John 10:10 (JBP) 68544

Bible Treasury: Volume 15, Life More Abundantly (10:10)

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As soon as our first parents fell, God in His grace gave a word for faith to take hold of and trust in, and so it has been ever since, divine revelation becoming gradually fuller and clearer, and perhaps more and more generally known in the world.

Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith in His word, its reception because it is God's word and comes to us with divine authority, is the indispensable condition of spiritual blessing, and of personal intercourse between the soul and God. Yet the degree and specific character of the blessing have altered from time to time. The case of Abraham, for instance, stands out conspicuously, in contrast with the antediluvian patriarchs, and in some respects even in contrast with his descendants under the yoke of the law. For, though testimony as to the Messiah and His kingdom was constantly getting clearer and brighter with the unfolding of prophecy, still the Sinaitic covenant “gendered to bondage” (Gal. 4:24); such was the result to the Israelites of putting themselves under law, instead of casting themselves upon the grace of God, as expressed in His unconditional promises to their fathers, the result in fact of their utter ignorance alike of God and of themselves.

But though Jehovah's righteousness has ever been that in virtue of which sinners have been saved—though in the mind and purpose of God even before our being justified by faith, and not by works, (by works only evidentially,) nevertheless of accomplished righteousness, and the subsisting justification which depends on and follows it, none could derive the benefit, as a known state and standing, till it became and was proclaimed as an existent fact. The prophets prophesied of it (Isa. 56:1); and Daniel stated (9:24), that seventy weeks were determined amongst the things “to bring in everlasting righteousness.” It was spoken of, and trusted in, from of old, but not “revealed,” nor could the Spirit consequently be given as the seal of accomplished righteousness (John 7:39), till the Lord Jesus died, rose, and was glorified in ascension. Paul however, formally dwells upon it as accomplished and revealed (Rom. 1:17; 3:24-26); and the whole teaching of the New Testament as to Christianity, and even as to eternity, is based on it. Vain is the attempt, then, to obliterate distinctions God Himself has made, and to reduce all His dealings to one common level. The wisdom of God's ways, as displayed in the successive dispensations, will remain for over marked, like the rings which mark the growth of the tree, or the successive accretions, the age of a stone.

The glory of God, and blessing of man, have all and completely depended on Christ as Mediator. Through Him only have men ever been saved. But this does not mean that, in the administration of divine grace to men through Him, there have been neither degrees of spiritual intelligence nor diversities of spiritual privilege. An infant has not the intelligence of a full-grown man, and what is in this true in the case of individuals is true of dispensations. The spiritual status granted to saints of previous economies was wholly and in all cases inferior to the Christian status, as is very clearly stated in Luke 7:28 and consequently the spiritual capacity and intelligence were also very different. It is fallacious to say that because Old Testament saints were born of God, and are now in heaven, that therefore what is known by the Christian, such as remission of sins, justification of life, peace, the heavenly calling, &c. were known to them as to us. They had simple childlike faith in God, and in His word—a faith given by God in the coming Messiah, sustained by Him, and which God did not disappoint, for He uses this resource in this world, and afterward took them to heaven. But to apply to them, either as regards spiritual intelligence, state, or condition, truth, which for its revelation and subjective realization depended on the accomplishment of atonement, and on the descent of the Holy Ghost, is altogether a mistake, and (though unintentionally) disparages virtually the work and person of our Lord. The Epistle to the Romans, for example, is written from a Christian stand-point: the spiritual experience and privileges, therein spoken of, must be taken as in the light of Christianity, and can be understood only from the Christian position, and by the Christian sense. The sins of the Old Testament saints are said simply to have been “passed over,” or pretermitted (Rom. 3:25). In fact the value and effect of the work of Christ could be known, in the intelligence and power of the Spirit, only after Christ had suffered, been raised, and was glorified. And the personal and practical state is necessarily and at all times contingent on, the revelation which God gives, varying in degree with it in such a way that whilst in each dispensation, individual and personal faith and apprehension varied, yet dispensational light, state, standing and privilege vary also, as a whole and as a system—the Christian economy being the climax and perfection of all, and justification of life, and life in resurrection, being characteristically Christian privilege. In Rom. 7:14-24, the man spoken of has light beyond that of an Old Testament saint, but not up to the full Christian standard. As to the divine nature there was that in the saints of Old Testament times, which through grace enabled them to please God up to the light He gave them. They were born of God, and therefore feared, trusted, and obeyed God. But we must distinguish between the quickening grace of the Spirit, and the Spirit as indwelling and so the seal of accomplished. righteousness. “Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you,” could not have been said till the Spirit was given. It is a test now, but would have been no test then, because, though born of God and by the Spirit, they had not the gift of the Spirit. Nor in their case was the distinction brought to light between the mind of the flesh and the mind of the Spirit, because flesh and Spirit were not then known to be irreconcilable. Without this profound and Spirit-taught knowledge, they simply walked in the fear of God, and with the sense of His mercy which enabled them to say, “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall no flesh be justified,” whereas the Christian knows that he will never come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life.

As soon as our Lord came into the world, hearts were opened to see in Him the Savior, and to receive Him as such. Simeon takes up the blessed Infant in his arms and said, “Now lettest Thou. Thy servant, O Lord, depart in peace according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” And when thirty years after, that Blessed Man, anointed with the Holy Ghost, went forth upon His mission, far surpassing any that the Old Testament saints knew was the privilege of those who saw, heard, and received Him. In short His appearance in the world constituted an epoch (1 John 1) a fresh starting-point in every sense, and in all God's dealings with men, either spiritually or temporally. Saints were not merely quickened but made “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,” with the Spirit of adoption given to enjoy it and cry to the Father. They had a conscious relationship, and a nearness of position, never known before. Of this salvation, Peter tells us, the prophets

had inquired, but were told that not unto themselves but unto us they ministered the things now revealed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven (1 Peter 1:10-12). We are told also by Paul, Titus 2:11, that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” &c. True, this does not mean that men did not look for a Savior before; but it certainly means that a vastly more advanced and privileged position is now proclaimed to all, and is ours by faith. J. B. P.

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