

FIRST PRINCIPLES

AND

PERFECTION

OR

THE BIRTH AND  
GROWTH OF  
A CHRISTIAN

BY

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## Preface

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THE following work was originally published serially in the "Christian Standard" — a religious paper of wide circulation and great influence. In response to numerous calls made by the readers of that journal, it is now submitted to the public in this more permanent form.

It should be stated that while the author is identified with the people known as Disciples of Christ, or Christians, and is heart and soul in sympathy with them, he alone is responsible for what is herein contained. The work is in no sense an *authoritative* exposition of their belief. Still, the fact that so many eminent and earnest men among them have given it unqualified and warm expressions of approval will show to the general public that the production, if not an adequate, is at least as far as it goes, a correct representation of their position and doctrine. In perusing it, therefore, the reader may feel assured that he is obtaining trustworthy information respecting a people who are coming so rapidly to the front; and he may find in the doctrine herein taught the real cause of their unexampled growth and widespread influence.

**GROVETOWN, GA.,** October, 1891.

# Preface to the Electronic Version

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# FIRST PRINCIPLES

## Chapter One: Introductory

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I DESIRE to submit to the readers of the "Christian Standard" a series of articles on the "Principles of the Doctrine of Christ." This language, quoted from Hebrews 6: 1, may be more literally rendered "the word of the beginning of Christ," as in the margin of the Revised Version; but the meaning of the two renderings is substantially the same. The word of the beginning is in fact the first principle of the gospel, as originally proclaimed.

The immediate context of the passage above cited suggests that these principles are *fundamental*; that it was upon them as a foundation that Christianity was built up; or that it was out of them as seed truths that it was developed.

Consequently, it is only by studying and understanding them that we can hope to reach a clear and full comprehension of the Christian religion, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

It should be noticed that the *specification* of principles given in the same context ("repentance from dead works," and "faith towards God," with some others) is not exhaustive of the *subject*, but illustrative of the writer's *meaning*. The items mentioned were quite sufficient for his purpose, serving as they did to exemplify the kind of things which he would have his readers "leave," that they might "go on to perfection." But it is scarcely

necessary to say, especially to anyone who is not "unskillful in the word of righteousness," that some extremely important principles (such, for instance, as faith in Christ) are not *included* in this list, although to a well instructed Christian they may be *implied*. I shall therefore feel justified in studying this great subject in *its historical presentation and development*, without confining myself to the allusions and specifications given in **the above cited Scripture**.

It shall be my object to conduct the investigation with all needful care and pains; and while I hope not to be tedious, I shall occupy as much time and space as may be necessary to give a perspicuous and orderly presentation of the whole subject.

On many accounts it is deemed important, not only by myself, but by others in whose wisdom I confide, that this work should be undertaken. The Christian Churches, or the people known as Disciples of Christ, who maintain and propagate the principles which I am herein to present and discuss, have established a character which naturally excites inquiry. They have not only exhibited an unswerving Christian and Biblical conservatism, but they have demonstrated, by almost uniform, certainly by very remarkable success, that they possess elements of influence and power which cannot be ignored by religious society, and which are beginning to command respectful attention and consideration from the leaders of religious thought. What I have to say, therefore, may be regarded to some extent responsive to this state of mind and feeling.

I also have in view that large class of serious and reflective persons, not members of any church, but who feel their responsibilities, who appreciate, at least in a general way, the importance and value of the Christian religion, and who, while caring nothing for the peculiar doctrines and conflicting claims of different sects, would still love to know and to receive the

essential truth. They may be in perplexity and mental difficulty. The jars, discords and rivalries among the churches may even have generated sober and honest doubts. May it not all *be* a delusion? Is there any sure and certain right way? If so, can it be found? And can it be known when it is found? To such persons the first principles of the gospel, clearly set forth and sufficiently supported by holy Scripture, will be almost like a new revelation from heaven, resolving their doubts, relieving their perplexities, banishing their darkness, and exhibiting in light and beauty the whole way of life and salvation.

Among the Disciples themselves, also, there are weighty reasons why those principles should be given a prominent and conspicuous place; and why they should be viewed from different angles, and exhibited in different lights. It is true that none of us can be said to be wholly ignorant of them. They have been discussed and advocated over and over again in some instances with indiscretion and *ad nauseam*; but in general, with thoughtful care and considerate adaptation. They have been viewed by minds of singular clearness and penetration, and supported with pen and tongue by men of great learning and strength. I cannot hope to surpass or even equal the able writers who have preceded me in this field. They have reaped the harvest; I come, like Ruth the Moabitess, to glean after them. Still, however wisely and skillfully they wrought, the special value of their work grew out of its adaptation to the times and circumstances which called for it. Now the times have changed. A new generation has come forward. Peculiar conditions and circumstances have arisen. In some respects the tone, spirit and attitude of the churches have been modified. Works which were formerly read with delight, and appreciated by every one at their true intrinsic value, are now seldom read at all, especially by the young, and when read seem to have lost something of the flavor and freshness originally possessed by them. In this rapid age it takes but a few years for such productions to go out of date. And therefore, if what I may



say shall have no greater value, it must at least, and for a time, have the value of recency.

It may be proper to add that, if spared to prosecute this undertaking, I expect to do so in my own way. I shall not seek after novelty, nor to avoid the paths which great and good men have trodden before me; and no doubt I shall generally, if not always, find myself in their company; but I shall not slavishly follow them. The nature of the subject, and the importance of the circumstances which call for its present discussion, demand that it shall be studied and treated *de novo*.

Finally, I cannot forget that the spirit of Christian unity is becoming daily more and more potential in religious society. Even the ministers of the different churches—who have hitherto exerted a repressive influence upon this spirit—are beginning to feel its force, and to anticipate the joy of its full development. And now that some of them, nay, that many of them, are coming toward us, as it were, with flags of truce, and words of love, rather than as of old with clubs and taunts, it would ill become me to meet them with blows and reproaches. If it was ever proper and necessary to present and advocate the principles of the gospel in the spirit and with the bearing of controversy and belligerency, it is not so now. It is not a time of war, but of peace; a time in which we may hope to "sit down together at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his spirit, and to transcribe his life in our own." We believe that the great fundamental principles for which we have so earnestly contended, and which have given us so much satisfaction and strength, are catholic in their nature; that by a divine adaptation they are fitted to and needed by every creature in all the world; and that it requires only a dispassionate consideration of them, free from bias and prejudice, for all to see that they are indeed what we believe them to be, "THE TRUTH AS IT IS IN JESUS."

# Chapter Two:

## Authority

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In approaching the investigation upon which we are about to enter, it is necessary first of all to consider the question of authority; for we can but acknowledge and feel that the subject itself is one which, from its very nature, is beyond the range of our own unaided thinking. We must have instruction and guidance. No philosophy, however profound and far-reaching, could ever lead us to the principles of the gospel of Christ. They belong to a different and higher sphere, beyond the boundaries of the realms both of consciousness and of observation. It is true that they come at length to be *brought* within the domain of consciousness, generating their delightful experiences, and leading the mind to intelligent and fruitful observation. But they must be *brought* there. Primarily, we cannot go to them; they must come to us. Left to themselves, our loftiest powers are wholly unable to solve humanity's most solemn problem. As already intimated, no system of philosophy ever did or ever could make known to a human being what he must do to be saved. On this subject we are dependent, absolutely and entirely, upon *revelation*.

Furthermore, as we did not and could not originate the principles of life and salvation; as they did not arise in us, and do not primarily belong to us, we have neither the right nor the competency to modify or change them. On the contrary, believing as we do that they were given to us from above, and given by Him who is the source of all light and truth, of all knowledge and wisdom, as He is of all saving grace and power, there is nothing that we can legitimately do but honestly study, gratefully embrace and faithfully observe them.

In this investigation we *assume* that the Bible is the desiderated authority. We assume it because those whom we shall address will not call it in question. If we were seeking to influence avowed infidels and skeptics, it would be necessary, first of all, to *argue* the point which we now take for granted, and give our reasons for believing that the Bible is the word of God, and its authority absolute and final. But, happily for our purpose, this preliminary work is not here necessary. We occupy ground which is common to all whom we shall especially address —the divine inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture.

It may be necessary, however, in order to relieve the subject of possible complications, to pause for a little while upon *the meaning of inspiration*; for while all reverent piety admits the *fact* of inspiration, and rejoices in it, there is room for wide divergence of opinion as to what the fact implies; and it is still an open question, In *what sense* is the Bible inspired?

Without pausing to notice the *growth* of the doctrine of inspiration as exhibited in the writings of Jewish theologians, church fathers, the schoolmen of the middle ages, and the theologians of the Reformation period, it will suffice to consider that at present all the nice distinctions and finely drawn discriminations of the past are generally disregarded, and the whole matter seems to be resolving itself into an issue between two theories:

1. That the very words of Scripture, just as they were originally penned, were *dictated* by the Holy Spirit—the writers being his passive instruments.
2. That the writers themselves were inspired with the *knowledge of the truth*, and were moved by the Holy Spirit to give expression to that knowledge, but in *their own language*; he, however, superintending the work, and preserving them from error; and that where the truth was of such character that it could be

acquired by ordinary means, without the necessity of immediate revelation from heaven, this superintendence of the Holy Spirit sufficed.

It should be added that there are persons (of them the writer is one) who believe that neither of the above theories will hold good in its application to every part of the Bible; and that it requires both to cover the whole of the sacred volume.

The twentieth chapter of Exodus will serve to illustrate my meaning in very few words. Here, if we credit the record, we are obliged to believe that "God *spake* all these words"; that he actually enunciated and dictated the identical words which follow, namely, the ten commandments—that is, from the first to the seventeenth verse inclusive. But now, when we reach verse 18, we can but recognize that we are on a different plane. It reads: "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off." Certainly this is a faithful record of what took place. It is the truth; but the knowledge of this truth was derived from observation rather than revelation. Moses *saw* what was done, and, moved by the Holy Spirit, he was led to put it upon record; and if, under the superintendence of that Spirit, he was preserved from mistake or error, we have the exact truth of the case, although the words may have been his own.

And so throughout the whole Book: when we read it with discrimination and reflection, we see that in parts it records what God immediately revealed, and what he said; in other parts, what holy men *spake* as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; in others still, mere historical information, giving incidents and narratives—telling what was said and done by good men and bad, by angels and demons; but the entire *record* "inspired"—that is to say, the Holy Spirit, by his superintending influence, directed

and controlled the writers as to what should be *recorded* and what should not; and so strengthened their memories and guided their hands as to preserve them from error in making the record.

But it matters not what particular theory of inspiration we may favor—what special phase of the doctrine we may regard as best accordant with the facts—if we do but hold fast to the conviction that the Bible is not an accident, nor yet the product of mere human genius, but that in some high and altogether peculiar sense it is the work of God, containing his word, revealing his will, and teaching his truth; and that the Holy Spirit who, in some way, presided over its composition, pervades it still, and imparts himself through it.

We should read and study it, therefore, in the spirit of profound reverence, believing that when we have reached its true sense and meaning, we have acquired the very truth of God, from which there can be no appeal. Nor should we forget that however controlling and conclusive its authority, and however high and sacred its revelations, it is all written in human language—retaining the current sense of the words which it uses, and combining them into propositions and sentences, according to the rules and laws governing human compositions. This fact suggests the sure and safe way to its proper understanding and interpretation. We are to observe in our investigation of its meaning the same rules and laws which were observed in its composition.

# Chapter Three:

## The Starting Place

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It is important to bear in mind that the true historical beginning of Christianity, considered as an *institution*, is not found in the first chapters of the four Gospels, but in the last. This institution or church was founded and widely spread over the earth before any of these Gospels had been written; and it was founded by the application of those very *principles* which are the subject of our present investigation. It is true that the wonderful facts which came subsequently to be recorded by the evangelists were well known by the apostles. The Christ had come into the world—God's only begotten Son—and had lived and taught among men. His chosen disciples had listened to his instructions, had witnessed his miraculous works, had been near to him in his sufferings and death, and had seen him again and again after his resurrection. On one of these occasions—the last one, at the close of his earthly work and mission, and just before he went back to live forever with his Father in Heaven — he gave commandment to his apostles, and sent them forth into the world. He commissioned them as his ambassadors, giving them special instructions as to what they were to teach and what they were to do in his name; and it *was the execution of this mission* which resulted subsequently in the establishment of the church and the propagation of the Christian religion. This, then, was the starting place. It was the initiation of the great movement which has so wonderfully and powerfully affected the world; and we may expect, consequently, to find in this commission, either explicitly or implicitly, all the *essential* elements and "first principles" of the doctrine of Christ. It shall be my object, therefore, to study it, first in its *terms*—to weigh and consider with all possible care the language of the document itself; to see what it *means*—what the *Saviour* meant by it; and then, secondly, to go with the inspired

apostles out into the world, as they were engaged in the execution of it, in order to see how *they* understood it. I cannot doubt that, if we engage in this task in the proper spirit, free from all bias and prejudice, and in humble dependence upon God, we shall be guided into the certain knowledge of those great principles which constitute the very essence and stability of the Christian religion.

We have in the Synoptic Gospels three separate versions of the commission. The reasons for this we need not pause here to consider; suffice it to say that they are mutually supplementary to each other, and we may understand that together they give us all the elements of that most important and fruitful deliverance. I will quote them here, once for all, as they stand in the Revised Version.

1. "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28: 18-20.)

2. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." (Mark 16: 15, 16.)

3. "Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the Scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of

my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24: 45-49.)

We cannot doubt that our Lord imparted to the apostles, on the occasion to which I have alluded, *all the terms* of this commission, 1: *e.*, everything mentioned in Matthew, in Mark, and in Luke; but the Holy Spirit, perhaps in order to induce us to study and compare these sacred records, has caused them to be written in part by one evangelist and in part by the others.

A brief and, for the present, quite superficial comparison of these versions will serve to show that, from Matthew's alone, we should not know *how* disciples were to be made; and while it reveals the obligation imposed upon the apostles to *administer* baptism, it does not disclose the *motive* which would induce men to *submit* to or *desire* baptism. From Mark's version alone we should have no baptismal formula; nor should we know that the baptized would sustain the personal relation of *disciples* to the Lord; and from neither of these versions should we learn that *repentance* was to be preached. From Luke's version we learn nothing about *belief*, or the consequence of *disbelief*; nothing about *baptism*; nothing about *discipleship*; but we do learn that the word "saved," as used in Mark, has the special signification of "remission of sins," and that this is closely connected with *repentance*. We also learn that the apostles were to be witnesses of the facts of the gospel; that they were to begin in Jerusalem, but not until after they should be clothed with power from on high.

If now we merge the three versions into one, and arrange their several items in what seems to be the natural order of their presentation, we shall have the following tabulation:

1. The apostles were to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be clothed with power from on high.



2. They were (first in Jerusalem and afterwards in all the world) to "preach the gospel," involving the Christhood, the sufferings and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

3. They were to bear personal " witness " to the *facts* of the gospel, and to confirm their testimony by the written word—their minds having been opened to understand the Scriptures.

4. They were to expect that the gospel thus preached and witnessed would, in many cases, result in "belief," in others in "disbelief," to be followed by "condemnation."

5. Those who believed would, as the .natural consequence, though it is not here stated in terms, become distressed on account of their personal sins.

6. Such persons were to be told in the first place to "repent," and in the second, to be "baptized" in the name of Christ, and "*into* the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

7. Upon compliance, they were to be assured of the "remission of sins," or that they were "saved" from their sins.

8. As the result of all this, they would be recognized as "disciples" of Christ, and, *as* his disciples, they were to be "taught" to observe "all things that he had commanded."

9. In the execution of this commission the apostles were assured that their Lord would always "be with them," even "unto the end of the world."

From this brief summary of the commission, it is evident that some things in it must, of necessity, be confined exclusively to the apostles—such as their personal testimony to the facts of the gospel, and their miraculous endowment from on high; both of which, however, were for the sake of *establishing* those great and

fundamental *principles* of the gospel—also contained in the commission—which are of universal and unchanging obligation. These we shall next take up *seriatim*. And surely if Christianity was developed out of them, and if it is still maintained and perpetuated by them, they must be worthy of our most thoughtful and serious consideration.

# Chapter Four:

## The Gospel

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The word *gospel*, as used in the New Testament, is to my mind one of the strongest incidental proofs of the supernatural origin and divine inspiration of that sacred volume. It is indeed a significant fact that no philosopher, even the most eminent, was ever 'led to call his system *a gospel*, much less *the gospel*; and obviously for the reason that it *was not* a gospel. However wide the range and application of the term philosophy, as used by us—whether we consider it as the product of observation or of speculation—it is in any case but a result of human thought. It originates with man. But the word *gospel*, as it comes from the lips of Christ and the evangelists, points directly to an origin outside of man, and remote from him. It is good *news* — glad *tidings* — *joyful intelligence*; and, like all intelligence or news, therefore, it is brought in from *without*—*from afar*! It comes from a region which to mere philosophy *is* foreign and unknown—a *region* in which primarily it neither moves nor can move. But in the New Testament, and in the New Testament alone, the word in this high sense is of repeated occurrence. It seems to arise spontaneously, and to be used as a matter-of-course; to be used as the natural and only proper word to express the stupendous fact that Heaven was speaking to Earth, and speaking in terms of love and salvation. And it will doubtless occur to the reader that both the nature and origin of this gospel are beautifully indicated by the proclamation of the angel to the shepherds: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." I *bring* you! I bring you from *above*! My message is good news from *Heaven*!

Later on, when the Babe in the manger had become a man, and had entered upon his ministry, he speaks of " the gospel of the kingdom," the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is at

hand." And still later, when he had wrought redemption for the human race, and had triumphed over death and the grave; when he had been made perfect through sufferings, and become man's only but all-sufficient Saviour—*this* constituted the good news; and hence it was called "the gospel of Christ"—the glad tidings concerning Him who was *sent by the Father* to be the Saviour of the world; of Him who *came from heaven* to seek and to save that which was lost. And it was these wonderful and wholly exceptional characteristics of his history—what he was, whence he came, what he said, what he did, what -he achieved—that constituted the elements of "news" in the apostolic proclamation. He therefore bases the commandment to preach the gospel upon these historical facts; that he was *the Christ*, as shown by the perfect correspondence of his life and work with the written word; that, still in accordance with this word, he had suffered, and risen again from the dead; that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him, and, consequently, that in his "name" (now above every name) men might procure the "remission of sins." These fundamental facts, with all that they involved — God's infinite mercy and gracious disposition — were to be universally heralded, proclaimed, preached; and by such *preaching*—foolish and impotent as it might seem to be in the eyes of philosophy—it pleased him to save them that believe. And this preaching itself—the preaching of the cross—at once expressed and imparted, displayed and conveyed the wisdom of God and the power of God. In no sense therefore was it "after men," or according to man's wisdom. And I doubt if we have been able even yet to appreciate how much this "foolishness of God is wiser than men."

I presume that very few, if any, of us have fully succeeded in overcoming what seems to be a sort of natural proneness to attach undue importance, in matters of religion, to the merely *outward*; to forms and ceremonies; to the spectacular—something that may be *seen*—*something* that is

presented, or, at any rate, presentable, to the *eye!* But God's wisdom is manifested in this: that in order to save the soul, *he addresses the ear!*

I am happy to believe that the more thoughtful and considerate among the people of God are coming to a better appreciation and realization of the fact that *men cannot be saved*, that is to say, cannot be brought back into communion with Him who is essential Spirit, *otherwise* than by the preaching of the gospel.

In the realm of mere material things it may be true, as Addison says, that "our sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses;" that it "may be considered as a more delicate and diffusive kind of touch, that spreads itself over an infinite multitude of bodies, comprehends the largest figures, and brings into our reach some of the most remote parts of the universe." But with all this, the eye, it will be noticed, is still limited to "bodies," to "figures," to the shape and size and colors of *things*, and, in fact, to the *outside* only of even these. But the living *voice* comes from *within*, and it bears along with itself a portion of that internal spirit out of which it is born; and it bears it through "the *hearing* of faith," into the very innermost spirit of him who hears. I do not forget that the voice may be *recorded* by the use of conventional symbols which are made to *represent* words, and which, by a figure of speech, we have come to *call* words. In fact, however, they are but suggestive signs of the real words. Still, we are so familiar with what they signify, we connect them so instantaneously in our thought with the signs for which they stand, that we can look upon them with our eyes, and drink in their meaning. The *mind* seems to *hear*, while the eye beholds. For this reason the written or printed document, perused in the quiet and stillness of the closet, may have great value, and may exert salutary influence; but for the highest effect, for the best results, for the attainment of the great end contemplated by the Saviour, all experience and observation have shown that nothing

is equal and nothing is comparable to the actual and literal *preaching* of the gospel. With deepest and most consummate wisdom, therefore, the Lord ordained that, as the *very first principle* of salvation, as the initiation of the whole process, the gospel should be *preached*. And with all our Bible Societies and printing presses we shall never be able to dispense with this part of the commission. There is no possible substitute for it. Whatever else we may do or leave undone, whatever changes may take place in our condition or circumstances, and whatever modifications or developments may be made in our conceptions of ecclesiastical and doctrinal subjects, it must still remain true, that, while we recognize the authority of Christ, and bow to him *as our King and Lord*, it will be solemnly incumbent upon us, either in person or by representatives, to "go into all the world, and *preach the gospel* to the whole creation."

If I have in any proper measure succeeded in accomplishing what I designed, I have made, I trust, the following points sufficiently clear:

1. The word *gospel*, in the high sense in which it is therein employed, is distinctly a New Testament word.
2. The introduction and use of this word, and especially the way in which it is used, give to it an evidential value of great importance.
3. The gospel which is to be *preached* embraces the historical facts in the life of Christ, and whatever these involve.
4. The wisdom of God was peculiarly manifested in making the *preaching* of the gospel the first principle of salvation --- in addressing the ear rather than the eye.
5. The obligation to preach the gospel is perpetual and universal— and there is nothing which can be substituted for it.

I have only to add, in concluding the present part of my subject, that the divine wisdom is yet further shown in ordaining, not only that the gospel shall be preached *to* men, but *by* men. Angels, though superior in power and intelligence, are not fitted for this ministry, chiefly because they are not within the boundaries of our natural sympathies and fellowships. Notwithstanding his imperfections, therefore, nay, perchance in consequence of these imperfections, man can better and more effectually reach his fellow-man, and pour into his heart the strength, the comfort and the grace which have proved efficacious in overcoming his own weakness, his own sorrows, and his own sins.

# Chapter Five:

## Power from on High

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The commission contemplated the performance of a work which was evidently too great for the unaided human capacity. Notwithstanding the apostles had been trained and educated in the school of Christ; notwithstanding they were perfectly familiar with the facts which they were to proclaim, and the conditions of salvation which they were to announce—all having been distinctly specified and clearly taught; still they were to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be, clothed with power from on high. This is deeply significant, and is worthy of calm and serious meditation.

It is obvious to remark that primarily this had reference to the miraculous endowment of the apostles for their special work. They were to be the first preachers of the gospel; they were to open the doors of the kingdom of heaven; they were to prescribe the terms of admission into it; and, in a word, to establish precedents for all time to come. It was peculiarly necessary, therefore, that their minds should be supernaturally strengthened and illuminated; that they should be guided into all truth, and preserved from the possibility of mistake or error. All this may be granted—must be granted; but still, if this power from on high be regarded, as perhaps by some it may be; as *merely* an intellectual safeguard—as only the *security* that the truth, and nothing but the truth, should be preached—I must think that such conception is inadequate. Over and above all this, and perhaps even more important than all this, was the influence of the Divine Spirit upon the apostles' own moral and spiritual natures, bringing them into sympathy with God, elevating their thoughts, purifying their affections, ennobling their purposes, and so sanctifying them, body, soul and spirit, as to make them worthy to represent the Son of God, and to be the bearers of his divine message.



And this brings us to the inquiry: What interest, what practical interest, have we of this nineteenth century in the subject now under consideration? Does it in any wise concern us? Are we in any sense, and, if so, in what sense, to expect the continued presence and influence of this same power from on high? Many, perhaps, in view of the fact that its original *coming* was miraculous, and that its *primary* object was exceptional, would answer, No. But to my mind these considerations are by no means conclusive. Of course we eliminate the miraculous from our present View. No well instructed Christian can now look for outpourings of the Holy Spirit. We shall have no more pentecostal scenes, no more Pentecostal sounds from heaven. Nor will the special work of that memorable day ever be repeated. But we cannot forget that the same Spirit which came then with signs and wonders and divers *gifts, came to remain; to abide, without the signs, the wonders and the gifts, but still to abide, as a Living Presence and a Divine Power, forever.*

In considering the subject as I now do, in connection with the preaching of the gospel—.for so it is presented in the commission which I am discussing—and in seeking to apply the essential elements of the doctrine to our modern life and work, it will suffice to indicate a few of the errors respecting it into which men seem liable to fall.

