

CLEMENT BAILHACHE

SERMONS: SELECTED
FROM THE PAPERS OF
THE LATE REV. CLEMENT
BAILHACHE

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Bailhache C.

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INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

The preparation of this volume for the press, whilst it has necessarily entailed considerable labour, has happily been attended with little difficulty. None of these sermons were prepared for the pulpit with any idea of publication, and only a few of them, which need not be specified, should be taken as finished compositions. Their author, however, never allowed himself to think superficially or to write carelessly. His MSS. are easily read, and are in such a state as to leave almost nothing to be done in the way of revision.

Many other sermons equal to these in power and interest might have been included, if space had served. I ought, perhaps, to say that the selection has been determined by a wish to place before the reader, in the order of a series, Mr. Bailhache's thoughts on Christian Doctrine, Faith, Duty, Privilege, Experience, and Hope. I trust that the collection, as it stands, will give as comprehensive an idea, as any posthumous publication *could* give, of the character and style of a ministry to which, under God, many souls – some in heaven, and some still on earth – owe their truest spiritual light and their best spiritual strength.

It must have been a privilege of no ordinary value to listen Sabbath after Sabbath to preaching such as this. No one could read, as I have had to read, the whole mass of sermons entrusted to me, without perceiving that he who wrote and spoke them was “a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” He was penetrated to the very centre of his being with a sense of the grandeur of the Bible as a Divine Revelation, and of the glory of the Gospel as a Divine remedy for the sin and sorrow of the world. He had his own way of developing religious truth, and of applying it to the mind, the conscience, and the heart. He preserved his individuality of thought and of method in every part of every discourse. But he was no theological speculatist. With all needful fearlessness in his thinking and reading, his constant endeavour was to ascertain “the mind of the Spirit,” and to present *that*, in its enlightening and sanctifying power, to his hearers in all their manifold spiritual conditions. He was familiar with the forms of scepticism prevalent in our time, and with the reasonings which give to them more or less of plausibility. “The riddle of the world” had its saddening aspects for him, as it has for all earnest souls. But the anxieties which spring from such sources found in his mind an all-sufficient solace in the beautiful adaptations and the splendid triumphs of the truth as it is in Jesus. He could see clearly enough that, by the Gospel, God was filling the world's darkness with light, and turning its curse into a blessing. Science might advance, and in its advance might seem to set itself against Biblical facts, and against the principles founded upon them; but he was all along calmly and intelligently assured that Science rightly so called, and Revelation rightly interpreted, so far from meeting in antagonism, must meet in cordial and comely agreement, and take their place side by side for the higher instruction of mankind. He did not preach on these matters controversially, but contented himself with the quiet announcement, on all appropriate occasions, of the results of his own studies; and those results were always on the side of an implicit faith in Evangelical Christianity. One of the most marked characteristics of his ministry was the uninterrupted and profound reverence he paid to what he believed, on honest and mature investigation, to be the Divine authority of Scripture teaching. He knew, of course, that a conscientious and enlightened criticism has its work to do upon the Book; but his comprehensive and careful reading only strengthened his conviction that such criticism, so far from invalidating its

authority, must render the nature of that authority increasingly transparent, and its basis increasingly firm. Thus he could draw forth from the Book the teaching contained in it, and could present it to the reverent faith of his congregation, without misgiving. His ministry was eminently evangelical, in the broadest and best sense of the word. It was this all-pervading quality which gave to it its special beauty and impressiveness. He wanted to be wise, and to make his people wise, *up* to what is written; above that he did not attempt to soar.

Mr. Bailhache was an able Biblical Expositor. I find amongst the papers before me, expositions of the Decalogue, the First Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the Messages to the Seven Churches, and the Epistles to the Galatians and the Philippians. These comprise eighty discourses, and many of them are so good that they ought not to remain in seclusion. Possibly some channel of publicity may yet be found for them.

The estimate in which Mr. Bailhache was held as a Christian teacher by those best fitted to judge, is fitly expressed in the following extract from the Address which was presented to him by the Congregation at Islington, on his retirement from the pastorate there in the autumn of 1870: – “During a period of six years and a half, you have ministered to us in holy things, and, as the servant of the Lord Jesus, you have sought our highest spiritual good. In all your ministerial work in our midst, you have so impressed us with the conviction of your entire devotedness to our interests, and to the exaltation and glory of Christ, that our minds have been the more easily constrained to give heed to your instructions, and we have the more deeply felt the force of your influence and your example. The thought has often occurred to us (and it has been often expressed), that if we were not becoming better Christians – more conformed to the image of Christ – our shame was the greater, considering how constantly you have been the faithful and able exponent of the mind of the Spirit, and with what freshness, variety, and power, you have been enabled to set before us things new and old out of the treasury of the Lord's word. Nor have you ever permitted us to feel that you occupied a region remote from ourselves, or that the isolation of the study and of your official character, made you self-absorbed or unsympathetic. The very contrary of this has been our happy experience. With an almost surprising power of appropriation, you have made our doubts and difficulties, our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, all your own, and, with a whole-hearted sympathy that has entered into all the experiences of the Christian life, you have, in the pulpit and in the class, and in the more private opportunities of the family and of friendship, been made eminently useful in the communication of help and strength. To not a few your ministrations have been made the savour of life unto life, who will be your crown and rejoicing one day, since through your word they have been reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. We magnify the grace of God in you, and none the less when we declare that your life and labours in our midst have placed us under lasting obligations of gratitude and love.”

I regret that I have not space for a few pages of pithy, condensed jottings extracted from the Author's “Diary,” and written by him during hours of private devotion. They would testify, in common with every other part of the volume, to the atmosphere of piety in which our beloved friend habitually lived. In social life, he was playful and jocose; and many who have thought that they knew him well, knew him almost exclusively as he was in such moods as these. He was however emphatically a man who “walked with God.” Many others knew him only in connection with his official work, and gave to him their unstinted admiration for his plodding, almost pertinacious industry. He had “a mind to work,” but he sanctified and ennobled all his work by prayer. I have often had, as, no doubt, many more have had, the privilege of his society in the lone hours of the night, when he could talk with the unreserved frankness of a confiding friend; and I never left him after such hallowed times as these without feeling that I had been drawn nearer to him, and through him, nearer to the Saviour, by the modest, holy, Christian beauty of his spirit.

Alas, that so comely and benignant a life should have closed so early! He died at forty-eight years of age. We have no right, nor have we any disposition, to repine; but we cannot refrain from mourning.

