

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

"Put Away All Filthiness."

Text—"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians vii, 1).

Minneapolis, July 17.—Pastor Russell of the Brooklyn Tabernacle today delivered two addresses to the International Bible Students Association...

Although the words of our text were not addressed by St. Paul to the world, they would, nevertheless, be excellent advice and very profitable to all. In a general way all civilized people recognize that "cleanliness is next to godliness."

"Having These Promises."

Our text tells the difference between the well-intentioned worldly person and the thoroughly consecrated Christian. The latter has heard through the Word of God certain "exceeding great and precious promises," which the well-meaning worldly class have not yet heard—heard in the true sense of hearing, in the sense of appreciating, understanding, the whole civilized world, in one sense, has the same Bible, the same Word of God, the same precious promises, but it has not appreciated them.

This is the class addressed in our text—the followers of Jesus. These have heard of the grace of God—that it is the Divine intention to bless Adam and his race through the great Mediator—the Messiah, the Christ. They have heard that Jesus left the glory with the Father and humbled himself to human nature, in order that he might redeem the human race.

They have heard that his Kingdom will prevail from sea to sea and unto the ends of the earth and that eventually unto him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess allegiance and obedience, and that all refusing thus to submit to that reign of righteousness will be destroyed from amongst the people in the Second Death (Acts iii, 22, 23).

But these have heard something more—something that belongs to the present time. They have heard that it is the Divine purpose to select from amongst mankind a "Royal Priesthood" to be associated with the great Redeemer in his Mediatorial Kingdom.

first and count the cost," before you undertake such a consecration of your life, such a sacrifice of your earthly interests. "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back would be fit for the Kingdom"—fit for a place on the Throne as a joint-heir with Christ (Luke ix, 62).

"Beloved, Let Us Cleanse Ourselves." We doubt not that as the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus so loved the world as to provide the great sacrifice for sin, so St. Paul loved the world—and all others of God's people must have a sympathetic love for the world.

These are "dearly beloved" because they have the mind of Christ, which is also the mind of the Father. According to the flesh they are not all lovely or beautiful. St. Paul elsewhere admonishes us that amongst these "dearly beloved" are not many great, not many wise, not many noble, not many rich, but chiefly the ignoble and the poor of this world. Their riches and their nobility are not of the flesh, but of the spirit, of the heart, of the new will, to which they have been begotten of God by the Holy Spirit.

Christians "Filthiness of the Flesh." Having located definitely the class addressed by the Apostle, "the saints" (II Corinthians i, 1), let us note how and why it is necessary that saints should receive such an exhortation. Why should the Apostle write to saints respecting the cleansing of their flesh from filthiness? Could one be a saint and yet have filthiness of the flesh?

We reply that these saints, begotten of the Holy Spirit, will not be perfected as New Creatures until they experience the "change" of the "First Resurrection." Meantime they have the treasure of the Divine nature, the Holy Spirit, the first fruits of their inheritance in imperfect human bodies. It is not the flesh that is begotten again by the Holy Spirit, but a new mind, a new will. The will of the flesh they sacrifice. They give up all earthly rights and ambitions and accept instead the will of God, the will of Christ, the Holy Spirit, that they may walk in newness of life.

(1) The Adversary is in opposition to them and will do them all the harm the Lord will permit. Their protection is the Divine promise that they will not be permitted to be tempted above that they will be able to bear—that the Lord will supervise their interests so that with every temptation there will be provided a way of escape.

(2) They are in a world that is dark with sin and selfishness, superstition and ignorance of God and out of harmony with his righteousness. The world and its spirit surge about them every day, from morning until night. Its tides and currents seek to sweep them away from their resolutions of self-sacrifice and loyalty to God and righteousness. In various ways it holds out to them enchanting prospects, pleasures and riches, ease and affluence. These have their weight, even though it be known that comparatively few who follow the world's beckoning and allurements ever receive the fulfillment of the promises held out to them.

Jesus, and thus to go in an opposite direction from the course of the world and at the cost of the crucifixion, the mortification, of his own flesh and his natural preferences.

