

# UPON RESPONSIBILITY No. 1

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Morning March 29th 1868, by

MR. JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

VOL. XI. - No. 490.

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

THIS arises, as far as the people of God are concerned, from the truth that God is the author of their salvation from first to last, and therefore to him, and to him only, are they responsible for the profession they make. Their legal responsibility is, by what the Savior hath wrought, at an end. They are set free from the demands of the law as a rule of judgement, and they are set free from the demands of justice; they are set free, in a word, from everything in the way of legal responsibility before God. But then they have their gospel responsibility; they are responsible to the Lord for the profession they make, and to him alone. Point me out one part of the salvation of a sinner of which man is in any way the author, than we should be responsible to that man for what we received from him; We cannot be accountable for that that is not committed unto us, but we are accountable for that which is committed to us. And we find, then, to our delight, that every department, from first to last, belongs to the Lord. Hence the apostle Paul, when speaking of himself, and when speaking of his usefulness, attributes both entirely to the grace of God; for while he says, “By the grace of God I am what I am,” he also says, “I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God that was given me.” And so it is that the Holy Spirit gives not only to every minister, but to every Christian severally as he will; so that all shall have their different degrees of experience, of knowledge, of sorrow, and enjoyment here; but when they get to the end, all those differences are terminated, and all will ultimately see, even as they are seen, and will know even as they are known, for there is but one ultimate standard to which they are to come, and Jesus Christ is that standard; they are to be like him and shall see him as he is.

We shall most likely have two, and very probably three sermons on the weighty matters brought before us in the language of our text; so I suppose we shall get through this morning only that which I propose to be the first part.

Now the people of God, then, are accountable to God, and, as we have recently shown, they are sure to give a good account. In the last discourse on this subject I shall have, perhaps, to show that dreadful account that the lost will have at the last day to give. As, therefore, the people of God are to give a good account to God, it is essential that the Lord should so deal with them, and so demonstrate to them what the truth is, as to render it impossible for them to be deceived. Therefore it is that in all ages he has so dealt with them that it is not possible for them to be deceived. And I shall notice this morning two orders of demonstration in which the Lord hath, and doth, and ever will deal with his people. In the first order of manifestation there are circumstances which other people see as well as the people of God. They all see

the same things, but there is an essential difference between the understandings of the two. The spiritual man and the carnal man may both see the same things; but the one understands what he sees, and the other does not; the one is made to understand what he reads, and the other does not understand what he reads. We have, then, if we go through the length of the text, these three doctrines. First, the principle under which all are responsible to God; secondly, the doctrine of individuality and of universal equality in matters pertaining to eternity; and then, thirdly, the doctrine of the final account.

But we notice, then, first, that order of outward evidence with which the Lord hath in different ages blessed his people. And it is profitable to range over them, because we feel an identity with those circumstances, we understand them, and we feel a sympathy with them. And besides, as we go along we shall show what a blessed thing it is to be taught of God, what a blessed thing it is to be taught of Christ; and, on the other hand, what an awful thing it is to be left out of an acquaintance with the truth as it is in Jesus. Let us, then, run through a few circumstances; though I shall interweave some of the internal as well as the external, even in the first part of our subject. Let us begin with Abel. Abel saw there was a promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; and Abel being brought to know how he was completely overcome, ruined, condemned, and lost, as a sinner considered, he was brought to see and to feel that none but the judge of all, that none but God himself, could save him. He was led to see that works could have no hand in the matter, and he therefore was so enlightened as to look forward to the day of Christ, and to see how sin should be put away; that a person should come into this world—namely, the Son of God—and that he should embody in himself that fire, that hell, that was due to sin. Abel was therefore taught by the Lord to set this forth by bringing in the spotless lamb; and when he brought this spotless lamb, how delighted he must have been! When he had built the altar, laid the wood in order, and laid the lamb upon it, as directed, there he stood. Now will the Lord accept this, not as an atonement for my sin, but as that that represents the atonement that shall in the fullness of time be made? Presently, independent of man, the fire descended, the sacrifice was accepted, and Abel was thereby proved to stand exempt before his Maker from all sin. Here sin was transferred to another, forgiven and forgotten, passed away. As the apostle says, "He thus obtained witness that he was righteous. Now Abel could not be deceived in this matter. Here were several things that made it impossible for him to be deceived. In the first place, the fire descended; and I will not now stop to notice the many things which are implied, and which you may find out by a little redaction, in the fire descending upon the sacrifice. Then secondly, there was the presence of the Lord, to give him that peace, and joy, and fellowship, and communion with God, that none but the Lord could give. Here, then, he saw that his salvation was entirely of God. I feel tempted to stay here just a moment, for it is such a beautiful representation the way of God's mercy, of the way of eternal life, of the way of sanctification, of justification, and of eternal triumph. I cannot but linger here just a moment. Suppose, then, a poor creature is awakened up for the first time in his life to feel that he is in an evil case, and to feel that while by nature and by providential favors he is borne up for the present, he feels in his own mind,—Well, my health must soon go, my life must soon go, this world with me must very soon be no more;—what will become of me then? Ah, when the voice comes that "he that believeth in Christ Jesus," in this atonement, in this sacrifice, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation;" and "there is no difference, whether male or female, whether bond or free, whether Jew or Gentile," whether youthful or aged; there stands the declaration,—"Whosoever believeth," —such an one must indeed give a good account of himself to God, because he has not to give account to God after the order of his sinner-ship, but he has to give account to God after the order of his saint-ship. You will never find the people of God in their ultimate prospects attempt to give account of themselves after the order of their sinner-ship, but always after the order of their saint-ship, in their final destiny. For Jesus Christ hath given account of our sinner-ship; he hath answered for our sin, he hath answered for all that we are as sinners. Therefore you find David losing sight in one sense of his sinner-ship, and looking to that saint-ship which he had in God's

