

## Canadian Pulpit.

## The Origin and Development of Spiritual Life.

BY REV. D. J. McVICAR, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF MONTREAL  
PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE.



TEXT:—Col. ii. 6-7.  
—"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." We have here the origin and development of spiritual life in the soul of man. Let us trace it briefly in the order indicated in the text.

I. *The first step is to receive Christ Jesus the Lord.* Is this the beginning of spiritual life? Certainly; for we are

told that "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." (I. Jno. v. 12.) But how are we to receive Him? We speak of receiving money, receiving friends, receiving congratulations, receiving instruction, and we understand what is meant by all these expressions. But how do we receive Christ Jesus, the Lord? What happens in this case? How is this transaction

You may be ready to answer that we receive Him by faith. But what is that? What is faith? Faith as an intellectual, an act of the human mind, is the persuasion of the truth of certain statements. In this sense faith terminates and rests upon propositions; but we are not saved by propositions any more than by geology or astronomy. Propositions do not secure pardon, or life, or purity, or resurrection or eternal glory. The mere intellectual acceptance of the facts of the Bible is not salvation. The devil is forced to acknowledge the truth regarding Christ, but he is not saved on that account. He knows of the divinity, the incarnation, the death, the atonement, the resurrection and ascension of the Son of God. He has thus a large and orthodox creed, but no Saviour. He is eternally lost in spite of all he knows and believes.

It is therefore necessary to say with the strongest emphasis that saving faith is distinctively trust, and trust not merely in dogmas or propositions, however true and indispensable these may be, but also in a living and divine Saviour. It is as revealing Him that propositions or dogmas prove useful. The doctrines of the Word, from Genesis to Revelation, lead up to Him and terminate upon Him—they are all Christo-centric, and therefore, it is far from being a matter of indifference what dogmas a man accepts, because these define the character of the Saviour in whom he trusts; and besides, a man's creed exerts a powerful influence upon his own character and life. If his creed is impure and false, he cannot be pure or saintly himself. Still more, it is necessary to make it very clear to all that the trust of which we speak and by which we receive Christ Jesus is not natural to man. We are all naturally suspicious of God and of Jesus Christ—indisposed to trust Him—we flee from Him as if He were our deadliest foe. We actually run away from Christ while He is tenderly calling after us and saying, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." The truth in this connection must not be concealed or modified. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and can only trust Him when persuaded and enabled to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence the practical question is, how are men to receive and enjoy the power of the Holy Ghost? And the precise answer is, by prayer. This is the link of connection between God and fallen humanity. However rebellious we may have been, and however far we may be away from God, this privilege of petition, of calling upon the name of God, still remains, and the Saviour's assurance is, "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him."

This promise renders all who hear the Gospel utterly inexcusable, for they are invited and urged to cry for help to their Father with the certainty that His Spirit will come to them in answer to their cry, and then, being quickened by His divine agency, they can by a living trust receive Christ Jesus the Lord. And here let us be quite specific in our understanding of the character in which we receive the Son of God. The text is quite definite on this point.

We are to receive him as Christ—the Messiah, the anointed one—the one divinely set apart to certain offices and work in our behalf. Under the old Testament economy, as you know, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil of consecration, and thus installed in office. And so we read of our Saviour being anointed. This is declared in the second and the forty-fifth Psalms; and in Isa. xli. we have these words, which he applied to himself, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek." And Peter, in the house of Cornelius, assured his audience that God had "anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power." (Acts x. 38)

We receive Him, therefore, as our great and infallible Teacher sent from God to be the light of the world, to deliver us from spiritual ignorance and folly, to give us peace and comfort and joy in believing, and to guide us into all truth by His Holy Spirit.

We receive Him as having, for us and in our stead, propitiated

Divine justice and expiated the guilt of our sins, as having finished transgression and made an end of sin by the blood of His cross, and as now living to make intercession for us, so we rejoice in the exalted status of being children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus.

We receive him as Lord, as being supreme in authority in us and over us, as ruling in our hearts by the purifying efficacy of His redeeming love, and ruling over our enemies and over all things in our behalf.

