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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A GOOD ACCOUNT.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 24TH NOVEMBER, 1867.

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.

WHEN we look at the order of eternal salvation, we are led to the unavoidable conclusion that the Lord's people cannot by any possibility have anything at the last to give but a good account, the work of Jesus Christ having completely met everything that was against them. And then the scriptures are clear also upon this fact, that “absent from the body, present with the Lord.” We have not only in the case of the thief upon the cross, and of Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and Lazarus being taken to Abraham's bosom—we have not only in these instances the proof that immediately “absent from the body, present with the Lord,” but the apostle lays it down as a general rule belonging to all the people of God, that “absent from the body, present with the Lord,” and all such die in the Lord. The soul, therefore, that dies in Christ, dies in what Christ is; and you might just as well speak of Jesus Christ having a bad account to give when he entered heaven, as to talk of the Christian having a bad account to give. Jesus Christ when he entered heaven gave a good account, and the soul departing from this world in him gives a good account of itself in accordance with the account that Christ has given on its behalf. And then again, at the last great day we are shown that the people of God are to be raised up in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here again will not be the presence, nor the shadow of the presence of anything against them. Thus it stands clear that the account they will have to give will be a good account. Some people try to make us believe that there is a place of purification between this and heaven, called Purgatory. It is our happiness to know that the scriptures contain no such doctrine. We are not to explain plain scriptures by ambiguous ones, but ambiguous scriptures by plain ones. They say,—Well, the thief was admitted to paradise—and they gravely tell us that the Jews drew a line of distinction between paradise and heaven. Why, that is the very worst quarter we could go to for an interpretation of the scriptures. The Saviour himself; as you see in the 23rd of Matthew, pronounces eight woes upon their system. I would as soon go to Satan himself for an interpretation of the scriptures as I would take the traditions of the Jews. Their paltry distinctions are contemptible to the last degree. The apostle

Paul makes the third heavens and the paradise of God to be one and the same place.

Now this morning my intention is to confine myself chiefly to the people of God. We may, of course, take another view, and perhaps some Lord's-day morning, should I be favoured to do so, I may give a sermon on the other side of the question, to show the kind of account that the lost will give. I will not, however, meddle with that this morning, but go straight on with the people of God, and try to point out what the Lord has done for them. And in so doing I will take a four-fold view of our subject. First,—*what the Lord Jesus Christ has done as their surety*; secondly,—*what they are before God by what the Saviour has done*; thirdly,—I will give some samples of the way in which they shall give a good account at the last, and then, fourthly—if time permit—*the individuality of this*. "Every one of us," that is, the people of God, "shall give account of himself to God." Here is no intervening of any mortal, but each one of us is to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ—the judgment-seat of God; each one of us must give account of himself to God, and the "us" here, I say, means real Christians.

First then, *what the Saviour has done for them as their surety*; releasing them from all legal responsibility, bringing them out of legal into gospel responsibility. These are two very different positions. The one is the responsibility of the servant, the other is the responsibility of the child, the son, the heir of God, the joint heir with Christ. First then, let us notice some plain and undeniable things, and the plainer the better. Now it is undeniable that the Lord Jesus Christ was made under the law—"made of a woman, made under the law." And the holy and blessed Spirit there explains to us by the apostle what this was for,—*"he was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,"* not forgetting here, that all of us are by nature under the law, under sin, and under the curse. Now Jesus Christ has come under the law of God, and we are also assured that he is the end of the law for righteousness, that he did live in a perfection of conformity to that law. In order to illustrate this point, I will just bring one scripture, and that is where the Lord saith,—*"For every idle word that man shall speak, he shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."* Now if you take that to yourself—I speak to the Christian—where would you be in the day of judgment? I say nothing about you before you were called by grace; but the idle words you have spoken since you have been called by grace. Why, if that belonged to the Christian, then where would be the completeness of the Saviour's work to set the prisoner free? Where would be the completeness of the atonement of Christ, that blood that cleanseth from all sin? Where would be the validity of the challenge, *"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"* It is God that justifieth; it is Christ that died and rose again." No, our answer to that is this,—that Jesus Christ never spake an idle word, he never had an idle thought, never spent an idle minute, never did an idle thing. All his thoughts, all his words, all his works, were of infinite and eternal weight. And precious faith in him frees us from all that and from everything else. *"Ye are complete in him."* Then again, the Saviour speaks of his responsibility as a duty—something that he ought to carry out. And of course he speaks of it in that way on the ground that he himself did, as a divine person, enter from everlasting into a covenant with the Father to do these things; for we read that his goings forth were from of old, even from everlasting. And therefore, simply on the ground of his undertaking to do so, not on the ground of any worth or worthiness in the creature (for just the reverse was the case), but on the ground of his undertaking to do so, he speaks of it as a duty. Our translation, it is true, does not use the word "duty," but the original contains the idea, where the Saviour saith, *"Ought not Christ to*

