

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 7

Romans 2. —There is no lesson more conspicuous in this chapter, than the one teaching that we are called to righteousness, and that our ultimate destiny in Christ will depend upon our relation to righteousness. It is very important to realise that lesson, for a variety of reasons. The first reason is, that our own natures continually incline to ways of unrighteousness: there is a struggle in ourselves:

“When we would do good, evil is present with us.”

The second reason is, that we are living in a very unrighteous world, where many things that are abhorrent in the sight of God, are considered to be not wrong; where indeed it is practically the case that evil is called good, and good, evil; light, darkness, and darkness, light. The third may be, that we live in a time when it is a religious sentiment that it doesn't matter whether we are religious or not—that without any qualification, Christ has been made our righteousness, and, therefore, there remains nothing for us to do, beyond simply believing on him.

These three things work together to make our walk in righteousness a very difficult thing. We require to be continually on our guard, to be diligent, to have our eyes open, and not for one moment to surrender the teaching of the word of God, to either our own desires, the pressure of current sentiment, or the vagaries of a perverted theology. It is worth while to stop and consider what righteousness is. The question admits of a simple answer, and that answer, though short, comprehends every phase in which righteousness may be contemplated; and that is, that righteousness is the doing of those things that God has commanded, and the avoidance of those things which God has prohibited. In itself, the word “*righteousness*” expresses in the abstract, those thoughts, words and actions are right. For this, we are referred to other sources. The world draws upon its own imaginations, reasonings and conclusions, in its efforts, so far as it puts forth any, to ascertain what is right. And thus in the world, a devout mind has great difficulty in arriving at a knowledge of what is right.

To us there is one very decided standard of right, and that is, the will of God. This in fact is the only standard of right: our conceptions of righteousness can only arise in connection with Him; for the very idea of righteousness implies a law or rule higher than ourselves, to which we are amenable. Therefore, our only course is to study what He has made known to be right, and to turn ourselves to the habitual doing of it, and to the eschewing of all those things He has declared to be wrong. Another fact is introduced to view in this chapter, that our righteousness or unrighteousness has relation to a time when it will be made manifest, and have effect in the fixing of our destiny. Paul says that—

“God will render to every man according to his deeds, in the day when He shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”

Now it is very important to realise this fact. It is one that is continually proclaimed throughout the New Testament scriptures; and our recognition of it is likely to have a very reformatory effect upon our minds. It enables us to see that the judgment to be disclosed will in one sense be no secret; that it will but be a disclosure of what is now true in every man's life. It will be a declaration of divine decision upon facts already existent, and known in every man's own bosom. The nature of the decision is the only thing we don't know. We know there will be no partiality, no favour and no disfavour; but a clear, impartial, just judgment, which takes its type, its cue, its result, so far as we are concerned, from **what we have been**. In view of this, the present time appears the most important time to us—a great deal more important than judgment itself; because the judgment is only a disclosure of the present—a judicial proclamation of what we are and how we actually stand. People sometimes forget this, and all the while straining forward to the future.

It is right to keep our eye on the future—we should never take it off the future; but we must ignore the immense importance of the present time. We are apt to think that the judgment will work a sort of miracle for us—as if resurrection will turn us up in a different state of character from that which pertains to us now. This is a very great mistake. It is one of the mistakes of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is wrong in every thing, from top to bottom. This is one of its fallacies, which forces itself upon our attention this morning. It declares in so many words, “there are the elect and the non-elect; the elect will be saved—the non-elect won’t; or in another form, it says Those who believe in the name of Christ will be saved, and those who do not believe won’t be saved; it is not a matter of works at all.”

Under the power of these delusions, inherited by birth, we have been accustomed to blindly trust to the future, as if it would do a new thing for us; instead of which, there is nothing more true, than that we shall stand at the judgment seat as we walk now in our time of probation. The routine of our daily life becomes interesting, when we remember this. Our daily life is the material out of which we are fabricating for ourselves the good opinion of Christ, or the reverse, for God will render to every man **according to his deeds**. Now we can only know what in daily life will be well-pleasing to him, by studying the Scriptures, and particularly Paul’s letters. It would almost appear that these letters were written for the very purpose of instructing believers in the kingdom, as to what it is in their private lives that God requires. To get at this knowledge, so as to be available in daily actions, we must cultivate familiarity with these writings.

By continual reading, we get to see many things we should not know. Some people, for instance, may have the idea that they are in such a position that it is impossible for them to do anything for Christ. It may be that they are exceedingly poor, and that, being poor, they are compelled to devote the greatest part of their time and strength to the duty of providing a livelihood, and this necessity presses upon them every day in their lives. The only day they have is Sunday, and they require that for rest. They may distress themselves with the idea that they have no opportunity for doing anything to work out their salvation.