And what is all this, but to receive Christ Jesus as our prophet, priest and king? As Christians, as living in Him, we have no will but His; we are, to use apostolic language, His prisoners, His servants, His slaves. Not that we suffer thralldom, or any encroachment upon our personal liberty, but that we willingly bow in thought, in feeling, in speech, in conduct to the good pleasure of His will. This is perfect freedom as well as perfect submission, for "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty."

I know that some take alarm at once when told that they must be in thorough subjection to the sovereign good pleasure of God, as if this meant something dangerous, as if God, were sure to do them harm.

Surely such persons must have most defective or erroneous views of God's character as their Father and Saviour. What can be safer or better for you and me than the sovereign will of one who is infinite in knowledge, in wisdom, in power, in mercy and love, as well as in justice and truth, who so loved the world—guilty and lost—that "he spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all." To know Him, to receive him by the exercise of a living trust, is the beginning of spiritual and eternal life in the soul. Why not exercise this saving trust at once? "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God serve Him."

II. *The second thing in the development of this spiritual life is to advance.* "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." To walk is to advance, to go forward. You cannot walk and stand still at the same time. This is self-evident. And it is worth while remembering that it is just regarding self-evident elementary things in the spiritual domain that men show singular obtuseness, marvellous facility in going astray.

Very many, for example, do not object to be in Christ, especially when they think they are about to die; but they do object to walk in Him, to have their whole course in life regulated by His Spirit and lessons. They have told me plainly that it is simply impossible to do business and follow the ethics of Christ and his apostles. I have heard a prominent member of the Church declare solemnly that he could not be an elder and do the business to which he was devoted to the day of his death.

Do you ask in what sense are we to advance? We answer, in godliness, which means God-likeness. But what is that? No man has seen God at any time, neither can see Him, and how then can we know what likeness to God means? We are at no loss in this respect—"The only begotten son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Hence the words of the Son to Philip—"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Therefore, we have only to study the life of Jesus, as revealed by Moses and the prophets, and as recorded in the Gospels by the writers of the New Testament, to know what God-likeness means.

And if you will honestly try this method, I venture to assure you that it will carry you far beyond, and often into direct conflict with what is known as conventional piety.

What I mean is this: It is one thing to follow the pious humdrum of Christian life exhibited in the ordinary career of Church members, and quite another thing to push forward in the service of God as Jesus Christ did, and be consumed, as He was, by zeal for the glory of God.

But do you ask more specifically, how are we to advance? I answer, we should do so in *Scriptural knowledge*, for truth, especially revealed truth, is the sentiment, the food, of the soul. The piety that is nurtured upon the truth, under the teaching of the Spirit of God, is unhealthy, sentimental, and unsafe; for "man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

We are to advance in faith, which is the root of all our Christian virtues. Faith, not merely in the intellectual sense, of grasping more and more of the truth of God, but especially in the saving sense of exercising a living and loving trust in the Divine Christ—a trust which is the outcome of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

To put the matter practically, and as plainly as possible, what I mean is this—If in the past you have trusted Christ for a few things, in future trust Him for all things—"Casting all your cares upon him, for he careth for you." If in the past you have spent a few occasional hours and days in seeking to promote His glory, and have given, as you judged and as others counted, liberally to this end; in days to come double your efforts, and double your contributions.

This is something of what is meant by walking, by advancing, and as your faith grows you will become more humble, more patient, more calm, more generous, more loving and kindly in your bearing towards others. Yes, and you will become more determined and vehement in your abhorrence and resistance of all forms of evil, however fashionable and popular they may be; for the more we walk in Christ and walk with God the less we will have to do with the world in its ungodly maxims and practices.

III. *The third thing in the development of spiritual life is stability, steadfastness.* But what does stability or steadfastness mean? It means holding your own—refusing to be driven, or coaxed, or swindled out of your religious convictions. It means that your fellow-soldiers know always where to find you—not vacillating, not uncertain or wavering in purpose or action, but with heroic courage standing firm at your post, and bravely bearing aloft the banner of your King and Saviour in the face of every foe.

This stability is set forth in the text under several metaphors well worthy of attention. One is taken from the natural world, from the