Zealous, but Wrong.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."—Romans 10: 1, 2, 3.

I would bring before you one peculiar class of persons whose conversion some of us should very earnestly pray for. They are the kind of people who are here described by the apostle: Israelites, religious people, intensely religious in their way, although that way is not the way of truth. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. They are righteous people, self-righteous people, that have done no sin, but, on the contrary, have labored to do a great deal of good. They are running, and running well, but they are not running in the right road. They are laboring, and laboring hard, but they are not laboring in the right style; and so they will miss their reward. Many of these people are around us, and very admirable people they are in many ways; but their condition causes us the utmost anxiety. There are a few such persons in this present congregation; and though they are not so numerous among us as in many other quarters, yet they have a peculiar place in our affectionate regard. We esteem them so highly that we should be shocked and grieved that one single person of their character should perish. I say most solemnly, "My heart's desire and prayer for such is, that they might be saved; for I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."

THEY HAVE A ZEAL FOR GOD.

Why are we specially concerned for these people? The answer is, "Because *they are so zealous.*" They have a zeal of God. I feel right glad to meet with a zealous man nowadays, for zeal for God has become a rare quality in the land. You see plenty of zeal where politics are concerned. Fashion, and art, and society, and literature, each one evokes zeal of a certain kind; but we are not overdone with those who are zealous in the matter of religion. We seem to be pretty nearly gone to sleep as to essentials of creed and worship. Who is zealous? Who burns with holy ardor? Who is consumed with sacred enthusiasm? If anybody comes to be a little zealous above others, he is straightway condemned. The man of fervent spirit is laughed at as "a hot gospeller"; he is called fanatical, and great efforts are made to put him down. I fear that both the wise and the foolish virgins are going to sleep at this present time. There is a dullness in the religious world, as if we had passed into a dull, thick autumn for. We want a great and general revival. Meanwhile, when we do meet with people who are zealous, we take an interest in them. Zealous at church, zealous in their ceremonies, zealous in their belief of what they believe—however mistaken their zeal may be, there is something interesting about them. We like to associate with people who have hearts—not dry leaves to rise, but of which all the juice has gone; but those who have heart and soul, and life, and fire, and go! I love to meet with those who believe in something, and who work under the pressure of their belief, and give their strength to the carrying out of what they believe to be the will of God. It does seem a very great pity that any zeal should be wasted, and that any one full of zeal should yet miss his way. We fear that there are some who will do so. If you want to go to York you may ride very fast south, but you will not get to York with all your speed. Unless you turn your rein towards the north, you may ride a thousand horses to death, and never see the gates of the old city. It is of no use to be zealous if you are zealous in a wrong cause. But when we meet with any who are such, I say that they become peculiarly the object of a Christian's prayers. Pray for the zealous with all your hearts, for it is such a pity that one of them should go astray.

BUT IT IS AN IGNORANT ZEAL.

What is it that these people are, according to our text? These people will not like the text, nor yet like me for honestly explaining it. According to our text, it is very clear that these good people are *ignorant*. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, go about to establish their own righteousness." Ah! you may be brought up under the shadow of a church; you may sit all your life in a meeting-house; you may hear the gospel till you know every term and phrase by heart, and yet you may be ignorant of the righteousness of God. This is not a very complimentary statement, but as it is made upon inspiration, it behooves us to give earnest heed thereto.

Listen! There are many who are quite ignorant as to the natural righteousness of God's character. They do not know how intensely he hates sin, how his anger burns against injustice and untruth. They have never conceived an idea of how pure he is, how infinitely holy. They have never been in sympathy with the angel's adoration so as to know what is meant by the celestial chant, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, of Sabaoth." "Thou thinkest," says God, "that I am altogether such a one as thyself—that if thou art pleased with thy righteousness, I must be pleased with it too; and if thy poor pride and stupified concience be satisfied, therefore thy God must be satisfied also. These who are satisfied with their own holiness are ignorant of God's attribute of righteousness.