everlasting covenant; and you see Simeon losing sight in a sense of his sinner-ship, and looking at what he was by the salvation of God. And so the apostle Paul, by nature a sinner, and by practice one of the worst of sinners, as he himself well knew, yet in the final account seems to lose sight of this; I do not mean that he forgot he was a sinner, but I mean to say that he gave account of himself not after the order of his sinner-ship, but after the order of his saint-ship; and he says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Oh, how sweet the thought! when you come to die you will not have to give account to God of your sinner-ship—Jesus Christ has done that, and you are brought to confess before God what you are, and that in a sense is done with; precious faith comes in and ends the whole; and you will enter heaven as a sinner saved by grace—as one saved by the wondrous work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our text, then, is delightful to those who are brought into the liberty of the gospel. Abel, then, could not be deceived, it was impossible he should be deceived. The truth was so revealed to him that you might as well try to persuade him out of his existence as to persuade him that he was wrong. Then, again, when the Lord will interpose and save Noah, will the Lord do so in a way that Noah cannot be deceived? What I want to show here is the blessedness of being taught of God. And I am sure there never was a day in which the special teaching of the Lord was more needed than in our day, among so many gospels, and "Lo here" and "Lo there's," that we have. The Lord interposed for Noah in a way that Noah could not be deceived. Thousands are to be deceived; thousands shall strive to enter in, and shall not be able. The Lord appeared to Noah, and gave him a plan of the ark. He went to work. I cannot say, because it is not recorded, what misgivings, what fits of unbelief, and what failings Noah felt in himself during the building of that ark. Probably many scoffed at him and despised him, but by and by the matter shall be demonstrated. Am I right or am I wrong? Is it of God or is it not? If the world is to be drowned, none but God can do that; and if two of every creature of the irrational creation, from east, west, north, and south, are to come into the ark, none but God can do that. And moreover, the Lord commanded me not to shut the door, because I should not know when they are all in. And so the Lord shut him in, not only for his safety, but because the Lord alone knew when all the creatures were in, as he alone will know at the last when the last chosen vessel is brought safely in. And if this ark doth carry me safely through the flood, and if the Lord doth appear to me after this, it is impossible for me to be deceived. The whole world was deceived to a man; there was not one that was not deceived. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, but nobody believed him; they were all deceived. Well, the flood did come, and Noah remained in the ark, and the ark was carried through, and the Lord did appear to Noah afterwards, as you well know,—accepted an offering,—the fire descended, and the Lord smelled a savor of rest. Could Noah be deceived? Utterly impossible. It is impossible to deceive God's elect. Noah understood it, abode by it, and reaped the advantage.

