

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO YOU.

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The fifth Gospel—have you read it? In the New Testament there are four records of the life of Christ. While they agree as to the great fundamental facts of our Lord's life, they differ in details. Each writer has left the impress of his own individuality upon the record, according as the truth passed through the prism of each mind.

But the fifth Gospel,—where is that, what is that? It is the Gospel *according to you*. It is a book read by people who never have read the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and who probably never will. Is it not worth while asking the question, then, "What is the Gospel *according to you*?" What impression do the men and women with whom you mingle all the week long gain of the value of the religion of Jesus Christ from the way you are living it? What conception of Christ as a Divine utility are they forming from your presentation of the Gospel in your life?

Every man and woman of us is writing some sort of record daily; and we are transcribing it in a dialect which all men understand and read: "Known and read of all men." We are usually anxious about those *outside* the Church; Christ was equally anxious about those *inside* the Church; for an unholy Church is the only thing that can hinder the triumph of His kingdom. It is not so much a matter of what we have in Jesus, as it is a matter of what Jesus has in us. That is the thought before us. What is the Gospel *according to you*?

We need to be very clear as to one thing, viz.: We cannot determine whether we will be witnesses or not. The mere fact that we go up to the house of God, and have to do with religious matters and religious people, is sufficient to make the world judge religion by our example. We bear witness unconsciously as well as consciously. Men are born imitators. Mere association produces a powerful influence upon the formation of character. Jesus Christ is daily at the bar of public opinion; and whether men accept or reject Him depends very largely upon the evidence *we* give as to His divinity, and upon the influence *we* exert over those who are not His followers.

The solemn obligation that rests upon every Christian is that he shall lift the acts of his daily life up to the same level as his profession. The religion that is not good enough for every place is not good enough for any place. See how this works in business. A church member buys wheat by the thousand bushels—wheat that has not yet been planted. He *speculates*. A young man, not a Christian, goes into a poolroom, and invests more than he earns. He *peculates*. There is only one letter between the two words, but that is the crookedest letter in the alphabet. One *speculates*, the other *peculates*;—no, both *gamble*! Men of the world do not discriminate as some fastidious church members do, but judge of a man's religion by the way he lives that religion.

The same thing is true in the matter of amusements. What is the Gospel according to that thoughtless, selfist, theatre-going, card-playing professor? While testifying with her lips, "Christ liveth in me," are not her actions contradicting her profession, by tacitly denying that Christ is all in all to her?

But notice another thing: Not only does the world judge of Christ by those who profess to be saved, but their defects, great or small, become the defects of their religion. Denying Peter, doubting Thomas, the vindictive John and James,—well might Jesus bid them all remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Ghost; for the less the world saw of them, until then, the better.

We may well shrink back as we think how we are sent into the world to reproduce the Christ-life. I can imagine John, as the full significance of his God-sent mission comes to him, rising in that little company to protest his inability to approximate to anything like his Master's life, and saying, "Did I not want to call down fire from heaven upon those Samaritans? How can I ever let men see in me His gentleness, His patience, His love!"

And look at Peter! See the tears streaming down his cheeks, as he says, in broken tones: "A witness to Him, to live His life among men? I, who denied Him with oaths? I might tell how I loved Him, but I can never show the world what He was like, never!" And if Peter and John found that task impossible, can we ever reflect His beauty and preciousness in our lives?

Now what ought to cheer us, in the midst of conscious failure, is that natural defects are no barrier to witness-bearing; for it is not so much what we are now, as what the dear Lord can make out of us that tells the story.

As the florist grafts upon a common briar, that scratching, tearing sign of the curse, a tiny bud, and produces a beautiful and fragrant rosy, so God engrafts into this old worthless personality of ours the Divine character of Christ, and works in us His own good will and pleasure. "Ye shall receive power!"

Plato tells a beautiful fable: how spirits came back to this world to find a body and sphere of work. One took the body of a king, another that of a poet. Ulysses came and said, "All the fine bodies are taken; there is nothing left for me." And some one said, "The best has been left for you; the body of a common man, doing a common work, for a common reward." Joining the Church is not the same thing as joining the Lord Jesus. Only those who have consciously done the latter have any clear right to do the former.

But there is another side to this matter. Those who are not professing Christians are also "known and read of all men." My unconverted friend, what are men reading in you? What is the Gospel according to you? What is your influence, suppose you, among your fellows? Is it what it ought to be? Is it what you would like it to be? Is it what you propose it to be?

SANCTIFIED COMMON SENSE.

Mr. Pope says "A mad saint is more dangerous than any other madman." Certainly a foolish saint can do a deal of mischief. Conscientiousness and sincere religiousness are qualities of the greatest value. But they are sadly marred if not guided by good common sense. When it is said of any community that they are "God's silly people," it is meant that they are religious and well intentioned, but wanting in practical wisdom and adaptation to circumstances. We know who has enjoined us—"Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The Church has lost many members through defect of wisdom, want of sanctified common sense. A man has zeal, and wishes to get opportunity of preaching; he suffers perhaps from restrained enthusiasm—an enthusiasm which only needs to be better taught and guided. Well, suppose he is not allowed the opportunity, and so he secedes to the Plymouth Brethren or to the Baptists, or possibly to the Salvation Army, where he has scope and free play. A wiser management would have retained that man and utilised his zeal. If allowed to speak in the first moments of his spiritual fervour, countenanced and guided and sympathised with, he would have become useful and settled down in some religious work in connection with the Church. Thus the Church of England lost Wesley and his followers, now numbering many millions. Thus the Church of Scotland drove out James Morison and his followers, now a considerable body. Another man has some peculiar religious "views," not morally wrong, not clearly opposed to Scripture, but different from those that prevail in the denomination. If he is preached at, and his peculiar opinions condemned from the pulpit, when he has no chance to reply, but must sit silent, can we wonder that he drifts away from that congregation, or in a temper leaves the Church for some other. Many have been alienated from the Church by an unwise forcing through of details of management, Church regulations and customs, which are right and good, but which need to be administered with much gentleness and prudence. Failing this people are driven off, and the very object is missed for which the Church is founded. Members that are cranky and difficult to work with—often the congregational leaders say, when such persons leave, that "the Church is well rid of them." This appears to be a huge mistake. These persons are