

VII.

GIVING GOD HIS DUE,

*I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and will call upon the name of the Lord. — (Psalm 116:17.)*

BRETHREN, this ought to be the result of every Christian's experience of divine grace. "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds; I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving." Being delivered from spiritual bondage, and made servants of the living God, we must and will praise the Lord as long as we have any being. Thanksgiving should always run parallel with prayer in connection with the Church of God. What is true of the individual is true of individuals collected as a corporate body. There is not a true Church of God on earth, but what has abundant cause to say, "I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving"; and we make a great mistake if, when we hold our days of prayer and cry unto God, we do not at the same time make them days of praise, and bless His holy name for what we have received. David seems to me in this verse to stand out in contrast with many, for there are some who will say, "I will continue to pray." "Yes," says David, "but I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving." Others will say, "We will meet together and sorrow over the sad estate of Zion; we will speak with one another about the defections of the faithful, the lack of piety, godliness, the superficiality of piety, the heresy of much of the doctrine that is preached, and the worldliness of much of the living that is lived." "Yes," David would say, "and I will come with you, too, and make confession and humble myself before God, but I will also offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving."

There is a tendency in the Church of God to play very much upon the discordant strings of the heart rather than those which still remain in tune. David would not forget how much there is that is out of joint. He would be among the first to humble himself before the Lord, among the first to join with Jeremiah and say, "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people"; but still he resolves upon it, he declares it against all comers — "I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving,"

Now, I want you, dear brethren, if at any time you have been inclined to deal out the word of discouragement, or even the more bitter word of censure, all round, upon this Church and that Church and the other, and upon this people of God and the other people of God — instead of that, to come to the resolution of the Psalmist which now lies before us and say, “*With* all the Church’s faults and with all our own, with all that there is to deplore and all that there is to confess, yet from this we will not start aside: we will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.”

I make that my resolve to-night; and I do it for four reasons. First, because I believe it is due to God; secondly, because I believe it is good for myself; thirdly, because I believe it is encouraging to my fellow-workers; and fourthly, because I think it is one of the helps towards the accomplishment of the purpose we are aiming at.

First, then, dear friends, I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving because it is due to God. Whatever happens, let not God be robbed of His praise. Suppose it be true that the ministers are not faithful. Shall not God have glory? Suppose it be true that many of the members of Christian Churches are not what they profess to be. Shall we leave off glorifying God because of that? Why, if He is robbed of His glory by ministers or people, the more reason why those who do love Him should sedulously cultivate His praise and earnestly offer to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving, for, notwithstanding all the gloomy views that may be taken of religion in the world, we have this to recollect we ought to praise God that there ever was a Gospel at all. He might have left the world not only in heathenism, but under the ban of everlasting perdition; He might have left us without a Gospel to preach, without a way of escape from His wrath, with nothing before us, as the sons of sinful Adam, but to go back “*to* the vile dust from whence we sprang,” and then to descend with the serpent into the place where he bears the wrath of God for ever. I will rejoice and bless God while I have any being that there is a Gospel, that there is an incarnate God, that there is an atoning sacrifice, that there is an ever-living Savior. If I have nothing else to rejoice in, I will bless Him that ever these words were possible: “*Jesus* Christ came into the world to save sinners,” and that ever it could be within the compass of fact that such a thing should be true, that we should be here to hear it, and that our lips should be privileged to speak it. I will offer to Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

And I will thank Him that, notwithstanding all the sins and infirmities of His Church, God has borne with us. Christ has not sued out our divorce yet. We sometimes speak against the Church, and very well we may, including ourselves in it. There are many faults and many failings, but for all that the Church of God on earth is Christ's bride, and if He can put up with her, I think we ought to do so too. If He still loves her, if still, for all her faults, it is through her that His spiritual children are born into the world; if He saith He hateth putting away, it is not for us to put her away, and, as some do, talk about independent action altogether from the Church being that which God is most likely to bless. I think that is most likely to bring spurious results. But that which is done in connection with the visible Church in due order, and after the Lord's manner, honors the Church, and God would have the spouse of Christ honored as well as Christ the King.

