

Romans - Commentaries by William John Hocking

Bible Treasury: Volume N9, Alive Unto God (6:11-23)

Notes of an Address on Romans 6:11-23

I commenced to read this evening at the eleventh verse, because the practical application of the truth communicated in the early part of the chapter begins there: "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

On a former occasion we saw that the apostle treats of the manner in which the believer is delivered from the power of sin as a principle of action, and the whole question of his conduct was seen to rest, like all such questions, on Christ Jesus and His work.

We have to look to Him for the solution of all the problems of practical moment that arise day by day in our lives, and one of our most difficult problems is how to regard the uprising of the evil nature in our hearts. This nature asserts itself in spite of the sense of God's love within us. We may have cherished the vain hope of growing out of such tendencies, and year by year of approaching nearer a state of holiness and perfection.

If so, honesty must compel us to admit that so far as our hearts are concerned, little or no real progress is made towards the extinction of inward evil. This chapter, however, sheds light on this problem. It shows that the evil nature whose presence and action we mourn received its utter condemnation in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin itself (speaking now not of sinful acts but of that which is the origin of them) was judged at the cross when He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). And we learn that in the mind of God we are associated with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, and thus, as descendants of the first Adam, we have passed into nonexistence, but have also partaken of the risen life of Christ beyond the judicial death. And this instruction brings us to the exhortation with which we opened this evening.

RECKONING OURSELVES DEAD TO SIN

The apostle had spoken of the death of the Lord Jesus, and that He now lives to God in a state altogether apart from sin. The Lord passed through this evil world uncontaminated by sin within and without. He went to the cross absolutely pure, but was there made vicariously the abhorrent thing, and judged on account of it. But rising from the dead and being exalted by the right hand of God, a new state of things ensued—a new creation—of which Christ is the Head. And in this newness of life sin is a past thing.

The apostle therefore directs believers to regard themselves as having already passed from death to life where Christ is: "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (ver. 11).

This verb "reckon" carries us back to the fourth chapter of this Epistle, where we read of God reckoning Abraham righteous because of his faith. The patriarch believed God in a matter which seemed in itself most improbable. For in the ordinary course of nature it seemed an incredible thing that blessing should flow to the earth through the unborn seed of an old man and woman. But Abraham believed the LORD and His promises, and this was counted to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). God looking down from heaven regarded Abraham as a righteous man. His faith was in connection with the seed which was to come, that is, Christ; and indeed this confidence was true also of all the Old Testament saints. There might be and was failure, as there were faults; but wheresoever there was faith in the Coming One it was reckoned for righteousness.

Here we are exhorted to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God. It must be carefully observed that this is an exercise of faith. If we consider ourselves conscientiously we shall find ourselves capable of sinning, if not actually sinning. We fail to find inward or subjective evidence that we are dead to sin. But faith accepts the testimony of the word of God that I am associated with Christ in both death and resurrection. Hence I am dead to the dominant power of sin and alive heavenward. This status I must accept if I believe God rather than self.

TO GOD OR TO SELF?

We must broaden our views of what sin really means. Taken comprehensively it includes all that lacks due reference to God. Actions precisely similar in outward appearance may nevertheless differ in essential quality and value according as they are done to self or to God.

An instance of this is recorded in the Gospels. It occurred in the temple courts at the time when the offerings were being placed in the treasury chest. Here was an opportunity of making a sacrifice to God by depositing a sum of money for the use of the temple service. Many rich and influential persons gave substantial amounts, doing so in an ostentatious manner to attract the attention and admiration of their neighbors. Thus the offertory became to them a means of self-advertisement, and they gained as their reward the notice of their fellows.

But the Lord observed among the offerers a person of another order. There was a poor widowed heart in the company overwhelmed with gratitude and praise to God. Something had happened in her experience which caused her to be full of thanksgiving to God who had granted her some special fullness of blessing. She was therefore impelled to offer some sacrifice of her goods to His service (Luke 21:1-4)

What should she render to the Lord for all His benefits? Two mites constituted her sole livelihood. Under such circumstances should she not divide the small pittance, giving a part and reserving a part? From the point of view of what is called practical economics this course would seem the more reasonable. But the widow did not regard the matter from the standpoint of her own present or future needs, for she was full of a sense of the great kindness of Jehovah to her. She resolved she would not hold back anything, being a contrast with Ananias and

Sapphira of a later day. She placed her all in the box—not the widow's mite, but her two mites. Her gift was to God. She gained the victory over self, and everything being offered to God, the gift was appraised by the heavenly standard. Her motives gave the sacrifice of her goods a value above that of all the rest.

