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Sermon preached by Mr. J. H. Gosden,
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton.
Wednesday evening 9th May, 1923.

Romans Ch. 4. verses 4 & 5.

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt, but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

The wisdom and compassion and mercy and goodness of God is seen not in a small measure, in that He has in the holy Scripture discovered to us, not only our own evil disposition, but also shown to us, how, that in, and by Jesus Christ, He can, and does, and will deliver all his people from all their sin, and that the Holy Ghost, in inspiring the Apostle to write at least this part of the epistle, did it in great compassion and wisdom and love to his people, knowing their vileness in a disposition to seek to make God a debtor. It is so laid in our nature; sin has laid it there, whereby we are perverted in our judgement of God. We are so foolish and ignorant that we think that He is like ourselves, and we estimate naturally through the folly of our hearts, our own works and doings at the same rate or even at a greater rate than we estimate the works of God and even then to our own confusion, forsaking by it, our own mercy; stumbling at the stumblingstone of mercy and grace. It is an abomination indeed, and it is a solemn thing to find it in ones heart- a desire to make God a debtor.

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." A legal spirit, a spirit which says- one must do something to procure God's favour, is nothing less than this dreadful sin, than attempting to make God a debtor, and if the Lord God should pay us what He owes us, what would it be, even suppose everything we have done should be put into the scale of reckoning, what I say would be the debt that God owes us. We have it in this epistle, in one verse the Holy Ghost says - "The wages of sin is death." If the Lord God should pay us our debts after a life-long struggle of legal working and self-righteousness, eternal death would be our desert. I wonder how many of us believe, how many of us feelingly believe it, and yet, as we see in the various epistles, especially,

that there is a disposition in the people of God to this work-mongering, this giving something as a price to God why He should not pay the wages of sin; why He should have a favour towards a poor sinner. Working for life is an impossibility now, that is impossible to be successful. Indeed when Adam was created, He worked, but He worked from life. It was natural for him to take the law of God and to work at it with all his might, in a freeness that we cannot conceive of, but we are dead. May the Lord save us from this. May He save us from receiving the payment of the debt that God owes to us, and turn us from that pursuit. It may appear most proper that they should work, most proper that they should seek to make themselves more fit for God; most proper that they should get their hearts into a right attitude towards God; most proper that they should soften their hearts and cleanse their consciences, and to pray and to read the scripture; most proper that they should attend the services, and these things are in themselves proper, but O what is the motive? If these things are done with a view to procuring God's favour, they are simply sins, and merit hell, as much as does any open act of violence merits hell. It is a most solemn breaking of God's sabbath. It is a most terrible replying against the wisdom of God, and the goodness of God, and the death of Christ to work for life. Only God knows how many here are working for life; are seeking to make themselves suitable for God; that trim their way to seek love; (Jer. 2 v 33.) but there is another way, and that is in the fifth verse - "but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Now what is it? What power is it that will bring a person into this condition of not working. "To him that worketh not." It is natural, as I have said, for an awakened person to work, for a person who feels himself to be sinful, to seek to be rid of his sins; for a person who feels the anger of God, to attempt, by some means to appease that anger, that is natural. What is it that will bring a person into this state and attitude- to him that worketh not?

First I will say it is this- a solemn and it may be prolonged discipline of the Lord God with His law in and about your works. When a person is convinced of sin, he has a good deal to do with the Holy Scripture, and in the Holy Scripture you will find many many solemn blessed injunctions, called promiscuously,

