

## GOD'S PURPOSE IN GIVING THE LAW

"That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." Psalm 78:7-8.

The story of Israel's waywardness and murmuring is graphically told in the seventy-eighth Psalm. Despite all that God had done for them and had been to them yet they kept not His Covenant and they refused to walk in His ways. They were a redeemed people, yet rebellious and full of murmuring and complaint because of the hardness of the way. Not only were they disobedient, but they despised the heavenly manna which He showered on them from on high. For their sin the wrath of God came down upon them, they repented and divine pardon was given. How wonderful is the story of His patience and His grace, and how He led them on safely, and finally brought them into the land of His mighty power.

In its original application this verse is simply a statement of God's purpose in giving the Law to Israel. The intention was that all future generations might remember what He had done, and be encouraged by the remembrance to hope in Him for the future; and, by both memory and hope, be impelled to the discharge of present duty.

This text tells us how the past, the present, and the future may be ennobled and blessed. In brief, it is by associating them all with God. There are two channels in which the Lord communicates consolation to His people. These are His Word and Providence. But we lose much comfort if we keep these separate. Diligent observation does many things for us.

1. It opens up the mystery of Providence.
2. It tends to increase a holy fear of God.
3. It enables us to discover the marvels of divine love.
4. It tends greatly to strengthen faith.
5. It is a great inducement to live closely with God.
6. It throws great light on the evil of sin.

In setting forth God's purpose in giving the Law to Israel, our text emphasizes three things: —

### I. Rightness of Intellect.

"Not forget the works of God." Grace cures bad memories. Those who soon forget the merciful works of the Lord have need of teaching; they need to learn how to cultivate the art of holy memory. I suppose that there are very few of the faculties of our nature which we more seldom try to regulate by Christian principles than that great power which we have of looking backwards. Did you ever stop to realize that you are responsible for what you remember, and for how you remember it, and that you are bound to train your memory for a religious purpose? All parts of our nature need God, and that is as true about our power of remembrance as it is about any other part of our being. The past is then ennobled and yields its most blessed fruits for us when we link it closely with the Lord, and see in it not only the play of our own faculties, but rather the fact that God has been regulating all that has come to us. The one thing which will consecrate and hallow memory, and deliver it from its errors and abuses, and raise it to its highest and noblest power, is that it should be in touch with God, and that the past should be regarded by each of us as it is, in deed and in truth, one long record of what God has done for us.

Most of us are old enough to have had a great many mysteries of our early days cleared up. "For all the way by which the Lord our God has led us these many years in the wilderness" let us try to be thankful, including in our praises the darkness and the storm as well as the light and the calm. Some of us are like people who, when they recover from an illness, begrudge the doctor's bill. We forget the mercies as soon as they have passed, and do not consider whose love it was that they spoke of to us. Bring all your joys and your sorrows in your thanksgivings, and "forget not the works of God."

Such a habit of cultivating the remembrance of God's hand, moving in all our past, will not interfere with lower and yet precious exercises of that same faculty. We shall still be able to look back, and learn our limitations, mark our weaknesses, gather counsels of prudence from our failures, and tame our ambitions by remembering where we broke down. There are people, and we are all tempted to be of the number, who look back upon the past and see nothing there but themselves, their own cleverness, their own success. Others look back disappointedly and say, "I have tried and failed over and over again. I may as well give it all up, and accept the inevitable, and grope on as well as I can without hope of self-advancement or of victory." Never! Tomorrow need never be determined by the failures that have been. We may still conquer where we have been defeated frequently. There is no worse use of the power of remembrance than when we use it to bind upon ourselves the faults and the failures of the past. "Forget the things that are behind." Cast all of your fragmentary goodness, your foiled aspirations, and your frequent failures behind you.

And some of us, unwisely and ungratefully, live in the light of departed blessings, so as to have no hearts either for present mercies or for present duties.

For all these abuses -- the memory that gloats upon sin; the memory that is proud of success; the memory that is despondent because of failures; the memory that is tearful and broken-hearted over losses -- for all these the remedy is that we should not forget the works of God, but see Him everywhere filling the past.

## II. Rightness of Heart.

"That they might set their hope in God." "And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright." The heart must be fixed on God as the supreme good.

Our remembrances and our hopes are closely connected. Hope owes to memory the pigments with which it paints, the canvas on which it paints, and the objects which it portrays there. But in all our earthly hopes there is a feeling of uncertainty which brings alarm as well as expectation.

But if we set our hopes on God, then we shall have a certainty absolute. What a blessing it is to be able to look forward to a future as fixed and sure, as solid and as real, as much our possession as the irrevocable past! The Christian's hope, which is set on God, is not a "may be", but a "will be"; and he can be as sure of tomorrow as he is of yesterday. Those who have their hope set on God have a certain hope, a sufficient one, and one that fills all the future. The hope that is set on God lets us see enough of the future to make our lives bright and our hearts calm. The darkness remains; what of that if "I know I shall not drift beyond His love and care"? Set your hopes on God, and you will never be embarrassed nor regret it. Live by hope in Him.

## III. Rightness of Conduct.

"Keep His commandments." After all, memory and hope are meant to fit us for work in the present. Both should impel us to this keeping of the commandments of God; for both yield motives which should incline us thereto. A past full of blessings demands the

sacrifice of loving hearts and of earnest hands. A future so fair and so certain, and a hope that grasps it, and brings some of its sweet fragrance into the otherwise scentless air of the present, ought to impel to vigorous and continual service. We should fill the passing moments with deeds of loving obedience.

the design of teaching is practical: holiness towards God. To bring man to this sublime rightness — this rightness of intellect, heart and conduct is the grand and ultimate end of all this teaching. Glorious end!