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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

No. II.—UPON RESPONSIBILITY.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 5TH APRIL, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”—ROMANS xiv. 12.

OUR discourse last Lord's day morning upon these words showed the principle upon which our responsibility to God, and God alone, is founded. We have two more doctrines to work out this morning from these words. The first is *the doctrine of individuality*. You will observe that this doctrine is named twice in our text. “*Every one of us shall give account of himself.*” See how it confines the solemn business to the individual himself, concerning himself. “Every one of us shall give account of himself,” independently of all others, “to God.” And the second doctrine we have to work out and make clear this morning is that of *the equality of all men in their right to judge for themselves in things pertaining to eternity*.

First, then, we have to notice *the doctrine of individuality*. Now just think for one moment of what we mean by individuality; and just take this one thought into consideration, that your own person is the only permanent possession that you have. Your houses and lands, your property, whatever you have, you must presently part with, but you can never part with your person. It is true the body will for a time be laid in the grave, but then it will, whether you be just or unjust, be raised at the last day. You can never, therefore, part with your person; you must possess it to all eternity. And is it not the great, the solemn, the essential question, seeing that your person is the only permanent possession that you have, How am I to possess my person? Shall I possess it here in my sins, and possess it hereafter in hell? Shall I possess it here in enmity against God, in ignorance of God, and despising eternal things, and hereafter possess it in hell, lift up mine eyes in hell? Or shall I possess my person here in faith in Christ, in love to Christ, in the knowledge of Christ and of truth? If so, I shall possess myself hereafter in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ; I shall possess myself, my soul, myself to all eternity in the likeness and glory of the Saviour. Now remember, then, that your own self is the only possession that you in reality permanently have; so that that, after all, is, or should be, and will be, if in our right minds, the greatest concern with us. What are you? Why, you are not an atom,

you are not a piece of dust merely, you are not a part of an amalgam, you do not form a part of anything; you are a world in yourself, you are whole, and complete, and entire in yourself. The people of God are compared to stars. As a writer well observes, a person is not like a particle of the globe, to be carried round as the globe chooses to carry it; but a person is a world in himself, a star in himself, of vast importance. Why, I do not exaggerate, and I fear not contradiction, when I say that if you could morally make the calculation—not physically, but morally,—and put, as it were, this mighty globe we inhabit in' o one scale, and put yourself into the other; why, in moral worth and value, you would outweigh the globe itself. We are told by astronomers that it would take 1,300,000 of our globes to make one as big as the sun; and I would even go so far as to say that if such a mighty globe as that were put into one scale and you put into the other, you would then in worth outweigh the whole. I like the words of Akenside,

“ The high born soul
Disdains to rest its heaven aspiring wing
Beneath its native quarry, tired of earth
And this diurnal scene, she springs aloft through fields of air,
And shall through all the ascent enlarge her view,
Till every bound at length shall disappear,
And infinite perfection close the scene.”

Call now to mind what high capacious powers lie folded up in man. Do not then think lightly of yourself in this sense; you are of the highest value. Does not the Saviour say, “What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Think you that there ever was since the foundation of the world, or that there ever will be, a man on earth that so enters into the value of the individual as did the Saviour? He himself well understood individuality; he himself has given the best and the greatest example of individuality. He did not do what he did by virtue of any association, by virtue of any establishment, by virtue of any organization, by virtue of any human contrivance, or by virtue of any human law whatever. What he did he did individually, by the will of God, the counsel of God, the decree of God, the purpose of God, the good will of God. He has given, as might easily be shown, the highest and best example of individuality. But let us hear the word of the Lord upon this matter, how we are to value ourselves in this sense. You cannot too much undervalue yourselves as sinners before God, as to your unworthiness of any one of his mercies; and you cannot over-estimate your worth in another sense. Remember that your soul is co-existent with eternity; it runs on for ever. Great as are the arithmetical powers of men, they fall to nothing when set by the side of eternity. And yet into that eternity we are hastening, there to dwell without end. One individual, therefore, thus with an immortal soul, and destined to the great tribunal, and from there to eternal woe or to eternal bliss, is indeed of vast value. Well may the apostle say, “I was among you in weakness, and fear, and in much trembling.” He knew, as Cowper says, the weighty charge that he had taken in hand. And is it reasonable that the Lord should trust this final destiny of the soul, a soul of such great value, in the hands of any mere created being? Why, “unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.” And the men who profess to have other people's souls at their command, if they knew the worth of their own souls they would never dare to come in and thus assume the prerogatives of the Most High. But let us hear what the Scriptures say upon this individuality, for the Scriptures are full of it. “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem”—the house of David there, of course, meaning the house of Jesus Christ, the brethren of Jesus Christ; the inhabitants of Jerusalem meaning the persons that should in the Lord's own time be, according to that promise, partakers of