the law. God's commandments. Now it seems to a person, most proper that he should take hold of these commandments and walk in them. And the Lord may allow a person for a long time to walk in some particular things as he thinks, whereby gradually he may find the trouble of his conscience grow less; whereby he may begin to think that he is getting religious, and it may be that he does really hide himself in some such refuge of lies, and be for a long time entangled in that net. It is a very solemn thing to be left here, to be left in, to stumble in a pursuit after the law of righteousness, to stumble at the stumblingstone, even Christ, for that is what legal workings are. But the Lord breaks the working arm in time, cripples it. He does what we read just now, to all his people sooner or later, makes them know it, because He does it in them- "I kill." and a dead person cannot work. If He kills you it may be a gradual work, there will come a time when you will come into this place- "To him that worketh not." You won't be able to work. What is that? Why, being made suitable for Jesus Christ. Worn out with toil. finding your working arm broken by the Word of God. The Word of God in the Holy Law may come bit by bit upon you, and gradually squeeze all the life of your hope out of you, and perhaps the last thing that will come to you, to kill the last spark of your hope, will be - "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Perhaps you have thought all along how you have feared God, and it is the fear of God that has made you work so hard, and yet though you have worked so hard at these things- prayer, reading, and attendance, and beseeching God, and fasting in some things, the Lord has not looked at you, or listened to you, and you begin to cavil at Him, that He has not paid His debts; then the word will come in, and you will feel it - "There is no fear of God before their eyes." That will kill the last spark of life." Some of us perhaps thought we feared God greatly at the first, but we have to live to prove this, that the tender fear of God's Holy Majesty is a spiritual exercise. When it is lively in exercise, it is only when God the Holy Ghost is quickening the soul. I little thought a few years ago, that that word - "There is no fear of God before their eyes, should have anything to do with me. Anything of this world before ones eyes will quickly catch and make a great impression in

the heart, but O how hardened, how speedily hardened one gets from the fear of God's holy Name.

And then again that word in the law where it is written, "The venom of asps is under their tongue." You may not spit out that venom in an outward way, but you may perceive by the coming in of that word into your spirit, that that is true of you, and that will kill you of all your thoughts of meriting God's favour by a gracious conversation. "To him that worketh not." This killing work is very solemn, weakening, terrible to the soul a solemn reality. It is no guess-work, no imagination, no religious fantasy, but a reality, and the soul that experiences it, knows, he experiences it, and he groans under it. I might go through the various supposed goodness that we might think we had, and all the graces we might, when we had no exercise, and prove they are not in nature even although we may have had some of them in exercise, that they are not ours, but God's gift and exercised by the power of God. O it is a solemn thing to be exposed to yourselves. and thus be killed.

"But to him that worketh not." There is another thing, another means which God uses to bring people off from this working for life. It is the discovery to him of a man, a Person, who is Almighty God, who has said, when He had completed that for his church which was necessary for her- "It is finished." A discovery, that is to say, of the Son of God. When that is made to a person that brings him away from working, makes him ashamed of his working, makes him confess the sin of his working, to God.

This is a great and a blessed way which the Lord uses to bring people off from the way of death, for depend upon it, a legal spirit is a deathly spirit, and if we are never brought away from legality, if we are never really delivered from the law, what will it mean, if the law of God holds us always. If we always, as it were hold ourselves to that in a solemn independance of Christ. Why, my friends, we forsake our own mercy.

" But believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." Nothing will bring a person to believe on God, as justifying the ungodly, but a manifestation of the Son of God as the Surety. I am not speaking, and do not wish to speak now of great revelation

and visions. What I speak of now is the power of the Holy Ghost making the Person of the Son of God real to the faith that is implanted in the soul, and this is a very blessed and a very solemn work if a person is brought down to this condition to need mercy; to need an absolute deliverance; to need that the debt that God owes to him should never be paid to him and that the grace and goodness and love which God has might be given to him else he must die. Equally a person is brought down to God's very free and very solemn terms. You will never find Christ if you have not lost yourself, if you have not been brought to forsake your own life, thus you are not yet fit for Christ, yet the Lord God by his Holy Spirit does sovereignly reveal Him and He may kill and will doubtless kill thoroughly, a legal spirit by revealing Him. Losing your own life, is not a legal work and an effort of nature, but it is the work of God the Holy Ghost. A man who believes in Him that justifies the ungodly, does not believe in his faith, but he believes in Christ, with a sure act of dependance on Him as manifested to him as the Redeemer and Saviour of ungodly men, as the gift of the Father for this purpose. What do men see in Christ, as discovered in the Holy Scripture that enables a poor sinner, a person feelingly ungodly with all that ^{that} means, yet longing for righteousness and for God, what does God show in Christ to enable a person to believe.

