
An Exhortation to Serve the Lord

by Edward Griffin

"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Deut. 10:12.

omplaints are often made against the ministers of Christ that their preaching is too rigorous and pungent. I sincerely wish that the world might once see what discourses the eternal God would himself deliver should he undertake to preach to men. —What do I say? He *has* published a volume of discourses, and they have been more harshly treated than any of the sermons of his ministers. The words which I have read were taken from a sermon which God delivered in tones of awful grandeur from Mount Sinai, or else through the medium of Moses. If it seems hard to you to be required "to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul," be it remembered that the source of this command is not ministers, but God himself. If any murmur at this, *I* have no controversy with them; I leave it to be settled between them and their Maker. Having often preached with little effect myself, I would now retire and leave the God of Israel to preach to you. I would stand concealed in humble awe behind him, while he delivers his heavenly instructions to the people. Sermons are often heard as the words of men. It is difficult, to a distressing degree, to produce a realizing sense that the truths we preach proceeded from the lips of God. In the present case I hope this difficulty will not be felt. Had you stood at the foot of Sinai and heard the trumpet and the thunders, and heard the words of our text issuing from the thick darkness, you would not have doubted that they came from God. But they *were* heard in substance by a million people, who trembled and fled as these sentiments were poured upon their ears from the burning mount.

And now, after the lapse of more than three thousand years, it is still as true as ever that they proceeded from the lips of God. Receive them therefore with as much veneration as though a throne were set in this house, and the God of glory were seated on it, and these words were sounded from his divine lips. And now, my people, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul?

Who obeys this command? A part of my hearers obey it in some degree. They esteem God above every other object. They consider his glory as their highest interest, and communion with him as their supreme happiness. They would sooner forget father and mother than forget him. It is their greatest grief that their treacherous hearts are so prone to wander from him. Their most fervent desires pant after him. And when in a favored hour they find him whom their "soul loves," they hold him fast and will not let him go. I have no reproaches for these. It is our Master's will that we should speak kindly to them and encourage them in his name. But are all such? Would to God all were. But charity herself would blush should we so far profane her sacred office as to lend her sanction to such an opinion. Charity herself must fear that in such a congregation as this there are many who have never yielded any service to God. Yet in most cases it is difficult to fix the charge where it ought to lie. So superficial are men's ideas of God's service, that they often think themselves his servants merely because they have been baptised, and attend public worship, and are charitable to the poor, and free from scandalous vices. But there is no service without love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "Good," you say, "and I love the Lord. I should be very sorry not to love so bountiful and good a God." Do you indeed? *Do you indeed?* Let us see. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other: you cannot serve God and mammon." There is no love to God which is not habitually supreme. For though love enough to give a cup of cold water constitutes a disciple, none are disciples but those who love Christ supremely. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Supreme love to God will certainly produce self denial for his sake. It will habitually avoid every thing which he has forbidden, and obey, not a part, but all his commands. He that offends "in one point," knowingly and habitually, "is guilty of all." Supreme love will seek communion with its object more than any worldly pleasure. It will pant after him and after greater conformity to him; it will seek his glory as the highest interest; it will count him the most desirable portion; it *will* delight in thinking of him more than in any worldly thoughts; it will delight in prayer, —will renounce the world and idols and cultivate a heavenly mind. Unless we have that which will produce *all* these effects, we have no *supreme* love to God; and if we have no supreme love, we have no love at all; and if we have no love, as there is no neutral state, we are his enemies. "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad." As humiliating as the thought is, we know that no man is otherwise than God's enemy until he is born again. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Hence it is that so many people who attend public worship and lead regular lives, are unmindful of God from day to day, neglect prayer, put eternal things out of view, and lose themselves in the eager pursuit of the world. They must be conscious, if they will but reflect, that the world engages more of their care than God or their souls, and is of course their supreme deity. They must be conscious that the Sabbath is a burden unless devoted to sloth or amusement,—that prayer is a burden,—that religious society is a burden,—that the thoughts of God which sometimes intrude are unwelcome,—that the divine service is not agreeable to their taste,—that they would rather be employed in business or pleasure than in religion, in reading an amusing story than in searching the Scriptures. Surely such people do not love God. Such minds could not be happy in heaven if admitted to the place. They must undergo a radical change or certainly they can find no happiness beyond the grave. Ah Lord God, how many such are to be found among us,—among the dearest friends of our hearts. It is distressing to look through our congregations and see how men neglect God; how they live without him in the world, —live as though there were no God. Is there no remedy for our lost brethren? Will nothing awaken them to their duty and danger? The necessity of making some attempt to rouse them is so pressing, that I trust Christians will excuse me if I turn my attention altogether to these. Let them stand by and assist me with their prayers, while I attempt to recall from death this interesting multitude.