Thus viewed every Spirit-begotten Christian, is an object of sympathy from the Divine standpoint, and this should be their standpoint toward each other. But the world has no sympathy. The world sees not, neither does it understand nor appreciate the exceeding great and precious promises which lie behind the consecration of the "saints," "the Church of the firstborn." So much the more, each of these brethren, "dearly beloved," should have sympathy for each other, and should encourage one another, strengthen one another, build one another up in the most holy faith, and, by all means, do nothing to stumble each other in the narrow way.

The "saints" cannot fight Satan. They can merely by their wills resist him and rely upon the promises of grace to help and to protect. The "saints" cannot conquer the world and convert it to God—that is too Herculean a task. God, as we have seen, has provided the thousand years of Messiah's reign for that purpose—to conquer the world, to overthrow sin and to uplift the willing and obedient of humanity. But the "saints" must all overcome the world in the sense of resisting its spirit and keeping their hearts loyal to God, loyal to their Covenant of consecration which they have made to him. The heavenly promises with the still greater rewards of glories far above anything that the world has to offer, are the greatest aids in this resistance of the worldly spirit.

The great work for the Church is the good fight of faith manifested in the putting away of the filth of their own flesh and spirit. Some by nature have more filth of the flesh and spirit, more meanness, more selfishness, more natural depravity, etc., than have others. Nevertheless, the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; for the Lord's arrangement with each member of the Royal Priesthood is that he shall be judged according to the spirit or intention, and not according to the flesh.

From the time of the Christian's consecration to the Lord he is reckoned dead as a human being and alive as a spirit being. His test or trial is not with a view to seeing whether or not he can do the impossible thing of living an absolutely perfect life in an imperfect body. His trial or test, on the contrary, is to see to what extent his mind, his will, fights a good fight against his natural weaknesses and frailties. "There is none righteous, no, not one." All the trying in the world could not prove this Divine statement an incorrect one. Righteousness of the will, holiness of heart, purity of intent, are the possibilities; for these God seeks and these he will reward in the "First Resurrection" by granting perfect spirit bodies, in full harmony with their pure hearts, their loyal intentions and purposes.

How to Put Away Filth of the Flesh. If it is impossible for the New Creature to perfect the flesh, what does the Apostle mean by urging the saints to cleanse themselves from the filth of the flesh? He means that we should not, as New Creatures, be discouraged and say that, because we cannot hope to attain perfection in the flesh, therefore we will make no endeavors in that direction. He wishes us to understand that it is the Lord's will that we fight against the weaknesses of the flesh with a two-fold purpose:

(1) That we may gradually cleanse ourselves—gradually become more and more what the Lord would have us be and what we should like to be ourselves.

(2) Additionally, this fight against sin in the flesh will make us stronger and stronger as New Creatures, in the spirit of our minds. It is this firmness, this determination, this positiveness of the New Creature against sin and for righteousness that God desires. Those who develop it are called "overcomers," and all of their experiences in these trials and battlings against the world, the flesh and the adversary, are designed to make them "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Their experiences are so ordered and directed as to lead them to more and more of faith in God and obedience to him. In order to be acceptable, they must reach the place where they love righteousness and hate iniquity—in equity.

Christian Filthiness of Spirit.

The word spirit in the Bible and in ordinary language is used in a variety of senses. In our text it does not signify that the saints, as spirit beings, are filthy and need cleansing. Quite to the contrary, the New Creature, begotten of the spirit, is holy, pure. But as the New Creature must use the body of flesh until it receives the New Body, so it must use the brain or mind of the flesh wherewith to do its thinking and reasoning, until that which is perfect shall be attained in the "First Resurrection." The Apostle's meaning, therefore, is that the saints should not only put away filthiness of words and actions, and all sympathy with impurity of every kind, but that their minds (their thoughts) also should be pure, should be cleansed of everything not fully in sympathy and accord with the mind of Christ. Nor are we to suppose that this work is purely God's work in us. It is his to forgive the sins of the past. It is his to cleanse us from all condemnation of the past. It is his to cover through Christ all of our unintentional blemishes. It is his to encourage by his promises. But it is ours to show our loyalty to the principles of his Word and character by putting away, to the extent of our ability, all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.



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