Beloved, I thank God, and I will, as long as I live, that He bears with His Church. The Spirit of God has not gone from her. Still there are the living in Zion; still her prayers go up; still her praises are received. There is a Church of God in the world. Yes, blessed be His name for that !

And I thank God, beloved, that the Gospel is preserved among us. I believe that in many pulpits it is perverted, philosophized upon, till the very soul of it has gone. We know that in some of the Churches ritualism on the one side has stamped out the Gospel, and rationalism, on the other, has all but buried it; but for all that, the Gospel was never more truly preached than it is now. If anybody wants to hear the Gospel they can hear it in this land, and hear it distinctly and plainly, too; for many run to and fro, and the knowledge of God is increased in the land. And I will offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving for this.

And I will thank Him that, notwithstanding all the dullness of the times, there is probably more Gospel abroad in the world than ever there was. Why, in the days of the apostles, there was not one Bible probably in the world to tens of thousands that are existing at this present moment. The invention of printing was a great blessing to the Church. You know that in our own English history it would have taken a man almost a year's labor to have bought a Bible, and now one can have it almost as a gift; and there is scarcely a language under heaven but what the Bible is translated into, and the copies fall as thick as leaves in Vallambrosa all over the lands. Oh, blessed be God, I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving whatever anybody else may do.

And I thank Him, too, that we have got over the dark times of the Church. Oh, brethren, if once we were to come under a tyrant's power again, and it was death to believe in Jesus, and imprisonment to speak a word in Christ's name, we should begin to sigh and cry for these times; but to-night I am not standing by a burn in Scotland between the hills in some dark glen reading my Bible by a lightning flash, or talking to armed Covenanters who are ready to guard their lives with swords. We are in the land where whoever wills to talk of Jesus may do it. There is none to hinder us; none to make us afraid. "I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

And, more than this, we have seen in this Church, and our brethren in their measure have seen in other Churches, that the Lord is still at work. The Gospel preached to-day saves souls as it did in days gone by. What if we do not see three thousand impressed by one sermon, yet he who speaks to you now can count those converted under his ministry not by thousands only, but by tens of thousands; for to my own personal knowledge, either by conversing with them or by letters from them, many more than could be compassed in twenty thousand have I known to have been brought to Jesus Christ. And I know that under our own college, the men trained in our own Churches have been privileged to bring into the Church of God many more than ten thousand more souls whom God has blessed them with. The kingdom does grow. It is not as we like, but still, God be thanked that it grows at all. It might have gone back. "I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord."

And, once more, we will do this because He is ready to do a great deal more. God is ready to convert millions instead of thousands, and He has given us a promise of this that we so much delight to sing —

*And a new song is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set;
Glory to Thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet.*

Glory be to God for what He is going to do! Clap your hands, oh, saints of the living God, for He is about to win the nations unto Jesus. Ethiopia and the land of Sinde and the dwellers in Arabian deserts — they shall come and bow before the Lord. The joy of the latter days shall be so great that we may well anticipate that joy and begin to rejoice in it now. As the husbandman rejoices in an expected harvest, so let us lift up the shout of

joy because the harvest is certain, and if it tarrieth, it is that it may be the greater when it comes. I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, let others do what they will. Now, that is because it is God's due.

II.

The second head was because it was good :for ourselves. And it is clear, because it is always good for ourselves to be just — good for our souls to perform a duty well. It is just to praise God; and it is one of the obligations of the saints to praise God's name. So it is good for ourselves besides. If we do not praise God we shall catch ourselves getting sour and morose. A man that does not praise God is not much liked, and then he goes off into a nasty sour, crab-apple disposition, from which the Lord save us! There is a person that cannot look at any work that is done except like a jackdaw or a monkey to pull it to pieces. There is a revival. "*Oh*, yes, that is mere excitement." There is a Church with a large increase. "*Yes*, there are a great many Churches, and they do gather in a great deal, odds and ends, and all that sort of thing; but they are not strict enough in their discipline." There is a young man raised up to make a stir in a provincial town. "*Ah*, yes, they have gone up like a rocket, and come down like a stick." That is a style to which one can be easily educated. I do not think anybody ought to pay very heavy fees to be a nasty critic; one can grow into that with a little watering very speedily.

