

“Heard, . . . seen, . . . handled.”

THAT Christ is our life, no Christian can for a moment question, any more than that He gives life. “The Son quickens whom He will.” He gives His sheep eternal life. He communicates or gives life, but besides that, He is the life. Both are true. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” And let us remember that it belongs to God to say “I AM;” and therefore Christ could say “I AM the life.” No one who is not “the true God” could be “the eternal life.” But it is written of Jesus, “He is the true God and the eternal life.” In this sense *deity* and *life* are inseparable; they cannot be dissociated without assailing the glory of His Person. But in saying this, we do not state or imply that in communicating life to us, He communicates deity. No one whose soul is abiding in the truth would or could suppose such a thing. No believer can say, ‘I AM the life’; but he is privileged to say, ‘I have it.’ “Christ is my life.” I cannot have it apart from Him, or I should be an irresponsible self-existent being. Thank God, that can never be. In giving, He does not give “as the world gives”; He does not give away. The recipient is ever dependent upon the gracious Giver, and, being made alive, enjoys the life in communion with Him, who is both Life-giver and Life-sustainer.

When we think or speak of life practically, everyone will own

that we do not mean by it merely the fact that we are alive. What is life to a criminal confined in a solitary cell? It is true he is as much *alive* as if he were free, and in the bosom of his family; but in the practical sense, is his "life" the same? Would he not describe his prison life as a living death? Now as to the Christian it is written, "He that will love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." (1 Peter iii. 10-13.)

In a true conception of life, righteousness is as inseparable from it as is the joy of heart which is from God; and besides that, there is relationship with others who have it. All this is dealt with in detail in the 1st Epistle of John. But in the first place, we read "The life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." (1 John i. 1-2.) And again, "Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." (1 John ii. 5, 6.)

Now the question is, what should I think of when the subject of "life" comes before me? For we own that it is not of the mere fact that I am alive; and we are not now speaking of the natural life we have as born into this world, but of spiritual life, or the new life. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." (Eph. ii. 5.) Our present point is not as to how we get life (scripture is plain as to this), but as to how it is presented to our minds by the Holy Ghost. "Eternal life is God's gift: it is not earned by law-keeping. (Gal. iii. 21.) When 'law' is treated of, we find the word

'life' (Gal. iii. 12), but in this connection the scripture takes care never to say 'eternal life'; for this is a gift of God: it is Christ Himself." (*Coll. Writ.* vii. 487, 499.) I repeat, then, when I think of "life" practically, what am I to think of, if not of Christ? Why is it that there is so much effort now made to turn away the thoughts from Christ to something else, such as our "blessedness"?

Take, for instance, a sentence constantly repeated of late, "Christ is eternal life, but eternal life is not Christ."

Or again, a parallel instituted to deny that eternal life is Christ: it will not hold. It is this: we say "God is love," but you cannot say Love is God. True; that would make an idol called "love." By inverting the order of the words, their sense is changed. "There be gods many and lords many, but to us there is but *one* God, the Father, &c." (1 Cor. viii. 5, 6). His nature is love. It is thus easily seen that there is no true parallel between the sentences in question. With far more suitability we might refer to what is said of the heavenly city, "The Lamb is the light thereof," or, according to the order of the words in the original Greek, "The light thereof is the Lamb," the One so known, familiar indeed to every adoring heart. All Scripture speaks of Him; there is no other. Nor is there any difficulty as to the order of the words.

Others, again, will tell you that you cannot say 'Eternal life is Christ,' because He is *more* than Eternal life. This is but a miserable worn-out sophism, confounding what He is Himself with divine attributes, or with relationships into which He may enter in grace, or with His power as a "quickening Spirit." What is not Christ for my soul? not only for me, or for His people, but for God; and He is God; I worship Him. But the argument as to what you can or cannot say, in cases like these, simply depends upon the subject of the sentence and what is stated or

predicated about it; and you must know all about both subject and predicate in order to speak of it correctly. In this, Scripture is the only guide. Mere *words* are used in different senses. Paul says, in one place, he is "in the flesh," in another that he is "not in the flesh." There is no difficulty to a simple reader, for the passage makes clear that "in the flesh" is used literally with the meaning "in the body, alive in the world," and it is used morally to mean the condition of an unsaved soul.

