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THE CORE OF THE PENTATEUCH.

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OUR position in these papers is simply to give the outcome of our studies carried on for our own mental satisfaction. We do not seek to reconcile things, but only to reach a *modus vivendi*, so that we may be able both to study science and to use our Bible. We treat them both, and students on both sides, with due respect, only desiring to avoid conflicting theories that might bar the way. On some points, both about the Bible and about science, we are not at all confident; but we do not regard the difficulties as insurmountable, or as greater than one might expect to encounter under the circumstances. We do not think ourselves justified in subordinating science to the apparent statement of Scripture, nor on the other hand in condemning the Scripture because we have failed to see how it can be paralleled with our notions of science. Whenever we fail to recognize their harmony we prefer not immediately to adjudicate the matter, but to await further light if it shall ever arrive. This course is in our opinion warranted by considering the outcome of older controversies, in most of which there were bilateral errors. We should add that from converse with men of science and clergymen, we have found that as a general rule they are very much alike, both sides wanting to find and to accept what is right, though apt at times on both sides to misunderstand the aims and attitude of the other side. It is usually a gross injustice, and also injurious to our own side, when we impute wrong motives to others because we do not like their arguments and conclusions.

Of the Pentateuch, as of every other book, and of many other objects, we may specify two categories of characters, the internal

LAYING ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT.

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR. ROBERT E. SPEER,
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ON the way here on the train to-day, reading over again the Epistle to the Hebrews, I was struck with the appropriateness of the letter to men who have gathered together to re-examine their spiritual ideals of character and of service and to raise their lives, if possible, a little nearer to their ideals. Dr. Moore referred to the message which Dr. Rice would speak if he were here this afternoon, as an appeal to men to lift their lives to levels more Christ-like, to levels of more holiness of thought and feeling, to levels of more usefulness. If any part of the Bible makes that appeal to us more strongly than any other, it is this letter to which I have referred. It is setting forth from the beginning the claims of superior things over inferior, and it would be an interesting study for any man to go through it and observe its succession of appeals to men to move from lower to higher, and from higher on to what is higher still.

The one particular appeal that has been in my heart to speak about—and I believe, after hearing what Dr. Moore has said, that it has been providentially suggested—is the one laying upon our consciences particularly the obligation to clean our lives of every unholy and weakening thing, and to draw as near as we can to the likeness of Christ, that we may acquire as much as we can of that sacred influence. I am thinking particularly of the beginning of the twelfth chapter of the epistle, where, after a long list of the heroes and heroines of sacrifice and faith, the writer of this Epistle, whoever he may have been, appeals to the Christians to whom it is addressed, that since they are compassed about with all this cloud of witnesses, they should lay off every weight and the sin that clings so closely to them, and run the race that is set before them, with their eyes fixed upon the Saviour, who stands behind the goal awaiting the runners as they come in.

Very often I go back to ask myself the questions which that appeal suggests—do I think of my life as a race? Have I that conception of it, of its intensity, of the gravity of the issues it presents, that feeling of earnestness about it, which would entitle me to speak of it as a race? And have I cleaned out of my life, stripped off from myself as I run, every hindering and encumbering thing which would impede me as I run my race to the Saviour behind the goal? We may be sure that, whether we ask these questions of ourselves or not, other people are asking them about us all the time. They think they ought to see some distinction between us, the men who are running, and the spectators. You have no difficulty in distinguishing between the runners on the track and the lookers-on; you have no difficulty in distinguishing between the team and the spectators in any athletic contest; the men show out by what they have laid aside. The world looks on and expects to see us, as men who are running a race, strip off everything that might hinder us. They expect to see us, to put it in moral terms, better men than they are. We are constantly asked whether ministers should be better men than others. No, not better than others ought to be; but they should be better men than others are. It is a perfectly just contention that we who are supposed to be leaders in Christ's church should show forth that we are better men. And woe to that Christian leader who does not show forth in his life that he is stripped, as for a race, of every weight, that he is keyed up in his conception of what he is here to do, as a runner who, stripped of every impediment, runs away with his eyes upon his goal.