He began life well, sacrificing fair interests as a member of the legal profession in Jersey, with the Island Bar in view, and was soon preparing for the Christian ministry at Stepney College. His preaching was attractive, and at the termination of his academic course, he became the pastor of the influential church at South Parade Chapel, Leeds. Four years later, he removed to Watford, and from thence, in 1864, to Cross Street, Islington, where his ministry may be said to have approached, if it did not actually reach, its maturity. In 1870 he relinquished the pastorate for Secretarial work at the Baptist Mission House, into which he threw all the steady, quenchless enthusiasm of his nature, and upon which the blessing of God conspicuously rested. Discharging his duties with a fidelity and a skill which were as effective as they were modest, he was equally beloved by the Missionaries abroad, and by his colleagues and the constituencies at home; and he had the satisfaction of knowing that, notwithstanding many difficulties, he was contributing in various ways to the advancement of the great enterprize. The toil and anxiety entailed upon him were onerous in the extreme, and after a time it became obvious to his friends that his multifarious exertions were undermining his strength. He went to the Baptist Union meetings in Leeds in the October of 1878, when he ought to have been taking repose; and, though seriously ill, he there preached what proved to be his last Sermon, in the chapel of his first pastorate – the Sermon on “Immortality” in this volume – and read his last paper, on “Our Missionary Principles and Motives.” It is remarkable that he should thus have finished his public course in the town of his first ministerial settlement, and that he should have there spoken his last public words on behalf of that great department of Christian work which had engaged his best thoughts and his warmest sympathies for many years, and to his holy zeal for which it may be truly said that he sacrificed his life. At those Leeds meetings, he was “already within the shadow of death,” and returned home to sink gradually but surely beneath the distressing malady which took him to heaven on the 13th of the following December.

To his widowed companion and helpmeet, whose faithful affection he prized as his most precious earthly treasure – to his children and kindred, who so fondly loved him, and so deeply revere his memory – to the churches which he so wisely and so zealously served in the work of the Gospel – to the Missionary Society in the sacred interests of which he lived and died – and to the numberless personal friends to whom he was so dear, and who will ever thank God that they were permitted to enjoy his genial confidence and sympathy – these productions of his brain and heart are dedicated, with the grateful assurance that, through them, he, being dead, will yet continue to speak, and, speaking thus, will still be the helper of many in “the way everlasting.”

J. P. BARNETT.

Oxford, August, 1880.

I. *SALVATION*

“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” – Titus ii. 11-14.

Briefly stated, the consequences of the Fall were these – that man became unholy in point of character, and guilty in point of law. The first covenant God made with man was a covenant of law, and the two “trees” shadowed forth, the one the condition, the other the benefit, of such a covenant. “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil” points to obedience as the condition; and “the tree of life” points to life, in its fullest and most spiritual sense, as the benefit. Man disobeyed. He failed to fulfil the condition, and thus he lost the blessing. Henceforth, if there is to be any blessing for him, it must come on some other ground, and from some higher source. Having forfeited all hope from law, his only possible hope must come, if it come at all, from mercy.

We thus perceive that when the great salvation wrought by Christ is announced to us, we have to do at the outset with what on God’s part is

1. An act of pure sovereignty. Condemnation was the righteous award of a just law to a creature who had broken it, and who could not plead any admissible excuse for his sin. The law might, therefore, have been allowed to take its course, thus receiving honour before the whole intelligent universe. Only one Will in the universe was free to interfere; the will of the Lawgiver and Creator Himself. Interference on His part, however, could not be under the pressure of legal obligation, but must be in the exercise of a sovereign right. Hence, the key-note of the gospel is “the *Grace* of God.”

2. An act of boundless love. It is obvious that salvation cannot have proceeded from any other motive in the Divine Mind. “God *so loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The Bible has no other solution of the origin of salvation to offer than this.

Now, that which proceeds from sovereignty and love on the part of God must absolutely preclude all claim or thought of merit on the part of man. Merit leaves no room, no occasion for grace. Grace begins where merit ends, if grace be given at all. – What, then, *is* the “great salvation”?

Man, being unholy and guilty, needed a salvation which would include his justification or his forgiveness, and one which would culminate in his sanctification by the restoration to him of his lost spiritual power. In other words, he needed a deliverance from the curse of sin, and also from sin itself.

This deliverance, man cannot find within his own nature. He cannot save himself from the curse of sin; for inasmuch as the law righteously demanded a perfect and constant obedience, he could never blot out the guilt of former sins by acts of obedience at a later period of life. Moreover, such later acts of a perfect obedience are impossible to him, for holiness does not proceed from a sinful nature. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Men do not “gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles.” Man is as depraved and as weak as he is guilty. Self-salvation is impossible; salvation is of the Lord alone. The gospel is the announcement of the fact that God saves, and of the method in which the great work of salvation is done by Him.

- I. The Word of God, both in the Old and in the New Testament, proclaims a dispensation of Divine mercy. So unexpected and so cheering is this proclamation that it has given the gospel the name it bears. It is emphatically “good news” – good news from God to man. This good news announces that the first deliverance which man requires is provided for. God remits the penalty of sin. But how?

He does this in such a way that, so far from weakening law, or invalidating the condemnation of sin, He shows more clearly than ever, how holy is the law, and how just the condemnation. Hence, though this forgiveness is an act of pure mercy, it is mercy exercised in a righteous way through the wonderful sacrifice of Christ. This was the meaning of the promise that accompanied the curse; and so clear was it that it was apprehended in the first sacrifices men ever offered. The Jewish sacrifices shadowed it forth. The Scriptures teach this method of Divine forgiveness in the plainest terms. I quote two or three passages in proof: Rom. iii. 23-26; John i. 29; 1 John ii. 1, 2; 1 Peter ii. 24; Isaiah liii. 4-6.

This is Scripture, and we must not dare to trifle with it. These declarations can have but one meaning. Christ has suffered in our stead the penalty we had all deserved, that we might receive, for His sake, that eternal life and blessedness which *He only had deserved*. On this point all the types and teachings of both Testaments speak with one voice.

There are, no doubt, in this substitution of the innocent for the guilty, some difficulties for human reason. But *we* have to do with the Bible. It meets conscience; and reason must bend in submission before a grace the deeper meaning of which it does not see. Observe, however, that according to the Scripture representation, the substitution was divinely appointed, and the Substitute Himself was a willing victim. We accept the doctrine, (1) Partly in virtue of human need. Conscience points to the necessity of a satisfaction. (2) Partly in virtue of the peace and the joy to which faith in the doctrine gives rise. – “Scripture always lays stress upon the Saviour’s humiliation and bitter sufferings. We are not said to be redeemed by His incarnation, by His birth, by His miracles, by His doctrine, not even by His agony in the garden, though all these were necessary to the ransom; but by His blood.” On this ground of the Atonement, the first part of salvation – forgiveness – is secured.