Again, they are ignorant of the righteousness of the law. Indeed, there is awful ignorance about that. You may hear the ten commandments read every Sabbath day, and I think that it is a good thing to have them read, and a good thing to have them posted up where they can be read, but you will not know anything about them by merely reading them. There is a depth of meaning in those commandments, of which self-righteous persons are ignorant. For instance, when they read, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," does it strike most men's minds that even lascivious look breaks that commandment? Do they reflect that not only acts of fornication and uncleanness, but indecent words, thoughts and looks are forbidden by that command? A man reads, "Thou shalt not kill," and he thinks to himself, "I never committed a murder. I can shake hands with that commandment, and sing a merry song under the gallows-tree." But Christ says, "He that is angry with his brother, without a cause, is a murderer"; and hill is round at bottom. Murder is but hate ripened into deed; and therefore the least degree of hate is a violation of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Who among us has ever measured the full compass of the great law of God? Let me stretch out the line before you for a moment. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." Who among us has ever done that? The man who says, "I have kept the law is simply ignorant of the righteousness which the law of God sets before us as the divine requirement. Could we behold the law in all its full-orbed majesty, we should as soon expect to hold the sun in the hollow of our right hand as to fulfil the law in all its length and breadth.

WHAT THEY DO.

Now I am going to show you what they do. According to the text they are going about to establish their own righteousness. I do not know whether I can give you the idea which this language suggests to my mind, but it is this: here is a kind of stuffed image, or, if you like, a statue, and they have set it up, and they want it to stand; but it is so badly constructed that it tumbles down. So they set it up again, and over it goes; in other words, they use all manner of plots and schemes to set up their righteousness upon its legs, but it repeatedly topples over. Another figure which may illustrate the expression is this, they have had foundations for a house, and had materials, and bad mortar, and they themselves are by no means good workmen. They have built up quite a height of wall to make a shelter for themselves, but it tumbles down. Never mind: they are very industrious, and so they set to work to put it up again. They are perseveringly determined, somehow or other, to build up a righteousness of their own. That is the meaning of this text. They go about to set up, to establish—to make to stand—their own righteousness, and it is such a crazy thing that it falls down of its own weight, and whenever it tumbles down they set it up again. They go about to do it; that is they invent all sorts of ways; they go to the ends of the earth to find another bit of stone that will just wedge in and help to settle the corner-stone. All their industry is spent in trying to set up this thing, which is not worth a button when it is set up. Alas, that folly should be so desperately entrenched in the heart of man, that he will spend his whole life in a persevering attempt to insult his Maker by preparing a righteousness of his own, when his Maker has already wrought out, and brought in, a righteousness perfect in every respect!

Conscience begins to call out, "It will not do." Peradventure, the man is taken ill. He thinks that he is going to die, and he says, alas, I could not die with so poor a hope as this! This bout would never carry me across the river Jordon. I can see that it leaks very terribly. There are a hundred points in which my hope utterly fails me. What shall I do?" Well, then, he must keep his wretched pretence afloat somehow; and so he cries, "At length I must go in for something thunderingly good. I will give a lot of money away." If he is a rich man, he says, "I will endow an almshouse. You see I need not give the money till I die. That will do very well. I had better keep it while I am alive, and then leave it when I cannot keep it. Won't that be a splendid thing. And if I put a painted window in a church, surely that will go a long way; or I will give a lump sum to an hospital." To build a large bridge, or mend the common roads, used to be the way in which a man who wanted to bid high for heaven made his offers in olden times; or else the monks and friars promised to sing him into glory for the small consideration of ten thousand a year. And so men go into that line, and seek salvation by purchase. And they hear about saints who fast. Well, then, they say, "Oh, I shall fast!" Then they say, "I have not prayed long enough. I must pray twice as long."

