

THE LABOR OF LOVE TO BE REWARDED

"God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." – Hebrews 6:10.

DISCOURAGEMENT is a hindrance to growth in grace; St. Paul was seeking to encourage his readers. The context implies that they had experienced some setback, some discouragement. He intimates that while they had begun well, their zeal had cooled to some extent. In this chapter and on to the tenth inclusive, he points out the danger of falling back and away after we have become Christians. And to those who are likely to become discouraged he gives the exhortation of our text, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love." We might inquire, What great work, or labor of love, could they do that would constitute it unrighteous for God to forget to reward it? Are not good works the proper course for all mankind? How would it be unrighteous for God to forget these good works?

The answer of Scripture would seem to be that the world cannot do any good works that God could acknowledge – "There is none righteous, no, not one." But "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love," writes the Apostle. What does he mean? We reply, He is addressing Christians, those who have become God's children by entering into a covenant with Him. They were children of wrath, even as others; and still, according to the flesh, they are imperfect. But God is not dealing [R5818 : page 381] with these according to the flesh. He has received them into His family under a special arrangement, a Covenant of Sacrifice. In that Covenant He agreed that through Christ He would make allowance for their weaknesses, and deal with them according to the intentions of their hearts and minds, according as they would seek to please Him as His children. God has thus bound Himself

of His own free will by entering into a Covenant with His people. He is bound to them, on the one side, and they are bound to Him, on the other side. Neither can escape the conditions of that Covenant.

DANGER OF LOSING THE REWARD

These Covenanters were members of Adam's fallen race, condemned to death. Ah, yes! but this is the race for whom Christ died, and who will be recovered from death and from the condemnation of sin that came through Adam's disobedience. And this merit of Christ's death was applied first for a choice class who during the Gospel Age should long after God and gladly accept His arrangement through Christ. This being so, when these heard of Christ as the Redeemer, they believed on Him, they sacrificed their earthly hopes, aims, ambitions – all – in order that they might enter into this Covenant with the Lord. The thought which inspired them to take this step was the hope that they might attain to the spiritual inheritance, to be joint-inheritors with Christ in the Kingdom to be set up on the earth. This was something to which God had opened up the way, through His provision in Christ. They gave up the earthly things for the grander, the Heavenly. They voluntarily sacrificed all earthly rights and interests. They bound themselves irrevocably to the Lord.

Now if they should make a failure in this matter, they would lose absolutely everything. The Apostle is pointing out this fact. They have acknowledged God's arrangement, and there is a great reward coming to them under their Covenant with Him. Do not, he urges, forfeit this reward by turning away from the Lord and becoming cold or lukewarm, which condition might lead on to entire rejection of God. Rather go on, and be of good courage; and the Lord, Jehovah Himself, shall strengthen your hearts; wait expectantly on Him.

In the 10th Chapter, the Apostle tells them of how some of them had in the past endured a great fight of afflictions, and of how others had suffered with those in affliction in that they had been sympathizers and companions of those who had been so persecuted. All this was endured for the Lord's sake, for love of the brethren, and in harmony with God's arrangement. Therefore they should have confidence in God, that He loved them and appreciated all they had borne for Him. The Apostle exhorts them again not to turn back, not to be discouraged, but to be encouraged; and again he assures them of his confidence that they would persevere to the end.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

St. Paul declares that their labors of love were shown toward God's name. This honor toward God's name consisted in their ministering to the saints. This was a proof of their love for the Lord. This ministry, too, had been kept up. The saints represent God in the world. Whatever is done for the saints is, therefore, done for God. There is a distinction to be noted in the Bible as respects those who are in covenant relationship with God and those who are not in covenant relationship with Him. We have certain duties toward the world. We have responsibilities toward them. The Golden Rule is to operate always and toward all men. But we have not the same obligation toward the world that we have toward the saints. Whoever honors the saints and serves them, honors and serves God. This seems to be the Apostle's thought in the matter.

We are not to understand that the Lord would be displeased that we should do good to all men. Rather the Apostle urges, "Let us do good unto all men as we have opportunity." Be generous, be kind to everybody, but especially to the saints. (Galatians 6:10.) This is what is particularly pleasing to God. Every service lovingly and gladly rendered to the saints is rendered unto His glory. This

is true in a very special sense; for there are people in the world who might be naturally more admirable in character, and it might be more pleasing to serve them than to serve many of the saints, who might be ruder, cruder, in some respects. But in the service to the saints there is a special blessing from the Lord. We are to have this in mind when meeting and fellowshiping with those who have become children of God, and when we have opportunities to assist or comfort them. They must have our love, our cooperation, our sympathy, our aid. There may be more or less option in respect to others, but not in respect to our brethren in Christ.

This same principle, to some extent, holds good amongst worldly people. For instance, an Odd Fellow would show favors toward an Odd Fellow, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, that he would not show to [R5819 : page 381] others. And the same with Masons. A Mason would show favor to a Mason the world over, whether he be rich or poor, black or white. If these are the human standards, much more so should it be thus with those who have become children of the Lord. The fact that they are disciples of Christ makes it incumbent on whoever is a follower of the same Master to do a brother's or a sister's part. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto Me." This does not apply now to the world, but it does apply to the Church, the Lord's faithful followers.

PERSEVERANCE IN THIS MINISTRY

The Apostle says, "In that ye have ministered unto the saints, and do minister." This signifies that they were still in this proper attitude. Although somewhat discouraged in the good way, they were still helpful to one another. Another thought – it was not merely the amount of good works that they did that counted; for many good works are done by many people which would not in any sense be recognized by God or be bound to be rewarded. The works of the world are works of sinners. The world are not in

covenant relationship with God. If any one does a good work, he by an unwritten law gets more or less blessing out of it. Whoever does a good work with a worthy motive will receive some reward, some blessing. It will ennoble his character and help to fit him for the blessings of the next Age, when all the world will be on trial for life before the Judgment Seat of God. The nobler the character in that Day, the fewer corrective stripes will be necessary. But in order to get the present blessing of the Lord, His special blessing, he must be in covenant relationship with Him.

The work now being done by those in such relationship with God will be worthy of His notice and reward. In the 13th Chapter of 1st Corinthians, the Apostle points out that, with the Body of Christ good works alone are not sufficient to indicate God's favor. He declared that if he should give his body to be burned, and should give all his goods to feed the poor, there would be no real merit in it unless it was done from the motive of love. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal," was his further declaration. One might **[R5819 : page 382]** do these good works to have the honor of men. If they were done for any such reason, God would not consider them good works to be rewarded. The works that God recognizes as good works and worthy of His approval and reward are those done by His faithful people, who are justified and sanctified, and who serve from love to Him, to His people and to His cause.

And so St. Paul says here to these, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love." This is important to have in mind. It is important for us to see to it that our motives are those of love toward the Lord and His Cause and His brethren. Such good works, if persevered in according to our ability and opportunity, will not fail of a blessed reward.

=====