

SOBER REFLECTION

WITHDRAWN once again from the immediate concerns of this passing life, we have an opportunity for sober reflection which we do well to turn to account. Soon we shall assemble in another place on an occasion, and for a purpose, that will cause us to think soberly, if we have never done so before, but our sober thinking may not have the same value then. Gathered in the presence of Christ for judgment, our sober thoughts will have no corrective power. There will be no further opportunity of giving effect to wise resolutions. The account will be closed. Things done under the impulse created by the announcement of the Lord's actual arrival will not be reckoned; for self-evidently, these would not be works of faith, and it is works of faith, or their absence, that will be the ground of acceptance or rejection. The difference between the present occasion and that, is that we can now sit in judgment on ourselves to some purpose. We can examine ourselves in the light of the standard, and see where we are. If we are walking as becometh saints, we can renew our course in thanksgiving; if we are faltering in the way, we can confess our sins, ask forgiveness, and determine on a more strict subjection to the work in all things, seeking to obey the apostolic exhortation which says: "*Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless*" (2 Peter 3: 14). Let our determination, however, on this head, take a wise form. Mere sorrow for shortcoming, and resolve to do better, will not help us. The religious world abundantly illustrates this vanity. In the more earnest sects the people come together in solemn assembly, and groan while the preacher declaims, or the player-saver pours forth his Baal-like invocations: they groan and cry and feel bad, and go away and continue as they were before. They are not benefited, because their feelings have merely undergone a superstitious agitation; their understandings have not been appealed to; they have not been pointed to the Word; they have not been placed in the way of well-doing: they have merely been put through a sentimental performance. No doubt they go away pacified and satisfied as though they had done an acceptable and a justifying thing. If they were scripturally instructed, they would see differently. Israel was condemned for this very thing, viz., that they lived in disobedience, and then thought to make good their deficiencies by making a doleful lamentation when they came to worship. Thus we read in Malachi, "*And this have you done again, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with crying out, inasmuch that HE REGARDETH NOT THE OFFERING ANY MORE, or receiveth it with goodwill at your hands*" (Malachi 2: 13). True, there is a time to weep, and there are people to whom it would be a great blessing if their levity and their indifference could be occasionally dissolved in tears of repentance towards God. James addresses such in these words: "*Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness*" (4: 8- 9). At the same time, the mere bemoaning of misdeeds will not ensure the amendment of our course. To rectify a man's actions you must affect the springs from which they come. Sorrow will be useful to him if it set him on the right way to do this. There is but one right way. It is indicated in those well-known words of the 119th Psalm: "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to THY WORD.*" The whole Psalm seems devoted to the purpose of holding up and extolling the Word of God as the means of enlightenment and sanctification. In this it agrees with the sentiment of the Scriptures generally, and with reason and experience. Joshua was commanded: "*Observe to do according to all the law which Moses, My servant, commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein*" (Joshua 1: 8). So also

it was provided concerning the king of Israel, that *"he shall write him a copy of this law in a book. . . . and it shall be with him and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God"* (Deuteronomy 17: 18-19). So also Israel was commanded to write the words of the law on the posts of their houses and their gates: *"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when, thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up"* (Deuteronomy 6: 7). The same thing was enjoined on believers in the apostolic day: *"As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, **that ye may grow thereby**"* (1 Peter 2: 2). *"Meditate on these things: give thyself wholly to them"* (1 Timothy 4: 15), *"I commend you to God and **THE WORD** of His grace, **which is able to build you up** and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified"* (Acts 20: 32). *"Ye are clean through the word that I have spoken to you"* (John 15: 3). *"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life"* (John 6: 63). The words of David, in Psalm 19: 7, may be emphatically applied to the whole testimony of God, whether delivered before or after his day: *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes, the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is Thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

These exhortations and statements are far more deeply founded in truth and wisdom than the majority of people recognise. The pagan view, that the human mind is in itself a celestial wise, and immortal good thing, has done more than anything to rob this department of the Divine testimony of its force. People have failed to see the great excellence of the Scriptures through the notion that they have in their own minds a fountain of wisdom. They think the Scriptures very good in their way, but not entitled to the, encomiums passed upon them in the foregoing language, which they consider strained and extravagant.

When people come to see the truth, they will get rid of this most truly unlearned opinion. Seeing the truth involves a perception of the utter poverty of the human mind by nature, and that the only knowledge that is ultimately valuable is precisely the knowledge communicated in the Scriptures, and which is nowhere else accessible. In proportion as they realise the actual state of the case, they will subscribe fervently to the declarations of David. They will come to see that no language can exaggerate the value and excellence of the Scriptures, but that what Paul says is true: *"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 thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* The result of this perception to consistent people will be that very daily reading and studying the holy oracles which are commanded. Therefore, brethren and sisters, if in our self-examination on such an occasion as this, we come to the conclusion that we are lacking, let our sorrow be mixed with the resolution to give a more diligent attention to **THE READING OF THE WORD**. This, if patiently persevered in, will lead to the other great corrective of our course; the other great enlightener and assimilator of our minds to the Divine standard prayer.