And first it can hardly have escaped the notice of anyone that ministers of fine natural and acquired ability are not always, indeed not usually, the most spiritually minded. They are apt to rely upon their native gifts. And it is scarcely necessary to say that an able man, such as I have described, may, simply from his own genius and intellectual resources, make a very fine discourse. There is, indeed, no reason why he should not be able to display, in the treatment of religious subjects, all those powers which would bring him distinction and renown upon any secular theater. I can imagine that Cicero, furnished simply with an intellectual

outfit of Biblical knowledge, could, *with the stimulus of ample fees*, have made a very popular preacher. Genius, imagination, art, learning, expression, and whatever else goes to constitute oratory, lose neither their nature nor their influence when transferred from the forum to the pulpit. Nor is it wrong to use there these natural and acquired gifts. Let them all be brought and cones crated to the work of the ministry. But what I wish to say with all proper emphasis is that these alone, without the power from on high, do not suffice to make a *true preacher of the gospel*. No man, I care not who he is, nor what he is, can bear to his fellow-man a message from *God* unless he has himself been *with God*. He must have the mellowing, hallowing, sanctifying influence upon his own soul, which comes only from habitual and intimate communion with God. The Apostolic benediction, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the *fellowship of the Holy Spirit*," must rest upon and abide with every true and acceptable preacher of the gospel. Apart from this, a man's service is either cold and perfunctory, or else his eloquence has but the warmth of natural heat—if indeed it be not a glittering icicle. Whatever notions, therefore, it may please men to entertain respecting the nature of spiritual influence or the mode of its operation, it is at least certain that, *as a fact*, it is the *Spirit* that is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and this he does through the *preaching* of the word. The influence, consequently, must come out of the heart of the preacher, and be borne along with his message. Truly, it is a sacred and solemn thing to be a preacher of the gospel—to preach it with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.

What is desiderated, however, is not some wild and extravagant frenzy which enthusiasts may *call* the influence of the Spirit. This may be in whole or in part a delusion, and we may well guard ourselves against it. But there is a true and real, a genuine and most blessed influence of the Spirit, which is absolutely indispensable to the generation and maintenance of Christian life;

and the preacher who ignores it, who fails to avail himself of it, and to be filled more and more with it, has missed his calling, and is really engaged in secularizing a most sacred vocation.

I may add, in conclusion upon this point, that the Disciples of Christ, who most truly believe that in conversion the Spirit operates through the word of truth, that he begets men to the new life by the gospel, should of all men be most solicitous, while preaching that gospel; to be themselves filled with that Spirit.

But while insisting, as I have been doing, upon the genuineness and necessity of the Spirit's influence, I yet have no sort of sympathy with much that passes for soundness on this subject. I do not now refer to any of those hysterical exhibitions which often, among the ignorant and vulgar, accompany religious excitement, and which it is gratuitously assumed are evidences of the Spirit's presence and power. These it may suffice us here to pity and dismiss. But among the cultivated and strong—among ministers of pure hearts and sound minds—the manifestation of great anxiety to have the doctrine respecting the Holy Spirit's influence strongly and constantly *stated*, as though that were equivalent to the thing itself, or at any rate necessary to the attainment of it. Under all circumstances and on all possible occasions, whatever else may be left out, men are sure to be reminded of the necessity of the Spirit's influence. Now my objection to this is not that I do not believe in this influence, for I do; but it is because it is teaching men, as it seems to me, to look for it outside of the place where God reveals that it is to be found. Instead of being helpful, therefore, it is rather confusing and distracting. Of course in a company of *Christians*, met together to increase their spiritual joys and cultivate their spiritual natures, my objection does not hold. But in preaching the gospel to *sinner*s—to men who are called in the Bible "the world," and who as such, it expressly declares, "cannot receive" nor "know" the Spirit, the case is totally different. And it surprises me that good

men and faithful ministers of Jesus Christ have been so slow to recognize the fact that they have no commission to preach the Holy Spirit. It is our business, our whole business, aided and comforted and strengthened and filled by that Spirit, to preach the gospel of *Christ*, in the confident assurance that the great source of light and life will not fail to do his work, and do it all the more surely by having the mind of the sinner directed to Christ whom he can know, 'rather than to himself whom he cannot know.

The special object which I have here in view does not call for a discussion of the general subject of spiritual influence; and I shall be content if I have, while guarding against certain natural mistakes, made it plain that the preacher, of all Christians, should most earnestly seek the Holy Spirit—to help his infirmities, to enlighten his judgment, to warm his heart, to enlarge his sympathies—that he may be able to preach Christ in love and in power.

# Chapter Six:

## Bearing Witness

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If I dwell upon the preaching of the gospel with its concomitants as presented in the commission, before proceeding to the consideration of other elementary principles, it is because of my high appreciation of its transcendent importance. Having in previous chapters discussed the subject matter of the gospel, the wisdom of God in obtaining that this gospel should be preached, and having considered the necessity for the presence and power of the Divine Spirit to qualify for this preaching, we come at length and in fine to the witnessing of the gospel.

When the Saviour says to the apostles at the close of Luke's version of the commission, "And ye are witnesses of these things," he refers to their testimony to the objective facts of the gospel of which they were personally cognizant. They were to bear witness to what they themselves with their natural senses have seen and heard. It goes without saying that, in this precise and definite meaning, the application of the passage is confined to the apostles. No one can now bear such testimony as they were competent, and therefore required, to furnish. But it occurs to me that, underlying this special and necessarily restricted application of the text, there is a broad principle of universal application, and of very great value. Before proceeding, however, to the consideration of this principle, I deem it necessary to call attention to an abuse of the *word* "testimony" and its cognates, which has been introduced into the pulpit and elsewhere, and which I think is not friendly to the cause of truth. I refer to the practice, which is quite common in some places, of narrating certain emotional or other personal *experiences*, and calling it a "testimony for Christ." Frequently it is made a leading object, with professional and enthusiastic evangelists to induce men to arise in

the congregaiton and “testify for Christ.” Now the objection to this is not that what is said is false or even doubtful. It may every word be true. The man thus “testifying” may have experienced all the peace and joy and comfort which he reports; and if the questions appertained simply to the *fact* of such experiences, he would be a competent “witness,” and his “testimony” might be regarded as conclusive. But the question upon which he is *assuming* to testify is not the *fact* of his experience, but the *cause*, the *meaning*, the *explanation* of it. And while he may give us his honest *judgment* upon this point — his *opinion*, his *belief*, his *conviction* — it is in no proper sense *testimony*, and would not be regarded as *evidence* before any competent tribunal. And now if this practice of so-called “testifying” bases itself, as I suppose it must, upon those scriptures requiring the apostles to bear witness to what they had seen and known, the misapplication and abuse of such scriptures are manifest, and nothing more need be said.

We come now to consider the meaning for us, and for all men, and for all time, of the Saviour’s commission to bear testimony; of the fact that he raised up and qualified chosen men who were to “be witnesses unto him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). I think that no one whose attention is called to it can read this passage and the numerous others of similar import, without perceiving that our Saviour evidently contemplated that the production of faith and the propagation of religion *were not to be by the inworking of a direct and supernatural agency*, but on the contrary, were to be strictly in harmony with the natural constitution and established laws of the human mind. Men were not to be *made* to believe, but were to be *furnished grounds and reasons* for believing. There intelligence was to be addressed; facts were to be submitted; evidences in proof of those facts adduced; and these, if duly weighed and considered, would satisfy the mind and result in belief. Faith comes by hearing — by hearing that naturally which is designed and fitted to produce faith.

It is also to be noted that, in harmony with this same intelligent design and most reasonable contemplation, the Saviour provided, not only that the apostles should bear witness to the facts which had come within their personal knowledge, but that their testimony should be *confirmed* by evidences drawn from the sacred Scriptures. Hence, primarily by his instruction, and subsequently by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, they were made competent to show that “thus it is *written* that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day.”

Finally, it is implied in the commission, and is elsewhere expressly taught, that the Spirit for whose coming they were to wait was to come as a *witness* — bearing testimony *concurrent with their own*. We read, for instance, in John 15: 26, 27: “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, *he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness*, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” Afterwards, therefore, Peter and the other apostles might well say: “We are his witnesses of these things; and *so is also* the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5: 32).

It must now, I think, be sufficiently manifest that the design and expectation of the Saviour were not to *constrain* men to accept him; their minds, their wills, their self-hood were to be left intact; and they were to be led to him by the presentation of proofs — evidences to convince them that he was the Christ; and all the agencies were engaged in this enterprise, both natural and supernatural, concurred in this design, and co-operated to this end.

As to the practical lesson which we may learn from the facts above stated, it is not far to seek. It is a lesson of principle rather than of detail. We are not able, as were the apostles, to bear original testimony to the facts of the gospel; the Holy Spirit no

longer witnesses with signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts; but it by no means follows that testimony has ceased to be necessary, or that in anything which may be properly called *preaching* it can be dispensed with. It is just as true in this age as it was in the first, that faith is the “belief of the truth”; and it is generated in precisely the same way that it as in the beginning. Hence it may be noticed, doubtless many of my readers have noticed, that the most successful preachers of our times — those who are doing most to promote the honor and glory of Christ, by leading men to trust and love and serve him — are those whose preaching is full of *evidences*. I do not refer to the formal and systematized “evidences of *Christianity*”; nor yet to evidences in support of the inspiration and authority of the *Bible*. The occasions when these are necessary in the pulpit, if ever, are rare and special. But what I mean is the presentation of the testimonies concerning *Christ* — the testimonies as we have them treasured up for us in the written word. Surely if Christ enjoined the use of this evidence, and if the apostles and the Holy Spirit availed themselves of it — quoting, applying and urging it, as *proof* of the Christ-hood and Divinity of Jesus — it is still valid for all the purposes that it then subserved; and, with the addition of the New Testament, it gives us a full and inexhaustible store of divine and most effective testimony. “Preach the word” “Christ died for our sins *according to the scriptures.*” “He was buried and rose again the third day *according to the scriptures.*” “The things which God foreshowed by the mouth of *all the prophets*, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.” This, then, is the God-appointed road to faith. It is not by talking about it, nor by insisting upon its importance, nor by explaining its nature, its place in the Christian system, or its effect upon the conduct and relations of him who believes — all of which has its interest and its subsidiary importance; but to *produce* it — to *generate* it in the heart — we must rely upon “the testimony of Jesus” which is “the spirit of prophecy,” and upon those supplementary evidences with



which the New Testament everywhere abounds. “Faith cometh” — cometh into *existence* — “by hearing the word of God.”

This chapter, and with it the general subject of the gospel, of which it forms a part, may properly close with a word of encouragement. There is no higher office nor honor than that of bearing witness to Christ. Apostles and prophets, angels from heaven, the Spirit of God, and God himself, bear witness to him. And although our testimony be, as it must be, only secondary and subordinate, it is still of high consequence to give life and warmth and force to that which else would be quiescent and inoperative. Whoever, therefore, is able, by study and meditation, and by daily communion with God, to bring forth his testimony from the fullness of his own soul and as the heartburst of his own love; nay, to bring it forth with the tenderness, the grace and the power of the Divine Spirit with which he is filled, may well feel that he is in fellowship with all highest intelligences, and that he is engaged in the most sacred and most important of vocations.

# Chapter Seven: The Acceptance

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We have at length reached an entirely new phase of our main subject. Hitherto our attention has been fixed exclusively upon its divine aspects—what God has done, and what, through his appointed means and agencies, he is now doing for the salvation of men. We have been looking upon the vast and mighty streams of force and influence flowing from his love and wisdom, and we have seen them at length concentrated and brought together in the gospel as the one mighty “power of God unto salvation.” Outside of this gospel, and concurrently with it, he is doubtless still working in the sphere of his gracious providence—working in ways which are “past finding out.” He rules the world. He has not retired from it. He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

He stirreth up the sea with his power,  
And by his understanding he smiteth through Rahab.  
By his spirit the heavens are garnished;  
His hand hath pierced the swift serpent.  
Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways:  
And how small a whisper do we hear of him!  
But the thunder of his power who can understand?  
(Jos 26:)

I sympathize with my fellow-men when their thoughts run in great channels like the above; when they think of God's almighty power; of the omnipresence of his Spirit; and of the boundlessness of his resources. And yet it is possible to abuse these lofty conceptions by making them the basis of an unsafe and unsaying trust. There is nothing in mere force, even though it be almighty force, that can redeem and sanctify. *The soul cannot*

*be saved simply by the exertion upon it of miraculous power!* Startling as this proposition may be, and as doubtless it will be to those who have been accustomed to rely upon such power, and to wait and look and long and pray for it as the one thing needful, it is still unquestionably the truth; and a moment's serious consideration, without bias or prejudice, will show that it must be the truth. We have but to note that miraculous power is nothing more than divine power, and that its exertion or putting forth by the Divine Being is just as easy to him as that which ordinarily reaches its end through the normal channels which we call laws. He has but to will, and it is done. If, therefore, he desires, as he certainly does, the salvation of men, and if that salvation could be accomplished by the transforming influence of miraculous power—that is, by simply willing it to be done—surely it is not possible for us to believe that he would withhold that will. Nor can we believe that he would have sent his beloved Son into the world to suffer the untold and immeasurable agonies of Gethsemane and the cross if those for whom he died could have been saved by the mere exertion of his power. It is also obvious to remark, and extremely suggestive to notice, that that beloved Son while upon the earth, who had come expressly to seek and to save the lost — and though his whole life was one grand display of supernatural power, put forth in every sphere of our mundane existence, in nature, in human life, in death, and even in the realm of the spirit world — yet so true was he to the everlasting and immutable will of his Father, and so careful to preserve the safeguards of our proper and necessary self-hood, he never exerted his miraculous power directly upon the soul of a single human being. It seems not once to have occurred to his perfect wisdom that a lost soul could be saved in that way. These considerations, if duly weighed, can hardly fail to be deemed conclusive upon the point in question.

But while very few might be disposed to regard miraculous agency as sufficient, in and of itself, to accomplish the work of human

salvation, there are many who look upon it as necessary in the way of antecedent preparation. The doctrine appears to be that, although the direct and supernatural power of God cannot really save the soul, it can and it does *prepare* the soul to *be* saved. I believe that I should not overstate the position if I were to say not only that this power ordinarily can and *does*, but that uniformly it *must* do this preliminary work. The soul is thought to be so dead in sins, so dark in its understanding, so enfeebled in all its powers, that it is not *able* to accept the gospel. It must be quickened, illuminated, strengthened by an immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, operating without means or agencies, directly upon and within the substance of the soul itself. And if the state of human nature is indeed such as is here postulated, it will at once be conceded that some such force, antecedent and supplementary to that of the gospel, must also be postulated as a condition of salvation *sine qua* non.

Nor is it to be wondered at that those who accept these postulates, and who feel the necessity of adjusting their work to assumptions so fundamental and controlling, not only preach the gospel of Christ, but along with it and in *front* of it "another gospel" of the Holy Spirit. They are consistent in doing so, and they would be quite inconsistent if they should act otherwise. For certainly, if no man can accept the gospel until he is first quickened by a power operating outside and independently of the gospel, such influence, as it is to be first in his experience, should be first presented to his consideration. Nay, more: the whole process of what, for want of a better word, I may call modern *revivalism* hinges upon the same assumption, and is to be approved or condemned along with it. This process is admirably calculated and designed in its discourses, prayers, songs and other exercises, to fix the mind of the expectant sinner upon the Holy Spirit as the power which is to *come from heaven* to regenerate, to convert and to bless. We note especially the earnest prayer to God—for in the main it is earnest, and its motive not to be

questioned—that he would *send down* the Holy Spirit; that he would *pour' it out* upon those who are waiting for it and dependent upon it.

Now, it cannot escape the observation of anyone whose attention is directed to it that in this procedure, and in the assumption which underlies it, there are two distinct and *separate* objects and forces presented to the mind: the one present, but of itself ineffectual, namely, the gospel; the other absent, but inherently and alone powerful and efficacious—the Holy Spirit. The gospel, it should be understood, is by no means ignored in this scheme. It is always preached; frequently it is most ably, most tenderly, most pungently, preached. But at the same time what seems to be expected from this preaching—what it is supposed the gospel is designed to accomplish, and is able to accomplish—is not the *salvation* of the soul, but the bringing home to it of the fact that it is *lost*. When this effect is produced—which, as we shall see hereafter, is certainly a necessary effect—it can do no more. The lost, helpless, impotent soul must wait and look for the *saving power* to come in from without, from abroad, from above. If it come, well and good; if it fail to come, there is no help for it. There is no other resource.

I am far from believing that those whose evangelistic practices seem to justify me in thus characterizing their position have really thought it over in detail as I have presented it. Many of them perhaps are wholly unconscious of its amazing incongruities; and they may even be shocked at the intimation that they have really been preaching a Christless, Spiritless, Godless gospel; that is to say, a gospel from which the saving influence of these divine personalities is *absent*. Such in my judgment is the true meaning of their *theory*, and the significance of their *revival practices*. And yet they are often signally successful in turning men from sin and winning them to Christ; successful, however, not because the theory upon which they proceed is true—for it certainly is

not—but in spite of it; successful because, notwithstanding the error of their theological assumption, they really preach Christ and him crucified, and preach him with an unction and love generated in their own hearts by the Spirit of God. And so they often impart and convey the saving grace treasured up in the gospel, even while bewildering the minds of men by teaching them to look elsewhere for it. But, oh, what tongue can tell, what imagination can conceive the success of the gospel — its glorious and world-wide triumphs — if all who believe and love it could be brought to preach it free from the confusions, the inconsistencies, the incongruities with which theology has encumbered and surrounded it!

I have already in a previous chapter emphasized the importance and necessity of the Holy Spirit's presence in the *preacher*. What I there said had reference specifically and mainly to his personal qualification and endowment for the work of the ministry. It was urged in effect, if now in terms, that he could not properly bear the divine message to the world without himself being filled with the divine Spirit. And now we come to say, with somewhat more distinctness than formerly, that this is God's method of imparting this Spirit to the world. Men are not to expect it to come down from heaven; they are not to look beyond the sea, nor down in the deep for it, nor even to think of it, so far as *they* are concerned with it, as something separate and foreign. It has its permanent residence *in the Church*; and it puts forth its influence *from* the Church, its living home, and *through* the Church, its living organ. Its gospel is there; not the gospel bound up in a book—but the gospel as it lives and breathes and glows in sanctified hearts. And not the Church's preaching only, but all its activities and blessed states, its words of comfort and peace, its prayers, its praises, its exhortations, its observances of the ordinances of grace—all are *of* the Spirit, and pervaded *by* the Spirit; for the Church, the true Church of Christ, does and must "*live* in the Spirit and walk in the

Spirit.” And when all the people of God shall have learned, as, after a while, I trust that by his grace they will, that for all the work of salvation and sanctification the Holy Spirit is not to be regarded as a far-away influence, as a distant something which may or may not come, but as an ever-present power, as the very atmosphere of the spiritual body, in which and by which it lives and moves and has its being, they will constitute, indeed, the Church of the living God. To use another image, all the riches of grace have been gathered into God’s spiritual house; his fatlings are killed; his table is spread; the feast is prepared; all things are ready. “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that heareth say, Come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Human destiny hinges upon the *acceptance* or rejection of this *gospel* call. How it is to be accepted will next demand our careful consideration.

# Chapter Eight:

## The Gospel Believed

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The elementary faith, or that which precedes justification, is not in all respects identical with that repose of the soul upon God which characterizes the Christian's faith or trust. The sinner begins his approach to this final goal by believing something *about* God; and this something which he is first of all to believe, and by believing which he is to be led on to ultimate salvation from sin, and into fellowship with the Divine Being, is the gospel. But exactly in what way the gospel operates to produce this result is a point which merits the closest attention; and I feel that I could render no more profitable service to my reader than by inducing him to think upon it. And if he should be led to a careful and discriminative study of the scriptures bearing upon it, he could hardly fail to find a rich reward.

It has not escaped the notice of anyone that the facts which the apostles proclaimed to the world as gospel, are two -- the death and resurrection of Christ. In preaching to the Corinthians, the apostle, doubtless for some special reason, also laid emphasis upon the fact of the burial — not, I presume, because of any saving efficacy in this fact, but because it tended to show the reality of the death and resurrection. Ordinarily these two constituted the substance of the apostolic proclamation, and these alone are specified in the commission.

We can hardly avoid the supposition that when two elements were thus used which were as totally unlike in their nature as *death* and *life*, and which had nothing in common, each was expected to have an effect peculiar to itself. Death was not to do the work of life, nor life that of death. We do not say here and now this was so; we merely suggest it as a reasonable



preconception. But even if it should prove to be the case, we should still expect that elements so intimately associated in the apostles' thought and speech would sometimes be referred to without discriminating their several and special work. We are not surprised, consequently, to find that in certain passages where only the grand results of the gospel are before the mind the whole effect is ascribed now to one and now to the other of these two forces. At the same time, whenever it is deemed proper for any reason to specialize them, the distinction between their respective functions is clearly stated and consistently maintained.

When we read, for example, that we are "justified by his blood," that he "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," that "we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins," and other passages of like force, I do not understand these scriptures to teach the *direct* and *immediate effect* of his blood, of his sacrifice, but rather the ultimate and consequential results. His death made all this possible; it brought a changed condition of things which led up to it — but in every deed it is God and only God who justifieth, who forgiveth sin, who redeemeth the soul. For it is manifest that these are effects which naturally proceed from life, and not from death.

But now let us look at a few examples of scriptures like the following: "And you that were sometimes alienated and *enemies* in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he *reconciled* in the body of his flesh *through death*" (Col. 1: 21, 22). "That he might *reconcile* both in one body by *the cross*, having slain the *enmity* thereby" (Eph. ii. 16). "For if, when we were *enemies* we were *reconciled* to God by the *death* of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be *saved* by his *life*" (Rom. 5: 10).

It is not easy to mistake the force and bearing of the texts, but a few words of comment which they teach, while at the same time

illustrating the nature and effect of the elementary faith of the gospel.

Enemies of God are his adversaries and antagonists. They not only oppose him, but, like the servants in the parable, they hate him. But it should be noted that unfriendliness and hatred spring from a *cause*, real or supposed; and in this case the cause is the supposed harshness and tyranny of God, who is thought of as “a hard Master.” The result is the separation of man from God, and his disobedience and rebellion. Now in order to correct this erroneous opinion, and so bring man back into friendship with God, it is necessary to prove to him in some way that it is false, nay, that the very opposite is the truth; that God is really compassionate; that he desires to promote the happiness and well being of his creatures; that he truly loves them, and seeks earnestly to save and to bless them; and that, notwithstanding their rebellion, he stands ready to forgive them and to receive them back into his favor.

The believe of these propositions must come in every instance from an attentive hearing and candid consideration of the gospel message. In no case can it be produced without this message. It is not something to handed down immediately from heave. It is not an effect wrought by any abstract or mysterious influence. Men must all be *taught* of God. In order to save sinners, God approaches them first of all with his word. He speaks to them. He demands their attention. He calls upon them to hear — to listen — for he has something he wishes to say to them. And then he speaks of his merciful disposition; that he does not desire the death of any, but rather that all should turn to him and live; and that he would welcome them back, forgiving all their sins, and filling their hearts with joy and gladness.

And now the *proof* of all this — for it requires proof; it is intrinsically so improbable, so contrary to all the sinners

preconceptions, that he naturally hesitates, and waits to be assured. And precisely here it is that we see the meaning and force of Christ's death. For that death was not a mere "economic arrangement"; not the execution of a cold "plan," which demanded it at a certain point; not a "scheme," nor a governmental "policy," but the expression of a divine heart. God so earnestly desired to save man, that he withheld not his own Son, who was also in perfect sympathy with him, but freely sent him into the world to *try* to save them; and so much was his heart in it, that, in the prosecution of that effort, rather than abandon it, he even *sacrificed* his beloved Son. And thus "God commendeth his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Now it must be evident that when this is once clearly perceived and really felt *to be true*, the enmity which was based upon the negation of it is obliged to give way. The supposed cause for hatred is displaced by the real cause for love. And, however we may call this belief, whether primary, elementary, historical or even intellectual, I am unable to understand how anyone — by the exercise of whatever faculties — can accept this story *as the truth*, without at the same time believing that God is love; and thus he is reconciled to him — "reconciled to *God* by the death of his Son." And just here I am reminded of one of Frederick Robertson's happy expressions. He says, "The death of Christ represented the life of God." Yes; for in representing what God *is* in his relation to the sinner, it represented what he is in himself — essential Love.

I have felt called upon to present these reflections with some fullness, because I have so often heard the death of Christ spoke of, and even tenderly spoken of, but still in a way that could give no rational satisfaction to the heart. It seemed to be presented, not as the means by which the soul is to led up to God, but as an ultimate object — as an end and resting place in itself, and as

having mysterious and inexplicable saving power of its own. But in truth, whenever we believe in and rely upon it as an isolated and independent fact, apart from its significance and its natural effect, our faith is mystical and without reason. "That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures," is a precious truth. It is a part, but it only a part of the gospel by which we are saved. It has its own necessary end to accomplish, an end which nothing else can accomplish; we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, but we are *saved* by his *life*.

It is not deemed necessary to show in detail that the main tenor and current of apostolic teaching is in harmony with the above conception. The thoughtful student will perceive that their preaching of "Christ crucified" was in fact the preaching of the *living* Christ who was crucified; or, in other words, it was "Christ and him crucified"; Christ who had died for our offenses, and *risen again* for our justification. And so the apostle asks: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, *rather* that is risen again." And he is not only risen from the dead, but he is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. In one word, they preached him as he proclaimed himself, when he said: "*I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore.*"

And so this great gospel — with its death and its life, its crucifixion and its resurrection, its shame and its glory — comes before us with all its elements harmonized, that through it and in it we may look upon the loving and living God, and upon his only begotten Son, our Saviour, who died for us and rose again.

I have only to add that, in my apprehension of the matter, it is not necessary for the sinner — if indeed it be for anyone — to settle or even to consider the speculative questions which men have raised about the atonement, or the effect of Christ's death upon the Divine Being. The subject is beyond man's power to fathom. It is as deep as God.

But whether in our feeble thinking we regard the sacrifices of Christ as having propitiated God, or having itself resulted for his already propitious disposition; whether we regard it as *cause* or as *effect*, or as being simply the appointed medium through which the grace of god could consistently and righteously flow; whether we think of it as the payment of a debt, or as the satisfaction of justice, or as having some other effect — so far as our present inquiry is concerned it matters not. For whether we understand the sacrifice of Christ simply *reveals* the gracious and propitious attitude of God, or that, having first *induced*, it *then* reveals it — in either case it *does* reveal it; and this is the one and only aspect of the subject in which the sinner is vitally and practically interested. And now the effect upon him of seeing, believing, and feeling this truth will demand careful consideration.

