toward Jesus and all who bear witness to him in truth is easy to explain. Human beings love life. They love life more than anything else in all creation, and all their institutions are founded on the love of life. The state or the nation exists to protect and defend life and to glorify it so that words and acts of disloyalty are quickly branded as treason, with the severest penalties applied. How much greater the hostility, how much more rapid the conflagration of hatred, when the disloyalty is not directly to the nation but to the very principle that under girds the nation and the whole of civilization – life and the love of life?

Churchmen and churchwomen are seldom exceptions, for their institution, no less than others, is founded on the love of life. When the pastor delivers the funeral oration over the deceased sister and he wants to praise her memory in the most laudable fashion, he says of her, "She loved life!" So dark is his vision, so blind to the truth of Jesus is he, that in the very act of issuing what he considers to be the highest praise, he has condemned himself; and if the praise is appropriate, he has announced the eternal condemnation of the deceased person.

The conflagration is inevitable when the Truth meets this darkness that hovers over the world of men. It is like a lighted match meeting gasoline. To preach the Great Principle of Jesus in the hearing of men means rejection, exclusion, casting out, persecution and bitter hatred. One is seen as a traitor to life, which is the most precious possession of men, and one deserves the severest penalties. Such a one must be silenced ere his words infect the minds of others and they incline to his treason. So men sought to silence Jesus with a cross, not understanding that his words had already seeded the world. The words are there, in the heart of the gospels, so that no one can avoid them and there is no excuse for ignoring them.

No Neutrals

There are no neutrals and there is no neutral ground. On the one hand there is only the little flock of disciples (the sheep who hear his voice, John 10:3,27) and on the other hand there is the one huge category, men (or men and women). Jesus expressed this sharp division in a very concise manner. The disciple, John, once said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name and we forbade him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said:

Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink, because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward (Mark 9:38-41).

This leaves no place for undecided persons. The one who is not against Jesus and his disciples must be for them. This can be explained only if the issue is so offensive that no one can fail to take an active position. So Jesus gives an example, the giving of a cup of water to a disciple who bears the name of Jesus. This action is of such a decisive nature that no one can do it unless he or she has become a disciple. Only then can one take a positive stance for Jesus before a world of human beings that he offends and enrages. Remember this cup of water, as we will come back to it shortly.

So, He that is not against us is for us. That is clear enough, but Jesus was not content to say that only. To avoid any misunderstanding whatsoever, he also spoke the same word in reverse.

He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters (Matthew 9:30).

No, there are surely no neutrals, and that can only be because the message of Jesus is so utterly offensive to humans.

Identification of Disciples

This matter has yet another dimension, which is that of identification. Here is the relevant utterance:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me (John 13:20).

Or again, we have this witness from the synoptics:

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (Matthew 10:40-42).

Note again, that cup of water! But do you see how the identification runs? Whoever receives Jesus receives God who sent him, and whoever receives a disciple of his, anyone whom he sends, also receives Jesus and God the Father! So intimately identified are the disciples whom Jesus sends, and Jesus whom the Father sent, with the Father, that to receive a disciple is to receive the Father. And of course it works backwards just as well. Whoever rejects a disciple whom Jesus sends rejects Jesus, and also rejects the Father who sent him. Were it not so, there would be no basis for reward for one who receives a disciple, even so much as giving him a cup of cold water – or for the condemnation of one who refuses to receive the disciple or give him a cup of water. But the implication is unavoidable, that to give a disciple a cup of water qualifies one to receive the reward of a disciple, just as if he were a disciple, one whom Jesus has sent! A further implication is unavoidable – a person who has never had an association with the disciples of Jesus is challenged to either receive or reject by the request for a cup of water! On this basis the one who was not a disciple receives the reward of a disciple – salvation! As one who has received a disciple, he is judged as a disciple.