Another example of this truth is to be gathered from the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul, by reference to himself, shows how worthless, though moral in themselves, acts become when the will of God is contravened. In the third chapter he speaks of himself and of what he was before he knew the Lord. He enumerates the privileges he possessed at that time only to pronounce them to be not only valueless but even offensive. His circumcision and law-keeping were quite proper matters for satisfaction until he learned the super-excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

The qualities he names are not such as are sinful in themselves, but such as might reasonably give him confidence in the flesh. And the flesh is not necessarily the evil principle. It is the natural way of doing things, that is, always acting from the individual's own standpoint, without looking above and seeking the will of God.

Saul of Tarsus before his conversion had a position of pre-eminence. If any one might have confidence in the flesh, he most surely might have done so. Did he not contend zealously for the law? Was he not desirous of keeping it to its most minute particular? Yet at the very time during which he supposed he was doing God service he was persecuting the church of God.

Touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless. Can you imagine anything more desirable in a man? In outward demeanor he was perfect and upright so far as the eye could see. But having learned the truth of the person of the Christ in glory, he counted the whole of his own attainments in this respect as nothing and worse than that.

He wrote then quietly in prison, looking back upon his past life in the light he had received through advancing years, without a warped imagination and without self-deception, and he describes his early days as blameless. The statement is a remarkable one; but whatever gain this unblemished character might have been to him he counted it but loss for Christ. He reckoned himself to be dead indeed to those things and alive to God through Jesus Christ the Lord. The things he mentions had no more effect upon him than upon a dead person.

This piece of autobiography is an illustration of our text. What Paul wrote by way of doctrine in Romans, he exemplified from his own life in Philippians. In the earlier Epistle he spoke of being alive to God through Christ Jesus the Lord. In the later we see the activities of that life expressing themselves in intensity of desire and earnestness of effort.

There was therefore a continuity in the life of the apostle. He did not depart from the self-renunciation of his early days. His enthusiasm did not wane as trials and persecutions multiplied. Neither did self assume a Christian garb. Christ was the dominating object before him, as the Epistle to the Philippians reveals. In practice he was still reckoning himself dead to sin, but alive to God.

THE REIGN OF SIN

We now come to a further exhortation: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (ver. 12). The truth underlying this command is that in our natural state the inward evil principle lords it over us completely. The whole person is carried away by selfish pursuits and pleasures, and from this bondage the gospel delivers us, bringing us tinder a new Master, even Jesus the Lord.

To Him we are called to yield ourselves as those who are alive from the dead. We are not free agents in the sense of being "our own," but we are His who died for us and rose again. We cannot plan to serve the Lord to-day or to-morrow as it may suit us. In such matters self has no right to rule or to decide. We are delivered from its reign, and Christian service is but to give Christ His own.

YIELDING OURSELVES AND OUR MEMBERS

From verse 13 we gather that there are two divisions in the act of surrender. The act is to apply to the person as a whole, and to the various separate powers he possesses. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

We have then to present self, that is, to present the entire being, spirit, soul and body. This we offer to Him as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, our reasonable service. The whole entity is His, and we "yield ourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead."

This act may be called consecration or dedication, or whatever you please. But in fact it constitutes the heart's response to the living Lord, from the initial stage of its history. Saul of Tarsus from the dust said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" In self-abnegation he placed himself unreservedly at the Master's disposal. This surrender was, of course, in principle at first, but he followed on in that attitude of heart, schooling and educating himself physically and morally to do the will of God in all things, all his members subjugated and working together harmoniously to this common end.

JUSTIFICATION OF LIFE

The apostle brings in practical righteousness as the outcome of such service as this, "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" "Being then made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness." "Now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

In the previous chapters of this Epistle the apostle treats of that judicial righteousness which we receive through faith. But the concomitant effect upon the believer is to make his conduct righteous also. Righteous actions or "works" are the evidence of inward faith. So James instructs us. He says, "Faith without works is dead," and he refers to the case of Abraham. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" (James 2:20, 21).

Now the patriarch believed God some forty years before the sacrifice of Isaac. It was a settled thing between God and him. God promised; Abraham believed God; and He counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). But this righteousness of faith was to be demonstrated before men, and on mount Moriah Abraham's life was justified by his actions.

