

THE EDUCATION OF THE SOUL IN THE TRUTH.

Luke vii. 37, 38, 48-50 ; John xii. 1-3 ; xx. 1-17.

I turn to these familiar scriptures, on which our hearts love so often to dwell, beloved brethren, with but one thought, which, I think, may be traced through them ; and that is the blessed way that, in the infinite grace of our God, needs are created in the soul, in order that the truth may come with power to it. And this is surely so in every aspect of the truth. It is possessed and becomes a reality and power in us, only when received as an answer to need, first of all awakened in the soul. In these scenes, reading them in the order in which they are presented to us in the history—alike precious fruit of His grace in drawing out devotedness to Himself in those who were with Him on earth, each with its own distinct character—I think we may see a moral order bringing out the normal education of the soul in the truth, from the soul's first awakening to the knowledge of the Lord, under His blessed leading and teaching.

In the first—the woman that was a sinner, in Simon's house—we are carried back to the way God had to begin with each of us, the only way He ever became known to us, awakening the soul, by His infinite grace, to the sense of its need of a *Saviour*. And what an awakening that was when

first the truth found entrance into our souls ! How precious the grace that, however varied the way it took with us, drew us, and drew us irresistibly, into the truth : " Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." There we found ourselves out in all our sins and ruin, but in *His presence*. The rumour (ver. 17) was true : God had visited His people. And she was at His feet, fully exposed to herself in her sins, weeping—no attempt to hide it, all come fully out, but come out in the presence of the infinite grace that brought God down to be a poor despised Man in this world. Sooner or later (if not now in the day of grace, in the day of judgment) all must come out ; but God has come, revealed in grace, before the day of judgment, to bring out the sins now, and lay the basis of the soul's everlasting relationship with Him in the full discovered truth of my guilt and utter ruin, and by it of what God is. What mercy it is, what infinite grace ! I belong to Him, I am His ; but this founded on the discovery, deep down in the conscience, of my sins. There and thus it was He won my heart ; and the blessed way love took to do it leaves no cloud upon the relationship it brings me into : His ways with me, too, but means to this end, as we see it in His words to poor, dark, religiously-blinded Simon : " Which of them will *love* him most ?" He had come not merely to meet all our need as sinners, but by that need to make Himself known to us as a Saviour, and thus to draw out the affections of the heart after Himself. Blessed

expression of it in this dear woman, who, even before she knew all that grace had come to bring her, was lavishing every little token of a heart thus won upon the Person of the Lord. By such appreciation of the grace that had attracted her, she proved herself to be the one whose "many sins" were forgiven, according to Simon's just interpretation of the parable of the Lord. And now she has His own direct word to rest on for the full effect of His grace: "Thy sins are forgiven." The truth has come to her with all its own divine authority and power. The Discoverer of all her sins is God manifest in the flesh, her Saviour; His word is the warrant for her faith, and He can add: "Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace."

So perfectly and divinely has He satisfied the first great need of the soul, divinely awakened that He might satisfy it, and formed the link of immutable relationship between the sinner and the Saviour, in the truth of what both are, fully revealed. Now the heart is set free for the next lesson in this wonderful school. Infinite as the grace is which has met our need as sinners and revealed to us the Saviour, it would be sad indeed if we stopped there: impossible, indeed, in the measure in which the heart has been really attracted to the Person who met our need. For in doing so He created new capacities in the soul, new needs, that nothing but new and deep knowledge of Himself can satisfy. This we find so blessedly in the case of Mary of Bethany. From the first, and by

the attraction of His grace, she took up her place at His feet ; it was not for anything she might get from Him, it was to listen to His word—and that ever expressed what He was (John viii. 25 *New Trans.*)—as with a heart that sought Him for His own sake, that had found its need of an *object*, and in Him the only object that could satisfy it. It is thus He leads us on. He had awakened in her heart the need of an object. In John xii. we see her satisfied, her action there the blessed expression of it.

