

PEOPLE'S

PULPIT...



Sermon by
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SECRET FAULTS—PRE-SUMPTUOUS SINS.

Who Can Understand His Errors?

"Cleanse Thou Me From Secret Faults; Keep Back Thy Servant Also From Presumptuous Sins; Then Shall I Be Upright, and I Shall Be Innocent From the Great Transgression" (Psalm xix, 12, 13).

Brooklyn, Nov. 7.—Pastor Russell preached today at the Brooklyn Tabernacle from the text above. He said:—
Our text prophetically represents the attitude of mind of God's true people. Those who are aliens and strangers from God would not thus pray. Even if they were repentant their first prayer should be in the nature of a confession of sins and an acknowledgment of their acceptance of God's mercy in the forgiveness of their sins and of his accepting them to be his children through the merit of the Redeemer. But even those who have become children of God, by renouncing sin and exercising faith in Divine forgiveness in the merit of Christ, have still to acknowledge that by nature they were "children of wrath even as others." Although they are saved by grace, only their minds, their hearts, their wills, have yet been saved or fully reconciled to God and harmonized to the Divine will. Their flesh is still imperfect, fallen.

Hence, in the language of the Psalmist, it is appropriate that the Lord's people take knowledge of their own blemishes, imperfections, and that they seek the Lord's assistance in fighting the good fight against those blemishes of their flesh. Thank God, this battle of the New Creature, the new mind, the new will, against the fallen flesh and its appetites will not last forever; to the faithful, death will be the close of the conflict. The glorified Redeemer is watching over the interests of his people. He guarantees us in advance that all of our trials, our difficulties, shall work together for our spiritual welfare. He guarantees us that when he shall have sufficiently tested our new minds, our new wills, by the opposition of the cravings of the flesh, he will forthwith declare our trial ended—declare us victors and heirs of glory, honor and immortality with himself, according to the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word.

The Object of Our Testing.
The question arises, Why should not the Lord grant to us and to all mankind an easier trial than is ours? Why should there be a fallen disposition to fight against? Why should it not be as easy, or more easy, to do right than to do wrong? Why should we not have flesh which should have a good craving merely, and not an evil craving? And if we must have an evil craving, why are we not at least relieved of the outward temptations which excite these evil cravings?—temptations from the world about us, inciting to evil rather than to good; and, according to the Scriptures and our experiences, temptations also from Satan himself, and from the fallen angels, who continually endeavor to intrude upon us, to incite us to anger, malice, hatred, strife and the various works of the flesh and the devil?

These questions are not unreasonable, and God acknowledges this when he shows us that just such favorable conditions as these questions suggest will be provided for the world of mankind during the Millennium. Satan and the evil angels under his captivity will be restrained according to the Bible and not be permitted to molest mankind in evil promptings and suggestions. We read that Satan shall be bound for a thousand years that he may deceive the people no more until the thousand years be finished (Revelations xx, 2). Relief is also promised from the injurious conduct of others, in that we are assured that during the Millennium nothing shall hurt or destroy throughout God's holy Kingdom. In that blessed time every evil deed will be restrained that it may not accomplish injury to another, while even the effort to commit sin will be promptly punished with "stripes;" not an immoderate, not an unjust torturing for centuries for finite sins, but, as the Scriptures declare, a just recompense of reward will be given both to the just and to the unjust.

The Scriptures assure us that promptness in the punishment for sin, and its reasonableness, its righteousness, will be promptly recognized and quickly bear fruitage throughout the world in peace and order—righteousness. Thus we read, "When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah xxvi, 9). The preaching of this reasonable, righteous judgment of the future surely bears much better fruitage than the preaching of the "dark ages," now fortunately disappearing—that the wage of a trifling sin might be either a century of roasting or an eternity of torment. The exaggeration of the error is so great that the human mind instinctively resists and rejects it.