have suffered?" Now the original word there translated "ought" is sometimes translated "duty;" therefore the Saviour's meaning there is, Was it not a debt that I owed? I entered into a covenant bond to pay the mighty debt you owed; I became the Surety of the everlasting covenant; and on the ground of my becoming the Surety, I felt bound to carry this suretyship out. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" Here, then, the Lord Jesus Christ came under the law, and grew up out of the law by having fulfilled the law, and has brought in everlasting righteousness. And then again, he has suffered in his person all that was due to sin. In a word, he came to set the prisoner free—entirely and eternally free. Hence that beautiful scripture, among many others, "As for thee, also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." Now if Jesus Christ be the end of the law, then the law is dead to me; it asks nothing whatever from me; and if I am dead to that, then I am alive to God by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit bringing me to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as my life. Thus the law is ended. Hence I have reminded you sometimes, that while the Saviour established the law of divine supremacy, there were some laws, as you are aware—which I will just name hastily—which, having answered their end, he abolished. You have in the 5th of Matthew an account of the three laws which the Saviour abolishes; and if you understand it rightly, it is very beautiful. He abolishes the law of oaths—"Swear not at all"—because his one immutable oath is our eternal security, and therefore we do not need any other oath, but we are to receive his sworn covenant. Also he abolishes the law of retaliation. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;" but I say unto you, that that law is abolished. You are to bless, and curse not. You are not now to deal in the law of retaliation. I have met all that your sins deserved, and God will not deal with you by the law of retaliation, but by the law of redemption, by the law of mediatorial righteousness, by the law of a sworn covenant: sovereign mercy will reign, and you shall be saved. Also he abolishes the law of hatred. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy;" but he shows that we are not to hate; and so he himself has slain the enmity, put away all wrath, so that his oath is our security;—no more retaliation, and no more hatred. This great matter of God coming to earth, this great matter of obtaining eternal redemption, originated in God's love, was carried on by his love, and terminated by his love, and all his saints are at the last to be perfect in love. When we look, then, at God laying all the sins of the people upon Christ, and what the Saviour has done, that all his work is complete, how is it possible that the people of God can have any account to give at the last of that but a good account? I have, then, made these few remarks to show how Jesus Christ has met the law, and met our sins, and met the demands of justice, and has met everything. Indeed, nothing more can be said than is said,—“Ye are complete in him.” And for myself, I am ashamed when I look at two or three things concerning myself. First, when I look at my doubts and fears. Here am I sometimes fearing I do not belong to the Lord; just as though he would show me these eternal truths, and then destroy me at last. And here am I fretting over a few crooks in temporal matters, instead of holding them as being needful to my welfare; for if these things were not needful, he would not suffer them to take place. And when we can see the Lord aright, we can rest on him, and fall in a little with the apostle when he saith, "We are exceeding joyful in all our tribulations." And then the last, and that which I am more ashamed of before God than I am of anything else, is my backwardness to serve him, my backwardness to pray, my littleness of zeal, my want of activity in his service. There is not anything worth existing for in comparison of Jesus

Christ, in comparison of his kingdom, in comparison of his glory. When old age comes on, and your poor body is withered up like a piece of grass, even then your soul shall be happy,—Christ will be your treasure, and you will realize more and more of the blessedness that God has bestowed upon you, more and more of the blessedness of a saving knowledge of Christ.

