

Text: "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." (II Pet.ii.8)

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

What a position for a good man to be in, to be quite alone in an enemy's country, to be surrounded with the violent abominations, with the worst corruptions and iniquities, and yet to be preserved and kept as the apple of Jehovah's eye! What spiritual instruction may there be in this record, which the Holy Ghost has here given of righteous Lot in such a filthy place as Sodom! It proves that a good man may dwell in the same place and in the midst of wickedness without himself being wicked; may be surrounded with the vilest of abominations and yet be preserved by the grace of God. It proves that he may dwell amidst heathens and yet be kept firm and stable in all God's truth, just because he is an object of Jehovah's sovereign love and mercy. And, again, there is in this divine record of Lot an instruction that, whilst God by His own faithfulness keeps His people in the midst of evil, Lot's position in Sodom was a carnal amalgamation. God did not tell him to go to Sodom, as Jonah was sent to Nineveh, to preach repentance to the Ninevites. Had God sent Lot to Sodom to testify against evil and for God's truth, his position there would have been beyond censure or blame; but he had put himself there voluntarily through covetousness. He saw what a well-watered plain it was, and the temporal advantages of the place led him to pitch his tent there. We are therefore instructed by this, as by numerous other parts of Holy Scripture, to distinguish between dwelling in the midst of evil because providentially placed there, and dwelling in such a place voluntarily through a spirit of carnal confederacy. And I do solemnly believe that one of the greatest evils of this day is the carnal amalgamation of the church and the world; and I do feel that this is a greater abomination to God than anything I could mention. May the Lord help me to speak from this portion of the word to our mutual profit! We shall take up the subject in two divisions:

I. The appellation, "that righteous man."

II. His situation, in which I would further observe that, whatever unlawful amalgamations a good man may be

involved in, the grace of God in the soul will be sure to burst forth. And so it will ever be, in one way or other, in the spirit and in the practice of every righteous man in the world.

I. The appellation, "that righteous man."

It is not being righteous by profession only, for that is worth nothing at all in a day like this; but it is being righteous in character - having upon us the righteousness of Christ - which makes us righteous in the sight of God. David does not say: "Blessed is the man that professes to be righteous," but he speaks of "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom.iv.6). The Word of God emphatically declares: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom.iii.10). What a sweeping statement upon the whole human race! "No, not one!" "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God." And what was the result? "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa.xiv.2,3). Remember, Christ was not on the earth at that time. If He had been in the world, God could never have made such a declaration. Therefore it is meant that the whole race of mankind were seen by God in the Adam fall as being altogether filthy. It follows, then, that whatever righteous persons have been in the world since the fall of man must have been newly created; they must have been made righteous by the grace of God. I feel that I have some reason for touching upon this point in London.

Are not we aware that the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness is being fearfully tampered with in the present day? It is being more and more virtually denied, and the denial of it is one of the evil tendencies of the day, against which (I must confess) Mr. Spurgeon has of late very manfully set his face in the most scriptural manner. I thank God for his testimony on this point.* Men of the highest intellectual endowments, in the Open Baptist denomination, have for some time past been attempting to fasten upon people's minds the opinion that the believer's righteousness is his own godly life. These men do not deny the satisfaction which Jesus Christ, as the Surety, rendered unto God's justice in all His substitutionary work. But they deny the transfer of the actual and perfect righteousness of Christ to the believer; and they persistently maintain that the believer's righteousness before God is his own

* Mr. Spurgeon died six months later - 31st January, 1892.

personal righteousness, his own godly life. Ah, it is nothing but a barefaced deception, an awful contradiction of God's most blessed Word, because a godly life - beautiful as it is, and needful as it is to insist upon the same (yes, and acceptable as it is to God through Jesus Christ, so long as we are kept from attaching any merit to it) - is nothing but "filthy rags," as the prophet says, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. lxiv.6). Observe that he does not say, "all the cursing, swearing, lying, stealing, and all that sort of thing, are filth," but "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." If, then, we put such things in the place of Christ's righteousness, we put abominable things in the place of it, and we trust our soul's salvation to nothing but self-righteousness.