The next query we shall answer is, Are God's ways unequal? And if not, why should he provide at the present time for the trial and testing of the Church under conditions so much more severe than those which shall prevail by and by, during the Millennium? Why must we battle against the Adversary and his minions as well as against our fallen flesh? Why must we contend with sinful oppositions in our neighborhoods and our homes? Why should not evil in every sense of the word be restrained for us as well

as for the world during the Millennium and our way be made smooth also? The Scriptures answer that the Church class, which God is now selecting or electing from the world, is a very special class, for which he has very glorious designs of joint-heirship with the Redeemer in his kingly and priestly offices for the blessing of the world during the Millennium. The greatness of the dignity to which the faithful will be exalted makes it reasonable that the terms and conditions should be exceedingly difficult in this way. Hence we read that the gate is difficult and the way a narrow one, so that few may find it. These few are the "elect," whose character-superiority will be fully evidenced to God, to angels and to men to be such as fully justifies the Lord in granting to them the high reward promised. Were their honors no greater than those the world shall experience, how could God's ways be just and equal in granting them the heavenly nature and Divine glory, while awarding the world of mankind restitution blessing and a worldwide Eden home corresponding to what was lost by Adam and redeemed for the willing and obedient by the sacrifice of the man Christ Jesus?

Who Understands His Errors?
If now we have clearly before our minds that it is the Church class who are addressed in our text, let us examine the various steps it suggests. During the Millennium the errors and secret faults and presumptuous sins of the world will all be made manifest and all be openly rebuked and punished. But not so now. Those who are now called to be of the elect Church are expected to be so zealous for God, so desirous to know and to do his will, so opposed to sin, that they will voluntarily search for their own errors, their own secret faults, and strive against presumptuous sins.

When we remember that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven the sins of the Church, the question may arise, What then are these faults or errors? If all of our sins are forgiven freely for Christ's sake, what sins then remain to be forgiven? The answer is that through faith in Christ's blood we were fully forgiven "the sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans iii, 25). We shall never more be held responsible for sins great or small which were ours before we came to the Lord and accepted his grace, his forgiveness, and became his followers through our consecration of our little all to him. What remains of sin with us is the imperfection of the flesh and its inherited weaknesses, and these blemishes may be with us to our dying day in considerable measure. It is against these that we must fight—fight the good fight and endure hardness as valiant soldiers of righteousness.

But some one may inquire, is not the merit of Christ sufficient, not only for the sins that are past, but for all of our unwilling blemishes of the past and of the future? In other words, Does not our Lord's satisfaction of Justice include our imperfections present and future, which are the result of Adam's sin and our inheritance of the fallen condition, as well as atone for our sins of the past prior to our acceptance of the Divine mercy? We answer, Yes, this is quite true; nevertheless the Lord requires of us that, after coming into the family of God, we shall take note of our imperfections and apply to him for specific forgiveness of all transgressions. Doubtless this is intended to assist us in keeping humble—to assist us in keeping in remembrance "the horrible pit" of sin from which we were lifted by the gracious merit of the Redeemer by which we were justified. All of these experiences will doubtless be helpful to us by drawing us the more frequently to the "throne of grace," that we may obtain mercy, and find grace (merit) to help in time of need" (Hebrews iv, 16).

The Blood of Christ Cleanseth.
The expression, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," refers not merely to the sins that are past and the cleansing which was ours at the moment we first accepted the Lord's favor, but rather, especially, it refers to the cleansing which is continually necessary to the maintenance of our relationship with the Lord. The forgiveness, the cleansing, is freely, promptly given, but conditionally. It must be applied for. This is the Lord's method of instructing us in the way of righteousness and of assisting us to overcome the oppositions and temptations of the world and to become at heart "overcomers." He knows our weaknesses better than we do; and he wishes us to learn of them, not with a view to discouraging us, but that we may fight a good fight against them, conquer them and, in so doing, develop the characteristics which he approves and has promised to reward with joint-heirship with the Redeemer in his Kingdom.

Hence, instead of openly rebuking his people, the Lord leaves as ours the work of searching for secret faults and putting them away. In proportion as we love him, we will be desirous of doing those things which please him, thus living in his smile, under his ap-

proval. It is quite sufficient that the light of the Lord's countenance, his smile, should be withdrawn from those who do not walk the narrow way with zeal—who do not seek for their own faults and endeavor to correct them and to thus make character. As those now being called grow in love for the Lord, every hindrance to his favor will be quickly noted. It is this class that in our text is represented as seeking Divine assistance in the searching out of their secret faults.