FRUIT UNTO HOLINESS

"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (ver. 22). Holiness implies separation to the service of God. The vessels of the tabernacle and of the temple were holy, for they were used exclusively in the worship of Jehovah. When Belshazzar used them at his revels, the judgment of God fell upon the impious king.

Believers are holy vessels belonging to God, and placed here in the world for His service. Filled with Christ, what use may we not be to thirsty souls? The result of our yielding ourselves up as bondslaves to God will be "fruit unto holiness."

It involves an error to think of holiness only from its negative side; for it implies much more than the absence of sin. Consideration of this aspect alone leads to a morbid state in which there is often a long and unavailing struggle to attain to this condition. The whole truth is that holiness is positive as well as negative. It expresses itself in an absolute devotion to God. The holy are His instruments. When God takes hold of a man, the divine touch makes him holy.

We are therefore to yield ourselves to God as those that are alive to Him, not keeping back a part like Ananias and Sapphira, whose devotion was a pretense and abomination to God. Such fruit was not unto holiness.

SIN'S WAGES AND GOD'S GIFT

The apostle concludes this section with the weighty declaration, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (ver. 23). This is one of the few instances of the mention of eternal life in the writings of Paul. In John the subject abounds both in his Gospel and in his Epistles. The two apostles, however, are in no sense in opposition to one another, but were inspired to record different views of the same blessing of God for man through His grace.

Paul shows us eternal life in its activities in the justified person — the new life which is in a risen Savior. Instead of corruption and death which are the emoluments of a life of sin, God bestows eternal life through Jesus Christ. Through the grace of God, we are justified by faith, for Jesus the Lord was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification; and that great sacrifice made way for us to be delivered from the thralldom in which we were once held to the evil propensities of our nature.

This then is the new life which God gives. He has made us free to live to Him and to serve Him in the name of Jesus Christ. W. J. H.

Bible Treasury: Volume N9, Death With Christ (6:1-11)

Notes of an Address On Romans 6:1-11

The verses which I have now read give us instruction with regard to our manner of life as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will at once be noticed that this instruction is not set out in the form of a detailed code which we are required to observe. There is no list here specifying the various conditions of our conduct. Indeed we shall look in vain in the New Testament for such particulars.

This feature of the New Testament is in contrast with the Old Testament where we find the duties of life specified perfectly and precisely, and the Jew could with comparatively little difficulty discover what religious ordinances he was required to observe. But in the later and the last revelation the will of God in respect of His worshippers is differently expressed. The duties of a believer are not now furnished to him in definitely prescribed formula. In other words, he is not, like the Israelite in regard to his sacrifices, commanded to do this in the morning, that in the afternoon, and something else in the evening.

The followers of Christ are now provided with principles of action in lieu of precise rules. These principles enter more deeply into the marrow of our lives than the Mosaic regime did. They are matters of consideration for the heart and for the conscience, and they make it necessary that we should pay careful heed to our ways if we desire, as we surely ought to do, to comport ourselves in a manner well-pleasing to God.

INDWELLING SIN

Here in this sixth chapter of Romans we have one particular principle with regard to the life of the believer and with regard to that part of the sincere believer which sooner or later causes him serious anxiety by its undesirable activity. The fact which underlies this portion of the Epistle is the continuous presence of sin within the believer. For that is but a foolish dream which supposes that the child of God may in this world arrive at a state of "no sin." It is merely a baseless notion to imagine that there are some persons who live in this world as if they were in heaven, and who are altogether, unaffected by any evil influences from without or from within. Any persons who assume to be in such a condition of perfection grossly deceive themselves (1 John 1:8-10).

The subject of this chapter therefore comprehends a great practical question, and one which for its vital importance should be fully faced. The apostle brings forward the evil principle of sin within the believer under the figure of a tyrant who seeks to exercise supreme control over the person in antagonism to righteousness and divine holiness. Alongside the description of the tendencies of this opposing power, the truth of the mastership and authority of God is developed.

For help in the exposition of this section we may conveniently entitle this chapter "The Two Masters," just as a suitable title for the latter part of the previous chapter would be "The Two Heads." There we have set out, in the way of contrast, that which, as to origin, is Christ's and also

that which is Adam's. From our first parents we derive our sinful nature as an inalienable inheritance. This is the first family, the family of human nature; but there is another family, of which Christ is the head; and as a matter of actual experience the honest and enlightened believer discovers that in spite of his new position in the second family, sin itself as an active force is still present within him.