Now, to keep our souls sweet, let us offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving just to keep this sour stuff, this horrible leaven, from making us as some are — by making us a lump of bitterness. Let us praise and bless the Lord. I have felt sometimes like the Quaker, who, when he heard a man swear, said to him, "*Swear* on, friend; get rid of all that nasty stuff thou hast in thy soul, for thou canst never go to heaven while thou hast that in thee. Get it out as soon as ever you can." And the best way of curing ourselves of the spleen is to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving will sometimes cure impatience, too. Sometimes in our zeal we really wish that we could get up to God's throne and manage things better. That is the short and long of what we are thinking of. We are not satisfied with the things as they go on. We want to push the Church before us, and drag the world behind us, and do in a day what ordinarily takes a century to accomplish — a very proper thing when it is not carried too far. But when we thank and bless the Lord, it kills our impatience, it prevents our falling into unpractical speculations, it enables us in patience to possess our soul and to go plodding on with

God's work, leaving the results with God, who knows better the times and the seasons than we dare pretend to do. But, brethren, if you have got into a bad consumptive state, and your soul is dreary and heavy, and you are reading all the books that foretell that Popery is going to cover the land, and you go to bed by daylight and think the sun is set, get somebody, get especially the divine power, to help you to sing, to help you to praise God. Oh, that you could get the good air into your lungs by prayer, and then breathe it out again in a mighty burst of praise! Nothing is so good for a man as to praise God. The man that prays but never praises has not only the spirit of a beggar, but a beggarly spirit. If we are always asking something from God and never thanking Him for what we get, the Lord might well discharge us and say, "I will hear you no more; you are always begging, and you never thank Me; and if you are not grateful for what I give you neither will I give you more."

III.

Well, now, thirdly; I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving because it is encouraging to my fellow workers. You know a very great deal in a Church will depend upon the leader. Christian ministers are but men; but still, when God sends them and they are what they should be, they very much affect the entire Church, and if they get into a dull desponding spirit, the workers, the most of them, feel the effect of it. If you have a frost in the pulpit, you will not, as a rule, have too much warmth down below. If the pastor's spirit is depressed, and he does not believe that God is doing good, *why*, the people begin to catch the infection and feel the same.. Hence it is important, my friends, deacons and elders round here, to keep up a cheerful spirit. You, my brethren in the Sunday schools, keep up that lively cheerful tone of thanksgiving to God, or else the teachers may get discouraged when they see that the superintendent gets dispirited; for there is always a party in the Church that are naturally desponding. They cannot help it. They were born in December, and they will never have a birthday in June. They are of that kind of spirit that they flourish best in the midst of a thaw and in wet times. They always look at the dark side of matters. For their sake let us look at the bright side. Then there are always some workers who are working under some very great discouragement; and if we do not thank God for what He does, then they say, how can we expect any good result to come of our labors. They think a great deal better of us, too often, than we deserve. Why, there is nothing in the world, after all,

among Christians that will have a greater effect upon them than the courage of real believers. When things are going heavily the bright eye and the cheerful ken of some one fellow worker will often inspirit all the rest.

