

THE ETERNAL LIFE.

1 JOHN I. 1-2.

The Epistle of John is the eternal life manifested in Jesus, and imparted to us—the life which was with the Father, and which is in the Son. . . . This life is so precious, manifested as it is in the person of Jesus, that the epistle has in this respect quite a peculiar charm. When I turn my eyes to Jesus, when I contemplate all His obedience, His purity, His grace, His tenderness, His patience, His devotedness, His holiness, His love, His entire freedom from all self-seeking, I can say, that is *my* life. This is immeasurable grace. It may be that it is obscured in me; but it is none the less true, that that is *my* life. Oh, how do I enjoy it thus seen! How I bless God for it! What rest to the soul! What pure joy to the heart; At the same time Jesus Himself is the object of my affections, and all my affections are formed on that holy object. And this is morally very important; while it is in *Him*, not in myself that I rejoice and delight. . . .

The law promised life on obedience; but life *came* in the person of Jesus, in all its own divine perfectness, in its human manifestations. Oh, how precious is the truth, that this life such as it was with the Father, such as it was in Jesus, is given to us! In what relationships it sets us, by the power of the Holy Ghost, with the Father and with the Son

Himself! The life has been manifested. Therefore we have no longer to seek for it, to grope after it in the darkness, to explore at random the indefinite, or the obscurity of our own hearts, in order to find it, to labour fruitlessly under the law, in order to obtain it. We behold it: it is revealed, it is here, in Jesus Christ, and he who possesses *Christ* possesses *that life*.

Now inasmuch as that life was the Son, it could not be known without knowing the Son, that is, that which He was, entering into His thoughts, His feelings; otherwise He is not really known. It was theirs, they had communion with Him—with the Son. Precious fact! to enter into the thoughts (all the thoughts) and into the feelings of the Son of God, come down in grace; to do this in fellowship with Him, that is to say, not only knowing them but sharing these thoughts and feelings with Him. In effect, it is the life.

But we cannot have the Son without having the Father. He who had seen Him had seen the Father, and consequently he who had communion with the Son had communion with the Father, for their thoughts and feelings were all one. He is in the Father and the Father in Him. We have fellowship therefore with the Father. And this is true also when we look at it in another aspect. We know that the Father has entire delight in the Son. Now He has given us, by revealing the Son, to take our delight in Him also, feeble as we are. I know when I am delighting in Jesus—in His obedience,

His love to His Father, to us, His single eye and purely devoted heart,—I have the same feelings, the same thoughts, as the Father Himself. In that the Father delights, cannot but delight, in Him in whom I now delight, I have communion with the Father, so with the Son in the knowledge of the Father. All this flows, whether in the one or the other point of view, from the person of the Son. Herein our joy is full. What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys and communion with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves? And if it seem difficult to believe, let us remember, that in truth it cannot be otherwise; for in the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost is the source of my thoughts, feelings, communion, and He cannot give thoughts different from those of the Father and the Son. They must be in their nature the same. To say that they are *adoring* thoughts is in the very nature of things, and only makes them more precious. To say that they are *feeble* and often hindered, while the Father and the Son are divine and perfect, is, if true, to say the Father and the Son are God, are divine, and we feeble creatures. That surely none will deny. But if the blessed Spirit be the source, they must be the same as to nature and fact.

“SEEN OF ANGELS.”

In earlier days the angels had desired to look into the things of Christ, (1 Peter i. 12). When these things themselves were manifested and accomplished, this desire was answered; for in the history, as we find it in the Evangelists, the angels are set to be eye-witnesses of that which they had long desired to look into. They are privileged to find their place and their enjoyment in the history of Christ in ‘the mystery of godliness;’ and to find it, just as of old they had found it, in the sanctuary of God. In that sanctuary all, it is true, was for the use and blessing of sinners. The altars, and the laver, and the mercy-seat, and all else, were provided for us. The action and the grace of the house of God were for sinners; but the cherubim gazed. They were set in that house to look at its deepest mysteries. And so, in the same condition shall we find them in the day of the great originals, or of the heavenly things themselves, when ‘God was manifest in the flesh.’ For then, it is equally true, all was for the service and salvation of us sinners, or that God, so manifested, might be ‘preached unto the Gentiles,’ and ‘believed on in the world;’ but still all was as surely for this end, that He might be ‘seen of angels.’

Thus they took the same place in the sanctuary of old, and in the great mystery itself. They gazed—they looked—they were eye-witnesses. And

further, the sight they took of the mystery was of the same intense and interested character as the cherubims had before expressed in the holy of holies.

'And the cherubims spread out their wings on high, and covered with their wings over the mercy-seat, with their faces one to another: even to the mercy-seatward were the faces of the cherubim.' And so, in the history of Christ, the True Ark, they will be thus again seen.

