

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 302

The two chapters read this morning —(Romans 7 and 8)—are peculiarly suitable to the occasion of the breaking of bread that brings us together, though at first sight, it might appear otherwise. They exhibit two features that are conspicuous in the death of Christ which we show forth as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup. They are features that are exceedingly distasteful to natural thinkers, and yet that are found truer even to nature than all their specious thoughts. The two chapters run down the flesh and exalt the Spirit. They tell us that in the flesh dwelleth no good thing, and that if we walk after the flesh, we shall die; while, on the other hand, that life and peace are to be found in the ways and things of the Spirit. How suitable is this to the memorialisation of an event that was the condemnation of sin in the flesh,

“That the body of sin might be destroyed.”

If it is unpalatable to those who, like Peter, “*savour not the things that be of God, but those that be of men,*” it is only because their eyes are not open to the breadth and fulness of the truth and fact of things.

The chapters in question are part of an argument that commences early in the epistle; and to see them in their force, we must see them in relation to this argument. Paul had adverted to the death of Christ as an event in which—

“God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Sin had entered the world by one man, and death by sin; and the very Law of Moses that came afterwards was introduced—

“That the offence might abound; that where sin abounded, grace might much more abound; that as sin had reigned unto death, grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21).

Sin was thus made a servant to righteousness in so far as it provided a situation in which the grace of God would be magnified in the forgiveness of sinners. But Paul anticipates a wrong use being made of this fact. He anticipates the suggestion that we should in that case “*continue in sin that grace might abound*” (Rom. 6:1). He spurns the suggestion as the evil thought of men who “*turned the grace of our God into lasciviousness*” (Jude 4). He asks how is it possible that men who had died to sin in being baptised into the death of Christ should live any longer therein? (Rom. 6:2). Did not Christ die that the body of sin might be destroyed? (Verse 6). If we were dead with Christ, was it not that we might also live with him?

“Knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more. Death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (verses 8-11).

They had once been servants of sin, but they had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine that had been delivered unto them, which had made them free from sin and changed them into servants of righteousness (17-18). Why should they want to return? What fruit had they in those things of which they were now ashamed? The end of those things was death, whereas in the new line of things, the fruit was holiness now and everlasting life at last (verses 21-23).

And now, in the 7th chapter before us, he enlarges the subject in much valuable detail. He is not commencing a new subject. It might seem as if he were, but we find ourselves in the same subject still more intensely.

“Know ye not, brethren, that the law hath dominion over a man only so long as he liveth?”

Yes, they knew that, for, as he says,

“I speak to them that know the law.”

He instanced the case of marriage as an illustration. A woman was bound to her husband as long as the husband was alive; but if the husband died, the woman was free from the law which forbade her having another husband.

“Wherefore, my brethren,” says he, “ye also are become dead to the law.”

How? By the body of Christ—by the body that had died. They had been baptised into that body, and therefore had assumed all the relations of that body. They had, therefore, died to the law: it had no more dominion over them. They were free, like the woman, to become *“married to another.”* To whom? *“To him who is raised from the dead”* (verse 4).

The necessity for such a change he manifests by referring to their experience when they were in the law for their own behoof, therefore standing in the flesh.

“The motions of sin which were by the law did work in their members to bring forth fruit unto death.”

The law in which they lived, but to which they had now died in dying with Christ, was a cause of death to them. Was the law sin then? He asks. Nay, nay; only the cause of sin in them. The law in itself is holy, just, and good (verse 12), but men who were not so were manifested to themselves by its holy demands. The object was that—

“Sin might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good: that sin by the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (verse 13), *“that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God”*

(Rom. 3:19).

So that the only ground of hope for men would lie in God’s favour in the forgiveness of sin granted for the sake of the declaration of his righteousness in Christ, to those receiving this salvation as little children.

Paul then proceeds to make remarks that some people have a needless difficulty in understanding.

“I am carnal, sold.”

They are remarks of self-depreciation, but in no mawkish spirit. They are not personal sentimentalisms, but impartial propositions of truth.

“I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing, for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I know not, for the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do” (18-19).

“Sin dwelleth in me.”

