

*PERSONALITY AND GRACE.*

## XII. THE WILL OF GOD.

FOR two causes the deepest moral needs of the moral personality cannot be met by any moral law. Whether the law be formulated as a decalogue or be the momentary imperative of conscience, the result is the same. First, the attention of the moral personality is directed to itself, and, second, it is made to judge itself by a negative standard. To understand the failure of all moral law to turn our attention from ourselves and to provide a positive and inspiring ideal, is to realise that righteousness cannot be by the law, and that, not as an antiquated theological notion, but as an urgent and ever present practical situation.

First, action on a moral law necessarily directs attention to our moral personality, nor can any kind of moral imperative set us free from that dangerous moral attitude. This arises from the necessity of the case. A moral law is the law of our moral personality. It exists precisely because the moral personality is an end and may not be treated merely as a means. We ought to do right purely out of reverence for what we ought to be. Nevertheless, it is not moral to live under the idea of ourselves as a moral end and to make even our moral good the object of our striving. Of that difficulty no merely ethical theory ever disposes. Moreover, the difficulty is practical as well as theoretical. Mere moral effort always leaves us in the end with our eyes directed to ourselves in self-satisfaction at our virtue, yet creates along with that a distressing consciousness that our eye should be on our duty in forgetfulness of the whole question of our merit or our perfection. Only that conflicting state prevents a consciously moral person from being

self-righteous, and, as it is an unhappy state to cherish, the protection is of the slenderest.

Second, no moral law can ever set up anything more than a negative moral ideal. From that fact indeed the danger of being a consciously moral person chiefly arises. Complacency due to the contemplation of our merit could not exist, were it not measured by a negative standard. Self-righteousness can only be fed by thinking of the things we have not done.

Here lies the deepest moral failure of mere morality. It can be put on as blinkers to make us walk in our narrow beaten round, with the whole vast horizon of life's possibilities hidden from our eyes. It is enough that we do not actively commit transgression, and we fail to recognise that the supreme sin is to be deaf to life's calls and blind to its opportunities. We recognise no suffering which does not cry in our ears, we see no duty which does not point along the accepted, formulated track. A dull and prudent common-sense, so long as it finds in us neither self-indulgence nor sophistry, may approve, but we see no visions and dream no dreams of life's real possibilities.

But the spirit, like a harp with many strings, ought to respond to life's many moods. Life is full of joy and sadness, tenderness and pathos, admiration and just anger. It can be ludicrous, and, to him who can see it, it hardly ever fails to be sublime. But string after string breaks as interest after interest dies. The saddest of all life's failures is to be left with one wailing note of peevish anxiety. From that any kind of moral purpose in life should save us. Yet, if the only note which drowns it is from the hard chord of formal conscientiousness, it also makes no divine music. The aspirations of the childlike soul are not heard in it, and it speaks to no heart of the beauty of goodness and the Divine joy of living. But the formulation of goodness is

nothing, and the beauty of goodness and the self-forgetfulness of childlike souls in the pursuit of it is everything.

A righteousness, therefore, which is by any law cannot escape being both negative and self-righteous, and so cannot enable the moral personality either to find itself or to lose itself in the right way.

The final triumph of grace and the final justification of its indirect method is to be seen in the way it delivers us from these difficulties in which a legal morality necessarily leaves us.

First, it deals with the danger of self-righteousness which springs from a morality which makes our own moral personality the standard of moral good, yet denies that it should be our moral object.

Once more grace becomes an antinomy, a thing of seeming opposites, which may be thus expressed. Grace is concerned altogether with the worth of the moral self, but its whole working is to direct attention from self to the will of God.

Grace is wholly occupied with the salvation of the moral personality. To deliver it from the sin which is its ruin and give it the holiness which is its health and peace are the end of all God's gracious dealings with us. Upon that view of grace all religious faith rests. Our Lord's whole teaching about the infinity of God's love means simply that God sets an infinite value on every moral personality, not that He will spare it any difficulty of the road by which it must attain. Because God would realise all its vast possibilities, He can be relied on to have a wise and gracious purpose even in life's most trivial events. Our Lord's teaching about the kingdom of God rests on the assurance that every moral personality means more to God than to itself. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of perfect blessedness in the perfect rule of love, where no soul can ever be the plaything of force, or be used merely as a means towards another end. God's rule is

precisely the rule of love in freedom. It is a kingdom no one ever enters except by realising his own true kingdom in its rule. Nor do we ever help another towards it by overriding even his evil will, but only by aiding him, through showing him the spirit of the kingdom, to discover for himself his own kingdom in it. Wherefore, if any one could be used as a mere means even for the kingdom of God, there would be no kingdom of God at all.