According to the church to which he belongs, the zealous person becomes a determined partisan of his sect. Remember how Mr. Bunyan says that when he was a godless man, he could have kissed the earth on which the clergy walked, and he thought that every nail in the church door was sacred. Among Dissenters, the man who is trying to save himself usually thinks that every practice of the little community with which he is united is infallibly correct. He has no real love to Christ, and he has no trust in Christ's righteousness; but how he will work at his favorite self-salvation! And you will have to work at it, sirs, if you are going to heaven by your works! To work your fingers to the bones is nothing. You might as well try to climb to the stars on a treadmill as to get to heaven by your good works; and certainly, you might more easily sail from Liverpool to America on a sere leaf than ever get to heaven by works and doings of your own. There is more wanted than will ever come of yourself. You want a Saviour. You must be born again from above. You want a salvation that shall be a gift of infinite charity, a benison of the boundless mercy of the eternal God; and nothing else will save you.

WHAT THEY WILL NOT DO.

The fourth thing is, what they will not do. "Going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." "They have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Why, there are some that have not submitted even to *hear it!* Possibly, I address to-night one who never came here before, and has always said, "No, I should not think of going to such a place." You are only one of a numerous band of people of that character. Our law does not judge any man before it hears him, but these people both judge and condemn the gospel without giving it an hour's attention. If you speak to them about it, they are wrapped up in an idea of their own righteous perfectness, and they really cannot endure to hear themselves talked to as if they were common sinners. Are they not good enough of themselves? What can you tell them better than they know already? They do not want to hear the gospel. I think I would recommend them, at any rate, to hear what it is, because the next time they speak against it they will speak with more knowledge. It is always a pity not to know that which we most despise. Even contempt should have a rational foundation. It will not hurt you, friend, to know. And yet there is such prejudice in the minds of some that they refuse to acquaint themselves with the verities which God has revealed. "Sinners saved by grace!" they say; "Salvation by faith! It is all very well for the commonality; but it does not do for ladies and gentlemen like us. We were always so good." Very well then; if that really is the case, you know there is a heaven for the commonalty, and it is highly probable that you ladies and gentlemen are too good to go there. Where will you go? There is but one way to heaven, and that way is closed against the proud; and if you choose to be so proud, you will close it against yourself, and we cannot help you. But we will pray—pray God that prejudice may yield, and that to-night, and at other times, those who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, may, at least, be willing to hear what the gospel is. How many have been brought to Christ in the old times by reading Martin Luther upon the Galatians! That is a book in a rough enough style. What sledge-hammer words Martin uses! Only the other day I met a man who came to me like one of the old Puritans, and he said to the that he had traversed the line of the two covenants. He began to converse with me in that antique, majestic style which comes of Puritanic theology. I thought—Bless the man! He has risen from the dead. He is one of Oliver Cromwell's gray Ironsides. He will be able to tell me of Naseby and Marston Moor. So I said to him, "Covenant and law, where did you pick that up, friend?" "Not at any church or chapel," said he. "There are none round about where I live who know anything at all about it. They are all in the dark together—dumb dogs that cannot bark." "How did you stumble on the true light?" I asked. The man replied, "In the good providence of God, I met with Master Martin Luther on the Galatians. I bought it for sixpence out of a box in front of a bookseller's shop." Oh, it was a good find for that man! Six pennyworth of salvation, according to the judgment of men; but infinite riches, according to the judgment of God. He had indeed found a jewel when he learned the truth of salvation by grace through faith. I recommend persons, whether they will read Martin Luther or any other author, to be especially careful to read the Epistle of the Galatians itself. Paul hammers there against all hope of salvation by the law, and puts salvation on the basis of grace, and grace alone, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Still there are many who will not incline their ear, and come unto Christ; they will not even hear that their souls may live. Do not they deserve to die who are too proud to hearken to the way of life?

The Apostle Paul.

