

THIS SERMON IS A REGULAR WEEKLY FEATURE

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by
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"BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD"

Text, "You that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled" (Colossians i, 21).

Sunday, July 10.—Pastor Russell of Brooklyn Tabernacle, New York, preached today from the above text. He said in part:—

In order to use a telescope to advantage we need first to obtain a proper focus on the object to be examined. And so it is with the Divine Plan and Purpose. Looking at it with the eye of faith through the Telescope of God's Word, adjustment of the focus is necessary. This focusing of the Word, Christian people in the past have very generally overlooked. As a result the Divine Plan has a blurred and indistinct appearance to our sight. The various word-pictures, symbols, types, allegories and plain statements of the Scriptures without this focusing together, make a very unsatisfactory and nondescript matter of the Gospel of Christ, one that is unsatisfactory to everybody, one that the learned of our day have repudiated entirely—an ambiguous collocation that is a source of vexation to millions of God's consecrated people. The difficulty is that the Telescope was tampered with during the dark ages and the proper focus was lost. Since then Christian people have feared to readjust it. They have gloried in the fact that they never changed the focus. However, they have overlooked the fact that some one else did change it for them long ago and that the unsatisfactory view we have gotten is the result of this and is entirely out of accord with the clear and beautiful vision of God's Grace and Truth and Mercy and Love and Wisdom and Power as seen by the Apostles in the early Church.

International Bible Students' Association.

Some of us, dear friends, instead of throwing away the Telescope of the Word of God, are taking pleasure in cleaning the lenses of the dust of the dark ages and adjusting the focus by a careful endeavor to speak where the Word of God speaks and to be silent where it is silent, and to bring, as the Apostle suggests, our every thought into captivity to the will of God in Christ as outlined in the Bible. The result, we all can testify, is not only comforting, but happy; not only enlightening, but refreshing. Truly, as the Apostle suggests, we have come to "Times of Refreshing from the presence of the Lord." And all this, we perceive, is exactly what the Scriptures foretold, namely, that a falling away and darkening of the understanding would follow the death of the Apostles, but that in the end of the age the darkness would begin to scatter before the oncoming light of the Sun of righteousness, in the morning of the New Dispensation of Messiah's reign.

In accord with all this, note the fact that for centuries we have been overlooking certain Scriptures while accepting others. We accepted the Apostle's statement in our text respecting the reconciliation of the Church, but we overlooked entirely other Scriptures which speak of a still different reconciliation—"God through Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians v, 19). We should have noted the difference between the Church and the world in this and many other passages of Scripture. We should have remembered the Lord's words, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We should have seen that the salvation and reconciling of the Church is one thing and the salvation and reconciling of the world is quite another thing; that these are two different salvations—the first to heavenly, spiritual conditions and joint-heirship with Christ in his Kingdom; the other to an earthly inheritance, to earthly perfection and life everlasting and an Eden that is to be world-wide—Paradise restored, God's footstool made glorious.

God's Purposes to Be Accomplished. Nevertheless nothing has been lost. No feature of the Divine Plan has been thwarted, for these two salvations do not progress at the same time. During this Gospel Age none are saved, nor desirous to be saved, except those "drawn of the Father," "called of God." These have been privileged to approach God through the Son, whose name is "the only name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv, 12). Only those who take up their cross and follow the Lamb through evil report and good report, faithful unto death, can now be spirit-begotten; in the resurrection, these will be spirit-born, members of the Bride of Christ, the Lamb's Wife and joint-heir with him in his Kingdom. It does not matter to the remainder of mankind that they have been allowed to remain in ignorance of the great fact that God is about to pour out upon humanity a great blessing; about to pour out his holy Spirit upon all classes; about to establish the Kingdom of his dear Son for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come;" about to cause the knowledge of the Lord to fill the whole earth; about to give to every son and daughter of Adam one full, fair, righteous opportunity to come to

a knowledge of the Truth that they may be saved.

If the knowledge of God's grace has proven to be a grand, glorious, inspiring message to the sanctified in Christ Jesus, the Church of this Gospel Age, called to the heavenly calling, will not the message of reconciliation to the world, in due time, likewise bring to the world comfort, joy, blessing as they shall be invited to the earthly portion—to full restitution to human perfection—to all that was lost by Adam and that is to be recovered by the sacrifice of Jesus. No wonder the Scriptures assure us that the night of weeping is nearly over and the morning of joy already dawning! No wonder the Apostle declares that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together," and that they are "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. viii, 22, 19).

The work of this Gospel Age has been the calling, the testing, the proving, the fitting, the polishing of these sons of God for the glorious heavenly state to which they have been called. The Apostle urges that however humble the position of God's saints in the present life, "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." When he shall appear in his glory we also shall appear with him. When he shall reign as the King of kings and Lord of lords, when to him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, the elect Church, his Bride, will be with him in his Throne, sharers of his glory and participants in his work—the work of blessing and uplifting the world—reconciling the world to God.

Calvin and Knox—Wesley and Whitfield.

Calvin, Knox and others of the reformers, we may then see, were quite right in their insistence that none at the present time are in a reconciled condition toward God except the comparatively few of our race—the saints. These turn from sin to righteousness, turn from disobedience to faith and consecration, and in and through the merit of the Redeemer are acceptable as probationary members of the elect Church. If faithful they will shortly, in the "first resurrection," constitute the Church of glory, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife and Joint-Heir.

Brothers Wesley, Whitfield and others were also right in their proposition that God was not content with electing merely a saintly handful, but surely loved the whole world and would surely give to every member of the race a full opportunity to come to a knowledge of Christ and to seek a share in the merit of his sacrifice for sins and an opportunity for life everlasting.

