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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

Third Quarter.

Lesson IX. August 28. Matt. 6: 1-15.

PIETY WITHOUT DISPLAY.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.—1 Sam. 16: 7.

I. THE GENERAL STATEMENT. 1. *Take heed.* For the danger of ostentation in religion is one that must be watched against, one that easily ensnares the unwary disciple. *That ye do not your alms.* The better Mss. give *righteousness*, as in Rev. Ver., and obviously with a far truer meaning, as the wider word which branches off afterwards into the three heads of alms, prayer and fasting. *Righteousness* means all right actions, both moral and religious. *Before men, to be seen of them.* Not all doing of righteousness before men is condemned, not all public almsgiving, prayer and fasting, but that, the object of which is human applause. *No reward of your Father.* Not no reward, but no reward from God.

THE PRINCIPLE is that it is the motive which gives value to the deed. The reward must be according to the motive and purpose, not according to the outward act.

II. THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED TO GIVING. 2. *When thou doest thine alms. Alms* here means acts of kindness to the poor,—the giving of money, food, clothing, or any such supply to the destitute. *Do not sound a trumpet before thee.* A figurative expression, meaning to make a great display to attract attention. *As the hypocrites do.* The word *hypocrite* originally meant one who plays a part on the stage under a mask, as was the ancient custom; and hence one who seems to be one person and is another. The hypocrisy in this case consisted in pretending to act from kindness and generosity, while really acting from a selfish desire of applause. *They have their reward.* Literally, have it in full. They have the reward they sought, the reputation of being charitable, very good, very pious. This is all the reward such actions deserve, and all they will gain.

3. *But when thou* (emphatic) *doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* Not only without any desire that others should know and praise, but without any self-praise.

4. *That.* "In order that." The mode should be chosen with a view to secrecy. *And thy Father.* He will reward thee as thy Father; not as a master who gives his servant just what he earns and no more, but as a father, who gives abundantly more, and without stint, to his son that serves him. *Himself shall reward thee.* Give thee the true and proper recompense. It is not a money reward, but a nobler spirit, a higher life, a more peaceful conscience, a becoming more consciously the child of God; and this will appear *openly.*

III. THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED TO PRAYING. 5. *And when thou prayest.* The plural form is more correct, as in the Rev. Jesus here takes it for granted that they will pray. *The corners of the streets.* The widest and most frequented thoroughfares were finely adapted for a vain display, but most unsuited for devotion. *They have their reward, i. e.,* the reward they sought.

6. *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.* Thine inner chamber. *Pray to thy Father.* Present you sincere petitions and praises. Do not merely go through a formal prayer. *Which is in secret.* The invisible spiritual God. *Which seeth in secret.* Who is omnipresent, and knows every secret place, every hidden desire. *Shall reward thee openly.* Better; as in Rev., *recompense thee,* answer your prayers. Give you the things you ask for, or, if these are not good for you, give you the better things you would have asked for, had you seen as God sees. The answer will appear openly in the results. This does not forbid sincere prayer in the presence of others, for Jesus and the Apostles prayed before others; but only formal prayers, made for the sake of appearing to pray.

7. *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions.* The repeating over and over of set forms, as if there were some virtue in the mere act of praying. *Their much speaking.* This forbids all mere saying of prayers or forms without the spirit. *As the heathen do.* The Gentiles. Illustrated by the conduct of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18: 26), and of the mob at Ephesus (Acts 19: 34).

8. *For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of.* Ye do not need, therefore, to pray in order to give God information, any more than to arouse his sympathies by much speaking.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE USE OF PRAYER? (1) God has commanded it; and he has commanded it because of the blessings enfolded in it. (2) Prayer is the natural expression of need, of our wants, our weakness, and of our desires, our praises, our love to God. (3) It tends to make us realize that God is our Father, and we are his children. (4) It fits us to receive and rightly use the blessings God would give.

IV. THE LORD'S PRAYER. 9. *After this manner therefore pray ye.* Because vain repetitions are forbidden, a pattern or specimen of the true form of Christian prayer is given.