# Chapter Nine:

## Conviction of Sin

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We saw in the preceding chapter that the gospel, when *believed*, produced a certain effect upon the sinner; and we noticed especially the effect produced by believing the first proposition of the gospel proclamation, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” We attempted to show that there was an immediate and causal connection between the fact stated and the result; or, in other words, that the death of the Son of God was naturally fitted by its very meaning to produce the effect; and it will be remembered that we characterized this effect as “reconciliation.” It may be necessary here, however, in order to avoid any possible misconception, to state explicitly that this primary “reconciliation” comes far short of that complete restoration to friendship and fellowship exhibited in the life and character and conduct of a Christian. This latter is reconciliation in fact—in practical relations—and is the goal towards which the former begins to lead the believing sinner. But at present we are considering him at the starting point, when he first perceives and recognizes, in the sending and the sacrifice of Christ, a manifestation of God’s true character and attitude. This overcomes his own feeling of estrangement and enmity. He sees that he has been acting upon a false view, and that consequently his whole past course of rebellion was wrong. He sees *God* in Christ, and in the history of Christ; and so for him the prayer of the Saviour is answered: “That the world may believe that *thou* didst send me” (Jno. 17: 21.)

And this brings before us a question which however simple in itself, and however clearly answered in the Scriptures, has been so complicated by polemic discussions that, to the popular mind, it seems confused and difficult. I refer to the proper and natural

effect of faith. Many persons think of faith as being a sort of arbitrary appointment, important because God has prescribed it, but having no vital and necessary connections with the blessings which succeed it. These blessings are thought of very much like the child in a school thinks of the prize offered by the teacher for diligence in study. He well knows that there is nothing in his diligence which tends to *produce* the prize; that it is in no sense causative, but only conditional; and conditional merely because the teacher has so appointed and declared. The natural effect diligence upon the mind and upon the character and attainments of the scholar in one thing, and the reward or prize, coming in *ab extra*, is a totally different one. Now I do not think that any of the blessings ascribed to faith in the New Testament are given as a prize, or as an independent reward; they all come through it and out of it as a normal effect. Faith is calculated and fitted in the very nature of things to bring to pass certain results; and these are what we shall find in the Scriptures ascribed to it.

When we thus look upon faith as something grounded in the very nature of God and of man and of their relations to each other—as something, therefore, which was not made true by being revealed, but which was revealed because it *is* true—we shall not be surprised to find that the very first effect of this faith is one which *seems* to be conducting the soul away from salvation. We are not surprised, I say, because we see at once that this effect is normal and natural. The recognition and belief of the truth concerning God and Christ, so far from comforting and gladdening the heart, fill it with distress and anguish. But unfortunately, instead of a proper interpretation of this fact, instead of looking upon it as a necessary result of *true belief*, most of us have been taught to regard it as indicating something wrong or *defective* in the belief itself; and the *believing* sinner is gravely told in his distress that what he needs, and all that he needs, is to *believe!* But I am obliged to think that the man's *faith* is all right. He believes in God and Christ, and in all that has been done and

suffered for him — believes it truly and heartily; and it is just because he does thus believe it that he is unhappy. What he needs, therefore, is not faith, for he has that; he has enough of it, and it is the right faith, and it is exercised in the right way, and it is having its right effect. What he needs, and what he feels in his soul that he needs, is to get into the right practical relations with God.

The distressed state of mind which is called conviction, and which is implied rather than expressed in the commission, is brought clearly and formally to our attention in John 16: 8, 9: “And he [the Comforter] when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me” (*Revised Version*). There are several points connected with this result which call for special notice:

1. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, or Advocate. He generates in the heart this profound sense of guilt and sin. It is not something that rises spontaneously in the consciousness; it is a product, the effect of an efficient cause, and that cause is the Divine Spirit. We may hence conclude that without the *presence* and *operation* of that cause the effect would never be.

2. This efficient cause operates to produce the effect stated, primarily through the apostles, and secondarily through the church and ministry. These, as stated in a previous chapter, constitute his organs, or the medium of communication between himself and the world; and it is through this medium, which he fills with his own light and truth and power, that he *operates* upon the world.

3. In effecting this work he uses, through the agency of these same organs, the gospel of Christ, in all the length and breadth of its facts, and in all the height and depth of their meaning. This gospel thus preached, with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, and with all the accumulated and cumulative testimonies



in its support, produces in given cases faith, or a deliberate and heartfelt assurance that *it is the truth*; and, consequently, that God himself is, in very deed, what he is there represented to be, but what the sinner has never before believed that he really was. And thus in this very faith is revealed to him the enormity of the sin and guilt of his past life. He is “convicted of sin.” He realizes his desperate wickedness, and *wakes up* to the fact that he is *lost!* — lost because he is out of proper relations with God, the only source of life and salvation.

But some one may say that my whole argument here is directly opposed to the teaching of the text upon which I have assumed to base it; that while I urge that the Spirit convicts men of sin *through* faith, the text declares that it does so because of their want of faith. This objection, if viewed simply upon the surface, and without reference to explanatory Scriptures, would seem plausible. The text certainly does declare that “he shall convict the world of sin. . . because they believe not on me.” And now, whatever this means is the truth.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say that I fully believe not only that unbelief is somehow connected with the “conviction,” but that it is the ground and cause of it. This is expressly stated, and puts the *fact* beyond controversy; but it does not settle the question as to the *location* of that fact. At what period of the sinner’s history can unbelief be predicated of him? Shall we say it is *after* he *believes* the gospel or *before!* It seems to me that to ask this question is to answer it. Surely, after the Holy Spirit has brought the sinner to *believe in Christ*, he will not convict him of sin because of his *then* unbelief. There would be no ground for it. The existing fact would not justify it. It would really be convicting a man of sin for having yielded to the Spirit’s influence. But the accumulation of guilt and sin, resulting from the whole previous life of unbelief, is a present fact and all-sufficient ground for conviction.

The usually accepted doctrine of two faiths, each before justification, the one “historical,” the other “saving,” confuses the intellect, while it makes dark many an otherwise luminous passage of holy writ. In this particular case, for example, the text is viewed through the medium of what is thought of as saving faith, and it is supposed to be the absence of this that constitutes the ground of conviction — as though the Holy Spirit would convict a man of sin for not exercising the kind of faith which is thought by those who teach it to be the immediate gift of Heaven, which the Saviour never mentions, and which an apostle mentions only to repudiate. I beg to suggest that if, instead of the phrase “saving faith,” we were to accustom ourselves to speak of “the faith of the saved” in distinction from that of the “unsaved,” we should point out a difference that is important and scriptural; while at the same time we should avoid the expression of any preconception as to the process of transition from the one to the other. The faith of the unjustified or unsaved would then uniformly be understood to be the “belief of the truth,” the belief of the word, the belief of the gospel. That is what it is, and that is all that it is. If that does not *save* the sinner—and of course it does not—it is not because the *faith* is not of the right sort, but because he needs something else besides faith. And in my judgment if, instead of pointing to him to that something else, we put him to looking for a different kind of faith, which he does not know where to find, nor how to get, we are misleading him.

But to return to the meaning of the text which is under review, we have, happily, recorded examples of the performance of this very work of the Spirit. The first instances give—found in the second chapter of Acts—is at once luminous and conclusive. In brief, the Apostle Peter preached the gospel — the Holy Spirit using him for that purpose; he bore witness to its fundamental facts, confirming his testimony by the Scriptures, and thus *proved it to be the truth*. Those who heard became satisfied that it was the truth; they recognized it as such; they believed it; and at that very moment,

and in consequences of that very fact, they were cut to the heart—"convicted of sin." But why? Manifestly not because of any defect or error in their present belief, for that was produced by the Spirit, and of course it was all right; but they were painfully distressed and conscience-stricken because in their previous unbelief they had rejected and crucified their own Messiah. And now, what is to become of them? What shall they do? What shall any sinner do who is in the same condition? The great commission of the Saviour, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit will answer. If what is wanted at this point is more faith, or a different sort of faith, it will tell us so. Or if something else besides faith is needed, it will tell us that, and tell us what; and its answers will be authoritative and final.

# Chapter Ten:

## Repentance

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It is not to be expected that in all cases the feelings resulting from conviction of sin will be equally anguishing. They will naturally correspond in depth and pungency to the character of the antecedent life. A young girl trained up from her childhood under Christian influences, who has been taught from the very first the true character of God as shown in the blessed work and sufferings of Christ, who has never *disbelieved* in the Lord, and much of whose conduct has been regulated and modified by conscious reference to his will, cannot be classed with the Jews who crucified him, nor with Saul of Tarsus who murdered his followers, “ignorantly in unbelief.” If such a girl should come to believe that, like Saul, she was “the chief of sinners,” or that, like the Jews, she was guilty of betraying and murdering the Lord Jesus, it would not be the truth. Whatever may be concluded by metaphysical theology, I am clearly of the opinion that our Sunday-school scholars should not be led to think that they must experience, in order to their conversion, a sense of guilt which would be appropriate only to a Herod or Caligula. And yet even the best of these scholars have not lived up to their light; they have often gone into forbidden paths, and they are guilty of *sins* — sins of omission and of commission. In general the world with its allurements and pleasures have captivated their hearts and led them away from Christ. They may have wandered off thoughtlessly, but still it was with the latent feeling that the requirements of God were *unfriendly* to them, and hence that he himself also was unfriendly. In demanding perfect consecration, involving self-denial and cross-bearing, it came to be felt that he was interfering with their true interest, and working against their highest happiness. And so in every case we find evidences of that same false judgment of which we previously spoke, that he is a

hard Master; that he demands more than he should; and that his demands are for his own sake, and not for theirs. We see, then, that in the best cases, as in the worst, the *root* of the trouble and danger is the same. All alike are out of proper relations with God—and of course the same is true of every intermediate shade and degree of sinfulness. In the case of the *best*, therefore, as well in that of the *worst*; or, as they are called in the parable of “both good and bad,” the same *change of relations* has to be effected, and effected in the same way. All alike must perceive and recognize in the gospel the love of God and of Christ; it must be brought home to the heart, must be *believed* as the very truth of God, resulting in the conviction of sin for not having previously believed it and acted upon it.

We recur, then, to the question, “What is to be done?”

I think it is to respond to this question, which thus naturally arises at this particular stage of the sinner’s progress, that our Saviour prescribes in the commission the preaching of repentance in his name. And this prescription, it may be well to note, is precisely adapted to that condition of the sinner to which it is designed to apply. It tells him in fact and tells him with authority and encouragement, to go forward and do the very thing which, in his present state, he is strongly, and as it were naturally, disposed to do. We may indeed suppose (so perfectly is the gospel adjusted to man’s nature) that if the word repentance had never been uttered, nor any word equivalent to it, men convicted of sin would still in some sense have repented, being moved thereto by the very instincts of their souls. Deprived of the instructions of the gospel, they would not doubt have proceeded with more or less blundering and uncertainty; while, deprived of its promises, they would have lacked an important *incentive* to repentance. The nature impulse needs the reinforcement and the authoritative direction which the gospel supplies; but that such impulse exists, as a fact in our nature, whenever we are brought into the

condition mentioned, is clearly seen in the case of the Ninevites. Jonah said not a word about repentance, but he brought them to believe in God, and thus convicted them of sin. This was all that he expected, and, as it appears, all that he desired, to accomplish. But when brought to this condition, they, of their own motion, “repented at the preaching of Jonah.” And now what did they *do!* The question, it will be perceived, is important in this view; as the Saviour calls what they did *repentance*, it will help us to the meaning of the *word*. Stated as briefly as possible, therefore, what they was the following: 1. They humbled themselves. It matters not how they were moved to *express* that humility; we are concerned alone with the fact. 2. They cried mightily unto God; that is, they turned to him with earnest and hearty prayer. 3. They turned, every one, from his evil way, and from the violence that was in their hands. I presume we could hardly find a better illustration of what Christ meant by repentance than that here given. Let us notice, then, that in its essence it is a *mental movement*—a turning of the mind to God. This is implied in the meaning of the original word, translated repentance, namely, *change of mind*. But apart from the examples and explanations given in the Scriptures, we should not know, for the word itself, precisely *what* “change of mind” was signified. The apostle, however, helps us onward in the direction of the full meaning when he speaks of “repentance toward God.” The idea evidently is that, antecedently to repentance, the mind, or the inner man, embracing both the intellect and the affections, has been looking and moving in the opposite direction—away from God; and repentance is the change of the mind *toward* God. The thoughts turn to him; the heart becomes interested in him and begins to seek him. It is that point in the parable when the prodigal says, “I will rise and go to my father.” But before reaching this point—nay, before he can reach it—the prodigal becomes very humble. He must feel that he has sinned, and gone far away from the home and heart of love, and that he is no more worthy to be called a son. This is the sackcloth of the soul—this “godly sorrow

for sin”—this feeling which makes the poor man still say “Father,” while ashamed to call himself a “son.”

And let us repeat once more that all this—the penitential grief, the humility, the sackcloth, the shame, aye, and the good resolution which follows—all this is in perfect harmony with the nature of the case. There is nothing strained here; no arbitrary appointment; no foreign requirement brought in and *imposed* upon us—nothing manufactured and introduced to make up a “system”; but on the contrary, the All-seeing Eye seems to be simply *looking on*, while it points out to us what really *is* the truth. And such indeed is the high province of the divine revelation; it is not to *make* truth, but to make it *known*.

But there is one other element in repentance. The Ninevites “turned every one, for his evil way.” It should be observed that, although this part of the great change is closely *connected* with what John the Baptist called “fruits meet for repentance,” it is not, even in though, to be *identified* with those fruits. Whatever is involved in “repentance” is complete in conception and in fact before it produces any fruits. We shall have no difficulty in understanding this if we keep clearly before us the definition of the *word* repentance—change of mind; or the characterization of it which I have herein expressed, as a “mental movement.” It is the deliberate *purpose* and the fixed and determined *resolve* to abandon every evil way, which constitutes “repentance”; while the carrying out this resolution in the subsequent life and conduct give the fruits of repentance. We can see, therefore, how the people on the day of Pentecost could obey the command to repent on the “same day” that it was given, and some of them at least, from the very necessities of the case, in a very short while after it was given. There was time enough for the *mind* to change toward God, and resolve upon its new course, but not enough time for fruit bearing. It is true that the act of baptism immediately following might in some sense be characterized as a

fruit of repentance, but it is very clear that such not th meaning that John the Baptist attached to the word.

It remains to say that this final change of mind—this resolution to abandon sin—is just as indispensably necessary as the previous one. Christ did not come to save a man in his sins, nor does he offer to do it. If salvation means, as in its deep and true sense it does, the restoration of the lost soul to communion with God, we are not to think for a moment that he can have fellowship with sin; and hence, so long as sin is retained and cherished in the mind, so long as we cling to it, and refuse to give it up, we are necessarily kept away from God, and debarred from salvation. Hence, he commands all men everywhere to repent—to cease to do evil, and learn to do well—for, “As I live,” saith the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Such then, is that “first principle of the doctrine of Christ” which is called repentance. The soul, convicted of sin, humbles itself under a deep sense of its unworthiness and guilt, and its consequent remoteness from God; and turning with loathing from its evil ways, resolves to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near (for he has *come* near in the person of Christ), and so it moves back “toward God.”

But now will it hold out in its purpose, will it go on in this right direction, will it continue its seeking, till it *finds* him! We have yet to see whether it will be willing to take the remaining steps which Christ has shown to be necessary in order to bring it to God.



# Chapter Eleven:

## The Confession of Faith

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Hitherto we have traced the career of the sinner as through he was isolated and alone in the world. His experiences have had no bond of connection with his fellow-men. What he has felt and done has been wholly without reference to them. He heard, believed, suffered, repented, all for himself, and only for himself — all as he would have done if he had been the only man upon the earth. And even as it was, amid the surroundings of friends and companions, who might have been disposed to be sympathetic or otherwise, all this work may have been going on in secret. The seed sown in the soil of the heart was covered up, and there in the darkness, all unobserved by human eye, it has undergone wonderful transformations and developments, and now it ready to spring up into the light of day.

Walking as we have been doing along the path of First Principles, and examining them one by one, in regular succession, we have at length reached the point where a man can no longer live only for himself, where he is obliged to bring out and profess, or confess, that which is in his heart. It is true that notwithstanding this confession may embrace other than personal considerations, it does first of all inure to his own individual benefit. It brings to him a blessing — a blessing which, as with the other elements which we have been considering, seems to be naturally involved in it. This is a point which has not received perhaps as much attention as it merits. All these principles are greatly enhanced in interest, and their importance becomes far more manifest when we are brought to perceive and appreciate that they are grounded in the nature of things, and that each is perfectly fitted and adapted to accomplish its own special and necessary work. We have seen that this is true of all the elements which have preceded and led

up to the confession, and now we come to ask, "Why should a man confess his faith in Christ?" Certainly it is not to let Christ know that he believes, for he searches the heart and understands the thought afar off. He already knows what is in man, and needs not that any should tell him. But in its very nature the confession of faith is more or less public; it is made "before men," and, as the apostle declares, it is "to the glory of God, the Father." Of course it can *add* nothing to his essential glory, but it extends the knowledge of it. The open, public and solemn avowal that Jesus who was crucified as owned, acknowledged and confessed as God's own Son and Lord of all, is really the proclamation of the fact that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" to save it. And this is his glory.

I think it should be more insisted upon and emphasized that the confession of Christ as Lord is to be made *for the sake of others*, as well as for the benefit of him who makes it. But we have so constantly presented and urged these latter benefits as the real and only motives to confession that we have will night lost sight of the fact that in truth it is the *birthplace of the unselfish element in religion*; and not simply of the unselfish, but of the philanthropic. The true confessor has been brought by his faith and repentance so near to God that he begins here to reflect his light and love upon the world. And it cannot be doubted that every time the confession is made its tendency, to say the least, is to do good to somebody else, and generally it accomplishes this result. We should, therefore, more frequently and directly address this high principle of unselfish benevolence, calling it into exercise as the reason and motive, for making the confession. That it will react salutary upon the confessor himself is of course true, for "confession is made unto salvation"; and this consideration may properly be presented in connection. But the time has come in the sinner's progress when, if he is to be saved, he must not only perceive the love of God in the gospel, but he must begin to feel and to manifest it in his own heart. And that

love in its very essence is sacrificial; it is poured out for the good of others. Thus the confession is lifted from a mere selfish seeking of good to a Christ-like impartation of it. Thus, too, it ceases to be thought of as only a formal prescription in the “appointed order” of conversion — as a sort of necessary preliminary to the next succeeding step — and it becomes elevated in conception, ennobled, divinized.

The form of words in which this confession may best be made was revealed from Heaven to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and with amazing wisdom it concentrates in a single sentence the whole essence of the gospel. When this revelation had been given to the Apostle Peter, he uttered it to the Saviour in these memorable terms: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” These are pregnant words. All the writings of evangelists and apostles are but the development and elaboration of their profound meaning. Nay, they reach back into preceding ages, and draw into themselves the significance of all revealed type and symbol and shadow, together with the essence of deepest prophetic fore-announcements made by men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

An intelligent confession made substantially in the above state form of words, and made honestly and from the heart, is equivalent to the solemn, formal and public declaration that the confessor not only *recognizes* Jesus in the offices and character mentioned, but that he thus personally and practically *accepts* him. It is the deliberate and voluntary *committal* of himself to Christ—for weal or woe, for cross or crown; and it is the making known of this fact to his fellow-men.

The meaning of the words of the revealed confession is familiar to every one—so familiar that only the briefest exposition of it is here is necessary. All have been taught that the term “Christ” is an *official* designation, and signifies that God the Father has

anointed the Son to fill the three offices whose functions are necessary to man's salvation. Hence, in confessing him to be the "Christ," the confessor *accepts* him in these three official relations. That is to say:

1. As Prophet, or Teacher sent from God. He is recognized as being fully competent and officially authorized to make known the ways of God in truth. The words that he speaks are words that were committed to him to speak—they are words of God. He says: "I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him" (John 8: 26); "As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (verse 28); "I speak that which I have seen with my Father" (verse 38). "The Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak" (chap. 12:49). "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (chap. 14: 10).

2. As Priest or High Priest—in which office he discharges in very deed and reality the functions shadowed forth in the Mosaic priesthood. With all the deep meaning and object of a true sacrifice, he offered himself without spot or blemish to God. But though he was "slain for us," God raised him up to live forevermore, to discharge in an unchangeable priesthood in heaven the office of mediation and intercession. Thus while as Prophet he represents God to man, as Priest he represents man to God.

3. As King—having all authority in Heaven and on earth, and with the divine right to rule and reign over all the sons of men; to rule not simply over them, but in them — their very thoughts and affections being rightfully subject to his will.

And now, finally, he is worthy to fill these high offices, because he is the Son of "the living God." His nature, therefore, is God's nature. He is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of

his person.” “In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” The confessor, in acknowledging and accepting Jesus as the Son of God, will not comprehend (for who indeed can comprehend?) the mysteries of the divine nature and of its tri-personal manifestation; but he can know that in some high sense the Son and the Father are one, and that all the love and mercy and tenderness displayed in the life and death of the Son reveal to us at the same time the heart of the Father. And so, believing all this in his heart, he comes back as a wandering prodigal to confess it with his mouth, well knowing that in calling Jesus Christ, who is his brother, the Son of the living God, he is really saying and feeling that that God is his own Father. And now in his rags and poverty, in his sin and shame, deeply conscious of all that he has forfeited, and deeply sensible of his great unworthiness, he can only say, as he looks into the benignant face that comes to meet him, “Father! — Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in they sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

This, I think, is the point to which the confession of Christ “with the mouth” brings the sinner. He has given up his pride and folly; he has abandoned his evil ways; he has changed his mind and purpose, and has resolved to turn unto the Lord; and in the furtherance of that resolve he has ventured to draw near — but still in his guilt and sin — and there in the presence he confesses his sin, by confessing his faith in Him who alone can forgive it. And now the robe and the shoes, the ring and the fatted calf — is he willing to receive them? Is he willing to humble himself yet further, that he may receive them as a gracious and unmerited gift? Is he willing, in short, to receive them in the Father’s own way? We shall see.

# Chapter Twelve:

## Baptism

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Disregarding minor differences, the following exhibit will show with sufficient fullness the present views of religious society on the question of baptism:

1. That the word, as used by the Saviour in the institution of the ordinance, meant immersion, and only immersion, or some equivalent, such as dipping; and that this original meaning of the word must still direct and control us in the administration of the ordinance. Without exception, so far as I know, those who maintain this view also believe that a personal profession of faith is a necessary prerequisite to any authorized baptism.

2. That which the original *word* is conceded to mean immersion, the substance or essence of the *ordinance* is not dependent upon that precise action. This view seems to regard the baptismal formula, or, at any rate, *something* distinct from the act, as the essential thing in baptism, and that this something, consequently, is not necessarily bound to immersion. Hence, that the sprinkling or pouring of water upon the subject, in connection with the baptismal formula, will accomplish the same *end* as if the subject were immersed in water; that it will reach the same *object*, though proceeding to it by a different road; and that that object is the *real and true baptism*, as distinguished from the mere *mode* of its administration. Those who hold this view also believe that the ordinance may rightfully be administered to infants, especially those of believing parents, or other competent sponsors.

3. That the word as applied to the *institution* of baptism, whatever its signification in the classics and in common use, does

not properly mean immersion at all, but rather purification or cleansing; and that, consequently, the *action* of baptism is best indicated by the *pouring* forth of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, when they were *baptized* upon the day of Pentecost. This view also contemplates the baptism of infants.

While I shall not here enter into an elaborate discussion of these points, and shall say nothing in a controversial spirit, it will be appropriate, in the interest of truth, and in view of the great importance of the subject, briefly to remark upon them. Taking them, then, in reverse order, I am obliged to regard the third view as most unfortunate; for while its influence upon the baptismal controversy is extremely slight, failing as it does to command the respect of the most eminent scholastic authorities, its advocacy is on other grounds to be deeply deplored. For if its conclusion respecting baptism is true, it might certainly be shown without assuming a position which necessarily calls in question and puts in doubt the only basis upon which it is possible for us to have any trustworthy revelation from God. Certainly if the *words* of such revelation do not have the *significations* which were current at the time they were used, we have no means of getting at their true sense, which is equivalent to saying that it cannot be to us a *revelation*. I grant that in the argument the assumption is limited to the word baptism—that *it* was not used in its current and well-understood sense. But if it is legitimate and right to assume this with reference to one word, why may we not deal in the same way with others? Who is to prescribe the limit? And by what sign shall we ever know, while reading, whether we are upon this or that side of the boundary?

I may dismiss the position in question with the remark that it was not the original basis of the doctrine which it has been brought in to support. That doctrine had been long held and taught upon *other grounds*, and it was only an afterthought that suggested this peculiar and remarkable interpretation of the Saviour's word, as a

means by which the commission could be harmonized with the doctrine.