the Spirit of God, and be brought into that citizenship described in the 2nd of Ephesians and other scriptures,—“I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son.” Here, then, when this Holy Spirit is thus poured out, there is a solemn and an earnest mourning after Christ; the bitterness of guilt is felt, the bitterness of the threatenings of God is felt; the bitterness of his wrath is more or less felt. “The arrows of the Almighty are within me; the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit.” Now, mark, there shall be a very great mourning—that is, mourning after the mercy of God, mourning after Christ;—“the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart.” Here it must be, you see, individuality; it must be independence of the nearest and the dearest relationship on earth. Yes, the Saviour gives us to understand that neither father, nor mother, nor wife, nor husband, nor children, can intrude upon this sacred province. Hence in the 31st of Jeremiah,—“In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten the sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity;” that is, if he is left to die in his sin. So that here is individuality. And “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Let us then look a little closely into this matter. You are, independently of any one under the heavens, rich or poor, great or small, to come to God’s word, and to say, Well, if I have not the Spirit of Christ, I am none of his. What is the spirit of Christ? We have just now shown—and I will not go on with further evidence, as I have many other things to say upon this weighty matter—that the Spirit of Christ is a spirit of mourning after Christ; the spirit of Christ gives a consciousness of what we are, and makes our existence bitter; it makes us unhappy, and brings us into such a state that we cannot be happy unless the Lord is pleased to take away this bitterness of spirit by the sweetness of his pardoning mercy; unless he is pleased to bring us out of this house of mourning into the banqueting-house.

But, again, where does individuality appear more strikingly, and on this side eternity more solemnly, than in a dying hour? You may be blessed with many most sympathetic friends, and your relatives may be exceedingly kind to you. But when you come to die, how helpless your nearest friends! how helpless your dearest relatives! There you are—it is all *you*. You cannot look eternity in the face because your parents were Christians, or because your brothers and sisters may be Christians; or because you are a Baptist, or because you are an Episcopalian, or because you are a Catholic, or because you belong to any denomination whatever;—that is, I say, you cannot scripturally look eternity in the face by virtue of any of these. It must be from your own personal soul’s acquaintance with God’s truth, as though none other, but yourself existed; so that to you personally the living God must be your refuge and your strength, your present help in trouble. Individuality. Look at the solemnity of it in the Holy Scriptures. I might, of course, go further, and remind you of the individuality of the man in hell. When he lifted up his eyes in hell, there he was, entirely isolated. There was not a drop of water—no sympathy for him from heaven, from earth, or anywhere. Individuality, however dear our friends may be to us (and we bless the Lord for them, and pray for grace to be enabled ever to value the favour of having friends, and to honour them, and return them all the kindness that we can; as saith the apostle, “Bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”),—yet when we come to this great matter of eternal salvation, it is then an individual thing altogether.

The next thought is a very pleasing one. Now, as the soul is of such value, and its redemption is precious, the Lord intends his people every one to judge for himself;—"They shall all know him, from the least to the greatest." There shall be individuality. And it is this individuality that will make up the harmony, and be essential to the unity and to the happiness of the saints for ever.