It is deeply instructive, too, to see the effect of a heart that has made Him and found Him its object. Drawn into the current of the thoughts of God, for He was His object, she could anticipate what was passing in the mind of the Lord before He had spoken of it. It was a time of varied testimony being borne to the glory of His Person : as Son of God in the resurrection of Lazarus, as Son of David in His last public entry into Jerusalem, and as Son of man when the Greeks came up desiring to see Him. But there was that which lay nearer to His heart than taking His place in all this glory—the necessary path to it for the glory of God—it was His death. He speaks of it fully, later on in this chapter : “ Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say ? Father, save Me from this hour ! but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.” How blessed it is to see a vessel prepared, as Mary of Bethany, that testimony might not be

wanting to this deeper glory of His humiliation in death, more present to the heart of the Lord. The effect of what was passing around is upon her spirit; the scene is closing in for her if He is passing out of it. So she gathers up all that is of any value for her, represented in that pound of ointment, "very costly," and pours it upon His Person. A blessed expression, when words fail, of what her heart had found in Him as her object—divinely satisfied! "Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee." How blessed to be led on to know Him as she knew Him, the One who, passing by death out of this scene, has broken every link that bound the heart here—blessed preparation for the new links of association to be formed with the risen Christ in the scene where He is gone. Her heart, formed by Himself for it, has found an object in Him that fills and satisfies it, the One that by Himself alone will fill and satisfy it for ever.

But this leads us to another necessary step in the soul's progress for which it is now prepared. It depends upon the power of the attraction of the Person of the Lord over the heart, which will alone give it its reality. I refer to the new place that He has taken on the ground of redemption, as Man in resurrection, to associate us with Himself in all the perfect blessedness of it before God and the Father. This gives its character to the last scene of the devotedness of Mary of Magdala in chap. xx. The disciples having verified the fact of His

resurrection, went away to their own homes, so little were their hearts under the power of the Object of the heart of God. "Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping." There is created in her heart the need of a new *place*. This place—the world that gave Him but a cross and sepulchre—was no longer suited to her. It had no home for her.

But was there, then, another place where she could find one? There was. The Lord had spoken of it fully, from the very first announcement to His disciples that it was only a little while He should be with them, addressing Himself to the trouble of hearts that He counted upon missing Him in the place of His rejection (chap. xiii. 33, xiv.) He had presented this to them as the first source of comfort. "In my Father's house are many mansions." He counted upon it that the cross would change everything for them here; that the world that had crucified Him would be no longer a place to satisfy His own. "I go to prepare a *place* for you." And thus the Father's house was, for the first time in Scripture, thrown open to His people. We find in that chapter four things that enter into and make up the revelation of the place so far, for the comfort of our hearts. As even in natural things, it is the people who make the place, so it is infinitely in the revelation of the Father's house. Philip was right, therefore, so far, when he said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." But the Father had been perfectly

revealed in the Son down here : "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," hence the Lord could say, "*Whither I go ye know.*" Already the first element of the revelation of the place was before them in His Person. But, secondly, "*I go to prepare a place for you.*" This is Christ taking His place in it as Man in divine righteousness, by virtue and in the power of redemption, that fits it perfectly for us, and us for the place : until, and this is the third thing, He comes to receive us to Himself there, that we may be actually with Him. But meanwhile (fourthly) He sends down the Holy Ghost to bring all the power and blessedness of the place into our hearts, as a present thing, while we are waiting for Him. (See 1 Cor. ii. 9-12.)

How beautiful and perfect it is in the ways of the Lord's grace, that the Gospel does not close without one at least whose heart opens to the need, and thus to the intelligence, of this very thing. There she is, with a heart desolated, as to this world, by the death of the Lord, detained by true devotedness to Him in the spot where she received the first full intelligence of the new place of wonderful association with Himself that was to result from Jesus ascending to the Father, and became the honoured vessel of the communication of it to the apostles. How blessedly He who created the need of it in her heart has satisfied her ! "He satisfieth the longing soul."

