

The Shining Light of Truth

"The scriptures are able to make us wise, which the traditions of 'divines' are not. Let us then come to these scriptures, for we have the assurance that he who seeks shall find. But we must seek by the light of scripture, and not permit that light to be obscured by high thoughts and vain imaginations which exalt themselves against the knowledge of God ... To the Bible then let us turn, as to 'a light shining in a dark place', and with humility, teachableness, and independence of mind, let us diligently inquire into the things which it reveals for the obedience and confirmation of faith" (Elpis Israel, p.8).

The Fallacies of the Flesh

The individual who earnestly seeks a sound comprehension of Divine truth must accept the reality that "the scriptures can do everything for us in relation to the light." Brother Thomas clearly stated this on p. 6 of *Elpis Israel*. He assured his readers: "Search the scriptures with the teachableness of a little child, and thy labour will not be in vain ..." At the same time he warned against the fleshly fallacies promulgated by the 'divines' of christendom. "Cast away to the owls and to the bats the traditions of men", which he described as "mountains of rubbish" which have "served the purpose of a dark and barbarous age".

In this, the mind of Bro. Thomas was in harmony with that of the Lord Jesus. In challenging the truth-nullying religion of the Pharisees, the Lord told them: "Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men ... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition ..." (Mark 7:8-9). In "laying aside" the Word of God in favour of "tradition", the Pharisees were effectively

rejecting the Truth, as do the 'divines' of christendom. Fleshly authority, or the product of man's own reasoning, was held in higher esteem by the Pharisees than the commandments of God. The "tradition of men" was anathema to the Lord, when such came into conflict with God's Word. "Full well," said the Lord, "ye reject the commandment of God". The words "full well" should be literally rendered "handsomely". The statement may appear odd, unless it is understood that the Lord used the term with heavy irony. Thus, his words should be understood to mean: "How noble is your conduct, in rejecting God's way, replacing it with your own tradition". The Pharisees thought themselves above other men: they were proud, conceited, disdainful of the attitude of others, supercilious in their self-assurance. They imagined their conduct to be a "noble" reflection of true piety. How deluded they were.

Positive Perception

Brother Thomas, with his mature grasp of the teaching of scripture,

was able to recognise these characteristics in the clergy of Christendom. This is not a matter of negative thinking on his part. On the contrary, his perception enabled him to give a positive warning to all willing to hear him. His words meant: Decisively recognise the destructive influence of error, and therefore seek out the Truth and value it accordingly. The Word of God categorically upholds this position: "Through knowledge shall the just be delivered ... No lie is of the truth" (Prov. 11:9; 1 John 2:21).

To endorse such an attitude towards the Word of God, requires absolute integrity, and a total lack of personal self-interest. Concerning the clergy of his day, Bro. Thomas forthrightly and courageously appealed to them: "Let them leave the fat things of the apostasy to those who mind 'earthly things'; and let them put on the whole armour of God, and go forth among the people with the two-edged sword of the Spirit, and do battle for the truth ..." Why should such a challenging entreaty be necessary? So that "the spirit of the truth" might "enter into them, and lead them into its liberty and fraternity; that at the coming of the Son of Man in celestial majesty and power, they may share with him in his joy, and inherit the kingdom of God with eternal glory" (*Author's Preface*, p. 19). Could any motive be more commendable? Could any aspiration, expressed for others, be more unimpeachable? So far as we are aware, Brother Thomas displayed malice towards none; repudiating only the systems men represented. He wrote: "Bible religion requires a man to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, which in these times cannot be done without upheaving the very foundations of the self-complacent,

self-glorifying, and self-laudatory communions of the antipapal constitution of things ... It is true that no man has a right to worship God as he pleases. This is a Protestant fallacy. *Man has a right to worship God only in the way God has Himself appointed*" (p. 7).

Keeping in the Way of Truth

Brother Thomas, is stressing three things: The first, that the Truth is the Truth, and must be understood and defended without conceding to what might be termed "middle ground"; the second is that there is little point in being numbered against those who "protest" against Catholicism (Protestants) whilst continuing to endorse attitudes towards the scriptures which nullify their teaching; the third is that God alone is the judge of that which is acceptable worship and that which is not.

With such a strong conviction based entirely upon his understanding of the Bible, Bro. Thomas knew that he stood upon a firm foundation.

Was he too rigid in holding such a belief?

By no means. On the contrary, such a disposition ensured that his search after truth, together with an unswerving loyalty thereto, kept him in *the way* of the truth. Having cast aside personal self-interest, and with an unequivocal sense of integrity, he became single-minded in his endeavours to candidly and lucidly expound the Word of God to all who might be willing to hearken.

God's Revelation, Not Man's Idealism

Thus, chapter one of part one emphatically shows that, apart from God's revelation to mankind through His Word — in contrast to man's philosophical *interpretation* of

religion — the human race would remain in spiritual darkness and without hope. Therefore, unless men and women are prepared to let God's Word speak to *them*, and direct their spiritual reasoning, they will remain in a state where they deny themselves true wisdom and an understanding of the way which leads to eternal salvation.

Upon this foundation, then, Bro. Thomas, in chapter two, takes his readers back to the beginning. The chapter deals with the creation, the formation of man and woman, the beauty and glory of Eden as a type of the "paradise of God" which will exist in the future Kingdom Age, the two significant trees in the garden, and the condition of man in his original state.

It is of interest to consider that Charles Darwin published his "Origin of Species" ten years after *Elpis Israel*, and that Brother Thomas wrote the Preface to the fourth edition in 1866. In the latter, he comments that in that year, 17 years after correcting the proofs for the first edition, he was "agreeably surprised" that "he had so few corrections to make." A perusal of the Preface to the fourth edition should convince the reader that any suggestion that Brother Thomas was in any way influenced by the theories of Darwin cannot be sustained.

The Sabbath: Past, Present and Future

The fourteen-page exposition concerning the Sabbath shows a remarkable depth of comprehension of the subject. His perception regarding some of the lessons to be learned is also evident. For example: The Israelites "were joyfully to devote themselves to the way of the Lord. They were not simply to abstain from work, yawning and grumbling

over the tediousness of the day ... Their pleasure was to consist in doing what the Lord required ... Such an observance as this implies a faithful mind and a gracious disposition as the result of *knowing the truth*" (p. 14). Bro. Thomas stressed that "the observance of the seventh day was obligatory only upon the Israelites as long as the Mosaic code was in force" and then pointed out that when the sabbath is reintroduced in the Kingdom Age it will be kept on the eighth day and not the seventh, as in the Mosaic dispensation (p. 21).

The explanation given by Brother Thomas as to the basis for his reasoning upon this subject is most illuminating; not simply as expressive of his depth of understanding, but for his scriptural concept of Yahweh's seven-thousand-year plan for the earth, which comprehends an overall understanding of the entire Divine purpose. His thoughts are beautifully summarised with these words: "That sabbath God requires sinful men to observe is to *cease from the works of the flesh* as completely as He rested from the work of creation on the seventh day, that they may enter into the millennial rest that remaineth for the people of God" (p.20). In one sentence he linked the unfolding of the Deity's purpose, from the creation to the Mosaic era, to the present epoch, and onward into the Millennial Age.

Recognising the importance of these matters will provide Yahweh's servants with a clearer comprehension of the Divine Master Plan for the Ages, and thereby strengthen their faith, preparing them for the coming of earth's future King. The regular reading and study of *Elpis Israel* with Bible in hand, will prove of great benefit to this end.

— J. Ullman.