THE ADDRESS. *Our.* Implying that all men are brethren, because children of the same Father; implying too our fellowship with Christ. *Our Father.* The most endearing name under which God can be addressed, reminding us of his infinite love and exciting our filial trust. *Which art in heaven.* This shows "the infinite difference between this and every other human relationship of a similar kind; he is no weak, helpless, earthly parent."

THE SEVEN PETITIONS. Each of these petitions implies an obligation to carry out on our own part what we pray God to accomplish.

1st. *Hallowed.* Held in reverence, regarded and treated as holy, by us and by all men. *Be thy name.* God's name means "himself as revealed and manifested."

2nd. 10. *Thy kingdom come.* The kingdom or reign of God through Christ. The true praying of this prayer implies that we are doing and giving all in our power to hasten on the coming of this kingdom in our own hearts and in the world.

3rd. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* Through the Holy Spirit working in men "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The standard is the way the inhabitants of heaven, the perfect servants of God, do his will. The prayer is first, that we ourselves may so do God's will; second, that all the world may obey God as the angels obey him.

4th. Now begins the second division of the petitions, in which "thy" is changed into "our" and "us." We are to pray for the general good first, and then for ourselves. 11. *Give us this day our daily bread.* The food we need for to-day. It implies the satisfaction of all our daily wants. No matter how much we must work for our daily living, still it is the gift of God, for he gives us the strength to work, and the opportunities, and controls the course of nature which supplies our wants.

5th. *And forgive us our debts.* Two parts: first, a prayer for forgiveness; second, a standard of forgiveness. Sins are debts. Sinners are debtors. They owe God vast amounts of love and service, which they have never paid him, and never can pay. God forgives the debts or sins of his people, by blotting them out, and not remembering against them their iniquities, of which they repent. *As we forgive* (better, have forgiven) *our debtors,* or, as in Luke, *for we also forgive.* We cannot sincerely ask God to forgive us, if we do not forgive those who have sinned against us. How terrible this prayer may become if we are unforgiving!

6th. *And lead us not into temptation.* Into those severe trials which test and try us more than we can easily bear. God may bring us into trials, and then we are to count it all joy; but the prayer of conscious weakness and humility is to escape these trials lest we fall.

7th. *But deliver us from evil.* The great evil of the world is sin, the source and fountain of nearly all the other evils in the world.

V. A COMMENT ON THE FIFTH PETITION. 14. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses.* Offences against you; their "stepping across" the line on to your rights. *Your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* Because it shows that you recognize your own weakness and sin, and are in that spiritual condition wherein the forgiveness of your sins will be safe and beneficial. 15. *But if ye forgive not men.* Then God will not forgive you because to forgive under such circumstances would be to forgive the unrepentant, who would harden themselves in sin by means of God's very act of mercy. Moreover, such are utterly undeserving of forgiveness.

The Matter of the Tithes.

BY MRS. ANNIE A. PRESTON.

I heard an aged Christian explain a few days since: "If there is one thing more than another that I regret in my past life, it is that I did not decide that question of giving a tenth of my income when I was converted. I always gave, I supposed I was liberal; but I was uninstructed, and during my later years have often queried why it is that when the Lord has made a way for his children to walk, they take such pains to avoid it?"

Why, indeed? Why do we so often, who love the Lord, and try in our humble way to serve him, persist in stumbling along through the thickets on the border of his pleasant paths, or zig-zag in path and out until no one can tell whether we are trying to keep in the way or not. Hundreds and thousands of instances might be found, where individuals have been blessed by following this plan of giving a tenth, as was the one we have in mind.

Ruth Barlow was converted when she was a young maiden in her teens, just setting out as a teacher in the common district schools. Her family was poor, but of her earnings she conscientiously set apart a tenth to the Lord's work. That she performed every other duty as faithfully, was well known to all with whom she came in contact.