How far do we, beloved brethren, know this divine education each one for himself and herself—needs created in the soul to be satisfied thus? Surely we are the subjects of the same blessed love that would ever be creating longings that the truth might meet them in power, as the answer to them, if never measured by them. We know the place, and are, by the Holy Ghost having come, in the full effect of Jesus having gone to the Father, as He said: "I go to prepare a place for you." He has unfolded it to us in those blessed words in which light first broke to Mary of Magdala: "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; unto my God and your God." There is now, in an association and identification of place and consequent nearness never known or possible before, what was to take the place of the relations Mary and the rest had had with Jesus upon earth. All our associations with Him are now in that new place that He has taken. We know the place—it is His own—the only place He could give us, the only place we could stand in before God—won for us in divine righteousness by so gloriously accomplished redemption. Blessed it has been to our souls to know it; but how feeble is the power of it, how little are our hearts consciously in company with Him! I think it arises often from the soul passing too lightly from the first infinite lesson of His grace that awakened the need and brought us the knowledge of a Saviour and His full forgiveness, into

the knowledge of heavenly association with Himself, without the link in the divine education of the soul that we find supplied in Mary of Bethany—namely, the heart of the saved one laying hold of the Lord Himself as its object. All real progress further depended upon the measure in which this is the case with us. What was that empty sepulchre to Mary—what will give this world the character of it to us—except that the One who has lain there was everything to her soul? It was this that made the break so complete with the place where once she had had her home; it was this that prepared her for the new association with Christ and consequent relationships that make Christianity.

The Lord give us each one to know Himself, beloved friends. It is Himself from first to last, but not measured by the need that made Him real to us, by the blessed way He met it; but this only as a basis to that deeper knowledge of Himself, in which the heart is divinely satisfied forever. For “He satisfieth the longing soul.” Otherwise, instead of the power of the heavenly associations into which He has brought us with Himself, earthly things will retain their attraction and power. That is what is the ruin of us—these things retain their hold over the heart, because He is so feebly known in His excellency and glory as the heart’s object.

And yet what remains but that He who has opened the place so fully to us, and given us

the Holy Ghost as the present power of our enjoyment of it, should come to receive us to Himself, "that where I am there ye may be also." With Him as the present object of our hearts there, a link so real with all heaven's blessedness now, what joy to be only watching for Himself! The Lord grant it to us, for His name's sake.

PHILIPPIANS III.

I think it is an important thing, in these days, to avoid the natural tendency of the heart, to measure the truth of God by the expression we have of it here on earth; or even to measure the truth by the apprehension we have of it here.

We see the truth and know it; we look around at the expression of it, and then the heart fails, when we find how little the expression really answers to the object before it. The truth is presented to us by God Himself; the expression fails, and then the tendency comes in to accept a lower standard than God has given. The standard remains the same. God does not lower the standard because of our short-comings. It is always the same standard in spite of our failures, and God seeks in His grace to cause that standard to have its effect upon us. The more we are occupied with the standard, the more we shall be conscious of how we fail.

Now one mark of being in the presence of God is consciousness of failure and short-comings;

there is no thought in the presence of God of how far I have attained. There is satisfaction in the Object, but with that, the conscious sense of how far short we come in practice and ways and life here.

Before the soul can really look at the Object, as presented here, it must get the truth, put before it in the beginning of the chapter: "We are the circumcision;" not of it—we represent it, we are it. He is laying the basis upon which the soul can stand, and be occupied with, can gaze in simplicity and uprightness of heart at the Object set before it. The Object is Christ in glory, not Christ upon the cross: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection."