Now this is a mistake, a very great mistake. Those who labour under it do themselves an injustice; for we learn from the letters of Paul that in whatsoever condition a man or woman may be placed, he or she can in that condition walk faithfully to the truth, and acceptably in the sight of God. The principle upon which they will be judged is: —

“Every man according to what he has received.”

Jesus distinctly says that to whom much is given, of them much will be required; so that the principle of absolute justice will work in every individual case. Nobody should feel discouraged because their opportunities are few; all that is required of them is that they **do what they can; that they be faithful in the least**.

There is one method of serving Christ that such mourners of small opportunity may not be aware of, and not being aware of it, they may miss the opportunity, although it is actually in reference to the thing they are doing everyday. A brother may be in the employment of a very hard master, whose service he finds to be very disagreeable, and in whose company he feels alienated from everything that pertains to Christ; and he may imagine that he is having a great deal of waste time thrust upon him. He may think to himself that if he could only get into a position where he would be able to visit the sick, contend for the faith, distribute tracts, or something of that sort, he would be of some use; but that as it is, his time is thrown away.

Now Paul has given us to understand that a man in such circumstances may serve Christ by simply construing in his own mind what he is compelled to do for a taskmaster, as a thing done for Christ. He says: (Col. 3:22-25)

“Servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And

*whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, AS TO THE LORD AND NOT UNTO MEN; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; **for ye serve the Lord Christ.** But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons.”*

So that an individual may actually turn to spiritual account the apparently sin-defiled circumstances of his daily calling. The mistake would be for him to exclude Christ from his thoughts and only to think of his master, and only to serve him, as Paul here says, with eye-service, that is attending to duty so long as you are under scan, but doing your own way as soon as your master’s back is turned. And so with regard to other little matters—serving each other, waiting upon each other, doing good turns to each other, using hospitality without grudging when the occasion arises, ministering when ever there is an opportunity—all these things can be done on a small scale by everybody, and **it is not the scale that determines the acceptability of the act in the sight of God.** It is most important to remember this—it is not the size of an action, but the spirit of it, and the relation of it to what is possible with us.

We see this signally illustrated in the familiar case of the widow woman, who cast into the treasury her two mites. Jesus said she had cast in more than the rich people, because they had simply put in a little of their abundance, whereas she had given all the surplus she had remaining. Keeping this in view, everybody will realise his duty. There are no two persons with the same powers of mind, or with the same condition of circumstances, or the same opportunities, in a social point of view. Therefore the same rule of judgment cannot be applied to all. In one sense, every man is his own standard. If we fix our eyes upon a fixed standard that we must all come up to, we shall oftentimes be discouraged at the impossibility of coming up to it. What we have to do is **to come up to the highest that is possible with us—to do what we can, —to be faithful in that which we have.** I do not mean in money alone; but time, strength, opportunity, everything that we possess. If this principle is acted out, there will be a place for the one-talent servants as well as the ten. The judgment of every one according to deeds, will not be a judgment according to a fixed standard; but a judgment in the light of each man’s capacity. It would not otherwise be a just judgment.

“To whom much is given, of him will much be required.”

An account from one man may call for censure and condemnation, which in another man will be the basis of approval.

The standard of the judgment will not be a fixed one. The scale is a shifting scale, according to the capabilities of the individual; and that is why the judgment will be conducted, and must be conducted by a Judge—

“Who shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of His ears;”—

but by divine penetration, will know what is in every man brought before Him, and give a righteous judgment to the utmost exactitude of infallibility. It is also a reason why we are not permitted to judge, because we lack the principal element of judgment, in our ignorance of those who may come under judgment. We may say “such a person has done so-and-so,” and we may comprehend the nature of the thing done; but what we cannot understand is the relation of the thing done to the capacity of the doer, and to his inclination to do other things from which he has refrained. This is exactly where Jesus is qualified to be our judge. “*He knoweth what is in man,*” as John says; and he can discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. He can measure the exact capacity, and estimate the particular forces in play; and can therefore decide infallibly what ought to have been done, and what ought not to have been done.

There is another thing that qualifies Jesus to be judge, and that is, “*because he is the Son of Man.*”—(John 5:27). God has committed all judgment unto him, because he is the Son of Man. We can see great wisdom in this. An angel, or any being not touched with the feeling

of human infirmity, would not have been qualified to sit as our judge, because he would not have been able to comprehend the exact relation between our ability and our performance. But Jesus was tempted in all points as we are. He was a man in every sense, though he was the Son of God, and, therefore, when he judges men and women, he will be able to give a just judgment. He will take everything into account.

