

## **A Question Addressed To The Pastor**

(Below is a Question addressed to the Pastor, and his long and practical reply. 1908 Convention Report, December. Nashville, Tennessee. Page 55.)

Question No. 6: Do the Scriptures teach that the Church must finish its course before they begin to fight as soldiers, or are we not to fight while we are running the race to the end, so we may finish with joy?

Answer:—There are different Scriptures which seem to present different thoughts to our mind. The subject has many sides. Just the same as if we were to take a picture of this building. We would say, What does that Auditorium at Nashville look like? One picture would be from here, and it would take in the Confederate Gallery; another from there, and another from here. They would be different pictures, but all would be pictures of the Auditorium. Then you go out and take a front view, and then to the side and take a side view, and to the rear and take a rear view.

So the Lord and the Apostles have given us—God has given us by His Holy Spirit through these various channels—various pictures of truth, and of our experiences in life. One of them represents us as running the race. Now you have got to run for something. You do not keep on running forever and then just die the very moment you have gotten to the end of the race. While it is true the Scriptures do set forth in some places that we keep running, and our Christian race in some respects is like a race course all the time, in that we must never stop in our endeavor to do right, there is another picture, which seems to be a very proper one, that we run for a mark. Suppose that table is the mark. What do you mean by the mark? Why it is a mark in the sense of being something that we must reach. I run for that mark. I stop here, halfway to the table; suppose I never went farther than this; I never reach the mark at all. Now there are a good many people I think never reach the mark at all. It is important for us to see what the mark is, so that when we run we may run wisely and not merely as beating the air. It is not how much effort you can put forth, but you want to do it for a purpose; there is something to be gained; there is something to be grasped. The person running aimlessly is like the person running around some road. “Where are you going?” “I don’t know.” He could not run very long that way with energy, but if he knew he was to take a certain course, and wanted to get back to a certain starting point which was fixed, and wanted to see how many minutes he could do it in, then he has an object in view, a motive in mind, and he can run better. So God sets before us a certain mark, and we are to run to that mark.

Now when we have gotten to the mark, what do we do? Why, having done all, stand—stand at the mark; do not run away from it. Is it going to be hard to stay there? Yes. There will be a good deal of endeavor to put you away from the mark after you get there. The Adversary will try harder to put you away from the mark than he did in preventing

you from getting to it. There is an intense fight coming after you get to the mark. There is a certain amount of shielding done before you get to the mark, but after you get to the mark, that is where you have your severest test.

Another picture is, “Put on the whole armor of God.” Where do you get the armor? God’s Word. You put on this armor—put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand. Now while I am putting on the armor, the Lord grants me a measure of grace and protection that I shall not be assailed before I have had time to put it on; He gives me a reasonable time in which to put it on. He will not allow me to be attacked beyond that I am able to bear; so I have a certain measure of time in which to put it on. Now I have on the armor—and what? Now fight. You say, where is the mark for which we run? Why this, dear friends—there is a certain mark of character which God will accept, and nothing short of that character, and if you do not have that character you can never be in the kingdom. It is not just anything that God is going to take into the kingdom; He has set a certain standard and made it favorable for you and me to reach that standard; He has promised every assistance, but He expects you and I will manifest interest and strive and labor that we may get to that standard.

What standard is set before us? How little will do? No, that is not the thought. We ought to have the desire of doing all that we can, and then more; never be satisfied with our attainments. But you can readily see that there is one standard you cannot be short of and get into the kingdom, because God has determined this. You remember that positive statement of the Apostle Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans that, “God has predestinated”—that is a strong word. What did God predestinate? That all of those who will be in the little flock must be copies of His Son; if they are not copies of His Son, they cannot be in the kingdom. That mark, you see, is a copy of God’s dear Son. Until you are at that mark of being a copy of God’s dear Son, God’s predestination is that you cannot be of the elect; and if you do reach there and maintain that stand that you may be one. Now the mark is a very important thing, is it not?

In our hazy way of reading the Bible at one time we did not see the mark or anything else; it was a kind of blind way of doing. We did not know what God had said. We had not paid enough attention to what God had said. We had read the catechism and were confused. Now we have come to a time where we will see what God says in His Word, and He gives us Christ as a pattern, and as an example. Do you mean to say that we must all be like Christ? Yes, we must all be like Christ. But Christ was perfect; must we all be perfect? I did not say like Christ according to the flesh, my dear brother I did not say in what way like Christ, but this is the way: Our Lord Jesus was perfect, and you are imperfect, and I am imperfect; we can never be like Christ in the flesh; but that is not the way in which the Lord is testing us. He says, Ye are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you. He is not judging you according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. What about our flesh? Why your flesh is reckoned justified,

the merit of Christ has been appropriated to you according to the flesh, covering all those blemishes and conditions; as between Christ and perfection in the flesh and your imperfection in the flesh, the merit of His sacrifice is imputed to you and to me to cover these blemishes. Don't you see then that reckonedly your flesh is perfected, while actually your flesh is imperfect?

