

The Sunday School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XXXV.

Aug. 10. } PRACTICAL RELIGION. } C. W. 1893. }

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men." Col. iii. 23.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Col. iii. 16-25. Practical Religion.
 P. Eph. v. 19-33. Parallel passage.
 W. Eph. g. 1-10. Parallel passage.
 Th. Phil. ii. 1-11. Exhortation to Humility.
 F. Col. iv. 1-9. Exhortation to walk wisely.
 S. 1 Cor. vii. 1-10. Holy Marriage.
 N. Deut. x. 12-22. Exhortation to obedience.

HELPS TO STUDY.

The epistle which contains our lesson was sent by Paul from Rome, and addressed to the believers at Colosse, a city of Phrygia in the central part of Asia Minor, with instructions that it should also be read by the Christians in the neighbouring city of Laodicea (chap. iv. 16). It rebukes mere formal worship and the following of human devices, sets forth the high origin and pure service of the true Christian system, always insisting that where true religion exists it will manifest itself in the aims, pursuits and general conduct of the individual, and indicating that those who are "risen with Christ" will "seek those things which are above," be guided by motives and principles not of earthly but of heavenly origin, these motives and principles producing fruit in their behaviour in all the relations of life. The chief topics of the lesson are (1) *Christian Service*, (2) *Home Religion*, (3) *All things to and of Christ*.

I. CHRISTIAN SERVICE.—Vers. 16, 17. All religious service must be authorized by Scripture and in accordance with its teachings. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly: not only the words of Christ, those words which He Himself uttered when on earth, but the Word of Christ—the sacred Scriptures as a whole. The mind of the true Christian is thoroughly imbued with the doctrines and principles of the Bible; by these his character is moulded and his conduct actuated; and it is to the Bible that he ultimately resorts for the decision of all questions of teaching, of moral conduct, or of ritual. In all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another: This right departure from the punctuation of the English version is regarded by competent Greek scholars as admissible, and seems to bring out the meaning more clearly. Those who themselves know the truth as it is in Jesus will be anxious that others should be brought to a knowledge of it. The older and more experienced are expected to teach those who, from youth or from any other cause, are beneath them in attainments. This passage is sufficient authority for the organization and support of Sabbath schools. Christians also admonish one another. They are not expected to go about as fault-finders but they are expected to be faithful in reproving and bringing back their erring fellow-Christians. A large amount both of teaching and admonishing is done by means of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

It is very necessary then that these, if not always inspired, should be at least in strict accordance with the teachings of Scripture. Regarding the three different classes of compositions referred to here Professor Hall in the "Sunday School Times" says: "The 'psalms' can hardly be anything else than the psalms of the Old Testament; chiefly, of course, those of the Book of Psalms, and secondarily the poems of the other books. 'The 'hymns' were compositions of a different sort; and, for all that appears to the contrary, were uninspired compositions of a solemn sort, written to be sung; while the 'spiritual songs' embraced a wider class of lays.

The Christian hymn introduced into the epistle to the Ephesians (chap. 5: 14), 'Awake thou that sleepest,' etc., is modelled after one of the metres used by the Greek poet Anacreon This turn of thought is the more proper, when we consider that Colosse, the home of the Colossians, was in Phrygia, where bacchanal revels, bacchic worship, bacchic frenzy, and bacchic singing abounded. The names 'hymns' and 'songs' as they appear in the Greek Testament, are the very names used by the Greeks to designate such bacchic songs. And at all festivals and revels among the Greeks, and among those who took their language and customs, such singing was a regular—and irregular too, for that matter—part of the entertainment. Paul has been exhorting the Colossians against inordinate faith in and practice of ritualism, and worship of spirits, and here he points out a better substitute for some of their Phrygian revels and mysteries, which substitute should be adopted by those who are risen from their death in sins with the risen Christ. In the rest of the lesson he shows how the following of Christ is not a following of mystic practices, which indeed have a show of wisdom, but a following out of the practice of the general law of love in the ordinary relations of life."

