Great Pulpit Masters
Volume VII

A. J. Gordon

Introduction by
Nathan R. Wood

New York
Fleming H. Revell Company
London and Glasgow
Now we have often noticed that just as the legalist represents the doctrine that good works can have no part in effecting our forgiveness, so the evangelical recoils from the idea that they can constitute any ground for our recompense. On the contrary, we have the feeling that such requital of faithful service and obedience is absolutely necessary to satisfy our instinctive sense of justice. We cannot think of a final divine reckoning which will assign the same rank in glory and the same degree of joy to the lazy and indolent and unfruitful Christian which are accorded to the ardent and devoted and self-denying Christian. We cannot doubt that God who can show Himself just and yet justify the ungodly through his faith will at last show Himself equally just in rewarding the godly for his works.

A.J.G.

9. GRACE AND REWARD

Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.—Isaiah 45:22. Look to yourselves . . . that ye receive a full reward.—2 John 8, r.v.

No subject seems to be so little understood as that of divine rewards. If the Romanist has exalted merit to the utter exclusion of grace, the Protestant may be in danger of exalting grace to the utter exclusion of merit. Not that the latter has anything to do with our pardon and acceptance. As sinners standing before the mercy seat, "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and therefore all must be saved on the same terms, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23,24). As saints standing before the judgment seat, there will be a difference, since believers are to "be judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20:13). Christ's work for us is the sole ground of our forgiveness; Christ's work in us will be the ground of our reward: the one is a finished work to which we can add nothing by our merit or obedience; the other is a progressive work, depending on our fidelity and consecration, whether it shall at last be crowned with the Master's "well done." It is evident, therefore, that rewards have a very important place in the scheme of redemption,
and it is not necessary, in order to magnify the grace of God, that, having reduced all men to the same level of unworthiness, we should fix them there forever. What is our Lord's promise to His faithful ones about being “recompensed at the resurrection of the just”? What means the prophet's declaration concerning such as turn many to righteousness that they “shall shine as the stars forever and ever”? But it is written, “For as one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead.”

As certainly as there is no difference between men before the cross, so certainly there will be a difference between them in the resurrection. Observe how clearly these two facts are contrasted in the Gospel, grace depending solely on the outward work of Christ on the cross, and reward on the inward work of obedience through the Spirit in our hearts. Hence these two looks enjoined in Scripture:

Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth (Isaiah 45:22).

Look to yourselves . . . that we receive a full reward (2 John 8, R.V.).

Now, we have often noticed that just as the legalist resents the doctrine that good works can have no part in effecting our forgiveness, so the evangelical recoils from the idea that they can constitute any ground for our recompense. On the contrary, we have the feeling that such requital of faithful service and obedience is absolutely necessary to satisfy our instinctive sense of justice. We cannot think of a final divine reckoning which will assign the same rank in glory and the same degree of joy to the lazy and indolent and unfruitful Christian which are accorded to the ardent and devoted and self-denying Christian. We cannot doubt that God who can show Himself just and yet justify the ungodly through his faith, will at last show Himself equally just in rewarding the godly for his works. Else why lighten our possessions here except to add to our eternal weight of glory yonder? Why accept of poverty now except to acquire “the riches of the glory of his inheritance” hereafter?

As a matter of fact, when we open the Scriptures we find the discrimination between grace and reward to be clear and unvarying. Without money and without price we are saved; with a great price must we obtain our heavenly recompense. Search the Scriptures diligently and see how clearly this is revealed:

For by grace are ye saved through faith, not of works lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Romans 4:5).

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).

Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be (Revelation 22:12).

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels and then he shall reward every man according to his works (Matthew 16:27).

Who will render to every man according to his deeds (Romans 2:6).

But let it be borne in mind that while the supreme and final reward of the Christian is at the coming of Christ, the Lord has promised much even in the life that now is. The record runs, “manifold more in this present time, and in the age to come life everlasting” (Luke 18:30). The age to come is the millennial age, to be ushered in by the second
advent of Christ, at which time the full reward will be meted out for losses and trials and hardships endured for Him in this age. All the crowns of the faithful are reserved unto that period, the crown of life, the crown of joy, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory all are assigned by the promise to the time of Christ’s return.* Let us settle this in our minds. The present is the age of cross-bearing, wherein we are to fill up that which is behind in the sufferings of Christ; the next is the age of crown-wearing, wherein we shall fill up that which is behind in the rejoicing of Christ. For as His sufferings can never be complete while He is still afflicted in His members, neither can His joy be full until His Bride the church is with Him, beholding the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

Now, no human biography can give us any light concerning the rewards of that age of glory. But the recompense of the just in this world, the “hundred fold now in this time, with persecutions,” is wonderfully illustrated in the history of Christ’s faithful servants. And to enforce this promise we shall turn to the story of several saintly lives and let them tell us how much of blessed requital, even now, the Lord bestows on those who choose to suffer with Him.