We need waste no time over the argument as to Christ and eternal life being "interchangeable expressions:" it has no weight for any serious person; for we know that the term "Eternal life" is used in *different* connections, and conveys a meaning modified according to the conditions which characterise it in various passages. It is applied to earthly blessing in Ps. cxxxiii., and to heavenly in Mark x. 30; 2 Tim. iv. 18. The righteous go away into it. (Matt. xxv. 46.) It is the goal before the soul of those who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and incorruptibility. (Rom. ii. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 12.) But we speak *now* of it in the sense of its "manifestation" as spoken of in 1 John i. 1-2,—a most blessed and practical thing for a Christian, in order that his soul may be established on a solid foundation, and be definitely exercised before God as to what life is, and as to how it can be manifested in this world, so that he may bring forth the fruits of divine life that the Father looks for from him. It is in this way that the Holy Spirit brings it before us in the beginning of the 1st Epistle of John. Is it not a Person that is set before us here? Let my reader answer for himself.

It has frequently been contended that "manifestation" has a spiritual meaning, and John xiv. 21 is quoted in support of this. It is so there; the passage itself states it. The Lord is speaking of the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost, that "other Comforter," who was to come *after* Jesus had gone to

the Father. In this connection Judas asks the question, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself *to us* and *not* unto the world?" His question, however little entering into what the Lord was saying, shewed, at least, how Judas understood the "manifestation," and that is our point now: he did not think it possible that there could be a manifestation to them, that would not be at the same time a manifestation to the world. It is also true that Jesus must be apprehended spiritually, if there was to be saving knowledge of Him. (John ii. 24, 25.) But He was there to be seen; and they were responsible to receive Him, for He Himself said to the Jews, "Ye also have seen me and believe not." (John vi. 36.) The most complete manifestation of what the life of Jesus was in love and obedience, was at the cross. His laying down His life is presented also as an example for us, both in the Gospel (chap. xii. 24-26), and in the Epistle (chap. iii. 16). So far from its being hidden from the world, Jesus said, "That the *world* may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." (John xiv. 31.) All that Jesus said and did condemned the world, and drew out the hatred of those that were of the world. Yet all His words and ways manifested God's love to the world; they repelled the proud Pharisee, but they met the need of the sinner. Enemies had to say, "Never man spake like this man."

Let any simple reader of the scripture say, Are not the eyes spoken of in 1 John i. 2, the natural eyes of those who had companied with Jesus here, and as to whom the Apostle writes, ". . . that ye also may have fellowship *with us*"? They had been the favoured witnesses of the truth embodied in the Person of Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God." To them He had said, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see?" (Luke x. 23.) Moreover, in chap. iii. 2, is it not the eyes of our renewed bodies that will see Jesus, even

as Job hoped to do—"My Redeemer liveth, whom I shall see for myself and not another." *Now* we walk by faith, *not* by sight; *then* we shall see face to face. The word "appear" in chap. iii. 2, is, in the original, precisely the same as "manifested" in chap. i. 2.

We say then that the "eyes" spoken of in 1 John i. 1, are human, natural eyes; and that the "hands" spoken of are human hands. Can there be a doubt, any more than when the Greeks said, "Sirs, we would see Jesus"? The word "see" cannot have there precisely the same sense as in Heb. ii., where we read, "Now we see Jesus." In the first case it is the natural eye, in the second the eye of faith. The question, 'What was the life?' will not then wholly meet the case when speaking of its "manifestation" in this world. I must say too, *Who* was it? It was Jesus Christ, the sent One of the Father, who said, "I am the life." (John xi. 25; xiv. 6.) "He is the true God and the Eternal Life." (1 John v. 20.) He is the only begotten Son, and if God has given to us eternal life, it is in the Son we have it. "The dead hear the voice of the Son of God." The Son quickens. He died for me, and He is my life.