The Significance of the Cup of Water

Jesus chose the cup of water very deliberately, for a single cup of water is of little value in the general scheme of things. Potable water was not abundant in Jesus' Israel, but wherever there was a good well or a cool, clear spring, there was good water to drink and people drank from it freely so it was not an expensive proposition. Of course, apart from its null monetary value it is of much value to a thirsty person. But like the water Jesus received from the Samaritan woman at the well, to provide it is no sacrifice. Therefore, one's great reward for giving the water does not arise from its direct cost to the giver, which is negligible. How is it possible that one can gain so much from a simple act that costs one nothing? Presumably, the one who gives the water and the disciple who receives the water thereafter part and everything is the same as if nothing has happened.

Or is it? No, nothing can ever be the same because people are watching. And when a neighbor sees what has happened – he has seen one whom he recognizes as a disciple of Jesus come into the house of his neighbor and leave refreshed – this cannot go unreported. So he rushes out into the street and begins an uproar, shouting up and down to all who can hear, "My neighbor here has just received one of those Jesus people!" Then a crowd gathers demanding to know if it is true, because this cannot pass. When the accused acknowledges what he has done, we can only guess what the penalty might be. Days, weeks, months in the stocks? Prison? Stoning? Ostracism? Crucifixion? Burning at the stake? All because of a cup of water? No, it is because the offender has received a disciple of Jesus, has refreshed him or her, has aided and abetted

PAUL: THE STRANGER

him or her, one of those abominable persons who go about preaching the hatred of life, how one cannot please God unless one hates life; how the love of life is condemnation before God. That is the issue rather than the giving of water to a thirsty person. But under the circumstances, the giving of the water identifies one with Jesus in the eyes of the world of men and also (interesting agreement) in the eyes of Jesus! Do you begin to see why Jesus characterized men as a category of abominations opposed to the Father.

Identification by Hearing the Word

There is another key to identification with Jesus, one even less costly in monetary terms, if that is possible, than the cup of water. That is, one identifies with Jesus simply by hearing his words:

Whoever hears you hears me (Luke 10:16).

So we can presume that whoever has given a cup of water to a disciple of Jesus has also heard what he has to say. He has received the proclamation of the words of Jesus, including the Great Principle (John 12:25). Then he has given him a cup of water anyway! It is the words that are so offensive to the world that no man can be neutral to them. This is the litmus test of the Spirit in a person – can he or she hear, really listen and hear, the words of Jesus? If they can, then according to Jesus, they are his sheep, for his sheep hear his voice. What, then, according to Jesus, is the state of those who refuse to hear him, to really listen and absorb his message and rejoice therein? The issue is not only one of hearing the words of Jesus but also of *parentage*.

They (the Jews) answered him, "Abraham is our Father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. You do what your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of fornication, we have one Father, even God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (John 8:39-44).

There you have it. The offense, the horrendous abomination to men, is the word of Jesus that he brought forth from God and that is therefore uniquely the word of God. Men cannot bear to hear this word that incorporates the Great Principle as its foundation. There was never any doubt in the mind of Jesus that men would kill him because of the inflammatory nature of the word he spoke. These are the things that must have been in his mind when he sent out the twelve to preach the kingdom in the cities that he was about to visit:

And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you [or listen to your words](#), shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorra than for that town. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:11-16).

Note the highlighted phrase. That is the issue that divides the sheep from the wolves. Again, Jesus has chosen metaphors that allow for no neutrals. In this world of human beings there are only two categories, the sheep and the wolves. As it is the nature of all wolves to devour sheep, so it is the nature of mankind to devour the disciples of Jesus. Between the sheep and the wolves there is no place for a neutral wolf that has no taste for sheep. Does this seem harsh to you? Remember that the metaphor is that of Jesus.

The Cup of Water at the Judgment

We have established that Jesus identifies with his disciples in the world so that whoever receives a disciple receives Jesus. We have also established that whoever receives a disciple will receive the reward of a disciple, just as whoever receives a prophet will receive the reward of a prophet or whoever receives a righteous man will receive the reward of a righteous man. The one doing the receiving is therefore identified with the disciple whom he receives, for he receives the same reward – and by receiving the disciple, he or she has received Jesus who sent the disciple, and God the Father who sent Jesus. Also, it cannot have escaped your notice that these considerations are critical to preparation for the final judgment of the sheep.

