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La R 197

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La R 197 Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill, on Sunday evening, January 11th 1953.

Text: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts". Psalm 119. 63

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"I am a companion of all them that fear thee". Wise people are very careful about their companionships, they are very careful what associations they form as they go through life. A man's character may be known by the friends he chooses, and it is a wonderful mercy when the fear of God in the heart inclines a person to seek the companionship of God-fearing people, as did the Psalmist when he said, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts". And when he says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee", he does not speak of just a sort of casual acquaintance, an ordinary sort of intercourse, but he speaks of some very close association here, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee." To be a companion of a person is to walk in unity with him, in fellowship with him; there must be some mutual communion and understanding if two are to walk together as companions. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" There must be an agreement in interests and outlook. So here the Psalmist was attracted to the companionship of those that fear God. He says, "I am a companion" of such.

I remember once being told of a certain minister who made what many felt to be a very great mistake. One day in preaching he asked the young people present, "if you saw a company of godly people on one side of a street, and a company of disorderly, drunken people on the other side of the street, which company would you choose to go to?", and supposing the answer to be, "the company of godly people" he said, "That proves that you are a child of God". Well, it proves no such thing, it was not a true evidence. Any ordinary, respectable young person would be repelled by the spectacle of a number of drunken noisy people, and they would naturally incline to the society of more sober company, but that is not grace, that is not being a companion of those that fear God. You remember in the Song of Solomon we have these words, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it", "The companions hearken to thy voice", and the speaker desired to be favoured with them to hear that voice. Those that fear God, people who are brought into some degree of real fellowship with the Lord Himself so that God has dealings with them and they have dealings with God, these hear His voice, as He says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me". And He hears their voices too, He hears their voices as they are lifted up in prayer and supplication and thanksgiving. He hears

their praises and their complaints, and He delights in the sacrifices that they thus offer to Him. It is a wonderful thing to be favoured thus to hear the voice of the great and good Shepherd, the voice of Zion's King.

Well, the speaker in that passage I was just referring to, desired to have a share in that favour. Now, have you ever looked at God's people in that sort of way, have you felt, 'here is a people who have to do with God and God has to do with them very graciously; He has called them by His grace, He has dealt with them by His Spirit and His Word, He has touched their hearts, drawn their hearts out in desire to Himself, He has put a little love in their hearts to Him, to His Word, to His ways and His people, O that I were thus favoured, O that I were among this happy company, "the companions hearken to thy voice, cause me to hear it" '. It is a wonderful thing to be a companion of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Ye are they", He said to His disciples, "which have continued with me in my temptations". The disciples had followed the Lord Jesus throughout the period of His earthly ministry; they were with Him under varied circumstances, in times of stress and of danger, when His enemies often sought His life, (and had they been permitted would have destroyed Him, but they could not do it - His time was not yet); but His disciples who were with Him in all these circumstances of danger, the trials, the afflictions and cares through which He passed, they were His companions, they in their measure shared with Him the sorrows that He felt, they shared with Him the pains, the labours, the experiences, It is a wonderful thing to be a companion of the Lord Jesus, to be called by His grace "to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach", to be willing to be despised for His dear name, to suffer reproach and even persecution for His sake, as one said,

"If on my face for thy dear Name,  
Shame and reproaches be,  
All hail reproach, and welcome shame,  
If Thou remember me".

Well, the Lord does make His people willing thus to be His companions, and to follow Him through good report and through ill report, to suffer loss for His sake, to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily and follow Him.

Now the Psalmist says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee", a companion of those who are thus called to follow the Lord Jesus and who are blessed with the fear of His great and holy Name, who are blessed with love to the truth of the gospel. Are those the people you would have for your companions? "I am the companion of all them that fear thee". I was thinking to-day of Bunyan's masterpiece, the Pilgrim's Progress. You remember he tells us that when Christian set out from the City of Destruction he was joined at the first by one named Pliable. This Pliable

differed from Christian in one respect, that he had not a burden on his back, and he was disposed to go a good deal faster than Christian could because he had no burden. Very significant is the teaching of that. All seemed to go well, and Pliable seemed wonderfully attracted by the account given of the City to which they were going, the glories of the place, the happiness to be enjoyed there. 'O', said he, 'let us mend our pace', but poor Christian could not go so fast because he was so heavily burdened. Well, they came to the Slough of Despond, and that very soon quenched Pliable's desires to go on pilgrimage. He made shift to get out of the Slough on the side nearest to his own house, nearest to the City of Destruction, and went back. Christian struggled on, and eventually by the mercy of God, was brought out on the other side, that farthest from the City of Destruction. I just mention that to illustrate how some people are just temporaries - they endure for a while. They may appear just like the people of God for a season, and seem to walk with them, appear to be one with them, to be seeking the same things, to be in love with the same truths, to be aiming at the same goal, but yet they are only temporaries. The time comes when they are offended, temptation comes, persecution, the prospect of some loss or other, the fear of the frown of the world, the longing to have its smiles; offences come, and away they go, returning "as a dog to its vomit and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire". They go back, and, says the apostle, "If any man draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him". You see, there was no true root, as we read in the parable of the sower of the stony-ground growth, because it had no root it withered up when the sun arose and shone upon it, it had no deepness of earth, and so these characters have no root. To use Job's expression, "the root of the matter" is not in them. How can they but wither up? How is it possible for them to endure if the root of the matter is not there? They are not true companions of those that fear God.

To be a companion of those that fear God you must be under the gracious influence and teaching of the same blessed Spirit. There is as the apostle says, "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", and there must be that unity, that secret influence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, knitting and uniting your heart in bonds of fellowship with the true people of God. And if we are led by the Spirit of Truth, that Spirit will be guiding us into all truth, here a little and there a little. There is none can teach like Him. It is He who opens up the Scriptures, opens the understanding that we may understand the Scriptures. It is He who testifies of Christ and glorifies Him in poor sinners' hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who prepares the soul for the revelation of Jesus Christ

by convincing it of its sinful, ruined, guilty state. Now this teaching must be known before we can be companions of those that fear God. One essential feature of this companionship is fellowship in this gracious teaching. The apostle John, after speaking of some who depart from the truth and become the enemies of the truth, said "But ye have an unction from the Holy One", (that is, ye have the Holy Spirit) "and ye know all things". And His teaching it is that puts the difference between them. It is this that puts a difference between the true character and the false, between those who are Christians in name merely and those who are Christians in reality, this unction from the Holy One, this gift of the Holy Spirit, being taught by the spirit of truth. He makes the Word of God to be the Word of God in the sinner's conscience. If you are a companion of these that fear God, then the Word of God is made at times very powerful, very weighty and very solemn to you. You will not be able to read your Bible as you read an ordinary book. A dear friend of mine in Leicester, years ago, who from a life of utter worldliness and dissipation was called by grace, said in my hearing that when the change came to him it was when the Bible became to him the Word of God. If you are companions of those that fear God, you are their companions in this, that you have your ears and hearts opened to attend to the Word of God's grace, to attend to the things that are written in these divinely inspired Scriptures, and you will sometimes be constrained to say, "O how love I thy law, it is my meditation day and night". I feel it a very important point, I often think of it, that we need to have a religion that is nourished by the Word of God. If our religion is nourished by the flatteries of other people, by the good opinion of ministers and of godly people even, if our religion is fed by that, it will prove to be a sorry affair, it will prove to be short weight, it will prove to be a masterly delusion, but if we are right our religion is one that is nourished by the Word of God. As Peter says, "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby".

If you are companions of those that fear God, as they have a desire toward His Holy Name, so your desire will be toward His Holy Name and you will be in fellowship with the Apostle Paul who in writing to the Philippians gives expression to the ardent longing of his soul, that he might win Christ and be found in Him, that he might know Him, and that will be your soul's exercise, and in this you will be the companion of those that fear God. It will be Christ you want; Christ will be to you the supreme necessity, that you may know Him, that He may dwell in your heart by faith, that He may be the foundation upon which all your hopes are built, that you may know Him as your Redeemer, Saviour and Lord, that you

may be assured that in Him you have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace", and in these desires and aspirations you will be a true companion of those that fear God. You will be seeking for the same things that the Apostle Paul himself was seeking, and as long as he was in the body he was still seeking them, following on to know the Lord. Can you say that you are a companion of those that fear God?

Then those who fear God are people who have some very solemn and deep sense of their own sinfulness, and although they be led more and more into the knowledge of Christ, they are also led more and more into the knowledge of their own sinfulness. One says, "his own bad heart creates him smart which none but God can know". and if you are a companion of those that fear God, you will be a companion of the Apostle Paul in the affliction that he speaks of specially in the seventh chapter of the epistle of the Romans. You will be his companion, you will be glad that chapter was ever written, and you will be very thankful for other portions of the Word of God in which it is revealed that in the people of God there are two opposing forces, the flesh and the Spirit. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would". And this affliction will be a painful one, it will cause many a sigh, cry and groan, and as, alas, at times a poor believer finds sin rising up strongly within him and he feels all defiled within. O what wretchedness he will feel, but how this will be useful to him in that it will make the blood of Christ to be very precious. O what a case he will have for the fountain of Christ's precious blood when he feels defilement within him, and when he finds guilt, fresh-contracted guilt on his conscience, O the need of that fountain.

"There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains".

and the hymn-writer also says that the precious blood from Jesu's veins,

"shall never lose its power,  
Till all the ransomed church of God  
Be saved, to sin no more".

Its virtue never declines, it is always efficacious, and if that blood be sprinkled upon your conscience, you will have peace with God, a consciousness of blood-bought pardon. Well, in this sense of sin and in an increasing sense of the preciousness of Christ and His blood, you are a companion of those that fear God. Many people, if I may use the expression, dabble in religion, they just dabble in religion without any real experience of the pathway, the sorrows, the temptations and the joys of God's people. They just dabble in religion, that is all you can call it, but the real Christian,

the God-fearing person, will be a companion of God's people, a companion of them in their temptations. Whenever the devil sees a God-fearing man or woman he will always be busy assaulting them and trying, if it were possible, to destroy them. He goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. What a mercy it is that there are those characters whom he may not devour, who are kept safe by the Good Shepherd. But the devil is a very busy devil, and he will assault the children of God and the ministers of God. He spared not the Lord Jesus Christ, and if he could thus assault a tree so green, as I think Hart says, "good God defend the dry". O, if he could tempt Christ as he did (glory to His name without success!) what wonder then that he should assault His poor believers, His humble believers! But in these temptations the people of God learn yet more of the preciousness of Christ, the needfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. O what a strength He is to the tempted soul! O what a graciously sympathising heart He has for a tempted soul! He well remembers what He suffered in being tempted, and as His poor people suffer being tempted He pours out His consolation into their hearts in due time. "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him".

The experience has its painfulness, it brings with it many distresses, but after all it is a wonderful mercy to be a companion of those that fear God, to be walking with them, to be sharing their sorrows, their labour, their experiences, sharing their griefs and their joys. A wonderful thing it is to be brought into this fellowship. You remember John says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ". O how high a privilege! O how truly blessed are those people who are bound together in such companionship! If you are a companion of those that fear God you will find this as you have to do with them, that you and they are, on some things at any rate, treading the same path. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man", and there is a wonderful blessedness to be experienced when two people of God come together, perhaps never having met before. When they begin to compare notes, as they talk their hearts burn within them, and there is kindled in each heart an affection for his brother. There is a bond of union formed and felt that will last not only till death, but throughout eternity. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee".

The bond that thus exists between God's people is stronger, is a more sacred, a more lasting bond than that which exists between families after the flesh. Parents may love their children, children may love their parents devotedly perhaps, families may love each other most tenderly, but their

natural love is not to be compared with the love that exists between those that fear God. O there is something in it very sacred, something spiritual, something supernatural. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity", says the Psalmist. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee", and these people will be those in whose company you delight. There are some people who like to be considered Christians, they may be members even of a church, but where do they seek their most congenial companionship? I have known of some who have very, very rarely been seen in company with those who tenderly fear God. The people with whom they are most at home are worldly people. They must associate with people of position, they must associate with people of taste, they must associate with people with whom they can enter into this, that and the other worldly enjoyment. That is not being a companion of those that fear God. The apostle James says, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God". But O, to be a companion of those that fear God! for them to be our chosen company, the company in which we delight. The Psalmist said, "My goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent in whom is all my delight". He delighted in the people of God, and in this Psalm we read, "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word". How delightful to you will be the worshipping assemblies of those that fear God!

"How charming is the place,  
Where my Redeemer, God,  
Unveils the beauties of His face,  
And sheds His love abroad".

"Not the fair palaces  
To which the great resort,  
Are once to be compared to this,  
Where Jesus holds His court".

I remember a dear old man in Oxfordshire had been very ill for a long season, and one Sabbath morning I saw him being carried across the road to the little wayside chapel where I was due to preach that day, carried between two of the brethren as he was too weak to walk. He was present throughout the morning service and at the close of it he said to me, 'I be like the apostles, when they were let go they went to their own company, and I be come to my own company'. He had come to the company that he loved to be with, the company of a few godly, God-fearing people, humble believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In those days there were some choice characters in that little village cause, characters whom one remembers with pleasure and with gratitude for having ever known them. Well, do you know

what it is to have a little of that feeling that you long for the opportunity to come when you can go to your own company? when you can get away from your necessary contacts with the world and its business and get among the people of God. Sometimes it will be like this that you will welcome the opportunity of getting to your own home and getting into some quiet place in your own home to seek the secret of the Lord's presence, and in that you will have fellowship with His people. "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts". "Of them that fear thee". The fear of the Lord is indeed a precious grace, a vital principle.

"Without its fresh flavour, in knowledge there's fault,  
In doctrines no savour; in duties no salt".

The great fault of Mr. Talkative in the Pilgrim's Progress was that he was destitute of the fear of the Lord. He had plenty of religious talk on his tongue but no fear of God in his heart and therefore no hatred of sin, but the fear of the Lord is a precious grace. The Lord grant that we may have it, and that having the fear of God in our hearts we may be companions of those who likewise fear Him, that our acquaintance with them may not be just a nodding acquaintance, a superficial acquaintance, but that it may be one of real spiritual fellowship, a walking together in the things and ways of God, and a feeding in the green pastures of gospel truth. Amen.

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