Now the next thing is this:—Supposing the whole world turn against you, and you have to say, Here am I, a poor solitary individual; then you would feel your individuality. But, you say, I have found grace in the eyes of the Lord; God Almighty is with me; God Eternal is with me; Noah, I dare to say, felt somewhat solitary in this sense; but he found grace—he found it as an individual; God stood by him while he built the ark, and brought him safely through all there was to come through. Passing by many things, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God made them feel their individuality by bringing them out into a position where it was impossible they could protect themselves. But the Lord struck a terror into the nations around, and came to Abraham, and said, "I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward." So of Isaac, so of Jacob, so of Joseph. When the Lord appeared to Moses, Moses felt the force of individuality. When Moses was called upon to go and deliver Israel, he contrived all the excuses he could think of. When Moses set the power of Pharaoh in contrast to himself,—Why, who am I, that I should deliver Israel? It seems a most absurd sort of thing. Well, Moses, you shall deliver them; but not by virtue of any civil power, political power, ecclesiastical power; not by virtue of any human contrivance whatever; you must reject the whole. You were originally learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but you must throw this away, and look to the Lord alone, and he certainly will be with you. And you know how the Lord was with him. So, then, Moses was enabled to set the powers that stood against him by the side of the power of God. He could smile at them all then. Ah, he would say, I myself could no more move those powers than I could carry Mount Sinai upon my shoulders; but if it be God working, and I have merely to lift the rod, I have merely to give the sentence, I have merely to say the word:—if it be God's work, then it does not matter about my solitude, about my being alone. And some of you are perhaps placed in life in a very solitary sort of position. You will go home to-day, perhaps, and dine by yourself, and tea by yourself, and sup by yourself; you live by yourself, a solitary individual. But then the Lord is with you, and his being with you makes up for everything. Indeed, let a man be placed how he may, his real consolations must come from individual realization of the love and mercy of the Lord. So we may go on. Joshua, how was he to get the promised land? Not by virtue of the goodness or the help of the people, for they had given pretty good proof they could not be depended upon; not by virtue of anything human. He was but a solitary individual; but he was to take the lead, and God would do the work. David, a stripling like David, goes to the battle, and his brethren wonder at his pride and naughtiness, as they call it—to think that he would go and beat that Philistine! What, a stripling like you? What, individually? Had you not better take the army with you? No, I shall have something with me better than that. Had you not better take Saul's armour with you? Well, perhaps I had. He put it on, and was glad to take it off again. Had you not better take Saul with you? No; I want nothing with me but the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord God of Israel went with him, and showed to David what David should do; he slew Goliath, and the Philistines were put to flight. David had, it is true, to run for his life afterwards,—not from the Philistines, but from his brethren, that envied him, and hated him, and cast him out as though he had been to Jericho, and talking with Rahab—they could not have served

him worse. David nevertheless lived, came to the throne, reigned, conquered his foes, died in all the fragrance and savour of an immutable covenant; died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour. And what shall I say to the apostles? There was individuality again. You never find them look round to the arm of flesh; you never find them look to the laws of men to support their religion. The apostle Paul appealed to Cæsar, as you and I should do, for his civil rights as a Roman citizen; but he did not appeal to Cæsar either to sanction, to support, or to help his religion. The apostle Paul knew that it mattered not how weak he was; he had seen his religion shake the foundations of the gaol, open the doors, smite off the bands of the prisoners, and set them free; in a word, he had seen what his religion had done through the Old Testament age, what it was doing then, and what it would do down to the end of time. Never give up, then, your individuality; remember you are an individual. There are some people always expect somebody else to help them. There are some women as soon as ever they are married become dyspeptics, mere drawing-room nothings; you cannot move them. So with some men, they become mere dyspeptics; they can do nothing for themselves, but want others to do everything for them. What you think ought to be done, do it yourself. We are all at times brought into circumstances where the help of our fellow-creatures is of vast importance; but then you know you always feel a pleasure in helping those that help themselves. Such men, when they get into adversity, are like a cork with a stone tied to it; if you throw the cork into the river, the stone will drag it under water; but if you cut the string, the cork will come up again, and swim as well as ever. So that man—there he is down; he will struggle to get free; by and by the string is cut, he rises again, and get him down you cannot. There must be individuality. Individuality, then. If I am to stand as I have done, it must be by my own individual experience, perseverance, and usefulness, the Lord being with me. As I once reasoned with a minister when I began to preach—I said, Now either the Lord has sent me or he has not. If he has, I do not need the help of man; if he has not, the help of man is all in vain. All of you that are Christians, therefore, maintain the dignity of individuality; maintain your independence. You are sons and heirs of God; you are kings and priests to God, treasures to the Saviour, jewels in his crown; he esteems you as brethren. This doctrine of individuality being so practised in England is the reason why the English excel everybody else. The Frenchman founds a great part of his comfort upon who his neighbours are, or what they are. But the Englishman relies on himself; if he is a working man, he takes his hammer, or his chisel, he minds his business, and works his way out of the attic, out of the cellar, and by and by has a nice little mansion—something of his own. There is nothing like self-reliance. Learn, then, to retain your individuality. What, would you not like to go into some sort of association with other churches? Would that give me more grace? Would that make me more useful to the people? Would that give me more liberty, and more of God? No; it would take me away from God, and unite me to man; the one is admirable, the other is contemptible. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Now the next doctrine we have to make out is that of *the equality of all men in their right to judge for themselves in things pertaining to eternity*. And I shall assign four reasons for this right. In the first place, the word of God declares that “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Another scripture saith, founded upon the fact I am now stating, “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.” But when I find the word of God uniformly declaring that there is no difference, then I say, To whom shall I look? “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.” I can find only one that I can with any reason commit myself to,

