

For Dominion Presbyterian.

New Testament Holiness.

What is it? How Attained?

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(Continued from last week.)

This might bring us to a special consideration of New Testament holiness in connection with our use of our money. The money of which it is supposed that it "answereth all things," Ecc. x. 19, and is therefore sought above all things. It would be worth while that some one should deal at large with the subject of the Christian or holy use of money. But I may be allowed to say a word or two on the subject. It is certain that God does not prosper a Christian man, so as to place the comforts of life abundantly within his reach, merely that he should deny himself and his family the enjoyment of them; or that he should practice a voluntary asceticism, living himself and compelling his wife and children to live on bread and water, leaving the comforts of life to the ungodly. But though, on the contrary, He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy," 1 Tim. vi. 17, and will have "Them that believe and know the truth to receive with thankfulness" the bounties of His Providence," 1 Tim. iv. 3, it cannot well be doubted that Christian people generally have much to learn in the matter of the holy use of money. Were it otherwise, we would not find that the giving of money for Christian purposes is so little regarded as a privilege and realized as a blessedness; and that, on the contrary, money is so often given enviously and in dribbles by those who have it in sufficiency and even in abundance. How often do we hear even the best of our people speaking with self-satisfaction of their willingness to do their share, assuming that no principle of New Testament teaching calls them to do more, and forgetting that the unwillingness and consequent failure of some to do their part in Christian work makes it necessary that other should do more, perhaps, far more, than their share; and forgetting also that he that does less than his share is, according to gospel principles, the loser, and that he who does more than his share is the great gainer in the end? How many really believe that? Or might we not rather say, who does really believe it? Surely our people, notwithstanding all their knowledge and orthodoxy, needs to learn what are the "first principles of the oracles of God," in relation to Christian giving and to Christian Endeavour generally. For, if there is anything prominent in the New Testament, it is that the needs of humanity, the fruit of human sin, require us who "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though He was rich, became poor for our sakes," to deny ourselves and to labor, as He did, that those needs should be supplied, as ours have been by the self-denial of others.

I would have liked, in this connection, to have asked particular attention to the great principle of our devoting first fruits to the service of God, Prov. iii. 9-10. It is not one of the adornments in the Old Testament of mysteries to be fully manifested under the New Testament dispensation. But it was a principle of distinct and specific legislation. And without entering into any discussion, I would

only say that it cannot but be an essential principle of holiness, under any dispensation, that we should "honour the Lord with the first-fruits of all our increase." Let us therefore urge upon our people to eliminate from their vocabulary the common phrase of "giving," i.e., to God, "what they can spare." Let us seek to impress upon them that to devote the first-fruits to God and His service is to be actuated by faith and gratitude; where as to give to Him "what we can spare" is to count ourselves and all that we have as our own, and thinking that He will gratefully accept from us the world's leavings, instead of rejecting them with infinite contempt.

There is just one other thing, on which I would ask leave to say a word; because, from the way in which it is referred to in the New Testament, we may be very sure that it is no small part of Christian holiness. I refer to our great gift of speech, and to our government of the tongue. "If any man," it is said, "offend not in word, the same is a perfect man" or a mature Christian, "and able also to bridle the whole body," James iii. 2. And the same apostle says, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and brideth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain," James i. 26. Though I cannot say anything very hard against brethren in this respect, yet I think we have cause to be pained sometimes, by hearing how a brother is unkindly spoken of. And though people are apt to be guarded in the presence of their minister, I have learned enough to make me too sure that to many it is a chief pleasure to know and to speak evil of others, and enough to realize the terrible inconsistency with Christian holiness, in the indulgence of many in what the apostle calls the "cursing of men" with the same member with which, perhaps in the same breath, "God is blessed," James iii. 9, 10. I fear it is not very often that the backbiter sees an angry countenance to restrain him, when "the poison of asps is under his lips" and his tongue "is set on fire of hell," Prov. xxv. 23.

Time will not permit of my saying much in answer to the question. How is New Testament holiness to be attained? But let me say, first, in general that we must, as already indicated, cultivate the habit of dedicating ourselves to the Lord who bought us; and, second, in particular, that, remembering that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," Prov. xxiii. 7, we must be very careful of our thoughts at all times—in the house and by the way, lying down and rising up, in company and alone. Without dwelling on details, let me say (1) we must think much of our sinfulness and our sins, the sins of our youth, the sins of our best times, and of our present sins; "for as many things we all offend," James iii. 2. (2), we must think habitually of death—I mean our own death. In reference to the first of these, let us pray habitually, "Take me to know my transgression and my sin," Job. xiii. 23; and in reference to the second, "Make me to know my end and the measure of my days what it is; that I may know how frail I am," Ps. xxxix. 4. These are the prayers

of Old Testament believers. But they are no less now than in old times the marks of a gracious state. For we cannot habitually have our sins and our death before us, without at the same time thinking habitually, (3), of Christ and things above, praying with the children,

"Fill our hearts with thoughts of Jesus
And of heaven where He is gone."

and remembering always the exhortation of the apostle, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above," or, as in R.V., "Set your mind" including the affections.

In connection with the subject before us, I trust my younger brethren will allow me to close with recommending to them the careful study of Edwards "On the Religious Affections." A young minister can not do better than make and keep himself master of its contents, by frequent, careful, perusal; for it is, if any treatise is, the last word in discriminating between the genuine and the counterfeit in the religion of Christian holiness. I would not think of putting a human composition on a level with the Scriptures—the quick and powerful, searching and discriminating word of God, Heb. 12. But the treatise whose frequent perusal I am commending is nothing but Scripture, in every page from top to bottom, applied to the subject before us, by one whose unsurpassed power of reasoning was more than equalled by the rarest and almost unapproachable saintliness of character. It was written long before the times of the "higher criticism;" and when the English Bible was universally regarded as the inspired rule of faith and practice, and properly so, as I trust was sufficiently proved in a paper submitted to the Presbyterian a few years ago, and printed in Knox College Monthly. We have nothing to say against what is called the "higher criticism," or against any criticism, even the highest, if it is only honest and reverent. But happily, however interesting and valuable may be our more or less limited acquaintance with the original languages of the Scriptures, we and our people can equally with the highest critics "grow in grace and with the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ," i.e., in holiness, by conscientious habitual contact with the sanctifying truth of the word, John xvii. 17, as it is presented to us in our English Bible. Wherefore, "being born again of the incorruptible seed of the word of God, which liveth and endureth for ever," let us, "laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocries, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby," 1 Peter i. 23-ii. 2.

Delight thou in the Lord, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire;—Himself; and then surely thou shalt have all.—Robert Leighton.

God's kingdom is not a kingdom of fanatics striving for a doctrine, but of willing, loving, obedient hearts.—Charles Kingsley,