

TRACTS ON THE KINGDOM
No. 14.

RESTING AND WRESTLING

by Robert Govett

In our days has arisen the important inquiry: '*How is a man to be sanctified?*' To this two answers have been given.

1. It is by *faith*. By the same principle whereby a man is justified. *By faith* the sinner is justified, by faith too he is sanctified. He is grafted into Christ. He is in Him as the branch is in the vine, and therefore partakes of its fullness. And so it is written: "To them that are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints:" 1 Cor. i, 2. Paul was sent to tell of the forgiveness of sins, and of "inheritance among them that are *sanctified by faith that is in me*:" Acts xxvi, 18. Now this is true. But it has been held that there is to be no effort towards sanctification; so that a critic observed of this one-sided doctrine, that according to some, the way to holiness is—'Relax your muscles!'

2. The second reply is: That sanctification is *the result of effort* directed towards holiness, as an end in view. And the advocates of this doctrine can appeal to Scriptures still more numerous. They can plead, that the Christian's whole life is warfare, a fight for which God has provided celestial armor: Eph. vi. That we have to *wrestle* against invisible foes, as truly as Israel of old against foes of flesh and blood. The Christian is a racer, like those in the Grecian games, and is called by God to put forth his best energies in pursuit of the prize: 1 Cor. ix, x. He has to put off the old man, and to put on the new: Eph. iv, 22. Paul rebukes those who were at rest and not advancing Heb. v, vi.

Now faith is not effort, but a sitting still, and receiving.

In short, we seem here to be led to the verge of a contradiction in so many words.

'How is a man to be *justified*?' (1) 'Not by works, but by faith,' says Paul. "Therefore we conclude that a man is *justified by faith, without the deeds of the law*:" Rom. iii, 28. (2) 'Not by faith, but by works,' says James. "Ye see then, how that *by works a man is justified and not by faith only*:" Jas. ii, 24.

Have we not then the same contradiction also in regard of *sanctification*?

How then are we to reconcile these things?

Both sentiments are Scriptural; *both* are true.

There is, however, no contradiction; because *two* objects are set before the Christian, and each of those rests on opposite grounds.

I. One of these is a GIFT to him that believes; a *gift in opposition to his works and deservings*. “*Not by works of righteousness which we did, but according to His mercy He saved us That being justified by His grace, we should be heirs (according to hope) of eternal life:*” Tit. iii, 5, ‘7. “For the wages of sin is death; but *the gift of God is eternal life, in Jesus Christ our Lord:*” Rom. vi, 2. Here then we have presented to us the first object—’ Eternal life.’ That, as the Scriptures attest, is a free gift. It belongs to him who believes. To attempt to win *that* by effort would be unbelief. “To him that *worketh not, but believeth* on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is imputed unto righteousness:” Rom. iv, 4, 5. “What shall we do (said unbelievers to our Lord) that we might work *the works of God;*” “This is the work of God (said Jesus) that *ye believe on Him* whom He hath sent:” John vi, 28, 29. “*By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast:*” Eph. ii, 8, 9. Hence already the believer possesses much: he has pardon, peace, eternal life, regeneration, the Spirit’s indwelling, sonship, and an inheritance in heaven.

II. But a second object is set before him; a PRIZE, *to be sought .for by effort*. Effort with an end in view is the very difference between a ‘gift’ and a ‘prize.’ The gift is ours at the moment we accept it. The prize is *not ours*, but is to be sought for, as obtainable in a future day. Towards this end effort is to be put forth. Care must be exercised, or we may lose the object set before us. “I press toward the mark (goal) for THE PRIZE of the high calling* of God in Christ Jesus:” Phil. iii, 14. What was that? The attaining of a place in the select resurrection of the just: ver. 11. For this Paul sought as the racers in the games of Greece strove for the victor’s crown. There, but one could receive the prize, and all was uncertainty. But with us many shall receive the prize, and to the candidate that obeys the laws of the games there shall be a sure reward.

This first resurrection is another name for the kingdom of the thousand years of bliss which is to be enjoyed by some, while others remain in their graves: Rev. xx, 4—6. The prize shall be awarded at last “according to works.” “Behold I come quickly; and *My reward is with Me to give each according as his work shall be:*” Rev. xxii, 12. “For the Son of man shall come in His glory with His angels; and then *He shall reward each according to his works:*” Matt. xvi, 27.

Hence there is a perfect reconciliation between the two things. 1. The unbeliever, in order to be justified and sanctified, is called on to believe! He is fully justified at once, before he does a single good work. He is “in Christ Jesus,” and his sanctification by the Holy Spirit has begun in his regeneration and his union with Christ. He is *not to work, but to accept the work of another already accomplished, perfect, and accepted by God*. He has *eternal life:* John v, 24.

2. But the *believer* is then called, as a man alive in Christ, to put forth effort to attain a prize set before him. This may be won or lost. It depends on his conduct, and Christ will give the award to each individual at His appearing. Here then come in the calls to diligent service, zeal, carefulness. “Occupy (trade) till I come.” “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” “He that *overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.*”

Now these two objects spring out of the natures of God and of man respectively.