Come, my unhappy friends, and let us reason together. Lend your whole attention while one who hopes he is a friend to both parties, makes an humble attempt to reconcile you to your Maker. It is not an enemy you hear; not one who would needlessly disturb your peace. God knows I wish you nothing but happiness in time or eternity; and if the present address might be the instrument of making you all blest, I should account this the happiest day of my life. But in what language shall I address you? What new arguments shall I set before you? The enemy of God in your breast has resisted so many sermons, that those who love you are afraid that nothing will ever avail. O when shall it once be? Would God that this might be the sermon. But so many better discourses have been lost upon you, that I tremble for the fate of this. The longer you hear without improvement the longer you may. Every resisted sermon renders future resistance more easy and certain. And this very address, unless it softens will harden you; unless it proves a "savour of life," will become a "savour of death."—Shall I stop or shall I proceed? —I must proceed; but first let me entreat you to lift one earnest prayer to God that he would carry the truth home to your hearts. You may have sometimes complained that your fears, rather than your reason, were addressed. You shall have no cause for this complaint now. I mean to appeal to your understandings and to treat you like rational beings. For such indeed you are,—rational beings, endowed with Godlike faculties, capable of enjoying and adorning the heavenly city; infinitely too precious to be lost and devoted to eternal blasphemy and pain.

The great reason of your insensibility is, that under the stupifying influence of unbelief, you have secretly doubted whether there is a God, or if there is, whether you have any thing to do with him or he with you. The thought has lurked in your heart, that if there is a God, he is so far from you, and so unconnected with you, that you have nothing more to do with him than with an inhabitant of another planet. You have never conceived that you owed him your whole heart and life. But now for God's sake attend.

"What dost thou here, Elijah?" Child of dust, what dost thou here in this world? Who sent you hither? and for what end? You are conscious that you did not create yourself, and your parents know that they did not create you. It was God that made you what you are, and put you into a world which he had richly furnished for your use. Have you nothing to do

with him or he with you? You are absolutely his property, and he is your Lord and Master, and has a right to you and to the use of all your talents. What was the precise end for which he sent you into the world? I wish to draw your attention to this single point: for I am persuaded that if this one consideration could be fastened on your mind, you would be convinced that you have neglected the great end of your being. Do you imagine that he created you and raised you so much above the brutes, and put you into a world on which he had expended so much labor, that you might wander from him into the regions of darkness? That you might seek your happiness out of him, and live in rebellion against him? that you might spend your life only in preparing to live in this transitory state? Or that you might live only to eat and drink? The latter the brutes are fitted to do; but can you imagine that you have no higher end than they? Indulge no such fatal mistake. As God is true, he sent you into his world for the same end that a master sends a servant into his vineyard,—*to labor for him*. The sole reason that you are in this world rather than not here, is that you may have an opportunity to serve and enjoy God. He has sent you into the field abundantly furnished with powers and means to serve him, and has strictly commanded you to use these talents in his service. Say not that he is too far above you to be apprehended.

