

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

God's Work and Ours.

Sunday, December 12.—Pastor Russell of Brooklyn Tabernacle preached today from the following text to a packed house:—

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians ii, 13).

The proper relationship between faith and works and between God's work and ours are matters apparently not clearly understood by the majority of Christian people and, of course, not at all comprehended by the worldly. It is not only worth while, but very important, that each Christian entering into covenant relationship with God should understand distinctly his own responsibilities, the assistance which God is willing to grant him through the merit of Christ, and what is required of him individually in the matter of good works. A great stake, a great prize is involved. Carelessness or ignorance might jeopardize this prize—might lose us a place amongst "the very elect," who shall be joint-heirs with their Redeemer in his Millennial Kingdom soon to be inaugurated for the blessing of the whole world.

Mark well that we purposely avoid the error which so long had beclouded our spiritual vision. Note that we do not say that a failure to be amongst "the elect" would signify to be with damned millions in eternal torture. No such unreasonable proposition is represented in God's Word. The question of this Gospel Age is to gain or not to gain eternal life and glory and honor as members of the Body of Christ. In a word, not pleasure or misery, but life or death, is the alternative.

Who are addressed by the Apostle in the words of our text? He is not addressing the wilfully or ignorantly wicked—the world. He is addressing those who had been such, but who repented, reformed, turned to God and saw a great light. They have seen themselves to be sinners under just condemnation of the Creator, and have seen also that Jesus, the Sent of God, has provided reconciliation with the Father through his blood—his sacrifice. More than this they have by faith accepted this proffered grace of God, and through a full consecration of their all, made acceptable through their Advocate, they have been received of the Father as his spirit-begotten children. They have been advised that as children they are "heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord, their Head, their Redeemer, in the glorious Millennial Kingdom which the Father has foretold shall be his for the blessing of all the families of the earth. But all these blessings they have received through faith and not actually. They must wait for the actualities until they and all of their brethren of the same class, "called of God in the one hope of their calling," shall have been tried, tested, perfected, in character, in heart, "Copies of God's dear Son."

Our text declares that we should work out our own salvation, because it is God that worketh in us. This puts God's work first and ours subsequently. Let us therefore consider the matter in this order. How, in what sense, does God work in his people—not in the world; not in the repentant sinner; not in the merely justified; but in those who have passed those stages of approach to God and, by the begetting of his holy Spirit, have entered his family as children, as sons? "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John iii, 1). "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans viii, 17). How does God work in such as have thus become his children—his sons?

We reply that he works in them through his spirit—the spirit of the Truth; the spirit of holiness; the spirit of consecration; the spirit of sonship. That is to say, a certain holy power or influence operates in and about the spirit-begotten children of God in harmony with this relationship. It has to do with all of their experiences in life—home, family, business, joys, sufferings, pleasures, sorrows.

But God's special way of dealing with his spirit-begotten children is through their intellects—communicating with them through the holy Scriptures. As the Apostle says, "God who spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews i, 1). The twelve apostles whom the Father specially gave to him, he particularly accepted as his representatives, his mouth-pieces, the channels through whom would come to the family of God the instructions necessary for their development in holiness—the instructions necessary for their attainment of the hope of their calling—glory, honor and immortality in joint-heirship with Jesus their Redeemer as the spiritual Seed of Abraham for the blessing of the world (Galatians iii, 29).

Our Lord Jesus refers to this work of God in his people through his Word, saying, "Sanctify them through thy Truth. Thy Word is Truth" (John

xvii, 17). St. Paul refers to the Scriptures as the power of God, saying, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy iii, 16, 17).

"Ye Are God's Workmanship."

We have seen that God does a work in his consecrated people, using his providences in connection with the experiences of life, and that he specially uses his Word for their instruction in righteousness. We are to remember incidentally that our Lord Jesus who redeemed us and reconciled us by his blood is still our Advocate with the Father and our Instructor as the Father's representative; that through him we may be all taught of God—in the School of Christ. Next we should note the Divine method in this work of grace being carried on in our hearts from the time we fully submitted them in full consecration, in faith. Our text declares that God's work in us is divided into two parts—to will and to do. Let us examine first—

How God Works In Us to Will.

The will is the real person or ego. The body is merely responsible as the agent or servant of the will. With the world the will and the body are usually at one—sympathetically co-operative. But in those begotten of God's Spirit as his children matters are different. Their wills by consecration are developed along lines quite antagonistic to the natural preferences of their flesh, so that the Apostle wrote, "With the mind I myself serve (or desire to serve) the Law of God, but with the flesh I serve (or desire to serve) the law of sin" (Romans vii, 25). Hence every spirit-begotten person has a warfare between his new mind, with its holy aspirations and desires and its opponent flesh with its animal propensities, some good and some bad. Hence the Apostle exhorts all these New Creatures to "war a good warfare" against their own flesh and to bring it into subjection to the New Mind and to the Divine Law. He urges that we "Bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians x, 5). This, of course, would mean absolute perfection, so far as the New Creature would be concerned and a complete deadness so far as the flesh is concerned. With every thought captivated to the Lord the individual would never in any sense commit sin other than the sin of ignorance or imperfection.

