Ecclesiastes - Commentaries by Hugh Henry Snell

Streams of Refreshing From the Fountain of Life, Have You Peace?

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Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment (Eccl. 9:7, 8).

Many exercised souls have not peace. We hope that God's Spirit is working with them, yet they have not found peace. If you ask them, they will tell you that they get worse and worse, and find themselves further from peace than ever. They say they can sometimes look to Jesus, but have not peace. Why have they not peace? Because they have not believed that Jesus so completely saves every sinner that comes to Him, that He says,

Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace (see Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50).

Blessed be His dear name, Jesus still says, Come! Come unto me! He still looks with an eye of pity on poor sinners. He still says,

Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:10);

and almost the last of the sayings is,

Let Him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

To the believer He says, Go thy way. Doubt no more. Be happy. Go in peace. Sometimes a sin-burdened soul came to Jesus. One woman cast herself down at His feet in deep sorrow of heart; she so felt her sinfullness, and that Christ was the Savior of such, that big tears rolled down her cheeks, and washed His blessed feet, and she wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thus she came as an unworthy, sinful one to Jesus; and He said to her, You are saved; go in peace! With open arms of love and mercy, He said to a sin- oppressed people,

Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Some did come, and then He said,

Go in peace (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50).

The Lord Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He will save; none other can save. If you do not come to Him, you will never find peace. You may go to church or chapel, say prayers, and the like, but these will not give you peace. Jesus is the only peace-maker between God and man, the only peace-giver; hence He is called the Prince of peace. Some of you may think you have peace, because you do not feel particularly unhappy; but it is not so. If you awoke at midnight, and found your bedroom brilliantly illuminated, above any brightness you ever beheld, you would tremble, you would fear and dread, lest the Lord were come, because you have not peace with God. When you place a friend in the grave, and think how soon you may be laid there yourself, you are not happy — you have not peace. Why? Because you have not come to the Lord Jesus, and been reconciled to God by His death. You have no peace, because you will not come to Jesus. The vilest sinner may come. Publicans and harlots do come, and Jesus washes their crimson sins in His blood, and says to them, Go in peace! Nothing can be more simple. It was not the woman's tears that we have referred to, nor her humility, nor anything else of her own that saved her. No; she simply came to Jesus as a helpless sinner, and He saved her. Some people are constantly thinking or talking about their sins, and say they are always coming to Christ as miserable sinners; they have not peace, because they do not believe God's word, which says that they are now justified by Christ's blood. Other true-hearted people have not peace, because they expect some extraordinary visitation; they say, If I had a particular dream, or heard an angel's voice proclaim that I was saved, I should have peace. But they should not thus speak. Our ears may deceive us; but we have God's word, His unfailing truth, the promise of Him to rest in, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. He declares that He will save to the uttermost them that come to Him through Christ; and this should be enough. Here is a rock for coming sinners to rest upon, solid ground for peace and happiness; for Go thy way! go in peace! are the words of Jesus now to such. But how fearful is the thought that He will say to others by and by,

Depart from me, ye cursed (Matt. 25:41)!

Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 22:13).

Now God — the God of peace — preaches peace by Jesus Christ. All that He wants of sinners is, that they come to Him about their sins; for He gave His Son to put away our sins with His own blood. The Holy Spirit shews men their sinfulness, and leads them to the Lord Jesus Christ, who was crucified, as the only ground of peace. Come, then, now. Come as sinners, miserable, wretched sinners, and come trusting in the atoning work of Jesus. God has sent His truth, and it has been rejected; His servants have been persecuted and put to death; many of the apostles were martyred; still God saves sinners that come to Him by His beloved Son. Some may say, You must do this good work, or that. But Scripture says salvation is not by works, but by believing on Christ Jesus; for God will have mercy, and not sacrifice. Those who thus come to Him are washed in the blood of Jesus, reconciled to God, and able to serve Him acceptably. There must be reconciliation between parties, even if enmity exists only on one side, before there can be acceptable service rendered, or peaceful intercourse known between them. The Queen of this land could not accept the homage and service of a rebel and traitor. No; however much she may wish it, the past transgressions must be first justly dealt with, before such an one would be allowed an audience by her Majesty. How much more the thrice holy God, before whom the heavens are not clean! Oh the blessedness of having to do with the God of peace, whose own arm, instead of being lifted up for our utter destruction, has brought reconciliation, acceptance, and eternal salvation to us!

The first words of these verses,

Go thy way,

have suggested these thoughts. God accepts the person, and therefore his works. He cannot accept the works and not the person; for

the prayer (sacrifice) of the wicked is an abomination in His sight (see Prov. 15:8).