But now then the object of God reckoning us perfect is that we may present ourselves living sacrifices. According to the divine will no sacrifice might come to the Lord's altar except it was without spot and without blemish. Our Lord Jesus was the Lamb of God without spot and without blemish, and He was the acceptable One. You and I have spots and blemishes according to the flesh, and the Lord says you cannot come to the altar with those. What must we do? We must get rid of them. How? They must all be covered. What will cover them for us? The merit of Christ's sacrifice, imputed and applied by faith. This covers all those blemishes. Why, Bro. Russell, are we acceptable to God's altar after that? That is exactly the point, dear brethren. That is what the Apostle says: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God [He having forgiven your sins, and provided this covering for you] that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service." Holy? Yes, holy. What have we done to make us holy? Christ did the thing which makes you holy. The word "holy" means "whole or complete." Christ's imputed righteousness makes us reckonedly whole, complete from sin, and from blemish. So then, according to the flesh you are no more, says the Apostle, but you are in the spirit, you have ceased to be from a human standpoint, you sacrificed that humanity as your reasonable service to the Lord; you count yourself henceforth as a new creature, begotten through the Holy Spirit. Now this newly begotten new creature in Christ Jesus, a member of the body of Christ, you see, is a different person from the old, and so the Apostle from this standpoint could speak of himself as the old "I" and the new "I." He says, I and yet he says, not I. Here is the old and the new. Here is the new Paul and the old Paul. The old Paul, according to the flesh, is reckoned dead; the new Paul, according to the spirit, is reckoned alive. So then, this is our glorious position that we as new creatures may offer our sacrifice, and as new creatures are acceptable to the Lord, and may fight the good fight and may win the victory, the Lord helping us all the way through.

But as new creatures we must get to this stand, we must not stop; as new creatures, God tells us there is a mark, a copy of God's dear Son. Are you up to the mark? Oh, says someone, I never expect to be up to the mark until my dying moment. What makes you think you will be any nearer the mark at your dying moment than the day before? There is no reason whatever. You see, this mark is a mark of character, and you and I ought to get to that place in character. How do you mean? In this way: What was the character of Christ? In what way did He offer a sacrifice? In this way: Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God. Thy law is written in my heart. That is the standpoint—full consecration to the Father's will, nothing short of it. And must

you and I come to that? Yes. Well, what is the Father's will? The Father's will is that we should conform, according to the heart, not according to the flesh necessarily, but the best you can do according to the spirit. According to the heart you must keep His will, and His will is, that thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy being, and with all thy strength.

Can we come to that? I think so. The Lord says so. We can in our minds. With my mind I serve the law of God, says the Apostle, and with my flesh, to some extent I serve the law of sin; but the flesh is reckoned as dead and the Lord is not judging according to the flesh. If we have the mind of Christ we will do the best of our ability in the flesh, endeavoring to keep it under in harmony with the Lord's will. But we are not being judged according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, according to the mind, according to the new creature. So here we have it, dear friends: With my mind I serve the law of God—all your heart, all your mind, all your being, and all your strength. If so, you are at the mark.

Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Yes, you say, I love everybody and like to do good to everybody, and glad of it. Then you have really come to love the brethren? Yes. And you love God? Yes, and you love all mankind? Yes. Don't want to do harm to anybody? No. You don't want to do any wrong or see any wrong? You love them and would like to see good done to them. Yes. Well, I guess you must be at the mark.

That is what the Lord puts as the mark. That is what Christ did. He loved the world and gave Himself for it. He loved the Father and laid down His life to do the Father's will. He loved the disciples; thus having loved His own, He loved them to the end. So that must be our spirit, and as soon as you get there, so that you love everybody, and love your enemies, you are at the mark. It is harder to love your enemies, but you must love your enemies; the Lord said so: "Do good to them that despitefully use you."

If you have not reached the point of loving your enemies, you are not at the mark of the prize, because none having a less standard can be of the elect class at all. They must be copies of God's dear Son, and that is the copy; that is the mark. If you have not gotten there, run and get there as quickly as you can. Let everything else go in life and get to that point. Someone may say, there is just one person that I cannot love; he is an enemy, and he has spoken such and such a thing. Never mind what he said or did; you are not living for yourself, are you? You are living for the Lord. Now the Lord says, Put away all that evil, and envy, and everything else that is wrong in your heart, and get your heart to that condition where you will love them, and would like to do good to them. That is getting to the mark.

After getting there, then what shall you do? Then stand. Why, that is nothing to stand there, that is easy enough. But wait a little while; stand there a little while and see. You

will find that the Adversary will get at you in various ways, and the Lord will allow him to get at you in various ways. He will do various things to make you do otherwise than love your enemies, and love the Lord and love the brethren, and the world. He will do everything he can to turn your mind from the glorious standard of Christ. You will be assaulted in a thousand ways, more than you were on the way to the mark, because on the way the Lord protected you and said, I will not permit you to be tempted more than you are able; but when you get up to the mark you were able to stand. Then I will allow you to be tempted as much more as you are able. He knows how much you are able, and He wants to test you as much as you are able because all of those who will be of that elect, glorified class must be thoroughly tested and proved, and it must be demonstrated that they have loyalty to God and to the brethren, and love in all of these high and noble respects.