SIN AND SINS

In the former part of this Epistle (Rom. Ch. 1-5:11), the effects of sin in debasing the human family are expatiated upon, and the means, divinely introduced, of justification for the guilty. This portion deals with sinful deeds, overt actions, the specific acts which are offensive before a holy God; and from such offenses none are exempt. But peace with God is shown to be the possession of the believer since the Lord Jesus Christ has secured justification for those who believe God—those who “believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification” (4:24, 25).

But in the sixth chapter the subject of offenses, the evil things done, is not treated, but rather the question how these things arise in the history and experience of the child of God. Why are there evil tendencies present in the heart of an earnest Christian? How is it that sin springs up contrary to desire within such a person?

That such distressing anomalies do occur is the practical experience of every person who follows Christ, devotedly follows Him perhaps through persecution and tribulation. In spite of our sorrow that such things should arise, and of our earnest desire to be preserved therefrom, evil obtrudes itself even into our most solemn occupations. We find that unholy thoughts spring up, uninvited and unwelcome, apart from any conscious influence around us. They arise from within, from indwelling sin.

How strange this condition of things appears in a person who has tasted of the grace of God and who is persuaded that Christ died for his sins, and who has confessed His name before the world! Many Christians are confronted with this difficulty in their own experience to their own consternation and grief. Often the person fails to find a satisfactory solution of this problem. He seeks perhaps an explanation in the literature and philosophies of the world, or in the wisdom and experience of his friends, but he is unable to discover any clue to the mystery why he finds himself perpetually doing what he hates to do.

It seems only natural and right to assume that if a person loves the Lord he will also love to do His will. And in seeking to do that will, if he does not at first succeed, he will by perseverance improve on the second and third attempts, and so eventually overcome the susceptibilities of his heart to evil.

But such is not the experience of those who are faithful before Him who searches the hearts, as to the results of their efforts at self-conquest. The light of God manifests themselves to themselves. Even in their prayers and in their praises the inward evil intrudes. Some thereupon resort to stern measures to eradicate these unholy tendencies; they seek to choke them, to overcome them, to live them down. But in this self-imposed contest with the sinful nature they find themselves worsted again and again.

Such struggles with self therefore will in practice prove to be in vain. If there should seem sometimes to be a victory it is only a momentary one. The root of sin has not been extirpated nor even weakened. And all efforts to destroy it by fasting or by rigorous torture of the body also fail. Seclusion within four walls and regular series of protracted devotional exercises are likewise ineffectual to expel the inward evil.

INDIFFERENCE TO SIN

Such an experience of failure, sometimes, when the doctrine of scripture on this subject is ignored, leads to a reaction—to a dangerous acquiescence in this state of things as if it were both inevitable and unavoidable. It is then assumed that the presence and activity of sin is not to be regarded as a serious matter. A man argues thus: “If I cannot rid myself of the sin within me it cannot be helped, and I need not be anxious; God is gracious; His love is infinite; the sacrifice of Christ is efficacious for all things; my conduct as a believer is not a subject of grave concern; everything will be righted in the end.”

Now this Epistle utterly condemns such a spirit of license, and at the same time affords the real solution of this practical problem of Christian life. Here it is declared that where sin abounded so profusely there grace exceeded in abundance: “Where sin abounded there did grace much more abound, that even as sin reigned unto death, even so grace reigned through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So that inasmuch as sin overwhelms man in direst disaster, grace more than meets this condition of abject servitude, since it exceeds all the sum of evil in the whole world. We are to believe therefore that God's grace is superior to all sinful influences that assail the believer, and must therefore lead to triumph. Only the practical victory may not be gained except by warfare on lines approved by scripture.

The fact, however, is made clear that this eventual triumph of grace must not be abused to condone present license. The apostle asks the question: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Let it not be. How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer therein?” (vers. 1, 2). The habitual practice of sin by a believer is an utter denial of the delivering power of God. The concurrent reign of sin and grace is incompatible with the divine nature. And the fact that a man, cannot deliver himself from the power of indwelling sin is no evidence that God will not deliver him.

The apostle here condemns the evil suggestion that would seek in the abounding grace of God an excuse for sinful indulgence. Such a thought is unholy, and it is sufficient to state it to expose its self-condemnation. Can grace reigning through righteousness permit a sinful course to be pursued? And this evil thought to which we are subject is held up before us that we may see how wretched and unworthy it is and flee from it.

SELF

But it is needful to be aware of the diverse forms of sin; and perhaps no form of it is more common or more subtle than that of pleasing oneself. Continuing in sin may not necessarily imply walking in forbidden paths of flagrant unholiness, but simply living for self without any reference to God and His will.