And that we are meant to take this stern and rigid view of our lives is obvious enough from the terms in which this appeal is couched. We are not asked to lay aside everything unclean—that is included in the things we are to lay aside—but the appeal is not only to lay aside every sin, but the weights also that hinder us. There are numerous things that hinder us which cannot be denounced as sins. I think the line is not so clearly drawn as we sometimes draw it, but it is clear enough, from the language here, that everything hindering is intended to be radically handled. Everything that will clog a man's activity, everything that will impede him in the higher life, everything that may shear him of his power, however legal it may be, however moral it may be, is nevertheless resolutely to be stripped from a man's life and from himself.

There is something about the weights with which we load ourselves that makes them more perilous than sins. A man knows generally what sin is, he goes into it with open eyes. But a man may bear weights without knowing he is bearing them at all. Maybe he was conscious of the weight when he took it on, maybe it hindered him a little bit then and he felt it, but he soon became accustomed to it, and he runs now fettered and shackled without knowing that he is not free. I am not so much afraid of the sins that I see; what I am afraid of is my color-blindness, that I may not be able to see things that a keener and more sensitive vision would discern, that I may be bearing burdens to which I have accustomed myself so that I do not know that they are hindering me in my life. You know that when we were small boys, we would sometimes get water in our ears while in swimming. When we first got it in, all the world seemed to be changed; there seemed to be a Sabbath stillness over the whole world. But we got accustomed to it in a few hours, and then we would not know that we had lost any distinctness of hearing. But after a few days the obstruction was gone, and suddenly the sounds of the world burst upon us with a great roar, and only then did we know how we had been encumbered during those days when our hearing had had this slight impediment.

Any man with a clearer vision than I will discern in myself some weight. There is not a man in this room this evening who is not hindered by some weight. And the anguish of it is that we do not know we are hindered, and no one else will disclose it to us. If we could only lay our lives down, open to the eyes of Christ, every man would discover to his shame that he was bearing burdens of which he was not aware. Once let a man try to tear a thing off and then he can judge whether it is a weight or not. Is it a hard thing for him to give up—this indulgence, this particular personal pleasure? Then it is a weight that hinders him. I remember going off, a little while ago, with a friend who is a minister in one of our largest cities, and while I was in his company he told me how he had been led to give up an indulgence of his. He had never realized that he had been a slave to it until one day the thought came to him, "Don't you think you would be a better man if you gave it up?" He said, "I will try it and see," and then he realized how shackled he had been, how hard it was to tear off those chains; and when he got them torn

off, he walked out into a life and liberty of whose existence he had not known so long as he had walked in the old serfdom.

Men often say about these hindrances, "I am a better man than so and so with them," which has nothing to do with the morals of the question. Carrying those weights I may be a better man than another, but I am not as good as I would be without those weights. Would I not be a man superior to myself, regardless of the comparison of my life with that of other men, if I cut this thing off and walked forth a free man? If you will examine your own lives to-day, you will find some things which you will concede are really impediments and hindrances, things you would at once discontinue, as you know, if Christ came walking into your room. Have I any right to cherish practices which I would not practice in the presence of Christ?

And there are subtler hindrances than these that might be described as weights and impediments in our character. There is that self-consciousness that so poisons all the best that is in men and destroys all the foundations of a man's spiritual life—the self-consciousness that fills up our lives when our minds are concerned with thoughts of ourselves rather than of Christ, or about ourselves as serving Christ rather than Christ as served by us. I know men who can make themselves cry thinking of the sacrifices they might one day make for Christ, but they never cry about the sacrifices Christ has made for them. A self-consciousness that poisons the inner life in that way inevitably creeps out to poison a man's works, so that when he gets up to preach the gospel it is his own face that looks at him instead of the face of Christ. And this exaltation of ourselves takes a thousand wretched forms. There is a self-consciousness which takes the form of pride of strength—a man finding out what in him is strong, and becoming vain of that. There is a self-consciousness taking the form of pride of service, so that when a man does service he will sit down and feel gratification at what he has done and the success with which he has done it. There is a self-consciousness that takes the form of pride in over-coming. As Mazzini says, "The morrow of victory is more perilous than its eve." I think that is exemplified in the prayers of our Master after the great events of his life. Any man, before the great events of his life, is keyed up, with all the powers at his disposal, aware of the danger of failure, and throwing himself

at the crisis with all his powers. But every man knows, who studies his own life, that those are the very times when a man can stand alone, if he ever can stand alone. It is after the battle is over, after the victory has been successfully achieved, when we sit down in the moment of victory, that we fall—that our character suffers collapse and the evil one finds his access deepest into our souls.