II. Man needs also to be redeemed from sin. This need, like the former, he is unable to meet of himself, but God meets it on his behalf. How? By putting into the heart a fertile germ of holiness.

Freedom from condemnation and regeneration are indissolubly connected together in God’s idea of salvation, and He achieves both by the work of Christ His Son. This redemption from the love, and consequently from the power of sin, is accomplished by Him on a principle which is divinely simple and efficacious; a principle which lies at the root of the theory of evangelical sanctification. This principle is the love which He excites *in* us by the manifestation of His own love *to* us. Thus the Apostle John writes: “Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him” (1 John iii. 6). “He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love” (1 John iv. 8). To love God, and, under the constraining influence of love, to serve Him, we have need to know and to realise how great is the love of God to us.

Now this Divine love has been revealed to the world through the medium of that same Saviour, who by His sacrificial death has opened up the way for our pardon and our restoration to the Divine favour. The Son of God came into the world to reveal the heart of the Father. What greater gift could God have bestowed than that of His Divine Son? What greater proof of love could He have exhibited than that which this greatest of all possible gifts presents? “God *so* loved.” And Christ has perfectly performed His mission. His whole ministry was a declaration of the Divine love. Of that love His death on the cross was the sublimest expression. We learn therefrom not only that God manifests to us His mercy, *but also at what cost*. Our debt must be paid; and as we are bankrupt, He pays it on our behalf. And who is our Substitute? Not a man, not an angel, not any creature; but the Divine Son, “by whom God made the worlds and upholds them by the word of His power,” “who is the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person” – it was *He* who “by Himself purged our sins.” Such is the love of God. We cannot fathom it, for it is Divine; but in proportion as we are enabled to “know” it, we say “We love Him because He first loved us;” “We are bought with a price: we are not our own.” And we say our devout “Amen!” when the chiefest Apostle of mercy says to us: “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

This Divine love, however, wonderful as it is, is offered to unsusceptible hearts. Hence the necessity – hence also the gift – of the Holy Spirit, through whom God strives with man. The Holy Spirit is the gift of Christ; and He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto us.

See, then, the completeness of the Divine plan of salvation. To undeserving hearts God offers His love in Christ; to unsusceptible hearts He explains and commends it by His Spirit.

III. The only remaining question is as to our own part in the great plan of mercy. Because we are intelligent and moral creatures, God does not save us without our own concurrence. To every one who desires to receive this twofold gift – the gift of pardon and of sanctification – a certain disposition is necessary. That disposition is in the Scriptures called “faith.” Faith is the divinely-appointed condition of salvation. The terms are simple, but they are indispensable. Scripture, in every part, recognises and imposes them. From the earliest times they have been complied with, as in the sacrifices of Abel, Noah, and Abraham. It was this same principle of faith that gave validity to the worship under the Mosaic dispensation. So the Lord Jesus Christ, who healed men’s physical diseases as types of the diseases of the soul, always demanded faith as the condition of His working. As it was with Christ, so it was with His apostles. Thus Paul said to the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” All this shows to us that whilst, on the one hand, we are saved by grace; on the other, we have no participation in the grace which saves, except by the exercise of our own faith in the Saviour.

What is this faith? It may be considered in its principle, and in its application.

In its principle, it is a general conviction that the Bible is the Word of God, and that what He says therein should receive our assent; or, in other words, should be accepted by us as *true*. In its application, it is the belief of God’s Word as it respects *ourselves*. It is this which Paul commends to the Philippian jailer. When a man, under the burden of his sin, says, “I am lost; I cannot save myself; save me, Lord!” we have an illustration of this applied faith – a sense of personal misery, a sense of personal helplessness, a sense of a Saviour willing to save him personally, and a direct appeal to that Saviour for salvation. From the moment of such a prayer, there is not a single promise of Scripture that such a man may not make his own. A promised pardon, a promised Spirit, a promised heaven – all are his! The essence of the faith is in the conviction which expresses itself thus: “Jesus Christ is not only able and willing to be the Saviour of all men, but He is my Saviour.” Such a faith brings Christ and the soul together in precisely those relations in which He is the Saviour, and in which the soul is saved.

But how is this faith obtained? Must not God give it? Yes. So Paul, writing to the Philippians, tells them it was “given” to them “to believe in Christ.” Must we, then, listlessly wait until it comes to us? No. Paul again says to these same Philippians, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” The reconciliation of these two truths into one theory may be difficult, but in practice it is easy enough. *We recognise them both when we ask for faith.* For to ask is to recognise our need of that for which we ask; it is also to recognise the fact that we do not possess it of ourselves; and it is also to seek and to act. Ask, then, for faith, and God will say: “Wilt thou be made whole?” Will you – not as a vague desire, but as the most earnest determination of your heart and will? Ask for faith; God will grant it. Ask largely; you cannot ask too much. And even if you sigh over the weakness of desire, press the old and never-failing prayer: “Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief.”

Faith saves, and grace saves. This is scarcely a contradiction in terms, and certainly it is no contradiction in principle. Faith is the instrument; grace is the primary and efficacious power. Faith is the channel; grace is the stream. Faith touches the hem of the Saviour’s garment; grace is the virtue that passes forth from Him in response to the touch. Christ reaches down from heaven; faith reaches up from earth; each hand grasps the other – the one in weakness, the other in power – and salvation is in the grasp. Take – oh, take that pierced hand! Amen.

II. *PROPIATION*

“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” – 1 John ii. 2.

It is easier to attack than to defend. An objection may be stated in a single sentence which shall require many pages for an adequate reply. Those who reject Christianity generally adopt this method, but I know not why they should be allowed to monopolise it. Why should not believers, instead of simply proving that there is a God, and that the Bible is His Word, insist upon positive proof from their opponents that there is no God, and that the Bible is nothing more than a human book? Why should we not impose upon them the more difficult task of defending their position, by attacking it with all earnestness at every point? For Christian defence, we have need to be both really and consciously very strong in the truth. On the other hand, to be an unbeliever, a man can do without either knowledge or goodness. He has only to ply you with his eternal “*Why?*” *Why*, because the universe exists, must it have ever been *created*? *Why* may it not have always existed? *Why* are we bound to accept the teaching of the Bible? *Why* was it necessary that Christ should suffer to expiate our sins? *Why* did Christ come so late in the history of the world? *Why* are there no miracles now? *Why? Why? Why?*—

As Christians, however, we take the position open to us, whether of attack or defence. We do so because the salvation of our adversaries is dear to us, and because we are so sure that the course they adopt injures, not ourselves, but them. We bring to them a priceless treasure – salvation through, and from, the crucified Christ. If they hinder us, the loss is theirs.