This subtle character of evil was manifested from the beginning. The first sin was not one that at first sight appeared loathsome in its nature, as some offenses do. To have eaten of desirable fruit would not be regarded as an abominable crime, if judged from a human code of ethics. But Eve consulted her own interest or inclination or pleasure, in complete disregard and even defiance of God's express prohibition. In short, she pleased herself. And such a selfish motive is the essence of sin. The description of the sinless Man is that He pleased not Himself (Rom. 15:3). And the believer is called to imitate the life not of the First but of the Second man, by living not for self but for the praise and glory of God.

HOW WE ARE DELIVERED

Now we are taught in this chapter that by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ we are delivered from that bondage to sin wherein we were held. This redemption from slavery is as definite as the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. They were under the power of a despot in a strange land where it was impossible for them to serve God. But the nation was first of all preserved by bloodshedding in the hour of judgment, and then rescued from slavery. Jehovah brought them miraculously through the Red Sea, and they were able to look back and see the dead bodies of their oppressors upon the sea shore. They thus became Jehovah's freed men.

Now the freed men of grace are those to whom this chapter is addressed. Sin is represented under the figure of a tyrannical master who carries away the heart and motives in pursuit of passionate desires, whether purely carnal or mental. Under the rule of sin these desires or delights are characterized by an absence of regard for the will of God in the matter. The delight may be in poetry or philosophy or pure science, but the natural heart only finds satisfaction in these things so far as the will of God is excluded from consideration. But the apostle declares that the believer is delivered by death from this order of things. He argues, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" (ver. 2).

DEATH WITH CHRIST

It is important to observe that there is here no injunction to put oneself to death. The fact is announced that the members of the family of faith have died to sin. This is a judicial pronouncement with regard to the whole question. And we learn that the act whereby we become dead to sin was perfected in the death of Christ.

The apprehension of this fact is a matter of faith in the declaration of the word of God. It could not be otherwise. Just as we learn that God laid our sins upon Jesus our Substitute, and believing we rejoice in the knowledge of this mercy, so it is necessary to believe in order to know that we were associated with Christ in His death for our deliverance from sin. The apostle says, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto his death?" (ver. 3).

BURIAL WITH CHRIST

In these terms a judicial association with Christ is predicated of all believers. We are regarded as having gone down with Him into death, leaving thus the place of bondage, to emerge into the place of life and liberty. For this identification applies to the burial as well as to the death of Christ: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (ver. 4).

An illustration of this passage of the believer through death may be found in the Old Testament. I refer now to the crossing of the Jordan by the children of Israel. The general analogy of this historical incident is no doubt more with the aspect of truth revealed in Colossians and Ephesians than with that in Romans; but I make the reference now solely to the manner in which the tribes passed the barrier to their goal.

By divine direction the ark of God was borne to the edge of the swiftly-flowing river, and when the feet of the priests touched the waters, the current stayed. The priests went forward, bearing the ark, until they stood in the midst of the river-bed. There they remained upon dry, ground, and the Israelites were enabled to make their way across the stream upon dry ground. The ark maintained its position until the last person had crossed over, then upon its removal the waters resumed their normal course.

Thus, the supernatural power associated with the ark prevented the floods of Jordan from overwhelming the people of God. So we learn in the New Testament that Christ Himself went down into death, and while we went through it with Him, He as it were held back its waters from us, and we passed through "dry-shod" with Him. He died and rose again in the power of an endless life, and because of our intimate association with Christ we are now called to walk in "newness of life."

What are we to understand by these things? The facts are here stated in order that we may see how to gain the victory and how to live and walk in communion with the Lord after a new fashion of holiness. This result is not to be attained by any personal determination to overcome all the inward and outward forces which oppose holiness. The divine method is not to do, but to accept what has been done for us—not to conquer self by pure effort, but to live in the new, the Christ-life bestowed upon each believer.

THE OLD MAN CRUCIFIED

We find from this scripture that the believer is taught to find that in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ there is for him not only deliverance from the guilt of sins but also deliverance from the power of sin. We died with Christ, but are also alive again, even as He is. We have passed through what is here regarded as the judicial extinction of ourselves as sinful persons with irremediably sinful natures. The apostle, speaking of the child of God in his natural condition, declares that the "old man" was crucified with Christ: "Knowing this that our old man was crucified with him that the body of sin might be destroyed that henceforth we should not serve sin" (verse 4). There are many forms of death, but crucifixion is a form associated with shame and ignominy, and under the Mosaic law with curse. And the "old man" because of its evil propensities, was, in the language of the text, worthy not only of death but of the death of the cross. It was man's injustice and malignity that assigned the Son of man to the death of crucifixion, but it was the justice and grace of God that sentenced our "old man" to be crucified with Christ. The purpose of this judicial act is declared to have been that the body of sin might be destroyed or annulled.