But those whom God accepts may well rejoice, because He now not only accepts their persons, but also their works —

God now accepteth thy works (Eccl. 9:7).

There are three points more in this Scripture that I would like to touch a little upon, as the Lord may graciously help.

1. The believer is called to rejoice.

2. To be watchful.

3. To savour of Christ.

1. THE BELIEVER IS CALLED TO REJOICE.

Eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart (Eccl. 9:7).

He is not to doubt that his sins are forgiven, and that he is accepted in the Beloved, but to be happy in the knowledge of these things. Believing the truth of God, he is assured that he is not condemned — will not come into judgment, but that he is a child of God — has passed from death unto life, and will never perish; because Christ has died and rose again, and entered into heaven itself with His own blood. He stands as a pardoned sinner, accepted and born again of the Spirit; therefore God now accepts his works. He is, then, to eat and drink with joy. He is to take up the necessary matters of every-day life with a happy heart, as unto the Lord. He is to rejoice evermore; in everything to give thanks; yea, to rejoice in the Lord alway. This is true Christian experience, what the apostle Peter calls,

Joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8).

But when we find “bread” and “wine” mentioned in Scripture, we may generally be pretty sure that the Holy Spirit is reminding us of Him who said,

I am the bread of life: . . . the bread that I will give is my flesh (John 6:35, 51);

for Christ is the Christian’s food. It is broken bread. As we cannot partake of a loaf of bread for our bodily sustenance till it is broken; so we could not eat of Christ, the bread of life, till His body was broken; therefore Jesus said, prior to the cross, the bread that I will give. It is the broken body and poured out blood of Christ that is now our bread and wine; and perhaps the greatest blessing we can have, next to salvation, is a good appetite for the flesh and blood of Christ. Nothing can compensate the believer for a lack of this. Christ is our daily bread. No Christ, no food. We are blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings, and are called to live on Him for constant spiritual supplies. When meditating on the written word, under the Spirit’s teaching, we feed on Christ. We know nothing of Christ, but as revealed unto us by the Spirit in the Scriptures.

The words that I speak unto you,

said Jesus,

they are Spirit, and they are life (John 6:63).

We feed on Christ when we receive His word by faith into our hearts. Hence it is that those who neglect the reading of the Scriptures have barrenness of soul. In this, as in every other thing, Christ hath left us an example. He emptied Himself, and took a servant’s form. He lived in continual dependence on the Father; therefore He said,

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me (John 6:57).

Communion with God, in the person, work, and fullness of Christ, as accepted worshipers, made nigh by His blood, gives true Christian joy. A believer must know something of these things for abiding happiness and joy. So long as he feels outside the vail, not near to God, not in His blessed presence, he will not be happy; but when the blessed Comforter shows him that he is now standing in Christ, inside the vail, cleansed by the blood of Christ, and accepted in Him, with every provision made for the wilderness journey, then it is that he eats his bread with joy, and drinks the soul-cheering wine of the banqueting-house with a merry heart.

How is it that God’s dear children do not more rejoice? Because they are not believing the precious words of Christ, not living upon Christ, not feeding on Christ, not drawing out of the fullness of Christ, not apprehending their acceptance and standing in Christ, not abiding in Christ, not dwelling within the vail where Christ our life is, not having communion with God in the flesh and blood of His beloved Son. Hence passing things too much occupy the mind, painful circumstances quickly cast down our spirits, pleasant things easily elate us, and our affections are drawn from those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Oh, my fellow-Christians! let us look away unto Jesus, cleave to the Lord Jesus; let us hold fast our blessed privileges in Him, let us eat our bread with joy, and drink our wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth our works!

2. THE BELIEVER SHOULD BE WATCHFUL.

Let thy garments be always white (Eccl. 9:8).

The garments of salvation are pure and spotless. The robe of Christ is white and clean. The world through which our wilderness journey lies is unclean and defiling, and our evil flesh is easily acted on by Satan; hence we are admonished to keep our garments unspotted (Jude 23). If our

children were attired in white and costly garments, and we sent them to walk along a muddy road, we should doubtless charge them to be careful how they walked, and to be watchful lest they defiled their clothing. So our heavenly Father, having put on us

the best robe (Luke 15:22),

tells us that the world through which we walk is evil, and lying in the wicked one, and charges us to be watchful, so that our garments may be always white. Ah, my friends, we have great need to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. The defiling world is terribly ensnaring, fleshly lusts are very deceitful, and Satan is a mighty deceiver; so that we need to watch. Jesus always kept unspotted garments. He resisted every temptation, and quenched every fiery dart of Satan. He never sat in the scorner's chair; He always rejected the counsel of the ungodly. No one on earth ever so loved sinners, and yet He was

separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26).