This is Paul’s description of his own nature as a mortal man. It is a contrast to the ideas of philosophy which have gone into world-wide currency with immortal-soulism. It is the contrast of scientific fact with speculative assumption. It is experimentally true that human nature is destitute of wisdom when left to its own resources as a product of natural generation. Whatever of good it at any time shows has been put in us. We see this truth readily if we consider either those nations that have had no contact with divine ideas, or those individuals in civilised communities who are brought up without the advantages of education. Degraded cannibals in the one case, or brutalised individuals in the other, show that in the flesh as such dwelleth no good thing, as Paul says. He seems to go to an extreme length when he says:

“I am carnal, sold under sin; for that which I do I allow not, for what I would, that do I not, and what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now, then it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me . . . I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I perceive another law in my

members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”

But this statement of the case only seems extreme when we leave out of view the divine state of mind pertaining to spirit-nature with which it is contrasted. When these are in view, the apparently extreme words become only accurate words. There are spiritual incapacities inherent in this mortal body which we shall never get rid of till we are changed. Paul speaks of inabilities and necessities to which every spiritual man’s experience will respond. There are heights of spiritual life to which we ardently aspire but cannot attain. There are depths of darkness and chaos in which we are held in bondage against our will—things that we would but do not: the things that we hate and do. Life in the flesh abounds with instances. Who would not, but who can, dwell in the perpetual calm and sunlight of divine love to God and man? Who would not, but who can, avoid the times, states of languor and dimness and bitterness inseparable from human weakness? We disown ourselves—we hate ourselves—in proportion as we are out of practical conformity with that delight in the law of the Lord which reigns in the enlightened inward man. It is a matter of helpless subjection to evil, in which the Father pities, and blames us not. Every son and daughter can say,

“No more I but sin that dwelleth in me.”

But they say this, not in any spirit of content, but only of explanation. It does not mitigate the wretchedness which Paul acknowledges in his own case:

“Oh wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

The comfort lies where he places it:

“I thank God (I shall be delivered) through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

There is in all this a seeming contradiction that stumbles the carnally-minded. They cannot understand a righteous man owning to this sin-bondage. They would understand it if they themselves were spiritual. It is a principle holding good in every department of human attainment—that the most skilled are the most sensible of deficiency—a novice is delighted with performances that make a master-hand squirm, and said master-hand thinks not of his own performances as others rate them. A man who knows God as revealed and loves Him as required—*“with all his soul, and all his strength, and all his mind”*—is aware as the carnal man is not, of the sluggish and inefficient and obstructive character of the mortal nature he possesses.

But though distressed to the point of wretchedness oftentimes on this head, he is not the abandoned character that some have imagined to be depicted in Paul’s words. As Paul otherwise expresses it, he *“keeps his body under”* lest having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. He recognises absolutely what Paul says in the 8th chapter, *“If we walk after the flesh, we shall die,”* and that those who do the works of the flesh *“shall not inherit the Kingdom of God”* (1 Cor. 6:9). The fundamental incapacities of the flesh is one thing, and the overt acts of life quite another. The man of God suffers from his inabilities in spiritual directions and his compulsory subjectionties in the reverse direction, but he is not an evil doer. He *“delights in the law of God after the inward man,”* and gives effect to that delight in practical conformity to its revealed requirements. It is this that makes him a man of God. Paul is most careful to maintain this doctrine. Those who think he is speaking only of legal relations and that he absolves the man of God from the necessity for a walk in righteousness, make a great mistake.

When he says there is *“no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”* he immediately adds, *“who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.”* If they walk after the flesh, he says *“they shall die”* (verse 13). He lays it down that—

“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit” (verse 5).

There are those technically in Christ of whom he testified *“even weeping”* that they were the enemies *“whose god is their belly, whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things”* (Phil. 3:18-19). It is not of such that he speaks when he says there is no condemnation for them who are in Christ. For

them he plainly says there is condemnation. It would be strange if there were not. “*The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” only makes free those who confess their sins and forsake them. To all others, Jesus, in whom the life-law reigns, says he will say—

“*Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*”

It is the personal and moral bearing of the matter that he upholds throughout the whole epistle to the Romans. The way has been cleared in Christ for personal forgiveness if there is personal repentance and reform. Personal sins are the great barrier to divine favour, and it is personal sins of which forgiveness is offered and personal reform that is pressed upon the believing.