But it may be asked how this deliverance is effected. And nothing can be added to the words of this text. The illustration employed is a most forcible one. What can be a more complete deliverance from slavery than death? If an Israelite died in Egypt he was thereby most effectually delivered from bondage to Pharaoh. The whip of the taskmaster at once became unavailing. In like manner the believer is rescued from his slavish service to sin by death. Only he has, unlike the Israelite, died unto sin in the person of Another. He is moreover alive to a new order of things entirely.

It follows therefore that the attempt to eradicate the evil principle of sin by pure self-discipline is a virtual denial of the truth before us which asserts that the believer has already died to sin in the death of Christ. Much confusion sometimes arises in this connection from not observing that the scripture does not say that sin is dead, but that we are dead to it. The two statements are totally different. Some finding evil rampant in inward activity argue from this fact against the plain declaration of God's word. But the latter can never be wrong. The word of God is truth, and no lie is of the truth.

A believer is bound to believe that we died with Christ, and, moreover that we also "live with Him," and that we live to God. Further, by His death we are freed from bondage to sin, for according to scripture this is an accomplished fact.

The conclusion of this portion before us is a practical exhortation founded upon this great judicial transaction. Let us meditate upon its full significance in the light of the preceding verses: "Reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 11). W.J.H.

Bible Treasury: Volume N6, Our Standing in Grace (5:1-2)

"THEREFORE being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Through our own partialities for those scriptural truths which we assume concern us the more intimately, we frequently allow ourselves to pass over with scant attention many weighty words of scripture. The familiar text quoted above contains a brief summary of the attendant blessings of justification in which we are entitled to participate as those who have the faith of Abraham (Rom. 4:16).

Peace with God. The passage speaks first of the peace of a purged conscience; the comfort of which we realize as we think of what preceded faith within our hearts the dark forebodings of a spirit wounded by sin, the despair wrought by the sense of our guilt before God, the inward conviction of an inevitable outpouring of divine wrath upon our deserving heads—and then of the assurance that this condition has passed forever: "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The God against whom we sinned has Himself justified us freely by His grace, and we who were enemies in our minds by wicked works are now at peace with Him. And while we regard this great deliverance we say, and we say rightly, as we lift our eyes to our God and reiterate our grateful praise, "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes."

The glory of God.—Further, as we think of Him who "was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification," the heart within us leaps with desire, and our new-born affections crave that we may behold Him who loved us and died for us. Like the cleansed Samaritan leper, like the renewed Gadarene, we would be with Him, at His feet, and behold some gleams of that glory of God which shines in the face of Jesus Christ. But why think such vain thoughts? Who are we to indulge such bold aspiration? How dare mortal man think to approach Him who sits on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens? Ah, it would indeed be becoming on our part to chide ourselves unsparingly for such presumption, had we not God's own sanction in His word for the longings of the new nature within us. We are permitted to expect "a bright tomorrow." Every justified one is authorized, because he is justified, to hope for the glory of God, not with the feeble vagueness which necessarily accompanies every human effort to peer beyond the present instant, but with the serene confidence that springs alone from the knowledge that the eternal God has spoken as to our future, and has irradiated the dark beyond with His coming glory. No wonder that in consequence we are filled with holy exuberance: we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." We are transported with the prospect of it, and we love to let our very souls be flooded in anticipation with the life-giving beams of Christ in His coming glory.

Present grace or favor.—Hence it is often brought about that, having our hearts sensible of that peace as to a guilty past which otherwise we could never know, and also of a future gorgeous with visions beyond the dreams of poets and artists of every age, we are apt to pass quickly over that sweet interposition of the Spirit in the passage at the head of this paper, dealing with our present standing before God in this work-a-day world" by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." We cannot, without personal loss, neglect this bountiful accommodation made for our pilgrim journey from the state of guilt to the state of glory. The person who is justified is entitled, and is entitled because he is justified, to regard himself as standing in the grace or favor of God. Such an elevating and assuring description of the present state of guilty sinners who have been pardoned and justified demands more than a passing consideration.