The concurrent testimony of tradition and the oldest attempts at representation enable us to summon up before us the aspect of the man. A modern writer, who cannot conceal the bitter dislike which mingles with his unwilling admiration, is probably not far wrong in characterising him as a small and ugly Jew. You looked on a man who was buffeted by an angel of Satan. And yet when you spoke to him; when the prejudice inspired by his look and manner had been overcome; when at moments of inspiring passion or yearning tenderness, the soul beamed out of that pale, distressful countenance; when with kindling enthusiasm the man forgot his appearance and his infirmity, and revealed himself in all the grandeur of his heroic force; when, triumphing over weakness, he scathed his enemies with terrible invective, or rose as if were upon the wings of prophecy to inspire with consolation the souls of those he loved—then, indeed, you saw what manner of man he was. It was Paul seated, as it were, on sunlit heights, and pouring forth the glorious pæan in honor of Christian love; it was Paul withstanding Peter to the face because he was to be condemned; it was Paul delivering to Satan the insolent offender of Corinth; it was Paul exposing with sharp yet polished irony the inflated pretensions of a would-be wisdom; it was Paul rolling over the subterranean plots of Judaizers the thunders of his moral indignation; it was Paul blinding Elymas with the terror of his passionate reproof; it was Paul taking command, as it were, of the 270 souls in the driven dismantled hulk, and by the simple authority of natural pre-eminence laying his injunctions on the centurion and the Roman soldiers whose captive he was; it was Paul swaying the mob with the motion of his hand on the steps of Antonia; it was Paul making even a Felix tremble; it was Paul exchanging high courtesies in tones of equality with governors and kings; it was Paul "fighting with wild beasts" at Ephesus, and facing "the lion" alone at Rome. When you saw him and heard him, then you forgot that the treasure was hid in an earthen vessel: but of the shattered pitcher there blazed upon the darkness a hidden lamp which flashed terror upon his enemies, and shone like a guiding star to friends.

The Elder's Sermon.

"I really wish, Deacon, that you would tell me what your candid opinion of our minister is."

Deacon Brown looked meditatively at the speaker, a small, wiry looking man, whose features were almost as sharp as the sharp black eyes fixed so intently upon him.

"I don't know, Brother Quimby, as a candid opinion of our minister would do him any good."

"I dare say not," responded Mr. Quimby, darkly; "but then it would do me a great deal of good to hear it."

"I don't know as to that either."

"There's no one in the church whose opinion I think more of," continued Mr. Quimby. "Not that I approve of giving it to every one. But you needn't be afraid of saying just what you think to me, Deacon, for it won't go any further, and it might serve to clear up some doubts that trouble me."

"What doubts?"

"Well, about various things. But you haven't told me what your opinion is, Deacon."

"I have only one opinion of Elder Wakeman, and that is that he is a man who tries to do his duty in all the relations of life."

This was evidently something that Mr. Quimby had neither expected nor desired to hear, and he stared blankly at the speaker. But quickly recovering himself, he said:

"Ha! I think I understand you, Deacon. What you say is very well put indeed. I have thought that he might have been a leetle more willing to take advice; but there is no question in my mind but what he tries to do his duty, as you say. But is he sound?"

"Perhaps not. Some ministers are all sound."

The merry twinkle in the good Deacon's eyes found no reflection in the solemn visage opposite him.

"It's no laughing matter, Deacon," responded Mr. Quimby with a rebuking shake of his head, "I am surprised that you should speak on so serious a matter with such unseeming levity. I refered to being sound in doctrines. I have been a good deal exercised in my mind in regard to this ever since I heard his sermon on 'Justification,' which is no justification at all, as I understand it, and as good old Dr. Seaver used to lay it down. Dear old man! I wonder what he would say if he could come back and hear the new-fangled ideas that are taught from the pulpit where he preached such good, old-fashioned, doctrines nigh on to twenty years."

"If he is where I think he is, he doesn't want to come back. I only hope that some things he used to preach about are clearer to him now than he ever succeeded in making them to me."

"There is no merit in believing where everything is made clear. There are mysteries of faith, Deacon, that nobody has any right to try to understand. Now, Elder Wakeman is forever preaching about what we ought to do, as though such poor weak creatures as we can do anything toward affecting our salvation. As for me, I am free to own that I don't consider anything I have done, or am doing, of the least account whatever."

