

Deuteronomy - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 3 (1855), "The Rock, His Work Is Perfect."

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DEUT. 32:4.

THERE is a remarkable passage in Hooker's "Discourse of Justification," written upwards of two hundred and forty years since. It is this, "It may seem somewhat extreme which I will speak; Therefore, let every one judge of it even as his own heart shall tell him, and no otherwise; I will but only make a demand. If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham; if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons should be found in a city, for their sakes that city should not be destroyed; but, and if he should make us an offer thus large; search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam, find one man that hath done one action which has past from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and for that one man's only action, neither man nor angel shall feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men?"

Whilst the Christian, who is most deeply occupied in self-judgment, a most important part of his priestly function, before "the throne of grace," will acknowledge, most heartily, the truth of so broad and searching a statement; instead of being discouraged at such a discovery, it will lead him to "encourage himself in the Lord," and to value that present priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, which ever goes on for him in heaven.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Philippians, says, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." This last word, the translators have rendered in the margin, "sense;" which seems to be more correct than judgment. The Spirit that "rested" on Jesus was the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord; it made Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, so that He did not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears (Is. 11: 2, 3). Now, the same Spirit which rested and abode on Jesus, because of His intrinsic holiness, in other words, because of that which He personally was, dwelleth in those that are His, because they are "sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" not because of that which they personally are, but because of that which they are made by His grace in Him, even the righteousness of God in Him. And the Holy Ghost is to them "the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord;" so that the more deeply He instructs them in the knowledge of Jesus, the more sensitive they become in the fear of the Lord. Where others discern faultlessness in them, they discover a mixture of motives which they can hardly separate; but Jesus, their great High Priest, can separate the precious from the vile, and take up and present that which is of the Spirit, as acceptable to God, which by reason of infirmity the sensitive soul could not itself separate. All this turns to a testimony. The Lord Jesus is the Rock, the only one in whom is no flaw, no mixed motive, no bias by the power of circumstances, no seeking of His own. He is the Rock, the One to be depended on because of that which He Himself is. He "needeth not" to have anything done for Him. And the moment it pleased the Father to reveal to Peter the Glory of the Person of the Son, the Lord could speak of a Rock on which to build His Church. He is the Rock. Peter's confession to the glory of His Person is the Rock; as Peter teaches, "To Whom coming as unto a living stone." Peter and his fellow Apostles were the doctrinal founders of the Church; because they laid no other foundation than that chosen and precious Stone, disallowed indeed of men, which God had laid to try conclusions with men, whether His or their foundation should stand (see Is. 28:14-17). Hence we are taught, that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone."

But it is because "He is the Rock," that "His work is perfect." "The Preacher" thus defines perfection, "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it that men should fear before Him" (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

It is blessed, indeed, to contrast the Lord with the works of His own hands in creation. "Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands; they shall perish, but Thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall was old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end." But in redemption, we cannot separate the work from the Worker. All the wonderful works which the Lord Jesus did during His ministry on earth, must give place to that one work, of which He Himself was the subject, "He was numbered with the transgressors." He is the Rock, "His work is perfect." It is "once," "finished," and "for ever." Here alone is absolute perfection. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). "It is finished." We say not, it was finished, as we say, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished" (Gen. 2:1); because the expression would not imply absolute perfection, but "It is finished." The work and the Rock are so identified, that the perfection of the Rock is carried into the work; and it is of the same value and efficacy, the same freshness and preciousness to God, this very moment, as on the very day that Jesus gave Himself for our sins. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and as He is, so is His work. It is "for ever." As concerning sin, by His work, He hath made "an end of sin;" concerning righteousness, He hath "brought in everlasting righteousness" (Heb. 9:26; Dan. 9:24); concerning redemption, He hath "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).

When the apostle contrasts the ministry of Moses with that of the New Testament (2 Cor. great and glorious as that of Moses was, it wanted the element of permanence; it was but transient and to be done away. "For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." This is one most blessed element of the ministry of the New Testament. Whoever comes under its power by its reception, comes under permanent blessing. The Lord sent forth His apostles to "bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain" (John 15:16). Contrast the highest human glory with the thought of one sinner brought to Christ. All human glory passes away, but if one sinner be brought to Christ it is "for ever." Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be "for ever."

