**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 TIMOTHY-009**. **ONE WITNESS, MANY CONFESSORS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"12. Thou ... hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 13. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, 14. That thou keep this commandment... ."*

*1 Timothy 6:12-14*

You will observe that a good confession, or rather the good confession, is said here to have been made both by Timothy and by Christ. But you will observe also that whilst the subject-matter is the same, the action of Timothy and Jesus respectively is different. The former professes, or rather confesses, the good confession; the latter witnesses. There must be some reason for the significant variation of terms to indicate that the relation of Timothy and Jesus to the good confession which they both made was, in some way, a different one, and that though what they said was identical, their actions in saying it were different.

Then there is another point of parallelism to be noticed. Timothy made his profession before many witnesses, but the Apostle calls to his remembrance, and summons up before the eye of his imagination, a more august tribunal than that before which he had confessed his faith, and says that he gives him charge before God (for the same word is used in the original in both verses), who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus. So the earthly witnesses of the man's confession dwindle into insignificance when compared with the heavenly ones. And upon these thoughts is based the practical exhortation, Keep the commandment without spot. So, then, we have three things: the great Witness and His confession, the subordinate confessors who echo His witness, and the practical issue that comes out of both thoughts.

**I. We have the great Witness and His confession.**

Now, you will remember, perhaps, that if we turn to the Gospels, we find that all of them give the subject-matter of Christ's confession before Pilate, as being that He was the King of the Jews. But the Evangelist John expands that conversation, and gives us details which present a remarkable verbal correspondence with the words of the Apostle here, and must suggest to us that, though John's Gospel was not written at the date of this Epistle, the fact that is enshrined for us in it was independently known by the Apostle Paul.

For, if I may for a moment recall the incident to you, you will remember that when Pilate put to the Saviour the question, Art Thou a King? our Lord, before He would answer, took pains to make quite clear the sense in which the judge asked Him of His royal state. For He said, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me? If it is your Roman idea of a king, the answer must be, "No." If it is the Jewish Messianic idea, the answer must be, "Yes." I must know first what the question means, in the mind of the questioner, before I answer it. And when Pilate brushes aside Christ's question, with a sort of impatient contempt, and returns to the charge, What hast Thou done? our Lord, whilst He makes the claim of sovereignty, takes care to make it in such a way as to show that Rome need fear nothing from Him, and that His dominion rested not upon force. My Kingdom is not of this world. And then, when Pilate, like a practical Roman, bewildered with all these fine-spun distinctions, sweeps them impatiently out of the field, and comes back to Yes, or No; are you a King? our Lord gives a distinct affirmative answer, but at once soars up into the region where Pilate had declined to follow Him: To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth. Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the good confession. And His confession was His royalty, His relation to the truth, and His pre-existence. To this end was I born, and the next clause is no mere tautology, nor a non-significant parallelism, and for this cause came I into the world. Then He was before He came, and birth to Him was not the beginning of being, but the beginning of a new relation.

So, then, out of this great word of our text, which falls into line with a great many other words of the New Testament, we may gather important and significant truths with regard to two things, the matter and the manner of Christ's witnessing. You remember how the same Apostle John--for whom that word witness has a fascination in all its manifold applications--in that great vision of the Apocalypse, when to his blessed sight the vision of the Master was once given, extols Him as the faithful witness, and the First-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. And you may remember how our Lord Himself, after His conversation with Nicodemus, says, We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen, and how again, in answer to the taunts of the Jews, He takes the taunt as the most intimate designation of the peculiarity of His person and of His work, when He says, I am one that bear witness of Myself. So, then, we have to interpret his declaration before Pilate in the light of all these other sayings, and to remember that He who said that He came to bear witness to the truth, said also, I am the truth, and therefore that his great declaration that He was the witness-bearer to the truth is absolutely synonymous with His other declaration that He bears witness of Himself.

Now, here we come upon one of the great peculiarities of Christ as a religious teacher. The new thing, the distinctive peculiarity, the differentia between Him and all other teachers, lies just here, that His theme is not so much moral or religious principles, as His own nature and person. He was the most egotistical man that ever lived on the face of the earth, with an egotism only to be accounted for, if we believe, as He Himself said, that in His person was the truth that He proclaimed, and that when He witnessed to Himself He revealed God. And thus He stands, separate from all other teachers, by this, that He is His own theme and His own witness.

So much for the matter of the good confession to which we need only add here its pendant in the confession before the High Priest. To the representative of the civil government He said, I am a king, and then, as I remarked, He soared up into regions where no Roman official could rise to follow Him, and to the representative of the Theocratic government He said, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven. These two truths, that He is the Son of God, who by His witness to the truth, that is, Himself, lays the foundations of a Monarchy which shall stretch far further than the pinions of the Roman eagles could ever fly, and that he is the Son of Man who, exalted to the right hand of God, is to be the Judge of mankind--these are the good confessions to which the Lord witnessed.

Then with regard to the manner of His witness. That brings us to another of the peculiarities of Christ's teaching. I have said that He was the most egotistical of men. I would say, too, that there never was another who clashed down in the front of humanity such tremendous assertions, with not the faintest scintilla of an attempt to prove them to our understandings, or commend them by any other plea than this, Verily, verily, I say unto you!

A witness does not need to argue. A witness is a man who reports what he has seen and heard. The whole question is as to his veracity and competency. Jesus Christ states it for the characteristic of His work, We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen. His relation to the truth which He brings to us is not that of a man who has thought it out, who has been brought to it by experience, or by feeling, or by a long course of investigation; still less is it the relation which a man would bear to a truth that he had learnt from others originally, however much he had made it his own thereafter: but it is that of one who is not a thinker, or a learner, or a reasoner, but who is simply an attester, a witness. And so He stands before us, and says, The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life. Believe Me, and believe the words, for no other reason, primarily, than because I speak them. In these two respects, then, the matter and the manner of His witness, He stands alone, and we have to bow before Him and say, Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth. Before Pontius Pilate He witnessed a good confession.