The second of the views above tabulated is not exposed to the same fatal objection. It recognizes fully the proper sense of the divine word, and frankly avows it. It seeks neither to hide it nor to pervert it, but on the contrary it openly acknowledges and proclaims it. We are obliged to admit, whatever our own views may be, that this course is honorable and respectable. It places the issue where it legitimately belongs. There is no equivocation about the meaning of the *word* baptism. That is a settled thing, known and recognized by all genuine scholarship. It signifies immersion, dipping, plunging; and it has no secondary meanings which are inconsistent with these. And now, after thus candidly and fairly conceding the proper sense of the *word*, it submits a proposition respecting the *thing*. It says in effect that that which was *instituted* was not identical with the word which *created* the institution. Of course every one perceives that this *might* have been so. It is conceivable. We may join issue at this point, and deny that in fact it was so; but we shall feel that we are in a Christian atmosphere, beyond the region of mere quibbling and equivocation. We have a distinct issue of fact, and in my opinion, so far as the action of baptism is concerned, it presents the only ground upon which any discussion can be entered upon with the likelihood of reaching profitable conclusions. It is also encouraging to note that those who have presented this issue are, in the main, not only gentlemen of lofty character, but of fine scholarship. I feel confident, therefore, inasmuch as I have tried to state their positions fairly, and to characterize it without terms of disparagement, that such objections as I may feel constrained to file against it will be considered in the spirit of dispassionate candor in which they are offered.

1. My first objection to the view as stated is that it is not clear. I have sought to present it as distinctly as possible; and I have



certainly succeeded in making it as plain as its advocates have usually done, if not, indeed, much plainer. And yet I very much doubt whether the general reader will be able, after all, even to conceive of baptism apart from its action. I have already granted that in some sense it is conceivable; but still it must be allowed that the lines separating the *act* for the *institution*, the *baptizing* from the *baptism*, are somewhat blurred and confused. The conception is thus difficult from the fact that the act and the ordinances seem to be inseparably blended, so much so that when we eliminate the former, the latter also disappears. We cannot find it. We cannot even think of it. Where there is no baptizing there is no baptism. Hence, whatever mental discriminations we may make between the, we are obliged to view them as a unit, having no separate and independent existence.

2. But let us suppose the difficulty removed and that in spite of the mist and obscurity encompassing the subject, we have succeeded in conceiving of baptism as a veritable entity distinct from any action, and consequently that some action other than immersion may contain that entity and bring us the same blessing, we are still forced to ask, "What action?" It will hardly be held, I suppose, that *any action whatever* will answer the purpose. There must be *some* reason for giving one the preference over others; some baptismal mark or sign designating it as right and proper, and supplying the desired assurance that it *would* serve for baptism. But in the absence of any definite utterance of the Scriptures, the determination of the question is certainly not without difficulty, which it involves a serious responsibility. Conceding, as the representatives of the view we are considering do, that the Saviour commanded to immerse, they cannot have failed to give the most profound and prayerful consideration to the matter before deciding upon a substitute action; and among the many possible substitutes, is it by any means certain that they have fallen upon the right ones? Even admitting, therefore, for

the sake of the argument, that the essence of baptism may be imparted by some other action, it does not follow that it could be imparted by any other; and I am free to confess that I know of no valid reason designating either sprinkling or pouring as having superior claims in this regard.

But not only is the questions of the *sufficiency* of the substitute, for baptismal purposes, seen thus to be uncertain and doubtful, but a still graver doubt arises respecting the *authority* to make any change at all. If Christ nowhere authorized even his inspired apostles to do other than *execute* the commission as he gave it, with no hint or intimation that he contemplated any departure from it or alteration of it, “even to the end of the world,” can we be certain that the church was justified in substituting sprinkling or pouring for immersion, or that he approves or sanctions the change? I press these questions in no partisan spirit, and with no ulterior aims, but because to my mind they are serious questions; and they are such as I can but ask, when I read the able and scholarly proofs and candid admissions made by eminent Christian teachers, that the word used by the Saviour meant immersion, while they yet claim that something else is equally valid, authoritative, and efficacious.

I have no reason for preferring the first of the three views mentioned at the head of this chapter, other than its simple and literal conformity to the words of Holy Scripture. If the term used by the Saviour in instituting the ordinance meant immerse, as all competing and ingenuous scholarship freely concedes, it is certainly safe to retain the practice of immersion until the same divine authority abrogates it, or sets it aside for some other. The avoids all the uncertainty and doubt which must necessarily inhere in the views already considered. With this practice it matters not whether baptism be regarded as a divinely appointed and significant *act*, or as an *institution*, or as both combined in one; in any case we have the most satisfactory assurance that

what we administer is literally and truly “an ordinance of the *New Testament*,” or, as others express it, “a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life; which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in his Church until the end of the world” (Presbyterian Confession of Faith, chapter 28). Certainly, if all or even any of this is true, we cannot afford to have the slightest doubt or uncertainty connected with our baptism. We must find that which was “*ordained* by Jesus Christ,” and which, by his “own appointment, was to be *continued* in his Church to the end of the world”; and we must accept it and be thankful for it.

Reverent, candid and competent scholarship, rising above mere party considerations, has, to all intents and purposes, settled the first of these points, namely, what was “*ordained* by Jesus Christ”; it was immersion—such being the conceded meaning of the word which he used. And now the only practical question remaining is whether *this* action which he prescribes is to be “*continued* in his church to the end of the world.” I shall not argue this question, but content myself with the expression of the hope that if the Church’s “standard” is right, it will, sooner or later, realize the importance of practically conforming to it.

# Chapter Thirteen: The Place of Baptism

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It is impossible for me to know how many of my readers may have sympathized with the special object which in all the preceding chapters I have kept constantly in view. Some of them, it is probable, have read with feelings of disappointment; for while I have not refrained from opposing what seemed to me to be error, I have not done so in a way that would be likely to bring comfort to the mere controversialist. The antagonism of those with whom I differed has not, I trust, been aroused; while I have contributed no supplies to the arsenal of those who may have agreed with my positions. So far from assisting them in any belligerent conflict, I have not even come upon the battle-field. Still, I recognize that there are times and circumstances in which controversy is demanded. The truth must be urged and advocated, whatever conflict it may bring. Error must be assailed and driven from its strongholds, let the consequences be what they may. The things which *can* be shaken *must* be shaken and removed, that those which cannot be shaken may remain.

The present state of the religious public mind, however, is one which in general calls not for war, but for peace. Men are emancipating themselves more and more from old traditional influences, and are becoming able to study great cardinal principles such as those which I have been discussing with a freedom, a candor and an honesty of purpose which in other time was not practicable. They are substituting investigation for mere advocacy, and hence are not seeking, as formerly, simply to find props and supports for a preexisting conception. They have discovered that the Bible was not written in the interest of their party, and they are coming to feel with Tennyson that

Our little systems have their day—  
They have their day and cease to be;  
All are but broken parts of the,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

It has been my purpose, therefore, to present the first principles of the gospel from no partisan angle and in no sectarian light, but simply as great vitalizing and organizing elements of the truth; to point out their peculiar and gracious adaptations to human wants; to lift them, in short, out of the coldness of merely intellectual statement, and to exhibit them with something of the warmth and freedom of living forces. Nor do I believe that anyone, however well satisfied he may be of their superiority to other and rival principles, and however clear and full be his logical comprehension of them, can properly appreciate their divine significance and real value until he has removed them from the plane of partisan contention into the region of life and use.

I have deemed it necessary to make these remarks in connection with the special subject which I am now considering, because more than any other it has been abused and maltreated. Every foot of ground which it covers has been fought over, not only once, but again and again. These contests have always been warm, and sometimes even bitter. Of course, the memory of them lingers still, while in many hearts the old passions and prejudices are but lightly slumbering. Let us not awake them, but lull them, if possible, into deeper sleep.

I should love, if it might be, to forget the things that are behind, and to write without a moment's consciousness of the bearings what I may say upon any preoccupied position. But whether I succeed in this or not, in any case nothing can deprive me of the comfort of knowing that personally I am totally indifferent to whatever controversial interests may be involved. If I can succeed in finding and exhibiting the doctrine of baptism as it is taught in

the Holy Scripture, my single aim and object will have been reached. I may, therefore, safely pretermitt any argumentative discussion of the question whether infants are proper subjects of the ordinance, as the answer will be necessarily implied in the statement of what the Scriptures really teach. This we shall now seek to ascertain.

Recurring once more to the commission, we notice that the Saviour required the apostles to baptize those whom they “discipled.” Primarily the obligations rested upon *them*, and then of course, as a resulting duty, upon all who should subsequently carry on the work of making disciples. Briefly stated, therefore, the obligation to baptize rested and still rests upon the Church, or people of God. These are the active agents, and are responsible to Christ for the performance of the duty. The subject of the baptism is passive. Of course he must voluntarily act in coming to the Church and placing himself in her hands. This, however, is not baptism; and having done this, he becomes simply passive, and submits to *be* baptized. As an inducement to this coming and this submission, the Church is required to teach him that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

The word baptism, as we have already seen, means in the commission immersion, or, as elsewhere explained in the Scripture, a “going down into the water,” as the necessary preliminary to a burial in it. The word dipping covers the whole of this double action; that is, the putting under and the lifting out, or the burial and the resurrection. The mere force of the word does not embrace the element in which the baptism is to take place. We might, for example, dip in oil or wine, or any yielding substance; but we learn from numerous passages in the Scriptures that the element must be water. Thus expanded, the meaning of Saviour’s requirement, expressed in the simplest terms—the meaning of the obligation which the laid upon his people—was this: “Make disciples of all the nations, dipping them

in water, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

I enter no further into the question, already briefly considered, whether some other action will answer as well as dipping, or whether the whole church, or any part of it, would have the right and authority to change the only action in an ordinance which her Lord commanded her to keep. These are serious and solemn questions which she must answer for herself in view of her responsibility to God. What she teaches on the subject, through her authorized and accredited ministry, her converts will receive as baptism. As she along is active, while they are passive, it could hardly be otherwise. Whatever errors may be committed under such circumstances, we hand not doubt that the Righteous Judge will attach the responsibility where it properly belongs; and we surely believe that the unlearned and ignorant, who could not know his will, and who were obedient in heart and intention, will not be punished with many stripes.

We may safely conclude, from all that has gone before, that what the Saviour originally designed — disregarding here all questions of changes and of authority for such changes — what he ordained, and required his Church to observe, was the immersion of believers into the holy name of Father, Son and Spirit.

We proceed, therefore, to consider next the place which this divine institution fills as one of the elements or first principles of the gospel; for while it might be taken for granted that it was ordained in the interest of the sinner, it will be well for us if we can see in what way it responds to his condition, and contributes to his spiritual comfort and salvation.

Let it be remembered, then, that we have traced his progress step by step up to this point. We have seen that his feelings of alienation and enmity were overcome by the preaching of the gospel, with its amazing demonstrations of divine benevolence

and love; that in consequence of believing this he became deeply and painfully sensible of the sinfulness of his previous life of unbelief; that under the influence of such feelings he repented towards God, changed his mind and purpose, and resolved to seek him, and, if possible, to get back into friendly relations with him; and that in the execution of this purpose he came out publicly and confessed with his mouth the faith that was in his heart, *to wit*, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Thus he is brought before the face of his Father, humbly confessing his sin and shame, and pleading for favor and forgiveness. We may know the heart of that Father, but as yet *he* cannot. He must still feel that his own unworthiness will in some way be taken into the account, and prevent his perfect restoration. His heart can only say: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." It is true he does not now suggest the servant's place, as he thought he would before he came, but still his conscience tells him he has forfeited that of a son. And so, hesitating and trembling, he can but stand and wait for the decision of his case. Nor has he to wait long. The Father looks upon him with eyes of compassion. His full heart overflows with its love. He speaks, but as yet not to the prodigal sinner, but to his servants—the his Church: "Bring for the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." Do for him all that love itself can do, for he is my *son*; he was dead and is alive again: he was lost, and is found.

And now, in obedience to this commandment, the Church, by her authorized servant, takes the trembling sinner, whose condition the Great Teacher so beautifully portrays, and leads him down into the water—going with him into it—and there, amid the solemn hush of the world, and while the prayers of pious hearts are going up like incense to God, she solemnly and authoritatively baptizes him into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit — and the work is done! Reconciliation is



complete. The soul has come back to God; nay, it has come into God, for it has come into his name, which is himself—himself, truly, but not in the awfulness of his absolute Being, nor yet as manifested in the lightnings and thunders of Sinai, but in his tri-personal and most gracious manifestation as he is revealed in Christ.

It has been evident from the time the sinner was first brought to believe the gospel, that what he consciously needed and most earnestly sought was to be restored to proper relations with God. Every step in his progress, “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God,” has had reference to such restoration. The significance and value of baptism lie in the fact that it is the final step in this progress—the end of the soul’s journey from darkness to light. Here, where God has recorded his name, he meets with the lost sinner, and blesses him—blesses him with the personal assurance that he is welcomed back; that the past is all forgotten; and that the present is only joy and rejoicing. Thus baptism, rightly administered to a properly prepared subject — the baptism which is from God—is the consummation or final completion of the process of conversion, where man is brought practically into right relations with God; where he begins to live with him and for him in a “newness of live,” in which his daily communion is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, through the gracious aid of the ever-present and Holy Spirit.

# Chapter Fourteen:

## The Results of Baptism

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The teaching of the Scriptures on the subject now to be considered is very plain. In the early ages of the Church, when this teaching was simply accepted and rested in as truth, there seems to have been no difficulty in perfectly understanding it. The common people, as well as the more erudite and gifted, were all of one mind respecting it. The Saviour and his apostles had distinctly, and in quite unambiguous language, declared what were the results or consequences of baptism, and during all the purest doctrinal period of the Church's history no serious question was raised. The matter had been settled by authority, and nothing more was to be said.

But, unhappily, with the coming in of questions respecting the proper *subjects* of baptism, it was impossible to avoid a corresponding consideration of its *objects*. Whatever might be the consequents resulting to a penitent believer, baptized upon his own voluntary profession of faith, it might well be doubted whether the same consequents would or could result to a baptized infant. As the infant was without volition or faith, without actual sin or repentance, men could hardly fail to ask whether it was in such spiritual and mental condition as made it possible for it to receive the peculiar blessings attributed to a believer's baptism. The ordinance did not seem to respond in the same way to anything in the infant's case. It satisfied no longing, it imparted no comfort, it brought no joy; and so far from being the consummation of a spiritual process, the final step in a progressive movement toward God, it was not even the conscious beginning of such movement. It is not surprising, therefore, that to many thoughtful persons the baptism of infants seemed to be revolutionary; that it transposed and reversed all the settled

meanings of the ordinance; or else that it set these aside and substituted others for them. The inevitable result was controversy, prolonged and earnest; and this in its progress led to the introduction of metaphysical views upon the effects of baptism, some contending that in and of itself it exerted a regenerative influence; that the unconscious soul of the infant was quickened by baptism into spiritual life, and made thus a child of God; consequently that it received, by anticipation the titles to the whole baptismal estate which was in after years to be possessed and enjoyed. Others, not venturing to pronounce definitely upon the direct and immediate effect upon the spiritual name of the infant, and hesitating to attribute a life-giving power to the ordinance, were content to rely upon it as producing simply a change of relations — that it introduced the child into the family and kingdom of God.

Those who opposed the above positions were not always discreet or wise. In many cases their minds appear to have been confused and agitated. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration seemed to them to be so seriously erroneous that to avoid it and get as far as possible from any complication or fellowship with it, they went to the opposite extreme, not only antagonizing baptismal regeneration, but renouncing and disclaiming all those blessed effects which the Scriptures do certainly and most clearly attribute to the baptism of believers. It came to be regarded, therefore, as merely an outward and formal initiation into the Church; to be scrupulously observed because it was commanded, but only because it was commanded. The great reasons for Divine Love which led to the giving of the commandment—reasons which are most clearly seen in the consequences which the Scriptures attribute to baptism—these, if not overlooked, were sought for as blessings through a different channel. It was even esteemed meritorious, and a mark of the most perfect soundness of doctrine, to discount and depreciate the ordinance in every respect except as a legal requirement. It was not “for the

remission of sins," it was not an "ingrafting into Christ," it was not a "putting on of Christ," it had nothing to do with "salvation." All that was really good in Christianity must be reached before coming to it.

Amid such a contrariety of views prevailing even now in religious society, I can but feel that what I may say will be liable to misconstruction. And it will certainly be misunderstood if it be viewed from any other angle than the one which I myself occupy. Let me emphasize the fact, then, that the results which I shall attribute to baptism appertain only to such a subject of the ordinance as I have already, in previous chapters, so fully described.

As taught by our Lord when he instituted the ordinance, the objects which were to be attained by its observance seem to be left in no uncertainty. In part, they are stated expressly in words of clearest import: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; and if anyone after comparing the different versions of the commission, can suppose that Luke's "remission of sins" does not contemplate the baptism distinctly mentioned in Matthew and Mark, he must at least perceive that such remission is necessarily implied in the baptismal formula. This involves, indeed, not only remission of sins, but every blessing which the hungry soul hopes to find in God. He is the "Fount of every blessing"—he, and not baptism, nor anything that we can do, nor any state of mind into which we may enter. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." If, therefore, there is any meaning in this baptismal formula; if it is not altogether delusive; if what it plainly expresses is the truth, then it is evident that in some sacred and most important sense the man who is truly prepared for the ordinance is "baptized into Christ," is baptized "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Now, if we can believe that this is the simple truth—that the baptism of a proper subject actually accomplishes this result—we can have

no further trouble or mental disturbance respecting it. We shall no longer realize the need of any nice distinctions and learned criticisms to determine the exact meaning of the preposition in the phrase “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2: 38), because, if this blessing comes from God, we shall know that it is to be found in him, and that it will be found when we are introduced into him. No metaphysical exegesis can make us doubt this evident truth; and no human conception of the ordinance, in whatever interest it may be cherished, can make us believe that, as Christ gave it, there is really no good in it. Surely we cannot be translated into the very fullness of the Divine Love, and into the most sacred relations of the Divine Nature, and find nothing in that Fountain and Source of “every good and perfect gift” — nothing but the consciousness that we have complied with the terms of a mere external formality. The subject is lifted above the plane of profitless logomachy, and of doubtful interpretations, and becomes at once simplified and luminous, while all the numerous declarations of the inspired Scriptures respecting it are accepted in their plain and obvious sense as the very truth of God. When we read, for example, such texts as the following:

“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2: 38).

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16: 16).

“Arise and be baptized and wash away they sins, calling upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 22: 16).

“Know ye not, that so many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6: 3).

“As many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ, have put on Christ” (Gal. 3: 27).

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II. Cor. 5: 17).

“Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5: 25, 26).

“And ye are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power; in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col. 2: 10-12).

“According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3: 5).

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 3: 21).

I say, when we read such texts as these, they are seen at once to harmonize with the expectation produced by the baptismal formula, and we have only to accept them with grateful hearts, and be satisfied. Surely no candid mind, free from bias and prejudice, can read the above quoted Scriptures without perceiving that the Holy Spirit recognized the very richest of spiritual blessings—remission of sins, washing away of sins, newness of life, the gift of the Spirit, sanctification, union with Christ, salvation—as being immediately consequent upon baptism. And let us hope that the day has passed, or, at any rate, that it is rapidly passing, when anyone can believe that these consequents are caused or produced by baptism; that is, by any force or influence inhering in the act itself. Baptism is but a step or

passage-way leading on to the results—is but the boundary line, beyond which lie the blessings. But being the last step, and consequently the one which actually carries us across the boundary, men have no unnaturally attributed to the step itself the virtues to which it brings us. They have ascribed to the path the salutary efficacy of the Fountain to which it leads, and have even claimed this efficacy for subjects which, from the very nature of the case, were unable to drink of this Fountain. Others, antagonizing this view, and seeing clearly that the step was not the source of the blessing, have strongly insisted that there is no necessity to take the step.

All this confusion is avoided by simply recognizing the fact, so clearly implied in Scripture, that the value of baptism is not to be estimated by anything in the mere act itself, but by the object to which it introduces us. There is no remission of sins, no pardon, no salvation, in baptism alone, however and to whomever administered; if God be not in it, it is nothing more than an empty and meaningless ceremony. But as he has appointed to meet with the returning sinner in that ordinance, and then and there to receive him back into his favor and fellowship, forgiving him for all the past, and strengthening him for all the future, I do not see why it should be thought a thing incredible with anyone that God should forgive the man's sins, and do it in his own way! Of course the baptism cannot wash away sins, but Jesus Christ can do it in baptism, if we come to it according to his own appointment, that we may surely find him there. He sanctifies and cleanses by the bath of water by the word. Of his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. It is all of him, and that is the reason why we must be baptized into him, and thus put him on.

We may not know the reasons moving the Divine Mind to appoint this particular ordinance as the meeting place — the place where God and the repentant believer actually come together, and

where the reconciliation between them becomes a practical fact; where they enter into new covenant relations — the one party pledging forgiveness and mercy and everlasting love; and the other, faithful, devoted and loving service; but we can readily understand that something of the sort was needed to give comfort and assurance to the sinner; and to supply this need, the Infinite Wisdom commanded to immerse him in water — into the Holy Name. Without this, a man might think himself accepted and pardoned — for aught I know he might be so; but to remove all his doubts and fears, and to give to him individually the authoritative assurance demanded by his heart, God receives him in this ordinance, and speaks to him, and owns him as his son. He clothes him here with the robe of his love, the best robe; he kills for him the fatted calf; he takes him into his own house and home and they live and feast and rejoice together. Love's redeeming work is done; God and man are reconciled.



# Chapter Fifteen: The Whole Subject Exemplified

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I have sought to bring out, and to exhibit somewhat in detail, “the word of the beginning of Christ,” or the elements of salvation as taught in the Great Commission. No attempt has been made to treat the subject exhaustively. And if I have succeeded in settling forth these First Principles distinctly, and in their own clear light, showing their adaptation to the ends contemplated by them, and their mode of operation in reaching those ends, I may well leave the reader to survey, with more leisure and deeper thought, the whole ground which I have thus outlined. Lest, however, any should still be disposed to question the correctness of my interpretation of the commission, I deem it proper, before proceeding to consider its closing requirement, to ask how the apostles and primitive Christians understood it. Did their practice correspond in all essential particulars with the views which I have enunciated? They went forth to execute the very commission upon which I have been commenting, and what they did and said in the performance of this duty is upon record; or, at any rate, such specimens of their acts as were selected by the Holy Spirit is to be written for our learning; and this record, consequently, will show how men who were supernaturally preserved from mistake understood it. As, therefore, this commission is the one under which *we* are acting, and the only one which furnishes any divine authority for our action, the propriety of the above inquiry is manifest.

I had occasion, while discussing the subject of “conviction,” to refer to the Apostle Peter’s first discourse in Jerusalem, and to point out its immediate effect. But the reader will do well to study

all the occurrences of that day with care. He will find that first of all the apostle preaches the gospel of Christ; that in doing so he presents the two leading facts in his history—his death and his resurrection; that he and his fellows apostles bear witness to these facts, as does also the Holy Spirit; and that this testimony is confirmed by showing its manifest agreement with the predictions of inspired prophets. It will furthermore be seen that, as the result of all this, a great multitude of his hearers were *convicted of sin* — a consciousness which could only have arisen in consequence of *believing* what had been preached. It will be observed that this effect was produced by the Holy Spirit, who was *in the apostles*, but not as yet in the hearers; and that it was produced by means of the word of truth which he spoke *through* the apostles—they serving as his organs for communications. So far, all is plain matter-of-fact, and my statement of it is manifestly correct. Its agreement, up to this point, with my previous argument is equally evident. When the convicted sinners asked what they were to do — meaning, as a matter of course, what they were to do to be saved, for they could have no other motive in putting the question — the apostle tells them to *repent and be baptized*. The only point which might here seem to diverge from my position is the fact that no mention is made of the *confession of faith*, which, it will be remembered, I located between repentance and baptism. But as such confession is elsewhere clearly taught as one of the elements of salvation (see Rom. 10: 9), its mere omission from the *record* in this place does not argue its absence *in fact*. Indeed, faith itself is not mentioned here, though, of course, it is necessarily implied. The confession is necessary, not only for the reasons stated in my chapter upon it, but also to *make known to the Church, the existence* of faith and repentance in him who makes it, thus giving evidence that he is a proper subject for the ordinance. We may safely conclude, therefore, that the three thousand confessed the Lord Jesus with the mouth, and thus made it manifest to the apostles that they “gladly received” their word; and thereupon they *were baptized*.

As to the *results* which were to follow this baptism, the apostle specifies only two — “the remission of sins” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” But these two involve and imply every good thing which Love itself could provide and impart. If God gives *himself*, as personated by his Spirit, nothing else can be withheld; if he receives the baptized into communion and fellowship and friendship with himself—with himself as Father, Son and Spirit—he must receive him as *pardoned, justified, sanctified, reconciled, elected, redeemed, and saved*. For surely from the Divine Heart of love, for this boundless Store-house of grace, no real blessing can be absent!

I neither say nor suppose that the returned sinner is able at once to appropriate all this in *conscious* enjoyment. But these blessings are his. They are freely given to him. And he takes hold of them little by little, and drinks them in more and more, as he daily “grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It seems to me, therefore, that the first authoritative exemplification of the true meaning of the commission is precisely in accord with the exposition which I have sought to give of it. And it should be noted that, for the very reason doubtless that it is the first, it is more elaborately detailed, and its elements more specifically stated, than most others.

For instance, in the third chapter of Acts, Peter preaches to the people after healing the lame man, substantially as he had done in the second—the same gospel, the same Christ, the same facts, the same testimonies; but when he comes to give them directions what they are to do to be saved (verse 19), he uses the *generic* word “turn,” or “turn again,” where he had formerly used a *specific*. The authorized version of this text is exceedingly inaccurate and misleading, and so I quote it from the Revised Version: “Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing

from the presence of the Lord.” It will be noted here that, as in the previous case, instead of enjoining faith and telling them that they must exercise it, or seek to procure it from Heaven as the direct gift of God, he simply goes to work, by the direct presentation of testimonies, to produce it; and having done so, he is satisfied with it. He requires nothing more in the way of faith, and nothing different from this simple belief of the truth. It had risen normally and naturally as the result of considering and weighing the testimonies—of hearing the word of God. That was all there was to it; but that was enough. It was true faith, for it accredited, believed and received what God taught. But if they thus *believed* what he said, the apostle must instruct them in the duties and privileges consequent upon such faith, and so he proceeds to say, “Repent ye therefore, and turn again.”