Secondly, let us notice *what the people are before God by what the Saviour has done*,—to carry out the thought that they cannot by possibility have any account to give but a good one. Let us hear what is said upon what the people are by what Jesus Christ has done, and the intense, the unalterable, and unabateable delight that God hath in the people by what Christ hath made them. In the 45th Psalm it is said of the Saviour, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” That means because he had no sin. We will therefore take the word “fair,” as applied to the people of God, to mean that sinlessness which they have by Jesus Christ, “Thou art fairer than the children of men; ‘grace’—covenant of grace—is poured into thy lips; therefore, God hath blessed thee for ever.” So that when the people are called “fair,” I take that to be a declaration of their likeness to Christ, and a declaration of their sinlessness by what Jesus Christ has done. In Solomon’s Song there are representations of his mediatorial work, and of the happy consequences that should follow. The Saviour’s path and sufferings are compared to a winter, and to a tempestuous rain. You read of fire and brimstone being rained on the wicked; and what is to be rained on them stretched out to eternity was to be on him in a concentrated form; and that cold that perisheth us, perishes our mortal lives, and brings us to eternal privation and destitution, the Saviour endured. Now mark, he comes to the church, and speaks of his sufferings as past: “The winter is past; the rain of wrath is over and gone.” It was not yet literally, but it was in counsel, it was in God’s decision. Then he goes on to describe what the church is in the happy state of things that shall follow what he has done. “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” from the law, where the winter is; come away from the world, where the winter is; come away from all the devil’s religions, as well as his irreligions, where the winter is. “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away, for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth.” What are these but the fragrant promises of the gospel? “The time of the singing of birds is come;” and what will make the birds of Paradise sing but a knowledge of what Christ has done?—free, and free for ever; brought from under the most inclement skies into the most genial, paradisiacal climate, where there shall be no more night while eternity rolls; where “the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick; for the people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquity.” “The voice of the turtle”—the Holy Spirit—“is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs,”—these are promises ripening for us—“and the vines with the tender grape”—Christ is the vine, the tender grape meaning his tender words; for he spake tender words, words of compassion, words of kindness, such as no man ever did, ever can, or ever will speak. His tender words have melted the hearts of millions; they have melted off the fetters of untold thousands; his tender words have healed innumerable diseases; his tender words have taken all bitterness out of the souls of a number that no man can number. “Arise, my love”—it is for you this paradisiacal scene of things;—“arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” What! something laid to her charge after all this? Why, do you think he loves to-day and hates to-morrow; justifies to-day, and condemns to-morrow; hot to-day, and cold to-morrow; interested to-day, and indifferent to-morrow? No, no; he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Now if that is the way the Lord deals with you, you will see the account you will have to give. The account

you will have to give will be that he met the storm for you, brought you out from Sinai, brought you out from Satan, brought you out from where you must have perished to where you cannot perish, brought you into this paradisiacal scene of things, where all is pleasing—east, west, north, and south. “He shall take away the rebuke of his people from off all the earth; and there is no quarter from which any evil can reach those that are brought into these mystic mountains. But again—take another representation of his mediatorial work, and of what the people are by it, and the intense interest he has in them. “I will get me to the mountain of myrrh”—the mountain of bitterness. I make no hesitation in saying, if I am charged with the fault of extravagance, that there never was since the foundation of the world, and there never will be again, such an accumulation and concentration of intense bitterness as that which Christ underwent. I believe the bitterness he underwent was that which none but himself could survive. Such was the bitterness of his spirit that he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Oh, it was a bitter cup that he drank; it was a bitter scene through which he went. Those of you that know something of the threatenings of the word lying on your spirit, and a consciousness of guilt in connection with those threatenings, a consciousness that God might in a moment rain down those threatenings upon your guilty soul—you do, indeed, thus slightly taste the cup; but you will join with Mr. Hart, and say concerning Christ,—

“We, indeed, but taste the cup;
Thou alone hast drank it up.”

“I will get me to the mountain of myrrh.” Ah, if he had not himself gone there, none could have brought him there—no. When he said, “Whom seek ye?” by a slight movement of his omnipotency, “they went backward, and fell to the ground.” They could not have taken him if he himself had not gone; he could have escaped the whole. But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled? Will he leave his bride? will he leave his brethren? will he leave his Father’s will and counsels? No, never; he was the spotless one, the perfect one, under all circumstances. “I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense;” that is, his intercession. And now mark what he says next. The very next words are, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.” Look at that! “Come with me from Lebanon;” you will find me a true friend; you will find me a friend that loves at all times; you will find me a friend above all others; you will find in me all you can need for time and eternity. “Come with me.” Here is the invitation on three grounds: first, on the ground of what he has suffered; secondly, on the ground of his intercession—the hill of frankincense; thirdly, on the ground of purity—spotless by his righteousness. “Come with me from Lebanon”—the forest of this world;—“look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon.” And if we follow Cruden as to the meaning of those words (and we cannot follow a better, for he is well versed in scripture words and their meaning)—if Amana mean “truth and integrity,” then we ask, where was the promise confirmed? At Calvary’s cross. “It is finished.” Take your stand there by faith, and look from that point, and see that the sacrifice is accomplished, the promise fulfilled. “From the top of Shenir;” and if Shenir, according to Cruden, signifies “light,” then you have there the light of the Saviour’s completeness. “And Hermon,” signifying “destruction,”—take your stand here, in the confirmation of the truth, and in the light of the Saviour’s completeness, and you will see sin’s destruction, Satan’s destruction, hell’s destruction, the grave’s destruction; you will see carried out what is written—“I will redeem them from death; I will ransom them from the power of the grave. O death, I will be thy plagues; oh, grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” “From the lion’s den.” What is

