

Introductory Sermon by the Rev. W. M. Edwards.

PREACHED AT JACKSONVILLE, CAROLINA CO., TO THE WESTERN N. B. BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, JUNE, 1889.

Subject, Christianity a Vital Power. Text, John's Gospel, 6th chap. and 63rd verse.—It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

Our Lord's teaching in this chapter implies that the Messiah's kingdom was not of this world; and they were to understand what he had said of a spiritual living upon him and his fulness by faith; as without the soul of man the flesh is of no value.

Let a system of Philosophy which includes in it everything which belongs to Christ and to a Christian life, may and does have its uses; but, after all, it is not a living power. It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.

In the second place, the Apostle Paul declares the gospel explicitly to be, what? A history of the life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. May; for although all these things are in the gospel history, he declares that the essence of that gospel was the wisdom of God, and the power of God, unto salvation.

The kingdom of God is not in word; but in power. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Regeneration is that spiritual change of the heart beyond the power of any created agent to effect; it is God who must take away the heart of stone; it is the Spirit that quickeneth; the first step that the Spirit takes in quickening the dead sinner is to say, let there be light and life, and light and life are at once produced. "Oh what a vital power is this," what a preparation for the entrance of Christ into the soul, a preparation performed not by the creature, but by the Spirit in the creature; and in what does the Spirit's preparation consist? Not in bettering the condition, but in exposing the depravity of our fallen nature, etc.

Not in concealing, but in uncovering the leprosy within, he goes before the Lord, to prepare his way, by discovering to the soul its extreme emptiness, poverty, and vileness. He creates a felt necessity for Christ's entrance. He brings the soul into such a position that none but Christ can meet its case. He awakens a sorrow which Christ alone can heal. He awakens grief, which Christ alone can assuage. He creates a void, which Christ alone can fill.

Christ represents His kingdom by a wind; the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, neither whither it goeth. So to every one that is born of the Spirit.

This comparison is here used to show that the Spirit in regeneration works as a free agent; the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, neither whither it goeth. So to every one that is born of the Spirit.

When the soul is brought to mourn for sin, to groan under the burden of corruption, to breathe after Christ, to cry that he is merciful to me a sinner, etc., then we hear the sound of the "spirit, it is the sound of life."

He works mysteriously and in secret, hidden ways; thou canst not tell whence it comes, or whether it goes; the manner and methods of the Spirit's workings are a mystery; it wanders up and down the life of the soul, looks into the filthiness of the heart, it goes through all the valleys and makes itself known from the benefits which it brings. Yet no man can see the viewless course of the air; so it is with the Spirit of benevolence the breath of life in the human soul, it is universal; it is endless; it is boundless as the summer and blessed as God; for it brings to the soul crying for mercy that great truth of the New Testament that Jesus died for sinners; not for the righteous, not for the worthy, but for sinners; for the unrighteous, for the unworthy, for the guilty, for the lost; precious moment when the Holy Spirit brings this truth with power to the heart, "I had believed," exclaims the transported soul, "that Jesus died only for those who were worthy of such a sacrifice, of such immense love!" I thought to bring some piece of merit in my hands, some self-preparation, some previous fitness, something to render my case worthy of His notice, and to propitiate His kind regard. But now I see His salvation is to the vile, the poor, the outcast, the miserable; I read that when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly, that while we were sinners Christ died for us; that while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His son; that it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that it is without money and without price; that it is by grace we are saved, and that it is of faith, that it might be by grace.

The good news these joyful tidings, this glorious message of free mercy for the vilest of the vile, believed, received, welcomed, in a moment the clouds all vanish, the fog all disappears, the face of God beamed with mild and softened lustre, and amidst light and joy, gladness and praise, the jubilee of the soul is ushered in. Surely the gospel is a vital power, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, in the few first verses to the Greek.

