

Read all of II Chronicles chapter 19
while studying this lesson.

CHRISTIAN ALLIANCES WITH WICKED MEN.

And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer . . . said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? — 2 CHRON. xix. 2.

IT is wonderful at how many points the biographies of the Old Testament touch modern life.

“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?” Such is the reproof addressed by the prophet to the king of Judah. Jehoshaphat seems to have been a good sort of man, as the world goes, — better than the average of his age. “Good things are found in thee,” is the kindly judgment of the prophet about him. But he was an ambitious man. He wanted to stand well with the world. He aspired to the glory of a splendid reign. To promote his political aspirations, he sought alliance with one of the most impious princes of the time, and an apostate from the true religion. As the monarch of a theocratic government he could hardly have done a worse thing.

Jehoshaphat was a representative man, — representative of a large class of good men in every

age, who for selfish ends choose their friends from among the irreligious and the worldly.

1. The friendship of wicked men is *one of the most dangerous social temptations to which Christians are subjected*. Modern life in cities illustrates it with special force.

The *wealth* of the world is very largely in the hands of men who are not the friends of Christ. Wealth is a great power. It commands respect. Honestly gained and properly used, it deserves respect. It is not necessarily a sin to desire the friendship of the rich.

In many communities *intelligence and culture* also are possessed mainly by the irreligious. Religion often thrives best amongst the poor and the illiterate.

“Not many rich or noble called,
Not many great or wise:
They whom God makes his kings and priests
Are poor in human eyes.”

They who heard Christ gladly were the common people. “Have any of the rulers believed on him?” His chosen apostles were humble tradesmen and fisher-folk.

Irreligious men are often very bright men. They are brilliant conversers, ready wits, racy in thought and speech. Even profane men are forcible talkers. The society of such men is often fascinating. Fun, repartees, humorous anecdote, though not forbidden by the Christian religion, it

must be conceded, are not its strong points. Irreligion often seems to have a monopoly of them. The joy of a godly life does not depend largely on the risible faculties. The young, therefore, often find powerful allurements to irreligious friendships in the social brilliancy of those who are living without God.

The *interests of business* sometimes create a similar peril. Two men once took the lease of a hotel. One was a professing Christian, the other not. The enterprise threatened to bankrupt them both. Nothing could save them but the secret and illegal sale of intoxicating drinks. The Christian partner's faith was not strong enough to withstand the resolute selfishness of the other.

In a higher circle of life *professional success* often tempts a young man of aspiring mind to seek to ally himself with those who love not God, and care nothing for his cause. Many years ago a young lawyer, who afterwards became a member of the House of Representatives of the United States, was a member of an obscure church in the mountains of New England. So long as he remained nestled among the hills, he was faithful to the religion of his fathers. But his professional prospects required him to migrate to the metropolis. There he found himself in a new world. The faith of his childhood was unpopular. Very largely it was the faith of the poor and the middling classes of society. The wealth, the culture, the

social rank, the professional prestige, of the community, were compacted in almost solid phalanx against it. Prejudice against it ran so high, that the churches in which it was preached were branded with opprobrious nicknames. Their worshippers were hustled in the street.

It was a severe temptation to the youthful and brilliant lawyer, who may have felt that he had the making of a great statesman in his brain. The necessities of his professional future—yes, of his professional usefulness—seemed to compel him to abandon the old faith of the Pilgrims, and to seek association with the magnates of the bar and bench by casting in his lot with those who denied Christ. He fell before the temptation. From that time to his death, his religious faith, though probably not theoretically changed, was clouded over, and practically buried under his professional alliances.

This form of trial is often not only severe, but insidious. The wiles of a crafty adversary seldom create one more plausible and alluring. There seems to be no escape from it, and often nothing fatal in it. Men find themselves confronted by a compact and insurmountable wall of circumstance, which shuts them in and hedges them around. As they see things, no course is left to them, but to choose their friends from the secret or avowed enemies to the cross of Christ. Said an excellent Christian lady not long ago, "Almost my entire

circle of friends is made up of those who have no sympathy with my religion. In the city where I live, there are no others with whom I can associate on terms of social equality."