On the present occasion we deal with one of the questions often propounded: “Why was it necessary that Christ should die for our sins, in order that we may be saved?” or, “How can the sufferings of the innocent atone for the sins of the guilty?”

To make our answer more clear, we begin by saying: “We do not know.” Why should we insist – why should any one insist – upon understanding the “*why*” of this arrangement? Why should not every one be content to know the *fact*? If the reason of the fact were obvious, we should, of course, gladly accept it; but if it be hidden from us, whilst the fact itself is disclosed, why should we complain? We cannot fully understand the Divine purposes. We can only guess. Even angels study, and wonder, and adore, but do not fully know. Let it be observed that the real question here is not exactly as unbelievers put it. Thus: I do not know how the rays of the sun enlighten my eyes, nor how my enlightened eyes transmit ideas to my mind. Does it follow that the sun does not enlighten, or that my mind does not receive impressions through what I see? The imperative question is, not, “How is the thing done?” but, “*Is it done?*” – not as to the *reason* of the fact, but the *reality* of it. So in the matter before us. It is surely enough for us to show that redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, like the sun, comes from God, and that it gives light, life, and fruit. This being done, nothing more can be reasonably asked.

To know whether this doctrine of redemption is God’s truth, it is sufficient to know whether the Bible is God’s Word. And here we ask, What will you do with ancient prophecies and their fulfilment? – with confirmations of Bible history which are continually accumulating? – with the conspicuous excellence of the moral teaching and influence which the Bible supplies? – with the sublimity of Christ’s character? – with the miracles He wrought? – with the marvellous effects of Christianity upon the world, notwithstanding the strongest inducements, in human prejudice, to its rejection? Settle such questions as these according to the admitted laws of evidence, and then there will be no reason to contend as to the “*why*” and the “*how*” of redemption.

Such, however, is not the method which the unbeliever pursues. He turns away from the Record as a source of instruction. It is hard to convince a man who begins by closing his ears with his own pride. To whatever study a man addresses himself, he will never advance in it in *spite* of himself.

His progress will be proportioned, among other things, to the amount of honest effort he makes to learn. That is, he must feel the fact and the disadvantage of his own ignorance. Who could study mathematics by beginning at the outset to dispute its axioms? Just so with Christian truth. Put aside prejudice and pride. Do not take it for granted that you have light enough in your mind, at starting, to pronounce upon the truth or the falsity, the reasonableness or the unreasonableness, of the doctrine of salvation through the cross of Christ. Listen attentively. Look for more light, and receive it when it comes. We do not say: “Believe before you have read;” but we do say: “Don’t contradict before you have read.”

I have already said that we are not obliged to *explain* the philosophy of the redemption which is taught in the Scriptures. Let me now say that that redemption is itself the best solution of the great difficulty which is felt by the believer and the unbeliever alike. It is this: Conscience tells us that God is just; the heart tells us that He is good; – how then can a God whose justice and goodness are equal, *i. e.*, both of them infinite, escape from the position in which sinners have placed Him? I put the difficulty in this bold form in order that it may be the more distinctly apprehended. We have sinned, and a just God must punish. We sigh after happiness, and a good God – a God who is infinitely kind – may be expected to bestow happiness upon us. But how can God deal with us in both these ways at one and the same time?

We know instinctively, of course, that there is no real dilemma to God Himself; but those who reject the atonement of Christ are bound to deal with what presents itself as an inevitable dilemma to *them*.

The unbeliever says: “God is too good to punish.” What then becomes of His justice, since conscience testifies that we are sinners, that sin deserves punishment, that vice and virtue are not one, that God cannot deal in the same way with both without encouraging the vice which needs to be suppressed, and discouraging the virtue which needs to be upheld? Take away the fear of punishment under the pretext that God is good, and you deprive conscience of its meaning and its power.

Shall it be said, then, that God will punish every transgressor? Have the numberless generations which have been upon the earth gone to an inevitable doom? This conclusion is as hard to admit as the other. The instincts of the heart are against it.

No; men do not accept either conclusion to the exclusion of the other. They say God will adopt a mean between His justice and His mercy so as to bring them into harmony. But how? Here is the crucial difficulty. Is it to be solved by the principle of mutual concession?

Let me remind you, again, that the difficulty is not created by God, but by man. In Him, justice and mercy are really one: it is only to us that they are seen to be two; and it is our sin which disturbs and confuses our conception of their union with each other. He might indeed annihilate us, and so leave us no opportunity to complain. But our whole moral and emotional nature repels with horror the thought of such a termination to our sin, as being unworthy of the God who has to govern us. No! when we reflect seriously upon the question, we cannot resist the feeling that God must have some plan of rescuing us from the doom we merit which shall give equal expression to His justice and His mercy.

Men in general, alas! hold justice cheaply, and, lowering the Divine standard of human character, they easily persuade themselves that they may enter heaven through the breach they have made in the Divine attributes. They think that God is indulgent, and will forgive, forgetting that indulgence is weakness. God *will* forgive, but His forgiveness must stand on safe ground. It cannot apply indiscriminately to all men. Men think they have said all when they have said, “God will forgive.” Such a forgiveness would aim a blow at His justice. No matter; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness is without motive – an effect without a cause. No matter; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness has its root in sentiment, not in reason. It matters not; He will forgive! Such a forgiveness imposes no obligation on the forgiver, and encourages sin. Never mind; He will forgive!

Surely this is the spiritual blindness which comes from the perversion of the conscience and the heart.

Some say, "God forgives; but the condition is that we turn away from sin and live a life of holiness." There are many answers to this; but I will only ask those who thus speak, "Are you now living in such a way as to have in your present holiness, and on the ground of it, the assurance of your pardon?" That is a question which conscience may be safely left to answer.

At this point Christianity comes professing to reveal to us the Divine plan of salvation. It tells us that God forgives for the sake of Jesus Christ, who is Himself, in His sacrifice, the gift of the Father's love. A debt has been contracted; the insolvent debtor presents in payment the money which a friend has freely contributed for the purpose; the creditor is satisfied. In this way goodness and justice are reconciled. It is Divine love which meets the claim of the Divine Righteousness. The redeemed soul, redeemed by the blood of Christ, is led to obedience by a love which responds to the love which has redeemed him. This last result none can dispute. Does it spring from error? No; it is too pure, too blessed for that. The redemption that produces it is a true principle founded in the nature of God – sublime in its working – like sap, inexplicable, but justified by the beauty of its foliage and the goodness of its fruits.

Let us look a little more closely into this principle of Propitiation. Suppose we were reading the gospel for the first time, free from prejudice, and from the deadening influence of habit; we should be struck with the prominence everywhere given in it to the death of Christ. Ask a Christian child, or an aged saint, "What did Christ come on earth to do?" The answer from each will be, "He came to die for us." The child finds his answer on the very surface of Scripture; the aged man finds it in that same Scripture when he has studied it to its very depths. The one quickly learns that this death of Christ was often predicted by Christ Himself, that it holds the most prominent place in each of the four Gospels, that it is constantly referred to in the Epistles, that it is the text of all the preaching of the apostles, and that it is symbolised in both the sacraments, for "we are buried by baptism into His death," and whenever in the Supper we partake of the bread and wine, we "show forth His death till He come." The mature Christian, in his turn, learns to look upon the death of Christ as the centre and the soul of all the great acts of the great work of our redemption, which seem, whether they preceded or followed, to have been done in direct view of it, and in indissoluble connection with it. The incarnation was designed to open up the way for it. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." The resurrection was intended to attest its meaning and its value. For Christ was "delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The object of the ascension was to secure the precious fruits of it. "For He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The remarkable thing in all this is that in the gospel, the aim of which is to reveal eternal life, the Prince of Life is always offered to us as dying upon the cross. *Death in order to life!* What can be the meaning and the bearing of a death which God has placed in so exalted a position? We can only get our answer from Scripture; and we can only get it from Scripture as we read in the simple, unsophisticated humility of mind and heart of which Christ Himself and His apostles give us the example.

"*Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins.*" We have sinned against God, and our sins have been so many *offences* to Him; offences which must be dealt with. Christ averts the penalty from us by taking it to Himself. The Holy One consents to suffer for the sake of the guilty. The apostle who styles Christ as the "Propitiation" has said, in a sentence immediately preceding: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Almost numberless passages teach the same doctrine. If we were engaged in an exercise of Biblical criticism, we should have to discuss each of these passages minutely in its turn. But the general idea we gather from them is definite and clear. A ransom paid,

our sins borne, the wrath of God appeased, an offered sacrifice – all these contain one idea: Jesus Christ freeing us from the desert of our sin by Himself satisfying Divine Justice on our behalf.

Hence the two great facts of our religious history. We were under the condemnation of a holy law. He who was “the Life,” *for our sake* endured death that we who deserved death might have life *for His sake*. And God is “faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”

To a simple-hearted Christian all this is clear. Men may be scandalised at the exchange (as they term it) between justice and sin, between life and death; but Paul knows how to state the matter: “God hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Men may be indignant (as they often profess to be) at the thought of the innocent suffering for the guilty; but Peter does not hesitate to say: “Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

What is it, moreover, that *connects* the teaching of the Old Testament with that of the New? The doctrine of sacrifice, as thus explained, is not simply *attested* by Scripture: it is the *soul* of it; its bond of unity. The death of Christ is *the* sacrifice “once offered in the end of the world,” in which all the sacrifices of the Old Testament find their common destination; to which they correspond, as the figure to the reality. The cross is the end, the key, the meaning, the value of all of them. Without this we cannot understand them. They were types: the cross is the antitype. What they *represented*, the cross *achieved*. The cross procured the pardon which they proclaimed. And so the cross has always been the symbol of the Christian Church. The Jews understood it, and were scandalised; the Greeks understood it, and sneered.

And now what ends does this sacrifice of Propitiation serve? Mainly two, which are inclusive of all the rest.

I. It is the fullest revelation of the Divine character. Leaving aside all questions of abstract and technical theology, we observe that it sets before us, in one great act, the righteousness and the mercy of God. The cross proclaims the pardon for which infinite love solicits. *The heart of God yields to itself*. But how can this be? It is because the pardon solicited by love is obtained by a sacrifice which equally exhibits God’s righteousness. If we seek the universe through for the greatest proof we can have of the love of God to the sinner, we shall find it in the cross; for we there see not only that God forgives, but also that He is *so resolved* to forgive that, rather than that the sinner shall be left to perish, the stroke of the offended law shall fall on the willing head and heart and life of “His only begotten and well-beloved Son.” On the other hand, if we want to know something of God’s abhorrence of sin, we shall find it in the cross; for we there see that, so impossible is it for Him to allow it to go unpunished, that He secures for it a Divine expiation in the willing sacrifice of His Divine Son. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Most persons can see in the cross a demonstration of Divine love; in the light of Bible teaching, they may also see in it a demonstration of Divine justice more marked and telling than in a closed Eden, in the waters of the Deluge, in the overthrow of the cities of the plain, in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in the punishment of the wicked in eternity.

II. If men are to be saved at all, they must be saved *to holiness*; they must be sanctified as well as forgiven. The result cannot be otherwise for those who truly believe in the sacrifice of Christ as thus explained. Holiness and love, the two great elements of the character of God; these are expressed in the cross, and they must be reproduced in the character of those for whom the cross does its appointed work. How can we believe, as the cross teaches us to believe, in God’s hatred to sin, without feeling that we must hate it also, and, hating it, must forsake it? And how can we believe, as the cross teaches us to believe, in the love which has obtained our salvation, without giving our own love as a genuine, though feeble, return? Let a man, struggling with the sins which he condemns, but which he cannot shake off, learn that the Son of God came into the world to die for him; and he will find in that revelation a strength for conflict with sin which he never had before. Speak to him of the beauty and dignity of the law, of the righteousness of God’s claims, of the penalties of transgression; and, though

his conscience may assent to all you say, his heart will not yield. Can he refuse when he sees Jesus on the cross, and knows what, for him, that spectacle means? The cross is an argument presented to his reason, his conscience, his will, his heart, his whole being; nay, it is more than an argument, it is an appeal; and the response must be: "We love Him because He first loved us." "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."

And now it only remains to be said that this Propitiation is needed by all, that it is sufficient for all, and that it is free to all. Let all receive it.

III.