and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. "I am persuaded," saith the apostle, "he will keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." So, then, this being the case, I have a right to judge for myself. I stand as a sinner before God; all others stand the same; and consequently no man has right or power to usurp my conscience in these solemn and eternal things. The next reason why each has an equal right is because there is no difference between the people of God in God's love. The apostle, in the 3rd of Romans, says, "There is no difference." And the Saviour saith, in the 23rd of Matthew, "Call no man your father upon the earth." *Pope* means *father*. "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." "Be not ye called rabbi, or master: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." They disputed which should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven; but the Saviour set up a little child in the midst of them. Oh dear, say they, is that it? Yes, that is it. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." There shall be no lordship. The Gentiles exercise lordship, but it shall not be so with you. As to your minister, if he has your esteem, it must be a voluntary esteem for his work's sake, and not on the ground of any claim he may make, nor on the ground of any right that he may assume. If you choose a man you believe to be a man of God, and he is a blessing to you, your esteem for him must be voluntary, independent of man altogether. "Call no man on earth master." You must all be little ones; there must not be a great one among you. The apostle said, "Esteeming each other better than yourselves." So it is, then, that the people of God are all loved with the same love, chosen with the same choice, bought with the same price, called by the same grace, stand upon the same rights. What right have I to make a creed for you, or to make a prayer for you, or to judge for you? Not the slightest whatever. "He which is spiritual," whether little faith or great faith, "judgeth all things; yet he himself is judged of no man;" because the natural man is not capable of rightly judging the people of God. Now if you have any right over me in these matters, where do you get it from? Not from the Bible; and if you do not get it from the Bible, then I am sure it cannot be real. So that we may bless the Lord, then, for this individual right of private judgment, or judging for ourselves. Another reason for this right is that contained in our text, that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God." And I may just observe here that there is no such thing in the New Testament authorized as anything like an earthly Establishment. Hence, for instance, the Pope and the priests. Now either their religion doth save the soul or it doth not. In their estimation their religion doth save the soul. Well, then, if their religion save the soul, what do they want the civil power and the civil sword for? Why, the Pope and the priests refute themselves. You want the civil power—what for? So, then, if their religion doth save the soul, they never ought to dream of having the civil power. Then, again, our present Prime Minister, Mr. Disraeli, seeing of course with political eyes—for were he a reader of the Bible, and taking it only for his guide, he would not say what he has said,—he says that the union of Church and State is sacred, that it is the chief means of civilization, and the best security of our liberty. Now there do appear to me in these three phrases to be three of the veriest delusions that a man could ever utter. In the first place, what is the State? Why, the State is the world; and the Saviour says, "I have chosen you out of the world; ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Therefore, so far from the union being sacred, it is profane. And, pray, who formed it? Did the Saviour form this union of Church and State? No, man formed it. And the ministers of this Establishment call themselves "the lawful ministers." How did they become ministers? Why, by human education and by the

