

No.
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"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS
WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE
RIGHT HAND OF GOD." COL. 3. 1.

DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE.

An Address (revised) at

Forest Gate, E.7.

7th March, 1912.

by

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An Address by Mr. P. W. Heward,

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Our first subject this evening, dear friends, is a continuation of the doctrine of the Bible, the doctrine concerning God, and to-night the doctrine concerning the attributes of God. The first point on our paper is DO GOD'S ATTRIBUTES CHANGE? Like many questions, we can answer this one best in the words of Scripture. In Mal. 3. 6 we read that the Lord said, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed". God is spoken of throughout Scripture as the invariable One. Times may alter, circumstances may be quite distinct, but God is the same and His years have no end (Ps. 102; Heb. 1). Scriptures in all parts bear a witness to God as the One Who is never surprised, never caused to change His thought, never altering His belief or His method in its inner central principle. He may alter the manifestations of His attributes, but He never alters His attributes. He may alter His way of dealing with His people, not to suit circumstances, but to display something of Himself and something of themselves, but He never changes in Himself. "I am the Lord" is His Divine utterance, and the very Name LORD means the One Who ever is - the continuous One. But in the second part of this first point there is suggested an earnest rebuke of the thoughts underlying such a thought. Most thoughts have thoughts underlying

them, more thoughts than we realise. Everything we do is the product of a number of other things. Now, if any have the thought in their minds that God's attributes change, what is the underlying reason of their thinking this? Very frequently it is an objection to certain parts of the Scripture. We turn, for example, to the earlier Scriptures, and find there God brought before us as "THE LORD God to Whom vengeance belongeth". We find God persecuting men from under the heavens of the Lord; we find wrath poured out and judgment displayed in a very marked manner, and people are apt to say, "Oh, I prefer the New Testament, I prefer the meek and gentle and lowly Saviour Who came down to save poor sinners", and by so doing they make one part of Scripture against the other part and they really hold the opinion that God's attributes change. Ah! dear friends, let us by the grace of God get away from this thought. The God Who sent the flood is the same God Who loves us in Christ; and the God Who sent fire from heaven on Sodom and Gommorrah is the same God Who sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying "Abba Father!" The God Who judged the army of Sennacherib outside Jerusalem is the same God Who in mercy has welcomed us as His very own, and He Who slew three thousand beneath Sinai at the giving of the law, is the One Who quickened three thousand when He gave the Spirit. 'Tis the same God, there is no contradiction in God's actions, God may work in different ways but His attributes are just the same. God is as stern as ever He was, and God WAS as loving as He

ishow.

Secondly (in this first point), the reason why some seem to imagine that God's attributes change, is that they cannot conceive of the immensity of God. We are so apt to bring God down to a level with ourselves. Now we are always changing. The heathen used to portray their gods as great men, they attributed to them the vices of men, and the opinions of men, and the actions of men, because the heathen~~s~~ could only conceive of something like themselves. Now the danger is that we become heathenish in our view of God, and that we bring Him in some way, or measure, down to our level. ~~WE~~ vary, therefore we cannot grasp the immensity and the majesty of God Who never varies, Who is the Same from one eternity to another eternity, Who never knew less about us than He knows now, Who loved us of old before we were created, with the same love wherewith He loves us now in Christ Jesus. That God Who is never surprised by circumstances, and never frustrated by human actions - that glorious God Who has planned out everything though we only see the parts of His ways, and how small a portion of them is known! Let us once and for ever get rid of any thought that levels God. It is well that we should realise something of the majesty and the glory of God, and that we should know that His attributes never change to fit in with something fresh He has found out, for He never finds out anything fresh and never comes to know that which He did not know before. He did not suit His plans because He finds men changing, He knew all about the changes

before men were made. Men come up to date and contrive to suit surrounding circumstances, but God knows no expediences, God knows no mere contrivance. God has a plan and everything must be brought down before His plan, and nothing can change that eternal purpose which He is gradually working out and which He will work out until in the days to come we shall look back upon it if we are saved by grace, and admire the wisdom and the perfectness of our Lord.