It is not gazing upon Christ on the cross as an offering for sin, but Christ in glory at the right hand of God in heaven. In verse 3 he lays the ground. It is no longer Israel. If we are truly the children of God, and have this Object before us, the sole ground upon which we can stand and gaze upon such an Object, is that given us in this verse. If we think of ourselves, and what we are, we can only go back to this verse, and the truth therein contained: God has set us before Himself as representing the entire cutting off of the old man; not an effort of the old man to turn over a new leaf; not a cultivating of the old man; not a giving of the heart to Christ; but a consenting in the bottom of the heart to this—that we represent the entire cutting off of the old man. What takes the place

of the old man? The new Man, the Christ of God, and that Christ in heavenly glory. That is the only ground upon which we can stand before God : not looking for feelings, or apprehensions, or anything in ourselves at all ; not looking even to see how far we appreciate that Object ; but gazing on that object. The consequence being that you are able to witness to that Object, you reflect that Object. It is, too, the only way in which the soul is really honest with God.

Look at Luke x., for instance. There we have a man not really honest with God, a man who comes and asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Tell Me, the Lord says, how do you read the law? What is your version of it? He tells the Lord Jesus, and he had read it rightly. Do that and live, the Lord says. Here the dishonest heart comes out: the man turns to the Lord, and he does not say, Who is my God? He avoids the keen edge of the word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," etc. When the Lord applies the word out of his own lips to him, he does not say, Who is my God? It is a heart not prepared to face the truth, and he says, "Who is my neighbour?" The word applied by the Lord Jesus cuts down to the heart and conscience ; he cannot stand it, therefore he seeks to "justify himself." He was surrounded by all the marks of who his God was, and what it was to have to do with God ; but he seeks to "justify himself." Then the Lord goes on with him, and seeks to take him up on that ground. He

comes in, in all the wondrous blessedness of divine grace, to the heart that is set to avoid the keen edge of the word. I will tell you who is your neighbour, He says. You have no such neighbour in all the universe of God as God Himself! And He has come down to you where you were, half dead, stripped of everything, robbed of everything. Here He presents Himself as come not merely to give forgiveness of sins; He takes him to the inn and takes care of him. You remember the blessed story, always so fresh to all of us. He places him at His cost for ever. He makes no bargain with the owner of the inn. He says, Whatever you spend I will repay; he is at my cost forever. On no other ground will He have to say to the man

Now, before we go back, just look, for a moment, at one who is really fit for the place we have in our chapter. Mary had the divine Object before her soul. The Lord Jesus was in Martha's house—she was occupied "about much serving." There was one there who sat at "Jesus' feet, and heard His word," and the Lord took care that she should not be interrupted. What was it she heard? Was it anything good about herself? He did not come to flatter, He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." Do you know what He had come to do? That was part of what she heard. Do you know what He was Himself? That was another part of it. She heard of the goodness of God, of the love of God, we may be sure. It was bringing God Himself before her, in the delight of satisfying His own heart of love, in such a world as this; and He takes care she shall not be interrupted in hearing of it.

Do you say, there is no fruit in that occupation? Beloved friends, we must be empty vessels before

we can be full ones. The great difficulty is to be an empty vessel. We think we have something, instead of being empty to be filled with Himself and His love. I do not think it is a question of what we can do for Him; it is the heart so taken up with Him, so kept by Him, that testimony to Himself flows out, because it cannot be kept in. It flows out because the heart is full.

Now read verse 3. That is what we are: "We are the circumcision." And then He speaks of the flesh. It is not sin now, but the religious nature that the flesh could have to boast of; the religious man was taken up, and disposed of, because displaced by another. It is not now a religion of of God's establishing, but a Person; it is having to do with a Person; being here in this world, simply and heartily and uprightly gazing upon that Person. The consequence is you reflect that Person. (See 2 Cor. iii. 18.)

You remember when the Lord comes to the disciples in the boat, He comes to them walking on the water. They all think they have seen a spirit, and are alarmed by the supernatural manifestation before them. He was doing an impossibility for man—walking on the waves! Peter says, "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." Jesus says, "Come." Peter gets out of the boat and does the same thing, the very same thing that Jesus Himself was doing. The one, who has his eye fixed on Him, does the same thing that He does. The reflection of the Object comes simply from occupation with the Object. He looks neither to the right hand nor to the left, and he walks on the water. There is the reflection of Christ Himself. There is the testimony. There is no testimony when Peter looks at the circumstances around him, and begins to sink. Then he

says, "Lord save *me*." It is not bearing witness to what Christ was Himself, but he cries to Him, for the power that shall uphold him.