Surely no reverent person can suppose that by the phrase “turn again” he means to set aside any of the conditions of salvation mentioned in the commission, and to substitute something else in their place. The supposition would do dishonor to the apostle’s faithfulness, and discredit his authority. We must believe on the contrary that, as he had not right, so he had no disposition to depart from his Master’s instructions. Nor did he do so in fact. those addressed were not to be deprived of the privilege of being “baptized into Christ.” If they did not know, from being having heard the previous discourse, or having seen the three thousand baptized, or some of the numerous other instances exhibited every day in the city (for “the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved”)—I say if they did not know that this specific act was *involved* in the more general word “turn again,” we cannot doubt that he would have explained it to them when they *resolved* to “turn.” Similar variations in mere phraseology are usual with all speakers; and to candid hearers, seeking simply to know the truth, they are neither misleading, nor of uncertain meaning. In this case the very generality of the word “turn” would have led those who desired to obey it to ask, if they not already

know *what* it involved. The text, therefore, cannot be understood to teach a different doctrine, but only the same doctrine in different terms. As for the results or consequents of this “turning again” these, too, are the same that were promised in the first discourse, but also differently expressed. We have here “blotted out” instead of “remission” of sins, and “seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,” for “the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Other cases recorded in the Book of Acts exhibit slight variations in phraseology, but the most notable feature is the *omission* from the *record* of now one and now another of the essential elements of the saving truth. But we may not conclude that these were absent in fact simply because in the summarized report they are not mentioned in detail. For example: In the salvation of the Samaritans and of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:) nothing is said of their repentance, nor, especially in case of the former, of confession; and yet we must believe that they did repent, and that with the mouth they did make confession unto salvation. In the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the only element expressly *recorded* is his baptism; but how truly each of the others was present is evidenced by the genuineness and thoroughness of the change wrought in him. It is obvious to remark that in his case there was an immediate and supernatural visitation, wholly exceptional in its character, which puts it to this extent outside the sphere of our present investigation. But it will be observed that, notwithstanding the miraculous appearance to him of the glorified Lord, he had still to comply with the terms of the commission, in order to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

The case of Cornelius (Acts 10:) was also, for reasons which are obvious, exceptional in several particulars, especially in the angelic visitation, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit before his baptism. This was God’s way of signifying to Peter, not that Cornelius did not need baptism, but that, Gentile though he was, it was not to be withheld from him. And who was Peter that he

should withstand God? Again we see that, notwithstanding the miraculous visitation, the commission must still be observed; nay, in this case the miraculous gift was bestowed only that it might be observed.

Yet once more: In Antioch the preachers “spake unto the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11: 21). It will be remembered that in the third chapter the hearers were told to “repent and turn,” and here they are reported to have “believed and turned.” In the case of Lydia, “whose heart the Lord opened, to give heed to the things spoken by Paul,” it is immediately added: “And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord come into my house, and abide there” (Acts 16: 14, 15). The conversion of the jailer, reported in the same chapter, shows (1) that Paul told him to believe; (2) that he spake *the word of the Lord* to him, with all that were in his house, that they might believe; and (3) that he was baptized, he and all his, immediately. Of Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, we are told, in the historical account, only of his belief, that “he believed in the Lord with all his house;” and yet, in the epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle makes known that he himself baptized him (see I. Cor. 1: 14). We thus learn that, though the fact was not reported in detail, his case did not differ from that of the others, of whom we are told that “many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18: 8).

And so we learn the principle that prevailed in recording the numerous examples of conversion; that the writer did not deem it necessary to give a tabulated statement in every individual case of the elements of salvation which were present and operative; that he sometimes *generalizes* them by using terms that *involve* them; and that in mentioning only one or more of these elements we are to understand, not the exclusion, but the implication of the

others. All this is so obviously true, and so entirely free from even a shade of difficulty, to any honest and unbiased inquirer who is simply seeking to ascertain what God's word really teaches, that however the facts stated may have been abused in the interest of party, I need not dwell longer upon them. Suffice it to say that the inspired record furnishes abundant and conclusive evidence that the apostles and primitive Christians understood the commission in the plan and ordinary sense of its terms, substantially as I have presented it. And although they might upon occasion vary the expression of them, and although one or more might be omitted here or there in the reports of cases—as something well understood and to be taken for granted—still we cannot doubt that in very deed they uniformly inculcated and observed each and all of those First Principles of the gospel which constituted then, as they do now, the germ and essence of the Christian religion.

# Chapter Sixteen:

## Practical Teaching

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I trust it has been made sufficiently manifest that the man who cordially and practically accepts the elementary principles of the gospel is led by them into new and blessed relations with God. He becomes a member of his Church, a subject of his kingdom, a child in his family. Old things are passed away, and behold, all things have become new. Of course he must needs enter upon this new life and into these new relations without any experience to guide him. Everything is strange and unusual, and he is very ignorant. He knows not what to do. He realizes that for the mercy extended him he is under weighty and solemn obligations, but he cannot tell how he is to discharge those obligations. He would fain walk consistently with the profession which he has made, and the covenant into which he has entered, but the way is not clear before him, and it seems beset with difficulty. It is not easy for any to lead a *Christian* life in an *un-Christian* world, and especially for one who has but just renounced that world.

To meet this condition, and furnish help here where it is most needed, the Saviour directs his apostles—and of course also the Church—first of all to *instruct* those made disciples by them, “*teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.” Of course the word means, primarily, to *impart knowledge, to give information*; and for the young disciple this is felt to be the most pressing need. But in the connection in which it occurs above, it seems also to imply the idea of *training*—teaching them not only *what* I commanded you, but to *observe* it, and *how* to observe it. And this is a very large lesson; it is “*all things whatsoever* I commanded you.” The whole of the epistolary writings, as well as the word of Christ in the gospels, may be regarded as bearing upon this part of the commission, and as



showing the length and breadth of a clause which covers the whole Christian life, and all Christian lives. I can take no part here the element of "training," if such be involved, as I think, in the word "teaching." It is to be done chiefly by example and close personal contact; by the manifestation of friendly interest, and by the stimulus of judicious encouragement and timely assistance. But in the matter of primary religious *instruction*, I may hope to contribute a few suggestions that shall serve as a fitting conclusion to the present series.

To one, then, who has complied with the conditions of salvation as "first principles," and who has just entered upon the life into which they have introduced him, I make these friendly recommendations:

1. *Try to realize the new relations into which you have entered.* Your baptism, preceded as it was by those preparations so clearly taught in the Scriptures, has brought you *in fact* into fellowship with the personal God. He has become to you in truth a loving and gracious Father, whose redeeming and merciful Son is your Elder Brother, and whose sanctifying Spirit is your ever-present Helper and Comforter. But do not be disturbed if you fail to realize in your own heart a *consciousness* of the divine presence. God is very wise, as well as very gracious, and he will not permit you to *lose yourself* even in him. What you need is not the excitement of over-wrought *feeling*, but the firm recognition and assured belief of the divinely attested *fact*. God *is* to you all that I have said; and what I mean by *realizing* is, is for you to accept and appropriate to yourself, and rest in, this truth as an undoubted certainty. Thus it will enter more and more into your daily life, and will gradually mold your character and sweeten your experience, until you come to think of him always a being near and gracious, as being in you, and over you, and for you.

2. *Recognize heartily and fully the obligations of the new life.* As a Christian, redeemed by the Lord, you belong to him: "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." In coming to him, and voluntarily entering into his kingdom, you have acknowledged his right to reign over you and in you, and that it is your duty to do and to be what he requires. Now let the sense of this obligation rest upon you. Keep it in mind and in heart, and resolve to accept it and to act upon it without any mental reservation whatever. All the sweetness of the Christian life, if not indeed its acceptability, will be lost by half-heartedness. It is only what we bravely, cheerfully and without reserve recognize and take hold of the duties incumbent upon us that the performance of them is pleasant and profitable. But *when* we do, the "yoke is easy" indeed, and the "burden is light."

3. *Find rest for your soul.* You do not wish to live, and you do not need to live, a disturbed, agitated, doubtful sort of life. Seek, and you shall find that restful, peaceful state which is troubled by no fears as to your present acceptance or future salvation. It is found only in Christ. "Come unto *me*," he says, "and you shall find rest." The man that is faithfully and lovingly *trying* to do his duty, however short he may come of the perfect standard, may and should repose his soul upon God in humble but confident trust; and in doing so, the very peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be given to him.

4. *Study to learn what the Lord will have you to do.* The apostle, in one of those beautiful summaries of truth, of which we have so many examples in his epistles, presents this subject in a way that may well give direction to our studies. He says; "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." Let us pause here for a little while and notice in detail what is embraced in this divine instruction.

(a) *Our duties to ourselves.* These begin with *self-denial*. The Saviour had taught this lesson long before: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself." We cannot read such passages with recognizing that there is something in our human nature which powerfully incites us to go astray—something which causes evil and wrong to seem attractive and desirable. They are not repulsive to us. We are not shocked at the thought of them, but on the contrary we feel drawn towards them. We clothe them with qualities which do not belong to them, and then we say that they are good for us—things to be desired, and *properly* desired. Thus we are tempted, and the very *self* enters into the temptation. We are drawn away by *our own* lust and enticed. It hence becomes necessary for a man to recognize an authority above himself, and to obey it, even when its voice is contrary to the inclinations of self. This is self-denial — the refusal to gratify the desire for the pleasures of ungodliness and worldly lusts, however strong that desire, and however urgent and pressing the solicitation. Whatever, therefore, is *wrong* in itself—wrong as judged by the perfect standard of right which has been given us; whatever is *injurious* to our higher interest, whether it be essentially wrong or not; and whatever *excess* even in necessary things would be *hurtful*—these mark and define the boundaries within which we must carefully keep ourselves. This course is further indicated by saying that we should "live soberly"; that is with masterful self-control. The higher nature, the spiritual part of our being, is to take the lower *in hand*, bring it into *subjection* and *hold it down*. It must be *kept under*. This, of course, will require great watchfulness, and the enthronement in the heart of lofty principles. And thus, though it will not be easy, by the help of God it will be possible to "*stand* in the evil day."

(b) *Our duties to others.* The Scriptures represent these obligations as *debts* — debts which are to be discharged, because the creditors, though they may not know it, have a *right* to the payment of them. Hence, in the text before us, this class of duties

is indicated by the phrase “live righteously.” Of course the term “righteously” means more than this, involving as it does, all the elements of upright and irreproachable *personal character and conduct*, but it certainly includes love and duty to the neighbor as among the essential of such character. If the apostle felt himself to be “debtor” to all men, it was only because he had received from God light and truth and blessings which all men needed, and which he, who is “no respecter of *persons*,” had given to him for the benefit of all men. If God loves our neighbors as he loves us, we are to love them as we love ourselves. As, therefore, we have opportunity, we are to do good unto all men; and we are to owe no man anything but love, which from its very nature is the one debt that can never be fully paid.

(c) *Our duties to God.* Of course all that we do from high religious motives, whether the acts terminate immediately upon ourselves or others, has reference to God, and honors him. We do it for his sake; do it in obedience to him, and because we believe and love him. But apart from these there are many things which look and point directly to him, such as adoration, praise, worship, thanksgiving — involving that whole circle of thoughts and feelings which bring us in communion with him. In a word, to “live godly” is to walk and work and “endure, as seeing him who is invisible.”

But I cannot pretend, in one brief chapter, to cover the ground embraced by the New Life. Suffice it to say that from the first breath upon earth to its final clarification in Heaven, we are unable, by our own wisdom and strength, to perform any of its duties, or to appreciate and improve nay of its privileges; and therefore, *we must daily look and pray to Him, for who all blessings flow.* There is no such possibility as leading a *Christian* life without prayer to God and loving communion with him. We need him every hour — in joy and grief, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, at home and abroad, in the world and in

the Church—he is our refuge and strength, our protector and guide, our life and salvation. Let us pray to him without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.

Such, in brief, is the new life into which we are introduced by our baptism of faith and repentance. It may lead us through struggle and trial, sometimes into clouds and darkness, and we may go down into deep waters, but he will be with us; and beyond — beyond the river's brink, it brings us to everlasting life and everlasting love!

# GOING ON TO PERFECTION

## Chapter One: Newness of Life

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The elementary principles of the gospel of Christ comprehend whatever is involved in that change of state and relations known as conversion. They embrace the whole process, from the beginning to the final putting on of Christ in baptism. And now the apostle teaches (Rom. 6: 4) that we are raised up from this baptism to walk in newness of life. Much has been said — perhaps most of it with but little practical utility — respecting the precise state in the antecedent process in which this life was generated, and exactly what influence produced the result, and in what way it operated. It is certainly interesting to think upon these points and to compare the various Scriptures relating to them; but unless some obstructive error makes it necessary to discuss them, it will be quite sufficient for us to know that at the end of the elementary process we first begin to “*walk* in newness of life.” Whether the grand result was brought to pass by the Holy Spirit, by the gospel of Christ, by Christian baptism, or by the concurrence of them all, together with the responsive cooperation of him who was the subject of the change, are questions whose consideration here is not demanded. Suffice it to say, that whoever has cordially and practically embraced the first principles of the gospel, and who has come thus into fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is a “new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (II. Cor. 5: 17).

And now, how to make the most of this new life which we have acquired; how to develop and mature it, notwithstanding its

union with our animal nature, and its exposure to trials and dangers; in short, how we may, in spite of obstacles and difficulties, go on to perfection—this is the subject upon which I hope to be able to prepare a number of articles, which I trust may be helpful to earnest and aspiring Christians. The subordinate subjects to be considered under the leading title will not in general have any logical sequence or dependence, but each will be complete in itself, and will be presented as an aspect or element of the main theme. I cannot, of course, say whether I shall be able to handle the subject to the satisfaction of those who are seeking “a closer walk with God”; and the only assurance which I can give in advance is that for many years my best thoughts and feelings have lingered lovingly around it.

It will be helpful to us, let me say in the beginning, to give emphasis in our reflections to the *newness* of this life. It is somewhat difficult fully to realize this, from the fact that we are living in the same old world, in the same homes, mingling with the same people, engaged in the same callings, and in many respects we find ourselves the same. We have the same natural wants and animal passions that we had before. Our individuality has not been set aside—we *feel* that we are the same persons, and we are. And yet with all this old, which necessarily remains with us, there is something essentially new. Perhaps in every case the first thing of this sort which is present to our *consciousness* is a certain peculiar feeling, which we may call joy, or peace, or gladness. It is that sweet serenity and comfort of mind which results from the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance with God. It is what the hymn calls “The new-born joy of sins forgiven.”

And certainly anyone who has experienced the effect of that work of the Spirit which is called conviction of sin; who has realized that he was alienated from God; that he was dead and lost; and who, filled with godly sorrow, has turned with penitent confession and humble submission to his Father, must rejoice to find how

cordially he was welcomed back, and how freely and fully he was pardoned.

Then, of course, the *relations* which the converted sinner sustains to Christ are radically new. He has put him on; has become a member of his body; his loyal, loving and devoted subject. He has voluntarily enlisted in his service, and has consecrated to him all his powers of mind and heart, of soul and body.

He has, too, entered into new relations with the people of God. They have become his brethren, and are to be treated with all brotherly kindness and helpful sympathy. They may be weak and frail and fallible; may have their faults and shortcomings; may be poor and ignorant and rude; but whatever they are, and whatever they do, he still feels a brother's interest in them, and he sits down to the table and eats and drinks with them, and with Christ.

It will be well, also, for him to realize that his relations to the world have been changed. While he is still *in* it, he is not *of* it, and is no longer to be conformed to it. For wise purposes of discipline and development, the heavenly Father leaves his children to struggle against the spirit and temper of the world—to live exposed to its temptations and allurements—in order to cultivate in them a truer and manlier virtue than would otherwise be possible. At the same time he warns against its dangers, especially teaching that our hearts are not to be given to it, and assuring us that if we are born of him we shall be able by his grace to overcome it. This, of course, will require much thoughtful care and watchfulness, and must self-denial and prayer.

In short, the dominant purpose, the whole end and aim of a Christian's existence, is radically new. He is in a new kingdom, a new world, under a new government. He has turned round. The very direction in which his life moves is changed. He has begun to struggle upward, which is Godward; and he feels that the deep meaning of his existence, here is the wonderful complexity of



Providence and grace, of tribulation and trial, and blessed help, is that he may attain unto the heights to which God has called him, that he may become ennobled and sanctified here, and glorified hereafter.

Having considered thus the newness of it, we should bear in mind at the same time that it is *life*—life from God. Nay, it is eternal life, germinal as yet and undeveloped, but still with attributes of *divine* life. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3: 36, 5: 24). This results from the fact that we are God’s *children*—begotten of God; born again, and from above; born of water and of the Spirit. Our conversation was no merely outward conformity to a prescription; it was a coming to God, who is the Source of all life; it was the acceptance from him of the gift of his Spirit to dwell in our hearts; it was the entrance into the Lord Jesus Christ, “who is our life”; and so we came into fellowship and communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Truly this is “newness of *life*.”

And now, in concluding this preliminary chapter in which we are outlines, but in no very definite way, the course that we are to pursue, let us call up before us the duty and privilege of *walking* in this new life. This is one of the terms used in the Bible to express a predetermined and continuous course of conduct. It implies that we are *going* somewhere, and that we are taking the necessary *steps* to land us there. Elsewhere it is called a “journey,” a “Pilgrimage.” We are to recognize the fact that we are only passing through the world; that we do not live here; that it is not home; and that if we *settle down and identify* ourselves with it, we shall fail to reach our true destination. Our watchword must be “Onward, ever onward!”

Walking seems to be a favorite figure with the apostles, and they have connected with it many wholesome instructions. For example:

“We walk by faith, not by sight.”

“We are his workmanship, created in Jesus Christ unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

“I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”

“Brethren, mark them that walk so as ye have us for an example.”

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”

“That ye may walk honestly towards them that are without.”

“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.”

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”

And so we might quote “walk in love,” “walk in Christ,” “walk in wisdom toward them that are without,” and numerous others; but the foregoing will suffice to show us what the Holy Spirit would have us understand by “walking in newness of life.” It means that we are to walk in *faith*, in *good works*, in *truth*, in *love*, in *honesty* and *wisdom*, in the *light*, in *Christ*. Such a walk will be *worthy* of our high calling, and will conduct us on, step by step, towards perfection.

This is the *ideal* Christian life. We are not likely to realize it all at once. We may sometimes blunder and stumble and fall; but, by the grace of God, we get up and try again. Our very failures, when we are honestly endeavoring to do right, will help us to better success afterwards. They will disclose to us the weak places of our character; they will make us more watchful and guardful; and especially will they lead and call us to look unto Him who is the

Source of all strength and help, and to cry, not simply in the music  
of song, but in the sweeter melody of the heart;

Nearer, my God to thee;  
Nearer to thee!

# Chapter Two:

## The Goal

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I rejoice to believe that there are many who, like myself, are dissatisfied with their present attainments, and who would fain realize their own ideals of mature and lofty Christian character. It speaks well for our ministers and church officials that they have excited a desire so deep-seated and widespread to become and to accomplish all that the Great Teacher and Helper has made possible.

From the general title which I have given to these chapters, it will be seen that the object contemplated is *Perfection*. And while we can but feel that this goal is far distant, that the journey to it is long and difficult — aye, and hazardous, too — still we may find comfort and encouragement in the other terms of our title—*Going on*. We are not expected to be perfect in the beginning of our Christian career, nor yet in the second, nor the third, nor perhaps in any subsequent stage of it; it will suffice if we are *moving forward*, always in that direction—going on *to*, that is, *towards* perfection. And I must think that our heavenly Father bestows special honor upon us in calling and inciting us to aim at this, and to strive and labor for it, with good hope of ultimate success. It shows that he has made us capable of becoming very great and noble, of reaching even the highest glory, and of living with all lofty intelligences, and with himself in friendship and fellowship forever. But “he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust”; and I am persuaded that he requires of us only the earnest and patient *effort*, without expecting anything beyond our ability. Many of my readers may be capable of being and doing very much more than I, and yet I feel sure that he will be satisfied with me if I do my little best. They may seem to be, and really may be, much nearer the goal

than I; and yet if I keep faithfully plodding on, with sure and well directed steps, though slow, I shall as certainly gain the prize as those who appear to be outstripping me in the race.

The term perfection, it should be remarked, when predicated of human beings, is used in a relative sense. We cannot in this world be developed into complete likeness; and even when we get to Heaven, and enter consciously into fellowship with the great company of the “spirits of just men made perfect,” we shall all be different—no two of us, I presume, will be alike—and yet we shall all be perfect. Moses and Elijah, on the mount of transfiguration, were readily distinguished from each other; but both “appeared in glory.” Indeed, I am glad to think that Heaven is not peopled by person all of whom have been cast in the same mould, even though it be a perfect mould. The apostle’s aim was to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”—every man, with all his individuality, and even it may be his idiosyncrasies, but still every man *perfect*.

This consideration, if duly weighed, should yield abundant encouragement. We look around upon holy men and women in our acquaintance, who have developed elements of character that we greatly admire, and which, alas! seem beyond our attainment, and we feel like saying: “If that is necessary to perfection, we shall never reach it, and may as well give over.” But has it occurred to us that what was necessary to *their* perfection may not be necessary to *ours*? We have, perhaps, only two talents, and they had five to start with. It was meet that *with* more they should *do* more than we. God has not made many Florence Nightingales or Frances Willard’s, but he has put myriads of blessed women into the sweet homes of this earth, every one of whom can be as perfect in her sphere as these her more distinguished sisters, and every one of whom may be greeted at last with as cordial a “Well done, good and faithful servant.” We all *start out* in this life different; and very soon this difference is

magnified. In temper, in taste, in capacity, in opportunity, we are individualized. In many respects—nay, in most respects—we are necessarily *alone* in this vast universe. Even those most intimately associated have their reserves, their sacred arena, their uncommunicated selfhood. And now the object which the heavenly Father sets before us is for every man to make the best of his individual self. We cannot be Pauls or Johns. No human being could now be a Luther, or an Alexander Campbell. A reduplication of these characters is not needed by the world or the Church. What is wanted, and this *is* possible, is for every man, whatever his sphere in life, whatever his gifts or graces, whatever his peculiarities in disposition or circumstance, to make the best of *himself* that he can. In doing this, he will not be like anybody else—his character will not be an imitation nor a sham, but an honest development of all the good that God put into him; and so he will come forth at last, and live to all eternity in his own grand and distinctive individuality — a *perfect man* in Christ Jesus.

This fact that God has made no two of us alike, and that, consequently, our proper development cannot result in sameness, is important in its bearings upon Christian freedom. The failure to consider this has often led even good men into very serious mistakes. Their own religious clothes, if I may so say, fit *them* so nicely and well, and they feel so easy and comfortable in them, they conclude that they have found exactly the right pattern for all clothes. And not only so, but they are also quite sure that if this is the *right* pattern, any variation from it is *wrong*; and so they insist upon arraying the tall and the short, the fat and the lean, the bit and the little, in garments of precisely the same cut! To the extent of their success in this well-meant but foolish design, the result is grotesque and ludicrous. Men and women appear in habiliments which are fearfully and wonderfully made—habiliments which, in nearly all cases, are too tight or too loose, too long or too short, which sit awry and hang badly; and however excellent the material, they are positively ugly, simply

because *they do not fit the person upon whom they are imposed*, and who are forced to wear them.

It is needless to say that, of course, there is one great model of *moral* character to which every one must seek to conform his life. If we have habits, tastes, inclinations, tendencies which are contrary to the perfect standard of right, we may not plead the existence of these things as an excuse for their indulgence. They simply show that we have gone astray—that we are out of the right road; and every step which we may take in this direction is a step away from perfection, rather than towards it. We may as well set down as an indubitable fact that we shall never reach our true goal without the most sedulous care and the most diligent watchfulness. There is much within us that calls for *correction* — strong passions which must be bridled and subdued; unlawful desires which plead powerfully for indulgence; habits of heedlessness, of hastiness of speech, of impatience, and of uncharitable judgments. And then there is that large catalogue of Christian virtues and graces which are to be *nourished* and brought to maturity. But the *what* and the *how* as to many of these things will be considered more *in extenso* as we proceed. My special purpose at present is to encourage all who earnestly desire to perfect themselves in grace and goodness, by the assurance that their object is attainable, not in the sense of absolute, but in that of relative perfection. I feel sure that every one who deliberately and steadily sets his head and heart to it, and who is willing to use the means and to make the sacrifices demanded by such an object, can attain to a full, well develop, well rounded, and thoroughly established Christian character, which I suppose is what is meant by the phrase, “The stature of a *perfect man* in Christ Jesus.” Though he may never in this world, owing to the weakness and frailty of his earthly nature, and to the unfriendliness of his environment, reach the goal of absolute sinlessness, he can feel and realize that in his heart, he is really *devoted* to all that is true and beautiful and good, while he

loathes and hates every mean and evil way. Such a man may fill a very humble sphere in this life; he may be ignorant of the world's knowledge, and pass his days in poverty and obscurity; but if he has attained to a truly *rounded* character, if his affections are centered in Christ, and his whole life completely *circled* about him, his *perfection* is equal to that of the greatest and noblest and best. A small *circle* is as perfect as a large one.