The angel of the Lord comes, in his commission and ministry from heaven, to announce to the shepherds of Bethlehem the birth of Jesus. But as soon as He had fulfilled His service, suddenly there was with Him 'a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' And when the time came for another great event, and 'God manifest in the flesh' was raised from the dead, soon to be 'received up into glory,' the angels are again present with the like intense and interested delight. At the sepulchre, as Mary Magdalene looked in, two of them were sitting, 'one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain;' and at the crisis of the ascension itself, they are again present, instructing the men of Galilee in the further ways of Him who had just then gone up on high.

What hanging over the mercy-seat was all this! What cherubim-gaze again and again was this! This utterance of the heavenly host in the fields of Bethlehem was not part of their ministry to man,

but an act of worship to God. They were not then instructing the shepherds, or even formally addressing themselves to them; but breathing out the rapture in which their own spirits were held in thoughts of the One that had been then born. And so their attitude in the sepulchre. When Mary appears, they have, it is true, a word of sympathy for her; but there they were in the sepulchre before she had come, and there they would have been though she had never come. As the cherubim in the tabernacle had hung over the ark and mercy-seat, on either side one, so now in the sepulchre the angels hang over the place where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and the other at the feet.

What ways of *seeing* Jesus were these! As we read, 'God was manifest in the flesh—seen of angels.' Well may we, beloved, covet grace to have like utterances and like attitudes over Jesus. And well may we grieve over what in our hearts is short of this, great indeed as some of us know that to be. I believe that many of us need to be attracted more than we are wont to be, by these things. Many of us have dwelt (if I may distinguish such things by such terms) more in the *light* of the knowledge of the divine *dispensations*, than in the *warmth* of such *mysteries* as Bethlehem, the garden, and the Mount of Olives, revealed to the enraptured angels. But in this we have been losers—losers in much of that communion which marked the path and the spirit of others in other days.

My desire has been to turn to this great sight, led that way by the condition of things around and among us. Glorious, I need not say, is the object—the same Person, ‘God manifest in the flesh,’ followed by faith from the manger to the cross, from the cross through the grave up in resurrection, and thence to the present heavens, and eternal ages beyond them.

REMARKS ON PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD.

As Mentioned Together in Scripture.

Prayer and the word of God are frequently mentioned together in the gospels and epistles. Their importance cannot be too forcibly impressed upon the saints. The writer does not doubt that very many are far more diligent in this respect than himself, but he is encouraged to make the following remarks, being assured that those, who are the most earnest in prayer, and the study of the word, will be the foremost to approve of, and have communion with anything that may tend to remind the saints of the importance or lead them on to the more diligent observance of these things.

They are, as remarked above, often mentioned together in the Scriptures. When the word of God joins together things in themselves distinct, the one from the other, it is not only important to notice the things themselves, but also to notice the

connection in which they are found. Thus it is with *faith* and *love*; the former to the Lord, the latter to the saints.

In like manner as faith and love are joined together, so also *prayer* and the *word* of God are joined together. From among the passages where prayer and the word thus occur, I quote the three following, viz :—Acts vi. 4; Luke, end of chapter x. and commencement of chapter xi., and Ephesians vi. 17, 18.

The first occurs at a memorable epoch in the history of the assembly of God here upon earth. Acts vi. makes mention of the first failure collectively of the saints. Individual sin had occurred in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, but now the change from the freshness and devotedness of chapters 2 and 4 begins to mark the saints in their collective character. How sad this scene! The blessed Lord had suffered, had been crucified, had risen from amongst the dead, and ascended on high; thence he had shed forth the Holy Ghost, the power that wrought in His disciples, so as to make them vessels of testimony in Jerusalem, both for the conversion of thousands and also for bringing home to the consciences of rulers and people that there was a power in these witnesses which was superior to all the power that was of the world; the apostles were faithful, the blessing was abundant, the proof that the Lord was working with them was manifested to the least as well as to the most spiritual (Acts iv. 31), and yet, with all this grace and privilege

before their eyes, there was a murmur amongst some as regarded the manner of serving the food. Even in early days how soon thoughts similar to those which influence man in his natural state entered into and had power over the minds of those who were the first fruits of the grace of God and the work of Christ. The attack of the enemy, as is ever the case, was directed against those who were foremost in the battle, for from verse 2 it is clear, that the apostles themselves were to be taken from their hitherto glorious testimony to Christ in heaven, in order to bestow their time and labour upon that which might serve to lessen the murmurings of saints on earth. Wisdom was given to the apostles to meet the danger and to still the murmurings, "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables," (v. 2), and again, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word," (v. 4). If in these early days prayer and the ministry of the word was needed for the work, how needful in these days that the saints should continue stedfastly in both prayer and the reading of the word!