Some of these faults may be known to ourselves and to the Lord, but unknown to fellowmen. The heart that is truly converted to the Lord and to harmony with all the principles of righteousness which he represents must more and more desire full perfection—full victory over the weaknesses of the flesh, and must strive for this condition. Other secret faults may be secret from us but well-known to the Lord and possibly quite plainly manifest to our brethren and neighbors. How earnestly all who are truly the Lord's people should seek to see themselves as others see them, and to correct those faults which hitherto have been secret to themselves.

Assuredly the Lord's assistance is necessary in this work; but, in praying to him, in the language of our text, we should remember that his method of answering our petitions is to show us the facts of our case, and then to encourage us by his promises to fight a good fight against the weaknesses thus brought to our attention. The Bible is the Lord's lamp. The Spirit of its wonderful teachings, like a two-edged sword, is sharp and penetrating. It can discern or discriminate between the very thoughts and intents of the heart which deceive so many into thinking a wrong course justifiable. The Christian who makes continual and good use of this "sword" will soon find that with its assistance he is able to analyze his own motives lying behind his words and his acts; will sometimes find himself secreted them, and sometimes masquerading them as graces and virtues.

The difficulty with the majority of Christian people seems to be that they have never undertaken a close scrutiny of the motives lying behind their words or their deeds—yes, the motive or intention lying hidden in their own minds. The reason for this laxity, the reason for their failure to follow up with the searchlight and to "bring every thought into captivity to the will of God in Christ" is that they have not yet attained to a sufficiency of love for righteousness and a sufficiency of a hatred for iniquity. The reason for this condition of things may be that they are "babes in Christ" who have in the past fed merely upon the milk of the Word and not upon the strong meat and are, therefore, weak in the faith and weak every way along the lines of Christian character development. What they need is more love for the Lord and a greater appreciation of his Word, which will lead to more earnest study of the same.

"The entrance of thy words giveth light" (Psalm cxix, 130). As the Word of the Lord dwells richly and abounds, it educates us respecting God's will and its standards and, if we are obedient to his will and his gracious purposes, we will endure his tests and ultimately stand approved as our Lord's joint-heirs in his Kingdom.

Keep From Presumptuous Sins.
One of the great character tests imposed upon the Church is *humility*. It is not sufficient that we love right and hate wrong and search for even our secret faults. Even after attaining perfection we might be presumptuous and, if so, be unfit for the proposed exaltation. Satan, when a holy angel called Lucifer, the Morning Star, was perfect; but the sin of presumption crept into his heart and blighted everything. So Satan strove to tempt our Lord, who was perfect, to commit a presumptuous sin, through which he would have made shipwreck of his career. He wished him to presume upon God's goodness and abundant care, not by starting a rival empire, as Satan himself had attempted to do, but to presume, nevertheless, upon Divine goodness to the extent of jeopardizing his life by leaping from the pinnacle of the Temple and trusting that God would suspend the laws of nature and work a miracle for his protection, when no such miracle was necessary, because no such hazard had been demanded.

Applying this matter of presumptuous sin to the Church of our day; we find some who appear to be the Lord's people presuming upon his goodness and mercy and love by jumping from financial and other pinnacles and trusting for miraculous protection from disaster. This, to our understanding, is presumptuous sin. Sometimes we see presumptuous conduct amongst elders and others in the Body of Christ, much after the manner of Moses' transgression, when presumptuously he smote the rock, while God had merely bidden him to speak to the rock. For pastors and elders of the Church to assume and to exercise an unscriptural lordship over the Church would appear to us to be a presumptuous sin—a presuming to take place and authority not bestowed by the Lord. On the contrary, sometimes a congregation of the Lord's people may be presumptuous in neglecting the Scriptural direction to take heed to those who have the rule over them and watch for their souls, as those who must give an account. In how many ways might we be presumptuous and ignore the Lord, his supervision over the Church, and his message to us in his Word!

Our text declares, "Then shall I be innocent of the great transgression"—innocent of anything which would prove me unworthy of eternal life and worthy of everlasting death—"the Second Death."

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