First He shows his Person, that justifies the ungodly, He shows the Person of Christ. You must have an object for faith. Faith is not an indifference, a hazy, shadowy thing with no end to it; no beginning and no reason for it. There is a great reason for faith, though natural reason does not exercise faith. Faith is above reason, but there is a great reason for faith, and the Holy Ghost makes demonstration in the soul of the reason why the soul should look to Christ and to God in Him. The Person of the Son of God is this object, when the Holy Ghost makes the Lord Jesus as the Mediator, one who was set up by God to be the Surety of the church; when that Person who is God and also is man, is made real to a poor sinner who longs for mercy, and who longs to come to God, and longs to feel that things are right between him and God; who groans under the burden of his guilt and by a solemn sense of this word-ungodly, and says he, I am an ungodly person. I say when that person, the person

of God's dear Son is made real to him, then away with his working. Then he is after Christ. Before, he was after something, he knew not what. He wanted to be rid of guilt; he wanted to be rid of trouble and of sin, but he had no direction. Now there is a direction in his soul and Christ is the object to which he is directed, and says he, as the poor woman said- "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole." Touching the hem of Christ's garment is a different thing from working for life is it not. All the works of the pharisees in the law, the making broad their phylacteries and enlarging the borders of their garments, and the washing of their hands, and prayers in public places and all these things, why there is no proportion between that and touching the hem of Christ's garment, but says a poor sinner- This is what I want, virtue from that person; an interest in His mediation, to be brought to God by Him as the Mediator. This is what I want. "To him that worketh not."

Then the Holy Spirit does bring a person off from working by showing the work that the Person has done, not only that there is a Mediator set up by God, and therefore sufficient for mediation, and that for an ungodly person, but also that this Mediator in His work of mediation has wrought out that which will make those for whom He stood as Surety, acceptable with a Holy God. They themselves are ungodly persons in their own apprehension, solemnly ungodly, in their nature ungodly, feelingly so, and this work is a very great work; every jot and tittle of the law spiritually, perfectly and fully did the Lord Jesus fulfil for the church, and this the Holy Spirit shows. He shows the sufficiency of this work. Is there a single word in the whole law and book of God that the Lord Jesus Christ did not, with the whole power of His holy person keep. Did He not love his neighbour as Himself? Love his enemies? Did He not love God with all His heart. Did He not fulfil all righteousness? Did He not go about doing good? The work of Christ in His obedience is full of virtue, and that virtue flows into poor ungodly sinners by faith. The demonstration of the Spirit, of the righteousness of Jesus Christ enables a person to turn away from all his busyness and he believes this work included His death whereby he took the wages due to the church. The wages of sin is death, and paid God his

debt, the debt the church owed He paid, when He suffered, bled and died, and if this is really made known to you by a spiritual and a lively manifestation of it, in the light of the Holy Ghost, why it will make you say - "O let that merit avail for me.

Let that death be known in its virtue and life-giving power in my soul. I seek nothing else, and you will go to God with it. Faith does, when it acts upon the Person of Christ, cause the person who acts that faith, to go to God with what He says. You will make a plea of it. The Name of the Lord is given among men whereby they may be saved. A poor sinner in the act of faith takes this precious Name, the Name of Christ crucified, and pleads the price that Christ has paid for redemption, and says- "O that that Christ might be known in the virtue of it in my soul, that I might have the liberty Christ brought by His death; that I might know what redemption means in the experience of it. This kills working, and yet it sets the soul at work in a different respect. It gives him life to work, it bows in the motives in his prayer. Now it is- If the Lord would but hear me for Christ's sake. If He might but engage the ear of the father for a testimony of the Spirit, of an interest in this Person, it is all he wants. In other words, if he may but touch the hem of Christ's garment, he will be whole immediately, and this is faith.