the lion's den? An ungodly world. "I send you forth as lambs among wolves,"—lambs among lions would have been the same meaning. What is an ungodly world but spiritually a den of wild beasts? and none but God can tame them. "From the mountains of the leopards,"—all meaning the same thing. And is not this effect actually produced? Oh, the soul leaves an ungodly world, leaves an empty professing world, for they are nothing but enemies to God's truth; the soul feels its way after the Lord Jesus Christ. And then mark the Saviour's intense delight in the people by what he has done; and there is something very deficient in us if we cannot in some humble measure respond with similar feelings, allowing for the infinite disproportion between the Saviour and the sinner. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes:" ah, what eye is that but the believing eye, the eye that looks upon him with confidence, without a shadow of doubt as to what he is?—"with one chain of thy neck." I suppose I must not be fanciful here, or else I know what I should say,—well, never mind, I may as well say it; I never can get away from it; whenever I read that scripture, "one of thine eyes," I say to myself, That is the eye of faith, and the eye of faith is a loving eye, an earnest eye, a chaste eye; it looks upon Christ, and rejects every other, disdains every other. And then, "one chain of thy neck." I never can get away from the 8th of the Romans when I read that,—“Whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate; whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” That is a beautiful chain, it is a complete chain, too, and it will distinguish you. Yes, they will call you a *hyper* if you wear that chain; never mind, it is a chain of grace. "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." So if you are the Lamb's bride you will be glad to wear that chain that God has made you a present of; you are to wear it to your own comfort and to his honour. And if people say, Ah! you have a chain round your neck—foreknowledge, I see; predestinarian, I see; effectual calling, I see; justification, I see; glorification, I see; I see what you are,—never mind that; I am glad you do; I am glad you are enabled to see what I am, because it may make you long to be the same. Here, then, Jesus Christ is the best of friends, and his people are the best of people. His heart is ravished, carried away, wholly delighted. And then he shows—and I like that, too how pure her affection is to him: "How fair is thy love!" how pure!—"grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility," as it may there be rendered, and is rendered in the margin. So, then, if Christ say, "Poor sinner, lovest thou me?" the answer will be, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine!" Here is a condescension for the great God to make so much of our little affection to him. Does it not encourage us still to seek his love, and to pray for more and more of the shedding abroad of that love? "And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" What are these ointments? Why, the truths of the gospel. Ointments are for two purposes—to heal and to perfume; and so the truths of the gospel heal the soul and perfume the soul. And you know when you do hear some of the children of God give an account of the work of God in their souls, and how the truth has healed them, ah, what a savour attends the testimony! Then, again, the Saviour goes on to appreciate the sweetness of the church. "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." Is it possible that a poor minister, a feeble stammerer, a piece of clay, an earthen vessel, can stammer out a few things concerning Jesus, and the Holy Spirit shall make them taste to the people sweeter than honey and the honeycomb? And what is thus made sweet to them is

sweet to Christ; he loves to see his children seeking him, he loves to see them assemble together;—

“He makes a more delightful stay
Where churches meet to praise and pray.”