It has often seemed as though God takes care to reward His faithful servants most richly at the very points where they have suffered and sacrificed most for Him. As the clay is fashioned to the mold, so His bounty is shaped to our privations, His fulness to our self-emptying. His gift of Himself to our surrender of self for His sake. Indeed, is not this the substance of what He promises in that saying of His, “He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it”?  

* 1 Thess. 2:19, 2 Tim. 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4, Rev. 2:20.
denied and sorrowing began to crowd upon him from every
direction, to crave his spiritual ministrations. Mark it well,
oh, popular preacher, compassing all art and originality in
order to draw people! Here was one who had no thought
of drawing anybody, his heart being set only on the one end
of becoming holy unto the Lord, and perfectly doing His
will. Indeed, while pursuing his humble calling as a ribbon
maker, how little he anticipated being a preacher at all.
But, like his Master, for whom he lived supremely, "he
could not be hid." The people thronged upon him. He
tried to withdraw from them, but so much the more they
pressed about him. Before he had risen in the morning,
fifty or sixty would gather at his lodgings to hear the word
of life from his lips; while state-church clergymen were
jealous of his irregular ministry, and complaining of him
to the magistrates, he was yielding to the importunity of
hungry souls, and consenting to preach; and such crowds
gathered that they not only filled every part of the house,
but climbed on ladders about the windows in their eager-
ness to catch his words. One totally unknown to him comes
two hundred miles on foot and in bad weather, that he may
hear the words of this blessed man. But Tersteegen, meantime,
is strangely amazed at it all, since his discourse is so
plain and unstudied. "I cannot think what the people seek
from such a poor creature," he exclaims. Yet the secret is
clear to us who read his life today. Give thyself wholly to
Christ, and Christ will give Himself wholly to thee, all the
infinite wealth of His temporal and spiritual favor freely
bestowed. "Jesus alone is sufficient," he wrote, "yet insuf-
cient when He is not wholly and solely embraced." True
without question is the saying, and equally true that those
who wholly embrace Him shall have "all-sufficiency in all
things, and abound unto every good work." Think of this

man, once shunned and derided as a fanatic, now pressed
upon by such eager crowds of anxious souls that he can
hardly find time to eat or sleep; once lying alone in an attic,
burning up with fever, and so poor and neglected that from
morning till night no one brought him even a cup of water,
now made the recipient of such sumptuous legacies from
friends whom he had never seen, and from spiritual kins-
men in foreign lands, that he feels obliged to decline them.
How was he enriched unto all bountifulness, temporal and
spiritual, even as he heartily and without reserve embraced
what he calls "the mystery of the inward and the outward
cross?" Can we wonder that he should have given this as
his estimate of life?

Methinks it would be an inexpressible consolation to me, if
in my dying hour, and when I shall have to appear in the
presence of God, I could proclaim to all the world that God
alone is the fountain of life, and that there is no other way to
find and enjoy Him than the narrow way of inward prayer,
self-denial, and a life hid with Christ in God, opened out to
us and consecrated by the death of the Saviour.

An unconscious, far-reaching spiritual attractiveness was
the special reward of self-denial which he reaped. It is an
honorable ambition to crave the power of drawing men if
we are intent only on bringing them to Christ. But let us
remember that the true center of gravitation is the cross.
"If I be lifted up will draw all men unto me." Whether
by word or by example, whether by the preaching in which
Jesus Christ is "evidently set forth crucified," or by the life
in which His cross and obedience unto death shine out
conspicuously, this is the strongest attraction. Oh to learn
this lesson well, that through our self-renunciation, God's
drawing power is most effectively brought to bear on hu-
GRACE AND REWARD

man souls. Gerhard Tersteegen carried his renunciation so far as to be willing to forego the joy of divine communion if it must be. In seasons of spiritual abandonment and barrenness, he advised that we neither turn to the world for comfort nor persist in begging of God that comfort which He, for the time, is pleased to withhold. He says:

Before the day of Pentecost arrived, the disciples could not hold out long in solitude without the bodily and visible presence of Jesus. "I go afishing," said Peter. Time appeared long to them in solitude; and such is the case with us. We go, as it were, afishing, in a book, in company with others, etc.; and it is a favor if, having caught nothing during the night, the Saviour meets us and shows us as He did the disciples, the fruitlessness of all such attempts. I testify with fear, shame, and deep acknowledgement of the divine long-suffering and goodness, what my own experience has taught me in this respect, that the exercise of prayer is of so much importance, and that in seasons of inward darkness and barrenness we fall into the temptation so easily. But, on the other hand, when we cannot proceed with the exercise of prayer in the customary manner, we ought not to hold fast with firm efforts and self-will, what the Lord pleases to take from us; but humble ourselves, quietly consent to our nakedness and poverty, sacrifice our relish, light, and pleasure, to his good pleasure, and make the latter our prayer and our food; we should thus find, in time, the advantage of letting go of ourselves, of privation, and the loss of self, so to speak, and be made capable of a more profound, or rather of a purer retirement, made of prayer, and union with God, which is the very object the Lord has in view.*

What a depth of self-abnegation is here reached! To accept the cross of withheld communion, the self-denial of the divine favor, for the sake of the deeper humiliation and chastening—this is to go far beyond the common bounds of obedience. And we cannot wonder that the recompense attending it so far transcended the ordinary limits, so that from sharing his Master’s trial of being despised and rejected of men, he shared also his Master’s glory, and unto him was the gathering of the people.

We are speaking thus far of the present return which the Lord makes for faithful service. Sometimes this comes after the death of the servant of God; it is in the time that now is, but after the departure of him who has earned it. This seems to be the promise in the beatitude of the faithful dead given in the Apocalypse: “For they rest from their labors and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13). Their hands have ceased from toil and their tongue is silent; but because their labor was so truly in the Lord it continues in perpetual increase and blessing on the earth. They did not live to behold the fruit of their service; but the generations following see it and praise their memory.

Let us stand for a moment at the grave of one of these blessed ones who died in the Lord. It is in St. Mary’s chancel in Taunton, England. We stoop down and read the inscription, “Here lies Master Joseph Alleine of Taunton—a sacrifice to God and to you,” and our thoughts run back to that November day in 1668 when this grave was closed. There stands the widowed Theodosia, the partner of his sorrows, and the mourner for his early death. Beside her is the aged George Newton, his beloved brother and companion in tribulation, and close by John Howe with a weeping train who have come over from a neighboring parish to look for the last time upon the face of this endeared servant of Christ.* What thoughts must fill their minds as they try

to justify the ways of God to men! This faithful minister, so gifted by nature, so unreservedly devoted to God, brought to his grave at the age of thirty-five, utterly broken by long imprisonment and heartless persecution, his candle put out when darkness is covering the land, and gross darkness the people, and he such a burning and shining light—how could the Lord permit it? If such thoughts arise in the heart of the widowed one, let her turn back to that beautiful letter written to her in the early days of their espousal. Did Joseph Alleine have a presentiment of the sorrowful future that lay before them? Did the shadows of Ilchester prison already stretch across his path? It would almost seem so. But let us read from the letter:

None ever was, or ever shall be a loser by Jesus Christ. Many have lost much for Him, but never did, never shall any lose by Him. Take this for a certainty, whatsoever probabilities of outward comforts we leave, whatsoever outward advantages we balk, that we may glorify Him in our services, and enjoy Him in His ordinances more than others where we could, we shall receive an hundred-fold in this life. ’Tis a sad thing to see how little Christ is trusted or believed in the world; men will trust Him no farther than they can see Him, and will leave no work for faith. Hath He not a thousand ways, both outward and inward, to make up a little outward disadvantage to us? What doth our faith serve for? Have any ventured themselves upon Him in His way but He made good every word of the promise to them? Let us therefore exercise our faith, and stay ourselves upon the promise, and see if ever we are ashamed of our hope.

What is wanting in the means God will make up in the blessing. This I take for a certain truth, while a man commits himself and his affairs to God, and is in a way that God put him into: now, if a man have but a little income, if he have a great blessing, that’s enough to make it up. We must not account mercies by the bulk. What if another have a pound to my ounce? If mine be gold for his silver, I will never change with him. As ’tis not bread that keeps men alive, but the word of blessing that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, so ’tis not the largeness of the means, but the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich. Oh! if men did but believe this they would not grasp as much of the world as they do. Well, let others take their course, and we will take ours, to wait upon God by faith and prayer, and rest in His promise; and I am confident that is the way to be provided for.