God works in the minds of his people not along the lines of enslavement of the mind after the manner of Satan and those who are subject to his delusions—by hypnotism, etc. God's operation is the very reverse of this. He enlightens the mind to do his work. He displays to our minds gradually light and Truth, purity and goodness in their true colors, in contrast with sin, ignorance and defilement. And in the same words he sets before us the great prize of glory, honor and immortality and joint-heirship with our Redeemer in his Kingdom. The power of these hopes working in a consecrated mind is wonderful. It can make the naturally weak strong, the naturally timid bold as a lion.

This operation upon the mind is a gradual one from the time of our begetting of the holy Spirit until our change—not all at once, but gradually, little by little, the Lord displays to us one feature after another of his wonderful Plan of salvation. Step by step he shows to the appreciative and obedient heart the riches of his grace, his loving kindness, his tender mercy, the boundlessness of his love and the ultimate outworking of his Divine powers for the blessing of all of his creatures who will accept his favors on his own terms. All the while he leaves us free agents to will in harmony with his proposition or to reject it. He will coerce no one. Our Lord Jesus expressed the Father's sentiment in this matter, saying, "The Father seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth" (John iv, 23).

How God Works In Us to Do.

Endeavor to do right naturally follows right willing. But this does not signify that God completes a work upon our wills first and then begins a fresh work upon us, stimulating us to do right to the best of our ability. On the contrary, as through his providence and Word God exercised an influence upon our wills through the knowledge of his Truth, little by little each new point of Truth was expected to be acknowledged by efforts on our part to do God's will to the extent that the new will was able to control the imperfect body. We may safely conclude that each step in right-willing must be followed by a step in right-doing before another item of grace and Truth would be granted as a basis for additional willing and then additional doing. Thus, as we walk by first putting one foot forward and then the other repeatedly, so the New Creature walks or progresses by first willing and next doing the Lord's good pleasure to the extent of his ability.

As surely as the right-willing is the result of Divine operation in the revealing of Truth, so also is the right-

doing. Of the Divine influence in our hearts working in us both to will and to do God's good pleasure, St. Peter gives us a word right to the point, saying, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature" (II Peter i, 4).

Work Out Your Own Salvation.

We have heard many improper prayers presented at the Throne of Grace by well-intentioned but misinformed children of God. Many Christians request God to do for them that which he tells them they must do for themselves. The one who asks amiss sometimes leaves the Throne of Grace confident that God will do for him what God has never promised to do for anybody, but has told us each must do for himself. Many pray, "Abandon us not in temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One" and then walk straight into temptation, wholly neglecting the directions of God's Word. Indeed, many so neglect the study of that Word that they are not aware what are its teachings, its counsels,—respecting Satan and the temptations from the world, the flesh and the devil, to which all must be more or less exposed for their testing and character development.

Some pray to God to save them by his Divine power and expect him to work miraculously in them, while they are giving the best of their time and talent and influence to business or to pleasure or to self-gratification. Such need to learn the meaning of our text, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." They need to learn the meaning of the Apostle's words, "Keep yourselves in the love of God." God absolutely refuses to deal with us as machines. More than this, he refuses to coerce, to push, to pull, to drive, those whom he is now calling to sonship and joint-heirship with Christ in his Kingdom.

During the Millennium the world will receive all sorts of pulling, pushing, driving, "stripes," for their correction in righteousness,—to make them all eventually see, to ultimately force all to take their stand for right or for wrong, intelligently. But now it is different. God is "calling," "drawing" and accepting through faith in Christ as "members" of the Body of Christ, only such as have a willing mind—only such as can be moved to energy and devotion by the enlightenment of their minds through the Truth. None others are wanted for this "elect" class.

Those who rightly understand our text could never have so misunderstood the Savior's words to the dying thief, "Thou shalt be with me in Paradise," as to suppose that he meant that the penitent thief would be a member of the "elect" Church, his joint-heir in the Kingdom. Indeed not! That thief had not worked out any salvation! He will indeed be in Paradise eventually. Paradise will be restored and the whole earth become as the Garden of Eden under the Millennial reign of Christ and his "members," the Church. But he was not "begotten of the holy Spirit." He was not "transformed by the renewing of his mind," that he might prove the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. He never added to his faith fortitude; and to fortitude knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love, as the Word assures us all must do who would make their calling and election sure (II Peter i, 10, 11). We will not, however, discuss the thief further, as we did so on a previous occasion and that sermon is in print. I will be pleased to mail it free on post card request.

The spirit-begotten children of God must work out their salvation as New Creatures in Christ by growth in grace. And growth in grace means growth in knowledge—not general knowledge, but the special knowledge provided by the Lord in his Word. It is in full accord with what we everywhere observe of the wide-spread ignorance of the Word of God, even amongst Christians, that the Scriptures declare, "My people perish for lack of knowledge" (Ysaiah iv, 6).

Development in heart, in character, is necessary to fit us for the future service as "members" of the Christ, associated in his glorious Kingdom work. Our call is to be kings and priests that we may serve the world of mankind. To prepare us for that service is the object of our present call and the trials of faith and patience, that by all these, character-likeness of Christ might be developed in us. If we do these things we shall never fail and an entrance will be granted us into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior. If we do these things heartily they will prove that we are copies of the Lord Jesus and it is the Divine predestination that only such as are copies of God's dear Son shall be his joint-heirs in the Kingdom (Romans viii, 17).

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To Pastor Russell, Brooklyn Tabernacle, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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