He has brought himself down and spread himself out before you in his works and word, and it is only to unbelief that he is invisible. As your Proprietor and Master, he has a right to expect that all your time and talents, all your wealth and influence, should be consecrated to his service; that your affections should all be engaged for him; that every motive and aim should be "holiness to the Lord;" that "whether you eat or drink" or whatsoever you do, you should do all to his glory; that this should be the general scope of every action and the leading care of every hour.

Having sent you into his vineyard, he looks after you to see whether you are faithful or not. Has he nothing to do with you? His eyes are upon you every moment,—upon the very bottom of your heart. They follow you wherever you go, and mark you out and contemplate all you do, as though you were the only object of his attention in the universe. The fixed design for which they follow you is, to observe whether you perform or neglect the great business for which he sent you into the world. Dream not that he is too distant to concern himself with you; he is

“not far from everyone of us.” He is by your side and on the very seat with you this moment. Has he nothing to do with you? In him you “live and move and have [your] being.” For so many years he has sustained you out of hell, and suffered you to live on his earth and breathe his air. And why is all this? I beseech you to consider the end for which he has done all this for you. Why do you feed and clothe your bond servant? It is that he may not die but live and *labor for you*. And what would you think, if, while living at your expense and sharing your kindness, he should altogether neglect your service? Should you assign him his task for a certain day in the field, and lie behind the hedge and watch him, and see him all day long doing nothing but wasting your property, what would be your feelings towards that servant? God has sent you into his field,—has solemnly charged you to be faithful to him,—has supported your life,—has fed and clothed you,—and from his invisible seat has kept his eye upon you through all the day of life; and now the day is drawing to a close, and you have not yet begun your work, but have been only marring his estate. And now you are about to return from the field with nothing done, to give in your account to your Master. And what, in the name of eternal justice, will your account be? How will your Master receive you? Ah think of it; it will be a serious hour.

Your Lord and Master, having sent you into his world to serve him,—having sustained you from year to year, with great expense and care, and kept you from the eternal pit, for the express purpose that you might live and labor for him; has added one mercy more which has astonished heaven and earth. At the expense of the life of his own Son he has redeemed you from death. And why was all this? For no other purpose than that you might yet live and labor for him. He has given you opportunities for the means of grace,—has followed you with calls,—has offered to pardon the past if you will only be faithful in future,—has waited upon you and labored with you, with so much pains, for so many years, under so many discouragements, to see if you would not at length feel some sincere regrets and return to his service; and yet, to the shame of all creation, you refuse to serve him still. These amazing kindnesses have well entitled him to the name of Father. He is your Father, and as such you owe him honor. He is your Redeemer, and as such you owe him the tenderest thanks that a grateful heart can render. And have you nothing to do with him? Is he so distant and unconnected with you, that you have no cause to move a thought towards him? Better to say that the

inmost fibre of your heart is a stranger and foreigner. Better to sever the bonds of nature and turn off your dearest friends as outcasts from your love.

Did your Creator turn you loose into the world, to run wild in pursuit of your own imaginations, without law or restraint, intending to look no further after you, but to throw you out from his care? Woe to you if he had done this; though this, I fear, you have often wished. But he did no such thing. His intention was still to follow you with his cares, as beloved creatures whom his own bands had formed,—to exercise government over you,—to establish eternal communion with you,—to lead your desires up to him,—to fill you with his own sublime happiness, and to make you a part of an harmonious, blessed, and glorious kingdom. To accomplish these ends he put you under law,—a law admirably calculated to unite you to him and to consummate your happiness. As he is infinitely the greatest and best of beings, whom no man can hate and be happy; who, in order to further an harmonious kingdom, must be acknowledged as the Head, and must be the centre of affection and the great bond of attraction; therefore he has commanded all his rational creatures to love him supremely. In this he has required no more than was his due, and the very least that it was for his honor to accept. Indeed he has conferred an infinite favor on creatures by making a law so essential to public order, and pointing out the only way to individual happiness. The unreasonable will complain of anything, and murmurs have filled the world because this law requires the heart. But were it otherwise,—were God to relinquish his claims on the heart and compound for outward service only, would it be better then? Could they be happy here, could they be happy in heaven, without a holy heart? They had better never been born than be excused from loving God. Should God give up his law, still they are wretches to eternity without love to him. The law enjoins nothing but what in the nature of things is essential to happiness. Have you nothing to do with God or he with you? You have forgotten that you are subjects under law, bound by all the authority of Jehovah. "You *shall* love the Lord your God with all your heart." This comes to you under the great seal of heaven. It is the express command of the eternal God. Whatever you may think of it, neither the praise nor the blame of making or publishing it belongs to men. From this moment you must either renounce your Bible, or understand that God accounts you rebels for not loving and serving him with all the heart and soul. He admits no excuse. Your plea that you