If we now consider a moment "life" in the sense of what a soul has or possesses: is it *Christ* that I have received, or merely truth about Him? The Apostle answers, "Christ" (Col. ii. 6.) "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in HIM, rooted, &c." "To me to live is Christ." "Christ lives in me." Elsewhere, "I in you." "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." (John xiv. 20.) "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I IN THEM." (John xvii. 26.)

In the same way, believing on His name is described as the reception of Him: "To as many as received Him to them gave

He power [or, the right] to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name." (John i. 12.) Jesus did not commit Himself to those who only believed through the evidence of miracles they witnessed and could not deny, and which they could own to be "miracles," judging of them by their natural intelligence. (John ii. 23; and compare John x. 41.) "Believing on His name" might be a mere effect of the unregenerate mind, not wrought by the operation of the Spirit of God. But the Gospel was written not only that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but that believing we might have life through His name. (John xx. 31.)

Everything depends upon the way in which Christ is presented in Scripture. In 1 John i. 1-2, we find a Person who was and is the Eternal life. In this sense I can say that "the Eternal life" there spoken of, and thus personally presented, is Christ: He is such *for my soul*. That is the way I think of the life; I am not occupied with my being alive, or with my blessedness, but with Himself. But while I speak of Christ personally as the Eternal life, how does that possibly deny His being set forth in various relations as Messiah, Shepherd, Saviour, Lord, Friend, Head of the Body, and so on? He was God manifest in the flesh, the Word who makes God known; and He is Himself the *Word of Life* to my soul, that is, I find out in *Him* what God means when He speaks to me about eternal life as manifested among men in this world; and that is the important thing for my heart and conscience.

The new theology really separates eternal life both from His Godhead and from His manhood, so that it becomes a question whether "eternal life," as it is explained to mean, was ever on earth at all; for it is presented to us as a mystical thing "in heaven." All this is evil reasoning upon the blessed Lord's Person, whom "no man knoweth," submitting it to speculative analysis, separating what God has presented as one and indi-

visible, and denaturalizing the eternal life, which was manifested in *all* that He was here : for He was it, and wherever He was, He could not be other than Himself.

How can those who accept this mysticism have any sense left in their souls of that grace which, in divine power, and in communion with the Father, could adapt itself to every circumstance of *human need*? And that is a practical side of the life which is specially to characterize the Christian. When Paul speaks to Timothy of the great mystery of godliness, he was directing him how he ought to behave himself in the house of God. And he sets Christ positively before his soul, "God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the nations, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. iii. 15, 16.) Eternal life, in its full fruition, will assuredly be in heavenly glory ; no one questions that. Our Lord's "will" is to have us with Him where He is. He has been "received up into glory ;" and He is "with the Father." (John xiv. 28 ; xvi. 28 ; 1 John i. 2.) But that being so, the power of the life in communion with Him is now to be realised by us through the Holy Ghost's taking of His things and showing them to us. We have the life *now*, here in this world where it was "manifested," and we have to walk with Him as He walked *here*, taking His yoke upon us, and learning of him.

If we open John's Gospel, we find this blessed Person, the Eternal Word, who was God, and who became flesh,—became Man,—and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. Grace and truth subsists through Him. "In Him was life, and life was the light of men." The divine form given to the words here makes the proposition a reciprocal one ; that is, I may say, "The light of men is the life," or I may say, "The life is the light of men." It is true both ways. And it is not merely something IN Him which was light—"the light of men"—but

Himself, who, coming into the world, lightens every man. *He* was in the world, and the world knew Him not—*Himself*, the Light. Furthermore, chap. viii. sets forth His *words* which were rejected by men—words which presented *Himself* as being “the truth,”—as He said, “Altogether that which I also say to you,” and closing with this: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was I AM.” He was the Light of the world, who could and did bear witness to *Himself*. And any who followed Him and heard His Word were turned from darkness to light; they had the Light of Life. In chap. ix., His *works* set forth what He is, and what God is. They are equally rejected, and the favoured object of His sovereign grace is cast out of the synagogue. The “works of God” were manifested in the blind man notwithstanding; for Jesus said, “I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no man can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.” These two things are taken up by the Lord in the end of chap. xv. His words (verse 22)—“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.” His works (verse 24)—“If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin”: and He adds, “But now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.”