One day a well-known home missionary came to the town, urging the needs of some particular branch of Christian work. Ruth met him by accident at the parsonage, and learning of his mission, put into his hands two silver dollars. He was surprised, for some of the wealthy people, upon whom he had called, had not given as much. He questioned her, and found out the plan upon which her offerings were based.

"It is the Lord's money and not mine, you see," she said. "I think he intends it to go for this cause, for he brought me most unexpectedly to the village to-night, and most unexpectedly detained me here until you came in."

The gentleman was impressed, and when sometime after a position of trust connected with the mission became vacant, and was placed at his disposal, he bethought him of the quiet, decided little country school-ma'am, and Ruth was sent for. It was a step in advance along the Lord's appointed way, and she accepted. She has gone on from one position of usefulness to another, until she now receives a much larger salary than she ever even aspired to earn.

She has never been paid a dollar that was not tithed—she often gives more, but that she considers another matter entirely, and she does not hesitate to say that all her success and usefulness are due to her settling that matter of the tenth, when the Lord accepted her as his child.

Charles Kingsley's Meditation.

Surely as the years pass on, they ought to make us better, more useful, more worthy. We may have been disappointed in our lofty ideas of what ought to have been done, but we may have gained more clear and practical notions of what can be done. We may have lost in enthusiasm and yet gained in earnestness. We may have lost in sensibility, yet gained in charity, activity and power. We may be able to do far less, and yet what we do may be far better done. And our very griefs and disappointments—have they been useless to us? Surely not. We shall have gained instead of lost by them if the Spirit of God has been working in us. Our sorrows will have wrought in us patience, our patience experience, and that experience hope—hope that he who has lead us thus far will lead us farther still, that he who has taught us in former days precious lessons—not only by sore temptations but most sacred joys—will teach us in the days to come, fresh lessons by temptations, which we shall be more able to endure; and by joys which, though unlike those of olden times, are no less sacred, but sent as lessons to our souls by Him from whom all good gifts come.

Out of God's boundless bosom, the fount of life, we came, through selfish, stormy youth, and contrite tears—just not too late, through manhood, not altogether useless; through slow and chill old age, we return, whence we came to the bosom of God once more—to go forth again, it may be, with fresh knowledge and fresh powers, to nobler work. Amen.

The First Telegram.

Professor Morse found it hard to get the bill for the first magnetic telegraph through Congress. He thought it had failed, for at the evening session of March 3rd, 1843, there were 119 bills before it, and it seemed impossible for all to be acted upon before Congress adjourned. The professor left the Capitol with a sad heart, and prepared to leave for New York.

While at breakfast a servant informed him that a young lady desired to see him in the parlor. There he met Miss Annie Ellsworth, then a young school girl—the daughter of his intimate friend, Hon. Henry L. Ellsworth, the first Commissioner of Patents—who said, as she extended her hand to him, "I have come to congratulate you."

"Upon what?" inquired the professor.

"Upon the passage of your bill," she replied.

"Impossible! Its fate was sealed at dusk last evening. You must be mistaken."

"Not at all," she responded. "Father sent me to tell you that your bill was passed. He remained until the session closed, and yours was passed just five minutes before the adjournment; and I am so glad to be the first one to tell you. Mother says, too, that you must come with me to breakfast."

The invitation was readily accepted, and the joy in the household was unbounded. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ellsworth had fully believed in the project, and the former, in his confidence in it, and in his warm friendship for Professor Morse, had spent all the closing hours of the session in the State chamber, doing what he could to help the bill along, and giving it all the influence of his high personal and official position.

Grasping the hand of his young friend, the professor thanked her again and again for bearing him such pleasant tidings, and assured her that she could send the first message as her reward. The matter was talked over in the family, and Mrs Ellsworth suggested a message, which Professor Morse referred to the daughter for approval; and this was the one that was subsequently sent.

A little more than a year after that time, the line between Washington and Baltimore was completed. Professor Morse was in the former city, and Mr. Vail, his assistant, in the latter; the first in the chamber of the Supreme Court, the last in the Mount Clare depot, when, the circuit being perfect, Professor Morse sent to Miss Ellsworth for her message and it came.

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