There is a form of self-consciousness that constantly attacks every man engaged in organized Christian work—the poison that arises out of the pride of precedence; men quarrel over whether they have the place to which they think they are entitled. There is nothing which is more un-Christlike, nothing which produces friction and waste in the Christian church more than this thing. As I came out of my office last evening to keep an engagement before taking the train here, I saw hanging upon the wall of my stenographer's room a little pasteboard card on which she had printed these rules of Archbishop Benson, "First, not to call attention to crowded work or petty fatigue or trivial experience; second, to heal wounds which in times past my cruel and careless hands have made; third, to seek no favor, no compassion to deserve, not ask for tenderness; fourth, not to feel any uneasiness when my advice or opinion is not asked, or is set aside."

What a transformation would pass over Christian service if every man could strip off the weights that hinder him!

Then, at the other extreme, is self-depreciation, living in the despair which arises out of that exalting of ourselves to the first place or to that pre-eminence which belongs to Christ alone. With reference to so much of the work of our life, however Christ may think of it, we think of it only with shame and abhorrence. Thus that poison of self-consciousness stains and poisons us on this side, as on the other. Then there is the spirit of torpor that creeps into our lives, as we see in our use of old, well-worn phrases in prayer, as we fall back upon old, effete phrases when we try to preach the gospel, seeking the easy thing, the repetition of some old or borrowed message rather than the spiritual anguish a man must pass through to become the bearer of a message sent through him. And is there any one who is not hindered by the spirit of lifelessness in service, speaking the words when there is no corresponding yearning beneath? I was speaking in a military school in the South some years ago, and after the

meeting was over, the head of the school, who had been a major in the Confederate army, came up to me to speak with me about the meeting, and I said, "Yes, Major, but it is hard for a man to speak all he feels." He said, "Mr. Speer, is that really the difficulty? Don't you think it is harder for a man to feel all he says?" We often speak the words of invitation, but there is no passion of the soul that goes with them. I was reading the other night to a friend who is studying law in New York, who is not satisfied with what he is doing, and yet is not clearly of the opinion that he is called to the ministry, some of James Thomson's poetry, and I looked again at the "City of the Dreadful Night," and that marvellous picture—some of you remember it—of the soul passing through the desert, until at last through the darkness it came out alone and stood upon a bluff and looked down on the sea. Suddenly, to its horror, it saw, lying upon the white sand, where the waves were coming in and the tide was rising, its own body asleep, and it stood on that cliff where it was impotent, unable to go down and save itself lying there. Presently coming down the sands was a white figure, and as it drew nearer it seemed to have a red lamp in its hand; and as it came nearer, the soul saw it was a woman, and the lamp she carried was only her own heart with the blood drops trickling through her fingers. And she came to the lifeless body lying there, and raised it up in her arms, and carried it back from the rising tide. I do not know all that James Thomson intends to teach by his allegory, but I have taken it as typical of that tenderness which must mark all service.

Those are only a few of the weights that hinder us. And alas, there are not only weights resting on us; would to God they were weights alone! With a little of the clearer vision of Christ, we might discover them, and, by his grace, tear them from our lives. But worse things hinder men, even Christian men. Lay aside the weights, to be sure, but also the sins. I read last summer in the *British Student* a very suggestive article called "The Perils of the Forgiven Life," and the last peril was the peril of grievous moral fall. I am thinking of one minister who was once one of the conspicuous ministers of New York City, a man of delicate mental nature, of responsive spiritual disposition and spiritual influence, whose life went into a moral abyss, and he is wandering out in the world somewhere—nobody

knows where he has gone—with the stamp of the adulterer on his brow. Let no man think he is so sacred that he does not walk on the edge of the possibility of great moral fall.