Conversely, any one who rejects the disciples of Jesus also rejects Jesus; and whoever rejects Jesus rejects the Father who sent him. In Matthew 10:11-16, quoted above, we see that whoever rejects the disciple of Jesus and refuses to listen to his words has a dim prospect on that day, for Jesus plainly stated:

It shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorra than for that town!

Further, the other passages quoted above illustrate the reception of a disciple (or the rejection) by the example of giving to such a one a cup of water (or by refusing to give such a cup). Now, when Jesus came to describe the details of the judgment at the last day, we should expect him to have preserved a place for the cup of water, and we are not disappointed:

When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left (Matthew 25:31-33).

With this introduction he has set the stage and described the scene as one in which all who come before him on that day will be divided into only two groups, the sheep and the goats. There is no third category, no intermediate group of felons who might be worthy of a lesser punishment, neither any intermediate group of innocents who might be worthy of a lesser reward. The sheep we have met before, for they are the same as those metaphorized earlier as sheep in the scenario that included only sheep and wolves. But on the Day of Judgment there are no wolves in addition to the sheep – only goats! Clearly, the persons are the same, for they belong to the only category other than the sheep.

The wolves have become goats! With but a little thought we can agree that this is a reasonable transition. We are seated in the Great Assize (or standing), where absolutely every individual is powerless before him who is Judge of all and Lord of all. In this picture, the wolves are no threat to anyone; they are utterly in His power. They have been defanged and declawed and can only tremble before him who is seated upon the glorious throne. Further, great numbers of these wolves, in their lifetimes when they were indeed wolves complete with fangs and claws, nevertheless masqueraded as sheep – being wolves in sheep's clothing. These are more accurately identified as the "reverends" and their disciples that, in the name of Jesus, have led multitudes astray by preaching another gospel so that their followers are tragically unprepared for the Great Day of Judgment. Therefore these wolves, who in sheep's clothing were indeed, in their lifetimes, by appearances, sheep-like, sort of, have become also sheep-like, sort of, on that Great Day – specifically, goats!

The great drama continues to unfold as the Judge speaks from his glorious throne:

Then the King will say to those at his right hand (the sheep), "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was

PAUL: THE STRANGER

hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

This wonderful news is clearly a complete surprise to the sheep-like ones, which respond in amazement with the question,

Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee (Matthew 25:37-39)?

Then Jesus continues,

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say unto you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Did I not tell you we would see that cup of water again? "I was thirsty and you gave me drink." When? "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." That single cup of water identifies one as a disciple. Even though it was given to the least of the disciples, it nevertheless qualifies one to stand among the sheep – on the Last Day – and to receive the reward of the righteous for it was given to Jesus . . . "you did it to me!" Here Jesus shows that the drink of water is only one of many things one may do to aid and abet his disciples (and himself). Included are feeding him when he is hungry, welcoming him when he is a stranger, clothing him when he is naked, visiting him when he is sick or in prison. Indeed, if only giving him to drink a cup of cold water qualifies one for the eternal blessing, then anything else we can do to assist, aid, abet or minister to a disciple of Jesus likewise qualifies us to receive the eternal blessing.

What of the goats? Jesus immediately proceeded to address them (I will not quote him here, you doubtless know what he said), but they every one are cast into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. They are terribly astonished and are led to understand that it is all because, when he was thirsty, **they gave him no drink**, neither fed him, clothed him, welcomed him nor visited him. Doubtless these goats will come trotting into the Great Assize with confidence and great anticipation; they will leave in utter dismay.

