

327 Perfect hearts and careful speech

We read in I Chronicles Chapter 28.1 of how King David assembled in Jerusalem all the leaders and office-holders in Israel – “princes, captains, stewards, officers, mighty men and valiant men” – quite a gathering!

First David announced that God had decreed that he, David, as “a man of war” who had “shed blood” (28.3), was not “to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God” (v 2b); instead, Solomon, David’s son and heir, would build the house (v 6).

David then gave clear instruction to the people gathered before him (v 8). He described Israel as “the congregation of the Lord”, and reminded them that they were “in the audience of our God” (v 8a, KJV), that is, that God heard all that was said. He continued – “keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God, that ye may possess this good land, and leave [it] for an inheritance for your children after you for ever” (v 8b).

And then, to his son and heir Solomon, in the hearing of all the people, David spoke with equal clarity: “And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever” (v 9).

In these old words of Scripture there is much of benefit for the members of today’s “congregation of the Lord”, the Christ-redeemed members of the Church, the body of Christ. For we too are “in the audience of our God”. We too are to follow in the old, well-trodden paths of obedience, knowing “the God of our fathers” and seeking to serve Him “with perfect hearts and willing minds”. We gather that the Hebrew word for “perfect” here involves not only perfection of heart and conduct but also a sense of deep safety and freedom from harm, all set within the covenant of peace and friendship with God – truly, some wonderful fruits arising from our obedience. We too are to remember that the Lord does indeed “search all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts”.

Such words are timely reminders for God’s people in these days of political and social chaos for our nation – a nation which, as with Israel later on under Solomon, has wilfully turned aside from “the God our

fathers” (egs., I Kings 11.1-13ff / I Chronicles 5.25). As a nation we are now reaping the inevitable consequences of this folly, and, as God’s people in the midst of it all, there is no surprise that we are entrusted with a crucial role.

A very practical part of our having “perfect hearts and willing minds” in times of turmoil such as at present involves our speech, both what we say and how we say it – a lesson that many of our Members of Parliament would do well to apply to themselves. A few verses from the Book of Proverbs, (given to us from the Holy Spirit mainly through Solomon no less), can help make the point.

First is the need for restraint in our speech: “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (Proverbs 21.23); and, “Seest thou a man [that is] hasty in his words? [there is] more hope of a fool than of him” (29.20). We can rest assured that unguarded, hasty speech brings trouble.

And then there is the need for gentleness of speech: “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (15.1); and, “... a word [spoken] in due season, how good [is it!] (15.23); and, “Pleasant words [are as] an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (16.24); and, “A word fitly spoken [is like] apples of gold in pictures of silver” (25.11); and, “... a soft tongue breaketh the bone” (25.15). How very, very easy it is, especially in times of high tension, for us to blurt out hot, ill-tempered words which fly smack in the face of God’s Word and bring more problems in their wake.

We pray earnestly for our nation and our politicians, especially in the light of the frequently appalling behaviour in the House of Commons; no wonder others look on with astonishment over what has become of us as a once-respected nation. Yet thanks be to God, the central truth in all of life’s turmoils remains rock solid – quite simply, that “Jesus Christ is Lord”. All else in human existence flows from that fact, whether His Lordship is currently acknowledged or not.

In Christ may we remain as salt and light, as Gospel proclaimers, as reconcilers and ambassadors (Matthew 5.13-16 and 28.19 / II Corinthians 5.18-20), seeking to be God’s people of perfect hearts, willing minds – and careful speech.