

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN OBSERVER.]

FAITH—SELF-APPLICATION OF GOSPEL TRUTH.

In a land of Gospel-light, and amongst those who have been educated under Gospel influence, it is a common thing to find upon the lips of men who confessedly have never tasted that the Lord is gracious, a general assent to the great truths of our faith. They profess to believe and admire the blessed assurance "that God gave his Son, that whosoever believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life;" but it has no living and controlling power over their hearts and lives; it kindles no holy love; it awakens no holy joy; it begets no glorious hope. There is no room to question the sincerity of their profession; and the question is, in what respect is their faith defective? It might be answered, "they are not believing the very truth which God has declared, else they must needs love, hope and rejoice in it." But it would, perhaps, be a more distinct answer to say, that however cordial may be their assent to the truth in general, there is wanting a vivid and specific application of the truth to their own cases and characters.

A case of frequent occurrence in actual life may illustrate the difference between a lifeless assent to truth in the abstract, and that living faith which makes a personal application—a self appropriation of the truth. A man may have gone so far in habits of intemperance that his neighbours have concluded his case to be all but hopeless, while he has not even been startled by a suspicion of his own impending ruin. Such a man may have clear views of the pitiable and despicable character of a sot, he may know the ruin of soul, body and estate which intemperance ensures, its heartless desolation of home, the certain bankruptcy of credit and character to which it leads, and that no drunkard hath eternal life. He knows it all; perhaps frequently moralizes on it all; but it has no effect upon his conduct; until some mortifying exposure, some sorrowful event in providence or some faithful exhortation brings it all home to his own business and bosom; and then, it may be, the man within him is aroused to a deadly struggle with his enemy for life and liberty. Now this man with his operative knowledge of drunkenness much resembles our professed believer who cannot shew his faith by his works—who alleging that he believes, cannot say "being justified by faith, we have peace with God."

The statement of such a man's faith might be placed in marked contrast with the declaration of Paul's faith, or indeed that of any man to whom the word has come in power. The first says, I believe the fact that Christ was crucified, I believe the doctrine that God set him forth to be a

propitiation through faith in his blood, and I believe the assurance that whosoever believeth on him is not condemned." Paul says "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I LIVE, yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me;* for the life which I now live in the flesh, is a life of faith on the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The whole truth is brought home to Paul's case. He is the sinner condemned and undone, who cannot be justified by works of law, and he sees in Christ crucified, not merely a sufficient sacrifice for sin, but a sacrifice for his sin; in Christ risen, not merely one who is able to save to the uttermost, but one who will save him.

The first man contemplates the mystery of Christ's love to a guilty world; Paul says boldly but tenderly "*he loved me,*" just as much as if there were not another object of that love in the world. The first admits the fact of death, and speculatively owns the sufficiency of the sacrifice; but Paul says with humble boldness, "*the Son of God gave himself for me,*" just as much as if there were not another sinner in the world whose sins were laid upon him.

With our limited faculties we can think of the human race at large, or we can think of an individual man, but we cannot, at one and the same time, think of the race, and of the individuals of whom it is composed. The divine Omniscience is not thus straitened. That eye which takes in the whole, sees each. The individual is not lost in the crowd. If a man should perform some signal service for a nation, every individual in that nation might regard with gratitude a common benefactor; but each could not in any strict sense say "*he loved me and did this for me.*" But, just as the Divine Omniscience, looking upon the race, has a full and distinct knowledge of each individual man, so the Divine love does not in the mass and multitude of its objects lose sight of the individuals composing the mass. Each is loved as expressly as if he stood alone. The general truth "*God so loved the world,*" contains the particular truth for every believer, "*he loved me;*" and when Christ gave himself for all, he distinctly gave himself for each; so that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Never until a man makes this personal application of the gospel, perceives the truth as thus pointedly aimed at his heart and receives its blessings as offered specifically to himself, will he know its peace and its power.

The directness and closeness of Paul's self application of the truth is strikingly illustrated in the remarkable expression above quoted, "*I am crucified with Christ.*" So completely is the believer identified with Christ in his work and sufferings, that he does not merely look gratefully to Christ doing something for his sake, as one friend might undergo much toil and pain to benefit another; but he looks to the cross and sees

Christ taking his place there. The vials of wrath due to the sinner are discharged upon the head of the sinner; and the believer exclaims "*there the chastisement of my peace is laid upon him—the pangs indeed are his, but the sins are mine;* when he is crucified, it is virtually I that am crucified; when the law hath carried out its penalty upon him, then I am dead with Christ." There is a similar identification of the believer in the results of Christ's sufferings. As he died unto sin once and now, the law being satisfied, he lives unto God, so the believer, being crucified with Christ, lives with him; or as Paul expresses it, "*Christ liveth in me.*" The believer says "*In his acceptance, I am accepted.* There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus; Christ hath died, and then the law's penalty against me was virtually executed. He is risen again and, since he acted as my substitute, in his resurrection I am delivered."

The Gospel message does not fling abroad a general assurance without any aim, but it comes to each and every hearer with a special and personal intention, and says "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*" It will readily be seen how much a general assent wants of an actual faith upon the Son of God. We conclude with a brief quotation from Luther's commentary on the expressions "*he loved me, and gave himself for me,*" with the earnest prayer that the admonition may find its way to the heart of some trembling enquirer. "*Read*" says he "*read, therefore, with great vehemency these words 'me' and 'for me,' and so inwardly practise with thyself that thou mayest with a sure faith conceive and print this me in thy heart, and apply it unto thyself, not doubting but that thou art of the number to whom this 'me' belongeth: also that Christ hath not only loved Peter and Paul, and gave himself for them, but that the same grace also which is comprehended in this 'me' as well pertaineth and cometh unto us as unto them. For as we cannot deny but that we are all sinners, and are constrained to say that through the sin of Adam we are lost, were made enemies of God, subject to the wrath and judgment of God, and guilty of eternal death; so can we not deny but that Christ died for our sins, that he might make us righteous. Therefore, when I feel and confess myself to be a sinner through Adam's transgression, why should I not say that I am made righteous through the righteousness of Christ. This did Paul most steadfastly believe, and therefore he speaketh these words with so great vehemency and full assurance."*

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DEVOTION.

We admire greatness; we love goodness, When any person combines in his charac-