civil power. There is no more grace in making a man a minister of any Establishment, than there is in making a man a member of Parliament, or making him a physician, or anything else. It is all done by education and by the civil power. There is no grace, no spirituality, no godliness. And as to the bishops, what does the apostle say? "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Yet these men sit in the House of Lords, to make laws for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is brought by every human establishment under the laws of men. For instance, suppose the Lord Jesus Christ wanted one of his servants to preach in a Church of England pulpit, the law steps in and will not let him do it. And suppose Jesus Christ wanted one of his servants in the Church of England—for there are some there—to preach in the pulpit of a Dissenter, man's law steps in, and says to Jesus Christ, Though thou art King in Zion, thou shalt not have thy way; not thy will, but my will shall be carried out. Why, look at it;—the union is profane, unscriptural, and will by and by die out. There is no question that it is coming to an end. We see the work of the Lord; we rejoice in seeing people brought to understand this glorious doctrine of equal right. You see the Austrians have found out that the prayers of the Pope and the priests were no use against the needle-gun of the Prussians; so the Austrians have broken their bonds, thrown off the infamous Concordat, and taken thus a step in the right direction. So good-bye to Popery there. And as to Poland, good-bye to Popery there after a bit. For myself, I do not sympathize with what some call the troubles of Poland; because the main body of the people in Poland are much better off under the government of Russia than they were under the government of their own infamous tyrants of nobles. And, therefore, those who are conversant with the history of Poland will see that the late outbreak against Russia in Poland originated not with the people—it would have succeeded if it had,—but with the nobles, who wanted to regain their tyrannical position again, to oppress the people. So good-bye to Popery there. And Spain—that is creeping out of obscurity; Portugal is hearing a few whispers. So that the poor Pope will by and by have nothing left but himself. He cannot get rid of that; and a wretched self it is. But in conclusion. Some people have said, Well, but the Church of England has civilized. Has it? Civilization has been a matter of individuality, and not of organization. It is individuals with mighty minds that have burst the bands, and forwarded civilization. And as to the Church of England, being any security to our liberty—not the Church of England, sir, but the civil common law of the land is the guarantee of our liberties. For myself, I am thoroughly loyal in heart; and my Bible teaches me to honour the monarch, whether that monarch be king or queen, and to honour all that are in civil authority. "Honour to whom honour is due." Now I have no antipathy to any persons whatever while I am thus speaking; but I may just make this remark;—if the doctrine of personal equality be maintained, then no sect, consistently with that doctrine, can have the mastery. And, for my part, I would as soon trust the one as I would the other—every bit. I would no more trust the class to which I belong with the civil sword than I would the Pope. I would no more trust the Archbishop of Canterbury than the Pope. And again, as to Church of England people, they should be the last in the world to complain of Dissent. Why, they are Dissenters; they dissented from the Church of Rome. Ah, say they, but then that was a false church. So I believe is the Established Church in England. It is not scriptural in principle, and therefore, whatever reason they assign for dissenting from the one, we can assign for dissenting from the other. But one word in conclusion, and it is this:—We will call the Old Testament dispensation an Establishment; and we will call the Church of England an Establishment. The Old Testament Establishment took tithes; but on what

ground? That Establishment came to a man, and said, Here is a ready-furnished house for you; here are wells dug, oliveyards and vineyards planted; there is a good estate for you; there is no rent to pay; but if you will just allow me a tenth of the fruits, that is all I want. Thank you, sir. And I, James Wells, this 5th day of April, 1868, publicly declare that if any Establishment will come and make me a present of a house ready furnished, and a good Artesian well in the garden, and oliveyards and vineyards, and a good estate, and all they want is a tenth of the fruits; I will say directly, You shall have it, sir, and most readily; and I should be a most ungrateful man if I did not pay the tithe. That was the ground upon which they paid tithes under the Old Testament dispensation. But our Establishment gives us nothing, and would rob us of everything if it could. It wants every tenth apple, and tenth pear, and tenth cherry, and tenth plum, that grows on my trees, and gives me nothing in return. Their claim is founded on mere assumption. So, then, when they will do as the old Establishment did—give us a promised land, then we will give them a tenth.

Thus you see how different the Old Testament Establishment and the Church of England Establishment are. The Old Testament Establishment gave to the people—freely and fully—a good, a fruitful, a plentiful land, and asked for nothing in return but simply a tenth of the produce; but the Church of England Establishment is simply this:—There are a few men who happen to have the secular power at command, make laws, and make a creed, and make prayers, and invent ceremonies, and make ministers, and create carnal dignities, such as my Lord Bishop, and Archbishop, and Right Reverend Father, and so of the rest, but have no more Scripture authority for so doing than Jeroboam had to make and set up the golden calves. These men, having done these things, *force* them upon the people, not by the only scriptural right—persuasion—but by the *sword*. This is the unscriptural and arrogant assumption of one class of men over the others; so that the others are not to look either to God or to the Bible for themselves, but only to the laws which these men have feigned out of their own hearts—out of hearts deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked—and *force* us to pay to the support of their blind devices, teaching our very children to tell lies in the name of the Lord. Why, this Church of England Establishment has about as much analogy to the Mosaic Establishment as Satan transformed to an angel of light has to the Saviour; for all these systems that are of man are not far off from being from below. Mr. Disraeli is a great scholar and a great politician, but he is a blind and wretched theologian; let us hope he will some day know better than to call an ungodly union and system sacred, or to attribute to an ecclesiastical despotism either civilization or freedom, which has been a hindrance to both. Upon the *advantages* of individuality and right of private judgment we hope to have a word in our next and last sermon for the present upon responsibility.