Although occupied in the daily business engagements of this life (engagements doubtless for the most part necessary), the earnest Christian will when such engagements are fulfilled, find time for prayer and reading the word. He is thus refreshed and strengthened, and keeps fresh in his own

spirit, whilst performing that which appertains to his calling to perform ; but when the energy of his first love is tested by time, there is a danger of his gradually ceasing this habit of prayer and study of the word, and at length he may find himself passing day after day, and the Bible hardly looked at; and even where the reading and prayer with the family continues, he is aware that, though the form is the same, the freshness and power is gone. What is the remedy? Let him judge himself, and he will find he will again have recourse to prayer and the word, the former making him humbly feel his dependence from moment to moment upon God, and the latter ministering to him refreshment and strength in his own soul. Again, as regards the assemblies of the saints; sometimes after years of testimony and blessing, the work in its active form ceases, the older saints leave this world, and their places are not supplied by others, the attendance at the meetings for reading the word and prayer diminish, and the meetings themselves are at length discontinued. The light is no longer the same in the village or town. And why is this? The answer given is, "Because there are so few who attend." But this is no reason why the two or more who desire to go on with prayer and the word of God, should not habitually continue to meet together. The failure in such cases is owing to our thoughts being more occupied with the things which are seen than with the things which are not seen. Matt. xviii. 19, shows us that two are

enough for prayer, and experience has often shown the earnest Christian how much blessing can be obtained in reading the word alone or with but one other Christian.

The second occasion of this joining together of the word and prayer is in Luke x. and xi. In Luke x., whilst Martha serves, it is her sister Mary who sits at the feet of Jesus, and hears His word. When Martha complains of her sister leaving her to do all the work alone, the Lord replies, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that *good part* which shall not be taken away from her." Immediately afterwards in chap. xi. the Lord is in prayer, and the disciples also ask Him to teach them to pray, and thereupon He teaches them the prayer so well known to all: "Our Father which art in heaven, etc." This prayer commences with the desire for the glory of the Father before any mention is made of the wants of those who are the objects of His love; and thus we have another lesson as regards these things, first that to listen to the word is choosing "the good part," and secondly, that in our prayers the glory of the Father and the Son should ever take precedence of those things of which we have need whilst here.

The third and last portion of the word referred to above, is Ephesians vi. 17, 18. In Acts vi. it was the work upon earth, here it is the combat in the heavenly places. For this contest the Christian

requires the whole armour of God, first, to escape the wiles of the enemy (v. 11), and afterwards, to oppose him in the combat (v. 13). The different weapons for this warfare are enumerated in verses 14, 15, 16 and 17; all are defensive, excepting the one mentioned last, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," (v. 17). But as soon as the saint being completely equipped for defence, receives the word of God, immediately prayer is mentioned. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (v. 18.)

Thus we have the word of God and prayer set before us in close relationship together again and again in the blessed testimony which God has been pleased to give us. There are other passages where they are joined together, but I give only the number three, being the full number given by Scripture itself for testimony to the truth (2 Cor. xiii. 1). I add some remarks, however, as to verse 105 of Psalm cxix, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Sometimes wrongly quoted as a light to the feet and a lamp to the path. The difference is important, the word of God being a light for the whole course of the believer, and a lamp for each particular step that he should take. The darker the night, the more valuable the light which a wayfarer sees in the distance, and to which his steps are directed, the more valuable also the lamp which gives him guidance for each step. The

lamp warns him of dangers which are between him and the light, and it may be necessary for him to stop, or alter the course for a time, to avoid some snare or pit on the path, but as soon as the lamp shows that the direct course towards the light may again be taken, the wayfarer makes straight for the light. . . . But for the believer there is another thing needed, viz : dependence ; and though he may have the lamp and the light, yet, in a pathway full of snares, pits, and other dangers, he needs the aid and strength of Him who knows every portion of the path (Heb. iv. 16). Hence the importance of prayer. Prayer is the expression of our dependence, and the word is the weapon which overcomes the enemy (Luke iv. 1-13; 1 John ii. 14.)

PRAYING AND WORKING.

"We will give ourselves continually to Prayer and the Ministry of the Word."—Acts vi. 4.

The veil is rent. Thou now mayest enter in ;
 No flaming sword of cherub bars thy way ;
 He who, without the camp, once bore thy sin,
 Appears within the holiest *to-day*
 And intercedes for all who come by Him to pray.

His Blood is sprinkled on the mercy-seat,
 His Blood is sprinkled, too, before the throne ;
 Where'er ascends the cloud of incense sweet,
 The work of reconciliation all is done :
 He lives our great High Priest, who did for sin atone.

