

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

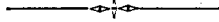
<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Lord Salisbury said in a recent speech¹: "When there is great suffering in a community, the various members of it naturally struggle with each other as to the mode in which the suffering should be distributed." That is an exact description of the case before us. Some persons have lost a good deal of money in land, and they are trying to make the tithe-owner bear a portion of that loss.

H. T. ARMFIELD.



ART. III.—THE PROPORTIONAL REWARD.

WHEN James and John came with their mother and asked our Lord that these two young men might have the most honourable place in His coming kingdom, the Master had naturally little to say to such a request. He saw the blindness and mistake of it. He saw that they did not in the least understand what they were asking. And the attempt of the good woman to steal a march on the other ten disciples was unfair and discreditable. It was as clear a piece of favouritism and secret influence as was ever undertaken. All this was perfectly true. But at the same time it was also true that there were such seats in the kingdom of heaven to be disposed of. Somebody must sit in them. They would not be left empty to all eternity. "To sit on My right hand and on My left . . . shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father." And then, when the ten were moved with indignation against the two who had thus tried to supplant them, our Lord kindly shows them the way by which alone they could become the greatest. There was such a thing as degrees in the kingdom; but James and John had not gone the right way about it. "Whosoever will be great among you," He said, "let him be your minister: whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant." Degrees and places there will be; but they will not be had by begging for them.

It is very right for us to desire glimpses into the unseen world—that future which seems so far off, and may yet be so near to any one of us. It has been said by Montaigne that "those who accuse mankind of folly in hankering and panting after things to come, and who warn us to enjoy the present, and to take our fill of it, as we have no sufficient hold on the future, as little indeed as that which is past and gone, have hit upon one of the most common of human delusions. We are never occupied with what is within us—we are always

¹ Mansion House, 1887.

looking beyond; fear, desire, hope are spurring us on toward the future—stripping us of all feeling and thought about what is, in order to interest us with what will be.” But Montaigne should not have spoken of delusions; it is an instinct of human nature. “Futurity is the great concern of mankind,” said Burke. “The future mingles itself with every thought and sentiment,” wrote Sir D. Brewster, “and casts its beams of hope or its shadows of fear over the stage both of active and contemplative life; it appears and disappears like a variable star, showing in painful succession its spots of light and shade; and at the great transition, when the outward eye is dim, the image of the future is the last picture which is effaced from the retina of the mind.”

I wish in this paper to call attention to one aspect of the future which is commonly forgotten. It is in the words of the Revelation: “Behold I come quickly, and My reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” I believe it to be indisputably true that the doctrine of a proportional reward is everywhere insisted on in Holy Scripture. We ought not to neglect anything which can help us to bind the future in with the present—to weave the threads of what is to come with the texture of our daily life. It is a doctrine which cannot fail to give us additional zeal and activity in the cause of the Lord, and to remind us that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Above all, on so grave and serious a subject, we are surely compelled to exclude nothing from the range of our contemplations, but carefully to set before ourselves what we believe to be the plain counsel of God. An opposite doctrine has been, as I hold, falsely imputed to us by Mr. Morrison in his late attack on Christianity.

There are two parables in particular which throw light upon our condition as having all to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. The first is the parable of the labourers and the penny. The other is the parable of the servants, the pounds, and the cities. The parable of the labourers who all got the same wages for their different hours of work, was directed against the disciples who were eagerly asking what they were to have for their readiness in following Christ, in contrast to the reluctance of the rich young man. Our Lord shows them that eternal life, like the penny, is the free gift of God to all alike; of that none can have either more or less, whether they have enlisted in His service late or early, whether they be Jew or Gentile. But He warns them that some who, like the earlier labourers, thought themselves first, would become last by that very self-justifying and claiming spirit. Although that eternal life would be alike given to all, there would be in it degrees of enjoyment of its blessings, there would be first

and last. Let them take care lest their eager greedy spirit make them among the last in the degree of bliss and happiness. What we learn, then, about the future in the parable of the penny, is that eternal life is the free gift of God, but that there will be first and last—in short, places or degrees—in the enjoyment of it.

The other parable, that of the servants, the pounds, and the cities, carries the teaching further still. It shows us that while all reward is a free gift, and not a matter of merit, yet that God is absolutely just, rewarding every man according to what he has done. The servant who brought his lord's pound and said that he had gained ten pounds, is told, "Well, thou good servant; thou hast been faithful in a very little; be thou ruler over ten cities." Then came the second, saying, "Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds." He got his proportional reward: "He said likewise to him, Be thou ruler over five cities." In a word, God is not unjust that He should forget our works and labour of love. The reward is not earned by ourselves—it is the gift of God; but the scale by which it is determined is the way in which we work out our own salvation, God working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

I said that this soul-stirring doctrine of the Proportional Reward is insisted on everywhere in Holy Scripture.

It is taught by Isaiah: "Surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God."