**II. We have here suggested to us the subordinate confessors who echo the Lord's witness.**

It is a matter of no consequence when, and before whom, this Timothy professed his good profession. It may have been at his baptism. It may have been when he was installed in his office. It may have been before some tribunal of which we know nothing. That does not matter. The point is that a Christian man is to be an echo of the Lord's good confession, and is to keep within the lines of it, and to be sure that all of it is echoed in his life. Christ has told us what to say, and we are here to say it over again. Christ has witnessed; we are to confess. Our relation to that truth is different from His. We hear it; He speaks it. We accept it; He reveals it. We are influenced by it; He is it. He brings it to the world on His own authority; we are to carry it to the world on His.

Be sure that you Christian men are echoes of your Master. Be sure that you reverberate the note that He struck. Be sure that all its music is repeated by you And take care that you neither fall short of it, nor go beyond it, in your faith and in your profession. Echoes of Christ--that is the highest conception of a Christian life.

But though there is all the difference between the Witness and the confessors, do not let us forget that, if we are truly Christian, there is a very deep and blessed sense in which we, too, may witness what we have seen and heard. A Christian preacher of any sort--and by that I mean, not merely a man who stands in a pulpit, as I do, but all Christian people, in their measure and degree--will do nothing by professing the best profession, unless that profession sounds like the utterance of a man who speaks that he knows, and who can say, that which our eyes have beheld, that which we have handled, of the Word of life, we make known unto you. And so, by the power of personal experience speaking out in our lives, and by the power of it alone, as I believe, will victories be won, and the witness of Jesus Christ be repeated in the world. Christian men and women, the old saying which was addressed by a prophet to Israel is more true, more solemnly true of us, and presses on us with a heavier weight of obligation, as well as lifts us up into a position of greater blessedness: Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord. That is what you and I are here for--to bear witness, different and yet like to, the witness borne by the Lord. We have all to do that, by words, though not only by them. That is the obligation that a great many Christian people take very lightly. That yoke of Jesus Christ many of us slip our necks out of. If He has witnessed, you have to confess. But some of you carry your Christianity in secret, and button your coats over the cockade that should tell whose soldiers you are, and are ashamed, or too shy, or too nervous, or too afraid of ridicule, or not sufficiently sure of your own grip of the Master, to confess Him before men. I beseech you remember that a Christian man is no Christian unless with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, as well as with the heart belief is exercised unto righteousness.

**III. Lastly, we have here the practical issue of all this.**

I charge thee before God, who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, that thou keep the commandment without spot. The commandment, of course, may be used in a specific sense, referring to what has just been enjoined, but more probably we are to regard the same thing which, considered in its relation to Jesus Christ, is His testimony, as being, in its relation to us, His commandment. For all Christ's gospel of revelation that He has made of Himself to the world, is meant to influence, not only belief and feeling, but conduct and character as well. All the New Testament, in so far as it is a record of what Christ is, and thereby a declaration of what God is, is also for us an injunction as to what we ought to be. The whole Gospel is law, and the testimony is commandment, and we have to keep it, as well as to confess it. Let me put the few things that I have to say, under this last division of my subject, the practical issue, into the shape of three exhortations, not for the sake of seeming to arrogate any kind of superiority, but for the sake of point and emphasis.

Let the life bear witness to the confession. What is the use of Timothy's standing there, and professing himself a Christian before many witnesses if, when he goes out into the world, his conduct gives the lie to his creed, and he lives like the men that are not Christians? Back up your confession by your conduct, and when you say I believe in Jesus Christ, let your life be as true an echo of His life as your confession is of His testimony. Else we shall come under the condemnation, Nothing but leaves, and shall fall under the punishment of the continuance of unfruitfulness, which is our crime as well as our punishment. There is a great deal more done by consistent living for, and by inconsistent living against, the truth of the Gospel, than by all the words of all the preachers in the world. Your faults go further, and tell more, than my sermons, and your Christian characters will go further than all the eloquence of the most devoted preachers. There is no voice nor language, where their sound is not heard. Their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Again, let the thought of the Great Witness stimulate us. He, too, took His place by our sides, though with the differences that I have pointed out, yet with resemblances which bring Him very near us. He, too; knew what it was to stand amongst those who shrugged their shoulders, and knit their brows at His utterances, and turned away from Him, calling Him sometimes dreamer, sometimes revolutionary, sometimes blasphemer, and now and then a messenger of good tidings and a preacher of the gospel of peace. He knows all our hesitations, all our weaknesses, all our temptations. He was the first of the martyrs, in the narrower sense of the word. He is the leader of the great band of witnesses for God. Let us stand by His side, and be like Him in our bearing witness in this world.

Again, let the thought of the great tribunal stimulate us. I give thee charge before God, who quickeneth all things--and who therefore will quicken you--and before Jesus Christ, that thou keep this commandment. Jesus, who witnessed to the truth, witnesses, in the sense of beholding and watching, us, knowing our weakness and ready to help us. The faithful witness, and the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth, is by us, as we witness for Him. And so, though we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the saints in the past who have witnessed for God, and been witnessed to by Him, we have to turn away from them, and look off from all others, unto Jesus. And we may, like the first of the noble army of martyrs, see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing--started to His feet, to see and to help Stephen--at the right hand of God.

Brethren, let us listen to His witness, let us accept it, setting to our seals that God is true. Then let us try to echo it back by word, and to attest our confession by our conduct, and then we may comfort ourselves with the great word, He that confesseth Me before men, Him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven.