

VERILY, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, they have their reward. But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

"Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

With what tender care every weakness of our fallen nature is pointed out in the Scriptures, that they may be guarded against, and not become occasions of stumbling to those endeavoring to walk the narrow way. When we realize that the Christian life is a life of sacrifice, and decide upon that as our course, a temptation is ready for us at the very outstart. It requires no little determination to come to that decision, and to solemnly covenant with God to faithfully sacrifice all our human will, interests, hopes, and aims, henceforth to be led only by his will. With the firm decision to thus follow in the Master's footprints, comes the blessed consciousness of the divine approval – a

joy which the world cannot give, neither can it take away, except with our consent, or through subsequent unfaithfulness in the performance of our covenant.

Having fully decided upon this course, and having begun to offer ourselves as sacrifices, our Lord warns us to take heed, lest while we continue to sacrifice, or to do any good work, we get to looking for human, instead of the divine approval. How unconsciously and almost imperceptibly we fall into this snare, if not taking heed. And therefore, just at the door of this temptation, we are cautioned to set a guard. If you have just done a good work, do not go and tell your neighbor about it. Do it with as little ostentation and display as the circumstances of the case will admit of, without any if possible. If you do good deeds for the approval of men, you will very soon get to doing only such deeds as are likely to bring their approval. And if you study to meet their approval, verily you will get your reward. But what a mean reward it is in comparison to the Lord's approval. The subtilty of this temptation lies in the fact that those drawn into it imagine that while they seek and obtain the praise of men, they also merit and obtain the favor of God.

But this is only a delusion. He who searcheth the heart, reads our motives, and judges and rewards us accordingly. If we do good, benevolent deeds to court the approval of men; if we prefer to make long and devout prayers in public, rather than to commune with God in secret, and to search his word to know his will; if we make a show of our fasting that we may appear unto men to fast, then we may be sure that we have no reward of our Father which is in heaven. If done skillfully for men's approval, we will likely get the approval of some men, at least; but such need not expect any reward from God. They *get the reward* they seek, as our Lord said. God is not blind to our motives, and will not credit and reward us for services not done unto him.

Fasting, under the Jewish dispensation, was a symbol of self-denial and sacrificing under the Christian dispensation. It was a

common thing among those who desired a reputation among men for special sanctity, to fast often and to make as much capital out of it as possible by advertising their fasting, disfiguring their faces, that they might appear to men to be very self-denying and very devout.

Against such a spirit the Lord cautions us. If you would present yourself, your time, your means, your efforts and all your talents as a sacrifice, see that you are presenting them to God and not to men. Do not go about with a sad countenance, telling every one as you have opportunity that you are carrying a very heavy cross, that it is almost crushing you, that you cannot stand it much longer. Do not tell them that you are starved and pinched on every side, and ground down by the iron heel of oppression; that the Lord's service is a hard service and his yoke a very heavy yoke. That is not presenting your sacrifice unto the Lord. That is representing a sacrifice before men to gain their sympathy and perhaps their pity. And such a course will bring its reward. Some will say, It's a pity of the poor things; they have a miserable time of it; they must serve a hard master, but they are fools for doing it. Why don't they act sensibly, quit fasting (sacrificing) and take all the comfort and pleasure they can get out of life. There is nothing to be gained as we can see by living in such a way. And very soon their kindly sympathy finds expression in efforts to dissuade you from the course of sacrifice, and in temptations to walk with them in their way. And the probabilities are very strong that such a one will ere long turn back, or at least turn aside from the narrow way. Looking back at the things behind prepares the [R955 : page 6] way for turning back, and makes the onward progress in the narrow way more and more difficult, and finally impossible. "No man, having put his hand to the plow and *looking back*, is fit for the kingdom of God." – Luke 9:62.

How carefully, then, should we heed the Lord's counsel – When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which seeth in secret. Bear the cross cheerfully, with a hearty good will; rejoice in the privilege of

being counted worthy to share in the blessed work of proclaiming the glorious gospel of the blessed God at any sacrifice – at the sacrifice of time and money which might be otherwise employed in selfish gratification; at the sacrifice of reputation, ease, comfort, convenience, friends, health, and finally of life itself.

To such a one the yoke actually becomes easy and the burden light, just as our Lord promised that it should be, saying: "Come unto, me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me [how to bear it], for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls: For my yoke *is easy*, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30.) Because he was meek and lowly in heart, Jesus could ignore his own will, cease to do it, and take upon him the yoke of the Father's will, and even though it led him to Gethsemane and Calvary, he could say, I *delight* to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. It is my meat and drink to do thy will. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

The more we get of that meek and lowly spirit which treats our own will as dead, and labors with singleness of purpose to accomplish the divine will, desiring and seeking only the divine approbation, the more swiftly we will run the race for the prize of our high calling. Let us take heed then that we do not barter away the heavenly approval and crown and glory, for the mean rewards of this present life.

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