

Talk at Universalist Church

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Original English



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Notes by Joseph H. Hannen

The doctrines and creed of this church, so capably expressed by its revered minister, are truly commendable, sanctified and worthy of praise and glorification, for these precepts are opposed to the deep-rooted religious prejudices of the day. It is evident that prejudices arising from adherence to religious forms and imitation of ancestral beliefs have hindered the progress of humanity thousands of years. How many wars and battles have been fought, how much division, discord and hatred have been caused by this form of prejudice! But inasmuch as this century is a century of the revelation of reality — praise be to God! — the thoughts of men are being directed toward the welfare and unity of humanity. Daily the mirage of imitations is passing away, and the ocean of truth is surging more tumultuously. All the existing nations had a divine foundation of truth or reality originally, which was intended to be conducive to the unity and accord of mankind, but the light of that reality gradually became obscured. The darkness of superstitions and imitations came and took its place, binding the world of humanity in the chains and fetters of ignorance. Enmity arose among men, increasing to such an extent that nation strove against nation in hatred and violence. War has been a religious and political human heritage.[pg 40]

Now it is enough! We must investigate reality. We must put away these superstitions. It is a self-evident truth that all humanity is the creation of God. All are His servants and under His protection. All are recipients of His bestowals. God is kind to all His servants. At most it is this: that some are ignorant; they must be educated in order that they may become intelligent. Some are immature as children; they must be aided and assisted in



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order that they may become mature. Some are sick and ailing; they must be healed. But the suffering patient must not be tested by false treatment. The child must not be warped and hindered in its development. The ignorant must not be restricted by censure and criticism. We must look for the real, true remedy.

All the Prophets of God, including Jesus Christ, appeared in the world for the education of humanity, to develop immature souls into maturity, to transform the ignorant of mankind into the knowing, thereby establishing love and unity through divine education and training. The Prophets have not come to cause discord and enmity. For God has wished all good for His servants, and he who wishes the servants of God evil is against God; he has not obeyed the will and emulated the example of God; he has followed Satanic leadings and footprints. The attributes of God are love and mercy; the attribute of Satan is hate. Therefore, he who is merciful and kind to his fellowmen is manifesting the divine attribute, and he who is hating and hostile toward a fellow creature is satanic. God is absolute love, even as Jesus Christ has declared, and Satan is utter hatred. Wherever love is witnessed, know that there is a manifestation of God's mercy; whenever you meet hatred and enmity, know that these are the evidences and attributes of Satan. The Prophets have appeared in this world with the mission that human souls may become the expressions of the Merciful, that they may be educated and developed, attain to love and amity and establish peace and agreement.

In the world of existence the animal is a captive of nature. Its actions are according to the exigencies and requirements of nature. It has no consideration or consciousness of good and evil. It simply follows its natural instinct and inclination. The Prophets of God have come to show man the way of righteousness in order that he may not follow his own natural impulse but govern his action by the light of Their precept and example. According to Their teachings he should do that which is found to be praiseworthy by the standard of reason and judgment of intellect, even though it be opposed to his natural human inclination; and he should not do that which is found to be unworthy by that same standard, even though [pg 41] it be in the direction of his natural impulse and desire. Therefore, man must follow and manifest the attributes of the Merciful.

The imperfect members of society, the weak souls in humanity, follow their natural trend. Their lives and actions are in accord with their natural propensities; they are captives of physical susceptibilities; they are not in touch or in tune with the spiritual bounties. Man has two aspects: the physical, which is subject to nature, and the merciful or divine, which is connected with God. If the physical or natural disposition in him should overcome the heavenly and merciful, he is, then, the most degraded of animal beings; and if the divine and spiritual should triumph over the human and natural, he is, verily, an angel. The Prophets come into the world to guide and educate humanity so that the animal nature of man may disappear and the divinity of his powers become awakened. The divine aspect or spiritual nature consists of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. The second birth of which Jesus has spoken refers to the appearance

of this heavenly nature in man. It is expressed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and he who is baptized by the Holy Spirit is a veritable manifestation of divine mercy to mankind. Then he becomes just and kind to all humanity; he entertains prejudice and ill will toward none; he shuns no nation or people.

The foundations of the divine religions are one. If we investigate these foundations, we discover much ground for agreement, but if we consider the imitations of forms and ancestral beliefs, we find points of disagreement and division; for these imitations differ, while the sources and foundations are one and the same. That is to say, the fundamentals are conducive to unity, but imitations are the cause of disunion and dismemberment. Whosoever is lacking in love for humanity or manifests hatred and bigotry toward any part of it violates the foundation and source of his own belief and is holding to forms and imitations. Jesus Christ declares that the sun rises upon the evil and the good, and the rain descends upon the just and the unjust — upon all humanity alike. Christ was a divine mercy which shone upon all mankind, the medium for the descent of the bounty of God, and the bounty of God is transcendent, unrestricted, universal.

The revered minister read from the words of the Gospel, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.” The century has dawned when the Spirit of Truth can reveal these verities to mankind, proclaim that very Word, establish the real foundations of Christianity and deliver the nations and peoples from the bondage of forms and imitations. The cause of [pg 42] discord, prejudice and animosity will be removed, the basis of love and amity be established. Therefore, all of you must strive with heart and soul in order that enmity may disappear entirely and that strife and hatred pass away absolutely from the midst of the human world. You must listen to the admonition of this Spirit of Truth. You must follow the example and footprints of Jesus Christ. Read the Gospels. Jesus Christ was mercy itself, was love itself. He even prayed in behalf of His executioners — for those who crucified Him — saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” If they knew what they were doing, they would not have done it. Consider how kind Jesus Christ was, that even upon the cross He prayed for His oppressors. We must follow His example. We must emulate the Prophets of God. We must follow Jesus Christ. We must free ourselves from all these imitations which are the source of darkness in the world.

I shall ask you a question: Did God create us for love or for enmity? Did He create us for peace or discord? Surely He has created us for love; therefore, we should live in accordance with His will. Do not listen to anything that is prejudiced, for self-interest prompts men to be prejudiced. They are thoughtful only of their own will and purposes. They live and move in darkness. Consider how many different nations and divergent religious beliefs existed when Christ appeared. Enmity and strife prevailed among them — Romans, Greeks, Assyrians, Egyptians — all warring and hostile toward each

other. Christ, through the breaths of the Holy Spirit, united them, established fellowship among them so that no trace of strife remained. Under His standard they became united and lived in peace through His teachings. Which is preferable and more commendable? To follow the example of Jesus Christ or to manifest the satanic instinct? Let us strive with all our powers to unite the East and West so that the nations of the world may be advanced and that all may live according to the one foundation of the religions of God. The essentials of the divine religion are one reality, indivisible and not multiple. It is one. And when through investigation we find it to be single, we have a basis for the oneness of the world of humanity. I will pray for you, asking confirmation and assistance in your behalf.[pg 43]