There cannot be genuine prayer till there is a genuine faith in God, and genuine faith in God cannot in our day be attained excepting by a continual dwelling in the word. It is in the word we make His acquaintance, both as to what He has done, what He has promised, what He desires in us, and what He is in Himself. These things are not learnt by looking at the sky,

the sea, the mountains, or any of the other features of Nature. God had to reveal Himself for us to know Him. He has done it, and we can only get the knowledge of Him by having recourse to the repository of this knowledge—the word of His truth written afore time, very voluminously for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Having recourse to this— *"watching daily at wisdom's gates, waiting at the posts of her doors"*— we make our acquaintance with God, and are moved to approach Him continually with the ascription of our adoration, the thanksgiving of our gratitude, the confession of our short comings, the petition for His help of which we stand in need, in the various matters related to us. This habit will grow, and become an increasing source of strength, comfort and enlightenment. It is a thing we are commanded to do. Jesus taught that *"men ought always to pray"* (Luke 18: 1). He told his disciples to *"pray always"* (Luke 21: 36). The apostles are frequent in their exhortations on this point. *"Pray without ceasing"* (1 Thessalonians 5: 17) *"Giving thanks always for all things"* (Ephesians 5: 20).

In Moses we have an illustration that has stood forth in all time— a plain, graphic, striking intimation, in picture, so to speak, of the fact that God delights to be requested to move in our behalf, and that our help depends on the continuance of our attitude of *prayer* towards Him. On the hill top, overlooking a battle going on in the valley between Israel and Amalek, he stood with the rod of God in his hand. *"And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed"* (Exodus 17: 11). So must we always have our eye towards the upholder of heaven and earth, in everything give thanks, and make our requests known unto God. The disposition so to do will grow with the reading of the word.

The Psalms abound with examples of this pouring out of the soul to God. We cannot do better than bestow a few moments on the Psalm read this morning (21). It strikes a joyful key-note: *"The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord."* In this it differs from most of the Psalms. The Psalms for the most part are of a sorrowful cast. They give utterance to the oppressed feelings of David and the Son of David during the times of their affliction. But in this case we have a burst of joy. This reminds us that the sorrow is provisional: *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."* Mourning will not always be the lot of God's people. Jesus pronounces them *"blessed"* in their mourning, for that *"they shall be comforted."* This *"comfort"* is the end of the matter. *"The redeemed of the Lord shall come to Zion with singing: everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."* This coming time of gladness can only be reached through sorrow. The gladness is prepared for us by the sorrow. Without experience of evil, we should not be fitted for the goodness that is to succeed for those who put their trust in God before the sons of men. Their sorrow does not come for its own sake. *"God doth not willingly afflict the children of men."* *"He will not always chide."* We are chastened, now, that we may not be condemned with the world. We are expressly made subject to evil, *"that we may become partakers of His holiness";* without evil, we should be liable to become heedless and strange towards God. If we remember this in all the burdened days of our pilgrimage, and especially when we are dashed against the sharp pricks of adversity, it will, greatly help us to endure and to be profitably exercised. Nay, it will actually give us seasons of joy, and these seasons will become brighter and more enduring as faith grows stronger.

This joy will be of the complexion of David's and his Lord's. *"The king shall joy in Thy strength; and in Thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice."* This joy in God is what is commanded: - *"Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous."* It is what Paul enjoins: *"Rejoice in the*

Lord always; again I say, rejoice." To the man of the world this is unintelligible; to enlightened experience it is one of the sweetest facts of existence. There are various kinds of joy. Most people's joys are of creature origin. A friend comes to see them from a distance, or they get a better situation, or they are invited to some great man's house, or they succeed in making a great profit, or they get well married, or they get children, or they come to some estate, or they acquire some fame; some such matter is the fuel by which the flame of their gladness is fed. God is unknown in their experience, and joy in Him a thing impossible. It is the mission of Christ, through the Gospel, to reach men to rejoice in God. And an unfailing source of joy is God when once the mind opens to the great fact of His existence, excellence and power; for is not He beyond all minor causes of joy? Those minor causes fail; He never. He is from everlasting to ever lasting. With Him is strength; not the strength that belongs to man: man owes his strength to the bread he eats; and the bread he eats, with man himself, is a perishable thing. Man dieth and wasteth away. But when we turn our eyes to God, we see the full meaning of the words: "*Be Thou exalted in Thine own strength: so will we sing and praise Thy power.*" What an admirable idea! Oh, peerless truth! Oh, measureless ocean of comfort, in whose healing waters it is life to bathe! Men appreciate intrinsic excellence in small things. The glittering gold, the sparkling gem, are valued because in themselves enduring and cankerless; but where are the fine gold and precious stones when we lift our eyes to ETERNAL, UNDECAYING, SELF-CONSISTING STRENGTH, WISDOM, LIFE, LOVE and POWER? There is no glory but this; no good but God, He is the fountain of all the little good we see, and Himself the highest good of all. No wonder that His invitations to eternal fellowship with him should be qualified with the request that He should be first. No wonder that His advances to us are so planned that no flesh should glory in His presence. No wonder that evil should prevail when sin against His holy name is so rampant in the earth. "Many there be which say, Who will show us any good?" What is the answer of the instructed? "*Lord, lift upon us the light of Thy countenance.*" "*The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and all the upright in heart shall trust in Him.*" This is their present joy. Vain is every other satisfaction. They fix their eyes on Him, knowing that even during the present night of darkness, during which He hides His face for a moment, He guides them with His hand unseen; and that in due time, the night will flee away, and His glory shine forth with the brightness of morning, which shall revive their hearts and fill their mouths with song.

From Seasons of Comfort Volume 1 Pages 97-101 by Bro. R. Roberts