And there are other sins that confront us, not sins of conduct alone, but sins of temper also. One is tempted to think at times that spiritual workers, more than any others, are exposed to sins of irascibility. Any of us who will stop to scrutinize his own life will realize how many sins of temper there are. I think the thing I have to fight hardest myself is just this temptation to impatience. One sees things clearly oneself, and cannot brook hesitation or opposition in others; one perceives what he believes to be the truth so easily oneself, and cannot understand why others cannot see it as easily and respond to it. There are no sins to which we are so prone as sins like these, and they simply rob men of their spiritual power, as they destroy in men their likeness to Christ.

And it is not the sins that we speak of generally and as public weaknesses, but it is the sin that clings closest to a man, that does most easily beset him. I think I know mine; I suspect you know yours. That is the thing to be taken hold of and rooted remorselessly out of your life. The weights, and the sins also, are to be laid aside.

Notice how sweeping — “laying aside every weight.” You may say, “Some of my seminary professors do these things, some of the holiest men I know do these things.” What has that to do with “laying aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset you”? I believe one great fault of the preaching of our day is its lack of moral rigidity, its readiness to make compromises, and to deal with the highest and firmest standards of life in a spirit of compromise. I think I know the hearts of students, and I believe that what students and young men everywhere want is a gospel that makes an appeal for moral character as hard as granite, and will not abate one jot or one tittle of its moral standard. You cannot win the young men we want by exalting a standard of life that lets in all sorts of compromises. What young men respond to is the thing that men responded to in Jesus’ day—the hard, firm, religious teaching of unqualified integrity and righteousness.

I wonder sometimes what principle occasioned the selection of those events in the last week of Christ’s life that are recorded

for us. Take, for example, the purging of the temple and the destroying of the fig tree. The only principle I can see is just the principle of unqualified, uncompromising absoluteness of the Christian appeal to the character and to the life. Not only the men who sold oxen, the men who changed money and the men who sold doves, but even the men who carried vessels were driven out by our Lord. Now what under the sun took him to such extremes? What harm would the carrying of water through the temple do anybody? The selling of oxen and doves and the changing of money would create a disturbance, but would the carrying of water disturb anybody at worship? Why did he go to such an extreme? For the simple reason that with our Lord a principle was a principle. Little or big, it was a principle none the less. The truth was the truth unqualifiedly, and he asked it all of men.

"Laying aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us." You know, Chinese Gordon cut off his newspapers. Men say that was an act of moral cowardice. The world never accused him of that. He wrote to his sister that he found that the newspapers were simply poisoning his spiritual life, and he was going to cut away from all of them. Whatever a man finds is robbing him of spiritual power, that thing he must hurl out of his life.

I went this week to a retreat in one of our presbyteries, and there was just this question raised of cleaning out a man's life. One of the last men to speak was one of the strongest men in the presbytery, and he said, with his chin quivering, "Brethren, I am going home from here to have a house cleaning. I am going to take every picture from my study walls except two, one is Hoffman's head of Jesus, and the other is a picture of a foot-ball game in my student days; I am going to leave them there—one to show me the life of training, and other the man I want to be. And I am going to put under them just two words, 'Running' and 'Stripped.'" Can you and I say that of our lives—running and stripped?

And it is not alone in the phraseology I have been quoting that this appeal is made in such a striking way. "Let us *run*," he says; "let us *run*." I was wondering, when Dr. Moore began to speak of Dr. Rice, whether he was going to name, among his services, the writing of the biography of James Brainerd Taylor,

the founder of the society in Princeton College out of which grew the Intercollegiate Young Men's Christian Association. Dr. Rice wrote a little biography of him which has been one of the influential books in my life. It came into my hands in one of the old editions of the Evangelical Family Library, worn out almost from much handling. James Brainerd Taylor was a man who stripped himself and ran; it was not a long race, but so long as he lasted he ran. He left his impress on Lawrenceville, where he went to school; he left his ineffaceable impress on Princeton, and he left it on this movement. He was one of those men who said he was unwilling to be a common Christian; it was his will to be a Christian after the fashion of Jesus Christ, and out of his life to tear, with no hesitation or compromise, everything that hindered him from coming to the image of his Master and from the doing of his Master's work.