All this was truly prophetic: “Hath he not a thousand ways, both outward and inward, to make up a little outward disadvantage to us?” We shall see what some of these ways were in his case. But let us first glance for a moment at the man. Such a life of prayer he lived that he carried the very atmosphere of heaven about with him. Neither prison damps nor the corrupt manners of his age could vitiate this atmosphere. “All his garments smelled of myrrh and aloes and cassia,” as one who daily walked with God in Paradise. “At the time of his health,” writes his beloved wife, “he did rise constantly at or before four of the clock; and would be much troubled if he heard smiths or other craftsmen at their trades before he was at communion with God, saying to me often, ‘How this noise shames me! Doth not my Master deserve more than theirs?’ From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation and singing of psalms, in which he much delighted and did daily practice alone or with his family.” Here are laid bare the sources of that cheerful heavenly-mindedness which so powerfully impressed those with whom he came in contact. And his preaching was perfectly mated to his praying. “He was in-
finitely and insatiably greedy for the conversion of souls, wherein he had no small success in the time of his ministry; and to this end he poured out his very heart in prayer and in preaching: he imparted not the Gospel only, but his own soul. His supplications and his exhortations many times were so affectionate, so full of holy zeal, life, and vigor, that they quite overcame his hearers; he melted over them so that he thawed and mollified, and sometimes dissolved the hardest hearts.”

All the story of his imprisonment for conscience’ sake, his trial of cruel mockings and revilings, all the ungodly deeds which the ungodly committed against him, and all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners spoke against him—these things we must pass over. Only let us know of his patient endurance, of his unrelating silence under misrepresentation, and yet of his stern refusal to be silent anywhere and at any time when he could preach the Gospel to perishing souls; only let us hear what was his joy and hope and unfailing consolation amid all his trials. Here is a brief passage from one of his letters:

Verily, sir, it is but a little while that prisons shall hold us. Surely He is gone to prepare a place for us; and He will come again to receive us to Himself, that where He is we may be also. And what have we to do but to believe, and wait and love, and long, and look for His coming, in which is all our hope? ’Twill be time enough for us to be preferred then. We know beforehand who shall then be uppermost.*

* It is good to hear such a true note struck concerning the Christian’s hope and reward. No talk of that sentimental heaven fitted up with modern improvements which is so popular in our times. In another place, speaking of the death of his father, he says: “But I bless the Lord, I do believe and expect the return of the Redeemer with all His saints, and the most glorious resurrection of my own dead body with all believers; and this makes me rest in hope, and fills me with unspeakably more joy than the death of myself or any other saint can with grief.”
tion, and a revival resulting therefrom which swept over a whole region with its transforming power. Oh, wise and trusting servant of God, serenely suffering in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, and enduring "as seeing him that is invisible," how true thy words, "Hath he not a thousand ways, both outward and inward, to make up a little outward disadvantage to us?" He who loved the preaching of the Gospel and the saving of souls better than his own life wrought, by this work, even more mightily after his death than by his oral teaching in his life.

God is not limited to present times and circumstances in giving His servants the reward of their labor. The shutting of one pulpit may be but the opening of a wide and effectual door into another. Edwards in New England, Spener in Germany, Monod in France, were each thrust out of his church and their places of testimony closed against them because they moved for a purer faith and a higher style of Christian living than that prevailing about them. But no smallest loss of influence or usefulness was thereby incurred.

And then there is the inner joy, the testimony of a good conscience in the breast of those who have been faithful unto death in their witness for Christ. Here is a spiritual revenue, over and above all others. "God pays, but not always at the end of the week," says an oft-quoted proverb, and, we may add, nor always in the same currency. By a divine exchange He often settles temporal losses with spiritual coin, a coin which bears only the image and superscription of Christ, and therefore has no value in the world’s markets, but which is of inestimable worth to such as have spiritual discernment. How endless the illustrations of this inward spiritual requital if we had space to consider them. Here is the patience and faith of the saints—the balm of the Spirit healing the wounds of the sword, the reality of heavenly citizenship assuaging all the pains and privations of earthly exile.

We need not wonder if Zinzendorf, who exclaims from a glowing heart, "I have one passion; it is He, He alone," should soon find himself the object of bitter contempt in a world whose one passion is self and self alone. But what matters it? "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house, by which he condemned the world." A holy choice of God and life eternal as our supreme good will cast an inevitable reflection upon such mind earthly things. But the portion of such is with the Lord and in the communion that lifts us into His presence. Slander and detraction followed Zinzendorf as dark shadows follow a brilliant light. He who had renounced earthly citizenship, owning that "that place is our proper home where we have the greatest opportunity of laboring for our Saviour," found his residence for years in exile. But in the midst of it all he could say, "I would rather be despised and hated for the sake of Jesus than be beloved for my own sake." Weighed down with labor, and often bearing the heavy cross of obloquy, he could yet exclaim concerning a journey, "All the way I swam in peace and joy in the Lord."

Thrice blessed are they who have such a portion. "And your joy no man taketh from you," says the Saviour. Let God’s servants be incited by these brief glimpses of suffering and victorious lives to choose this divine inheritance. "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself."