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By PHILIP WILLIS.

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Fitness for Heaven: Who has it?

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Fitness for Heaven: Who has it?

HOW many people there are in these so-called Christian lands who are, in one way or another, vainly trying to fit themselves for heaven.

The very fact that they are *trying* to fit themselves for that place, plainly shows that they still feel their *unfitness* for it.

That the most religious man is in himself as totally unfit for heaven, as the woman of Sychar's well (John iv.), who had had five husbands, is plain enough from the Lord's own words to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John iii. 3.)

When a soul is awakened to feel its true state, a step has been taken in the right direction. When Job said, "Behold, I am vile," he discovered something he had never known before. When he exclaimed, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of

the ear : but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes," he had found out his true place before God.

Many think, like a lady with whom I once conversed, that our fitness for heaven depends upon our own personal goodness. Speaking of a deceased gentleman, whom she held in high esteem, she said, "If anyone goes to heaven, *he* is sure to be there, for he was such a *good* man." "Well," said I, "if that man is in heaven, he can only be there on the same ground as the dying robber—as a guilty sinner cleansed from his sins by the precious blood of Christ, and saved by God's sovereign grace." "Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. ii. 9.)

No one was ever fitted for heaven on the ground of his own goodness. "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans iii. 10.) "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Romans iii. 12.) "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans viii. 8.) "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Isaiah lxiv. 6.)

An old bishop, when he was dying, said to some friends gathered around his bed, "I have just taken all my good works and all my bad works, and thrown them right overboard, and I am going to heaven on the ground of free grace."

Nothing but the work of Christ can give us title to stand in the light of God's holy presence. The moment a person believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and has received the Holy Spirit, he is as fit for heaven as if he had been there for fifty years. In Col. i. 12, Paul does not say, the Father *is making* us meet (or fit), but "which HATH made us meet." We give thanks to Him for what is already done, namely, that we who are in Christ Jesus are fitted for the very light of God's glory. He is, of God, made unto us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. i. 30.)

If we take the dying thief as an example, we find, after he confessed his guilt, that he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." His hands and feet were nailed

to a cross, and he was, therefore, powerless to do anything to fit himself for heaven. However willing he might be to perform good works, if such *could* have atoned for his past guilt, he could not do them.

How, then, did the Lord meet his sad case? Did He tell him that he was too great a sinner to be saved? Did He bid him wait until, by doing better for the future, he had reformed his wasted and mis-spent past? Nay, there was no time for that. The man was in the iron grip of death, and was about to pass into eternity to meet a holy God. He wanted salvation *immediately*, or he must perish in hell-fire everlastingly. His request was listened to at once, and he got far more than he asked for. Instead of waiting to get the glory of the kingdom, Jesus says, "*To-day* shalt thou be *with me* in paradise." (Luke xxiii. 43.) What a glad surprise!

What, then, cleansed the dying thief from his sins, that he might be fitted for such holy companionship, for such a blessed place? Not, surely, his prayers, for he only uttered one prayer that we read of,

and that a very short one. Not even his penitential tears. There is no divine record of such. And certainly not his attending feasts or fasts for the purification of his soul, nor performing good deeds of any kind. No, no, it was nothing less than the all-cleansing blood of the blessed Saviour, who, in rich grace, died for him, thus making a full and perfect atonement to God for all his guilt. The dying malefactor could truly have said—

“Thy blood is my claim and my title,
Beside it, O Lord, I have none.”

“It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” (Lev. xvii. 11.)
“Without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Heb. ix. 22.)

What a magnificent triumph of divine grace, that could save such a man from the very deepest degradation and the most appalling doom; that could snatch him from the verge of hell, and fit him at once to be Christ's companion in paradise, fit him to enter the presence of God's brightest glory! What joy it must have been for

a sinner, who deserved the very lowest hell, to go in company with God's blessed Son into such heavenly festivity! If man's sin closed the gates of an earthly paradise upon him, God's wondrous grace opened wide the doors of a heavenly paradise to him.

No one could purchase salvation. Nor was any child of Adam's guilty race ever entitled to it. On the contrary, if God had given us what our sins merited, He would have cast us into hell for ever.

Could we obtain salvation by our own works, we should make God our debtor. Salvation would not be of grace. But God will not be any man's debtor. He wants us to be His debtors for all eternity. Salvation has been procured for all who are not too proud to take it for nothing. It is offered "without money and without price." Divine grace has brought it down to *you*, my reader, *as you are, and where you are*.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." God must ever have the more blessed place. "If thou knewest the gift of God," said Jesus to the poor Samaritan

sinner, "thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Dear reader, let the thought be banished from your mind for ever, that God is *asking* anything from you. GOD IS A GIVER. He delights in giving freely and bounteously. Let Him fill your heart with joy unspeakable, by receiving Christ as His gift to you. There is enough in Him to fill and satisfy your heart with boundless joy. You shall never thirst again for the unsatisfying pleasures of this poor world, if you drink of His infinite fulness.

Blessed Lord Jesus, Thou art not only our Saviour from hell, but Thou art the satisfying portion of Thy people's hearts. Thou fillest the infinite heart of God with unchanging delight, and, if so, Thou canst fill the hearts of all who receive of Thy fulness with pleasures never ending.

P. W.