We pass along now to the second point - ATTRIBUTES WHICH ARE NOT BELONGING TO GOD. What a blessing, dear friends, to be able to say some things do not belong to God! It is a mercy to know that there are some things away from God; God would not be perfect if He had them; there are some things that we have that Satan has, but God has not. The apostle tells us concerning God that He cannot lie, and that there is with Him no variableness nor shadow that is caused by turning. The passages are Tit. 1.2 where we have "God Who cannot lie" and Jas. 1. 7 "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with Whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning". So we have a continuation of the first part of the subject in the second part. The first part says God's attributes do not change, the second part goes on to say God has not any variableness in His character, therefore He has something absent from them which men have. Variableness and lying, and unreality are not attributes of God, they are outside His character. In like manner, we read that God cannot die. He is a God of eternity

Failure on the contrary is a mark of man, namely to die. Man is capable of death, we attribute to man frailty of which death is a climax, but God has no frailty. In other words, the attributes which are absent from God are those which are defects; whether defects naturally (defects of nature and physically) or defects morally. Men have those attributes; Satan has those attributes; but God has neither. Thus we pass on to realise, and realising to adore - "Our God is perfect". There is nothing in the character of God of which we can say "Here is something that falls short". There is nothing in the character of God of which we can say "I wish this were otherwise". There is nothing in the character of God which He will gradually alter or improve, God is unimprovable, He is perfect; not only is His way perfect, not only are His works perfect, not only is His law perfect, but He Himself is perfect in every way, and eternally. It is well for us to realise this, that we as those saved by grace, might value God more; but, oh, dear friends, ARE we saved by grace? Do we all know the preciousness of this salvation? If not, God's perfectness is against us. If He were imperfect He might overlook us; if He were imperfect He might excuse us; but that which is the resting place of a believer is the doom of a sinner - THE PERFECTION OF GOD. That which is the joy of a saved one will be the agony of a lost one - THE PERFECTNESS OF GOD.

We pass next to considering GOD'S ATTRIBUTES AND OUR EXPERIENCE. 'Tis a blessed thing to know facts in the head,

if we can put them in practice in the life, and enjoy them in the heart, but facts in the head as bare dry facts are a miserable substitute for experimental Christianity - A MISERABLE SUBSTITUTE.

Dear Friends, you can learn the Bible by heart, in the common sense of those words "by heart", but unless you have learnt to enjoy it IN the heart all the knowledge is vain and empty; the greater knowledge will bring greater doom. It is a serious thing to be orthodox unless one is also spiritual. The more exact we are, the more sinful are we unless we are also walking with God; knowledge brings a responsibility, and I do long that the attributes of God might be our experience. I do not want simply to tell you of the majesty of God, and you to be able to make a list of the verses where we read that God is great in counsel and there is none like Him; that "Of Him are all things", and to Him are all things, and through Him are all things": that He is a God of wondrous might and power, - Nay, I want that that might enter into our experience to make us reverent. I do not want that you should simply be able to collect the passages which talk of God as a God of wisdom, for example where we read of "GOD ONLY WISE" and that the wisdom of God does this or that. It is well to collect those passages, it is well to have them, not merely at your fingers' ends, but in your memories well arranged, that if anyone says to you, what passages speak of the wisdom of God? to be able to mention them. That is well and important, but I want just to go a step beyond that, and to have the wisdom of God realised in our experience, just to understand that God

is so perfectly wise, then we shall go to Him if we lack wisdom, and ask and He will give to us liberally and will not upbraid. It is well for us to know that God has a perfect foreknowledge of all events. We do not want merely to say, "Well, the word "foreknowledge" comes in Scripture, and God says that He declares the end from the beginning, and that the Lord Jesus Christ prophesied exactly what would come, and it came exactly true". It is all well to know that in its place, but we want something deeper. We are going through a ruined world and a world in which we find everything upside down. We want to have that peace and experience to possess our souls, because God knows what will happen next year, and God knows what will happen the year after, and God knows what will happen until the "happenings" are interrupted by the great "HAPPENING", and "HE SHALL COME WHOSE RIGHT IT IS TO REIGN". Nor is it enough for us to merely know in our heads, that God is the God of all grace, that He has the attribute of lovingkindness and that He is rich in mercy. We want more than that: we want it to enter into our experience, that when we feel our nothingness we just flee unto that mercy, and rest ourselves upon Him because of His love, knowing that great love wherewith He loved us, that attribute which is more than merely a part of our doctrine, it is the foundation of our salvation. "Because He loved He predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son". In love He chose us though we were utterly unworthy. "The Lord loved you because He loved you". God's attributes will settle the pride of our nature. It must bring low the

doubtings and the quakings when we fear and feel that there is a danger of being lost, for that love which laid hold on us will never lose us. "Having loved His own which were in the world" the Lord Jesus to manifest an eternal love "loved them unto the end". And even now we may hear the words sounding in our ears if we have fled unto Christ "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with ^{loving} kindness have I drawn thee".