"A man ought to know better than any one else the quality of his own works, Brother Quimby, so I won't dispute you on that score. So far as I am concerned I feel that the Lord will have quite enough to do in effecting the work you allude to if I help him all I can."

"Well, Deacon, I wish I could have my mind cleared up in regard to Elder Wakeman. What did you think of his sermon last Sabbath morning?"

"There is one thing I might say about it, if I thought it a prudent thing to do. We can't be too careful speaking, especially if its anything that's likely to affect the character and usefulness of a man like Elder Wakeman."

"Very true, Deacon. But you needn't be afraid of my telling; I'm not one of the leaky sort. I knew, as well as I wanted to, that a man of your sense couldn't approve of such doctrine as that."

"Oh, I've nothing to say against the sermon; it was a very good discourse—you won't often find a better. But the fact is, every word it contained—I really don't know as I ought to mention it though; if it should get about it might make trouble."

"I'll never lisp a word of it to any living soul," was the eager response.

"Well"—here the Deacon lowered his voice to a very impressive whisper—"I have a book at home which has every word of it in."

Here the train for which Deacon Brown was waiting came rushing up to the depot.

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Mr. Quimby, with uplifted eyes and hands. "But you haven't told me"—

Beacon Brown was already up the steps, smiling and waving his adieux from the platform of the rear car, which rapidly disappeared around a curve in the road.

He was absent nearly a week. When he returned he found not only the church but the whole village in a state of excitement and commotion.

He had not been home more than an hour when Elder Wakeman called on him, and in the course of the day he was waited upon by two deacons and several church members, to say nothing of being interviewed by various of his acquaintances and neighbors, all of whom were anxious to ascertain if there was any truth in the rumor of the grave charge made against his pastor.

Deacon Brown, though evidently somewhat startled at first by a result so little anticipated, took all this with his usual calmness and serenity. He was very reticent on the subject, asserting that he had said nothing that he was not both able and willing to prove when the proper time came to do so. His interview with Elder Wakeman was a private one, but it was noticeable at the close that the countenance of the latter had a serene, almost smiling aspect. But the Elder took no measures to prevent the meeting of investigation that had been called, no particular importance was attached to this. He didn't seem disposed to talk much about it, merely saying that the Deacon ought to have an opportunity to prove or explain what he had every reason to believe he had said about him.

The meeting in question was held a the vestry, which was filled to its utmost capacity before the two chiefly interested, Elder Wakeman and Deacon Brown, entered, and who appeared to be the least excited ones present.

Mr. Quimby was there, full of importance, and with an exultation of look and manner only thinly veiled by the gravity which overspread his countenance. He was standing by the stove, the center of an interested and curious circle, when the two entered, but he avoided meeting the eye of either.

At the motion of Elder Wakeman, one of the deacons called the meeting to order, briefly explained its object, the serious nature of the imputation under which their pastor rested, and appealing to Deacon Brown to put a stop to the talk it had occasioned by either denying or proving the assertion.

Rising to his feet, Deacon Brown looked around upon the excited and curious faces that were directed toward him.

"Behold, brethren, how much mischief the tongue can do! I said a few words to one of you, under a pledge of secrecy. I think it was under a pledge of secrecy, Brother Quimby?"

"I considered it to be my duty to tell what you told me," said the individual addressed, turning red.

"You are to be commended for having performed your duty so thoroughly," continued the Deacon; "a very painful duty, as it is easy to see! I understand you said that I told you Elder Wakeman stole his sermon from a book in my possession; are you sure that I used the word 'stole,' Brother Quimby?"

"You said that you had a book that had every word of it in! Where's the difference, I'd like to know?" was Mr. Quimby's prompt and triumphant rejoinder.

"There might be none at all, and again, there might be a great deal," responded the Deacon.

"I did use the language ascribed t meo by Mr. Quimby," continued Deacon Brown, addressing the rest of the assemblage; "moved thereto by his evident desire that I should say something to our pastor's discredit, and without a thought that it would lead to this trouble and excitement. I declare, furthermore, that I have seen a book containing every word of his sermon in Elder Wakeman's own library. I have taken the liberty of sending for it, and will offer it as evidence as to the truth of my statement."