There we see plainly, I think, the two powers that are always there: the power of the Object that can produce likeness to the Object, and make the one occupied with it answer to the Object Himself. But there is another power, and that power is always ready, that hand is always stretched out—the power to save. But that is not testimony. Peter, sinking, cries, "Lord, save me," and the hand is stretched out immediately; He is near enough to stretch out His hand, and save him from sinking. The power is always in the Object, but if we are looking to the right hand or to the left, the power fails us for the time being; but the other power is always there—the power to save. It does not do to look at the effect produced, or what the consequences are—we soon then get back to be occupied with ourselves.

I do not know, whether we have apprehended what it is to be occupied simply with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and then with what corresponds to Him down here. You cannot be rightly occupied with what is dear to Him down here, unless you are occupied with Him first, and what suits Him.

Verses 8, 9, 10. Here is a man with an Object outside himself altogether. I look forward to that Object. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection." We know what He has done—we should not be Christians if we did not; we must know that before our consciences can have rest—but it is *Himself* here: "That I may know him"—a Person before me. The very first step, in my introduction to Himself, is the knowledge of what He has done, and when I know:

that, I seek to know Himself, the One who has done it, and the very motives, not only that actuated Him to come down to seek and to save the lost, but that actuated Him in all His life here. I see One who had the glory of God before Him, in everything He did. I cannot get near Him, unless I know the effect of what He has done. It has been to transfer me from the ground, on which I stood as a lost creature, to the ground not only of being forgiven and pardoned, but of being received and established by God Himself, in the very same favour as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Have you ever asked yourself that question: How much does God love me? Just as much as He loves the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Surely we speak of it with bated breath. We look at ourselves, we think of ourselves, God loves *me* as He loves the Lord Jesus Christ! He has accepted me in Him! Received me into that same favour, loves me as much as He loves Christ! You come back again then to the ground of grace, and drink afresh of that blessed stream. It is the sovereignty of divine love and grace that has set us before Him, in order to delight His own heart in us. Poor, needy things we may be, but He has us before Himself, that He may satisfy His own heart, in bestowing all His love upon us, that He may have, always going up to Him, the praises of those hearts that have found all in Himself. It is the having to do with God Himself.

As to myself, he says, "I count all things but loss . . . that I may win Christ." And that is the one Object, he says, I have before me now: "That I may know Him." Not, that I may go back and study His wonderful, blessed life on earth; wonderful and blessed it is; wonderful in

grace and mercy ; but that I may know Him in the power of His resurrection ; what it is now to have to do with Him who, when here upon earth, said : " I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ! " To have to do with Him who is now unstraitened in all His desires ; He has passed through it, and is now on the other side of death and judgment ; to know what it is to be taken up by Himself, at His cost, at His charge every moment of our time down here, that He may express out of such a thing as I am what can conduce to His glory.

But how soon a kind of cloud comes over that ! Something of self comes in How soon a cloud or mist comes over it, and we turn away from it, and we look at other things, and we think things ought to be so and so, and like this, or like that. And so they ought to be, perhaps. But He knows a great deal more about it than you and I do, and He looks for subjection to His hand. He looks for us to be in His Hand, that in the midst of all these things, He may express from us and through us, what is to His honour and glory.

It is true, we are in the school, but it is a blessed school. I think, it was said, if we are not good at school, we are not good at home. Had we not better put it the other way ? The one who is good at home, will be good at school ; we must begin at home first. Here is the secret of all good conduct. In the school we are tested, the heart is tested, and failure appears, and this is the reason—we are not, in our inmost souls, right with Himself, not walking in simplicity and uprightness, not walking as the apostle says here of himself, really clear of everything but this one blessed Object before him : " That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection," and here in this world " the fel-

lowship of his sufferings." It is not possible for you to enter into the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ here, unless you "know him, and the power of his resurrection."

