

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 13

Romans 5—This chapter is, perhaps, one of the most fruitful in spiritual things that we can read. It presents in complete aspect the position to which we are and have been related.

“Now, therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We had occasion last Sunday morning to see, from Rom. 4, that faith is the means by which God pleases to justify men unto eternal life. That lesson had a special value to those who, like Paul and the other apostles, had been brought up under the law, and who had been taught that their only method of acceptance before God was to live blameless in the obedience of that law. This obedience was almost an impossibility from the weakness of human nature. It was, therefore, a particularly welcome intimation that men could be justified by faith in Christ—that members of Adam’s condemned race, could, by the belief of God’s promises, place themselves in such a relationship to God as ultimately to attain unto eternal life, without “*the deeds of the law*,” by which it was now declared no flesh could be justified. This was the lesson of Paul’s simple declaration:

“The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.”

Being justified by faith, standing in the position which we occupy if we have believed the gospel, and assumed allegiance to Jesus, in the putting on of his name, “*we have peace with God*.” We could not have peace with God in any other position. As between God and ourselves individually, it was not in our power to change our positions as aliens and strangers—outcasts from the friendship of God, having no hope and no destiny of eternal life. Not only ancestral extraction, but our own individual delinquencies were against us. Friendship with God was as high above our reach as heaven is above the earth. But, blessed be His name, there is now a way by which we can reach to it, and that is through Jesus Christ. This is a way of His own making. We had nothing to do with it. He saw there was no man, and His own arm brought salvation. He manifested himself in flesh by the spirit, raised for himself a son from our stock, who went through all our tribulations, and bore our curse and died, that he might overcome the sentence of death that works in all of us; him hath God raised from the dead, and highly exalted as the mediator between God and man: the only channel by which intercourse with God is possible: God deals with no man outside of Christ; He has committed all judgment into his hands. Utterly weak and sinful, and mortal as we were, it was impossible we could have a standing in the presence of God of ourselves, but we are here this morning to rejoice that through this man, we can.

“By whom,” it says, “we have access by faith into this grace (or favour) wherein we stand.”

By Christ alone, we stand in this favour, and it is really a position of favour. These verses, which to most people are dry and non-expressive of intelligible idea, sparkle with glorious meaning to the understanding of those, who by continual reading of the word, and reflection, become exercised to discern. Those who do not read, cannot know the unsearchable riches of Christ. Those who read and do not reflect upon what they read, are little better off. Under the law, the clean animals were those which chewed the cud—those which, in zoological language, are called ruminant animals, which not only take the food, but afterwards bring it up again for re-mastication, deriving additional pleasure and enjoyment

and nutrition from the process. The unclean animals were those which swallowed their food at once, and did nothing more with it.

Now we are given to understand, that all these things in the law were typical of what was to be, so that when God wanted to represent to Peter the Gentiles from whom He was about to take a people through him, He showed him a great sheet full of all manner of beasts, so that animals represented different classes of men. Those represented by the clean are those who not only get the word in, but ruminate upon it, —turn it over in their minds, dwell upon it, and grow by it. If we are of this class, we shall be able to appreciate what is meant by this position of favour, and we shall the better appreciate it, if we look at the bad side of it, that is, the position we occupied before entrance upon our present one. We have all had experience of that position. It is that in which Paul says we were without God and without hope in the world. That is to say, although we were in God—for all things exist in Him: a house, a tree, a rock, as much as a man; for His spirit is everywhere, and by His spirit he embraces all—although we were in God in this sense, we were without Him in the sense of His friendship. There was no mental connection between us and the Father, —only a physical one, such as exists between Him and grass. He has made the grass, but the grass grows, and changes, and passes away, and other grass comes. So with beasts; by the spirit of God they live; as individuals they have no recognition. They are the embodiment of His power, which, in its operation, will destroy them and make way for successors. So with poor man: his breath is in his nostrils; the physical does nothing for him, beyond giving him a status while he lives. He will die and perish like the beast if he get nothing more of God in him than his birth gives him. The mental is the basis of the physical. This is seen in many ways. The divine idea precedes creation. This is going back to the beginning.

As regards ourselves, mental relationship is the basis of permanence, physically, toward God. This is going deep, perhaps, yet it is the simple truth. Man as man has nothing of permanence in him. He is without God, though physically in God, because the divine purpose is in such relation toward him that he will come to nothing. In Christ, he becomes a new creature, and this will be more apparent in future results than seen now. Those who become sons of God, by having their minds and actions fashioned after a certain model, in the present time, will endure for ever. All other individuals are transient as a dream, which is very real while it lasts, but a nothing for all that. The Scriptures declare this of human nature, that in its natural condition,

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass; the grass withereth, the flower thereof falleth away.”

That is the position we were in—in company with the grass and the beasts of the field. In our ignorance and soft complacency, we did not feel as if we belonged to the grass. We were more important in some sense; yet as regarded our permanency, we were in no better position. We had eyes, and we could look upon the beautiful things around us, but neither eyes nor the beautiful things were ours, because death was hastening to close the scene for ever. We felt the capability to love and to rise to great ideas, but our position was such that they would soon sink beneath the ground. We could also see a great deal to be desired, and feel within ourselves many high desires; but the very capability to entertain these desires was not our own, because we were without God, and related to the law of sin and death, which would inevitably destroy us from the face of the universe. We felt the hopelessness and misery of our position. We were all unhappy. This is everybody's experience, who has any capability for noble things, who has anything of the man in him at all; in whom human nature is developed in anything like approximation to its original type.