Taking a ponderous volume from the hands of his son, who had just entered, Deacon Brown laid it on the table before the presiding officer, who carefully adjusting his spectacles, opened it.

Giving one glance at its outspread pages, he raised his eyes to the serene and kindly face opposite.

"Why this is a—a dictionary!"

"Very true," responded Deacon Brown. "But you'll find every word of Elder Wakeman's sermon in it—if you look long enough."

"I must confess, however," added the Deacon, as soon as the general laughter and astonishment had subsided a little, glancing smilingly across the table at Elder Wakeman, "that there are not many that can string them together so as to form such an interesting and instructive discourse."

Here the Elder and Deacon shook hands, which was the signal for a general handshaking, congratulations and good feeling. No one was dissatisfied, with the exception of Mr. Quimby, who, mortified and confounded at the unexpected turn affairs had taken, had slunk from the room.—*Boston Traveller.*

The Secret of the Lord.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him," yet none in the busy crowds among whom they move in the noisy street, know what is passing in their hearts. An American citizen in a foreign city, seeing the meteor flag of his native land floating at the masthead of a ship, is inwardly moved by the associations it revives, to patriotic feelings, to emotions of love, to fond anticipations of his return to the joys and repose of his fireside. But of his secret thoughts the people about him know nothing. To them the flag of his country is but as one flag among many others. They meddle not with the secret joys it kindles within his swelling breast. It is even so with the secret of the Lord in a good man's breast. He walks the street like other men. Yet while their thoughts are of things visible and earthly, his are of God and things unseen. He sees God in everything about him. God is communing with him, feasting him on holy thought, quickening his spiritual aspirations, comforting him with the assurances of his sonship.

Miss Smiley's Lesson.

In the summer of 1879 I descended the Rhigi with one of the most faithful of Swiss guides. Beyond the services of the day he gave me, unconsciously, a lesson for life. His first care was to put my wraps and other burdens upon his shoulders. In doing so he called for all; but I chose to keep back a few for special care. I soon found them no little hindrance to the freedom of my movements; but still I would not give them up until my guide returning to where I was resting for a moment, kindly but firmly demanded that I should give him everything but my alpenstock. Putting them with the utmost care upon his shoulders, with a look of intense satisfaction he led the way. And now, with freedom, I found that I could make double speed with double safety. Then a voice spoke inwardly: "O foolish, wilful heart! Hast thou indeed given up thy last burden? Thou hast no need to carry them." I saw it all in a flash; and then, as I leaped lightly from rock to rock down the steep mountain-side, I said within myself: "And ever thus will I follow Jesus, my guide, my burden-bearer. I will cast my care upon him, for he careth for me."

"Uncle Stead" is what they called a shrewd old gentleman who used to live in Winthrop, a little way out of the village, up the side of the pond, near Readfield. One of his fellow citizens was a man named Lovejoy. Uncle Stead met Lovejoy in the village one day, and he said to him: "Lovejoy, there's a poor woman lives out on the edge of the town that needs some provisions. I'm willing to supply her, but I've sold my horse, and have no means of getting the stuff to her. Now, I'll buy her a barrel of flour and a ham and some other supplies if you'll carry them to her with your team." Lovejoy said certainly, he'd be very glad to do it. Accordingly Uncle Stead bought a barrel of flour, a ham, a bucket of sugar, etc., telling Lovejoy where the woman lived, sent him off on the errand of charity with the good things in his pung. Lovejoy easily found the house where the woman lived. He unloaded the goods, puffing like a grampus as he rolled the barrel of flour in, and said to the woman: "Mr. Steadman sent you the provisions. He's a mighty kind-hearted man to send you all these things." "Well, I don't know why he shouldn't send them to me!" exclaimed the woman in surprised accents. "He's my husband."—*Lewiston Journal.*

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Pugwash, Nov. 12, 1884. R. A. DAKIN

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