1. God is love. To believers, His sons, He is full of grace, and His gift is worthy of Himself—eternal life! It is bestowed in its fullness at once on him who will accept it: John iii, 1~, 16, 36. This perfection the Most High is manifesting now; for it is “the throne of grace” on which He sits. “*Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life:*” Rom. v, 21.

The believer rests in safety and joy on the work of Christ completely accepted by God. He has access with boldness to God. His are the unconditional promises attached to faith.

Now the characteristic of man, which answers to the grace of God, is his *passiveness*. He is dependent, weak, wicked; he cannot help himself in much that befalls him. He is capable, then, of receiving any amount of blessing out of the hand of God as the Benefactor. And the believer is one who rests upon the grace of God. He is at rest in the work of Christ. He is the possessor of eternal life, a member of Christ, chosen by God, assured of salvation through the bounty of the Most High. Here is ample ground for our repose of soul

II. But God is not mercy alone, He is JUST also. As in the present day He is manifesting His grace; so in the day to come He is determined to manifest His righteousness or *justice*. There is a second throne. “The Lord hath prepared *His throne for judgment; and He shall judge the world in righteousness:*” Psa. ix, 8; Acts xvii, 3. This throne is shown in Rev. iv, and it is the moving force in that book. At the word of that throne, thunders, lightnings, and ministers of wrath go forth. Here then come in these promises of the New Testament to believers, which are *conditional*, and depend on their conduct. For the day that is coming is “the Day of Judgment,” or of justice. It is a day in which God means to bring this attribute to bear upon “*every soul of man.*” It is “the day of *wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each according to his works:*” Rom. ii, 5—16. The land that bears useful herbs in answer to the rain from heaven, and the tillage of earth, receives blessing from God. But if it bear thorns and briars, as the result of all that care, it is disapproved, and is nigh unto a curse: Heb. vi, 7, 8.

Against this view, however, many rise up. (1.) 'The judgment of God and Christ is for the ungodly and unregenerate only. For it is said of the believer: "He *shall not come into judgment*:" John v, 24.'

Nay! If God is to manifest His righteous judgment, it must take effect on all. Partial justice is not manifestation of justice. The text from John too is quoted amiss, for it is wrongly translated. The translators have put the future, where the Holy Spirit has written the present. "He that believeth hath eternal life and *doth* not come into judgment." Christ will judge believers! He has said so again and again. "All the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and the hearts: and *I 'will give unto each of you according to your works*:" Rev ii, 22, 23. "Hence-- forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which *the Lord the Righteous Judge* shall give me in that day:" 2 Tim. iv, 8; Rom xiv, 10—13; 2 Cor. v. etc.

Some take up a further position: 'If there be a judgment of saints, it is only of their *good* works. The blood of Christ atones for their evil ones.'

The blood of Christ takes the sinner out of the place of enmity against God and consequent perdition. But the judgment of believers before Christ is a judgment not of enemies, but of servants, in order to assign them their place. And in order to this their conduct, whether good or evil, must come in: Matthew xxiv, 42; xxv, 30. "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of the Christ, that each may receive the things done by means of the body, according to the things that he hath done, *whether good or bad*:" (*Greek*) 2 Cor. v, 10. "Of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. *But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons*." Col. iii, 24, 25. Twice does the Holy Ghost set before us Israel's history as the redeemed of the Lord: twice does He bring before us their provocations; and warn us, that as the Lord dealt with them so will He act towards like offenders of His new people: 1 Cor. x; Heb. iii, iv. Rev. ii, iii, give us further proofs.

II. The characteristics of man, which answer to justice in God, are his *activity and freedom*. He is responsible to God, as one who is under commands, and as one who is able to do as he pleases. He is entrusted by God with powers, for which he is to give account. He is capable of seeing his own interests too, and of pursuing them. He is more or less fond of glory and advancement; and Christ calls on His servants to seek the true glory of the kingdom to come. He may be faithful or unfaithful to his master and his orders. He is set in a world where dangers many and sore menace him. He may in their presence be watchful or unwatchful. He may be diligent or he may be slothful. In the battle to which he is called he may refuse to appear, or he may be wounded, or come off victorious.

Here then are ample fields for effort. Here God's exhortations come in to prudence, diligence, watchfulness, and activity of all kinds.

Let us look then at some of the passages that call for *effort in order to attain the coming millennial kingdom of glory*. For while Christ our Lord is now seated on high as the Priest, and Intercessor, and Advocate, upholding us against our deserts, yet in a day close at hand He is to leave the Father's throne for the air, and as the King to call all His servants before His judgment seat, in order to dispense to them recompense according to their obedience or disobedience. There are accordingly two days of opposite character: "Now is the accepted time; now is *the day of salvation*." "The acceptable year of the Lord" the Saviour proclaimed at Nazareth: Luke iv.

But the passage to which He appealed speaks of the day of *justice*. And in that the righteousness of God must be manifested to all by His dealings with each, whether believers or unbelievers. This is shown us in the parables of the Talents and the Pounds: Luke xix, Matt. xxv. The diligent servant is rewarded in proportion to his service, when the nobleman returns as the king.

