

Perfected For Ever

Psalm 40: 5.

from **Memorials of the Ministry of G. V. Wigram.** Vol. 1.

[Notes on Scripture; Lectures and Letters.

Second Edition, Broom 1881 (First Edition 1880)]

Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

This and the two next papers are gleanings from G.V.W.'s ministry in Dublin in 1872. Ed.

In this psalm we have the Spirit of Christ speaking in behalf of the mercy that will reach Israel hereafter. Immediately after that, He goes into the great work they will be brought to know — the work of One who took the place of fulfilling God's will when God had no pleasure in sacrifices; and having done that will, He will take the place of proclaiming the faithfulness of Jehovah.

We find the psalm largely quoted in Hebrews 9. It brings out the argument of the apostle to the Hebrew Christians, who, after going on a little, got frightened at difficulties, and were tempted to let slip the substance, and take up the shadow. There is a great deal very important at every time for man here, particularly at the present day. There has been a great deal of Judaizing. I do not mean to charge the present generation only with it. The ten commandments have a place assigned to them as the *sine qua non*, the recognition of which was necessary for true religion while man was under law. To insist on their having that place now tends to bring men into fearful bondage, and to hinder them getting into the full liberty of the children of God.

In Hebrews 9 and 10, we find brought out in connection with Hebrew Christians the whole question. And just let me from this bring out what the question was to the apostle's mind. There were two points, from the nature of things strangely contrasted the one with the other — one, man's conscience, the other, the glory of God. And the question of the apostle was, whether they ever met together in these Hebrews to whom he wrote. He traces out how the law had not got in its power or aim to make a man perfect as concerns conscience. Let me put the question, What is conscience? Some would say, If Adam had not conscience in nature, how was he to know that he ought not to touch the fruit? There is no force in that remark; for when God had given all blessings to man — "all is yours if you do not touch the tree" — it was clearly right for the man to observe the commandment, and, even without understanding it, to keep it. Directly Eve ate of the fruit there was the balancing as to right and wrong, but tending to wrong. "That is right," "This is wrong," constant exercise in the mind, conscience accusing or excusing — one or other. Could the law make that conscience perfect? It could not, never did, with anybody. Now it is referred to in Heb. 9. But turn to Heb. 10: "The law . . . can never . . . make the comers thereunto perfect," in contrast with, "By one offering Christ has perfected for ever them that are sanctified;" i.e. those set apart by His blood.

I want to look at this in detail. The testimony of Scripture about truth, not only leads us to the blessed portion of the Church as the Bride of Christ, or into the portion of the children of God as sons and daughters, but it also leads us into all the different places where the Lord Himself has displayed His glory; and, as in Romans, the whole question is gone into of how God could take up a ruined creature and settle it in spite of its ruin. The grand point of the chapter is, how conscience ruined becomes so perfect that God Himself could not make it more perfect, more thoroughly fit for God, for man, for Christ, altogether clean and made good — so that we can serve the living and true God. This

will lead into the question of priesthood. There were two priests — Aaron and Melchisedec. Christ is never said to be a Priest after Aaron, but after Melchisedec; but all that Aaron's priesthood pointed to as a sign-post in connection with sin, this the Lord did, but did in a way entirely in contrast with the law and the system of Aaron's priesthood.

In Lev. 23, you find the two great works — the Passover and the day of Atonement at the end of the year. Judaism began with the Passover and ended with the day of Atonement; Christianity begins with atonement and goes on to fellowship with God. The two things in Leviticus are atonement and that which carries sin clean away — the azazel, or scapegoat. A system had been set up, and the question was how that system, being a system that recalled sin to mind every step of the way, could be carried out among a sinful and a stiff-necked people. God had a resource so that He would not be defiled while dwelling among them — the blood was brought in and sprinkled on the mercy-seat. The blood was for God, it was not putting away guilt. Read verse 16, chapter 16, "He shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness." They were stiff-necked and rebellious, but there was no pretence of removing their sins. It was done for God, it justified them, it pointed to the blood of another, and enabled God to pass by sin, not to cleanse from sin. The goat took away what? Directly the day was past, it was in the mind of the Mediator that sin would be again contracted, for the great day of atonement was to come round again at the end of the year. When I turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, as in Psalm 40, there is this remarkable thing. He is represented in Hebrews 10, as setting up a new system. There had been the tabernacle and the sacrifices, and no conscience perfect, and the two sides the Scripture presents are the counterpart of Leviticus 16. He goes in and sets up something that never existed before; He never did this but this once; and He provides not for the removal of guilt only, but for those who had been dead in trespasses and sins. He provides for their being able to be dead to sin. He takes sin away. Was Paul a man habitually sinning? No; he was living in the power of the life of Christ, and of the marvellous work Christ had accomplished; and he knew the Lord had so presented himself before God, that all contrary to God was met in the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and says, "I reckon myself to be dead indeed unto sin."