Head of the church, behold His glorious face ;
 His members all accepted in their Head ;
 In Him all fulness dwells of truth and grace .
 To meet His people's ever-varying need :
 Draw nigh by Him to God without one pang of dread.

Prayer is the breath of faith in God's own ear,
 Prayer is the open mouth He waits to fill ;
 Prayer is the voice our Heavenly Father hears,
 That brings down blessings from His holy hill :
 Wisdom to learn and strength to do His gracious will.

First PRAY ; then WORK. No work can e'er succeed
 That prayerless wit and will to do combine ;
 All prayerless strength is but a broken reed.—
 A withered branch that's severed from the Vine :
 No fruits, or works of such, shall heaven-recorded shine.

THE WORD PRECIOUS ABOVE EVERY- THING, OR AN OFFENCE.

MARK iv. 16, 17.

Note, how vital *root* is—secret life. *If the word has given life, only the word can satisfy it.* The rain which cometh oft upon it will be relished. And needed, too, for as there is no power of life in the heart, so there is no source of nourishment if life exists.

But if I have got divine life through the word, it will be everything to me. If I have found my

joy in God's word, persecution or affliction, because of it, will make me cling to it the closer. Persecution, in such a case, would merely come to rob me of my treasure. But if the word has never separated me from myself, by the gift of a new eternal life in Christ, then if trouble comes for the word, I shall give it up to keep myself—*my* life.

‘THIS WONDROUS MAN.’

Self-emptying obedience, subjection of a kind quite its own, is, therefore, to be seen in every stage and action of such an One. And what was that course of service in the esteem of Him to whom it was rendered? As the *born* One, the *circumcised* One, the *baptized* and *anointed* One, the *serving*, *sorrowing*, and *crucified* One, and then as the *risen* One, He has passed here on earth under the eye of God. In the secrecy of the Virgin's womb, in the solitudes of Nazareth, in the activities and services of all the cities and villages of Israel, in the deep self-sacrifice of the cross, and then in the new bloom of resurrection, has ‘this wondrous Man’ been seen and delighted in of God—perfected, untainted, recalling the Divine delight in Man more than when of old he was made in God's image, and more than annulling all the Divine repentings of old, that man had been made on the earth.

His Person lent a glory to all His course of service and obedience, which rendered it of unutter-

able value. Nor is it merely that His Person made all that service and obedience *voluntary*. There is something far more than its being thus voluntary. There is that in it which the *Person* ('My Fellow, saith the Lord of hosts') imparts—and who can weigh or measure that?

We know this full well among ourselves. I mean *in kind*. The higher in dignity—in *personal* dignity—the one who serves us is, the higher the value of the service rises in our thoughts. And justly so; because more has been engaged for us, more has been devoted to us, than when the servant was an inferior: more has the heart instinctively learnt that our advantage was indeed sought, or our wishes and desires made an object. We do not forget the *person* in the *service*. We cannot. And so in this dear mystery we are meditating on. The service and obedience of Jesus were perfect; infinitely, unmixedly worthy of all acceptance.

But beyond that—beyond the *quality* of the fruit—there was the Person who yielded it; and this, as we said, imparted a value and a glory to it, that are unutterable.

The same value rested on the services of His life which afterwards gave character to His death. It was His Person which gave all its virtues to His death or sacrifice: and it was His Person which gave its peculiar glory to all He did in His course of self-humbling obedience. And the *complacency* of God in the one was as perfect as His *judicial acceptance* of the other.

WHY SPEAK YE NOT OF JESUS?

Ye are speaking of the Sovereign,
Ye are speaking of the State,
Of the battle, of the warrior,
Of the good and of the great:

Why speak ye not of Jesus?

Ye are speaking of the sunshine,
Ye are speaking of the rain,
Of your flocks and pleasant pastures,
And of the golden grain:

Why speak ye not of Jesus?

Ye are speaking of your children,
Of kindly hearth and home,
Of loving and beloved ones
Who far away must roam;

Why speak ye not of Jesus?

He hath kingly orb and sceptre,
He hath a royal sway,
And a priceless wreath of victory
That fadeth not away:

Why speak ye not of Jesus?

He is the Sun of Righteousness,
He sends the Spirit's rain,
And lovingly He leadeth

To the pastures and the plain;
Why speak ye not of Jesus?

His love is love abiding,
Which never can decay;
Though home and heart be lonely,
He will not turn away;

Then speak to me of Jesus!

Are ye speaking by the Spirit
In glance, and thought, and word,
And by the quiet wisdom
Which cometh from the Lord?

Then speak to me of Jesus!

Now listen, O my brothers!

And listen, sisters mine,
Go on and scatter freely
Each seed of truth divine;
And ever speak of Jesus.

But go, remembering daily

To live in blessed strife;
You'll speak of Him most surely,
By likeness to His life;
Thus truly speak of Jesus.

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