II. HOME RELIGION.—Vers. 18-22.

In this section of the lesson we find Christian principle reduced to practice. We are taught that religion is not only something for the church but also for the home; not only something for the Sabbath day but also for all the week; not only something that affects the relations of a person to his spiritual adviser, be he priest or minister, but also something that affects and ought to regulate the relations between husband and wife, parent and child, master

and servant. In short we have here an exposition of the duties required in the fifth commandment. This commandment, like the others, is very broad. It is only the worst way of breaking it that is mentioned. The boy who is disobedient or disrespectful to his father or mother, and the person who is rude or uncivil to a chance fellow-traveller, both break the fifth commandment, but the former breaks it in the worst way, and between the two there are many ways of breaking it, the chief of which are indicated in the passage before us. It is not a mere servile obedience that is here inculcated, neither is our behaviour towards others left to be regulated by their behaviour towards us. "Do unto others as they do unto you" is not the golden rule though it may sound somewhat like it. Obedience to God, arising from love to Him, is the Christian's spring of action. In all the relations of life he treats those with whom he comes in contact with that respect and courtesy due to them, not because they are worthy of it, but because God commands it. Hence arises that stability, that steadfastness, that trustworthiness always to be found associated with true religion. Rev. D. O. Mears, in "Sermons by the Monday Club," says:

"Religion is above all things sternly practical. The loving disciple cannot cheat in business, cannot bear false witness, cannot injure his fellow-men. A false weight is an abomination unto the Lord; hence no Christian disciple will give false weight. God abhors the small ephah or measure, and no disciple will give small measure. The divine power which regenerates the heart and changes the affections from the world unto God must declare its presence in the outward life. The pure in heart cannot be impure in action. The meek cannot appear proud. The really merciful cannot be cruel. Thus does every attribute of the soul manifest itself in the outward conduct. Christ is both the author and the finisher of our faith. Do not write the name of religion upon the boxes and wrappers of your goods: the quantity and quality will declare the fact. Never change your tone while speaking of your hope, but let religion pervade all your words and thoughts. 'Christ is all and in all,' hence the key-note of the text, 'Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.'"

"But not only is religion practical, it is eminently positive in its nature. We are not merely to put off anger, wrath, malice, evil speaking, and the like (v. 8); but we must put on their opposites,—mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, forgiveness, love (v. 12, 14). Religion is not summed up in the evil things we refrain from doing, but in what we accomplish of positive goodness. Sinlessness is only the negative side of a perfect character. The great distinctive characteristic of Christ was holiness; he was sinless because he was holy, and not holy because He was sinless. Holiness means far more than sinlessness.

"It is not enough that we do nothing wrong. This absence of wrong-doing must be based upon the certainty of our doing right. It is not enough to refrain from anger, to speak no evil, to exercise no malice; we must show mercy, kindness, love, and their counterparts. It is not enough that we defend not, that we envy not, that we kill not or steal not; it is not enough to 'abhor that which is evil,' we must 'cleave to that which is good.' There is a vast difference between being goodish and good. The young man of the gospel could truthfully answer the Master by saying, 'All these I have kept from my youth up;' but the instant Christ made known the test of doing something positive, he went away grieved. To become faultless in the sight of men is not necessary to become faithful in God's sight."

III. ALL THINGS TO AND OF CHRIST.—Vers. 23-25.

The false professor engages in religious duties to please men, to gain applause, or to help his own worldly position, and should he be disappointed in the attainment of these objects the duties are practised no longer. The Christian works for none of these things; he works for Christ; he works heartily, earnestly, willingly, cheerfully; and his work will go on steadily in spite of trial and discouragement. Instead of thankfulness he may meet with ingratitude; instead of being praised he may be blamed; instead of his worldly position being improved it may be injured—no matter, the work still goes on; he knows that he shall receive the reward of the inheritance; he is like the heir of a great estate, who during his minority, works, neither for thanks nor wages, but for the benefit of the estate in which he is so deeply interested. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done; and there is no respect of persons. Justification is by faith and not by works; but works show the presence or absence of faith—persistence in wrong-doing shows that there is no faith, no justification, no inheritance—and the finally impenitent have therefore nothing to look for but what they have earned, "the wages of sin." The believer, on the other hand, receives the gift of the inheritance and the reward of well-doing besides.