We shall find a striking contrast between Leviticus 16. and Hebrews 9, 10, in connection with what the Lord did. Just remark, as characteristic of this, that we do not get before that eternal redemption or salvation spoken of. There is nothing here on earth, but in heaven there is the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, and all the sacrifices were offered in connection with the government of God. There had never been a man in heaven until the Lord Jesus Christ went there. He went into the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. Just take some verses, and we shall see what is very remarkable in Hebrews. First, it is done in eternity, not in time; secondly, it involves the whole Godhead; thirdly, it is heaven, not earth. Let me read a few verses in Hebrews 9: 11, 12: "Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come . . . by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." 14: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" 22: "Without shedding of blood is no remission." 24: "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." 26: "Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." 28: "Christ was once offered . . . and unto them that look for Him shall He appear . . . without sin unto salvation." Now when we come to Hebrews 10, we find more than that, not His coming in the end of the ages, but His going in to heaven; and having gone in, in the power of His own sacrifice, He sits down at the right hand of God, and the throne of God becomes — what? The abiding-

place of Him who could not add anything more to His work without the denial of His own glory. Without the denial of God's thought about the work He had done, He could not add anything more to the settlement of the question of sin. See how He is spoken of here; the sort of authority He takes, not to set aside the work of Moses, but when it comes to the question of sin, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me." The mind rises to God, who prepared a body for Him, who had written a book about Him, rises to Him with full intelligence — the Son of God able to choose the good, and refuse the evil, and all that sinful men might bring in in connection with sin. All was defiled, and not only so, but if men brought thousands and tens of thousands of victims, all would be utterly unable, not only to satisfy God's mind about sin, but even to satisfy their own conscience. If all the flocks on all the hills were brought before me, a man full of sin, are they to be sacrificed? Is it my first-born that I am to give up? What would these do? He comes in with all dignity, — "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; I delight to do thy will, O God." Thus we have God and His Son, and the way the Holy Ghost comes in as a witness to us. (v. 15.)

What was this will of which He speaks as His lot to do? Not sacrifices, but "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Nobody else had part with Him in doing it. Numbers among Jews and Gentiles will get the fruit of it. He did, the work, and did it all alone. "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Just mark verse 9, when He said, "Lo, I come," He takes away the first, that is, all the offerings, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified — set apart once for all. I am persuaded that until the soul gets simply to see the force and meaning of that, and not only so but conscience also, that inward exercise the mind has about itself in God's presence, gets exercised with this offering of Himself, the conscience will never be made perfect and get its proper bearing.

Just see the position, setting up a new state of things, introducing something new. How long has that true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man, how long has that state of things been in existence? I suppose, if we took the thirty-four years of the Lord's life from 1872, we should have the period. And what was the great object? God did it for His own pleasure, before the thing was announced to anybody. It is the revelation of a new character of God. The character of God! How that thought comes to light, that God and sin cannot meet! If He brings me to the place where He is, what do I find there? Not that it is full of sins, but that the great leading Person, who marks the place to me, made an end of sin before He went in there. Quite different from the tabernacle or the temple, where there was nothing but sin, sin, sin; nothing but curtains and distance from God; and now I am told to go right in. What meets me? There is the rent veil, the flesh of God's Son, going through that, the death, of Christ. I go in — yes, to see what is at the other side. I go in as confessedly one who has not one word to say for myself, because He has borne the penalty; and the way up leads into the purest light possible, where the object that meets my mind is only one, the Son of man, who sat down at God's right hand. There is no guilt whatever in this place I have come to, a place where sins, where guilt, cannot live. All has been judged, all borne, recorded if you please. Because mercy shines from this place, compassion shines there, and God is presented there as meeting conscience. Ah! the sinner is received in, and seen through, God's delight in that blessed One before Him.