# Chapter Three:

## The Law Within

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The predictions concerning the new covenant recorded in Jeremiah 31: 31-34, is so important in its bearings upon the object which we have in view that, although the passage is very familiar, I beg to quote it in full:

“Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Every clause of this prophecy is worthy of serious meditation, and if it were germane to our immediate purpose, the whole prediction might be profitably analyzed and discussed. I have introduced it here, however, mainly to call attention to its leading promise: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” This is one of those “better promises” mentioned by the author of Hebrews when he says of Christ that “he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” given unto us—promises which enable us to be “partakers of the divine nature” (II. Pet. 1: 4). In view, therefore,

of the heights to which this covenant is designed to lead us, we are not surprised to find it spoken of not as a modification or emendation of the old, but in contrast with it. It is new; it is not “according” to the old; it is not like it; it is essentially and radically different. And the root of this difference—that out of which the other differentiae spring and grow—is the fact, already stated, that the law of the Lord is put in the inward parts, and written in the heart. We are to understand, consequently, that this is contemplated as one of the distinctive peculiarities and essential characteristics of the Christian religion. It may and must, as a matter of course, have its externals. In order to its propagation and conservation, it must be exhibited and maintained as an *institution*, having all needful organs, forms and ceremonies. The *revelation* of God’s law and truth was also wisely given us, first of all, in an outward and visible form. He did not choose to fill us *immediately* with his divine light, thus making us a law unto ourselves; he provided rather for our *growth* — that we should *gradually attain* unto the statue of perfect men in Christ Jesus. It is probable that angels, owing to the excellency of their character, and the perfection of their relations to God, may receive from him directly a fullness of knowledge of which we can have no adequate conception. But for creatures such as we are, imperfect, weak and sinful, and subject to daily trials and manifold temptations, our educational and disciplinary wants require something different. It was the Evil One who tempted our first parents to seek *immediate* knowledge — to “become as gods, knowing good and evil;” but it is far better for us to reach the heights of attainable knowledge through *faith*—faith in a distinct and *outward* Divine Person, and in his audible and written communications. Thus is maintained that feeling of dependence so appropriate to our low estate and condition, while little by little we grow into godlikeness. This, as I understand it, is the underlying, or, rather, the pervading principle of that new covenant promise which we now have in mind. It does not mean, I suppose, that we can ever in this life cut loose from the outward

letter and become independent of it; we are to study it; to meditate upon it; to drink it in; and so to transfer it more and more from the outer form to the inner life, and thus to change it, so to speak, from “letter” into “spirit.”

It will be perceived, therefore, that, in thinking of the fulfillment of this “better promise,” we should by no means entertain a mechanical conception of it. What the Lord does in the case is not a *transaction*, but a *process*; not something done and completed once for all, but a continuing and progressive work. The divine will and the revealed truth are gradually instilled by him more and more into our heart, as we become better and better prepared to receive them. The heart is the proper *place* for his word, and it is there that he is seeking to “put” it and to “write” it; but the heart is the center of spiritual *life*, and his work, therefore, can proceed only in harmony with our own living processes as manifested successive stage of development and growth. It was not by accident, therefore, that the apostle conjoined the growth in grace and in knowledge. The two will always be in proportion and concurrence.

I beg only to add that the final *completion* of the process which God is carrying on within us, and always with our cooperation, will be that very “perfection” towards which, I trust, we are all actively moving. When the new covenant promise shall have been fulfilled in us — when God’s gracious purpose shall have been thoroughly accomplished — we shall need nothing more. In heart and life and purpose we shall be at one with him; the very fountain of our being will be pure and good, and we shall “stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col. 4: 12).

I have consumed so much time in seeking to excite the reader’s interest on the subject, and to set forth its supreme and vital importance, that I have not reserved to myself sufficient space in which to discuss, with proper discrimination and care, certain

practical phases and details, which in any case would merit a separate chapter. Postponing, therefore, the consideration of these, it will suffice here to invoke the reader's own calm and thoughtful meditation upon the whole subject. And let me say that it would be well for us to realize that we are here on holy ground; that we are drawing very near to God; that we are entering into the very secret of his counsels, and becoming acquainted with his purpose. Let us remember also that these purposes have reference to us, and that he is seeking to accomplish them in us and for us. We are *parties* to this Great Covenant, and it cannot be executed without us. We must concur and cooperate *with God*; and in order to do this we must seek to understand his purpose, and to appreciate its deep significance and vast importance. But if our hearts and sympathies are right—if we really desire to please him, and to be co-workers with him— we may confidently rely, whatever our shortcomings, upon his long suffering patience; for he is slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

# Chapter Four:

## Letter and Spirit

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If my purpose extended no further than the development of a good moral character, I should not deem it necessary to dwell upon a subject which, though not essentially difficult, is of course less simple in its nature than would be the statement and illustration of mere precepts. But I earnestly desire to lead my readers and to bring myself into a better appreciation and fuller enjoyment of the true Christian *life*. And hence I venture to hope that those who are disposed to go with me will be willing to linger yet longer upon a subject which lies at the very foundation of all genuine progress.

It is familiar to every one how earnestly and constantly the Saviour labored to inculcate and enforce the very truth which we are seeking to realize. His contemporaries, with hardly an exception, had lost sight of it; and even his chosen apostles, brought up as they had been under the influence of mere externalism, were exceedingly dull of hearing and slow to understand. But, happily for us, the very grossness of messianic hopes and expectation which he encountered led the Great Teacher to a fullness of deliverance and a wealth of illustration which make our studies comparatively easy.

“The kingdom of heaven,” he says, “cometh not with observation.” It is not an outward and visible thing. It does not *consist* of forms and ceremonies. These may gather *about* it, and may have more or less intimate and important connect *with* it, but they are not the thing itself. The true, vital, heavenly kingdom “is within you.” Its territory is the soul; its throne is the heart; and there its King lives and rules and reigns.

Again, he says that this kingdom is “like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.” Now it matters not what view we may take of the merely circumstantial phrases of this instructive parable. We may or may not attribute special significance to such words as “woman,” “took,” or “three measures,” but in any case the essential meaning cannot be mistaken. The vital and vitalizing principle, represented by the term “leaven,” is hidden away out of sight in the human heart; and it works there in secret. At once this suggests to us the new covenant: “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

In like manner, the parable of the sower, that of the mustard see, and the others relating to seeds and sowings, all proclaim this same truth. And surely no one can read the Sermon on the Mount with perceiving how Christ glorifies the law by lifting it out of the rigidity of mere letter, and presenting it as a free and living principle. Nay, his own commandments come to us not as fixed and inflexible precepts, to be observed in simple punctilio, but rather as blessed and luminous instructions, addressed to the spirit of love, which is open and waiting to receive them. Here, as elsewhere, he opened his mouth and *taught* them. He was the great *Teacher* sent from God. And this is the characterizing idea of the whole New Testament; it is above all things else a book of religious and spiritual instruction. Its lessons may be exhibited in mandatory and prohibitory forms among others, but still for the true Christian they are simply lessons. *He* is not under *law*; *his* life is not to be regulated by *rule* and *measure*. The kingdom of Heaven, which is within him, is not a matter of prescriptions; it is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

When the apostle presents, as he does in his masterly way, the contrast between the two covenants or “testaments,” what he says is worthy of careful notice. Let me quote his language from the Revised Version: “But our sufficiency is from God; who also

made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly upon the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which glory was passing away: how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit be with glory?" (II. Cor. 3: 6-8).

Now it should be observed that the apostle does not *limit* the application of the term "letter" to the ten commandments engraven on stones, though he illustrates his meaning by such references: for in truth the whole of Moses law and ritual was letter. Nor should we understand that the covenant of spirit is confined to New Testament commandments. On the contrary, it embraces every line and word in the whole Book. It is all of the spirit—every commandment, precept, prohibition, injunction is to be kept in its principle and spirit, and not necessarily in its letter. Very often, to be sure, the letter and the spirit will coincide, but not always. For example, the spirit of the commandment addressed by the Saviour to the rich young man is deeply instructive and most important; its letter, regarded as a general precept, would be unwise and really impracticable. We can hardly conceive of a proceeding more injurious to highest interests of the Church and of society than for all Christians to sell what they have and give it to the poor. But how prone we are to rest in mere words! Many persons read the passage lately quoted, "not of the letter, but of the spirit;" make a careless application of it to the ten commandments; declare, of course, that the new covenant is not of letter, because the apostle says so, and immediately proceed to convert it all *into* letter, and to put themselves, and try to put everybody else, under it as letter! But in truth the same apostles teaches us that "we should *serve* in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7: 6). There is no limitation nor exception here. The whole round of duties, the entire range of obligation, whatever is embraced in our Christian

service—all of it is to be, positively, in newness of spirit, and negatively, *not* in the oldness of the letter. We read that the Jews were “under tutors and governors” until the fullness of time, and were in bondage under the elements of the world till Christ redeemed them, that they might receive the adoption of sons. But the apostle does not speak of his tutorship and governorship and this bondage as something to be desired, but as something from which it was a mercy to be rescued. Still, for those of my readers who may be as yet only “babes in Christ,” a little kindly “tutoring” and “governing” may be very helpful. The restraining and guiding influence of experience and wise pastors and of other able and discreet Christians, is needful for the young and immature and should be yielded to with cheerfulness and gratitude. But surely those who are of full age, and whose senses have been exercised to discern both good and evil; those who have been brought into loving sympathy with God, and into cordial devotion to his will, should be able to “serve” him “in newness of spirit.” Such can but feel that the rules and regulations, the demands and prescriptions of legalizers and literalists—assuming to control and direct the details of their conduct—are an impertinence and a hindrance; that they fetter the freedom of the soul, and interfere with its normal expansion and religious comfort. There is no joy and no good in constrained service.

I trust it will not be overlooked that I am writing for those who are *Christians*; not for hypocrites, nor formalists, nor cold, carnal, worldly “professors”—nor yet for mere moralists who expect to get to Heaven by *observances*, and who have not taken heed to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”; who think, perchance, that the absence of a gold chain will commend them to God, and that sin lieth at the door of costly apparel. Some of these characters may need a medicine which it is not my purpose to administer. My single aim and object is to aid those who are seeking to develop their true religious life; those who love God



and his people and his word, and who are really and heartily seeking and trying to *be* right and to *do* right. Such persons may be safely turned loose with God. He is enthroned in their hearts, and his law is armed and cherished in their inward parts. They do not need rules; they are principled against wrong, and in favor of the right; and principles make their own rules. But we do need—we all need—instruction in divine things; more of heavenly light, more of experimental knowledge, a deeper insight into God’s character, and a deeper consecration to his service.

# Chapter Five:

## The Higher Law

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The apostle, after saying to Timothy, “As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge certain men not teach a different doctrine, neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, the which minister questionings, rather than a dispensation of God which is in faith,” immediately adds: “But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned; from which things some having swerved have turned aside unto vain talking; desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully, as knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane.”

The whole of this instructive text is so helpful to us in view of the object we are seeking to gain, that I could not refrain from quoting it, though the immediate purpose with which I turned to the passage was to call attention to “the end of the charge.” It seems that certain men in Ephesus had turned aside to “vain talking,” and were teaching a doctrine essentially different from that taught by the apostle. They were giving undue prominence and ascribing unwarranted influence to the law, considered merely *as* law; and the evident implication is that they were attributing salutary virtue to it. No doubt they were insisting that *good* men must come under the law, or they could not be saved, showing thus a radical misapplication of the true meaning and object of the Christian religion. Now in order to enable Timothy to combat this error, the apostle reminds him that the essence of the whole matter of salvation, and which was, therefore, to be

the end and object aimed at his “charge,” is “*love* out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and faith unfeigned.”

And this, my beloved readers, is to be our objective point; it is to reach that state and condition of heart and life in which the external law does not apply to us. It is not made for a righteous man. God did not design it for good people, but for bad; “for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane.” These are *under* it, subject to its control, its restraints, its limitations, its bondage; but the true Christian is free from it, not because the law, which is holy, just and good, is set aside with reference to him, but because he has risen above it and gone beyond it. He has been lifted into the divine region of *love*, which cannot be measured by law. No statutory enactment can prescribe its course or define its action. It overflows all the embankments of mere rule, and moves by the power of its own fullness, and its own spontaneous and living impulses. Or, to use a different image, it is a well of water in the heart, a divine fountain springing up of its own accord unto everlasting life. To one who feels in his soul the stirring and swelling influence of such a principle as this, how cold and dry and dead, how jejune and tasteless is mere law! And how we sympathize with Paul when he says that those who desire to be teachers of the law “understand neither what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm.”

I trust my considerate readers will pardon me for lingering so long upon the essential principles and characteristics of spiritual life before proceeding, as I hope to do after awhile, to consider the means and processes of growth. For myself I feel that what I am now attempting to do is the most essential part of my work. If we can but be sure of having the living fountain within us, the stream will in a large measure take care of itself. It may need the removal of an obstruction here and there, and perhaps some little leading in order to guide its course through the greenest fields and the

richest pastures; but in any case it will be sure to flow towards the great ocean of love from which it came.

I am the more inclined to the course which I am taking, because there seems to be a sort of proclivity in us — at any rate the tendency is widespread, and very hard to overcome—to substitute morality for life and law for love. We wonder sometimes that the members of certain religious communions submit so uncomplainingly to be governed by “rules” and “Disciplines;” but really it is just what men desire. It is a *relief* to them to have their conduct prescribed; to be told in measured letter what they shall eat, and when they shall fast, and where they shall go, and how they shall worship. Peter exhibited something of this same feeling when he said: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.”

Peter felt that he would be quite willing to conform to any definitely measured requirement. Only give him the exact rule, and he would be careful to come up to it. He was not the man who would go back upon the letter of a commandment. “Just say how often,” such is the spirit of his question, “and I will forgive him that many times; but after that, let him look out! The next time he sins against me, I will settle up the old score along with the new!” In other words, Peter did not really contemplate the *forgiving* of his brother; what he meant was simply the refraining from taking vengeance upon him. But how his Master undermines his worthless legalism! Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven—that is, *always*. The very spirit of forgiveness is to be in *you*; and you are to act it out as from yourself, without reference to any definite law. And then he utters the parable of the two debtors, which concludes with the lesson that we are *from the heart* to forgive *every one* his trespasses. Not some people and some trespasses, but every man and every trespass.

Nothing could more forcibly express the difference between “letter” and “spirit;” between a rule imposed from without, and the law of God written in the heart, and obeyed from the heart.

Has it ever occurred to the reader to consider what this is called *God’s* law? We usually understand that it is simply because he *reveals* and *proclaims* it, or because it is he who requires us to keep it. But while this is one aspect of the truth, may there not be a deeper meaning in it? I feel strongly inclined to the belief that it is his law, *because it is that which he himself observes*. I do not mean, of course, that the *details* of it in its necessary adjustments to our earthly life and human relations are applicable to him, or predicable of him; but the true essence of it; that from which all these details flow as from a fountain; that upon which they all depend, and which alone can secure their proper observance — this law of true and holy life — this principle of love, which, after all, is the one and only law—this is his divine attribute and his eternal characteristic.

When we read, therefore, that all the law and the prophets, that is to say, *all revelation*, hangs upon the law of love; when we read that love is the fulfilling of the law, and that every one who lives is born of God, and knoweth God, for God is love—we begin to realize the blessedness that must spring from the keeping of *this* law, and keeping it as only it can be kept, from the heart. It makes and marks us the children of God. It fills us with all his fullness. It brings us into sweet communion and fellowship with him. Our hearts respond to his, and beat in sympathy with all that he feels.

The importance of conduct is not in *itself* so much as in what it *means*. There is no inherent value in our mere doings. They are but signs of what we are. If we do the right things with the right motive, and in the right spirit, well and good. We shall be rewarded not for the things done, but for the heart that prompted the doing of them. It is *we* who are judged *according to*

our deeds. They declare and show our inward state and character. If we are pure and holy and good, if we are sincere and guileless, if we really and heartily love God and our fellow-men — all this will necessarily express itself in corresponding conduct. But, alas, we may ape this conduct; we may substitute it for those inner traits of which it should be the true exponent; we may simulate a virtue which we do not possess, and impose upon ourselves and our brethren by exhibiting the galvanic contortions of death in place of the spontaneous movements of life. We have listened to many sermons — many excellent sermons — on “What must I *do* to be saved?” To those who are out of Christ, and seeking to find him, these discourses are appropriate and necessary. But for Christians—for those who have *done* the things that made them Christians—there is another, a more absorbing and momentous subject: “What must I *be* to be saved?”

# Chapter Six:

## Seeing the Invisible

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If I have not signally failed in my efforts thus far, it has been made sufficiently evident that the man who *is* what he ought to be will not need to be lashed into the performance of his duty. The things which please God are the very one which please *him*. If in the real core of his heart he is honest and truthful and upright; if in his very soul he is merciful, forgiving, compassionate and tender; if he sincerely loves all that is good and pure and Christlike, he will not have to be driven and dragooned into a course of life corresponding to such a character. It will flow spontaneously out of him.

And yet he may need to be *led* onward, and encouraged to attempt greater things. Brotherly counsel and sympathy, scriptural instruction and godly example will all be helpful to him. He may be brought to a higher appreciation of his privileges, and to a heartier realization of his sacred and blessed relations to God. He may be shown, perhaps, with greater clearness that he has hitherto seen it, how conduct reacts upon character, and promotes its development. And certainly we can all assist one another in the study and improvement of the great volume of God's Providence — a book which he makes the companion of his word, and the commentary upon it. Though deeply sensible of my unfitness to treat these lofty issues as they should be treated, I can at least fix the attention of my readers upon some of them, and this of itself will be a source of profit and blessing to them.

The terms of the title which I have given to this chapter, if understood in their strictly literal sense, would be incongruous. It is, of course, impossible actually to *see the invisible*. And yet the word "see" is sometimes used in the Scriptures to signify the

“view” which the *soul* may take of that which, with the natural eye, cannot be seen. For example, the apostle speaks of “*looking at the things which are not seen*” (II. Cor. 4: 27) that he literally *saw* God, we are told that “he endured as seeing him who is invisible.” In like manner the patriarchs are declared to have *seen* the promises afar off (Heb. 11: 13); and Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day, “and he saw it, and was glad” (John 8: 56).

In that passage (Job 19: 26, 27), which seems to be difficult to translate, we read in the Revised Version, as modified by the American revisers: “And after my skin, even this body is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I *see God*; whom I, even I, shall see on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger.” Here the figure of seeing with the soul alone, “without the body,” is vivified by the use of the “eyes.” Finally we come to the beatitude: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see God*.” But while this is in the future tense, like the assurance expressed by Job, and seems to point for its realization to the future state, I do not think that the blessedness of this *vision* is wholly postponed till we reach the heavenly world. Whatever the state or condition into which we may hereafter be changed or introduced, I doubt whether it will ever be possible for us to *see* the Infinite Spirit in any sense essentially different from that in which we may now see him. We may hope to breathe this Spirit in deeper inspirations, to come into more intimate communion with him, and better to understand his character and his ways; but I suppose that we shall never literally *see* him, save in the person of Christ, who is “the *image* of the *Invisible God*.” “We now see [him] in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face” (I Cor. 13: 12). And this vision, imperfect and indistinct as it is, exerts a transforming influence upon us, and tends to make us more and more like him upon whom we look. This is expressly taught in II. Cor. 3: 18: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.” If we are thus gradually



changing and growing into the likeness of Christ, who is himself, it will be remembered, the image of God, we are certainly *going on* to perfection, and our hearts may well be filled and animated by the hope of finally reaching this goal. But the consummation as well as the progress, the fruition as well as the hope, is connected with *seeing*: “We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; *for we shall see him as he is*. And every one that hath this hope set on him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3: 2, 3).

Of course now, while we are compassed with the flesh, and our minds disturbed and distracted by so many worldly objects, we can see only “as in a mirror,” and the view is necessarily dark,” that is, *enigmatical*, mysterious. *Reflected* objects are not exhibited in their true relations, either to us or to each other. They consequently suggest problems or riddles, for the full solution of which we must wait till we reach the *direct* vision of the world to come. But even as it is with us here and now, with our clouded intellect and imperfect sight, we can still perceive that what we gaze upon with our inner eye is “glory” — the “glory of the Lord.”

And let me ask, What is the glory of the Lord, but his character? His several attributes which constitute all that we know or can know of him, such as love, mercy, goodness, wisdom, power—these are his glory; and while we contemplate these, meditating upon them and striving to appreciate them as qualities of inestimable worth and value—as being in fact the only good—we find ourselves little by little becoming weaned from meaner things, and changed into these more excellent and divine characteristics—“transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” This means, I suppose, from the glory of God which we behold, to our own glory, and also from one degree of this to another. It indicates our progress upward and Godward.

We are very little and imperfect; we are sometimes hardly able to stand; and we feel that we cannot move. We are often sorely tried; the world, the flesh, and the devil tempt us to give over, and we are liable to become discouraged. At such times how blessed it is to reflect that if we can do nothing more, if we are unable to walk or even to stand, we can at least sit down, or, better still, kneel down, and *look*; and *by* looking be transformed into the divine image. It is certainly no ordinary provision—no common privilege—that enable us to acquire strength and courage, and light and peace, and joy and love, just by *seeing* Him who is invisible.

We talk at great deal about *faith* and *trust*, and this is well. We cannot say too much upon these important subjects, if only we are careful to understand them aright. But we should remember that they are not abstractions. Faith is not a thing which has *inherent* virtue, or any saving efficacy in and of itself. Nor is *trust* a mere theological term to be lauded as having some mysterious worth of its own, nor yet a something for the mere possession of which God will reward us. Important and valuable as they are, their worth is wholly instrumental. They server to bring us into communion with the Invisible. They are the eyes, so to speak, with which the soul looks upon God, and by thus looking brings the glory of the Lord into itself. And its because we so frequently use the words *faith* and *trust* by *themselves*, as though they were things apart—as though they were meritorious *per se*—that I have chosen to express their dependent relation by the phrase, “Seeing the Invisible.” Mere “faith,” as a simple state of mind, or as a sort of conscious feeling, or what some may call an “experience,” is really of no value, and properly speaking, is not faith. Nothing is worthy of this name which does not bring us into connection with the Divine Being, and which does not constitute a channel through which his gracious and saving influence may flow into the soul. What we need is not faith simply, but *faith in God*. And there is nothing fraught with richer blessings to the soul, nothing that

can better sustain and uphold us amid the trials and afflictions of life, than the ability to realize that God is lovingly near us; that he is watching over us for good, and *leading* us onward. The Lord said to Moses, and no doubt the promise is applicable to every one of us: “My Presence shall go with thee.” If we could but habituate ourselves to something like a consciousness of this “presence”—whether we call it feeling, or seeing, or believing, or trusting—if it could have for us a reality comparable to *some* sense-perception, as with

The poor Indian, whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds, and hears him in the wind;

it would bring to us an unspeakable comfort.

In our frailty and weakness we should daily look away from ourselves; we should cease to fear, for we should know that “by the power of God we were guarded through faith unto the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” And thus we could take home to ourselves the other promise to Moses: “My presence shall go with thee, *and I will give thee rest.*”

# Chapter Seven:

## Night Songs

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The apostle tells us that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” It follows, therefore, that if we live near to him; if we daily walk with the assured conviction that we are in his immediate presence, and with a faith that looks to him and *sees* him, we shall always “walk in the light, as he is in the light;” or, as they hymn expresses it, we shall “walk in the light of God.” I think it would be well if we could impress upon our minds and hearts some of the lessons of Holy Scripture which may tend to confirm us in the belief of this truth. I suppose it was from deep personal experience, as well as from direct inspiration, that David said: “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” And how cheerfully does Isaiah utter the rich promise that “thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (Is. 60: 20). It will be noted, too, that all that I have hitherto said upon the importance of spiritual life, and of the maintenance of vital connection with its Source, is more than suggested by what the apostle teaching concerning Christ: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1: 4). This doctrine of the identification of *our light* with *Christ’s life* is mentioned here merely for the reader’s serious meditation, as the elaboration of a subject so profound would lead us away from our immediate purpose. There is a sense in which his coming into the world enlightens every man (John 1: 9), but Christians are especially illuminated. They are “all the children of light” (I Thess. 5: 5). They “are called out of darkness *into his* marvelous light” (I Pet. 2: 9). And this expresses precisely the point with which I introduced this subject. We are near to God. His glorious face shines upon us. He has “lifted up the light of his countenance upon us,” and has put gladness into our hearts.

But not only is it our privilege to “see” him thus by faith; we may also *hear* his voice. It comes us in no thunder tones. It is neither loud nor startling. It is so “still” and “small” that we must needs *listen* for it if we would catch its whispered lessons, and be enlightened by its luminous directions. If we could realize that in all the instructions, encouragements, admonitions, comforts, promises which are applicable to us in the Scriptures, *God* is really *present* and speaking them to us *now*, the words would come to us with a vividness and a living power which, in our casual and careless reading, we too often miss. It is one thing to perceive that they were once uttered, and quite another to feel that they are, to all intents and purposes, being uttered now. And it is doubtless for this reason, because God is present with it and in it, that his word is “living and powerful.” To my mind there is something inexpressibly sweet in the thought, or, rather, in the assured conviction that our heavenly Father has not simply given us the record of what he said to distant people ages ago, but that he is really speaking every day *to us*, addressing words of comfort to *our* hearts, and of light to our understanding. When, therefore, the troubles of life assail us, when we are perplexed and cast down, when we are tempted and tried, and fell almost like giving over, it will be a blessing to us if we can get away from the noise and turmoil of the world, and hear a still small voice speaking not simply to the ancient Hebrews through Isaiah, but to our own troubled hearts, saying: “Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, *I will be with thee*; and through the rivers, *they shall not overflow thee*: when thou walkest through the fire, *thou shalt not be burned*; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43: 1-3).