Those dear brethren contended earnestly with each other over their differences, the one upholding the doctrine of Election, the other contending for the doctrine of Free Grace. Now we see that the election belongs to this Gospel Age and to the High Calling to the divine nature and that in an age following this Free Grace toward all of the race of Adam will prevail. "The knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth;" "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess." Then those who, under the rule and assistance and uplifting influences of the "elect" will come into harmony with the Divine Law, will be blessed with full reconciliation to God and eternal life on the human plane—in Paradise restored—while the intelligently perverse, instead of being everlastingly tortured, as we had supposed, will, as the Apostle says, be punished with everlasting destruction (II Thessalonians i, 9).

"Hallelujah, What a Savior!"

From this viewpoint the glory of our Redeemer and the glory of our heavenly Father are multiplied a million times. Our Redeemer not only is to be the Savior of the "little flock," his Church, his Bride, on the spirit plane of glory, but additionally, through the agency of his Millennial Kingdom, he is to be the Savior of the world. He "tasted death for every man," as the Scriptures declare, and, as they express it, "He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Isaiah liii, 11). Who could suppose that the Savior would be satisfied with the result of his labor if only about one in a million, as members of his Church, reach the heavenly glory-land?

Who in our day could for a moment believe the suggestion of Brother Jonathan Edwards, the great New England preacher, who declared that the Lord and his saints would, together, look over the battlements of heaven at their neighbors and friends and children suffering an eternity of untellable torture at the hands of demons, and turn around and praise God the louder on this behalf? Poor Brother Edwards had, we believe, but a small conception of Divine Justice and Divine Love. And his difficulty was that he did not see what is now so distinct and clear to Bible students, namely, that the Bible Hell to which all humanity goes is not a place of torture nor of consciousness at all, but the grave, sheol, hades, the tomb.

Instead of Christ and the saints praising God because of the tortures

of the poor groaning creation, the Divine program shines resplendently, showing us that the Redeemer and his Church will for a thousand years be engaged in a missionary work of the sublimest and most gigantic character—a work not only for a living remnant of the race, but one which will include in its blessing all the thousands of millions of humanity under the Divine sentence, "The wages of sin is death." Truly the Scriptures declare, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than man's way and God's plans loftier than man's conceptions."

Notice next the context. St. Paul, after mentioning Christ as the Head of the Body, the Church, who is the first-begotten, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, adds, "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell," and that (after) having made peace through the blood of his cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself—both the things in earth and things in heaven" (Colossians i, 18-20). The Apostle indicates the great scope of Christ's work as it shall be eventually when finished. He is appointed of the Father to establish peace and righteousness throughout the Universe. But he has not yet accomplished all of this. He has only begun. He has died for the sins of the world, as well as for the sins of the Church. But he has not yet offered to Justice the satisfaction for the world's sins: He first appears before God as the great Advocate for the elect Church, "called, the Lamb's Wife." Note how the Apostle expresses this thought in our text, verse 21.

The Church First Reconciled. "And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblemished and unrepugnant in his (the Father's) sight, if ye continue in the faith," etc.

Who are these and why are they reconciled in advance of the remainder of the world—brought in advance into fellowship with the Father by the Redeemer as his Bride? These were by nature "children of wrath even as others." By nature they were alienated and enemies in their mind by wicked works. They were unlike the Redeemer, who was "holy, harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners." Why then did God's grace specially come to this class—to us who are of the Church of Christ, "accepted in the Beloved" one? What did we do or could we do to contribute to this favor of God bestowed upon us? The Apostle assures us further along the same line, that the elect Church by nature was not superior to the world from which it was selected. He declares that it contains not many great, not many learned, not many rich, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, many of them ignoble as respects birth and natural advantages of heredity. The difference between these and others was, first, that they had "an ear to hear" the Divine message. Sometimes this hearing came to them through sorrow and tribulation. In their weariness and heaviness they heard the Master's voice, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest" (Matthew xi, 28). They heard this voice, while some of their neighbors more favorably situated heard it not. But a still further blessing came to them as they responded and drew near to the Lord by faith and prayer.

Desiring to come nearer and nearer they strove to put away all filthiness of the flesh—in its every form—the while realizing that they could not cleanse themselves. Then it was that the Master informed them of the terms upon which they might join his Church—"The Body of Christ which is the Church." They must make full consecration of themselves to God and to righteousness, even unto death. They must do this with a full understanding that it would take them out of touch with the world and the spirit of the world, while bringing them into closer relationship with the Father and with the Son. They were assured that if they thus presented their little all to God in the Redeemer's name and merit, this great Redeemer would serve them as their Advocate with the Father and impute to them a sufficiency of the merit of his sacrifice to make good the deficiencies of their flesh. Thus only could the Father accept their sacrifice of the earthly nature and all of its rights and beget them with his holy Spirit to joint-heirship with their Redeemer in all the glories and honors and blessed services for the world in his Kingdom of Glory which is to be set up as soon as this Gospel Age shall have finished its work of gathering out of the world the elect.

Let it not be forgotten in this connection that when the world shall be reconciled to God in the future, the blessings of that reconciliation will come to them while still in their fallen state, to assist them to the recovery of all that was lost in Adam. Hence our influence even with the worldly should be to encourage them towards as high standards of righteousness as possible, knowing that whatever they may attain in the present life will be that much of an advantage to them in the future life, and that in proportion to their degradation will be their difficulties in connection with their restitution to perfection. So then godliness is profitable, not only for the life that now is, but also for that which is to come; not only for the saints who hope to be of the "little flock" and associated with Christ in his Kingdom, but also for the world of mankind, whose hope is to be blessed under that reign of righteousness and its uplifting influences.



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