There is great consolation in this view of the judgment. We shall have a merciful judge; it is distinctly stated that mercy will characterise his judgment; that mercy will rejoice against judgment. On the other hand, there is this to be considered: He says—

“With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

We shall get at the judgment, the kind of usage we have dealt to others. This is evidenced by the parable of a certain man who owed his lord a sum of money; his lord said *“Pay me what you owe me.”* He replied *“I am too poor;”* and his lord—who was a merciful judge—forgave him. The servant goes out and meets some one who owes him a trifling sum, and he demands the money, saying *“I must have it immediately.”* *“I cannot pay it,”* says the poor debtor. *“You must.”* *“I cannot.”* *“You must go to prison, then;”* and he sent him to prison. It is recorded that the servants of the lord were very sorry when they saw this, and they reported the matter to their master, who had the unmerciful man brought before him. The master said to him *“Ungrateful man! Did not I forgive thee that which thou owedst me, and yet you have done thus harshly by a man owing so much less,”* and he delivered him to the tormentors.

“So,” said Christ, *“shall your heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your heart, forgive not every one of you his brother his trespasses.”*

If we are not merciful in our judgment now, we must not look for mercy when Christ comes; but—

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

Our judgment must be tempered with mercy. We ought to remember the weakness of those by whom we are surrounded. We ought to know our own weakness, and thus be prepared to extend consideration to those who are in offence. If we exact to the utmost farthing, letting nothing slip, but insist upon a precise and explicit confession from everybody who may happen to offend us, the judgment will be for ourselves a very dreadful visitation; because Jesus declares we shall be treated then as we treat now.

So, although there is much cause for consolation in view of the judgment, there is yet the other side. Jesus will be merciful, as he was with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he came and found them sleeping.

“The spirit indeed, is willing,” he said, *“but the flesh is weak.”*

He did not chide them, because it was an hour of the day when nature’s forces were gone, and he excused them. Though we shall have the same consideration, at the same time, we must remember, that the judgment will be **according to our deeds**. Jesus will not pass over an unrighteous life. Christ’s mercy will not go the length of ignoring the actual state of the case. He will not accept an individual who has proved himself unworthy. We must ever remember all sides of the question, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, that without holiness no man shall see God; that except we leave all that we have, we cannot be Christ’s disciples.

Our present duty is to surrender every other hope and scheme, and object of life, to give ourselves entirely to Christ. A man who has loved other things more than Christ—who has been ashamed of Christ in the day of Gentile prosperity—who has devoted his abilities to business more than to him—who has served himself and not Christ—must remember that Christ’s mercy will not go the length of altering the state of the account. The account is of our own making; all that Christ does is to strike the balance: we cannot do that. We could not judge ourselves. We cannot say who shall be saved—whether we ourselves shall be saved. We can only rejoice in hope and tremble whilst working out our own salvation. We do have

hope in Christ's mercy, and consolation in the assurance that he will do that which is just and merciful, but there is a great deal to turn the scales the other way. Christ will only make manifest what exists now.

So the present time is the time for us: the judgment will add nothing to the account. As at an examination in a school, the state of the prizes is an indication of what has been going on in the interval, so the disclosures at the judgment are based upon what is now in progress. But when we look beyond the judgment-seat, and imagine ourselves for a moment the blessed of God, we see something we very much burn to be—something to encourage us to continue steadfast. This is the great merit that will be recognised—a patient continuance in well-doing. We are to do as Paul says here: —

“By patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.”

That implies a good deal of trouble; for a man's patience is not exercised when there is no trouble. A patient continuance in well-doing is a tenacious abiding, day by day, in the midst of discouraging circumstances, and in the face of trying difficulties, in the performance of those things that God has required of us. There is great consolation for those who are walking in this patient way, but none for those who live in pleasure—those who are dead while they live. We must fellowship the suffering of Christ, before we shall be privileged to fellowship his glory; but when the battle is over, we shall feel the truth of what Paul says—

“That the sufferings of the present time are nothing to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Just for the present, we are in the Valley of Humiliation; we are in a state of weakness and sin, but keeping our eye steadfastly fixed on the morning dawn that has been so long held up in promise to human view, we are enabled to persevere and work until the night comes, when no man can work—a night that has come to all who have gone before us, and may come to us, but which will quickly be ended by the bright rising of that Sun of Righteousness, who will usher in eternal day.

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By Bro. Robert Roberts