When Paul was in the storm everybody's heart sank, except Paul's, and because he was courageous he had an influence over all that were in the vessel. I have known a dear young brother, and I did know one dear aged brother, whose word and whose presence always cheered us. I was reading last week a story of a ship, one of our ships of war, which had been in desperate combat with the enemy. Into our ship was poured a tremendous broadside; the deck was strewn with dead sailors, blood was flowing on all sides, and the captain was just about to issue orders to strike the flag. There seemed no hope but that the vessel would be blown into atoms unless the battle was stopped. Now, there were on board the vessel some chickens. One of the shots had broken the hencoop, and just at that moment a small bantam cock came and stood on the side of the vessel and gave a tremendous crow. As soon as ever he did that every man that was alive on board deck gave a loud cheer; the gunners rushed to their guns and sent back a tremendous broadside; and, instead of striking their flag, they captured the foe. It was no doubt a true British cock that did that. And I like to see some of that true British pluck in Christian men, so that when others are all desponding and despairing they can step forward and say, "I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving." Come, brethren, you may go away from your guns if you like, and you may cry, and you may weep, and you may say, "This cannot be done and it shall not." I see enough blue in the sky to betoken a good fair day ere the sun goes down; I see enough brightness in the promise; I see enough in the gloomy hills of darkness, as my soul gazes upon it, to believe that the promises do travel towards a glorious day of grace; and therefore will I offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.

IV.

We will do this and offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, because it is one of the best ways of promoting the great end we aim at.

Do this Godward. We aim at God's glory. It is well to offer thanksgiving, for it is to glorify Him.. "Who so offereth praise glorifieth Me," saith the Lord. And to do this in dark times is to glorify Him doubly. Therefore let us be of a large and joyful spirit and praise His name; because we are

striking the very center of the target when we are glorifying God. And this is the object even of the salvation of sinners. For sinners to be saved is not our object ultimately. The ultimate object is God's glory through the salvation of sinners. Let us get that then; and we shall do so if we offer the sacrifice of praise.

But secondly, we promote our object in the saints, for when the saints are encouraged and led to thank God they are better for service; they are more able to do it; they will do it in a better way; they will do it with more faith; and the more of faith the more of result is there sure to be; for the rule of the kingdom is, "*According to thy faith so be it done unto thee.*" If you want your men in good trim, O commander, say not a solitary word that shall lower their spirit, but rather show them how to magnify the name of the Lord.

And again. This answers our end sinner-ward. O sinner, if you see us thanking the name of the Lord we may remind you that you have much to thank Him for. What if you are not saved? Yet you are not yet shut up in hell. What if you are not forgiven? Yet you are where forgiveness is to be had. What if you cannot say yet, "*I am in the family of the Lord*"? Yet still there is space for you to arise and go unto your Father and confess your sin to Him. Oh, you ought to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving that you are on praying ground still, and are yet where the Gospel is preached to you. I see much reason why even you should thank God for what you have.

And then ! feel persuaded that the unconverted are more likely to be converted — we speak after the manner of men — by thankful Christians than by any others. I dare say there are some persons whose hearts will be won to Christ by preachers of a very sorrowful, heavy countenance and disposition. I suppose that when religion is painted as a dark and black thing there may be some hearts that are attracted by it, but I believe there are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and that there are more people led to think about their souls by grateful Christians than by the murmuring of believers.

I am inclined to believe that in the minds of a great many it is a very important question, whether religion does make men happy; and when they see it does, and they see us thankful and happy, then they say, "*We will find out the secret that makes these people happy; we will go with them that we may share in their blessedness.*"

And I think this leads the sinner to think all the better of God. I should not like to keep a servant that was always very miserable, so that everybody said, “*Ah*, that woman has got a bad master at home, you may depend upon *it*.” I should not like my horse, when he stood in the street, to be of such a sort that those around him should say, “*Whose* horse is that ?” “*Why*, it is the minister’s of the Tabernacle.” “*Is* that how he keeps his horse? *Why*, you can see his ribs. What a master he must be to keep such a horse as that.” The world looks at professors. “*This* is one of your Christians, is it —? Christians I *Why*, he is enough to make a tempest in the house — the very sight of his face, and if all the world were happy and he were to step in you would suppose that every wedding had changed into a funeral” I think the world would say, “*Oh*, they serve a bad master, you may depend upon it. The God they profess to believe in gives them a very few consolations.” I think they *say*, “*We* are happy, you know; we can be happy.” But they forget the future and only think of the present, and they think their position to be much superior to that of the mournful Christian. Don’t let them say that, beloved, but, on the contrary, let us say to-night, “*I* will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.”

That my soul is resolved to do.