

Anathema Maranatha

by H. A. Ironside

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1 Corinthians 16:22).

THIS is one of the most incisive and challenging statements in all the Bible. Incisive because there is no possibility of misunderstanding it. In the fewest possible words, it declares the inevitable doom of all who do not love the Lord Jesus.

Challenging, first because of its very incisiveness; and second, because of the fact that it contains two untranslated foreign words, "Anathema Maranatha", taken from two different languages, and which by their very strangeness compel our attention.

"Anathema" is Greek and means "accursed," or "devoted to judgment." It is the same word that the apostle uses in Galatians 1:8, 9: "But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." The man or angel who misleads others with a false gospel is under the ban of the Eternal God;— Anathema, "accursed," "devoted to judgment." He uses the same word again when speaking of himself: he says, "I could wish that myself were accursed, [Anathema] from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." It implies then clearly a definite separation from Christ, banishment from God, without any hope of restoration.

Then the other word, "Maranatha," is a compound word, an Aramaic expression of Chaldean origin, translated "our Lord come!" or "the Lord cometh!" It is a vivid reminder that the rejected Christ is to return in glory as Judge of the living and the dead.

So then the strange compound expression, this Graeco-Aramaic term, "Anathema Maranatha," is saying, "devoted to judgment; our Lord cometh." Slightly paraphrasing the entire sentence, it would read, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be devoted to judgment at the coming of the Lord." What a tremendously solemn statement and how seriously we should consider it!

Notice that according to this passage unless you are a lover of Christ, unless He is precious to you, you are not really saved; and if you are

unregenerated, you do not love Him. More than that, you cannot love Him even if you try. It is not in your power to make yourself love Him. You do not have in your heart one atom of love for Christ in your natural condition. And yet if you do not love Him, you must be accursed at His coming. Could anything be more solemn?

The Human Heart

Our Lord Himself sounded all the depths of the human heart, the heart which is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," which God alone really knows. He tells what He found in it, what proceeds out of it, and there is no hint of anything good; no righteousness, no holiness, no love. You cannot get good things out of the natural heart because they are not there. Hear what He, who spake as "never man spake," has said concerning this:

"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matthew 15:18-20).

Then again in Galatians 5:19-21, the Holy Spirit gives us a long list of the works of the flesh, but you search the record in vain to find anything about love or goodness. Listen to the appalling list: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

This is what you and I are capable of by nature. These are the things that abound in our hearts. Decency may keep us from following out all our evil inclinations, but these are the sins to which we are liable, one person just as much as another, if exposed to temptation. It is written: "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." And again, "There is no difference: for all have, sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

If then the great test of salvation is love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and you do not possess that love, you are lost, no matter how respectable your outward life may be. And if you say to yourself, "From now on I am going to love Him; I refuse to spurn Him; I will make myself devoted to Him," let me warn you not to try, for your efforts will end in disappointment and despair. You do not love the Lord Jesus Christ

if unregenerated, and you cannot love Him unless God Himself produces that love within your soul.

By this we see the absolute necessity of a second birth. Now, indeed, we understand why it is that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and there is no possible way by which it can be changed into spirit. The works of the flesh are unholy; the will of the flesh is ever opposed to the will of God. "The carnal mind," which is the mind of the flesh, "is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Hence man as born after the flesh is hopelessly lost, unless God intervenes.

But blessed be His Name, that "which is born of the Spirit is spirit." It is possible for man, totally depraved though he is by nature, to be regenerated by divine power, born again by the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and so become a new creature in Christ Jesus, producing fruit for God.

Man Totally Depraved

Some of you may object to that old theological term, "total depravity." You do not like to think of yourself as quite so far gone. But I beg you to remember that man as created by God is tripartite—spirit, and soul, and body. If in every part, man has been affected by the fall, then he has become totally affected, and inasmuch as he has been affected not for good, but for evil, he is totally depraved.

Your body is depraved. No man possesses today the splendid physique that our first parents possessed from the moment of their creation. Your body is subject to all kinds of ills, sickness, weakness, pain, and death. And moreover, everyone of your natural appetites or propensities is depraved. There is not one of them that is today functioning exactly as originally intended. "God hath made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." Every physical appetite is capable of perversion, and with this perversion comes sure and certain ill effects, all the result of sin: "Receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:27).