The person securing this favor.—Let us then first note how the gracious and adorable Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is introduced as the One by whom and in whom this present privilege is secured to us— "by whom also we have access, etc. His name and titles had been just mentioned in connection with the peace which He made "by the blood of His cross." It is the "same Jesus" whom we are taught by the next phrase to regard as the One who has given us a present position of signal favor before God, and, moreover, who maintains us in that standing. Clearly, it is of the highest importance for the practical enjoyment of our souls that this fact should by faith be continuously before us. And were it not for our natural pride and self-complacency we should the more readily admit the necessity for such a reminder as is here and elsewhere made.

But we shrink from allowing to ourselves that we are prone to be callous as to the present real worth of Christ, and therefore to fail in appropriating to ourselves what in scripture is intended to brace up our affections for Christ. This unreadiness to accept an unpalatable truth about oneself is no new feature in man. The prophet Elisha drew a lurid picture of Hazael's future violence. "Is thy servant a dog," said the astonished man, "that he should do this thing?" But, as a commentator pithily remarks, "The dog went and did it." Truly, Hazael was an

ambitious and unscrupulous worldling. But a similar disposition is also to be seen in the pious and the devoted Simon Peter, for instance. Zealous courageous, and passionate in his esteem and devotion to his Master, he would not admit for a moment the truth of the Lord's declaration concerning him, "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." Ignorant of his own inherent weakness, he exclaimed hotly, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." The sad sequel proved how true the Lord's words were. How much better if the self-confident man had heeded the gracious warning. "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth, and is confident." "A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov. 14:16; 22:3).

We may take it, therefore, that when we are directed to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as the One by whom we have obtained admission into the present favor of God, it is of the first importance that we should set Him before us continuously as the source, the means, and the guarantor of the grace in which we stand. And the caution will be of greater effect upon us if we recollect that the reminder would not have been made were we not liable to allow anything, even the blessing itself, to obscure the person of the Blessor before our hearts. "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen. 40:23).

Access.—"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." The right of admittance to this favor we have by Christ Jesus. What we could not possess inherently He has secured to us inalienably. The form of the phrase used implies that the access is ours abidingly, not intermittently, as it well might be if dependent on ourselves. In ourselves we can offer no claim to such favor, but in Christ what claims are found! How great is the favor of God in which Christ Jesus stands! Is He not the One whom God delights to honor? And He is our Introducer.

But He does not bring us just to the outskirts of the place of favor—"some low place within the door"—as might be if our Patron had but limited influence there. We can scarcely suppose that John the son of Zebedee, though known to the high priest, was particularly intimate with him. His influence was just sufficient to procure admittance for his friend, Simon Peter, to the high priest's palace. "Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door and brought in Peter" (John 18:16). Through the instrumentality of John, Peter obtained access into the palace of the high priest, but not into his favor. This, John was unable to do, and the illustration falls short of our subject.

The way into the presence-chamber of king Ahasuerus was hedged about by the irrevocable law that whosoever approached uncalled should be put to death. Esther drew near with her petition and stood in the inner court of the king's house. "When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom" (Esther 5:2, 3). She had access into the favor of the king, and so obtained the lives of her countrymen. Those justified by faith have access into the favor of God, the Lord Jesus Christ being infinitely more to such undeserving ones as we are, than the golden scepter stretched out to Esther.

The word "access" only occurs in two other passages in the New Testament, both being found in the Epistle to the Ephesians. "For through him [Christ Jesus] we both [Jews and Gentiles who believe] have access by one Spirit unto the Father." "In whom [Christ Jesus our Lord] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him" (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). The verbal form of the same word is used in other instances having the sense of bringing into the presence of another. Jesus said to the father of him possessed with an evil spirit, "Bring thy son hither" (Luke 9:41). Peter also speaks of the work of Christ as introducing us to the presence of God: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

In the Lord Jesus therefore we have our access. As He Himself said, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). He is the door of faith for Gentile as for Jew (Acts 14:27). Moreover, He is the way: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). And this is so both now when we realize it by faith, and shortly when He comes. Even as Isaac met Rebekah and brought her himself into his mother Sarah's tent, so will the Lord Jesus meet His bride in the air, and usher her into the rapturous intimacies, and the beatified delights, of the Father's house.

Grace or favor.—"By whom also we have access into this grace!" We are "justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:7). This is our initial blessing, but we are here assured that we also have a permanent standing in this grace, subsequent to our justification.