I know very well that to represent it in this way does not put it truly to the experience of men. We all know it is no short spurt, quickly done and over. That is not what is meant by tearing off an impediment and running out into the free life. I have never been able to understand how men can speak of the Christian life as an easy thing. I have never found it easy myself, and I never knew any Christian man whom I felt to be in the power and freedom of the life, who was trying to fight out his life as it ought to be fought, who found it a simple and easy thing. You remember how it is put by Frederick Myers, that you cannot do it in a minute, in the twinkling of an eye; that though you begin it in the morning, it will last until evening; and many a time the noonday and the evening of your life will be stained with tears and remorse at the shirkings, the surrenders and the cowardly retreats. Through all of this we shall doubtless have to pass, but we will pass through it if our eyes are on him who stands behind the goal.

I like to go back to those two great points in the appeal which seemed in the mind of the writer of it to furnish the motive power that is required to accomplish what is appealed for. "Wherefore," he says, "seeing that we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." I take that literally myself, just as I take literally the words used by our Lord that the angels of the little children have a privileged place and immediate access to God, and do always behold the face of our Father

which is in heaven—just so, around about us all the time are those who have run this race before us, watching us. I do not know how to put it better than in the imagery which this writer uses. Many of you have been in college contests, and remember how you came out on the field and saw the thousands of spectators. I warrant, you felt the thrills run over you as you came out; there were tremors that ran up and down your nerves. You became aware of great possibilities which you never dreamed that you possessed before. You would have done anything rather than fail in the moment of trial with all of those thousands of eyes looking down upon you. "Wherefore," you say, "seeing that I am compassed about by this innumerable company, my father, my mother, and all back of them, and the eyes of greater than these fixed upon me in the daylight and the dark"—think you, such a man would refrain from doing what he can do, would fail to do all he could if he was aware every hour of those eyes upon him—those millions upon millions of eyes? Whatever weight we have to-day, whatever sin clings closest to us, all of those eyes behold. Let us let it go.

And then there is that other motive that he cites, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." It is the old figure of the Isthmian Games, the judge, the rewarder, sitting behind the goal, awaiting the runners as they come in. Behind the goal sits the Saviour, watching. I do not care to go on with the rest of the metaphor in our modern terms, though that is what the writer of the epistle would do; he would picture the runner crossing the goal a victor, and falling exhausted into the arms of Christ.

Fellow students, we need that vision before our eyes every day. We need it, as a little while ago I hinted, to expose to us what our weight and sins are. In the first chapter of his book, *The Christ of History and Experience*, Dr. Forrest points out that one unique thing in the consciousness of Jesus was his being unpolluted by any past defect, tarnish or stain. We cannot say that of any of us. I look out upon my life through a poisoned atmosphere. I look upon everything that comes my way with a defective standard of measurement. I need to see Jesus Christ with absolute clearness of vision, because he alone is the one perfect standard of measurement of what I ought to be and what I ought to do. And not for that only do I need him. I think

that every year my theology becomes more and more evangelical, because of the necessities of experience. I know that in myself no impulse, no high moral resolution and will, can make me a better man. I know in myself that I only become a better man as the Lord himself within me does his work, accomplishing for me what I myself have tried and failed to accomplish for myself. Only by looking away at him and feeling him in us shall we be able to lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and to run.

It would be a great thing if, in this opening hour, we could break past all of those memories, those little, half-conscious conventionalities, which, for the most part, determine our Christian experiences and vitalize and individualize our Christian work,—it would be a great thing if, this afternoon, we could break from these into the realities of life, and see, first of all, what things are the weights that hinder us, what thing is the sin that does so easily beset us, and then tear it away from us, and *run*. “Seeing that we also are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us,” and let us run—oh! men, *let us RUN*.