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"To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." and I will say this again, for I do feel it to be an important thing. A man does not believe in his faith, but he believes in Christ. It is not faith that is shown to him as the matter of salvation, but Christ; and simultaneously with a manifestation of Christ, faith naturally results, and is made lively. It is a great thing to be brought here, to say to the Lord God,

Payment Thou cans't not twice demand,
first at my bleeding Surety's hand,
and then again at mine.

Perhaps you will tremble and be unable honestly to say-"First at my bleeding Surety's hand, and then again at mine." You will perhaps say it in a way of desire to the Lord, and your faith will say this to the Lord- "Lord, if this Christ died for me, then I have all I want", make it known to me and faith will be after this. That which is called union to Christ, they which

are in Christ Jesus have no condemnation, and it is this being in Christ, Christ being now in the heart the hope of glory, the person wants to know that he is in Christ.

"But believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." because he has condemned his own sin. That is a wonderful thing for faith to lay hold of- the condemnation of sin; not done by himself, but the condemnation of sin in the flesh of Christ. O the virtue of this. The hope that this produces in the soul. The strength that it gives to faith, to press on after the power of it to be made known. The merit of Christ's death will be everlastingly known, and all who know it will live everlastingly in the sweet liberty of the gospel. Live before God. Be delivered from every sin at last. And this is attractive to a new-born child of God. Justification by God is the one thing, the summit of all things that a person, born again would be experiencing. Now there is one way discovered in the scriptures, and it is God's power to bring a person into that way. No argument of the flesh will bring a person in; no natural argument is enough to break a legal spirit, but a revelation of Christ will do it. O what a rest it is. I do not mean that a person will rest merely, though that is very great, by knowing something of Jesus Christ, but he will rest in Christ as his object and yet press for a further knowledge of Him, and a more intimate union with Him. It is a rest from legal strife. The least bit, if I might speak so, of knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ is of the essence of gospel liberty. You may still have a good deal of bondage left perhaps. It may supervene; you may not be brought right out into full gospel liberty, but I say, every time faith has given to it an inkling, a single ray of God's glory in Christ coming to the soul, that is in the effect of it, of the essence of gospel liberty, you know it some of you. This is it.

A guilty weak and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall,
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
my Saviour and my all.

There is liberty in that. That is not legal, that is not bondage, but faith, and the spirit of faith is the spirit of liberty.

"But to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." Who believes on God, and that there is no unrighteousness with Him. He is brought to believe this and

to say it from his heart- "If my soul were sent to hell, Thy righteous law approves it well." He has been brought to believe and to say that, and now he believes that if Christ died for him God cannot justly condemn, and he blesses and pleads and presses after this.

Now to those who are brought to this point, the Holy Spirit by Paul says - "his faith is counted for righteousness, reckoned, imputed as the word is, for righteousness. This is the wonderful way in which God delivers people righteously from a just sentence. Every person whose attitude of soul is as I have briefly named, towards Christ is looked upon by God the Father with pleasure, and looked upon as acceptable and righteous. The knowledge of this imputation is a different thing, it is imputed before it is known to be imputed. God looks upon a person and loves him before he knows it. Why, the Lord God looked upon all his people in Eternity, and saw them in Christ justified, but when they believe, then it is actually that they are justified, for they are ordained to obtain salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, and when the Lord Jesus comes to them, when the holy Spirit brings Christ into their hearts, and enables them to feel, to know and realise that they are, even themselves washed in Christ's blood, then there is some experience of peace with God which is through the justification of faith. This gives to the soul a blessed life and an anchorage in heaven. O to have Christ manifested to the soul as having died unto sin once and risen for the justification of the whole church, and to have in your soul some evidence that He died and rose again for you, gives you, I say, a life in heaven, an anchorage there within the veil. This believing in God in respect of justification of ungodly people, will, in the spirit of it be in all prayer. When a person prays to God, he prays for something, and he prays in the Name of Christ when he truly prays. Perhaps some of you people often praying that your sins may be subdued; perhaps you are often praying that your consciences may be cleansed, and praying that you may feel peace with God. Now the basis of those prayers is the Person and work of Christ. A plea which, if used by faith, God can never reject, and it is the Spirit's work to bring a person here- "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." He does not justify the ungodly who is unrepentant in his sin. That is not the