In presence of these scriptures, and the end of chap. xii. from verse 42, (verses 49, 50 especially), I am bold to say that the present effort to deny that the Eternal life was Christ, and consequently to limit the manifestation of it to a certain class of persons, is a work of the enemy, a perversion of Scripture which will spread as a gangrene, and eat away the vitals of everyone who tampers with it.

Finally, it is objected that “life” is an abstraction, and cannot be considered as a form. After all, the main question is the doctrine. As to “form,” when applied to “life,” I am

not anxious about the word, if there be a better; but in conceding the term, I cannot give up the truth.

In the Old Testament, when God was not revealed, the point insisted on by Moses was that they had seen no form—only heard a voice. In Christ, God is *revealed*, and more, revealed as the Father of the only begotten Son (John i. 18). The first truth of the mystery of godliness—(of godliness, mark, that is, what is *practical* for our souls, the secret of our behaviour in the house of God)—is “God manifest in the flesh.”

Is it merely a thing, an abstraction, that is spoken of in the 1st Epistle of John, “as seen with our eyes, heard, handled, and looked upon”? Was there no bodily “form” when Jesus said, “Why are ye troubled? and why do *thoughts* arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have” (Luke xxiv.) Is there no “form” before the soul called up by the words of Jesus: “I am the Living Bread, which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever”? We do well also not to forget that it was God’s mind that the Spirit should assume a “form” visible to human eyes; for it is expressly stated that “the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him” (Luke iii. 22), and afterwards, on the day of Pentecost, upon the gathered disciples as “cloven tongues of fire.”

It is a sad but a very needful thing to discover the extent to which the enemy, in occupying us with abstractions, has succeeded in depriving us of Christ. Believing in Him I have life, but He said, “I *am* the life,” so that now when I think of life I think of Him. He is, as it were, the embodiment of it for my soul. With Him I have to walk in learning of Him. He is the food of life, my sustenance and joy. I think of that Blessed One who talked with the Samaritan woman at Sychar’s well, and won her sin-stained soul to God,—of Him who changed

the water into wine at Cana, and called forth Lazarus from the sepulchre that he might sit at table with Him,—of Him who fed the multitude, and who laid down His life for His sheep,—of Him who opened the blind man's eyes that he might see the Son of God and talk with Him, and who said to Peter, Lovest thou me?—I think of Him, and I say, He is my life. Oh to know more of those divine affections and energies ever displayed in this poor world by Him who said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." We know Him as now in the glory, where we shall soon see Him. And we learn in His death the judgment and the end of self, and of all that is of man, so that we may reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord. "This is the life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God, AND JESUS CHRIST WHOM THOU HAST SENT."

Christian reader, do you "love life?" and if you do in the best sense of it, how are your desires to be realised but in feeding upon Christ, and living in communion with Him who died for you and is coming to fetch you home to be with Himself for ever? Meanwhile, may we walk as He walked!—W. J. L.

NOTE.—A four-page tract on this subject, headed "Search the Scriptures," has just come into my hands. It is written to show that unless "Eternal Life" is a *title* of the Lord Jesus, you cannot say that the Eternal life is Christ. It abounds with questions not resolved, and the information volunteered from a concordance is incomplete and perplexing, not being so given as to place the subject fairly before the reader. But there is a foot note on the first page which shows the beloved author does not wish any to think he denies the personality of Eternal Life, as taught in 1 John, i. 2. One cannot but ask, Why did he write his tract? Spiritual instincts are better than reasoning intelligence. Further comment is needless.