But when I call attention thus to these exceeding great distinctions and honors — to the light of God shining into our hearts and upon our pathway; to his assured and certain presence with us, *never* leaving nor forsaking us; to his gracious and

almighty protection and support, let it be understood that I am speaking of the fact, rather than the experience, of what is really true, however we may fail to realize it. For very few, perhaps none, of even the best of Christians can be said to pass their days in unclouded sunshine and in unqualified happiness. God may be to us in every deed all that I have said—near and gracious, and pouring out his heart of love upon us—and still, owing to our fleshly nature, and to the perverting and blinding influences connected with our secular life, we may fail to see and realize all this, and may even be brought to feel that he is far away from us. We have seasons of depression. We come into a cold, prayerless, unjoyous spirit. The ways of God in his dealings with us are mysterious and inexplicable, and we sometimes think that his hand is very heavy for a loving *Father's* hand! And then doubts supervene. *Is* he a loving Father? And if he is, *are* we indeed his children? Surely something is wrong. Either we do not sustain to him the relation that we had fondly supposed, or else his is not the character that we had believed and in which we had trusted. Oh, it is a dreadful thing to get down into this “slough of despond!” — to feel that God has forsaken us; that it is in vain to serve him; that he hears, he heeds, he pities us no more. The wicked flourish like a green by tree; the men of the world seem to bask in his smiles; their lives are crowned with blessing; they have more than heart could wish; and with it all they appear to be gay and bright and joyous, while we are left to struggle with adversity, and to taste the bitter cup of disappointment, affliction and sorrow. He even takes from us our best beloved, and he leaves us to endure our calamities and griefs in loneliness and desolation of soul.

If any of my readers has ever experienced some such feeling as this, let him not suppose for a moment that his case is exceptional. Alas! to all of us the night cometh. For some reason — and I am now quite sure that it is a benevolent reason — God sometimes hides his face from us. Clouds arise over our lives. Our

sun goes down. Gloomy shadows come creeping across our pathway. We cry to him in our distress, but it grows darker and darker. And now we cannot see our way. We are “walking in darkness, and have no light.”

But shall we give over? Shall we abandon God because in his own wise love he is leading us down into vales of darkness in order to conduct us to greater heights and brighter joys beyond? Shall we imagine that we are not his children, and not accepted by him, because he chastens and corrects us? Surely we did not become Christians in order to make money; to secure uninterrupted worldly prosperity; to enjoy and immunity from the ills and sorrows of life, but to become *perfect* as God is perfect; and to this end to yield ourselves to his guidance and *discipline* in the full assurance of faith.

The instruction given by the prophet seems to cover the whole case: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that *walketh in darkness, and hath no light?* let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” (Isa. 50: 10). Translating this language into our dispensation, it is evident that he that “feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant,” the Christ, is a Christian. He need have no doubt as to his standing and relation. He is a child of God, beloved, and watched over, and cared for. And if it be so that for a time he “walketh in darkness and hath no light,” this should not be thought a reason for distrusting God’s favorable disposition, or his own acceptance with him. On the contrary, he is to feel that these clouds and this darkness are round about *the very throne of God*; and that, in being led into the darkness, he is really coming closer to God. While, therefore, the outward light is shut out, it should only, like Milton’s blindness, intensify the brightness of the spiritual vision. It is now that God is indeed specially near, a *very present* help in time of trouble. These occasions, therefore, are calls to us not to walk, and not to try to walk, by sight, but by

faith. When a *Christian* is in darkness and hath no light, he still has one blessed resource—he can “*trust* in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his *God*.”

And surely, if we can believe that our troubles, afflictions and sorrows are neither accidents nor judgments, but chastisements, giving evidences of truest love on God’s part, and assurances that he regards us as his children, we shall not only *submit* to them, but we shall find in them sources of richest blessing, and occasions for thanksgiving and praise. For though he may lead us into the darkness, he also giveth to his beloved *songs* in the night.



# Chapter Eight:

## The Everyday Life

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In making our pilgrimage through the world, all of us, whatever our state or condition, come to extraordinary emergencies, and have special occasions of trial and difficulty. These, however, are comparatively few. It is only once in a while that the daily routine of existence is broken up; for in general the current of life flows onward, if not without shoals and obstructions, still with no great disturbance. To-day is very much like yesterday and the day before; and perhaps for many weeks there has been but little in our experience outside of the ordinary round of commonplace duties and pleasures. Every night we lie down and sleep, and every morning we go to our regular business, domestic, commercial, professional, or whatever it is; and while there may never be a day in which we do not encounter more or less of trial—something calculated to annoy and worry us, some demand upon our patience, some need to control our tempers and our tongues, the great trials come but seldom, and are, therefore, properly called *extraordinary*.

It is remarkable that in general we bear these latter with more fortitude, and with the exhibition of a truer Christian spirit, than we do the former. We seem to summon up or latent powers, and to bring forward our reserved forces so as successfully to meet an unusual emergency. The extraordinary occasion arouses us to extraordinary effort; we become watchful over ourselves; we begin to examine our hearts and lives, and we pray with unwonted fervency. We draw in our thoughts and affections from the world; we lose our interest in it; our eye becomes single, and so our whole body is full of light. Thus in the perilous sickness of ourselves or our families, in the darkness and sorrow of a broken household, in the overwhelming calamity of flood or flame, the

very necessities of the case, and our own utter helplessness, bring us close to God, the Source of all strength, and we are borne safely through the crisis, and carried forward once more into the ordinary life.

The great apostle to the Gentiles barely mentions the more serious events of his history. Stonings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, scourgings, for these and such like he is always fully prepared. He expects them; he has secured the grace of fortitude and of patience that he may properly bear them; he even welcomes them, and rejoices in them. And when the great crisis of life is impending, when he is about to be “offered,” he looks forward to his martyrdom with serene composure—nay, he barely glances at it, while he fixes his gaze upon the “crown of life” which is just beyond, and which fills his soul with rapture. Compared with “the exceeding and external weight of glory” into which he was so soon to enter, no earthly affliction, however heavy and prolonged, could seem other than light and momentary.

Thus was he completely armed and armored with respect to the more dreadful and perilous conflicts of life. None of these things moved him. But when it came to the little “thorn in the flesh,” the difference in his feeling and behavior is noteworthy. He was not ready for it. It came as a surprise. He was amply able to meet and bear larger troubles; his mental and spiritual preparation for these was abundant; but he seems not to have deemed it necessary to provide himself with grace to endure so small a thing as a thorn! We do not know what this “thorn” was, but we do know that it was comparatively very insignificant—like a splinter in the finger, painful, but not serious, distracting to the attention, but not dangerous. And we can but notice that, until he was better instructed, he was unwilling to bear it. He besought the Lord thrice, not for strength to endure it, but that it might be taken away from him.

No doubt his experience with this thing was very much like ours in similar cases. We can meet a formidable adversary. We are willing to “take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them.” There is something manly and heroic in this; something worthy of our attention and our effort; something, too, by which we can manifest our trust in God, that his “grace is sufficient” for *these* things. But a grain of sand in the shoe, a cinder in the eye, a thorn in the flesh—these are mere irritations, annoyances, things which fret and worry, without seeming to be serious enough to call for divine grace, and the bringing into action of Christian virtues. If a child is prostrated with typhoid fever, the mother gives up everything for it, and does it cheerfully and as a matter of course. Day in and day out, during many long and anxious weeks, she devotes herself exclusively to the little sufferer, and does it with a patience and a fortitude that are well nigh inexhaustible. It is an emergency, a great and serious occasion, and it brings out all the best traits of her character, while she seeks and obtains special grace from Heaven that she may be able to hold out in the performance of her task of love. But this same woman, so sweetly meek, so admirably patient, so trustfully devoted in the presence of this extraordinary and great occasion, may be very different when subjected to the test of the little troubles and irritations of the every-day life. She may exhibit more impatience over the breaking a plate, or the burning of a biscuit, or the soiling of a garment, or the carelessness of a servant, than she manifested during the whole weary period in which the typhoid fever was running its course.

But we are prone to make not only the exercise and development of the passive virtues depend upon the *extraordinary*, the same is true in large measure of the active. If a *grand movement* is to be set on foot and urged forward; if a great moral or religious *reformation* is to be brought about; if some *momentous interest*, some supremely important *cause*, is to be supported, we rise with the emergency and become equal to it. We enter with spirit and

enthusiasm upon the great and unusual enterprise, and devote to its accomplishment all our best thoughts and powers. Thus the active virtues, zeal, enterprise, liberality, diligence, and whatever else terminates upon that which is external to us, are enlisted and brought into exercise, and by exercise that are developed. But what if the feebler calls of the daily life, the fainter appeals which the constantly recurring, and therefore ordinary circumstances of our existence — what if these be disregarded?

Alas, what progress shall we make towards perfection if we go forward only on great occasions, and under the influence of that which is exception, and of comparatively rare occurrence? The missionary cause comes before us in the form of active solicitation only two or three times a year; and it is but seldom that we are called upon to build churches, to endow colleges, to institute reformations, or “to do *some* great thing.” Mercifully, too, the more serious trials and afflictions of life come to us generally after long intervals. But the little ones — the little opportunities for doing good, and the little accidents and incidents of domestic and business life; the word that tends to rouse the temper, and to provoke retaliation; the slight that manifests unfriendliness; the advantage take of us in a trade; the gossip that would make us forget the law of love; the worries everywhere and always connected with servants and children and housekeeping—these and such as these enter into the very warp and woof of every-day life. We cannot avoid them if we would; we need not if we could. Properly understood, they are not evils, save as we make them such. Like the thorn in Paul’s flesh, they have their good design. They furnish the means by which we can exercise ourselves unto godliness, by which we can bring into action, and thus into development, qualities and virtues which would else become atrophied and impotent.

As, therefore, the providences which daily surround us, whether of joy or grief, of ease or pain, of encouragement or provocation,

of sickness or health, of success or disappointment, are wisely and lovingly sent, let us wisely and lovingly improve them. It is not approbation of the *words* love, patience, gentleness, sweetness, fidelity, nor yet the endorsement of the doctrine of Scripture respecting them, that constitutes our progress, but it is to *be* what they represent; and for this we need the very circumstances in which God has placed us.

# Chapter Nine: Spiritual Declension

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If we were all the time making progress towards perfection, even though we were moving at no very rapid pace, our advancement would be notable and encouraging. But, unfortunately, with most of us there are periods of decline. We go backward, and lose ground. the Fervency of our zeal is abated. Like the Ephesians, we leave our first love. It is not meant that we abandon our religion; that we give up or hope of eternal life; that we lose all relish for spiritual enjoyments. The probability is that in the state of mind indicated we shall still regularly, or at any rate, frequently, attend upon the services of the Lord's house, and even take part in them. We shall experience a degree of pleasure at any unusual successes in the Church, and shall be glad to read evidences of the prosperity of the "cause," for we have not cut loose from it; we have not gone back into the world; we still claim to be, and I trust we are, Christians. At the same time there is a manifest abatement and cooling down of our spirituality. Little by little, other interests have taken possession of our hearts, and have come to engross most of our time and our thoughts. These other interests may all be legitimate objects of attention, and many of them even necessary. We must be diligent in business; it is right and proper for us to pursue our several callings — to cultivate the farm, to harvest the crop, to market the surplus, to provide comforts and even luxuries for the family; and in like manner the merchant must needs be wide awake, well-posted as to the state of the markets, and closely attentive to all the details of his business, whether of buying or selling or managing. Similar remarks might be made of every profession and avocation. They all make and properly make, large demands upon us—demands which it is right for us to honor, provided we can do so without sacrificing higher interests, and ignoring more important claims.

But just here lies the danger. It is all well enough to be “diligent in business,” if one is able also, and *at the same time*, to be “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” I have known a *few* such persons—men whose religion seemed to be carried into their pursuits — who never forgot its claims, nor made them secondary, but who appeared to grow in grace, in humility, in generosity, in gratitude, in zeal for God and the cause of humanity — in proportion as the Lord prospered them in the worldly things. But I have known many more in whom the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches, springing up like thorns in their spiritual gardens have choked the word, and they have *become* unfruitful.

The times in which we live are fraught with special peril for this source. The spirit of contentment with such things as we have seems to have taken its flight from the world. Men are no longer satisfied with a modest and frugal living, the fruit of honest and daily toil; they desire to be rich, and not even this in any reasonable measure or degree, but immensely rich, far beyond any possible use that they can make of their wealth, or any comfort which they or their families can derive from it. It has become a passion with them, so engrossing and absorbing as to leave little, or no interest in their hearts for the true riches which God will give to those who are worthy to receive them. We should, therefore, be on our guard. “They that desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Tim. 6: 9, 10). Some of the peculiar “sorrows” or evils growing out of this root are intimated in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of this same chapter: “Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not *high-minded*, nor have their *hope set on the uncertainty of riches*, but on God, who giveth us richly all things to

enjoy; that they *do good*, that they *be rich in good works*, that they be *ready to distribute*, *willing to communicate*; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is life indeed.”

This, then, is one source of spiritual declension—the love of money *for itself*, for the gratification of the evil passions of pride and vanity and vulgar display which it may bring. We may fancy—I fear very many do fancy—that it is *possible* to serve God and mammon, but it is not!

I shall not undertake to mention all the various influences which tend to draw us away from “the chief concern of mortals here below,” but there is one other which seems to call for special notice. I allude to what we are wont in brief to call “Society,” with its round of pleasures, amusements and pastimes, its petty jealousies and rivalries, and its cold and uncharitable, not to say cruel, criticisms. It is the *spirit* that pervades and dominates this social circle, which constitutes the evil and danger of its influence. Really *good* society, even if it were not strictly religious in tone—if it were simply of exalted character—would be stimulating to the higher nature, and in many respects helpful to spiritual progress. But the low gossip of the newly enriched, their vulgar parade and display, their braggadocio and hollow pretension, their want of sympathy for all that is noble and good, not to say their skepticism of its existence—these are elements which enter largely into our modern social life. Now, of course, a matured Christian of fixed principles and fixed heart can mingle in even such society without serious detriment; but there are very many who come forth from the ordeal with distinct and unmistakable spiritual loss. They have caught something of the godless and pernicious spirit which they have been breathing. Their tone is lowered. Their taste for pure and the good is blunted. A careful examination will reveal to them that they have gone backward and downward.



I need not mention partisan politics, which ever and anon becomes so dominant in its influence as to lead men away from all interest in the Church, and even sometimes away from truth and honor and God.

It is a trite observation and a true one that we cannot stand still. If we are not moving forward we are going backward. It matters not what the cause may be. Indeed, without any assignable or recognized cause we may find ourselves becoming careless, and indifferent to the demands of the higher life. We have ceased to give constant and earnest heed to “the things that were heard,” and consequently, have “drifted” away from them (Heb. 2: 1). In the Old Testament this *drifting* is more than once called by the very suggestive word *backsliding*. It is not a running away; not positively and consciously forsaking and giving up, but it is *slipping, sliding* away.

Now with reference to this *backsliding, or declension, or loss of ground, or spiritual coldness and indifference*—call it what you may—I wish to say, first, that it is a *dangerous* condition. It is a movement in the wrong direction. The soul is relaxing its hold upon God, and consequently, upon the hope that rests on God. Second, it is a *sinful* condition, dishonoring to the Saviour, false to our own profession, destructive of our influence for good, and hazarding our eternal welfare. Third, it is pregnant with “many sorrows.” Either God will, in the necessary severity of fatherly love, *chasten* us back to repentance and the right way; or, worse still, we shall be left to reap the bitter fruits of our own folly, and to experience the remorse of wasted opportunities and a misspent life. But, finally, *it is not a hopeless* condition. Though we have lost ground, we may regain it. By hearty repentance and renewed consecration we may get back into the bosom of that Infinite Love which is ever open and warm to receive us. “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine

anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever” (Jer. 3: 12).

# Chapter Ten: A Reckoning

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Whether we speak of our passage through this world to the next as a pilgrimage, a walk, a race, or a voyage, in any case it will be wise for us occasionally to ascertain what progress we have made, and to see just where we are. We can make this passage but once, nor is it possible for us to avoid making it. Right or wrong, foolishly or wisely, rapidly or slowly, we must go on and on till we reach the end. There is no turning back. There is no way of escaping the responsibility. Whether willingly or unwillingly, we must finish our course,—*some* course, be it good or bad, and terminating in some destiny, either of joy or sorrow, of glory or anguish. In deliberately choosing the way of life which he will follow, and the principles by which he will be guided, and in making this choice in the light of the highest wisdom and most trustworthy experience known among men, the Christian is in no sense at disadvantage. His sacrifices are no greater, his trials no more serious, his disappointments no more frequent, his pleasures and enjoyments no less than those of the man of the world; while he has the assurance, which the other cannot have, that at the last he will reach the true home of his soul, and be perfectly happy.

We are, I fondly trust, faithfully striving *to* finish our course with joy, but very often the winds have been contrary, while strong currents have caused us to drift hither and thither. Fogs and mists, too, have sometimes encompassed our little vessels, and have shut out the light of sun and stars; and now we may not know in exactly what latitude and longitude we are. We have been trying to steer by chart and compass, but it may be that winds and waves and tides have deflected us to the right hand or

the left; and so it will be well for us to take an observation and ascertain our position.

The careful mariner, making his way across the pathless sea, does this every day at noon, if the sun can be seen, and if not, he still has the record of his log-book, from which with proximate accuracy, he can calculate his position by “dead-reckoning.” He can, of course, tell nothing by simply looking at his vessel, or by surveying the vast expanse of water in which it floats. To all appearances these are just the same to-day that they were yesterday and the day before. *He must look up to the heavens.* His place upon the sea is to be ascertained by observing his relations to the heavenly bodies.

So, while it is doubtless necessary upon occasion for us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith, I am quite sure that frequent introspection is neither necessary nor wholesome. Our peculiar frames and states of mind may lead, if we brood over them, to needless discouragement, or, on the other hand, to unwarranted spiritual elevation and self-satisfaction. It will be better for us, I think, to consult *our* “log-book,” the record of the course we have been following, and the rate at which we have been moving, and then to look up and ascertain our present relations to the great Sun of Righteousness, whose very unchangeableness directs and regulates our lives.

I am happy to believe that those whose principles and sympathies have led them to accompany me in this series are persons who, perhaps for years, have gradually been making progress—persons who could not be content to neglect the great salvation, and who have, therefore, been all the time, though with varying speed, going on to perfection. By comparing their present with their past, they cannot fail to observe, first of all, a marked and decided advance in *knowledge*. I do not mean by this merely an increase in intellectual attainments, nor even a greater familiarity with the

word of truth. These, great as is their importance, are subsidiary to the true knowledge. I trust that we have come better to know *God* and *Jesus Christ* whom he has sent, without which all other acquirements are vain and nugatory. This knowledge, and this only, is life eternal. This knowledge, and this only, is life eternal. We have been living with him all these years of sunshine and shadow. He has come near to us in our sorrows. He has hallowed our joys. He has blessed and brightened our lives. We have laid upon him our heavy heart-burdens, and have felt relieved. With the spirit of a little child we have drawn near to him in trustful love and in spiritual communion, and have found peace and refreshment and comfort. Yes, we have learned by sweet experience that in very deed he *is* to his people all that his word had led us to believe. “Grace and truth have been multiplied to us *through the knowledge of God*, and of *Jesus our Lord*, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, *through the knowledge of him* who hath called us to glory and virtue” (II. Pet. 1: 2, 3). We have indeed made good progress if we have come to know that we may trust him; that we may safely trust him; that we may always trust him; that he is really caring for us, and watching over us, and sympathizing with us.

To the extent that the foregoing is true of us, we must have acquired also “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (I Pet. 3: 4). We have learned by this time that fretting and chafing can do us only harm; that as God rules the world, and “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” our murmurings at seeming evils are really directed against him; and we have come, let me hope, to accept what he sends us in the spirit of resignation at least, if not yet of positive gratitude. We may not have reached, though it is possible to reach, as the apostle did, the supreme and crowning attainment of glorying in tribulation; but if we are *cultivating* this spirit, if we are more and more clearly seeing the hand of love in every stroke

of chastisement — if we are looking for the Fatherly heart rather than for that of the angry Judge—we are in some measure at least following Paul, as he also followed Christ.

Surely, too, with increasing years and riper experience, we have acquired a more complete mastery over ourselves, our passions, our appetites, our tongues. Doubtless we have found this last the most difficult. The apostle seems to place its achievement at the very end of progress—at the very goal of perfection. “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and also able to bridle the whole body” (James 3: 2). Again, he says: “If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1: 26).

If we have reached a deeper and heartier interest in the welfare of our fellow-men; if we have acquired the *habit* of always making allowances for their frailty, their weakness, their temptations, their want of early instruction, and so to put ourselves in their places that the sweet spirit of heaven-born charity dictates our judgments and mollifies our feelings; and especially if we have risen to the plane of earnestly desiring and faithfully laboring and sacrificing to promote the salvation and happiness of the poor and needy, the friendless and the outcast, we may well feel that we have drawn nearer to God, and that we are moving onward to perfection.

But alas, how often have we stumbled and fallen! How often have the distractions of the world, its cares and pleasures and riches, turned us from our true course, and filled our hearts with unworthy love! Our advancement at best has been unsteady, and come short of our duty and of the glory of God. If amid all this checkered experience we have made any progress, it is owing to his mercy, and because his compassions fail not. At best we have not yet attained, neither are we already perfect. But the glorious

Sun is shining above us. It is noontide. We may look up into his face, and by comparing ourselves with his matchless perfection, we may see and know “whereto we have already attained,” and may settle upon our course for the future.

# Chapter Eleven: Sanctification

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This word has been greatly abused. Modern ideas have been injected into it until it has come to stand in the popular mind for something which is not taught in the Bible, and which to sober common sense is quite unsavory. First the Roman Catholic Church led the thoughts of men away from the truth by assuming to canonize, or make saints, of only certain selected dignitaries whom she chose to esteem worthy of this high honor. In the next place, a class of Protestants, actuated by a zeal which was not according to knowledge, have identified the term with a sort of untempered religious extravagance and lofty personal pretension, which to most persons seems closely related to spiritual pride. When to this we add the brazen assumption of that modern iniquity known as Mormonism, or the “Church of Latter Day *Saints*,” it will be seen how difficult it must be for the masses of men to disentangle the word from the illicit senses with which it has come to be popularly associated. In each of these several errors it will be noted that the *attained sanctification* is limited to a certain class. Others may be good men and good Christians, but they are not saints. A distinction has been made and a line of separation drawn, unknown, as I read them, to the Scriptures. I trust, therefore, that notwithstanding the disrepute in which the doctrine as taught by men is held, the reader will consent to consider the subject *de novo* in the clear light of the inspired word.

Perhaps the main cause of the *Protestant* delusion above mentioned, as well as of the confusion and difficulty in the public mind, is owing to a failure to note that in the Bible the word sanctification, together with its kindred or equivalent terms is used to describe both a *completed* and also a *progressive* work.



The first of these is accomplished in *conversion*. When a man becomes a Christian, when he comes out of the world, and with true faith and repentance dedicates himself to God in baptism, these very acts are sanctifying in their effect. They separate him who performs them from merely secular pursuits, and devote him to the service and glory of God. The apostles, consequently, do not hesitate to characterize such persons as *saints*; and in the sense in which they thus use and apply the term they certainly *are* saints. They are set apart and sanctified to a special work. But it will be noticed that there is no class distinction in this. What is true of one is true, and in the nature of the case must be true, of all. Whoever is a Christian is necessarily and by virtue of that fact sanctified to God. Both the old and the young, the worthy and the unworthy, those whose lives are aglow with religious fervor, and those in whom there is barely a spark of spiritual fire—each and all if they have not actually renounced their hold upon Christ and made shipwreck of their faith, are recognized and spoken of by inspired writers as “saints.” The whole church at Corinth are addressed as the “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” notwithstanding the numerous imperfections and sins which were known to be present in that congregation. In like manner he addresses “all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.” The translators have unfortunately obscured the meaning of this text (Rom. 1: 7) by inserting after “called” the verb “to be,” which might be understood in the sense of “to become.” But this is not the true idea. As Paul wrote it, they “called saints;” called of God—called out of the world, and numbered among his holy ones. The reader may consult also the opening of the several Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians and the Colossians.

Now when we call to mind the manifest moral delinquencies and shortcomings in some of these Christians, and the comparative immaturity of all of them, of which the letters themselves furnish conclusive proof, the fact that, without exception or distinction, they are all designated as “saints” becomes impressive and

significant. I presume the Holy Spirit used this lofty term for the reason that there is potency in it. It bears in its bosom a suggestive and forcible reminder of what every Christian *is*—at least in profession and relation—and therefore, what he *ought* to become, more and more, in his moral and spiritual life. Unhappily, owing no doubt to the perverted meaning which has been given to it, we shrink from applying to ourselves, even in thought, a term which we have come to feel is appropriate only to the loftiest ideals of virtue, while it is *appropriated* only by fanaticism and weakness, or by ecclesiastical bigotry and baseless pretension.

But surely we may claim and should claim to be Christians—servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ; and it would be wholesome for us to remember that this claim involves that of our saintship. It would be wholesome because it would exert a restraining influence in the presence of temptation, and be a helpful incentive to a high and worthy life. Let us, then, freely recognize the fact, and strive deeply to feel it, that in some sense — it may be the very lowest that the word will bear, but still in a sense which is true and real—we are saints of God.