I go back to the point where I started, namely, there is not a man upon earth, not a man of Adam's posterity, that can claim the appellation of a "righteous man" unless he is a new creature in Christ, made righteous by the righteousness of Christ being imputed to him. Thus it is the very righteousness of Christ that is the righteousness of the righteous man, the righteousness of his salvation, of his acceptance before God, of his pardon, justification, security, preservation, and, finally, of his glorification.

For all man's righteousness is entrusted to a divine Surety, a responsible covenant Head; it is all the gift of Christ from first to last, pursuant to the purposes of God in the predestinating enactments of the covenant of grace. So that the entire righteousness of the whole household of faith is in the covenant of grace, treasured up in the fulness of Christ according to the Father's will.

Now comes a question: How do we personally stand with God? He is a heart-searching God, and He knows just how we stand with Him. You may stand well with the one who sits in the same pew with you every Sunday; you may stand right enough with your family, and with the deacons of the church, you yourself being a member of the church; but how do you stand with God? If we are not found righteous before God, what then? He will not accept of our flimsy excuses. When our first parents fell, the Lord God instituted an equitable investigation into the matter, traced it to its source, and damned the Serpent then and there. He cursed the earth for man's sake, and said to the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to

thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." To Adam He said: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field," etc. (Gen.iii.16,18). As mankind, we are accountable to God for our actions. "As many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (Rom.ii.12).

In my trying and dark moments, I feel intense anxiety to have it made manifest that I am righteous. I know the doctrine of imputed righteousness or I could not preach it; still, I have to go back to the question, Am I righteous? Shall I be able, when I come to my dying bed, to say, "I am righteous"? A dear saint at Croydon said to me two or three weeks ago: "Bless His Name! I am longing to be gone! There is just one thing that troubles me, and that is a fear lest I should get impatient through being kept here longing for Him to come." She has her feet upon the threshold of an eternal world, and she can say, "A righteous woman!" I have long professed and contended for imputed righteousness, but I want to feel the effects of this word as I stand on the verge of an eternal world: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom.viii.1). It is evident to me that there are many that are satisfied with very flimsy evidences of being righteous. Friends, let no flimsy evidences satisfy you. If you had a little bit of property, and your claim to it should be disputed, you would be very unhappy until your claim were legally established - all about a little handful of property! Many people who make a profession of religion do not show half the anxiety as to being righteous.

II. We will try to notice the situation of the righteous man. I feel it needful to take up this point in a scriptural way. It is God's will that righteous people should dwell with the ungodly, that God's enemies should dwell in the world with His people (John xvii.15). His people are His witnesses (Isa.xlviii.10,12). I wish they understood that, and I wish their testimony was more distinct. I said to my people at home the other Sunday: "I wish I could see half as much zeal, half as much concern, on your part and on the part of other Calvinists, in spreading the truth as is manifested by the Salvation Army. We are ever ready to pull them to pieces (and I do believe they are propped up by nothing better than free will); but, at the same time, how self-denying, how persevering, how constant they are! Yet how drowsy a state our people are in! It is that which grieves

me. God says, "Ye are my witnesses"; that is what we should be. I never was against tract distribution. So long as the tract contains the truth of God, I am willing to lend a helping hand. But it has often been the case - and I get lots of tracts sent me - that I have seen downright good reading for a few pages and, just toward the end, the whole of this has been dashed to piéces by free will. I would have nothing to do with anything like this, because I hate free will. Free will has never done anything for me, but free grace has done everything for me that has ever been done.

Nevertheless, believers are God's witnesses; they should be as a city set upon a hill, the very salt of the earth - in their families, in their business, in all their mortal conditions, they are God's Lots in the midst of the ungodly. Often it is like this, just one Lot in a family, the rest careless. Sometimes it will be two, and I have known some instances of all the family being God's Lots. In most business establishments and great manufactories, it will be just a Lot here and a Lot there. I have myself been in one such place at Trowbridge where a friend has taken me over and shown me two or three Lots in the midst of scores of carnal men and women. And this is what we see in chapels - comparatively few Lots; the rest, natural hearers of the Word.