BE NOT DISCOURAGED.

Many Christians are depressed and disquieted because they are not, as they fear, growing in grace. The following considerations should give them comfort: To see and lament our decrease in grace indicates not only the life of grace, but its growth. As it is a sign a man is recovering and getting strength when he feels his weakness, so it is a step forward in grace to see our imperfections. The more the Spirit shines in the heart, the more evil it discovers. A Christian thinks it worse with him than it was; whereas, his

grace may not have declined, but only his light have become greater.

If a Christian does not increase in one grace, he may in another; if not in knowledge, he may in humility. If a tree does not grow so much in the branches, it may in the root; and to grow downwards in the root is a good growth.

A Christian may grow less in affection when he grows more in judgment. As the musician, when he is old, though his fingers are stiff, plays on the instrument with more art and judgment than in his youth, so a Christian may not have so much affection in duty as at the time of his conversion; but he is more solid in religion, and more settled in his judgment than he was before.

A Christian may think he does not increase in grace because he does not increase in gifts; whereas, there may be a decay of natural powers, the memory and other faculties, when there is not a decay of grace. Powers may be impaired when grace is improved.

A Christian may increase in grace, yet not be sensible of it. The seed may grow in the earth when we do not perceive it to spring up, and grace may grow during our spiritual gloom, and not be perceived.

Christians, therefore, should not yield to despondency because they are not conscious of making advance in the divine life. The sun is reaching his meridian, even when clouds intercept his beams, and it is the assurance of a faithful God, that the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—*Philadelphia Presbyterian Journal*.

HINTS TO PASTORS.

In the London "Freeman" a pastor gives ten suggestions of great value to his associates. He says:

1. If you are the pastor of a church, don't give an "intimation of your intention to resign" unless you have some fixed ideas about leaving.
2. Don't resign unless you are quite sure it is your duty to leave.
3. If Providence directed you where you are, don't hastily conclude it is your duty to "seek another sphere" when He has not as yet opened the way.
4. Don't attach too much importance to the promise of your brother ministers to "look out for you," to "think of you if they should hear of a suitable opening." Remember that the "chief butler forgot Joseph."
5. Don't imagine that by leaving your present charge you will get clear of difficulties, or that another position will be free from them.
6. If a vacant church invite you to preach, don't hastily conclude they mean "the pastorate," and hint to your friends that you will "probably be leaving shortly."
7. In accepting an invitation to preach for a Sabbath, don't volunteer to lecture or conduct week-night services. Do what you are asked, and, having done so, leave.
8. Don't conclude because some of the members or deacons inform you that "you are the most acceptable supply they have had, and are sure to receive a call," that such will really be the case.
9. Discourage by all means "competitive preaching." If invited to preach "with a view to the pastorate," and you learn that no decision has yet been come to with reference to the brother who preceded you with a similar invitation, kindly but firmly refuse to be put into competition with your brother, or to preach until the question respecting his candidature be settled.
10. If at present engaged in some calling, and serving church, by no means be persuaded to "give up your calling to devote yourself wholly to the ministry." Many have done so, and have found time and reasons for repentance. It is often a delusion and a snare. Serve God faithfully and preach the gospel, but don't be ambitious to become "dependent on the churches," lest you some day be somewhat forcibly reminded that such is the case.

AN illustration of the daring of the Russian Nihilists, is the fact that a hundred were arrested on a Sunday on the estate of the Czar's Brother, the Grand Duke Constantin.