

(c) It is joy in the Lord. The joy of the Christian is not only in his presentments, not only in himself as a child of God, not only in his own experiences, but its root is in the Lord. The more we realize Christ as a living and loving personal reality, the more truly can we rejoice in him.

(d) It is constant joy. "Always." Christian joy is not a capricious sentiment, a glacial rapture, but a steady, uniform, and continued satisfaction. When we think of the change divine grace is wrought in us, of the ample provisions of the gospel, of the bright prospects before us, and of the infinite ability of our Lord to accomplish all he has promised us, our joy might well be constant.

(e) It is joy recommended from experience. Paul recommended what he himself enjoyed. If he, in the midst of disappointment, imprisonment, and suffering, rejoiced, so may we. The friends of Haller congratulated him on the honor of having received a visit in his last hours from the Emperor Joseph II.; but the dying man simply answered, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

2. *Moderation*.—Steadfastness will include moderation or forbearance. This means Christian equity—a desire to see justice prevail and, on our own part, to act justly. We should guide ourselves at all times by the broad principles of equity in the sight of God. Human laws, however from experience, may sometimes, if rigidly enforced, act unjustly and cruelly. We should not always urge our own legal rights to the uttermost, but be willing to repair a wrong, and rectify the injustice of law. This forbearance should be practised "unto all men." If we are always rejoicing in the Lord we cannot cherish hard feelings toward any one. The Christian spirit is the highest equity.

3. *Even-mindedness*.—Steadfastness leads to calmness of mind. "In nothing be anxious" is the revised version. It is not forethought that is here condemned, but anxious, distracting care. The future is not gone, but we are anxious about it. The past is gone, and regrets about it are unavailing.

"Act, act in living present,
Heart within, and God's overhead."

The future is provided for; for God, the great Provider, is ahead of every step his people take. We put ourselves on the rock when we ought to cast our care on God, not in part, nor occasionally, but in all things and at all times. The ancient custom of torturing a criminal was by tying him to the wheels of two chariots, which were then driven in opposite directions, illustrates how anxious care may be allowed to distract the mind. Trust in God, do the right, and keep your mind free from care.

4. *Peace*.—Steadfastness gives peace. A vessel held steady by the anchor in a turbulent sea, gives a measure of peace to all on board. And the human soul held steady by the truth of God has peace. The enemies of peace are:

(a) Melancholy. The cure for this is joy in the Lord (v. 4).

(b) Self-will and unjust demands. The cure for this is moderation, forbearance, equity (v. 5).

(c) Care and anxiety. The cure for this is trust, prayer, and confidence in God (v. 6). The final result is peace. It passes understanding. It is deep, satisfying, and immeasurable. It quiesces the fortress of the soul in peace though the shafts of anxious care and worldly strife are constantly hurled against it.

5. *Morality*.—Steadfastness produces a moral life. The ethics of the gospel characterizes the conduct of the Christian man. "Whosoever these are honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report . . . think on these things." Genuine virtue has its root in genuine religion. A modern school of ethics which professes to teach the possibility of morality apart from spiritual Christianity, is a return to the exploded theories of pagan moralists. The morality which is lovely and

of good report finds its ground-work in the human soul, is inspired by the spirit of Jesus Christ, and is developed by the teachings of the gospel. The charm of the Christian character is not the cultivation of one virtue that overshadows all the rest, but the harmonious blending of all the virtues in the unity of the Christian life. High moral principles should be translated into practical life. It is one thing to ponder, admire and applaud morality; it is another thing to practise it. The theory of music may be soon understood, but the mastery of any one instrument, such as the piano or violin demands incessant and patient practice. It means detail work and steady perseverance. So it is with every virtue of Christian ethics. It is the practice of morality as taught by Christ that declares to the world a gospel that it cannot fail to understand.

HISTORIC SIDE-LIGHT.

Lord Bolingbroke, an avowed infidel, declared: No religion ever appeared in the world whose tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind as the Christian religion. The gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, benevolence, and universal charity. Supposing Christianity to be a human invention, it is the most amiable and successful invention that was ever imposed on mankind for their good.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

The subject of this topic is steadfastness in Christ. How we need it! and how much it means! To make the topic interesting and impressive, appoint six persons in advance to prepare three-minute papers on (1) *steadfastness—its meaning and importance*. This is to be followed by five other papers on what grows out of steadfastness. (a) *Joy*. (b) *Moderation*. (c) *Even-mindedness*. (d) *Peace*. (e) *Morality*. Material for this will be found in the foregoing exposition. When three papers have been read, sing an appropriate hymn, and read in union I Cor. 13. Then proceed with the concluding three papers. Conclude with a blackboard exercise as follows:

CHRIST
THE
SOURCE
OF

1. SALVATION.
2. STEADFASTNESS.

Leading to

1. JOY.
2. MODERATION.
3. EVEN-MINDEDNESS.
4. PEACE.
5. MORALITY.

MARCH 3.—"RELIGIOUS BARREN-NESS."

Luke 13: 6-9.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., Feb. 25. First wrong steps. Matt. 21: 33-39
Tues., Feb. 26. Forgetting the pledge. 1 Sam. 12: 4-15
Wed., Feb. 27. Selfishness. Rom. 12: 1-5
Thurs., Feb. 28. Hypocrisy as silverware. Jas. 3: 15-17
Fri., Mar. 1. At a distance from Christ. Luke 22: 54-62
Sat., Mar. 2. Quenching the Spirit. 1 Thess. 5: 15-23

It was a common thing for the owner of a vineyard to plant a fig-tree in it. It would attain its maturity in three years. If it did not then bear fruit it would be removed, not only because it was useless, but also because it took up the ground which might be more profitably occupied by something else. The parable sets forth both the long-suffering and the severity of God. It is the principle of his government to give every man the fairest kind of a chance, but to "remove his candlestick out of the place" if he does not embrace the opportunity. His visitation upon sin, however long-delayed in order to give opportunity for repentance, is sure. The fig-tree represented the Jewish nation, but the principles which underlie it are for all time, and may be profitably applied to individuals in our own day.

SPECIAL FAVORS.

The tree spoken of in the parable had enjoyed special advantages. It was planted in good soil, and was attended to by one who both knew how to apply, and was diligent in applying, helps to its growth and fruitfulness.

It was not a tree growing wild among the rocks, or on the road-side, which one would naturally expect to have no fruit. It had all advantages, yet it bore no fruit. The spiritual meaning of all this is quite plain. From those who are outside the influences of religion little can be expected. Those who are placed in the most favorable conditions, who have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus from our earliest years, who have enjoyed all the helps and privileges the Church can give, to whom God's Word is so familiar that we are in danger of losing reverence for it, much is expected.

FRUIT, NOT LEAVES.

There was no fruit on this fig-tree. Yet it was not dead. Its chief indication of life was its leaves. Instead of being a fruit-bearing tree, it had become a tree of the ornamental kind, and the change should never have been made. It was not planted for ornament, but to yield fruit; if it did not yield fruit, it had no claim to its place in the vineyard. In this tree we have a picture of the mere profession of religion, as contrasted with genuine, vital religion. The person whom the fig-tree represents is in the Church, he has all the advantages of that position, he has the external form, and uses the language of the Christian. But one important thing is wanting—he yields no fruit. No one is any the better for his profession. He exercises no good influence. He is never known to do a generous, kindly, Christ-like action, or to assist in any good cause, except perhaps occasionally in a half-hearted, listless way. And this is the great test of the value of the Christian life—good deeds. The mere profession of Christ is something that *imports itself*, and not something that merely pleases the eye. It yields fruit in good deeds which serve to feed and nourish the spiritual life of others and to bless the world.

PATIENT, BUT DISAPPOINTED.

The owner is disappointed and impoverished by the fruitlessness of the tree. His fruit would have value for him as an article of food and merchandise, and he deeply regrets its failure to yield. In the same way, we belong to God, our life has been given by him, the place we occupy is that which he permits, and it is adapted to the great purpose of our yielding the fruits of righteousness and holiness. Some may be more favorably situated than others, but all have it in their power to yield some acceptable fruit. See how patient and persevering the owner was—"Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree." More than three annual visits are implied. The fig-tree bears three times in the year—in the early spring, in summer, and in autumn. So we may think of the owner of this fig-tree as coming time after time during these three years to see if there were any signs of fruit. But there were none. Our Master also is patient. If he were not, what would become of us? He comes to us every season—that is, whenever new circumstances occur in our lives, whenever there are new influences brought to bear upon us. He draws near to see if at last we are beginning to yield fruit. When, after protracted patience on his part, and prolonged indifference on our part, and there is no prospect of fruit, his sentence is simple and clear—"Cut it down; why cumberest thou the ground?" The tree is useless. It has been planted there to bear fruit; it does not bear it, and there is no reason for any longer preserving it. It is taking up space which might be occupied by a fruitful tree; it is not only doing no good, but it is hindering good from being done. This truth