The question comes in very fairly with regard to atonement. What really is the thought of Scripture about it? Is it that there is a debt contracted by the family of God, and that some one has paid it off? That is not Scripture. God presents in the person of His Son all the blessedness of those traits of His character which enable Him to be just, not merely in justifying the sinner down here, but in enabling Him to be just in receiving the worshipper right into the light where He dwells. As far as God is concerned there is no idea of any other offering. There is often a confounding of confession of sin with an offering to be presented afresh, which is a positive denial, not only of the one sacrifice, but of

the character of God Himself. The blessed Lord did bear the penalty on the tree; and all one can do is in reverence to bow when one thinks of the Lord drinking that cup which the Father had put in His hand. There is no possibility of the human mind measuring it. You must be able to comprehend the Son, and know the Son, if you would know what He suffered when forsaken of God. What passed there was known to Himself most surely, to God most surely too; but the clearest thought I can get in connection with what my sin is in the presence of God, is that because my sins were attributed by God to His Son, they hindered the light of God shining in upon His Son — "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That thorough independence of God, which is sin, which characterised me, He bore it, bore it all, and lives at the right hand of God. He has taken His seat there, proclaiming that it was according to the foreknowledge of God that He should bear that judgment on Calvary.

See how that meets the question, all that inward balancing of the mind of man, as to his state before God and the question of sin. The believer looks it in the face. Am I a sinner? and has my sin passed all measurement? Yes; the Son of God has borne the penalty, and was forsaken of God on account of my sin. Can God look on anyone, who through grace, gets an interest in the humiliation of the Son of God, and attribute to him once more that sin that was judged on the cross? And could God have a thought that that sin should survive in His presence? If He could, the God that appointed a way for bearing judgment would be leaving it still for the sinner to bear. The place this puts the soul in is perfect peace. The conscience does not want a hiding-place now. Sin would have shut man out from God's presence were it not that Christ bore the penalty on the tree.

Just look at the inexorableness of the holiness of God. Nothing could turn Him aside. I might say, reasoning as a man, I am such a contemptible creature, and He was God's Son, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. And what sort of thoughts had God? That when that Person stood in the gap there was no deviation whatever from the impossibility of God and sin meeting together. The Son of God fully able to take the place of charging Himself with the sins of all God's people, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is what He did, and then He went to heaven to present Himself there as the One who had done the work. By one offering He hath perfected for ever, not those that are *purified*, but those that are sanctified, set apart by blood. Have you been thus set apart? Have you recognized that blood? And has it made you own that you must walk in a new way? That having gone through the flesh of this Lord Jesus, having gone in by a blood-sprinkled way, and having met God in light, you must count yourself separated to God? If the blood of the Lord has no worth in the mind of a man, no practical effect, you will find his conscience is not perfect. The work and value of Christ's sacrifice cannot be pleaded by him. When the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has been let by God's mercy into a soul, that person counts himself separated by it.

The difference of grace and law comes out. At Pentecost men were terrified to hear of the Lord Jesus being up in heaven. Now when you hear of the blood, if you draw nigh, you will find all has become yours. If I have Him whose blood was shed, I know that He has made me perfect before God as far as conscience is concerned. Before a person can start to walk as a Christian safely, he must know that his conscience is perfect, and that the question of sin is settled completely. It is a test for a good many, this truth. If I have been trying to salve over things in myself, I get a measure of contentment, a certain measure of quietness. Now I am getting near to God, and I find that I am not settled. The effect on conscience when it is really perfect is greater the nearer you get to God; the nearer to the light, the more comfort you have. I have all sorts of feelings; but when I stand in the light, I have the conviction of the work and value of Him who is on the throne making it the mercy-seat. That is the character of that place where God and Christ are. If you can go by faith, then you get a perfect conscience; and the nearer you get, the more the thoughts of God about Him who is on that mercy-seat, the more the soul is

filled with holy boldness in the presence of God. My conscience is fit for God Himself. God looking on me must recognize that I have no plea except this — that before His Son went into the holiest of all, after dying on the cross, He shed His blood for me, and I am admitted to God on this ground when there is complete victory over the whole question of sin, balancing all the traits of God's character, so that God is glorified in receiving a poor sinner just as he is; and then comes right down to the dark place, as it was, the bright light of God giving confidence that Christ is there. That is the place everything is dated from for us, and the conscience is in keeping with it.