But the fact that our salvation is so exclusively God's aim does not mean that it should also be ours. Paul could desire to be anathema for his brethren's sake, so little did he consider his own salvation the end of his striving. We are to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness and leave all the rest to be added. Our salvation is precisely the thing which is most surely added, but for that reason it should no more be an object of anxiety than our clothes. Nay, to have our attention withdrawn from ourselves, even from absorption in the pulse of our spiritual health, is salvation, because we are saved in exact proportion as self loses its dominion and love rules.

The solution of all the apparent contradictions of grace is here. It is to be found in the nature of the righteousness of the kingdom of God. One word expresses it all. It is a righteousness of God.

What, then, is a righteousness of God? It has been taken to mean a righteousness God demands, a righteousness of larger moral requirements than any other. It is such a righteousness, as we should ever more fully realise, a righteousness beyond that of the scribes, beyond the austere human prescription, a righteousness not finite at all, but infinite. Yet if our own righteousness is a great deal more than we can fulfil, and there is nothing to help in the fulfilling, what gain could come to us by finding one larger still? On another interpretation, a righteousness of God is a

righteousness God gives. We have seen how in a new world, where love bears as well as forbears, it is also a righteousness God gives. But if we are already only too willing to appropriate any kind of righteousness which does not belong to us, how can that by itself help the moral personality in anything that truly belongs to itself? Both a righteousness God demands and a righteousness He grants might still be perfectly consistent with self-righteousness. To persuade ourselves that we are righteous, either because we have managed to satisfy God ourselves or because He has somehow managed to satisfy Himself, would still leave us ourselves as objects of self-complacency.

A righteousness of God is also a righteousness God looks after. It is a righteousness every discipline He appoints and every duty He demands are designed to forward. For it all things work together for good. Our whole life in all its most casual relationships, in all its most trivial happenings, in all its joy and all its sorrow, in the triumph of successful enterprise and the pain of broken endeavour, is one, infinitely varied, uninterrupted means of grace.

All real faith in God ought to teach us that no one can look after our righteousness except God. God's righteousness for us must be too far above our knowing to be our aim, and too wide-reaching in all its applications to be our task. It can only be God's work not ours, the object of His care not our own.

In that case, all ways of salvation by personally appointed discipline and still more by publicly arranged rule, by contract with ourselves or with others, spring from lack of faith to commit our salvation to Him alone who can know what it really is and who alone can appoint the right means for its advancement. Even when we make use of what we call the means of grace, it should not be with the direct object of forwarding our salvation. They are only means for en-

lightening us regarding the true means of grace which is life, and for enabling us to make a diviner use of it in humbler service. The public use of such means of interpreting and using life above all is not to be overlooked, because no one can understand God's meaning in life in isolation, but only in the fellowship of the saints; yet no use of them is in itself religion.

No room is left for us to act upon the idea of ourselves at all, not even upon the idea of ourselves as examples. However frequently that motive is urged in the name of religion, it is not a religious motive. True, we may not cause our brother to offend, but that should be done because it is our own task of loving service which it would not be anything but right for us to do on its own account, and not as a work of consciously shining example. Action for the mere purpose of example, moreover, is both morally futile and morally dangerous. It is futile, because, were its motive recognised, no one would be influenced, at least for good, and the externality and formality of the action very readily betray its source. Then it is dangerous because, seeing we must propose to ourselves as our object the figure we shall make in the action, we cannot help sunning ourselves in our own approval, which all the more certainly involves us in self-righteousness that we seem to be doing something more than the immediate requirement of our duty.

One object, and one object alone, remains for us. It is the will of God. Because it is the will of God for our salvation, our salvation ceases to be an object for our own wills. Our sole object ought to be that Will which by caring for our salvation proves itself the will of love. Just because our highest good is so secure in it, we can forget ourselves altogether and set before ourselves one sole question, What will God have us do? Then, and then only, the insistent problem of self-love and self-forgetfulness is solved for us, and our moral

personalities are saved in the only way they can be saved, by being delivered from self-regard.

It ought now, in the second place, to be possible to see how grace delivers us from the other danger of a legal morality—a narrow and negative ideal. By taking us away from all kinds of self-regard, even regard for our own salvation, it lays us open to every appeal of love. When God's love so encircles our whole personality that we shall never lack a heart to feel or a hand to succour, we shall never soften life's discipline or evade its duty.

The real misuse of life is to shut our ears to the calls of love, so that the most blessed trials cannot touch us and the holiest duties never rise above our horizon. Then we can live unscathed except by personal loss and uninspired except by negative ideals. Every one comes short who does not make it his supreme desire to hear what God the Lord will speak, and he has certainly not heard unless the claims of love upon his sympathy and service are becoming for him larger, more constant, more positive.

The limits of our moral imperatives all disappear. When love calls to us, we hear infinity. We shall never come to an end of what it appoints for us. And stranger still, we shall never wish to come to an end. Then we shall understand how small a mistake everything else, even vice and crime, may be, compared with shutting our ears to the only voice which can call us to the true feast of life and save us from missing all life's divine uses.

God's will of love is, as it always must be, love to others. God will not be served except through our fellows. But in that service truth grows clear and our practical difficulties are solved. "He that loveth his brother abideth in light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." To love our brother, however, is not a sentiment. It is a sense of what he means to himself and his heavenly Father. It is

never to look upon him as one of the masses, never to wish that he be wise only with our wisdom and ruled only by our conscience, but always to realise that he can be conscious of God's own reality, feel in his heart God's own ideal and have in his keeping the eternal choice of good. It means to reverence the moral personality simply because consciousness of truth, conscience of right and consecration of will are the true objects of esteem, though no robe of office adorn their possessor, no station set him on a pedestal, no wealth clothe him, no learning add to his merit. To love our brother is to see in him a dignity which ennobles the humblest toil, nay, to realise that working with the hands may bring men most directly face to face with life's realities—its plainest discipline, its simplest human relationship. Above all, it is to see that in any position humble toil is essential for the victory over life without which no moral personality is truly worthy of reverence.

That is the love to our brother whereby in the midst of all mental perplexity we continue to walk in the light, never failing to discern the real meaning and issues of life for all that concerns our true faith ; and also to have our true guidance, so that we are never the occasion of stumbling either to ourselves or to any one whom God has made our neighbour. What no might of reasoning, no practical ability, no foresight or precaution can do for us is made sure by this reverence for man as man.

Here we touch the ultimate thing in religion, and when we have a religion the truth of which can only be guarded by the scholar and the guidance of which must be in the hands of the ecclesiastic, we have manifestly missed the way. When our religion further becomes an appanage of the well-to-do, it is still more clearly no genuine religion deep based on reality, but has become a convention to hide from us reality and shelter us from its rude assaults. Only by showing that



the richest are poor without it and that with it the poorest are rich, can it prove that it succours the moral personality itself and is not merely another of its wrappings designed to hide the strange, disturbing, far-reaching fact that we stand each alone in the world yet united to God and man by consciousness of truth, conscience of right and choice of good, and that that relation to our own souls and the souls of others alone matters and in the end nothing else does.

Most clearly of all it is no religion of Jesus Christ. Perhaps no fact is more certain about His ministry than His repudiation of a religion which only the learned could practise, and only its professional representatives maintain, and His demand from the fisher-folk and the day-labourers of a better righteousness. We have already seen how He requires us to find Him in His brethren. To love our brother means, perhaps, first of all our Christian brother, but it means reverencing him under all conditions. Only then is it the assurance of walking in the light and being a cause of offence to none because in him we love Christ under all conditions. And more still is required of us than to esteem good men in independence of their trappings, for to love Christ is to be enabled to reverence man as man, man as God yearns over him and has hope of him in his worst estate.

Grace, we have said, does not work with love directly at all, yet its purpose is to bring us to that love which being in utter accord with God's will is the only perfect fulfilment of the law. The value of Jesus Christ for that final and adequate response to God's gracious relationship to us is seldom denied, but it is too frequently made of no effect by being united in a quite external way to His example. In Him the whole appeal of love can touch us. To-day, as in the past, no one comes near Him without having new depths of sympathy and humility stirred so that he cannot shun life's real suffering and service. It is thereupon concluded that

the practical problems of life can all be solved by asking the simple question, What would Jesus do ?

But in that external way His example might only be another formal substitute for our own insight. The failure of the method appears in the very fact that it is only employed for immense problems and striking situations. But the most amazing thing in our Lord's life is the way the greatest issues arose out of meeting ordinary people in every-day circumstances. What He said and did followed quite naturally from understanding people's needs and from seeing the possibilities of their situations. Though He never said or did anything except what every one should have said and done in the circumstances, even in the same circumstances the exactest imitation would be lifeless, unedifying mimicry. Everything He said and did sprang immediately from the amazing insight which was just perfect love, so that if we could echo it to the letter, the soul of it would still be wanting.

What we say and do should also follow from our own insight. As Christ's understanding of God's love was the fulfilment of His law, so our understanding of it should be the fulfilment of ours. The influence, therefore, of His example is not directly to be our pattern, but to succour the faith which sees love to be life's final meaning and power, and so to enable us to discern its illumination and guidance for our lives. Thus even with Jesus Christ we can only be religiously dependent through moral independence. He is not an external authority. On the contrary, His unique religious position is His immediate relevancy to our moral independence.

To depend on Jesus as an external authority for the will of God is not a right conclusion, as is so often argued, from the belief that He is pre-eminently the Word of God. On the contrary, to remain merely an authority would mark His failure to establish the true relation of God's children to

their Father. The very reason for the belief that God was in Him perfectly, that the Spirit was not given by measure to Him, is precisely that we find in Him our true liberty. Did He rule from without, He would immediately fall into the rank of mere human teachers whose authority fades as they vanish into the past. He lives eternally in the present precisely because God's will of love is so perfectly manifested in Him that it needs no appeal except to hearts willing to lay themselves open to be convinced. Wherefore, He never needs to ask from us faith in any truth except by showing us how to look at it that we may see it to be true, or obedience to any command except for the reason that, if we will face it in His spirit, we shall discern it to be our duty. Only what thus speaks to the image of God in us has any right to be called a word of God, and only what speaks to the image of God alone and has no need of extraneous aid, has any right to be thought His absolute Word.

But, it may be asked, is not all this humility of appeal altered by the resurrection? He who humbled Himself was exalted. From that point He rules not in meekness but in power. His symbol is the Son of Man coming with great glory on the clouds of Heaven. And no doubt the resurrection does mean, and the joyous spirit of His followers shows that it was taken to mean, that all power was given to Him in heaven and earth. But it does not mean what it is so often taken to mean, that the method of force was substituted for the method of love, that after a short and fruitless attempt at saving men by service and sacrifice, God will again use domination and compulsion; that, if He cannot persuade our moral personality, He will override it; that, if He cannot have sons, He will not fail to have subjects. Not merely in theory but in men's practical relation to Christianity that is constantly the unchristian interpretation of the resurrection.

But if the expectation of the kingdom of God was simply

the expectation of a perfect rule of love, a rule of blessedness in holiness, why did the belief in the resurrection so quickly fall in with it and so speedily take its place ?

In one of his early speeches Peter gives us the answer. The significance of the resurrection, he says, is that it shows Jesus to be a man approved of God. His method of suffering and sacrifice is proved to be the way of power. The same thought we have in Paul's words. Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power, according to a spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. God, that is, does not substitute force for love, but shows His power behind love. Thus the hope of the Kingdom of God and the resurrection of Jesus brought the same message, that the moral order of love is in the last, the Divine issue, the natural, the all-prevailing order.

To have found God in that way is to have found an order of love which is so entirely our succour that we need have no concern except to make it our service. That is the true practical harmony of morality and religion whereby we are enabled to be absolutely, not partially, dependent upon God in such a way as to be absolutely, not partially, independent in our own souls, so that we cannot have true piety without freedom or true freedom without piety. A saved soul is a soul wholly true to itself. But no one was ever true to himself through self-regard, the mother of all base compliances. He can only be true to himself through realising that God is his real world and love its supreme law. Then with his mind no more on himself but on God's will of love, he can stand on his own feet unbribable and undismayed.

In the last issue that independence is the sole proof of utter dependence upon God. There is no more religious than moral worth in any conviction which is not the result of our own faith, that is to say, which is not something we have veritably ourselves seen. Just as little is there either

religious or moral worth in any judgment of right which, to use Kant's phrase, is heteronomous, that is to say, other than the verdict of our own conscience. Nor is there religious or moral worth in a service which is less than the purpose of our own wills. No man can serve God, any more than he can be true to his own soul, with less than his own consciousness of truth, his own moral ideal, his own personal resolve and consecration.

A saved soul is a soul delivered from every tie which would hinder it from serving God. Wherefore, the idea of being saved in spite of ourselves is a contradiction in terms, even as the idea of being saved by ourselves. The tie that binds us is self and no man can deliver himself from it by aiming at its well-being either in time or eternity; but also no one can deliver himself from it except by finding himself in something which by saving his true self has a right to ask him to deny the self which opposes it. Our succour is God's will of love, and that, just because it is love, can only mean by ourselves, by our own truth, our own ideal, our own choice.

Grace is just the working of that will of love to enable us to find in God's will our will. Wherefore, it cannot override our moral personality, passing through it as a direct line of force, but must always encircle it with that curve which has its convex side of dependence and its concave side of independence, embracing us the more perfectly for maintaining that distance which is ever necessary in the fellowship of persons, because it enables us to find ourselves by denying the self that opposes its appeal, and to find our lives by losing them in its service.

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