cannot, is only pleading guilty. A heart that refuses to love the Creator and Redeemer of the world, is the very thing for which God condemns you,—is the vilest rebel in the universe.

And now have you nothing to do with God or he with you? Know well, my unhappy hearers, that God will have to do with you through the interminable ages of eternity, and on his sovereign pleasure it depends whether you shall spend your eternity in heaven or hell. You cannot be disconnected from him if you would. You *are* in his hands, and you must remain in his hands to eternity.

O my dear hearers, my flesh and blood, you have not sufficiently considered these things. There is no realizing sense of *one* of these truths in minds that can remain at ease in a state of enmity against God. You have not considered who sent you into the world, and for what end,—who supports your lives, and for what end they are supported,—who redeemed you from death, and why you were redeemed. You have not considered what God has earnestly commanded you to do, and what connexion you must have with him to eternity. These things you have not considered; but God considers them all. He indeed keeps silence, because this is not the state of retribution, but of trial. He keeps silence, but is angry. He is angry, and he will one day speak. He will speak in a manner which does not admit of present description, but it will be such as fully to assert his rights and wipe off the stigma which his long silence has occasioned, that he is “altogether such a one as” yourselves. He will take account of his servants to whom he committed the talents. “Every work [shall be brought] into judgment, with every secret thing whether it be good or evil.” At the close of all he will command them to cast “the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

And now what will you say to these things? Has not every word been calmly addressed to your reason, and been supported by positive declarations from the Word of God? If then the Bible is not a fable,—if it is the book by which you will be judged at the last day, your case is such as calls for immediate attention. God has a very heavy account against you. There is wrath gone out against you. It behooves you to get the sentence repealed without delay by deep contrition and application to the blood of atonement. Do you think it will answer for you to live any longer idle under the very eye of your Master? At this late hour ought any more time to be lost? I wish I knew what resolutions you are forming. My dear

hearers, what do you intend to do? What use will you make of this exhortation when you depart? Some, I fear, will think no more of it until it meets them in judgment. Others may be impressed for a season and afterwards return to stupidity. But will not some one be wise enough this once to believe God? O God, if any are hesitating, interpose and fix their resolves! Nay, let not that thought arise again, When I have got a little more of the world I will attend. So thought Felix, but the thought was fatal. A resolution to postpone, is half a resolution to die as you are. If it were not so pressing a case, I would not be so pressing. But you have souls capable of amazing happiness or amazing woe, and they are now under sentence of eternal death. "He who does not believe is condemned already." Can a rational being rest in such a state? You see also what pressing claims your Creator and Redeemer has upon you. Most of you would be agonized at the thought of defrauding one of your fellow men. But will you be scrupulous to "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," and feel no concern to "render unto God the things that are God's?" O that this sentiment might vibrate in your ears and be deposited at the bottom of your hearts, "*Render unto God the things that are God's.*" Let every thing sincere in you be stirred up at the names of Father and Redeemer, and arouse you to "render unto God the things that are God's." Then will he no longer frown, but smile upon you as dear children, and our joy on your account will be full. Amen.