Now this is God's ordination during the present state of things. It is the will of God that the two shall exist together in this world. Therefore no righteous man is to be condemned because his situation is in the midst of ungodly people. The godly husband is not to separate himself from the ungodly wife; the godly wife is not to separate herself from the ungodly husband; the godly parents are not to slight their ungodly children; and the godly children are not to treat contemptuously their ungodly parents. I would just refer to what the apostle says: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world" (I Cor.v.9,10). How carefully the apostle writes! His meaning is that God's children should have nothing to do with such people in the way of an unlawful affinity. Look at Jehoshaphat and Ahab. Jehoshaphat "joined affinity with Ahab" (II.Chron.xviii,1), an enemy to God. Jehoshaphat was a good man, the Lord's servant; but Ahab enticed Jehoshaphat to pay him a visit, and then look at Ahab's subtlety. He entangled him by degrees, until at last he said: "I want you now as king to join affinity with me,

so that we may make preparations for a great war which I am anxious to win." And Jehoshaphat, through the prompting of that fleshly spirit which sprang up, agreed to go (because when a good man deliberately goes wrong, the Spirit of the Lord leaves him). What dreadful things did that bring upon Jehoshaphat! Therefore it is as though the apostle says: "I wrote unto you in an epistle that you would steer clear of all unlawful affinities with the ungodly; but I do not mean that you should have nothing to do with them in the way of business, because that is unavoidable and would cause you to go out of the world" (John xvii.15). The righteous man's situation is with the unrighteous while in this world. This is indisputable.

I must dwell a little more upon this point. God's word everywhere speaks of the godly dwelling with the ungodly (Matt.xiii.30). Yet it nowhere sanctions affinity with them. It condemns a carnal amalgamation as being unlawful and as being beneath the conduct and character of a righteous man (II Cor.vi.17). God's children are to be seen living everywhere and dwelling with the ungodly without being like them, without being mistaken for them. That is how it should be (Phil.ii.15). It should be with every living soul as it was with that godly prophet Isaiah; and all the prophets dwelt with very wicked people. Isaiah says: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (vi.5). His very soul panted for intercourse with Christ; he longed for fellowship with the Father and His son Jesus Christ (I John i.3) He knew that he was where God had placed him, and that he was doing God's will by stopping there; so he set his face like a flint against all carnal confederacies with men of unclean lips (Isa. viii.11,12). Would that we could see more of that!

Then I might say, however base an act any good man may commit, grace will be sure to show itself in one way or the other. Look at David; what a good man! but, though he grievously fell, he had the grace of God in his heart, and God is faithful to His word - "He cannot deny Himself" (II Tim.ii.13). All the devils in hell will never be able to stamp out a spark of grace; grace is inextinguishable, unquenchable. But the arrow of God went into David's conscience, and, under God's frown, he begins to feel what an awful sinner he is. He cries out: "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me" (Psa.xlii.7). Look at Peter; a

blessed man, but he was naturally too forward. Yet, after his fall, the Lord looked upon him, the arrow of God pierced his heart, and "he went out and wept bitterly" (Luke xxii.62). Hart, speaking of Satan, says:

"With some the tempter takes
Much pains to make them mad;
But me he found, and always held,
The easiest fool he had" (775)

I have often said the same. Well, you see how beautifully grace burst forth in both David and Peter! So it will be wherever the grace of God is. God is true to His word: where there is carnal walking, a sowing to the flesh, the child of God will be brought to feel this, and it will be made a grief to him (Gal.vi.7,8); and there will be sorrow and confession.

I regret that I have not time to complete my subject by dwelling somewhat upon verse 9: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." May the Lord lead you into it! He will whisper into the hearts of His backsliding but repenting children that, though He is just, He is also "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom.iii.26), - yea, that He "justifieth the ungodly" through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom.iv.5,6).