2. Of this trial of Christian principle, it should be further said, that *the Christian religion requires no narrow or ascetic seclusion from the world.* "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Such was the *sensible* prayer of our Lord for his disciples. No fanaticism here. It is our chief discipline for a better world, to learn to live as a good man should in this world.

A crystal is sometimes formed in the embrace of a boulder of granite. To clear it of its rough enclosure, and to bring its beautiful facets to the light, Nature submerges it in deep waters, shatters it by tempests, and abrades it by contact with stones and mud, and the rubbish of the sea. Thus a redeemed soul is by the plan of God immersed in the cares and toils and enticements and usefulness of a world of sin, so that by sheer resistance to evil, and abrasion with depravity, it may be polished to the transparent image of Him who made it.

The thing which Christian principle forbids is the seeking of worldly friendships and alliances for selfish ends, and to the peril of religious usefulness and religious character. Every Christian's good sense discerns the distinction, and acknowledges its reasonableness.

3. Yet the irreligious friendships of religious men *violate the ruling spirit of the Scriptures*. A deliberate invitation of this form of temptation is close akin to apostasy. Gloss it over as we may, — and very ingenious and winsome are the disguises by which a deceived conscience can adorn it, — gloss it over as we please, it is a policy of life which *starts wrong*. Therefore it threatens catastrophe in the end.

The Scriptures recognize but two grades of *caste* in this world, — the good and the bad; the righteous and the wicked; the friends of God and the enemies of God. In the incisive language of the New Testament, men are all either saints or sinners. In the world, not of the world; come ye out from among them; be ye separate; a royal priesthood; a peculiar people; strangers and pilgrims on earth, — such are the *mottoes* by which inspired wisdom indicates the followers of Christ. The very being of the Church is for the purpose of keeping alive and fresh in human thought that old distinction between saint and sinner. Between the two the great gulf is fixed. They drift asunder in this world, as they are to be kept asunder in the next world.

Now, a Christian who subjects his Christian faith to worldly policy in the choice of his associates in life strikes right athwart the whole range of scriptural command and admonition and exposition and example. No Christian can safely do that.

The statesman to whom I have referred, with all his brilliant ingenuity, did not escape the apparent wrecking of his religious faith on this rock. From the hour in which he deliberately abandoned the religious connections of his youth, the spirituality of his religious character declined. He was never afterwards known to the world as even a professing Christian. Though nominally such, he mingled with men for years, and they never knew it. He was practically a man of the world, a lover of the world, an honored leader of the world, worthy of all the dignities he received, and more, but an alien from the people of God. He lost his reverence for the Christian sabbath. He forsook, for long intervals, the Lord's table. Even to the laws of Christian morality he became treacherous. His veracity, his honesty, his temperance, his chastity, all were submerged in his intense and overmastering worldliness before he died.

Though, at the last, a few not very positive words on his death-bed left his Christian friends not utterly without hope that he died a penitent believer, yet his public career of more than forty years belied the hope. For the great distinctive ends of Christian living and usefulness, his life was a failure. It ended a blackened ruin of that which had a splendid beginning, and gave magnificent promise for the future.

4. This suggests that entangling alliances with

the world *often involve an immense sacrifice of Christian usefulness.*

A man cannot be greatly useful as a Christian without great positiveness of religious character. It lies in the very nature of our religion, that a man must believe it with his whole soul. He must give his whole being to it. In a divided heart it cannot live. One who tries the experiment pulls down with one hand what he builds up with the other. He drenches every sacred fire he kindles. He does not win the world to Christ. The world wins him.

Such a man is commonly a dead weight in the Church. If not that, he owes what good influence he has to other things than his religion. A spiritual power in the Church he is not, and cannot be. He never heads a forlorn hope on God's side of things. If he is even a silent looker-on in the conflict, and not an active opponent of the more spiritual developments of Christ's kingdom, that is the best that can be hoped for from him.

