**THIRSTING FOR THE SPRINGS - SERMONS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**14. PERILOUS COMPROMISE by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Be not righteous overmuch."*

*Ecclesiastes 7:16*

THAT is most soothing and comforting counsel for the indolent soul. The unredeemed man instinctively shrinks from the pure and shining ideal. He recoils from standards that are too exacting. He prefers an easier servitude, a loose-jacket kind of restraint. How few of us like to hear the trumpet-call which bids us "stand upon the mount before the Lord! " We like to "measure ourselves by ourselves." So the counsel of the text is by no means unpalatable and unwelcome. "Be not righteous overmuch." What an easy yoke! How mild the requirements! How delightfully lax the discipline? Why, the school is just a play ground!

Have we any analogous counsel in our own day? In what modern guise does it appear? Here is a familiar phrase: -- "We can have too much of a good thing." To appreciate honey we must not live on it. We must have a varied diet. "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee lest thou be filled there with." Restraint is part of the ministry of appreciation. We can sicken the appetite and make it loathe the thing it loved. "We can have too much of a good thing." Such is the general application of the proverb. But the word is stretched out to include the sphere of religion. The counsel runs somewhat in this wise; we require a little religion if we would drink the nectar of the world, and we require a little worldliness if we would really appreciate the flavour of religion. To put the counsel baldly, we need a little devilry to make life spicy. That is one modern shape of the old counsel.

Here is the old counsel in another dress: -- "We must wink at many things." We must not be too exactingly scrupulous. If we would be comfortable, we must acquire the habit of winking at many things as we walk along the changing way. We must cultivate the art of closing the eye at the needful place. That is the way to march through life easily, attended by welcome comforts. Don't be too particular; "Be not righteous overmuch."

Here is a third dress in which the old counsel appears in modern times: -- "In Rome, one must do as Rome does." Our company must determine our moral attire. We must have the adaptability of a chameleon. If we are abstainers, don't let us take our scrupulosity into festive and convivial gatherings. Don't let us throw wet blankets over the genial crowd. If some particular expedient, some rather shaky policy be prevalent in your own line of business, do not stand out an irritating exception. "In Rome do as Rome does." If you are in company where the venerable is treated with laughter, join in the derision. Do not startle your fellowmen by eccentric conduct. Do not chill the riotous conversation by any freezing silence. "Be not righteous overmuch."

Now let us pass from the Book of Ecclesiastes to another part of the sacred Word, and listen to a voice from a higher sphere. What says Ecclesiastes? "Be not righteous overmuch." What says the Prophet Isaiah? "Your wine is mixed with water." The prophet is proclaiming the angry condemnatory word of the Eternal God. "Your wine is mixed with water." The people had been carrying out the counsel of Koheleth. They had been diluting their righteousness. They had been putting a little water into their wine. The prophet proclaims that God will not accept any dilutions. He will not accept a religion that is watered down. He despises a devotion which has been thinned into compromise. Wine represents blood. Blood represents sacrifice. To water the wine is to thin the sacrifice, and to impoverish it. It is to make the surrender imperfect. It is to give with one hand and to withhold with the other. It is a religion without strong piquant taste and flavour. It is a piety whose movement is almost imperceptible. "Your wine is mixed with water," and the Almighty God despises the impious concoction.

In many parts of the Old Testament this perilous compromise is condemned. "They have given their tears to the altar, and have married the daughter of a strange god." "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." This is the type of broken fellowship and of impaired devotion against which the prophets of the Old Testament direct their severest indictments.

Let us pass on now to the day when the light is come, and the "glory of the Lord" is risen upon us. Let us hear the counsel and command of "the Word made flesh." "Be ye perfect"; that is the injunction of the Master. We are to carry the refining and perfecting influences of religion into everything. Everywhere it is to be pervasive of life, as the blood is pervasive of the flesh. This is the doctrine of entire sanctification. Our piety is to be ubiquitous. We are to sanctify the scruple. Just as we can magnetise the point of a needle, and endow it with powers of mystic allurement, so the trifling things of life -- the needle-points -- -are to be converted into mystic magnets filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. Everything in our life is to constitute an allurement to help to draw the world to the feet of the risen Lord. This all-pervasive religion, this non-compromising religion is the only one that discovers the thousand secret sweets that are yielded by the Hill of Zion. It is the only religion that presses the juice out of the grapes of life, and drinks the precious essences which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Let there be no mistake about this. Religious compromise never gets beyond the husks. It is the man of entire sanctification who draws into his life the infinitely varied treasures of the crowded way. Life to him is no lottery; there are no empty packets. Every experience deposits its wealth. For him "to live is Christ!" "Be not righteous overmuch"; that counsel never leads a man to the Springs. "Be ye perfect"; that is the counsel which, though it entail ceaseless labour, converts life into a continual song. "Be ye perfect"; sanctify the entire round, never be off duty, and life will become an apocalypse of ever-heightening and ever-brightening glory.