“*What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, that God (hath done) in sending his own (righteous) son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and on account of sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law **might be FULFILLED IN US who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.***”

It is moral aims, and not legal relations, that Paul keeps to the front throughout. Hence he goes on to say,

“*To be **carnally minded** is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the **carnal mind** is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be . . . If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. But if Christ be in you, though the body is dead because of (ancestral) sin, the Spirit (that is, our spiritual relations and prospects) is life **because of righteousness** . . . and he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also (at the last) quicken your mortal body by (or because of) his Spirit that (now) dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh to **live after the flesh**. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. **For as many as are led of the Spirit of God, THEY are the sons of God.***”

From this point, the chapter proceeds to make those comforting applications of which we stand in need.

“*If children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs of Christ, if so be that we suffer with him that we may be also glorified together with him*” (verse 17).

All Christ’s true people suffer with him: it is inevitable that they do so. They may not, in times like ours, have to go to prison and to death; but they have to suffer disadvantage for being Christ’s. It is either loss of honour, loss of friendship, loss of trade. The world’s prizes are for those whom the world loves: and the world loves only “its own”—those who are of it, those who love the things that it loves, and speaks as it speaks. The mere possession and obedience of the truth renders the world’s hatred inevitable.

“*I have given them thy word and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world.*”

In our age, this hatred cannot find the particular expression it had in the apostolic age; but if not in the same form, it is the same bitter thing—the endurance of which is the price a man has to pay for the great privilege of being called by the truth to the kingdom and glory of God. In past times, a man might have to rot in a dungeon or be exposed to wild beasts. But whether in a light form or a grievous form, what Paul says applies to all:

“*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with **the glory which** shall be revealed in us.*”

Who can over-estimate the glory of being changed into an incorruptible and immortal state of nature, and of being promoted to the highest honour before angels and men, and incorporated with the numerous family of God’s jewels culled from all generations? To reign with Christ is the very perfection of well-being. Called to participate in this, it is reasonable that we should first have the opportunity of suffering with him. It is far from an agreeable experience, but it is an experience we can go through if we have our eye fixed upon the end. “In everything, consider the end.”

It is a glory so great that even *“the earnest expectation of the creature”* waits for it. That is, the whole world of mankind, considered in its totality from Eden to the finish of things, is in reality unconsciously waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God: for this is the event that will deliver it from the vanity to which it has been subjected, and which will bestow upon it the blessedness which it desires, and after which, generation after generation, it strives in many a bootless effort. The whole (sublunary) creation groaned and travaileth in pain together until now; and not only they, but ourselves also—the apostolic community in the first century—which have the first fruits of the Spirit (namely, in having among them the comforting, guiding, and gift-imparting presence and operation of the Spirit of God); even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption—to wit, the redemption of our body.

“The creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

That is, the salvation of which the children of God (a *“little flock”*) are heirs will in the end become world-wide—not as embracing the children of wrath who will be destroyed, but as embracing every country and every living creature at the last; for when the salvation of God is complete upon the earth, there will be *“no more curse and no more death”* anywhere. The former things will have passed away.

The hope of this keeps us up. We are *“saved by hope”*: but it is only hope as yet.

“Hope that is seen is not hope: but if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”

Patient hope is not so powerful as the actual sight of the eyes. Nevertheless, hope, when reasonably founded as is the hope of the Gospel, is powerful in the midst of the present evil. But there is another source of strength for *“the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”*

“The Spirit itself helpeth our infirmities: we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.”

That is, our inarticulate aspirations and self-dissatisfactions, and our unexpressed and inexpressible loves and longings towards God are all reflected to the Father’s knowledge by the Spirit in which all things exist, and are brought to a focus, as it were, in Christ, *“who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us”* (verse 34). It is all *“according to the will of God,”* in which there is completeness of comfort.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”—

All things—even the sufferings of this present time of whatever shape. Do we love God? We know if we do. Are we *“the called according to his purpose?”* If we know the Gospel and are walking in subjection to its precepts, we have the proof that we are, for there is no respect of persons with God. We have Christ’s word for it.

“Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out:”

Nay, even the Father himself gives us assurance direct, saying,

“I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things and I will be his God and he shall be my son”

(Rev. 21:6-7).

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

“He that spared not His own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him freely give us all things?”

If God justifies, who can condemn? If God protect, who can harm? Who can come between us and the living word of God incorporate in Christ, to whom nothing is impossible and from whom nothing is hid?

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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