The world could never force an entrance into His heart, so that He could truly say,

I am not of the world (John 17:14, 16).

From first to last, at all times, and under all circumstances, He kept His garments unspotted.

He knew no sin (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

But we, alas! even the most watchful of us, have to mourn over our defiled garments. It is, indeed, too true. They do get spotted, they are not always white. In unguarded moments we fail, and are defiled. But even here again the grace of God meets us, and our tears of sorrow and regret are wiped away by the uplifted hands of our great High Priest; and our sighs are hushed by the still small voice of our Heavenly Father, assuring us that,

if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

He tells us of the perpetual efficacy of the blood, and the all- prevailing character of the priesthood of Christ in maintaining our conscious nearness to God; and while reminding us of His holiness in commanding us to

sin not

His grace assures us that

if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

Thus, by the contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ, our communion is restored, our defiled consciences are purged, our garments are cleansed, and we realize again that we have white raiment, though surrounded by an evil-and defiling world.

We are called to walk with God; therefore we should be watchful, lest we slide away and fall from our high places. We should be watchful, lest we forget our standing in Christ, and be found again trying to feed upon carnal husks at the swine-trough. We should be watchful, lest our eye rest upon the world's vain glitter, and our hearts become attracted to it. We should be watchful, lest we yield to evil suggestions, and give utterance to unholy words. We should be watchful, lest we lay down the shield of faith, and slumber in the arms of unbelief. We should be watchful, lest we lose our relish for the sincere milk of the word. We should watch against everything that hinders our rejoicing in the Lord. In a word, we should seek to keep our garments unspotted: but when defilement is contracted, we should at once, with confession, bring it to God our Father, and believe that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:9). May we be diligent; so that when Jesus comes we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless!

3. THE BELIEVER SHOULD SAVOUR OF CHRIST.

Let thy head lack no ointment (Eccl. 9:8).

Some people of the world do not consider themselves full dressed, unless they have perfumed themselves with some pleasant odour, and wherever they go they leave traces of the sweet scent. So the true Christian is not only made the righteousness of God in Christ; but he is anointed with the Holy Ghost —

Ye have an unction from the Holy One (1 John 2:20).

Hence he is called to witness for Christ, to show forth the virtues of Christ, to confess Christ. As he yields to fleshly lusts, so the Spirit which dwelleth in him is grieved or quenched, and then there will be little of Christ. It is because of this that many talk so much about Christianity with scarcely any reference to Christ; that some preach a long discourse, and if Christ be named at all, He is only briefly referred to at the close; and others write upon religious subjects with Christless pages. If such are really God's people, it is because their heads lack ointment; they are living in fleshly energy instead of in dependence on God the Holy Ghost. The apostle Paul bids us beware of every thing which is not after Christ (Col. 2:8); and our Lord said,

Whosoever shall CONFESS ME before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that DENIETH ME before men shall be denied before the angels of God (Luke 12:8, 9).

Nothing can more plainly show us, that it is not religious things or opinions to which we are called upon to give testimony, but to Christ — Christ in the infinite perfections of His person, work, worth, and coming. Paul and others, through grace, kept so close to Christ, that the savour of His knowledge was made manifest by them in every place. He tells us that he lived by the faith of Christ, preached Christ, and so manifested Christ, as to be able to say,

For to me to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21);

and looked for Christ's coming again. If he wrote a letter, it was full of Christ; his inspired epistles show this. The apostle John also tells us that he was banished to the isle of Patmos for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. So we, being united to Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, are exhorted to be rooted and built up in Christ, to rejoice in Christ, to have our conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ, and to wait for His coming. For these things, we need frequent spiritual renewings, constant supplies of grace, yea, to be filled with the Spirit; thus our head will lack no ointment.

I have said more to the believer than I intended; but the deep importance of these points would not allow me hastily to pass them by. In conclusion, let me earnestly say to the reader, Have you peace? If so, I am sure it is through the blood of Christ. There is no other way. Oh, unconverted friends! beware of any false ground. You cannot honor Christ unless you accept Him as your Savior, and

he that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him (John 5:23).

Beware of being religious without a present and everlasting salvation by Christ. On your receiving or rejecting Christ who was crucified for sinners your eternal destiny depends. He that believeth not shall be damned. But perhaps, my reader, you feel yourself a heavy-laden sinner; you acknowledge your

transgressions, and are ready to despair and give yourself up for lost. The utterances of your anxious heart are —

My friend, you need not despair. Christ died for the ungodly. He delighteth in mercy. His blood cleanseth from all sin. It rejoices His heart to save; and He still calls with outstretched arms to you, saying,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

Only believe.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31).