And then see the security of the church. “A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse,” surrounded with the walls of eternal salvation. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people for ever.” “A spring shut up,”—she has no affection for any but her own love; she despises all others, rejects all others, and addresses the heart-searching God in the language, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth I desire beside thee.” There is a fountain of blessedness in her possession the world cannot get at, “a fountain sealed.” How completely is the fountain of eternal life sealed to some of you! You hear of it, but you do not thirst for it, you do not seek for it; it is hidden from you; it is sealed. But it does not follow that it always will be—no; if the Lord is pleased to give you the desire, then “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life;” and thou wilt soon find out where it is—that it is in Christ; that our God is the fountain of living waters; that he is that fountain that never runs dry; that he is that way in which everlasting consolation must be our portion. He next saith, looking round at what he had done, and what the church was by that,—“Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible” to thy foes “as an army with banners.” “Thou art beautiful.” You know that scripture in the 13th of Jeremiah, how differently it sounds when applied to the Saviour to what it did when addressed to Zedekiah. The Lord made Zedekiah king, and if he had kept all false gods out, he would have kept the Babylonians out and the Israelites in. But, saith the Lord to Zedekiah,—“Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?” Scattered to Babylon. And how is this? Because Zedekiah held with Satan against God’s truth. Ah, let this question be put to the Saviour,—“Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?”—“Here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me.” “Thou art beautiful, O my love.” What wife could be afraid of her husband coming home if that was all he had to say to her? No fault of any sort whatever. “Thou art beautiful, O my love.” Ah, she would say, I have got the best husband in the world, for in his eyes I am altogether lovely; no fault in me. Well then, friends, I am sure we need not be afraid to go home where our Husband is, if that is the way in which he will receive us. “Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah”—a paradisiacal district in Canaan; “comely as Jerusalem”—compact together; all that my heart desires;—“terrible as an army with banners.” Then the summing up is this:—“How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!” Now what shall we say in response? Must we not say indeed that Jesus is the perfection of beauty? Is it not by him that God hath shined out of Zion in the perfection of beauty? Is he not indeed a paradise of paradises? Is he not indeed comely as Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem? Do not he and the new Jerusalem sweetly accord? and is he not terrible as an army with banners—conquering every foe; and will it not be our song to eternity, “Victory through the blood of the lamb?” “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights.” I want my religion to be a delight to me. I know it is a great mercy to be in Zion at all, a great mercy only to be a mourner after the Lord; still at the same time there are moments when our souls can delight in the Lord for the great things the Lord has done for us! Then if I go to other scriptures, you will see the same thing. “Complete in him”; “perfect in him”; and “that he might present you in the body of his flesh through death holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.” And if you go to the latter

part of the Book of Revelation you will there see the Lamb's bride in all that sweetly accords with what I have said this morning.

I will now hasten to the third part, and that will be as far as we shall be able to reach this morning—namely, to give you *some samples of the way in which the people of God shall give a good account at the last*. It must be a good account; they cannot have a bad account to give. Christ has accounted for all their sins, and for all the law demands. All they will have to give will be what the Lord has done for them. What sort of account do you think Abramam would give? He would say,—There I was, but thou didst have mercy upon me; thou didst bring me out of Ur of the Chaldees, and thou didst reveal to me thy sworn covenant; I lived in it and died in it, and I am happy in heaven, not a word about his sins, Isaac would give a similar account; Jacob would give a similar account. And what account would Rahab give? Why, she would say,—Lord, there I was, a harlot by trade, there I was, on the road to eternal ruin, and knew it not. But I heard of thy mighty power in overturning Pharaoh and his host; I heard of thy mighty power in overturning the kings on the other side of the river; I heard that thou hadst given thy people the land; and by that hearing faith came into my soul, and I began to believe that thou wert the only true God, and I thought if I could but meet with one of thy ministers, one or two of thy servants, to get a little information upon this all-important matter, how delighted I should be! Lord, in thy providence thou didst send two men, called in the blessed word spies; and when they came, and I found they were servants of God, how delighted I was! How glad I was to enter into a covenant with them, and for them to enter into a covenant with me! and I felt I dare not betray them. The Pharisee world, and professors that are half-opponents of God's truth, may blame me for not doing so; but I could not and would not betray them; and thou hast saved me, thou hast brought me among thine Israel, thou hast given me a name in the genealogy of the blessed, and now I am here in this world of glory through thy sovereign mercy, rich grace, great salvation, wonderful providence, deep counsels, and eternal perfection. And what sort of an account do you think Ruth would? She would give an account analogous to this. There I was, a heathen; and I heard Naomi talk of the God of Israel:—I said nothing; but when I was going on my journey towards Bethlehem Naomi wanted me to go back. I did not mean to have told her the change that had been wrought in me; like some others of the people of God, who like to keep their religion to themselves as long as they can, but it must come out some day. Well, Naomi said, "Won't you go back, Ruth?" "No." "Why not?" "Because I like thy people." "Well, but I shall have some rough lodgings." "I don't care; where thou lodgest I will lodge." "Well, have you anything more to say?" "Yes; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." "What, above all other gods?" "Yes, they are no gods." Boaz met her—Boaz, the representative of the Saviour:—"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." What a good account would Ruth give. So of all the rest. And is not the reception of the prodigal a very pleasing representation of the final account? The prodigal came, and he meant to work out a long confession of what he had done. Ah, as though the father should say, I know what you have done; I have forgiven it all; do not say a word about it. The prodigal was not allowed to speak of his sins, the father would not speak of them; only the Pharisaic elder brother. How different the father! Bring the best robe; bring the shoes; bring the ring; bring the music; let us be merry: he was lost, and is found; he was dead, he is now alive.

Here, then, is indeed a good account; and if these things will not make us serve God with all our hearts and souls, I do not know what will.