intension, O, far be it from our thoughts to think that God who cannot look upon sin, being too holy to justify a person in sin, but the thing is, here is a person seeking for holiness and righteousness and God's presence and acceptance with God, deliverance from guilt. Sin plagues him. This is the person, feeling his ungodliness, and being troubled on account of it and fearing God will never have anything to do with him; having manifested to him whereby the same Holy God can pardon his sins, deliver him from the guilt of them and pronounce him just and yet suffer in His perfection nothing at all. Christ having suffered in His Holy Person on Calvary's cross, suffered no defilement, but He suffered untold agony in His Person, His Holy Soul and Mind and Body and poured out His Soul unto death, and made intercession for the transgressors; and here is the life of the church. I believe there is no place where a right spirit is so powerfully active in the soul as when a person is taken by the Holy Spirit to Calvary's cross, then, holiness, righteousness, justice, divine love, divine faithfulness, and meekness, all these are seen in their glorious harmony, then a person sees how dull, filthy, dark, his own righteousnesses are and how unworthy, how worthless and how vile he is to have thought to have put them by the side of Christ, His righteousness and His precious death. There it is that a person is brought to submit to the holy Sovereignty of God. There, a person is brought to cast himself upon sovereign mercy. Nothing but mercy is that which is intended in this word- "To him that worketh not." If you can do without mercy, undeserved mercy, mercy procured by the blood of Christ, you are not yet brought into this place - "To him that worketh not" but if you cannot do without that mercy and upon these terms - through the death of Christ brought freely to you, because Christ died and rose again for you, then I say, if you cannot do without that mercy, this word is for you, and may the Lord help you to pursue the way until it be manifested to you that this is true concerning you, that you are justified and your faith is counted for righteousness. And this faith we read in the Ephesians is the gift of God, of course it is the gift of God. Can you discover Christ? Can you find Him by any effort of nature? Why is it that a poor saint of old said - "O when wilt Thou come unto me." Why is it that David so frequently said- "Hide not Thy face far from me." Why is that the church said- "Shine forth from between the Cherubims? Why? Because God sovereignly

discovers Himself, and by discovering Himself, draws faith into sweet exercise upon Himself. All the work is God's my friends. Salvation from beginning to end, from the very inception to the glorification of the whole church, it is all the power of God's grace. "To him that worketh not."

And if and when a soul is brought to believe that the death of Christ was for him, and that therefore he will never receive the payment due to him, of his sin, but will receive all that heaven has good. When he really believes in his soul that the Lord Jesus Christ's precious blood has blotted out his sins, then he begins to work. Then he begins to seek after the precepts of God. Then he begins to ask the Lord Jesus what He will have him to do, as Paul did, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do." But he does not do it because he wants to commend himself to God. Why his recommendation is Christ, and love to Jesus Christ makes him yield himself unto God as one that is alive from the dead.

May the Lord grant us this gospel spirit, bring us away from our own vile legality and enable us to trust in the precious Person and death of the Lord Jesus and grant to us that sweet and indubitable testimony of the Holy Spirit that He is our Lord, and that we are his redeemed children, and so may we be enabled to live godly. Amen.