FAITH IN THE SAVIOUR

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” – Acts xvi. 31.

A startling providential dispensation was one of the means by which the spiritual nature of this jailer was roused. Only one, effectual so far as it went, but not complete in itself. It was preparatory and auxiliary to the action of the Holy Spirit, the instrument by which the Spirit did His special work of convincing the man of sin. Thus it is that outward events and circumstances are made to co-operate with God in the conversion of a soul. The way in which the Spirit works is a mystery, akin to that in which one human mind acts upon another. But the *means* of this spiritual action is no mystery. We use speech, external appliances of various kinds; the Divine Spirit does the same. In the case of the jailer he employed the earthquake together with the calm faith, the perfect serenity, of the apostles at a moment which was to himself a moment of terror, and which would also have been a moment of terror to them had they not been the Christians they were. A great joy; a great sorrow, commotion, loss, alarm, the apparent nearness of death; daily mercies, the “means of grace,” the Word of God, the ministry of the gospel – through all these the Spirit works. They are powerless in themselves; they can only become mighty as used by Him.

It is obvious at a glance that this man’s spiritual nature *was* roused. Spiritual realities burst in upon his mind in all their awful momentousness. His whole soul was suddenly concentrated in a sense of his ruin. Hence the short, sharp question – the question which sprung from an inward agony – “What must I do to be saved?” That question must be answered, if it can be – answered on the instant! There is a tremendous depth of meaning in it. It is as though a lightning flash had in a moment illuminated the man’s whole spiritual condition, bringing out every feature of it into startling distinctness. All the fears and the aspirations of his immortal being are here; his past life with all its sin, his remorse, his dread of judgment, his terror in the presence of God – all are here; he feels himself to be a lost man. How can he be saved?

In his question there is no hint of self-righteousness or of self-confidence, or even of the remotest hope in himself. He does not ask, like “the young man in the gospel,” “What good thing must I do that I may inherit eternal life?” The question of the young man is leisurely; the question of the jailer is hurried, under the feeling that there is not a moment to be lost. Helpless and hopeless, he wants but one thing, and that is to be “saved.” Of course his “What must I do?” indicates that he is willing and ready to comply with any possible terms; yet it is not a question of conscious strength – it is rather the question of despair.

Such a question shows that a great point – an essential point – had been gained. The gospel is a sovereign remedy designed and constructed to meet a desperate case. Not only do they that are whole stand in no need of a physician, but wherever there lingers an idea of spiritual strength, or a dream, of self-righteousness, the condition necessary for the reception of such a salvation as that which the gospel proclaims is entirely wanting. Christ is an exclusive Saviour, and “looking to Him” is an exclusive hope.

“What must I do to be saved?” Clear, quick, unhesitating, comes the answer of Paul: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Both the question and the answer strike the point – the centre of the soul’s supreme need, and the centre of the gospel message.

This answer of Paul’s is not simply his own. It is the answer of God to every man who wants to know how he can be saved. It is the answer of the whole Bible. It is the pre-eminently, distinctively Christian answer. All revelation has one great object – Jesus Christ, promised, announced, expected, seen by faith beforehand; then Jesus Christ actually come, His life told, His mission developed, Himself presented to the world as the one and only Name whereby men can be saved; – always Jesus

Christ. Patriarchs and prophets, Moses and David, Christ Himself, His apostles and disciples after Him, the whole Church – all unite to say to the awakened soul: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

But this answer, though not Paul’s alone, is nevertheless his in such a sense that an immense weight belongs to it. What does Paul himself understand by it? We know something of his experience, and that will tell us the meaning of these words as spoken by him. He spake that which he knew, and testified that which he had seen. He felt that he could offer to the spiritual need of every man that which had so fully met his own.

Read Paul’s life. Read his epistles. You see at a glance what Christ was to *him*— a Redeemer. And what to him was the very centre of Christian truth? “Christ crucified.” He had been so roused as to see clearly the relation between himself and God. The true sense of sin had been awakened within him. No man had made more strenuous efforts to obtain justification by the works of the law than he had; and no man had more deeply realised his helplessness. How does he describe the struggle? “I had not known sin, but by the law... When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died... Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me... That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) there dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do... O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

“I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

We all know how God arrested, overcame, and subdued him, by showing him in that same “Jesus Christ our Lord” the mystery of the Divine love. God taught him that he must no longer expect righteousness and eternal life to come from his own works, to be wrought by his own strength. Eternal life is the free gift of God. Look to the cross! Listen to the Spirit! Learn in “the folly of the cross” to adore the wisdom and the power of God – a forgiveness that glorifies justice as well as mercy; a forgiveness that kills sin as well as removes its penalty; a salvation that harmonises man with God as well as forgives him; a salvation that implies a perfect holiness, the motive being love, and the effectual power being that of the Holy Spirit. Deep as his want had been, it was now completely met by the revelation of the Saviour. To that revelation his response was prompt, complete, irrevocable. He says that it was as though scales had fallen from his eyes, this disclosure of the Divine plan of salvation to his mind. It was full of light, full of mercy. The manifestation of the risen Christ was the instrumentality which enlightened him. He saw straightway the nature and purpose of “the cross,” the certainty of justification through faith, the believer’s completeness in Christ. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” The natural result of these convictions in the apostle’s own case was his consecration to the Saviour. Bought with a great price, he felt that he was no longer his own, but that, in life and death, he belonged to Him who had given Himself for him. In Christ he had found peace for his conscience, light for his mind, love for his heart. And what was the secret of it all? Simply “believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This, then, was Paul’s gospel to the jailer, and there is no other gospel to-day. We know that sin incurs condemnation – the displeasure of God. The universal conscience gives testimony to that fact.

We know that man cannot, in his own person, satisfy the claims of the Divine law. But there comes down to us the old truth that Christ is “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” He “finished the work which His Father gave Him to do,” and the whole benefit of that work is given to faith.