Clearly, this eternal distinction between those who inherit the kingdom and those who are cast into the lake of fire has more behind it than a cup of water. We are not speaking here of having the preacher home for Sunday dinner. The reason can only be that feeding the preacher has no consequences. Who cares, apart from other families in the church who might have to do it if you don't? One even gets a little respect from one's fellow church members and from the community by thus taking an active part in supporting the church and ministering to the preacher. But when one really has Jesus home to dinner – in the person of a genuine disciple – there will be serious consequences. It will be like an American feeding a Communist during the Cold War or aiding and abetting a Nazi during the hot one. Therefore the mere preacher cannot be among the sheep, and the proof of it is that giving him a drink of water or food to eat, or whatever, has no consequences – EXCEPT ON THAT DAY!

The Basis of These Acts of Charity

It is important to acknowledge here three things that are often misunderstood. First, these acts of charity Jesus set forth as the basis of judgment are not, as so many presume, general acts of charity. They are not such acts as giving a drink to a beggar, donating clothing to the poor, visiting inmates at the county jail or feeding disaster victims from a Red Cross Emergency Response Vehicle. Now, these are good things to do. Jesus would approve of them since they manifest love for neighbor and his disciples have faithfully performed them throughout the

MEN: THE CATEGORY OF ABOMINATIONS

centuries. But there is no mention of them on Judgment Day.

The acts that are the focus of judgment are acts of ministry to Jesus himself, as he is identified with his disciples. "I was thirsty, and you gave me drink." Or, "you gave me no drink." Apart from this identification with Jesus, there is no Judgment Day benefit from any charitable act. Jesus is not to be identified with the general population of prisons, or hospitals, or streets, or poor houses or disaster victims. No, for his sheep, those who stand before him as the sheep on that day are only those who have heard his voice so as to receive him while they were in the world. One does not have to search only among Jesus' disciples to find people who are charitable towards their fellows. Wherever human beings exist in civil society, whatever the religion, nation, country, or type of government, there are many kindly persons who devote themselves to general good works. Christendom has no monopoly on such works, and they are not a factor on the Last Day.

No Testimony to One's Faith

The second thing to acknowledge is that on Judgment Day there will be no verbal testimony to one's faith. We will neither be asked nor told what we believed in the world nor judged on the direct basis of faith. That does not imply that belief, or faith, is unimportant. To the contrary, it is because what we believed while in the world will be clear enough from what we did; and if we did not give him a drink for his thirst, it will have been because we were unwilling to receive his words. It is no matter what we may affirm as our faith. It will have been because we were in love with life and unwilling to accept the consequent threat to life. You say you believed in Jesus? Well, the demons also believed, and they trembled before him. No, according to Jesus himself, all will be judged solely by what we did while in this world. Baptism? Creed? Church membership? Confession of faith? They will never be mentioned. But did you give him that cup of water for his thirst or otherwise minister to him in his need? This is the only question we will have to face and the only judgment we will have to bear.

Only One Judgment Day and One Judgment

The third and last thing to acknowledge is that this picture of Judgment Day is the only judgment. There is not some other judgment day when we will be judged by our faith, our church, or by our general good works. No, it is all done on one great day when all nations will be gathered before him. No one is to be omitted so there is no one else to judge on some other day; this is the only judgment that is needed by anyone, so that there is no other judgment for these, on some other day.

Finally, the basis of eternal judgment as described by Jesus can be seen to rest on the Great Commandment/Great Principle Correlate. Our attitudes to God and to life in this world will establish our eternal destiny. If we love God we will want to go to him and we will therefore hate life. If we love life we will want to hold onto it and will be threatened by every threat to life. And we will hate God, for we will not want to go to him. At bottom, we are speaking of the simplest thing imaginable. All who, like the repentant Prodigal Son, want to go to the Father to inherit and enter into his Kingdom and Glory will do so. And they will act consistent with that desire while in the world by manifesting the hatred of life. All who do not want to go the Father will not be compelled. Fair enough? And they will act consistent with that desire while in the world by manifesting the love of life.

The question for of us to consider is this: What do we want, right now? It will not be wise to put off the consideration of this desire for some later day because this may be the day that a thirsty Jesus appears before us. So, what Jesus said to all, I can only repeat to you:

Beware of men!