[Those who speak much of sanctification by faith speak also much of the Christian's *consecration* of himself, and generally by a special act of it. Has then Christ forgotten this matter, and left it to be supplied by His people's greater wisdom? By no means! Jesus calls for an act of consecration and it is to come at once after faith. *It is the immersion which lie has commanded*: an entire surrender and burial of the old Adam, and a rising up of the new man to walk with Christ in newness of life: Rom. vi, 1—5. That same act too looks onward to the *first resurrection, as the prize of our calling*: ver. 5]

We are invited by the Holy Spirit to contemplate Christ in two aspects: (1) as our LEADER—in that resembling Moses. Moses was sent of the Lord to lead on God's people to their *rest* and *inheritance*: Deut. xii, 9, 10. Even so the Lord Jesus is Leader of the men of the heavenly calling, summoning His people on to the rest of God, in the land. In one sense Israel rested at once on their arrival in the wilderness. They were delivered from the brickmaking and the lash. But they were not yet arrived at the land of promise. So the Christian, while resting on the work of Christ complete for his justification, is to push forward towards the hope of his calling. Here comes in the call to wrestle and to run.

(2.) But Jesus is to us HIGH PRIEST also: a greater than Aaron. By virtue of His perfection and His one sacrifice we have rest in God. He has "obtained eternal redemption for us:" Heb. ix, 12. Faith, looking at Christ's *past work*, is at *rest*. Faith, looking at Christ's *future coming and work* as the rewarder, is called to *wrestle*: Heb. iv. "Let us *labour therefore to enter into that Test* lest any fall after the same example of disobedience" [as Israel's]. (*Creek.*) "Let us run with patience the race set before us":

Heb. xii, 1.

The prize of our calling is a matter of *hope*, which is not to be devoid of all fear: 1 Pet. i, 17; Heb. iv, 1; Luke xii, 5. The *gift* of our calling is ours already and none shall pluck us out of God's hand. Hence the same epistle speaks of two "full assurances." There is "the *full assurance of faith*." That refers to our confidence of constant present welcome in drawing near to God in the Holiest through the perfect priesthood and past sacrifice of Christ: Heb x, 19—22. But the same apostle threatens with deep solemnity and awfulness those who were drawing back instead of advancing onward, even although he was assured of their being finally saved and of the present acceptance of their works before God: Heb. vi. Hence he urges them to diligence, in view of the reward. "But we desire that each of you should show the same diligence [that some display] up to the close, *with a view to the full assurance of hope*." Heb. vi, 11. Here he refers to the case of Abraham.

(1.) Abraham believed and was justified: Gen. xv, 6.

(2.) But after that God expected "the *obedience of faith*," and Abraham showed it. The Most High demanded the sacrifice of his son, and Abraham *obeyed*. Then came God's irrevocable oath to fulfil to him the promises He had made him. These were the "two immutable *transactions*," on which Abraham's future glory rests. First, the *formal ratification of the covenant* of justification upon faith (Gen. xv, 17, 18); and second, the *oath* over Isaac slain and risen, in a figure: Gen. xxii.

The future prize is to be sought across many difficulties. Hence they to whom the kingdom is proclaimed are to be "violent men," seeking to bear it away by force: Matt. xi, 12. Thus Paul sought it, refusing to be daunted by any perils in the course even though attaching to life itself: Phil. iii.

For our calling is to be soldiers of Christ, and our conflict is not against men as our enemies, but with mighty spirits of evil in heavenly places: Eph. vi. These never slumber, and hence we need ever the armor of God's supply. The Christian has *attained* something, and about that he is at *rest*. The Christian is *seeking* something, which he may win or lose, according to his conduct. Hence he is to wrestle. 'Looking unto *Christ*' is good, and is taught us by the Holy Spirit: Heb. xii. But "Look to *yourselves*," is also good, and is taught us by the same Spirit: 2 John, 7. "*Look to yourselves that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward*." 'Rest on the finished work of Christ' is good. "But let each *prove his own work*"; is also a command of the Holy Ghost: Gal. vi, 4.

For we must each give account of himself to Christ; and on Him it depends, whether we be "accounted worthy" of the prize of our calling, or no: 2 Thess. 1, 5, 11; Luke xx, 35, 36. With the faithful and diligent ones Christ will be well pleased. To such

there will be great reward, as the result of effort.

But some will be disapproved, and cast out as “unprofitable servants:” Matt. xxv. Some will be found unfaithful, as the steward, eating and drinking with the drunken, while he beats the manservants and maidens: Matt. xxiv.

Let us then accept both parts of God’s testimony. “God is love” towards His redeemed, and let us *rest* in God’s love. The Most High is also “a consuming fire” to those that fall under His justice. Let us therefore hold fast grace both in order to present acceptable service, and also that we fail not of the eternal and unshaken kingdom: Heb. xii. Neither *rest alone* nor *effort alone* expresses the true position of the Christian. As it regards righteousness and eternal life he is at *rest* through *the perfect work of Christ*. As it regards the reward of the millennial glory he is to be working, for that depends upon “*his own works*:” Gal. vi, 4.

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