It is a different question if I have a good conscience, not a perfect conscience. A good conscience is where there is no sense of having done any thing in thought wrong. A perfect conscience is brought to the light where Christ is, so that the soul can say — I say it humbly — "Thy word points out to me the true tabernacle thou didst pitch. I come on that ground, the blood of Thy Son. If that is Thy ground, it is my ground." The effect is most blessed; for the known certainty that, it is God's ground, produces the feeling that He that is precious to God, the Son of His love, is the One that is precious to us, and that we and God thoroughly understand one another, and the conscience is perfect in His presence.

As to worship, the priests had to be continually offering sacrifices. — What sort of priests are we? Part of a royal priesthood. The Lord has taken His place on high, and has here people, part of a royal priesthood. Peter speaks of it (1 Peter 2: 9), "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood." Are we to bring sacrifices? Yes. "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name."

The question of sin is never settled but by the blood shed on Calvary. When in the family of God, if there is failure, is the person to be cast out? Never. Is the sin to be covered up? Never. Then comes in confession — of what? If I fail twenty times a day, I hope I should make confession; I am quite prepared to say it in all simplicity. If I fail to man, I confess to man; if to God, I say that I failed in walking consistently with His complete forgiveness. I have been washed, but have been tampering with the world today. I ought to confess, if I have been tampering with the world, that I am heartily ashamed of it; it is not like Christ, and I am one of His, and have been doing something inconsistent. Because I am a son, I should do nothing but serve Him. What could I do down here but serve? Could I go and sit down with ease and comfort in the midst of frivolity? I could not do it. Could the Son of God down here seek merely the unbending of His mind by conversation? I have a purged conscience, and everything that disparages having a conscience fit for God makes light of the blood: not by confession rested in, but in making the confession is power found for resisting evil that was confessed.

I see evil everywhere around me; I look up and see the true tabernacle, the accepted sacrifice, the One by whom. is virtue and power. The way is open, right into the holiest of all. To me there is something wonderful in all the infiniteness of the character of God, all the unsearchableness of God, all that expressed Him shown out by the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; and I who in judgment before Him always presented a dirty spot within me, am made whiter and cleaner than snow, perfectly spotless, nothing to hinder God's intercourse with me, nothing to hinder the aspiration of my heart.

Another thing; ah, God does rest in His love there! Heaven is a wonderfully bright place, full of glory, a place where our hearts ought to be continually turning, going to get refreshed in Him in God's delight, in Christ. I find the mind of God so occupied with Christ, and in connecting me with Him, that the delight of God in Christ is joy to my own heart. Second thing; there is sin going off, taken away. What is the limit? Christ is the scapegoat.

In Hebrews you do not find the new nature spoken of. If God were to say, "I will take you to heaven just as you are," I hope I should not go so; I hope to get rid of the sin, the sense of contrast

between Him in His perfectness and me in my evil. I shall be like Him; but the consciousness of sin comes in in all my communion with Him, and it will be got rid of most certainly. It was no accident; He might have taken the sin clean out of us, but the battle is still going on. By leaving sin in us, He gave us the opportunity of voluntarily identifying ourselves with Him — against the old nature. When He got Israel out of Egypt He formed circumstances to drive them in upon Himself, to make Him their choice as He had made them His choice. He leaves us to prove whether we will take part with Christ against the world, the old man, and Satan, who loves to blend the old man and the new together. He is presented to us in humiliation; he that believes is crucified, dead, buried. The old man is dead in God's mind; then I reckon myself so, it is the stoppage of sin. I have lusts and habits of the old nature, and not of the new. God looks on me as dead together with Christ; He reckons me dead; then I can cease from these things.

As to the scene up there, God has got His rest in Christ, evil has been fully put away through faith reckoning self dead, and ceasing from sin. There is no fearful looking for of judgment. Guilt is the state of a man having sinned waiting for the penalty; but the penalty is paid, I have not that to bear. Christ has paid it. Sin is put a stop to in the will of the believer. Sin is self-willed independence of God. I am sure, if anyone has learned what His grace is, he will say, "Whenever I have a will of my own in contrast to Christ's will, I choose to die to my own will; I have made up my mind to do that. I cease from sin."