But the work of the Lord Jesus Christ is so perfect, "that nothing can be put to it." The Galatian Christians attempted to add their observance of the law to the work of Christ, but this was really to detract from the perfection of the work of Christ. Hence, the apostle cries out with holy jealousy, "I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Little do even real Christians

think of the constant tendency in their hearts to disparage the perfect work of Christ, by putting something to it. They allow the doctrine, that the work is perfect—is finished; yet, through the deceitfulness of their hearts, they often practically deny it. The Christian experience, real Christian service, genuine Christian graces may be put to the work of Christ, and thus, in reality, frustrate the grace of God, and nullify the death of Christ. He is jealous; and jealous especially in this respect, lest even that which, by His grace, He communicates to us should be put to that work which He hath finished for us. It was prohibited to the Israelite, under the most solemn sanction, to make any perfume like that of the incense to be “put before the testimony in the tabernacle.” “Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from His people” (Ex. 30:34-38).

Without any controversy, “works of righteousness,” and the graces of the Spirit are, through Jesus Christ, well pleasing unto God. But, if we “smell thereto,” if there be more fragrantcy in them, in our estimation, than in the perfect work of Christ, we are depreciating that work, by putting that to it which never had been at all, had it not been for the perfect work of Christ. Yet it is no uncommon thing for a Christian to admire in himself or in another, the grace of Christ, which is in Him or in another, rather than the grace of God in the perfect work of Christ. Let the best thing that any saint ever did be put to the work of Christ, and it immediately stamps imperfection on that work.

But if the perfection of the work of Christ is nullified by the addition of anything to it, it is equally nullified by taking anything from it. Christ “gave Himself for our sins.” “He is the Rock, His work is perfect.” It is because the work which He wrought, is the giving Himself, that the work is so singular and so perfect. The least diminution from the glory of the person of Christ, detracts from the perfection of His work. If He be not very Emmanuel, then, however perfect His work contrasted with any work of man, it is not divinely perfect. Hence, those who deny the essential deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, most consistently reject the doctrine of His atoning work. It cannot, with such denial, carry perpetuity with it: it is not perfect; it is nothing for the soul to rest on. On such a principle, Christ has died in vain. All the authorities in the world, “Herod, Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, were gathered together,” to compass the death of the Lord Jesus Christ; but now, the combination of the wisdom of the world, and of the religion of the world is against the true doctrine of the cross, the perfection of Christ’s work. The superstitious religionist, or the free-thinking infidel, vehemently opposed to each other, are agreeing in undermining the perfect work of Christ. How entirely is that work overlaid by the imposition of religious ordinances, as necessary to salvation; how entirely is it undermined by the assertion of human sufficiency. The very spirit of the age set on the obtaining a perfection not yet reached, is a virtual denial of that perfect work which God regards with infinite complacency, and which He commands to be proclaimed to man as the only basis on which He can meet man.

God sets forth this perfect work, “that men should fear before Him.”

The last stage of human wickedness is scorn. “Mockers” or “scoffers” characterize the last time of the present dispensation (2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). But this stage of wickedness is only reached after repeated contempt cast on the goodness and forbearance of God. It was so with Israel. What could God have done that He had not done for Israel; yet they only despised His goodness, “till there was no remedy.” “Wherefore, hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people, which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” It was thus God challenged the scornful men of old; it is thus He challenges the mockers now. Under the shelter of His forbearance and long-suffering, men have grown up to such a pitch of self-complacency and self-sufficiency, as to sit down in the seat of the scornful, and to deny their need of God to save them, or to make them happy.

Nevertheless, He still presents the perfect work of Christ to the judgment even of the scorners themselves, and not only challenges them to find a flaw in it, but whether there can be any work likened to it, by which at one and the same time, God is glorified and man supremely blessed; God’s justice not only vindicated, but most illustriously displayed in the very act of pardoning a sinner; God’s love to a sinner manifested in His hatred of sin. The work itself is so complete. in itself, that the moment it becomes the basis of a sinner’s confidence, he finds himself at home with God, and that in His presence there is fullness of joy.

Let Christians see to it, that in this day of man’s pride, their hearts are more than ever occupied with Jesus and His cross; and, instead of sitting in the seat of the scornful, let them sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word; and that is the better part which shall never be taken from them.

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How clear was the eye of the Lord as to the joy that was set before Him! How soon we shall be with Him, to know more about His sufferings and glory!

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