Such men are very apt to be opposers of revivals. In great awakenings they are ultra conservatives. Their instinct is to carp at or ignore such movements. The enemy of souls often finds in a group of such men his most efficient auxiliary. When at last death surprises them into a more truthful view of things, they often die mourning over a wasted and perverted life.

An old English proverb says, "He must have a

long spoon who would sup with the Devil." The saddest feature in the career of such men is that Satan most disastrously outwits them. They do not build as they think to build. They are beguiled, hoodwinked, led blindfold, to the loss of all that a child of God should hold most dear. They are Samsons: mighty, it may be, in resources of worldly prowess; great against foxes, lions, bears; but weaker than an infant in the lap of Delilah, and blind captives in the prison-house of Philistines.

5. Christian alliances with the wicked *do not command the respect of the very men for whose favor they are formed.* Men of the world are very keen in their judgments of Christian character. They know what is consistent Christian living, when they see it, as well as we do. Indeed, their theoretic ideal of a Christian life is commonly more exalted than that of men who are struggling to realize it. No other class of men are so prompt to tell us what they would do if they believed as we do, as those who believe nothing. An upright and downright Christian they always revere. In heart they make obeisance to him as to no other type of man. Do you not know a godless man who professes to have lost all faith in religion, but who makes exception of some one humble Christian woman, — his mother perhaps, or sister, or wife? "If ever human being gets to heaven, she will," is his testimony. That one life keeps open to his faith the celestial gates.

Said Walter Scott, on one occasion, to his daughter, — substantially, I quote from memory, — “I know this world; I have read many books; I have known many splendidly educated men in my time; but I declare to you that I have heard more lofty and noble sentiments from the lips of poor, uneducated men and women in times of trouble, than I ever met with elsewhere outside of the pages of the Bible.” Yes, the world reveres the honest principles of our religion in plain, honest lives.

By the same instinctive insight into facts, they recoil with contempt when they encounter men or women who sacrifice those principles to worldly policy or social ambitions. They never at heart trust such a man. They may use him as they do other tools; but they never love him in return, because they cannot trust him.

In religion, as in other things, few things command the respect of the world like courage. Fidelity to honest convictions, conformity of heart to the faith of the head, the struggle at least to make the heart tally with the profession, the world bows reverently to these things always. Men will bear to be browbeaten by an act of religious fidelity better than to be fawned upon. They tolerate a fanatic sooner than a traitor. We all respect a pugilist more than we do a coward. A professing Christian never makes a meaner blunder than when he thinks to flatter wicked men, and win their good-will, by trampling on his deepest convictions, or ignoring his most solemn vows.

6. Loving those that hate God *inflicts a wound of great severity on the feelings of the Lord Jesus Christ.* When a young man is choosing his life's companions, Christ is looking on. When a young woman is wavering between the Church of Christ and the world, in her choice of the dearest friend she is ever to know, Christ is watching the trembling scales.

Every professed follower of his, Christ regards as his personal friend. He loves him as if he were the only friend left him. Picture his look on the scared Peter. Think of him in Gethsemane saying, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" See him on the cross, turning his languid eyes in search of his hiding disciples. Every *one* who bears his name, he remembered and thought of in that supreme hour.

To-day he longs for your friendship, my brother, as if there were no other one in the universe to share the gift of his life's blood. He would have died for you alone, as readily as for countless millions. Hear him: "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was sick, and ye took me not in." Deeds of common human kindness, such as we lavish on a stranger, he longed for. He longs for them now. From you, from me, from each *one* whom he died for, he craves the human love which is so precious to us all. Love is hurt if it is not loved in return.

What, then, must his feelings be when he sees

one who *has been* his friend, turning coldly from him, and choosing in his place the friendship of the world which crucified him, and which would crucify him again? My brother, it is not so much that you are losing Christ, as that Christ is losing you. It is from Calvary that the voice comes now to each one of us in our solitude: "Shouldest thou love them that hate the Lord?"