Then, again, the Lord appears to Abraham, and gives him a yea and amen promise. And by gathering together the scattered notices of the history of Abraham, we see in that history what the Savior brings before us that "Abraham saw my day." Abraham felt he was by sin reduced, as it were, to dust and ashes; by sin he was brought into the dust. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return". He also calls himself "ashes," perhaps in allusion to the fire of hell, which he felt he deserved. He was convinced of his need; he saw in the light of Melchizedek the day of Christ; and God, by that coming sacrifice, made a promise to Abraham in relation to the progress of the gospel and the ingathering of sinners. Abraham received this testimony of the atonement, of divine immutability, and of what God would do, and he was called "the friend of God." Now bring Abel, and say to him, To whom are you accountable? To none but God, for from him only cometh my salvation. Bring Noah, To whom are you accountable? Who was it that warned you of things not seen as yet? Who was it that wrought in you to move with fear to the preparing of an ark? Who was it that conformed you to this order of things? To whom are you responsible? They would have disdained the interposition of any mortal under heaven. There was one God then, and one Mediator; there is one God now, and one Mediator—the man Christ Jesus. That was their path, and if we are in the right way that is our path also. Ask Abraham, Who was it that called you out of Ur of the Chaldees? Who

was it that revealed to you the great Melchizedek? Who was it that revealed to you the immutable covenant that had been lying in the secret mind of the great Jehovah from eternity? Abraham well knew it was God and God only that was his shield and his exceeding great reward.

Passing by many things we come to Moses. How open and clear were the circumstances of the deliverance from Egypt! How clear it was that it was of God! But to whom was it clear that it was of God? Would you believe it that the main body of the people did not see that the plagues were of God? that the main body of the people did not see that the exemption from death by the paschal lamb was of God? The main body of the people did not even see that God was in the midst of the cloud; the main body of the people did not see that it was the presence and power of God that divided the sea. But there were some among them that did see this, and it was chiefly for their sakes, and also (for so those circumstances appear to me) to convince others, that the Lord wrought in that manner. And hence the man that understood it would go to the 15th of Genesis, and say, Here is Abraham, when the sun is darkness. What does this mean? This means that we should be afflicted in Egypt the Lord there explains; and just as he has said, so it is. This is just where we have been. What darkness have we been under! —what horror, what oppression, what suffering! Well, he reads on in that same chapter. When the sun is gone down, when all hope of creature sympathy is gone, when Pharaoh and all his host turned tyrants, and began to cast our new-born infants into the Nile,—when the wretch had reached that stage his iniquities were nigh full. “Behold a smelting furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces”—the sacrificial pieces. Why, saith the Israelite, this lamp passing between the sacrificial pieces is nothing else but our deliverance, meaning, ultimately, eternal salvation by the sacrifice of Christ. So that one would say, Well, brother, look at this chapter, see how clear it is we have had the horror, and now comes the deliverance. Here is God’s promise hundreds of years ago, and now we are realizing the same. These plagues are of God, even the magicians admitted that this exemption from death is of God; when he saw the blood he would pass by us; this mystic cloud is the presence of God; this division of the sea is of God. Nothing could be more clear to those who were taught of God. Ask the true Israelite, “To whom are you indebted for this deliverance from Egypt?” He would say, “To the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” But ask those that were blind and perverted, “To whom are you indebted for your deliverance from Egypt?” “Well, I think to that golden calf.” Would you really believe it, that they were such double, quadruple distilled fools as to suppose that a piece of gold made into the shape of a calf could have anything to do with their salvation? And yet they actually publicly declared, “Those be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Ah, say you, people are more enlightened now; I do not think so; for when men take a wafer and call that a god; when men take the absolutions and various ceremonies that their fellow-creatures devise, and take them for gods, where is the difference? The one is a type of the other. But to those that were taught of God how clear was all this! They knew they were indebted to the Lord, that they were accountable to him; they had done what he had commanded, and therefore had no occasion to fear any man. Rahab afar off heard and understood what the main body of the Israelites did not understand; they perished, but she was saved. Just so now. The salvation wrought by the Savior, our exemption from death by his blood, our freedom from our enemies by the victory he has wrought, I solemnly declare that if I were in heaven this moment, I do not think I should be more satisfied than I am now of the truth of what Christ has done. Why, it is as clear as A B C. There is not a sin that he did not swallow up in victory; the enemy is as still as a stone; not one dog shall ever be able to move his tongue with any effect against any of the children of Israel. So with the manna, how clear it was to those that understood it! So with the water from the rock; so with the dividing of Jordan; so with the victory over Jericho; so with the sun and the moon standing still. Yet let us stop for a moment. I say it with reverence, and I say it with painful feeling, that let the living God do whatever he may, and make his truth as clear as clearness is itself, it is all of not the least avail unless he himself quickens the dead sinner’s soul, giving him eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to understand,—in a word, make him a new creature. Oh, what language could I use to describe the