The word grace (χάρις) is one of those employed by the Spirit of God to convey a truth which is exclusively divine, and in consequence all human language is inadequate to express its meaning; to seek to define it is to seek to set bounds to the infinite. We may only by assiduous comparison of its varied usage in Holy Scripture obtain some glimmerings of the vast truth communicated by the word "grace." In its many occurrences it has many shades of significations, as indeed we may gather from Peter's expressive phrase—"the manifold (ποικίλης) grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

It must suffice to note here how grace takes a dual character viz.—(1) from its source, God, and (2) from its object, sinful man. The frequently recurring words, "the grace of God," are sufficient to show that it has no earthly origin. The correlated phrase, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" reminds us that the grace of God came by Him (John 1:17). Flowing down from heaven where there exists no need for its exercise, let us rather say, emanating from the heart of God Himself, what an immeasurable character is given by its origin to "this grace wherein we stand." Like Him from whom it springs, grace is infinite in its freeness, its fullness, its spontaneity, its "exceeding riches" (Eph. 2, also 2 Cor. 9:14).

But the second characteristic of God's grace, to which allusion has been made, arises from the nature of those towards whom this grace is exercised. Grace is for sinners. Thus Paul, speaking of himself as "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," says, "the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:13-15). It was in the very habitat of sin that grace was displayed. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Hence in this brief consideration of the manward aspect of grace we see that not only were its activities uncaused and unmerited by its objects, but these objects were in a state of positive enmity against God and amenable to His just judgment. Herein perhaps lies one of the

distinctions between the allied words, grace and mercy. Mercy is awakened into exercise by the infirmities of its objects, their ignorance, their sorrows, their sufferings, and their needs: but grace flows towards those who are altogether undeserving, and who have by their sins forfeited every claim. We who were “dead in trespasses have been saved by grace” (Eph. 2:5, 8), But being “justified by faith,” having “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of trespasses according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7) we abide in that grace. It becomes the atmosphere, the home of our souls. If we received the grace of God when we were ungodly, sinners, enemies, what favor is ours now that we are justified and reconciled!

This is indeed an unspeakable privilege to know oneself standing in the unclouded favor of God. How feeble and fickle in comparison is the favor of earthly potentates for which men of the world so fiercely compete. Joseph “found grace” in the sight of Potiphar which he speedily lost through no fault of his own (Gen. 39:4). Again, he rose from the obscurity of the prison-house to the “favor” of Pharaoh, so that he was set over the land of Egypt, and the king's house (Acts 7:9, 10). But after all, this was but the favor of man, not to be compared with that favor of God to which the justified believer has acquired an inalienable right through our Lord Jesus Christ.

David the king found favor in the sight of God (Acts 7:46) and so did Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:28, 30). lint these were exceptional instances. The standing in the favor of God is not, as revealed in the New Testament, peculiar to a few, but possessed equally by all the justified. Let us consider it well; “for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace” (Heb. 13:9).

The standing.—By whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand. As the form of the phrase referring to our access implies permanence, so does it in reference to our standing. We stand steadfastly, without intermission, in the favor of God. The same term is used for the immutable foundation of God in contrast with the fluctuating character of what has been committed to man's responsibility—“nevertheless, the sure foundation of God standeth” (2 Tim. 2:19). It is also used negatively by the Lord referring to Satan, “He is a murderer from the beginning and standeth not in the truth” (John 8:44, New Transl.). So also the apostle Paul described the Corinthian saints as standing in the gospel. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand” (1 Cor. 15:1). In all cases an unvarying steadfastness is implied. What a comfort to learn that we have not only the entree to such a place of choice privilege, but that we stand there upon an unalterable basis and in an unchanging acceptance.

Is there any personal responsibility?—While the word of God guarantees to each believer this standing in grace without any qualification, it nevertheless cautions against a false assurance founded only upon unconcern. There is no warrant for assuming that this standing is compatible with indifference to sin, the indulgence of selfishness, and a course of practical unrighteousness. The justified believer is called upon to gird up his renewed energies and see to it that there is a correspondence between his life and conduct and the privileged position in which he is set. It is the over-confident that needs to beware. Hence we have the exhortation, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Speaking of Gentiles being grafted into the olive tree of promise, while Jewish branches were broken off, the apostle writes, “Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee” (Rom. 11:19, 20). Again, Peter exhorts the saints to maintain in practice their standing in grace. “I have written unto you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God: stand ye fast therein” (1 Peter 5:12, R.V.). We shall do well to heed the word, and to hold fast the immense privilege secured to us by Him who was “delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.”

W.J.H.

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