Let me ask, What answers to a glorified Christ? A suffering, dependent people down here! And we are content to be a suffering people here in this world. Why? Because it conduces to Christ's glory. It conduces to His glory that His people should be a suffering people in the place where He was crucified—God forbid they should be anything else! It was the ruin of the testimony always, when people began looking for something here, something that the heart could rest upon, and that the eye could see, instead of just the fellowship of His sufferings: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." Not, that I may lay hold of something, but that I may, by the grace of God, understand what He is, in His greatness, in His goodness, in His infinite love. What has He apprehended you for? To save you from hell? That is the poorest thing! It is a blessed mercy, surely, but is that all Christ died for? No! It is to have you for Himself, that He may be glorified thereby. He has laid hold of me for a purpose. We cannot perhaps express what that purpose is. We must know Himself, before we can know it; we must get near enough to Himself to know what that is, for which He has apprehended us (just as Mary could sit at His feet, and hear His word, and He would take care she should not be interrupted); letting Him pour into our souls what His blessed mind is. About *us*, and our ways down here? No! About *Himself* and His ways. Not about

yourself ; He has cut you off, and now He has taken you up, and set you before Him, that He may talk to you of Himself and His ways. There is no such blessed occupation as that.

If you look at 1 Thessalonians i. 3, 4, you see the same Spirit producing the same thought, the same desire. They are waiting for His Son from heaven. That is the one Object I have before me, he says, Christ Himself, and that I may know the power of His resurrection. The first effect of the gospel is that you become a waiting people ; the effect of occupation with Christ is that you are content to be a suffering people for His sake : waiting for His Son, and suffering for His sake. Whatever the past history may have been, that is the place we can always take through God's grace, where we can always find ourselves at home. We shall never be disappointed if we are only content to be a waiting and a suffering people with Christ ; the Object before us there—Himself, and the power of His resurrection, and waiting for Himself from heaven. If we are just content with that, we shall have no blighted hopes ; no shortcomings there, no expectations unfulfilled there, nothing to mar nor to soil. Paul was not satisfied with his own sufferings, but with the Object that led him to suffer—satisfied with Himself for whom we wait. That is the ground He sets before us ; a narrow path it may be, but a path that goes on changelessly. The difficulty is, people try to make out another pathway, and so sorrow comes in, and trial. People get distrustful and cast down because they look for something else. God sets before us the consequence of having to do with Christ, and waiting for His coming. If I have Christ in glory before me, I am a suffering person here, and I am content to be it, because He is

glorified by it, and I am in a world which crucified Him, and I am waiting for that blessed One who is coming.

Look at the end of this chapter. It is not isolation. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded," etc. That is the great healer of divisions, where there is singleness of heart and eye to Himself; a causer of divisions where there is not. If we are going to walk for Him and His glory, it must be simply as subject, dependent, suffering, waiting people. You say, It is a difficult path? It is more than difficult; it is impossible, unless you go back to verse 3. I must know Him and accept that ground. And if we are going to walk as dependent, subject, suffering, waiting people, that will be the great healer of all strifes and divisions, but it will be a great means of manifesting those who will not walk that way. Only, through grace, let me look straight forward.

You will find one prayer that seems to me to be always a prayer in the sanctuary: "Hold thou me up, that my footsteps slip not"—"Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." On that pathway there is no foothold for the flesh; and thus he expresses dependence upon Him who alone can hold up, but who is ever ready to do so, blessed be His name! "We are the circumcision." That is what God, in his wondrous grace, has revealed in these days; His people represent the cutting off of the flesh, and the setting up and upholding in this world, by the power, and at the cost of Another, of a people to be maintained for His glory. If we are content to be that there is no disappointment. Disappointment comes in where the heart is looking for, and seeking something, which does not conduce to His glory.