I do not think that we are called upon to parade this fact before our fellow-men, for our “saintliness” would be exposed to serious questions if we had to proclaim and advertise it in order for it to be known. Let it show itself in the life; let it speak in the character; let it shine before men as a light kindled and fed by the Divine Spirit; a light whose calm and steady radiance, undimmed by any fate or any fortune, so illuminates all that we do and all that we are, that others, seeing our good works, are led to glorify our Father who is in Heaven. In any case, the consciousness that we have been lifted by infinite mercy to this high plane, and that God graciously regards us as his saints, will be a daily and divine call to us to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; while the fact that we so imperfectly fill the measure of true holiness, and

so inadequately represent the true saintly character, will incite and urge us to the attainment of that which is higher and worthier. Thus the knowledge that we *are* saints in state and relation, will be an inducement and a stimulus to *become* saints in heart and life; the *completed* sanctification being at once the stepping-stone and the call to that which is to be evermore *progressive*.

If I have not overestimated the importance of the position which I have herein attempted to commend to the reader, and which, I think, is undoubtedly scriptural, it will enable him to detect the fallacy in the argument which confounds and commingles the double sense of the word sanctification, applying to the progressive (which is never perfectly realized) texts which appertain alone to that sanctification which is common to *all* Christians, without exception or discrimination.

I trust also that it has been made sufficiently clear that this primary and general sanctification, while in itself a high honor and distinction, is not to be rested in as a finality, but is to be utilized in the attainment of still higher degrees. The very genius and spirit of the Christian religion demand a constant improvement of the grace already bestowed, as the condition upon which we may receive new supplies, and in larger measures. There is no *terminus ad quem* for us in this world; no stage at which we may sit down and say it is enough. There are always heights beyond heights, and blessings beyond blessings—blessings whose affluent fullness would be too great for our present capacity, and which, therefore, await our approach to them, and our spiritual preparation to receive them.

The second part of my subject, that of progressive sanctification, I hope to be enabled to present in the next succeeding chapter.

# Chapter Twelve:

## Sanctification Progressive

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There is no recorded example among men of perfect holiness. The best and brightest of Old Testament worthies were not spotless; and those who lived and walked with the Saviour of men, and who drank deepest of his Spirit, never succeeded in reproducing his sinless and glorious character. Whatever their attainments in grace and in goodness, they had still, even from their loftiest height of excellency, to look up with humble hearts and adoring praise to Him who, alike in the glory of his majesty and the shame of his humiliation, was preëminently *the* Holy One. And it is deeply significant that one of these apostles of the Lord, and one, too, upon whose name there lingers, the fragrance of the Savior's tenderest love; nay, one who seems to have looked deepest into his divine nature, and to have come most intimately into his sacred fellowship — it is this one who tells us, "If we say that we no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1: 8).

In like manner the great apostle to the Gentiles, distinguished above all human kind by divine honors that were strictly exceptional; who had been visited and addressed by the glorified Lord in person; who had been caught up to the third heaven, and introduced into paradise; who had heard unspeakable words in that celestial world, and had received such an abundance of revelations that his humility before God and men called for especial safeguards — even this man, so highly favored and so richly endowed, felt that here was something lacking to him and in him. He expresses this feeling by saying: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 12). Not yet "perfect"—something not yet

“attained”—still “following after,” reaching forth, pressing onward; still fighting, struggling, praying, hoping, waiting; still wrestling “against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6: 12). Surely if this was true of him, there is no one who may claim to have gone farther, and to have attained more. The fact that God himself is the standard and model of perfect holiness should teach us to be at once humble in our pretensions and most aspiring in our aims. We may never in this world be holy as he is holy, but it is something to be permitted and inspired to strive for it; and even in the world to come, when we sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, and enter into eternal fellowship and fraternity with the spirits of just men made perfect, even there we shall take up the strain of the four living beings—representative of the whole creation—and looking up to him who is still infinitely above us, say: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty” (Rev. 4: 8).

There we shall indeed be free from sin, and beyond the reach of temptation; and there our Lord, who has sanctified and cleansed us with the washing of water by the word, will present us to himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, redeemed and sanctified and glorified, but still with all eternity before us in which to draw nearer and nearer to Him who alone is *absolutely holy*.

I have been led without predesign into the contemplation of this celestial state; and now that it is before us, let it be to us an incitement and attraction. Our chief concern while we remain here below is to “*follow* holiness, with which no man shall see God.” And although we may not hope to reach here the ultimate stage of that relative holiness which is possible to redeemed humanity, we may, by the help of the Holy Spirit, gradually approach unto it. And the pursuit itself, if faithfully and earnestly

made, will cause us to be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The subject in its practical aspects covers a large area — much too large for me to attempt to occupy it in one brief chapter. I may, however, make a few suggestions, which I trust will not be wholly without value.

In the first place, let me recommend as of supreme importance the cultivation of genuine sincerity and integrity of heart. Many of us have been so accustomed to reading and hearing the exposure of that sham sincerity which assumes to substitute itself for the truth of God, and to plead its existence as an excuse for neglecting the plain requirements of his word, that we in danger of undervaluing that which is true and real, and which, as an element of Christian character, and a condition of progress in holiness, is above all price. I have already spoken with disfavor of false pretensions to sanctity; a mock humility is equally contrary to the spirit of truth by which we are to be guided. In all our intercourses with our fellowmen, in our communion with God, in our secret thoughts and purposes, let us assume to be nothing which we are not, and to speak nothing, either by tongue or act, but that which is true. How easy it is or the substantial goodness of character to be sapped and undermined by what is frequently a carelessly formed habit of insincerity! There is danger from this source. It is so much easier to *seem* to be than really to *be*. Hypocrisy is an ugly word; but, alas! the thing itself is much worse—it is a sin. “Beware the leaven of the Pharisees.” It is an influence whose hidden working gradually spreads itself till it has corrupted and rendered false the whole nature.

To thine own self be true;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

And, better still, thou canst not then be false to God. When integrity and genuine sincerity reign within us and over us, we may come boldly to the throne of grace, for the Father seeketh such to worship him as worship in in spirit and in truth.

And this brings me to mention the second condition of progress in sanctification, and perhaps the only one which calls at present for consideration. I allude to the daily practice of holding intercourse with God. It can hardly required to be formally stated, especially for any intelligent Christian, that the only hope of reproducing in ourselves, in however small a measure, those qualities characteristics of the Divine Being which constitute his holiness is for us to bring them habitually before our minds. The contemplation of them as living and blessed realities and beauties in his person fills us with a longing desire to made like him. They cease to be to us merely empty abstractions, and present themselves as concrete harmonies, fascinating to the soul, and giving at once birth and exemplification to its highest ideals. And then we pray. The soul moves as it were from contemplation to desire, and from desire to earnest petition. And such prayer, so true to the inmost nature, so worshipful of its exalted Object, so worthy in its sacred subject, is not the expiration of empty breath, nor the heartless babbling of a cold formality; but it prevaieth much. It brings into the soul from an inexhaustible Fountain streams of refreshment which make it glad, with illuminations and influences which make it strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. And, no doubt, by the clearer vision of angel's eyes, it is seen to come forth from every such interview with a halo of glory upon its head, and with the shinings of divinity in its *face*. By such prayer we are transformed and hallowed. "Lord, teach us how to pray."

I fear that it may still be necessary to say in the conclusion of this subject, as I said in the beginning, that many person—many Christians—have ideas respecting sanctification which make them

feel that its possession in a world like this would be undesirable; that it would separate them from the common sympathies of their kind, and mark them as objects of derision or pity. But which this may be true of some fanatical simulation of the grace, or of some loud-mouthed claim by men whose conduct and reputation give it no support, it is not true of genuine scriptural sanctification. They are the loveliest of women, the most esteemed, honored and trusted of men — and loved and honored not simply by the Church, but by the world as well — who, without freak or phrenzy, without immodesty or vain boasting, show by the consistency of their conduct, the sweetness of their disposition, the simplicity and singleness of their hearts, and the straightforward, honest uprightness and truth of their lives, and, above all, by their genuine and devoted love to God and men, that they minister and feast at an altar whereat formalists and ranters have no right to eat.



# Chapter Thirteen:

## Peace

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It may be noted as one of the paradoxes of the New Testament that it represents the co-existence in the same persons of war and peace. These are terms which in secular things are incongruous and mutually exclusive. If the state described by the one is present, that which is signified by the other is necessarily absent. But in the kingdom of Christ it is not so. Its subjects are at the same time and always engaged in vigorous warfare, and yet living in profound peace. Nor are these terms used in any accommodated or unusual sense. War means real war; peace is true peace. And however incompatible they may seem to be in their *prima facie* or surface presentation, we know that deep down in Christian experience these two states, if they do not merge into one, become really harmonious. We have all been conscious, even when most ardently and resolutely fighting the good fight of faith, that God was keeping us in perfect peace, because our minds were stayed on him.

I have had occasion frequently to allude to the Christian warfare, a subject which occupies much space in the apostolic Scriptures. They lead us constantly to think of the enemies without and within—the world, the flesh and the devil—and of the strife which must be continually maintained if we would at last overcome them. This we may look upon as one side of our life—the side upon which insidious foes approach us and formidable adversaries assail us. Now with wily cunning, and anon with marshaled force and dreadful daring they attack the very citadel of our faith, which with taunt and derision they say, “Where is thy God?” And how often, alas! have they made breaches in our strongholds, or deluded us into opening our gates, and ourselves bringing in, with made exultation, their Trojan horse, filled with

deadly enemies! What with pride and vanity and sloth, and with worldly-mindedness and carnal security raising up within, and with the hosts of sin and Satan pressing upon us from without, we might well be appalled. If left to ourselves the conflict could result only in disaster and defeat.

But we are not thus left. “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (I John 4: 4). And it is this God side of us, if I may so express it; this assured conviction that God is, and that he is ever present with his help, and unailing in his support, that gives us peace of mind and composure of soul even in the thickets of the fight. “Though an host would encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise up against me, in this will I be confident” (Psa. 27: 3). By the words “in this” reference is doubtless made to the first verse of the psalm: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” If we can exercise such faith as this; if we are able to look away from the perils that environ us, to the Almighty Arm that defends us, and to feel sure that whatever help we may need in the evil day will come to us in good time and abundant measure, we can sign the song of trust with the spirit and the understanding and rest in peace.

Thought troubles assail and danger affright,  
Though friends should all fail and foes all unite,  
Yet one thing secures us, whatever betide,  
The Scripture assures us, the Lord will provide.

It is not only, however, in the extraordinary trials and fiercer conflicts of life that this grace is to be sought and prized; we need it as a guard and resource in the daily round of common experience. There is no hour so free from care, or so exempt from temptations and ills, that it will not be brightened and sweetened if we direct our thought and our faith to God, looking through

what may seem to be a “frowning providence,” to the “smiling face” behind. The true conception of scriptural peace is that of an every-abiding serenity of soul, retained and cherished alike in sunshine and in storm, in sorrow and in joy, through good report and ill, amid all the vicissitudes and changes of this earthly existence, and eve, if need be,

Amidst the war of elements,  
The wreck of matter the crush of worlds.

The esteem in which the Lord would have us hold this grace is repeatedly shown; and a few of his declarations respecting it may help us to a higher appreciation of its worth. “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a rive, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isa. 48: 18). *Peace as a river* — that is, abundant, full, living, and never failing. And we notice that it was this blessing of peace above all others, and which indeed includes all others, that the very heart of God had been yearning to bestow upon the beloved “house of Jacob.”

In like manner the Saviour of men, when he was about to return to his Father, and to leave his chosen apostles to struggle on in an unfriendly world — as in truth we all must do — a world which promised them only tribulations, persecutions and afflictions: a world whose sweetest smiles would be delusive, whose friendships would bring danger, and whose highest good was fraught with evil; looking down this gloomy vista, and selecting from his boundless resources that which alone could prepare them for their trying future, and bear them safely through it, he imparted it to them, and left it with them. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14: 27). And now, if it must be so, “*let the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing*”; nay, let the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; and let the

waters thereof roar and be troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof; the rage of the nations is impotent, and the roaring of the seas gives not alarm. For deep down in the soul, far beyond any disturbance from earthly enmity or ill, there flows and eternal and gladdening river of peace.

With such knowledge of its origin, and with daily experience of its comfort, it is no wonder that the apostles speak of it in terms of highest appreciation. It is “from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 1: 7); it is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5: 22); “the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14: 17). To the Colossians the injunction is given: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col. 3: 15); while to the Philippians is given that infallible and all-comprehensive prescription for happiness: “In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4: 6, 7). It is indeed incomprehensible even to him who experiences it. Like the gracious Spirit by whom it is imparted, its coming is attended by no convulsive shock nor startling sound. We may not observe its quiet approach, but as we rise from the fervent “prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,” we find that somehow a divine calmness of soul, a sweet rest as from heaven, is present with us; *and this is God’s peace.*

The attentive reader has doubtless noticed—and I trust without surprise — that in seeking in my humble way to aid him to attainment of this grace, I have simply sought to lead him to its Source. It might be helpful to timid Christians for me to add that, inexpressibly precious as this peace is, its acquisition is not difficult. True, it is wholly supernatural in its origin; it is a gift; we cannot create it, nor work ourselves into it. But what blessing

have we ever enjoyed that has not come down to us from the Father of lights? And he is waiting to bestow this one upon every child of his who will open the door of his heart to receive it. All of us, therefore, even the poorest and humblest, and however unworthy we may feel ourselves to be, live every day *within reach*, to say the least, of this heavenly boon. And we have but to stretch forth the hand of faith and of earnest prayer, for it to be ours. But let us remember that it lies not at the end of labor and toil and struggle. We do not come to it by that road. Nor is it to be gained by exciting and agitating ourselves with reference to it—not even by exciting and agitating prayer, as if Heaven must be stormed and God aroused in order to procure it; but by “praying in the Holy Spirit” — the calm, trustful, reposeful prayer, that *believes* in God’s love, and that lays the soul down upon his bosom that in him it may find rest.

# Chapter Fourteen:

## Drawing Near

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The Epistle to the Hebrews exhibits the Christian religion not only in the strength of its great argument, but in picturesque beauty and attractiveness. It draws from the offices and institutions of the Old Testament illustrations of the New. It discloses to us the gradual unfolding of God's eternal purpose, and makes known the object lessons by which men were educated to appreciate that purpose, and to enter into sympathy with it. After conducting us over the whole field of priestly consecration and ministration under the law, and explaining the prophetic announcement of a new and higher priestly order, whose type, in the person of Melchizedek was antecedent and superior to the Aaronic priesthood, we are brought to see and to feel that the full realization of all these types and prophecies is found in Jesus Christ and the institutions which he has established. He, as our great High Priest, had made the one needed and only efficacious sacrifice; has ascended into heaven itself, the true holy place; and there, in an unchangeable priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, he ever lives to make intercession for us.

And now, on the ground of this most stupendous fact, we are exhorted to draw near to the same holy place that we may obtain the blessings which are there provided and treasured up for us. The language, while stimulating to this high duty and privilege, is at the same time full of instruction. It reads:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he hath dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our heart sprinkled from

and evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water; let us hold fast the confession of our hope, that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh” (Heb. 10: 19-25).

But although we are thus urged to “draw near,” and are even told that we do so with “boldness,” we are still reminded of the preparation necessary for appearing in such a place and in such a Presence.

And first of all we are to come with a “true heart.” If there is anyone thing that should distinguish a Christian above everything else, it is perfect integrity and honesty—truth in the innermost part of his being—a perfect genuineness that is free from all sham and hollow pretense.

Already I have had occasion to speak of this under a different heading, but I feel that it needs to be emphasized again and again. We may not only impose upon others by an empty profession and sort of make-believe Christianity, but the Scriptures warn us that we may deceive ourselves — that we may think ourselves to be something when we are nothing. And there are no words which should come home to the soul in a tone of deeper solemnity, or with more awakening and even startling power than those which say to us, “*Be not deceived!*” Deceived, mark you—deceived in a matter of life and death. Those in this condition are not hypocrites, at least not consciously such. A hypocrite knows that his life is untrue and his profession false; but what must it be to *think* you are right when you are wrong, that you are safe when you are lost!

But let no one feel discouraged. The fact that we are told not to be deceived, while it shows the danger, indicates at the same

time that the danger may be avoided. And here as we come by the divine counsel to draw near to the very holiest place in all of God's dominion, and to One who knows the secrets of all hearts and all lives, it is specially incumbent upon us to see that our hearts at least are true. We may be conscious of great infirmities; we may feel deep down in our souls that we have come far short of what we might have been and might have done; we may know that in many things we have offended, and that we can only look unto the mercy of God for acceptance—still if we are truly and honestly *conscious* of all this, and do not simply *pretend* to feel and to believe it, we may enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil; and may do this in that perfect faith which is called in the text “fullness of faith.”

I presume that having “the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience and the body washed with pure water,” is not an *additional*, but a *preceding* work. These clauses refer back to that original cleansing and sanctification which we received in becoming Christians, and being thus made “priests unto God.” In other words, they refer to that great change in which our hearts were “purified by faith”; and when we “put off the old man with his deeds,” being “buried with Christ by baptism,” and not only “buried *with* him,” we were actually “baptized *into* him.”

It cannot escape the attention of any that this preparation for drawing near is represented as most searchingly thorough and complete, embracing the whole man, his heart, his conscience, his body, and the very state and attitude of his soul; and that to render such preparation possible it was preceded by the infinite love and wisdom of God, and by the amazing work of Christ. But when we remember that it is an approach to the very fountain of love and throne of grace, and into His presence who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who can detect every false way, and



will repudiate all empty lip service, it will be seen that such preparation is not only becoming, but necessary.

And now supposing it to have been made, and I am sure that some, and I trust many, of my readers have made it, and that the “way into the holiest” lies open and manifest before them, in what spirit and frame of mind should they approach?

More than once the Scripture answers, with “boldness.” When we sustain to God the relation that entitles us to come to him; when our hearts are true and pure; when our consciences are clean; when our life and walk are consistent with our profession, and when our desires, affections and aspirations are such as God approves, the whole ocean of his love is accessible to us, and we may enter his presence not with presumptuous daring, certainly, but with all freedom of speech (which is the meaning here of boldness), and in the confidence of undoubting and unwavering faith.

I shall be pardoned, I trust, for recommending those to whom this exalted privilege has been accorded, to learn, as soon as possible, and to embrace the truth that what we really need, and all that we need, is God *himself*. We know not what to pray for as we ought. Often the things most earnestly desired would be hurtful to us. And yet, little children that we are, short-sighted and ignorant, we can but long and pray for what seems to *us* to be good. Nor is such prayer to be supposed. We are taught that in *everything* we are by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto God, though of course always in subordination to his will, and with hearty recognition of his superior wisdom. Such prayers, whether specially granted or not, have always this blessing in them: that they bring us before God, and draw us nearer to him. But these prayers, though they manifest a degree of faith, and sometimes even a high degree, indicate at the same time the absence of the *very* highest. *Perfect*

trust in God's wisdom and care and love, an unqualified confidence in his gracious and abiding presence and sleepless oversight, would cause us to *wait* on him in worshipful adoration, rather than with Psalmist to be crying, "Make *haste* to help us." And I am sure that when we draw *very near*, when we really *enter*, even here and now, into the holy place, and come into full communion with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, we shall be able in large measure to anticipate "that day" in which, as our Lord says, "Ye shall ask me nothing." This is the very acme of faith—when the trust in his goodness and wisdom, and power and love, is so assured and steady that nothing is desired or prayed for but that his will be done. We may not reach this exalted spiritual state here, but we may make it our goal and object, and may more and more approach unto it, drawing daily nearer and nearer, and so entering more and more into "the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

God is the Father of our spirits. We have been separated from him by sin, which has caused all our unrest and misery. What we need, all that we need, is to get back into perfect communion and fellowship with him; and this is what is contemplated in all the redeeming work of Christ, and the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. When we come to see and to realize this; when all temporal and transitory things become as nothing in comparison with this one thing, our only thought and feeling will be to say, like David: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

# Chapter Fifteen:

## Behold the Perfect Man

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In bringing to a close what I have deemed it necessary to say on Christian Progress, I desired to speak a few words, which I trust may be strengthening and comforting respecting the last great change here below, and the final destiny above.

Christians frequently misinterpret the feelings which arise in them at the prospect of death. As we are at present constituted we are made to live in this world. We are bound to it by numerous ties of friendship and affection. For many long years it has been our home. All the sweet memories of childhood and early life are connected with it, as are also the struggles and trials and sorrows of maturer years. It is here that we have planned and worked and hoped, and here that we are still planning and working and hoping. We are at all times mixed up with present business, present cares, present responsibilities — matters and things which are in process, which have not yet been worked out. All these things seem to give us the pledge and promise of a future here, not a distant one, but still one that for the time at least is assured and certain. We count upon it; we lay our plans with reference to it; and while we may recognize in a general way the uncertainty of life, and may even say from the heart, as taught by the Scriptures, “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that”—we still think that we shall live. All this is natural and right. If it were otherwise with us we should not be fitted for the duties which God has made incumbent upon us. But it is this which causes the prospect of death to present itself as a sort of shock—as something that would be unwelcome and even dreadful. But it should be understood that this feeling with which we contemplate it is not the fear of death, or of any consequence

growing out of it; it is simply the God-ordained clinging to this life until it shall please him to loose the times which bind us to it.

And when this time really comes—when the heavenly Father calls for us — it will *be* a Father’s call, and we shall feel and know that he is but saying to us, “Come up higher.” We have been accustomed to associate the idea of death with the river Jordan which separated the children of Israel from the land of promise; and it is almost with a shudder of apprehension that we think of entering the rolling flood of its deep, dark, cold waters—all alone! But blessed be God, we do not enter them. Our Great Priest, with the ark of the covenant, has passed in before us, and the waters have “stood up upon an heap,” so that, like the Israelites, we may pass over on dry ground. The fears and alarms, so naturally anticipated, are not realized. We finish our course with joy; and we enter the realm of death with thanksgiving to Him who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

No, it is not dreadful to die. And however our earthly nature may shrink back from it, I feel sure that He who has given us grace to live will, when we come to need it, give us grace to die. He will support us with the cordials of his love; he will comfort us with the blessed word; “Be not afraid, lo, I am with you;” and thus gently, tenderly, and lovingly he will lull us to sleep upon his bosom; and the great solemn, mysterious pilgrimage of life will be over.

To most of us it has been a long and wearisome journey. The pathway has often led through danger and difficulty, and we have had many a hard-fought battle. We have passed through trials and toils and tears; but out of them all the Lord has delivered us, and though them all he has brought us safely to the end. And now we leave behind us our carnal nature; we come out of our earthly house; and the real true individual *self*, for whose perfection and glorification we have been subjected to the discipline of life,

departs in the blessed freedom of a spiritual body, without the burden of flesh and blood, and without the trammels of temptation or sin. By the powerful attraction of mutual love and likeness of nature it is drawn and borne into the society of just men made perfect, and into closer fellowship with Him who lives and reigns over all, God blessed forever.

It would not be seemly for us with our carnal eyes to try to peer curiously into the secrets of this spiritual state and condition. If it had been proper for us to know them, they had doubtless been fully revealed. As it is, we have only glimpses here and there of a life and a home of whose nature we can but faintly conceive. Enough, however, is told us to animate our hope, and to furnish cheer and support while waiting to be called.

Among the things thus certified to us, the reality of the future state is by no means the least important. It is never once spoken of in the New Testament in any problematical or doubtful terms. While the wisest men of the world, its deepest thinkers and soberest reasoners speculated about, and at best deemed it probable that such an existence might be, Christ testified of it; declared what he had seen and known in the heavens; spoke of the angels that lived there; of his Father's house and its many mansions; and always as a matter of certain knowledge, never as an inference from observed phenomena, or a conclusion drawn from any logical premises. The existence of that blessed state was an assured and certain fact. "We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen." In the same tone of perfect assurance the inspired apostles uniformly allude to it. We cannot read their recorded words without feeling that to their minds the future state was just as real as the present. They seemed to live and move and think and feel in the very light of it. However men may seek to account for it, it is at any rate a fact as remarkable as it is beyond question that somehow there had come into the minds and hearts of these chosen men a conviction respecting the

world above and the life after death, which held them to be as undoubted and real as the world and the life below. As we read the plain and honest records of these holy men we feel that they but reflect the glories of overshadowing heavens; and the gospel of life everlasting which they preached — the gospel for whose success they lived, and for whose maintenance they died — seems to derive its charm and its efficacy from powers coming in from above. So well assured were they of all this; so present and certain was it to their consciousness; so deep and strong and clear were their convictions of it, that the very intensity with which they realized it has made it real to all succeeding generations.

In the next place it is obvious to remark that for all the children of God this state is depicted as one of unalloyed happiness. They rest from their labors. Their tears are wiped away. Sorrow and crying are unknown. Sin with its polluting touch, and temptation with its perilous power, are warded off, and nothing that defiles or that loveth a lie can gain access to them. And not only so; not only are they freed from all evil and saved from all danger, but they are positively and fully blessed. They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The fact, too, that it is a life in which the very highest intelligences take delight, is evidence conclusive that its employments and activities are such as can give pleasure and satisfaction to personalities so exalted in wisdom and so abundant in knowledge. It is not, therefore, a life which is passed in a mere round of monotonous ecstasy, nor yet in the idleness of dreamy inactivity, but such a life as the great mind and heart of Paul would love to lead; such a life as Luther and Wesley and Alexander Campbell would find congenial to their sanctified tastes and noblest powers; a life truer, loftier, more glorious and blessed than human heart has ever conceived; a life, therefore, worthy of all sacrifices and all perseverance to attain.

And finally, *when* it is attained, we begin for the first time to realize the profundity and immensity of that *perfection* in Christ Jesus towards which we have been going on. And let me hope that with renewed zeal and more determined purpose we will continue to “press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The end shall crown the work—  
    Ah, who shall tell the end?  
    It is a woesome way, and clouds portend.  
The work is all we know;  
    Enough for our faint sight,  
The end God knows—press on—  
    The crown is light!