Happy those who can say —

Crumbs for the Lord's Little Ones: Volume 3 (1855), Faith and Feeling

"WHERE the word of a king is, there is power;" and Christ is the power of God, and the Word of God. You cannot separate Christ and the written word. He is Himself the very essence, life, and core of it. But what is Christ to us? What the word of Christ, without the Spirit of Christ to open up to our souls that word which testifies of Him? We cannot, we dare not separate them. The word of God, Christ the word, the Spirit of Christ, must go together. The word and Spirit testify of Christ. Christ declares the Father; and he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. (John 14:9; 1:18; 5:39; 15:26.) No man cometh to the Father but by Him; and all who come to Christ are drawn to Him by the Father. (John 14:6; 6:44); and Jesus says, "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23.) But we shall know nothing of the power of the word as a hammer to break the heart, as a salve to heal the wound which it has made, but as the Holy Ghost applies it, revealing through it Jesus to and in our consciences, as the Word whom God has sent to heal us (Ps. 107:20), originating at the same time faith to receive it. This is no miserable, dry, heartless doctrine: it is health and cure; it is a matter of inward experience, an experience inwrought by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us, (John 14:16, 17; 1 John 2:27,) and on whom we are hourly dependent to keep us, through the word, abiding in Christ by living faith; and where there is a measure of such experience, learnt in such a way, there will be, there must be, corresponding feelings. Tell us there is no feeling in joy, no feeling in peace: we say there is. He who has known the bitterness of a guilty conscience, who has felt the arrows of the Almighty within drinking up his spirit, who has had the terrors of God set in array against him (Job 6:4), and been holden in cords of affliction (Job 36:8), no matter from what cause; be it known guilt after a profession of faith, or bad and legal teaching on an ill-instructed, self-righteous conscience, such an one knows what misery is; he has felt it; and now let Christ be revealed to that soul, by the Holy Ghost, as the ONE who hath "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26), let him learn how He Himself hath made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20), that Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6), and that by Him, whom God hath raised from the dead, all who believe ARE justified from all things (Acts 13:39), and that just as he is, without one plea but that Jesus died for such, and that He bids him come, saying, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) I say, let such a poor miserable soul be drawn to Christ, and have the Holy Ghost witnessing in his conscience to the efficacy of the precious blood, as that which has met all his responsibilities to God, as his Creator and Lawgiver, as that which perfectly answers for him, cleansing him from all sin, and easing him from all sin's bitter gnawings, and will he not feel something? Tell such an one that there is no feeling in believers, and he will tell you that there is "joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13), and that he has felt it, and that he speaks of that which he does know, and testifies of that which he has tasted and handled. We do not say you must feel before you believe, or that your feeling is the seal and proof of that being true which is declared to you. When we believe we set to our seal that God is true, we add our "Amen" to it; but it was true before we believed; yea, it is the truth which has generated faith in the hearer; let God be true, though every one who hears were to reject the word; but some do and shall believe, for His word shall not return to Him void. We are to publish SALVATION, and leave the results with God, neither guarding it by conditions to be kept by the creature, nor by a certain amount of inward experience in joy or sorrow to be realized. We may despise feelings, and speak lightly of doctrines. It is quite true that doctrines are not Christ, and feelings are not faith; but let us take heed lest we despise what God cloth highly esteem, for doctrines are taught by Him, and feelings will be experienced, in a greater or less degree, whenever the truth is received in the love of it. A Christian whose head is more exercised than his heart, believing, of course, has life, and he will go on his way without much feeling himself or sympathy with others. We may and ought indeed to condemn that style of preaching which makes so much of feelings, which seeks to delineate so accurately, and does so narrowly analyze the inward workings of faith and unbelief, till the poor soul is driven to look within for Christ, instead of to the right hand of God, where He who died and rose again now is, and is there, too, because He has glorified the Father on the earth, and finished the work which He gave Him to do (John 17:4); but we must equally condemn the dry, theoretic setting forth of an accurately stated gospel, which bolsters up the hearers with a notional assent, while an incessant exhortation to submit to this, to obey that, and do the other thing, succeeds in molding into shape a lifeless lump of self-righteous, captious morality.

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Beloved, let us rest in the bosom of the God of peace, and the peace of God shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. The Lord of peace Himself rests there. All the toil is over. The waves which overwhelmed the Rock on which we build, are all gone back, and our Rock is within the vail. Jehovah is our rock; exalted be the God of the Rock of our salvation.

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