difference between those who lived in the Savior's day who could and who did look upon him with as much assurance as they did upon their own existence, and say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God; we know that thou art the Savior that should come; we know that thou hast the words of eternal life;" —the difference between these and others that equally saw his miracles; that equally heard his discourses that equally witnessed the innocence, devotedness, and solemnity of his life. But it was, if I may use the phrase all lost upon them. And even that natural conviction which they had they tried to stifle so that when Stephen addressed them their natural consciences were very uneasy, and they were cut to the heart, and ran upon him with one accord. They saw there was something about the whole affair they could not refute; and one of their own countrymen advised them to be quiet lest they should be fighting against God. Nevertheless, if the Lord does not give a new heart, and a new life in the soul, there is no clear understanding of these things. But, however, the point I wish to show is that the Lord has so appeared to his people as to render it impossible for them to be deceived. Was Abel deceived? Was Noah deceived? Were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob deceived? Was it possible for them to be deceived? Was Joseph deceived? Did not his dreams prove at last to be of God? Was Moses deceived? Was the right-minded Israelite deceived? Was Joshua deceived? Were any deceived that went into the Promised Land by precious faith? Not one; "these all died in faith," which they could not have done if they had not first lived in the faith. And then when the Lord takes his people to Babylon, see the 11th of Ezekiel "I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." When Nebuchadnezzar could not interpret his own dream, and the wisest men of his kingdom could form no idea of what the dream was, and if they could they could not have interpreted it, presently Daniel comes. And there is not a more wonderful circumstance in all the Old Testament, I think, than the revelation granted in, that 2nd of Daniel. We see there in what a striking and beautiful contrast the kingdom of our blessed Immanuel stands to the kingdoms of this world,—the stone cut out of the Jewish nation, called a mountain, without hands, and becoming a great mountain, becoming the substitute for everything; a kingdom founded that shall never be destroyed, nor left to other people, but which shall he possessed for ever and ever. Nebuchadnezzar was astounded, but he did not clearly understand it, or else he would not have been so foolish as to set up a golden image afterwards and command the people to worship it. But Daniel understood it. Was Daniel deceived? Was not this stone cut out of the Jewish nation, the tribe of Judah, without hands—that is by the power of God? "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise." Did he not achieve the victory? Did he not found an immovable kingdom? And are not his people as safe as the kingdom itself? "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed but abideth forever." Again, the three worthies knew not whether they should be burnt to death or not; but what did they say? "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter." One thing we know—you cannot burn us out of the love of God; you cannot burn us out of Christ; you cannot touch us there. It is a very frightful thing to look at the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and we are to be cast therein if we do not bow down to this image but all we can say is, we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image thou hast set up. Do your best and do your worst. Are the three worthies wrong? Ah, Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person, "and the fourth person was like unto the son of a god." —that is, a person of superior bearing majesty and appearance. The heathen held the doctrine of generation of gods. I say, where these worthies deceived? No. What shall I say of the lion's den? What did Daniel say? Well, Daniel, by what philosophical law, by what contrivance have the lion's mouths been shut? You are one of the wise men of Babylon; perhaps you have found out some secret by which you have shut the lion's mouths. No; "my God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lion's mouths, that they have not hurt me." Was Daniel deceived? Was Mordecai deceived, when he looked to the Lord, and turned the tide of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? But time would fail me to name the various instances. The disciples in their nonage, after all they had witnessed, feared they had been deceived. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." But when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, he brought all things to their remembrance that Christ had said unto them, and everything was opened up.

I must now come to another order of things by which the people of God know the truth, and that is the personal and experimental. We have in the Bible the experience of the saved; and if we have not the same experience in kind we shall be lost; for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." I will give you some samples in conclusion. Isaiah: "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," meaning Christ Jesus in his exaltation; "and his train"—that is, the train of blessings that he should bring in—"filled the temple;" that is the church. Isaiah had such a sight and sense of the contrast between himself and God, such a sight and sense of the solemn fact that not anything unholy, unclean, blemished, spotted, superfluous, or deficient, could come near Him, that he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts." I see now that his law is holy, just, and good; and unless I am as holy as he is holy, righteous as he is righteous, perfect as he is perfect, into his presence I can never, never come. Do you know anything of this? There must be this work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. "Then flew one of the seraphim's unto me, having a live coal in his hand"—the live coal expressive of the living promises of the gospel,—"which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar;" the sacrificial altar, to denote that the promises of the gospel are by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ;—"and he laid it upon my mouth, and said. Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." Now you are sanctified by faith in this sacrifice, now you are pardoned, now you are justified, now you are saved; now in Christ you are holy as he is holy, righteous as he is righteous, perfect as God is perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect;" and Christ is perfect as God is perfect. Here, then, is another kind of evidence— internal evidence, demonstrating to you your sinner-ship on the one hand, and on the other hand the entirety of salvation by Jesus Christ. How willing this made the prophet in the service of God! "Who will go for us?" The prophet did not stop and say, Well, Lord, I will go for thee if thou wilt tell me what it is; it may be a very hard work, a painful work, a laborious work, a work for which I shall get reproached perhaps; but if thou wilt tell me what it is, and if I happen to like it, I will go. Oh no, real love has no time and no inclination to reason in that poor, cold, and devilish way. When the Lord said," Who will go for us?"—"Here am I; send me." But you do not know where. I do not care where—to the ends of the earth; I care not where it is, I care not what it is. Now that I am a saved man, God will be with me, and I shall feel it the highest honor to take the lowest place in his heavenly service.

