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Chapter V

THE RIGHTEOUS

Comrades and Friends, - I have been thinking recently of the happy condition of the righteous.

The Bible, as you know, contains many references to their blessedness. It is to be well with the righteous man living, well with him dying, and well with him for ever. Here are a few of the many allusions to the righteous:

'The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; they shall bring forth fruit in old age;' 'the righteous shall have hope in his death;' 'they shall be held in everlasting remembrance;' and the Master Himself said, the righteous ' shall go into life eternal.'

No matter, then, what tribulation or persecution they may be call on to endure in this world, the righteous have the best of it in the long run.

I need not say, therefore, that it is most important that we should be able to justly claim the possession of the character that entitles us to be numbered amongst the righteous.

The assurance that we can do so must be very welcome. The knowledge that we belong to the class whom God regards as righteous will be a strength to us amid all the storms of life, comfort us in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and enable us to stand without fear before the Great White Throne.

It will be quite clear to all that sever things are required to constitute this confidence.

First, there must be the conscious possession of a righteous character; that is, you must be right, and know that you are right. Any effort to persuade yourselves that you are righteous when you know that you are not, will be labour spent in vain. Some people are always putting the best possible construction on their own actions, and magnifying their own virtues; although all the time they are tormented with the horrid reflection that something is wrong in their lives. They do not belong to the righteous.



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The character of the righteousness cannot be separated from righteousness. No man has a right to claim the character of the righteous whose life does not harmonize with the righteousness described in the Bible.

Righteousness is not a matter of profession, but of practice. For example, a man may say, 'I greatly desire to be right. I know I ought to be right; I have known it all my life; I very often pray to be made right. I am a student of the Bible; I am familiar with its commands and its promises. I am joined in fellowship with the Church, or The Army,' and ever so much more of the same kind, and yet not have just grounds for believing that God regards him as a righteous man.

If a man is right his thoughts will be right. He will not allow foolish or unclean imaginations to dwell in his mind. If a man is right his affections will be right – he will love right things and hate evil things. If a man is right his actions will be right. He will act rightly towards God, his own interests, his parents, his wife, his family, his master, or his servant, and his supreme desire will be to make other people right.

In a word, the righteous do nothing, wear nothing, eat nothing, visit no place, join in no partnership, form no companionship, engage in no labour, which is not in keeping with what they believe to be true and right.

The men and the women who have a just claim to be counted righteous, neither touch, taste, nor handle things that they know to be wrong. Neither do they allow themselves to hear or see anything calculated to injure them in body, mind, or soul; or that is likely in any way to damage their influence as children of God, or lessen their zeal in His service.

They think of the rightness of others, and ask themselves how they can promote it. They have pity for those who are wrong in their temporal conditions; they have mercy on those who have been carried away with wrong-doing; they weep over the backslidings of God's people, and they strive and fight for the honour of their Lord and the Salvation of sinners.

Do you, my brother, my sister, feel that you have just ground for concluding that you belong to the righteous? If so, rejoice and be exceeding glad.



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Let me give you a word of counsel: —

1. Beware of trusting in your own righteousness as the ground of your acceptance with God, and as being sufficient reason for expecting your deliverance at the Last Great Day. Salvation then and for ever will be through the Blood of the Lamb.
2. Beware of supposing that because you have reached your present happy experience you can dispense with any of the means of Grace by which you attained it. You must believe, and pray, and deny yourselves, and take up your cross daily, and fight for the Salvation of those about you as you did in the days of your first love.
3. Beware of thinking that you can maintain a righteous character without increasing your knowledge of divine things, your realization of the Divine character, your love for souls, and your faith that conquers men, devils and sin.
4. Beware of judging others, especially the ignorant, the poor, and the degraded, by the standard which the Holy Ghost has allowed you to set up for yourselves, and to which you have been so graciously brought. Much has been given to you, and through the loving-kindness of your Lord, you have been able to make a glad and happy return.
5. Beware of neglecting to ascribe all honour, and praise, and glory to the Holy Ghost, to whose aid you owe all that is good, pure, and Christlike within you.
6. But if, on the other hand, you feel that you cannot justly claim this righteous character; and that you are still wrong, wrong without or wrong within; knowing the good, and doing it not; desiring to be right, but destitute of the power, what shall I say to you?
 - a. Honestly acknowledge before God that you are wrong. That is the first step towards getting right.
 - b. Put your finger upon what you know in your life to be contrary to the dictates of your conscience, and be done with it once and forever.
 - c. Claim the forgiveness of God, and hand your life over to Him, to spend and be spent in working righteousness.

And if you faithfully carry out these instructions it will be well with you here, and it will be well with you hereafter. 'For thus saith the Lord: Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him.'

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.