Your soul is depraved. The soul, according to Scripture, is the seat of your entire emotional nature. But what man would dare to say that his emotions are all under divine control? He cannot trust himself when under the power of strong emotion even for one moment. Your very affections can no longer be depended upon. You wound and injure the very ones you profess to love the most. How true the words of that wretched man, who himself was one of the most striking illustrations

of the very fact I am stressing, Oscar Wilde, who wrote, "Each man kills the thing he loves." I venture to say that if you were to follow your natural affections and the desires of your emotional nature to the limit, your whole life would be wrecked and ruined.

Your spirit is depraved. The spirit is the highest part of man, that which distinguishes him from the brute creation; that which gives him the ability to form judgments, and above all else to hear the voice of God speaking to him. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly." But what man is constantly obeying the voice of the Lord? Have we not all turned away from Him in our pride and our folly, preferring our own will to the will of God? "The lusts of the mind" are as vile in His sight as "the lusts of the flesh."

And yet it is to such men that the Spirit of God says, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha"—devoted to judgment at the Lord's return! How solemnly this reveals our true condition, and how it ought to stir our hearts, and lead us to cry to God to do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves; to create in us a clean heart; to implant His divine love; to subdue these stubborn wills of ours; and to claim us for Himself.

And this is exactly what He offers to do in the gospel. In order that He might effect this change in us, that He might impart to us a new life, the very nature of which is love, the Lord Jesus Christ went to the Cross and there tasted death for us. The only way whereby we can begin to love Him is by believing the gospel message, and trusting Him as our personal Saviour.

It is when I learn that "the Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me," that my heart cries out, "We love him, because he first loved us." Oh, I beg of you take time today to stand in faith at the foot of Calvary's Cross! By the aid of the Word of God which so clearly depicts that awful scene, fix your eyes upon the wounded, bleeding Sufferer, the thorn-crowned Saviour, hanging there upon the nails for you. Listen to His tender pleading: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Hear His cry of anguish as He took the lost sinner's place, and bore the lost sinner's judgment, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and say to yourself over and over until you believe it with all your heart: "It was all for me; He died that I might live; He loved me even unto death." As you thus put your heart's trust in Him, and believe in Him as your own personal Saviour, you will find He imparts a new nature, and this nature manifests itself in love. You will love Him, and you will love His people, because the

love of God will be shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost given unto you.

See how this blessed truth is illustrated in the history of John Newton. He was a blackbirder, slave trader, drunkard, utterly godless, and lost to all decency until, broken down by grace divine, he gazed by faith upon the suffering Saviour. Hear him sing:

"In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear;
Till a new Object met my sight
And stopped my wild career.

"I saw One hanging on a tree,
In agony and blood;
He fixed His dying eyes on me,
As near His Cross I stood.

"Sure never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

"My conscience felt and owned my guilt.
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And helped to nail Him there.

"A second look He gave, which said,
I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou may'st live."

And John Newton was a new man; the old vile life was ended forever, and from that hour he loved the Lord Jesus Christ above every earthly friend, above everything this world could offer. And so at last he could say:

"Then I, who trembling learned to see
That I my Lord had slain,
Was fined with peace, because for me
He bore that grief and pain.

"Thus while His death my sin displays

In all its blackest hue;
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too."

Oh, that every unsaved person might see what John Newton saw, might believe what John Newton believed, and then he too would love the Lord Jesus Christ, and be forever freed from the danger of judgment at His coming.

It is a common saying among men that "love begets love." Surely if this is ever true it ought to be true in connection with the love of God to mankind. We are told that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And again, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Because we were dead in trespasses and in sins, the love of God caused Him to send His blessed Son, that in Him we might receive eternal life. Because we were guilty and deserving of His judgment, He sent His Son to be the propitiation, the atonement for our sins. It is as the Holy Spirit brings these truths to bear in power upon our souls that we become partakers of the divine nature, and we love Him who has so wondrously undertaken for us.

Apart from the manifestation of God in Christ, there is no revelation of divine love. We see the power and wisdom of God manifested in creation. In His provision for man's need and comfort, we have many evidences of His goodness, but His love is shown in the Cross. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Who can fathom the wickedness of the man who tramples such grace beneath his feet, and persists in sinning against love like this? Need we wonder that the Holy Spirit has said, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (devoted to judgment at the Lord's coming)?

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