It is taught by Jeremiah: "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins: even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings." And again: "Ah Lord God! behold Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched-out arm; and there is nothing too hard for Thee. Thou showest loving-kindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God: the Lord of hosts is His name, great in counsel and mighty in work: for Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give everyone according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

Our Lord Himself insists on this again and again: "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels: and then He shall reward every man according to his works." It is by this thought that He encourages the persecuted: "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." He points out how it will be proportioned: "He that receiveth a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward: and he that receiveth a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." Yes, and even further than that, each deed shall have its own recompense: "Whoso shall give to drink

unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, shall in nowise lose his reward." "Do good," He said—"do good, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest." In the parable of the sheep and the goats how is the question of entering into the joy of the Lord settled? According as the persons before the judgment-seat had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the prisoners. Those who were distinguished by righteousness in this life, He says in another place, will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. When talking by the well of Samaria about the labourers in the harvest, He encouraged the disciples by reminding them that they would not be forgotten: "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." To the twelve disciples themselves on another occasion He promised a very special position in heaven: "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Those who deny the doctrine of a proportional reward would be compelled in consistency to accuse our Lord Jesus Christ of misleading words.

But again, it is of great importance for us to know what St. Paul says on this question, because it is he who insists more strongly than any other writer on the doctrine of Justification by Faith, which the ignorant and thoughtless would at first sight think opposed to the doctrine of the proportional reward. What does St. Paul say? He speaks to the Romans of "the righteous judgment of God, Who will render to every man according to his deeds." He tells the Corinthians how "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. If any man's work abide which he hath built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, he shall receive a reward." He warns the Galatians not to be deceived. "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And again he urges them: "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not." To the Colossians he has just the same message: "Let no man beguile you of your reward . . . whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of your inheritance."

The Epistle to the Hebrews is equally strong. It appeals to the example of Moses "who had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

The aged St. John has no new message. "Look to yourselves," he says to the household of his friend the elect lady—"look to yourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." And in

his Revelation he gives us a very clear and distinct glimpse : "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened ; and another book was opened which is the book of life : and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." And in another place in the Revelation : "All the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and the hearts : and I will give unto every one of you according to his works." Just the same doctrine is put by him still more concisely : "Behold I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Degrees there are in heaven already, and it is natural that there should be hereafter. We are told of archangels as well as angels, cherubim as well as seraphim. St. Paul speaks in more than one place of thrones and dominions, principalities and powers amongst the hosts of God. St. Peter describes Jesus having gone into heaven and being on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him. Jesus Himself, as we have already seen, told James and John and their mother that there was a place on His right hand and on His left where some would surely sit. And He comforted His disciples by saying that He appointed unto them a kingdom even as His Father had appointed unto Him.

If loftier posts superior state declare
 More virtuous acts, if ampler needs requite ;
 If brightest crowns on noblest prowess light,
 And well-worn fields a fuller harvest bear ;

If thrones, dominions, princedoms, powers there are,
 Which God's inferior hosts excel in might ;
 If day's bright orb outshine the lamp of night,
 And Hesper's radiance the remotest star ;

Then shall the younger brethren of the sky,
 If right I scan the records of their fate,
 In varied ranks of social harmony
 God's mount encircle. Glorious is the state
 E'en of the lowest there ; but seats more nigh
 The Sovereign's throne His greater servants wait.

(*Bishop Mant.*)

A wise and well-directed ambition to be foremost in the battle of God here is the noblest spur of human action. "As long as the world lasts," says Clarendon, "and honour and virtue and industry have reputation in the world, so long will there be ambition, emulation, and appetite in the best and most accomplished men who live in it ; if there should not be, more barbarity and vice and wickedness would cover every nation of the world than it yet suffers under." Zeal for the glory of God, a desire to do His work well, call it what we

may, that is our best motive here. How far stronger a motive becomes, and how closely it brings the glorious future of the other world into bearing on the present, if we remember all these lessons which we have gathered from various parts of the Word of God, in evidence that our place in the mansions of light will be determined by the zeal and sincerity and purity of our work below!

Ought we not to think more than we usually think on the effect which what we now do will have on our everlasting future? It seems clear that every additional sin will lessen our reward in heaven; every act of useful self-denial done for the glory of God will increase our degree of that happiness hereafter which the merits of Christ have bought for us as the free gift of God. It is not unfair to say that the neglect of this great doctrine is the reason why there is so little real Christianity among us. Christianity is not sufficiently felt to be a real practical force. Let none suppose hastily that I mean that we can buy our reward; it is all the effect of the redemption of Christ. But we can never do enough to show our faith by our works. We cannot be too full of zeal for the higher blessedness of heaven reserved for God's more earnest servants here. The glowing faith of the ancient Church can only be explained by the strong, simple hold which they had on these great realities. This is partly the secret of that astonishing joy with which they ran forward to receive the martyr's crown. They were always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they knew that not one stroke of all their labour was in vain in the Lord.

WILLIAM MACDONALD SINCLAIR.



ART. IV.—THE REFORMED CHURCH OF IRELAND.¹

THE Church of Ireland has had to bear the brunt of a greater variety of criticisms than any other branch of the Anglican Communion. Passing over amongst others, as we are content to do, that which charges her with refusing to follow in the steps of the Ritualists, we are more concerned with the accusation that she has sinned in having failed to convert the Roman Catholic population. We might retort on the English critic that the Church of England has failed in what must seem the easier task of converting the Protestant

¹ "The Reformed Church of Ireland, 1537-1886," by the Right Hon. J. T. BALL, LL.D., D.C.L., Longmans, Green and Co., London; Hodges, Figgis and Co., Dublin.