How applicable are the words of the Apostle Paul. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the powerful principle of darkness, the new working in the children of disobedience among whom also we all took our course formerly in

the inordinate desires of our flesh, gratifying the propensities of the flesh, and of the mind, were by nature children of wrath, even as others; but God who is rich in mercy, for His great love whereof He hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with grace, by His grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast."

It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak, they are spirit, that is to be taken in a spiritual sense; and then you will find, that they are life to your souls, etc.

Whereas to take them in a literal sense, they are most unprofitable and erroneous. Christianity has nothing to do with the absurdities of Transubstantiation or the figurative phraseology of early Christian writers; it is not the doctrine which is employed, or the instrument; it is not the illustrations which are employed, but the power which is employed. He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. "Therefore Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps."

In His lowly spirit, meek, humble dependence, and patient endurance of suffering: Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." In the disinterestedness of His love, His pure benevolence in the unselfishness of His religion.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; for even Christ pleased not Himself.

Let us be so well-willed in matters involving the peace and comfort of others. Let us not form favorite theories or individual opinions to the hazard of a church's prosperity, or a family's happiness. Let us yield, sacrifice and give up ourselves to carry a yoke of peace and of the peace of others. Let us, with a generous, disinterested spirit in all things, imitate Jesus, who "pleased not himself."

Let us seek the good of others, honoring their gifts, respecting their opinions, not yielding when they are wrong, but gently and patiently promoting the peace of the church, consulting the honor of Christ, and seeking the glory of God above and beyond all private and selfish ends; this is to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, to which high calling we are called and destined.

Let the love of God be shed abroad in our souls by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us, and there is not one power of the mind nor in all the imagination, that is not willing to be ruled and about love and sky love rules; and truly desires pure and vanity; and all the ambitious forces of the soul will bow down in the train of love. When a man is actuated by this spirit, how easy it is for him to go to others and tell them kindly their faults, and help them rid themselves of them. He usually will bear to be told their faults by a person who has this disposition, but never by a person who has it not. It is the only feeling around which you can reconstruct the human character. I think there is no question but that a minister may speak who he thinks it is necessary to speak. The question is, can he love enough to be a faithful speaker?

A man who, having sin, is always thinking how hateful it is, is not well adapted to benefit those who are sinful, by preaching to abhor that which is evil, but that is not the whole nor the half of it. We are not only to abhor that which is evil, but we are to love our fellow-men, and a minister must not only abhor evil, but he must love his people.

So that the man who is not a true agreeable truth from the pulpit, he will leave the impression on their minds that he does it because he loves them, that he sympathizes with them, desires to do them good, and is willing to suffer for them. Let him do this, and he can say anything to them that needs to be said.

Under such influence is developed a personal experience differing from any that has been otherwise developed. A personal experience which awakens in us and finally perfects a character in some humble degree like that of Christ, which educates our nature and our habits into likeness Christ's nature and habits, and I think these may be stated in three words:

1. Purity, including all that is meant by righteousness, uprightness, integrity, truthfulness, etc.

2. Love, developing all that is taught by God, by Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, of goodness, of disposition or heart, kindness of nature, graciousness, actual goodness, beneficence and mercy.

3. Activity, the quality of being active; the habit of diligent and vigorous pursuit of the work God has given into our hands; we must employ all this resurrection power in the soul, as a force upon other men, and upon the world itself, etc.

As Christ was pure loving, and energetic, so every one that is born in God, has excited in him a tendency towards universal purity, universal love, and universal activity. This life not only begins by divine influence, but continues and develops itself all the way through by communion with His Spirit. It is an indispensable case, it is not a work that is completed and then left; that which began must continue, therefore Christ is called the "Author and the finisher of our faith."

That which awakens in us this new tendency is constantly nourishing it, and stimulates it day by day, and develops it into the perfect character of a man in Christ Jesus.

