
HEAVENLY LIFE,

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THERE is nothing to be considered private, privileged, or secret in what concerns the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the doctrines of Christianity. The truth commends itself to every conscience of men before God, and to introduce the principle of secrecy would ruin the whole character of revelation and Christian teaching; even as Jesus, when questioned concerning His doctrine, replied, "I spoke openly to the world; I taught always in the synagogue, and in the temple where all the Jews come together, and in secret I have said nothing. Why demandest thou of Me? Demand of those who have heard what I have said to them." The two important principles affirmed by our Lord here as to His teaching are its publicity, and that those who have heard are competent witnesses of it. A doctrine, therefore, is to be judged of by what is heard, and not by subsequent explanations giving by the teacher.

One may be really sound as to Christ, and yet go so far astray as to think that He was a substitute for our sins all His life on earth, or that we are justified by His living obedience and keeping the law. If, however, the reality of His Person or work be touched, it must be met with instant rejection.

And, remark, it is no question of a manifestation or manifestations of God, as though some part of His life in

flesh were so and the rest were not. Of such things men dream, and with presumptuous touch profess to distinguish between what was God and what was man ; but Scripture says " God manifested in flesh," and refers thus to His whole Person—a Man on earth now received up into glory. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

So also He is the " Eternal Life." And here again the mind of man steps in and reasons about such and such a circumstance, *e.g.*, the babe in the manger, the sitting weary by the well, the speaking to His mother at the cross, as not being a manifestation of eternal life. In charity one would hope that such teachings had been disowned, but it cannot be denied they have gone far and wide, and even in a still more offensive form. But the principle which lies at the root of such statements is far more dangerous, and until that is judged and renounced little good will be done by toning down offensive details. It has been boldly and formally laid down in the presence of perhaps over 200 brethren that eternal life was not manifested to the world, but only to the disciples. Where is there authority in Scripture for such a statement as this? It practically denies the Person of Christ as the Eternal Life, and makes it a certain character of manifestation which the world could not see, but the disciples did. Thus arises that serious irreverence which sets up the mind of man as competent to distinguish between what is eternal life, and what is not, in the life of the blessed Lord." But Scripture never speaks of a manifestation of eternal life, but says " we have seen and bear witness, and report to you the eternal life which was with the Father, and has been *manifested* to us." The Eternal Life "*has been manifested*:" it was in no wise all the truth that there had been certain manifestations of it.

Remark, too, that the eternal life which had been manifested to them is what they report to us, and they report that which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes; that which they contemplated and their hands handled. In fact, it is Jesus Christ, the Person of the Son, Man among men, presented to them as such, and, now glorified, He is the Eternal Life.

The error in question arises from a human reasoning which also falsifies eternal life as given to the believer, viz., the identifying eternal life with heavenly communion as one and the same thing, and consequently dissociating from it the pilgrimage life as not being eternal life at all. As this is very specious and subtle, it is well to notice that heavenly life and pilgrimage life are not expressions found in Scripture at all, but are used simply as concise and convenient phrases to express a true thought. Heavenly life does not mean living spiritually, or by the Spirit in heaven: this is true of every believer. It means living in spirit in heavenly places; setting the mind on things above, heavenly-mindedness. It is the manner of the Christian's life in communion with Christ in heaven. The pilgrimage life is his manner of life according to the grace and footsteps of Jesus among men here below. They both alike are divine, and proceed from the eternal life which is in His Son, Christ living in us; and the one is not more eternal life than the other. Eternal Life is no mere *manner* of life, but is the thing itself intrinsically, and is seen in its divine source and fulness in the person of the Son. Distinct as these manners of life are, we see the absolute oneness of their source in the divine life and nature displayed perfectly in Christ, "Be ye, therefore, imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love even as the Christ loved us and delivered himself up for us."

Ephes. ii. 1, 2. Here we have the man-ward side, but spoken of as being as absolutely divine, "imitators of *God*," as when the exclusively God-ward side is presented, "an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." The loving upward is not more divine than the love down. Nay, God, as such, cannot love up, for there is none above Himself; but His own love is commended to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. So also the Apostle in this chapter appeals to the saints: "See, therefore, how ye walk carefully be not foolish, but understanding what is the will of the Lord." This is the pilgrimage life. Then immediately follows the heavenly side, "and be not drunk' with wine,.....but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Does the Spirit of God present one as more excellent than the other? are they not rather diverse manners equally precious of the same blessed life? The Apostle himself speaks thus in his own case, 2 Cor. v. 13, "Whether we are beside ourselves it is to God, or are sober it is for you." Here we have the God-ward aspect and the man-ward expressly contrasted, but directly referred to the love of the Christ constraining him. If he thought of men, he was sober, if of God, ecstatic. Will man run the edge of his keen intellect between these two and tell us which was Eternal Life, and what the other was--if some inferior thing? Before leaving this subject let us notice that in Phil. ii, where the whole downward progress of the blessed Lord is presented from the "form of God" to the "death of the Cross," it is seen as the mind and act of One subsisting in the form of God who emptied Himself. Every step of that path was possible only to God, though He became Man to take it. Being sovereign Lord He *took* a bondman's form:

all others were in it by creation, and therefore could not take it. He took His place in the likeness of men, which to any other than God would have been apostacy; and, being found in figure as a man, He humbled himself. He had not to be humbled, and none could humble Him; but He became obedient, that He might display what obedience was in a rebellious world, in love to His Father and for His glory. In nothing does the Divine life and nature and glory shine out more conspicuously than in the humbled Jesus unto death. The ability to humble Himself is peculiar to God alone. Man has to be humbled because he has got out of his place in pride, and must needs be abased to take it again. Man, too, may be, and is, highly exalted, though in Christ, for the Father's glory; but God is supreme in His own place above all; and, when subsisting as such, Jesus could and did empty Himself and humble Himself, a thing possible to Himself alone. His life of humiliation is therefore specially and characteristically divine, while His exaltation is characteristically that of Man (Phil. iii.)

Another erroneous principle that mingles itself with current teachings as to life is that we possess nothing we do not enjoy. The contrary is true, viz., that we enjoy nothing that we do not possess. We must possess in order to enjoy. Even when indwelt by the Spirit, who is the power of life, there is no enjoyment, but quite the contrary, unless the practical state of the soul is one of dependence and communion. It undermines the Divine principle pressed throughout Scripture, viz., that responsibilities flow from relationships, which are their measure. Thus, to take an extreme case, a Gentile without law will never be judged by law, because it was neither his relationship with God nor his responsibility. Similarly he that hath sinned under law will

be judged by it. With the believer it is no legal claim nor effort. In Ephes. the relationship in which they are set is the having put off the old man and put on the new man, which according to God is created in truthful righteousness and holiness, wherefore they were to "walk in love," "as children of light," and "be filled with the Spirit." So in Col., on the same ground, iii. 10, they were to add love, let the peace of Christ preside in their hearts, and let the Word of Christ dwell in them, so as to minister to one another's joy and praise to God. Here we see spiritual joy is a response in the soul, flowing from the place of blessing in which the grace of God has set us. Phil. does not give us doctrine, but is the book of Christian experience, amid a pressure of circumstances fraught with unequalled sorrow. Yet in no epistle does the fulness and energy of the Christian life shine more conspicuously in joy. The Apostle joys as he prays for them, he rejoices that Christ is preached, in view of martyrdom he rejoices, and rejoices in common with them all, they are his joy and crown. How then does he encourage them? By saying you have not the joy because you have not the blessing; you have not got into it yet? Nay, he tells them that He who had begun the good work would complete it unto Jesus Christ's day; that they were all participator's in his grace; that he would abide with them for their progress and joy in faith. He exhorts them to rejoice and rejoice as he did, even in view of his martyrdom, and the thought that still rested on his heart, when all was said, was that they might rejoice in the Lord, yea, rejoice in the Lord always; again he repeats, "I will say rejoice." This was the true heaven-ward side of that life which expressed itself here below in gentleness, carefulness about nothing but occupation with all that was good. The life

itself is one ; it is Christ Himself. He is all as object, He is in all as life.

The desire to help the saints is good, but their souls are subverted instead of helped when the necessity of enjoyment is pressed, except there is the full recognition that they possess the privilege or relationship to which the enjoyment relates. This is true in every way, and applies to every state in which the child of God may be found. Would the man in Rom. vii. be helped by being told, you possess nothing you do not enjoy? He would reply, then I am poor indeed, for I enjoy nothing at all. Yet he has the new nature ; and the Spirit of God helps him precisely by making him aware of it. What their teaching would deny, because the man was perfectly miserable, willing good but not practising it, the Apostle insists upon in detail, pointing out that the wretched "I" is not sin, but the inward man, which is "I myself," serving with the mind God's law. Thus he is sustained in the trial, and in the sense of his own helplessness led to cry out for a deliverer, and so find liberty.

We have already seen that in Ephes. and Col. the Spirit of God recognises believers in their full place and privilege first, and then, as a consequence, exhorts them to the suited sentiments and state corresponding hereto. So, also, in Romans, having developed in detail previously the compassions of God, He beseeches them thereupon to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. He says not, if you do not enjoy you do not possess ; but, the compassions of God having been already effectually exercised towards them, this "is your intelligent service." Such was the God-ward result of being alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord ; and on the other hand as regards the world, they were not to be conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of their mind.

Romans does not take us out of the world, and therefore the life, whether acting Godward or manward, has this character. Where heavenly communion is specially in question, Col. iii. 1-4, the saints are exhorted to it, not in order that they may attain to heavenly life, but on the ground that Christ, who is their life, is there.

Nor does God minister righteousness to man by fitting and qualifying him for Himself.* That would only be a qualified man after all, and not righteousness at all, Divine or human. Having the qualifications proper to a position does not necessarily involve a righteous title to it. A person might be qualified to be a king, but with no right to the throne. Similarly he might have a right, but be disqualified for other reasons. A properly qualified barrister has a right to practice at the Bar. He may disqualify himself by some act, and his name be struck off the rolls. He thus forfeits his right; but the two questions are entirely distinct. His right to practice is accorded or withdrawn by the proper authority, but his qualification is in himself, and he may lose it. This shows us that the making our place in righteousness to consist of fitting or qualifying man for God is to destroy the truth of righteousness entirely, and to confound it with certain qualifying graces of the Spirit. The Scripture is very clear on the subject. The law ministered death (2 Cor. iii.): this was the qualifying state in which those under it were found. But more than this, it ministered condemnation—this was their due from God. So, also, now there is the ministry of the Spirit—this is our qualifying state. But more than this, righteousness is ministered—this is our title and standing before God. The glory in which it subsists and abounds is all seen in the glorified Man. The Spirit of the Lord gives

* See "Voice," p. 241, Aug., 1889.

us liberty, and the glory of the Lord displays our acceptance in Jesus' unveiled face. It is the *glorified* Man rather than man *qualified* that manifests righteousness, specially the righteousness of God. Christ is not in the glory merely because fitted and qualified to be there. He ever was ; and, as the Father's Son, desires that glory (John xvii). But if this were all He must needs have been alone. In verse 4, however, He requests the glory because of having glorified the Father on the earth and completed the work given Him to do. This was His title in righteousness to it ; and here we have our part in righteousness, too, for the work was done about us. So in 2 Cor. v. 21, our becoming God's righteousness in Him is not the result of being fitted and qualified for God, but is due to Christ's having been made sin for us. Remark, too, the contrast is not between what once we were, "wholly controlled and characterised by sin," and what we shall be in the glory ; but the contrast stated in Scripture is between what Christ was made for us and what we become in Him.

In conclusion, let us remember that righteousness is a relative quality, and in God is His consistency with Himself in relation to Christ, or believers, or men as such. As to the last He judges righteously. In regard to Christ He glorifies Him in due reward of His work. As for believers now, He accepts them in Christ, and will glorify them with Christ because He who knew no sin was made to be sin for them. Our becoming the righteousness of God in Christ is in no way whatever due to the work or indwelling of the Spirit in us, though never apart from it, but is solely due to Christ's being made sin for us.

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