

The Quiet Hour

For Dominion Presbyterian.

Lessons in Giving.*

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Here we are clearly taught that men should give of their best to God, for the support of His church and the glory of His name. It is true that there have been times, both under the old and new dispensations, when the church has been the greedy corporation, and the priests who ought to have fed the sheep thought only of shearing them. In the Old Testament and in the history of the church, things can be read on this head which are an everlasting disgrace, and which have done more to create infidelity than any speculative difficulties. The church as an institution should be managed on honest business lines and in a charitable and kindly spirit; ministers should be faithful and unselfish, following in the footsteps of Him, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor. All this is true, but is not the truth of this lesson. The truth brought before us now is that to support the visible ordinances of worship and service is both a duty and a privilege. All visible organization is liable to imperfections and is in danger of being abused, but without the visible church one of God's important witnesses would be lacking, and the visible church cannot exist without our self-denying help. Common funds and century funds are needed if worship is to be maintained at home and service rendered abroad. Without enquiring minutely into the life of the Jewish church, we will show how the principles of this passage apply to our own life.

There is a most sacred relation between man and God which we are apt to forget, "a son honoreth his father and a servant honoreth his master," but the eternal God may often look down upon our careless life and say, "Where is Mine honor?" and "where is My fear?" He who is the truest father and noblest master is often dishonored. We are all too much like the priests that despised His name. We should give to God of our best; it is a shame to offer polluted bread upon the altar, to give to heaven what is only fit for dogs. We would not treat our earthly governor as we treat the Eternal King. How many there are who give only the least leavings of their time, substance, and strength to God's cause. Whether it is in money, in the labor of hand, or the sweat of our brow something of our very best should be given to God. If our religion is a reality it will take something of our very life. The attempt to get off with a small, poor offering shows that there is no real enthusiasm and joy of service. This is the teaching of the prophetic voice in its address to the formal cold-hearted priests.

*S. S. Lesson for Dec. 10th:—Mal. i, 6-11; iii, 8-12.

Golden Text—"God loveth a cheerful giver."—2 Cor. ix, 7.

These priests should have been true mediators between the people and the nation's God, but how can they be seekers of grace for others who are so graceless themselves? So long as they are in that condition it would be better to close the temple door and not offer any offering. It is better to have no offering than to have one that is impure and vain. A closed temple door and an empty altar might speak even by its very silence and call men to repentance, but a proud offering that is the work of impurity is a delusion and a snare to the worshippers and an abomination in the sight of God. God has no pleasure in impure worshippers and will not accept their sacrifice. God will rather not have any worship than to have it selfish and unclean, but He will not lack worshippers. Outside this circle will true worshippers arise and those of great privileges will be put to shame by those of less fortunate religious circumstances. We who ought to present a noble sacrifice should remember that our sloth and selfishness will not destroy the true worship but only take away the glorious share we might have had in it.

III, 8-12. The next section opens with a startling question: "Will a man rob God?" One would think that it might be safely answered with an indignant no! But the charge is solemnly made that God's people have robbed him. They have brought the curse of barrenness upon themselves by their greed; in their effort to enrich themselves at the cost of their Church they have become poor. A man or a Church cannot buy spiritual blessing; the intercourse between God and the Church is not a commercial transaction. But we can keep God and heaven out of our souls by our selfish clinging to the mere earthly good. We do not know how much our personal and social life is blighted by our lack of generosity. As we think of all the blessings that have come down to us through the centuries, and of all the prayers and sacrifices of noble men through which these things have come, we ought to feel that the least we can do is to give something of our substance and life to the great enterprises of the Church so that even from our small efforts some good may come to the new century.

Letting God Love Us.

Love is not an impulse or an emotion, but submission to a law which is the expression of a perfectly loving will. So the beginning of commands is, "Thou shalt love God," and its enlargement is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." What some suppose to be an evanescent and hardly responsible mood of the mind, is really the voluntary submission of our wills to God's will, the free and steady obedience of a positive law. And as this law is the expression of God's loving nature, so it is by our participation of the

divine nature that we are enabled to render it obedience. "Loving God," says Bushnell, "is but letting God love us." John's great saying might be rendered in the present tense as truly as in the past, "Not that we love God, but that He loves us." Or, as Madam Guyon sings:

"I love my God, but with no love of mine,
For I have none to give;
I love Thee, Lord, but all the love is Thine,
For by Thy life I live."

Sunday School Times.

Putting First Things First.

Boys and girls just beginning to read are very apt to get the emphasis on the wrong word in the sentence. It is almost always the last word, whether the sense requires it or not. In life, "children of a larger growth" are constantly doing the same thing—putting the main stress upon the things that are of minor importance.

The business man thinks he must first see that his business is on a solid financial basis, so that he is sure of a livelihood or a competence, and then he will look after the interests of his soul. The professional man must make his mark first, then he will, at some convenient time, turn to God and be saved. Of course, no one intends to be lost. All expect to repent some day, and go straight to heaven when they die. But religion can be attended to at almost any time, even the eleventh hour, if need be. Business must be attended to now. That is the logic of the world.

But from every point of view it is false reasoning, unworthy of men with immortal interests at stake. Look at it for a moment. Will not every one admit that the salvation of the soul is the most important consideration of life? For a man to miss the true purpose of life, and then to miss his true destiny at last, surely that would be regarded as the one irreparable mistake, would it not? Then if salvation is admitted on every hand to be of paramount importance, why should not every man attend to it first? Is it right, is it wise, is it logical, to lift matters of merely secondary concern into the first place? Is it evidence of a well-balanced mind to do so? The best poised mind will surely rate all the facts of life at their true proportionate value, assigning to each its proper place.

The first thing for every man and woman, every boy and girl, to do, is to get right with God. The religious problem is the one to be solved first of all, because it lies at the basis of all right life and character. That problem solved, all other problems of human life will follow in their proper order by the divine law of self-adjustment. That is, all other necessary things will be added unto you. The person who first settles properly his relations with God will be in the best condition to study, to labor, to follow any proper vocation in life. With that relation unadjusted, all else will be chaos, resulting in wreck and ruin.—Herald and Presbyterian.

He so strengthened my faith as to perfectly banish all my doubts and fears, and filled me with humble, peaceful love. Oh, what a change God hath wrought in me! I am indeed put into possession of a new nature.—Joseph Benson.