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moulded and fashioned, in all godliness; every soul recast into this model, every mind conformed to this pattern, and every life reflecting this image, brings a revenue of glory to Christ, our Lord and our God. There is no practical truth in the word of God, on which the Spirit is more emphatic than the example Christ has set for the imitation of His followers, the church needed a perfect pattern, a flawless model, the very embodiment of the gospel so strictly enjoined upon every believer. To whom should it look? To the holiest of men men? Nay! Hear what one says who yearned to be a pattern of all that was noble in the Christian character.

Will, wait, ye winds his story, And you ye waters roll, Till like a sea of glory, It spreads from pole to pole; 'Till o'er our ransomed nation, The Lamb for sinner's slain, Redeemer, King, Creator, In best return to glory,

To the ministers and delegates of this Association, I say unto you, give Christ the pre-eminence in your love, desires, delights, conversation, in your homes, in the church, and in all our educational institutions, Home and Foreign Missionary Boards, and then you will be able to write the story of your brethren and sisters on the sands, that some friendly wave may wash them all away, but engrave their virtues on the tablets of enduring memory. And when heart and flesh shall faint and fail, be thou "Oh Lamb of God the strength of our hearts," and our portion forever. Amen.

For Jesus' Sake. Annie Grim stood on the dance stool for the third time that week. The offense was twisting her tangled brown curls into horns so that little Lottie May laughed outright and disturbed the school. The hands of the clock were pointing to four and the other children were marching two and two out of the schoolhouse, most of them looking wistfully over their shoulders at the shabby figure standing on the stool and wearing a pair of worn-out men's boots.

Annie was a general favorite; the older children would miss her merry chatter and cooings which brightened the long hours home and the little ones would miss the strong young arm in crossing fences and ditches. When the last child had gone out Miss Laura turned to her pupil and said, wearily: "You may sit down, Annie, and study the lesson you missed this morning." The schoolmistress came down heavily from the stool and their owner dragged them slowly across the room to her seat, into which she carelessly dropped, bending her curly head about love and sky love rules; and truly desires pure and vanity; and all the ambitious forces of the soul will bow down in the train of love.

When a man is actuated by this spirit, how easy it is for him to go to others and tell them kindly their faults, and help them rid themselves of them. He usually will bear to be told their faults by a person who has this disposition, but never by a person who has it not. It is the only feeling around which you can reconstruct the human character. I think there is no question but that a minister may speak who he thinks it is necessary to speak. The question is, can he love enough to be a faithful speaker?

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vital power, that the words that Jesus has spoken into us they are spirit, and they are life. There may be some here to-day with whom God's Spirit is now striving. Grieve not the Spirit of God, by which you are to be saved, and without which you shall never see the Kingdom of Heaven! Oh, come then, Holy Spirit, alkened to the saints from their celestial chambers, blow not only on these dry bones in this congregation, but far as the curse of sin is found, so that a mighty army may be raised up to call the Redeemer blessed.

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the pale face light up as he whirled round for a look at her. He will lead better lives, trusting all to Him." And they were faithful to the end. Tim became a minister of the gospel and won many souls to his Master, and years after he died, Annie's happy wife and mother. The old gray haired man the children call "grandpa," often gathering the little ones round him and tells him how the sweet duty of living for "Jesus' sake," planted in the heart of a child by her teacher, worked a miracle in his home and lives of three of their nearest and dearest.

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Vertical list of advertisements on the right margin, including 'AUGUST 7', 'PROFESSION', 'DR. SMITH', 'MONCTON', 'DENTISTRY', 'W.P.I.', 'A.C.P.', 'DELANEY', 'C.W.', 'JAS. C. MO...', 'DR. LANG...', 'EATON, PA...', 'WILLIAM...', 'HERBER...', 'JOHN...', 'PHO...', 'CHIP', 'Best Fam...', 'Marbl...', 'WALKER...', 'TRU...', 'TH...', 'MIDN...', 'Am...', 'SPOR...', 'Where H...', 'Residen...'.