Unfortunately, there are not many with whom this is the case. The image of the Elohim is scarcely visible in the majority of mankind. The merely animal faculties have got the upper hand in the world. The selfish impulses rule; the Elohist qualities are submerged. True nobility of mind is a scarce article. The friction of sin in the channel of many generations has worn it out, except where God, by the influence of His word, has preserved it. What you see going about the streets is a mere caricature of human nature. It is not the noble creature of Eden. The crowd is a crowd of “objects” when we speak of what man was and will be. They are distorted, disfigured specimens of a noble race. A real man or woman is a being beautiful to look at, delightful to consider, charming to deal with. But there are not many such. We were made in the image of the Elohim, but that image is nearly defaced. In some there are lingering traces. For these, there is hope through the gospel. It is only those who approximate to that image, that are capable of reflecting the divine mind.

Jesus teaches this lesson in his parable of the seed. The seed is scattered, and brings forth fruit over a wide area; but it is only in certain places that the fruit is unto eternal life. It goes into certain kind of soil, where there is abundant germ of weed and thistle; and what does Jesus say these are?

“The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.”

The soil in which the cares of this world are allowed to be stronger than the truth, is soil which will bring forth no fruit to perfection. Another kind of soil gives quick germination to the seed: the word is received with gladness; the parties are delighted with the truth, and for a little while they endure. The plant comes up, and shows a beautiful face to the sun; but by and bye, there come troubles. The disappointments and the offences of life bear hard upon them; their minds are not able to endure the strain—the truth grows dim within them, and by and bye, is choked in its power. They fall away; they have no root in themselves. As Jesus said, it is only the good ground that bringeth forth fruit unto eternal life.

But what I was about to say was this, that those who have at all an appreciation of divine things, have known the misery of being without God: of being in existence without knowing why; of being in a wilderness without track—on a sea without compass—in life without God. In ignorance of God, we were without His friendship. We could not love Him, nor have confidence in Him, or hope in Him; therefore we were shut up into ourselves, and our minds blighted. We knew that there must be a God; for it could not be that we had come here by accident—that there having been a time when there were no men and women upon the earth, we were not here without a creator. But we did not feel at peace with Him. We did not feel acquainted with Him. He was too distant, too great, surrounded with clouds that we could not penetrate. But when the truth came, it put us into the glorious position, that being justified by faith, we have peace with Him; because faith takes away these clouds that surround Him, and reveals Him as a being who, though all-powerful for destruction, is omnipotent to save, and unsearchable in the bounds of His love.

The truth tells us that though He is the Lofty One, inhabiting eternity, He condescends to the poor and contrite, who tremble at His word, and pitieth those who fear Him, as a father doth his children. It tells us that He is love; that our present position is owing to His love; that we are mortal, because His love prevents a miserable immortality; that the wages of sin is death, because His love will not suffer grief for ever. It tells that God in His love has made certain promises concerning our future state, to which he has asked us to look with believing confidence. We look at these promises, and we see that they are good. He covenants to raise us from the dead. That, to begin with, is the first thing needed, because the great shadow of death blights all that we see, and spoils what there is of beauty even in this frail state. Death is *par excellence* the great curse. It is busy ever around us. We do not see people fall down in

the streets, and yet the whole face of society is changing slowly but surely. First one drops out of his place, then another, then another, until death goes all round, and takes everybody. But it is so quiet in its operations that people of superficial minds—the mere children of the human race—forget that it is a fact, and go on living as if it were not so, —as if they were going to live for ever.

When we see that there is to be a resurrection, it strikes us as the very thing that we want; and the second point in the promise is another step in glory. We are to rise—not to the state of being in which we at present exist; the resurrection is not simply to be a reproduction of this mortal body, though that would be good to a certain extent, just so good as to be saved now from death in any shape. The resurrection will give us a different constitution from what we have now; we shall not in the spiritual body be weak, susceptible to pain, or corruptible; we shall be full of joy and wisdom, free for ever from the sadness, weakness and tears which belong to the present state; delivered from the imperfections which now tear us like brambles on every side. Everyone will be subject to the will of the Father, and, exhibiting the character of the Father, will be an everlasting joy in himself, and to all in the glorious company. How different will be the state of things on earth then from what prevails now.

Now, we see everything out of joint: human society misconstituted; millions obliged to slave continually for a crust of bread, and in consequence reduced in all the noble faculties of their being, brutalised in general development, and starved out of all warmth, joy and generosity. On the other hand, there are other sinners, rolling in wealth; in carriage, proud, arrogant, selfish, and tyrannical; who grind the poor, and think it is all right, because it is according to “business.” There are evils incident to a state of sin: and could we look no higher than man, dreary would the prospect be indeed; but God has raised up a man to cure the world. He comes in due time to destroy all the works of iniquity, to put down the tyrants, to break in pieces the oppressors—to let the poor have enough; and occupations beneficial to themselves and all the world, under the righteous rule of the saints. These are beautiful promises that God has made; and He, as it were says to men: “Now believe that, and, believing it, do what I tell you to do, and you shall be justified. What I tell you to do is this: identify yourselves with this man who alone of you all has a title to eternal life; join yourselves to him; give yourselves to him and bow before him, and obey him, and serve him, and all your past sins shall be blotted out; you shall then have a share in those things that belong to him; not otherwise.”

“Come out from amongst them, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.”

Doing this, we have peace with God, because we know He is not angry with those who believe His promises, hope in His word, and obey his commandments. If we trifle with His word, or allow other things to have a higher place in our affections, we have no ground for peace; but if we magnify His word and give ourselves to the contemplation of it, we may indulge a peace that passeth understanding. God is not angry with those who chew the cud, but with the unclean beasts that take His word, bolt it, and think nothing more about it. We appear here this morning to chew the cud, brethren and sisters: let us chew it to profit.

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Sunday Morning No. 13
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