It is in the name of this perfect system of truth – which, observe, is a perfect series of facts – consecrated by the trial of ages, by the experience of an incalculable number of souls in all times, places, and conditions, and by the world’s own verdict on Christian character wherever it is found – that we speak to you with a confidence equal to that with which Paul spoke to the jailer. And let me add that we so speak because we have made the experience of it our own, and that it is as sure in our hearts as our very existence. Yes, a perfect series of facts as well as a perfect system of truth. Men sometimes object that we put before them hard and abstruse systems of theology, and that we condemn them for not believing things which they cannot understand. There is no need to do anything of the kind, and when it is done a grave mistake is committed. I preach no “abstractions” to you when I urge you to faith in Christ for salvation. I deal with facts and their deductions – deductions which are as inevitable as the facts are real – deductions which follow the facts as the shadow follows the substance. Deny the deductions? You must first deny the facts. The jailer, poor man, was no theologian, and Paul did not perplex and mystify him. He placed the person of Christ immediately before the soul. Faith in a person; that is *first* – not faith in a creed. A creed will follow; for there cannot be faith without thought, and thought always strives to formulate itself. But, blessed be God, millions have been saved with next to no “theology.” Having Christ for its object, and salvation for its aim, faith reposes in the facts of His mission and work; but as He is a living Christ, it emphatically reposes in *Him*. This is the commonest form of the believer’s experience. In our social life we know what faith in a person means. We confide in known goodness; and therefore we believe words, promises, acts, and we do so because we trust *him* from whom they come. This is the last and most perfect stage of the faith men place in one another, and it includes a confidence which is not impaired by what, in the person who is trusted, seems startling, unexpected, mysterious, contradictory, inexplicable. Just so with the gospel. It meets our needs by telling us what God has done for us in Christ. We believe the record which fits our want, and we put our trust in the Saviour. Confiding in Him, we can accept such mysteries as we may discern in His dealings, and faith in a holy and loving Saviour is henceforth the true rest of life, and the true foretaste of heaven.

Such being the nature of faith unto salvation, we see how it contrasts (1) with indifference. Indifference is commonly supposed to be a mental state, in which a man neither believes nor disbelieves; whereas it is really a state of spiritual deadness. (2) With mere opinion, which is nothing more than an inclination in favour of, or against, a thing, and not an earnest practical conviction about it. (3) With presumption, which is a prepossession with no sufficient basis of evidence.

It may, perhaps, be said that, in this representation of faith in Christ as the one all-comprehensive condition of salvation, we have left no room for penitence, holiness, devotedness. But think again for a moment. Were not all these in this man? Did not his conduct to the apostles show, so far as the opportunity was given him, the fruits of faith in the various ways of grateful love? Faith is the starting-point; but when we are told to “believe in Christ” an appeal is made to us in response to which there is a whole career to be filled up. Faith, like everything else in life, has its beginning, and its development is progressive. It means thought, and thought means contrition, gratitude, and a glad and loving obedience. It requires time, but we have eternity before us. In some, the result of years is accomplished in a day. Simple-hearted men generally receive by a sort of intuition what others take a long period to elaborate. The one thing essential to all is that they be faithful to the light and the love they have received.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” We do not call you to a learned and critical study. The life and teachings and redeeming work of the Saviour are put before us with a simplicity that brings them within the reach of a peasant or a child. Attention, earnestness, sincerity, prayer, will do all

that is needed. Seek the faith that will make Christ yours. Do you not already, under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit, feel your need of Him? Oh, whilst mercy calls, and the throne of grace is accessible, pray and yield!

Ye that in these courts are found
Listening to the joyful sound,
Lost and helpless as you are,
Sons of sorrow, sin, and care,
Glorify the King of kings!
Take the peace the gospel brings.

Turn to Christ with longing eyes,
View His bleeding sacrifice.
See through Him your sins forgiven,
Pardon, holiness, and heaven.
Glorify the King of kings!
Take the peace the gospel brings.

IV. ***SINCERITY OF HEART NECESSARY TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL***

“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” – John vii. 17.

The Jews, marvelling at Christ’s teaching in the temple, exclaim, “How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” They do not mean to ask whether Christ is competent to teach, for they *see* that he is so clearly enough; but they thus express their astonishment at the authority and the ability with which He deals with the Scriptures, considering that He has never received the instruction of the Schools.

In His reply, Jesus fully enters into the thought of His questioners. That thought is this: “In order to teach, one must have been taught.” He intimates to them that He meets this requirement. As though He had said: “It is true that I have not been in the schools of your Rabbis, but I have been taught in a better school than theirs. He who has given me my mission, has also given me my message. So that my teaching does not proceed originally from myself. I have only to lay hold of my Father’s thought, and then to reproduce it faithfully to you.”

But how is this to be verified? The answer to this question is found in the text: “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” Christ’s teaching, in its highest aim, is a Divine method of sanctification. Whoever, then, earnestly seeks to “do the will of God” – that is, to be holy – will soon recognise the Divine adaptability of the gospel to its end. The meaning of the verse is the same as in chapter v. and verse 46: “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me;” and also in chapter iii. and verse 21: “He that doeth truth cometh to the light.” On the one hand, the holy sublimity of the gospel flashes irresistibly on the soul that longs for holiness; on the other hand, the soul, in its inability to attain its ideal, seeks peace and strength at the hands of the Saviour. Faith, therefore, is not the result of a logical operation; it appears to the soul as the best means of realising the satisfaction of its deepest want – holiness. The word “will” points to the loftiness of the aspiration and to the earnestness of the effort.

Our Lord’s words, then, mean this, that if any man be supremely anxious to do the right, he will find in Scripture sufficient proof of its divinity, and, as a consequence, of its adaptability to the soul’s deepest need. Christ was dealing with men who were disposed to cavil about His authority and about the truth which He taught. These men were acquainted with the Mosaic law, which enjoined not only purity of life, but also purity of heart. It was a law therefore which, if honestly studied, must lead to those convictions which would enable them to see the necessity and the wisdom of the gospel which Christ was preaching. And so He lays down the principle that sincerity in regard to the *known* law of God determines the real position of the mind *towards* God, and prepares it for deeper and still deeper penetration into all necessary spiritual knowledge. On the contrary, he who is insincere, and does not practise what he knows, but endeavours to evade it by sophistry, blinds himself until even the brightest light can be of no service to him. This was the case with the majority of the Pharisees with whom Christ had to do. This passage is therefore of the highest practical importance, since it teaches that man’s capacity for spiritual knowledge is dependent upon his inclination. If the will be opposed to God, the understanding becomes clouded; if it be inclined towards God, the ability to know increases. That the inclination is the door to the intellect is a fact universally recognised. It is expressed in the proverb: “None are so blind as those who will not see.” In every department of learning, a man, in order to attainment, *must make up his mind to it*. For good or ill, the will is a quickening power.