Now, for this experience, for this conviction, to whom are we indebted? Not to erroneous men, for they do not like that any man should have such convictions as these their craft is immediately in danger. To whom are we indebted for the revelation of this perfection by the work of Christ? Not to erroneous men, for it is the very thing they wish to hide from us. Erroneous men will preach it, but then they preach something else with it. But it so happens among them sometimes there is an inquiring sinner, who says, Our minister has spoken very nicely of God's electing grace, and of the completeness of Christ's work; why, it is all done; he has spoken very nicely of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit; why, it is all done. Presently the brazen sea (the gospel) is taken down from these pedestals, Ahuz-like, and put down upon the pavement of human effort;—You can all come if you like, and you will be damned if you do not come for not coming; as though the world was drowned for not coming into the ark, and as though the Egyptians were destroyed because they did not receive the paschal lamb. Well, the man says, I cannot make this out; here is a contradiction this is not the same gospel he preached just now; this is another gospel altogether; I cannot make it out. He drops a note to the minister; he writes back and says, "Dear brother, you attend to your duty, and do all we tell you to do, and don't you become a caviler about doctrine; leave it." Well, it seems inconsistent. The Lord says, "Come, let us reason together;" but the minister says, "You must not reason; leave it." Such a one goes on; but he has taken, somehow or another, a dislike to the leeks and the onions that are brought in at the last. He cannot get on. Why, he says, this spoils me entirely; this man wants me to eat these nasty leeks and onions, and I won't eat them. I will see if I can find some

table where the meal ends as it begins, and where I shall get a few grapes of Eshcol, a few golden apples from the apple tree in the midst of the wood, a few promises that hang upon the tree of life. And in the Lord's own time that man is brought to know the yea and amen truth of the gospel; there he takes his stand, to be moved no more forever. I will tell you one and all, solemnly, as a dying man—and I am speaking to you as dying men and women,—your conversion, if you have not this experience, is only deception, and the enemy is more delighted with you now than he was before; because when you were unconverted he was afraid you might be led to seek after God's mercy; but now you are mentally and morally converted, but have no downward experience, no poverty, no helplessness, no wretchedness, Satan has got you now more fast than he ever had you before. Now he is an angel of light, you are one of his pets, and lost you will be if you die in that state without this downward experience, and without this sense of poverty which drives you to receive God's truth. Then Habakkuk, he so heard the word of God as to cut him up, root and branch. "When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble; when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops," as our version says; but the margin reads it, "he will cut them in pieces;" that is, his adversaries. Then, when the Lord turned the tide, rolled in his eternal mercy, and the prophet saw that God was for him, Ah, he said, now that God is for me, let all nature fail, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet; and he will make me to walk upon mine high places," an allusion very likely to the 49th of Genesis and the 33<sup>rd</sup> of Deuteronomy. 49th of Genesis: "Naphtali is a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words." 33<sup>rd</sup> of Deuteronomy: "Oh, Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord." Then, again, I meant to have gone to many scriptures in the New Testament, such as—"if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me;" but the Savior, when the truth of the covenant to which he belongs is told concerning him, is not attractive to any but to the soul that is born of God, because none but such are poor enough to need what the Savior truly is. Thousands not born of God know they need a Savior, but they feel not their need of the Savior in that order of things essential to the salvation of anyone; they are attracted by a Savior set forth by a perversion of the Holy Scriptures. The apostle, in the last chapter of 2nd Timothy, says, "I have kept the faith;" and in the first chapter of the same epistle sums up in few words the substance and order of salvation thus:—"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."