In this connection, a word or two as to the importance of praise. If God's attributes enter into our experience we shall praise, and praise is so important because it gives something to God. Prayer says "I want something". Praise says, "I would give God something". Now, though we cannot give God anything till we have received from Him, when we have received from Him it is our privilege to give unto Him. If we simply pray we shall find selfishness creeping upon us. "I want this, I want that". To only plead our needs will mean an exaltation of self. You know how the disciples' prayer does not begin "Give us day by day the bread" but begins "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name". It begins with exalting God. We want more praise. Now a consideration of God's attributes in this connection must awaken our praise. But I want to put this before you specially that dealing with God's attributes in our experience, that we might not only praise Him for our experience of them, but for what they are. We do not experience all God's attributes. Do you experience His wrath? If you are in Christ Jesus, you do not. It is a mercy not to experience that

attribute of God. But oh, dear friends, if, by sovereign grace, we do not experience that attribute of God, the attribute of wrath, let us praise God, not only that we are free from it, but praise Him for His wrath. Everything that God does is perfect. If He saves a world and reconciles a world unto Himself we would say, HALLELUJAH; and if the smoke of Babylon goes up for ever and ever, the time will come when the redeemed will again say, HALLELUJAH. There is nothing in God of which we need to be ashamed; there is nothing in God which we can put on one side. There must be simply an outflowing of praise for all that God is and all that God does, and all that God will be and will do. For every attribute let us praise. "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable". We will make manifest by our lives, if we are the Lord's people, something of what His attributes mean to us, but let us never forget to praise for the attributes which are not entering into our experience.

Now we pass along to consider point four - GOD'S ATTRIBUTES MISUNDERSTOOD BY THE UNGODLY. And how often the dear people of God become siding with the ungodly, looking at things from an ungodly standpoint. It is a serious thing. Let us keep God's standpoint, let us be those who by the grace of God always view things from the Divine position. The ungodly misunderstand every attribute of God. Has God revealed Himself as a God of grace? "Oh", they say, "FAVOURITISM". Has God revealed Himself as a God of WRATH? They speak of it as unkindness and injustice. Why, dear friends, we all deserve eternal hell;

there can be no injustice in wrath; the worst is not too bad. It is not bad but holily right - the worst judgment for us. We have earned eternal hell, we have deserved eternal judgment. We cannot complain of God's character, but the ungodly complain of His wrath, and speak against it. They misunderstand God's knowledge. Because He knows everything they make Him responsible for everything, but God knows certain things that He permits, because in His perfect wisdom He has given man a certain exercise of freedom and man uses that freedom with defiance against God. We must not blame God for His perfect knowledge. And so with all the attributes of God. Those who know not Christ misunderstand them. We grieve for these, but it is easily understood. Until we are in Christ we look at everything from the wrong position, but when we are in Christ all is clear.

A few words as to prayerful preparation. If the Lord will, next week we shall consider the wisdom and the knowledge of God, those attributes linked. You all, or most of you, have concordances; I would ask you therefore, to turn up the words "wisdom", "wise", and "know" and "knowledge", and similar words, including "foreknowledge", that you may be prepared in measure to consider God's wondrous wisdom, and what it is and what it means, and God's knowledge. Do not brood over difficulties, but ponder them in the Sanctuary. Consider what God's knowledge means in connection with man going his own path of sin. Consider what God's knowledge is in connection with yourself as to your salvation, and as to your failures. Let

the thoughts be spiritual as well as mental, and God will bless the prayerful preparation. But do, dear fellow saved ones, try to get a few minutes of preparation, and not only pray yourselves ready for the meeting but pray that the Lord will grant to the speaker the word in season, and to the hearer the opened ear