It would be interesting and instructive to discuss this question in connection with religious error, both in and out of the professing Christian Church. My present purpose, however, is a more

simple and elementary one – namely, to indicate the bearing of the question upon man’s reception of the gospel for his salvation. I say, then, that honesty, sincerity, integrity of heart is the required and indispensable condition for perceiving and feeling the divinity and suitability of the gospel; and that even an ignorant man, if he be but sincere, and devoutly anxious to know the will of God, that he may do it, may discover in the Bible those traces of moral beauty and of Divine truth which a learned but unconscientious man will almost certainly fail to find therein. Sincerity of heart – this is the wisest, most natural, and most comprehensive means of access to the inner spirit of that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. A few remarks in proof of this.

I. Suppose the gospel to be so manifestly filled with the proofs of its divinity that all hearts, even the most obdurate, could not refrain from yielding to its claims. Suppose it to be *self-evidencing*, in the same way and to the same extent, as the sun is self-evidencing by its shining, or fire by its known power to burn. In this case, no moral or intellectual disposition would be necessary in order to its reception. It could no more be denied than the light of the sun, or the consuming power of fire. But what, with such a gospel, would be man’s position? Forced to assent to an imperious obligation, he would be, in relation to the gospel and to the salvation provided in it, nothing more than a machine, acting under the impulse of an irresistible necessity. There could, under these circumstances, be neither praise nor blame attached to him. He could no longer be accounted a moral agent – could not be regarded as free, inasmuch as it would not be possible for him to choose error or evil without obvious and startling folly. He could no longer be responsible, because he would have to yield to a necessity. There could be no free thought in his creed, no free love in his heart, and consequently no virtue in his life.

II. Since, then, some disposition is necessary in order to a man’s coming to the gospel, suppose that God had imposed an *intellectual* qualification – such, for instance, as is required for the learning of art or of science, or for the understanding of any difficult problem in philosophy. Observe what in that case must follow. If, to discover the truth necessary to salvation, a large measure of natural genius or of accumulated knowledge be required, we must consider as excluded from salvation the immense majority of the human race! Men cannot in any large numbers abandon the common, legitimate, indispensable pursuits of secular life in order to become students of theology. Such an arrangement would shut out from heaven all who have neither time, nor fortune, nor energy of intellect sufficient to enable them to follow our profounder investigations. The poor man for want of means, the sick man for want of strength, the old man for want of time – all, being unable to explore and to make their own the prescribed science, would be lost! The fearfulness of the consequences shows how false the supposed principle must be.

III. Take another supposition; viz., that, in order to a man’s being convinced of the truth of the gospel, he should be required to purify his heart from all evil, so that with a clear moral vision he should be able to see the beauties which have been obscured by his sinful passions. Doubtless this means of appreciating Christianity would be efficacious, were it practicable. But it is not so; for evidently the *knowledge* of the truth must precede the *practice* of the truth. A creature without wings might as well be told that he should go to heaven on condition that he would fly thither!

IV. See now, not what *our* plans might be, but what *God’s* plan is. He does not influence man so as to degrade him into a machine: He simply and uniformly demands the worship and the service of willing hearts. He does not require of him the genius or the learning which is the privilege of only a few. He does not ask in advance the goodness which is impossible as a spontaneous production of his degenerate nature. He just requires of all that which they can give, if they will – viz., simple, devout honesty of purpose. Christ’s words are not, “If any man *does*,” but, “If any man *will* do” — *desires* to do – is supremely *anxious* to do — *wills* to do – “the will of God he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” Who, then, has a right to complain? Who cannot be sincere? Who is unable to set before himself the purpose of living up to the light he has in order that he may be in the surest position for receiving more? Who will say, “This condition is too hard?”

Observe, then, how your case stands. Are you, or are you not, anxious to please God in any way which He may appoint and reveal to you? If you are not, His gospel must be a sealed and unmeaning book to you. Your mind is not open to the faith which unites the soul to the Saviour. You are altogether destitute of the motive which would lead you to the cross. But if you are, what then? You must see at once that you are sinners, that you are guilty, and that you are hopeless. In the light of these convictions, look at the gospel. It tells you of the Divine Saviour who died for you and who rose again, who paid your debt, who took to Himself your penalty, and who has therefore done all that was necessary to set you free. To meet your helplessness, He only asks for your faith, and offers to you the quickening and guiding and upholding influences of His Holy Spirit.

V. ***THE HUMBLE TAUGHT THE LORD'S WAY***

“The meek will He teach His way.” – Psalm xxv. 9.

Instead of “meek” read “humble,” and then connect the verse with the preceding, so as to see who and what are the persons to whom the Psalmist refers. The righteous Lord will teach sinners His way; but the sinners, in order to be thus divinely taught, must be humble.

Probably this text of Scripture does not seem at first sight to be very promising to some of you. If so, the reason probably is that one at least of the subjects it brings to our notice is not a favourite or inspiring one. Men are comparatively little attracted by the more quiet and passive virtues of life, and among these the virtue of humility is one of the least popular. The truth is that we are still under the influence of Pagan notions about it. The philosophers of the past never understood it. To them it was a mean and despicable thing – the evidence of weakness and poverty of soul, the necessary virtue of the enslaved and the helpless. This notion exists now. The world has far more respect for the self-confident, the noisy, the bombastic, than for the humble. Of course the world's ideas of humility are at fault, and have need to be corrected. We cannot enter upon that task now, except incidentally and very partially. One thing only let me say – namely, that Christianity has transformed and ennobled the despised word by giving us the thing itself. The life of Christ comprises the perfection of humility as well as of every other virtue. In Him we see that humility makes no man contemptible. He was no less a king because He was a servant. And the virtue that was perfect in Him is one of the essential qualities of the Christian character – one of the essential elements of the Christian life, whether in its high enjoyments or in its high achievements.

The words before us present this virtue of humility under one special aspect. Man has something to learn, and God has something to teach; and humility is *teachableness*. Christianity demands of its disciples that disposition of heart which is the indispensable condition of all learning whatsoever. No more objection can be urged against Christianity for this, than against any art or science or philosophy which men seek to acquire. All these might say to their disciples, “Unless you give up your prejudice, your conceit, your self-will, your presumption, you have no business here; we have nothing to teach you.” And so, “poverty of spirit,” as Christ intimates in the “Beatitudes,” is the strait gate into “the kingdom of God.”

It is only as respects religion that this principle is seriously misunderstood, and a little reflection will show why it is that outside Christianity humility is misapprehended. Humility is the result of self-knowledge, and this cannot be obtained until man has learned to know himself in the light of God's wisdom and holiness. So long as he compares himself with his fellow-creatures around him, it may seem to him that there is no necessity for such an element of character as this. Nor is it in this way that the virtue is commended and enforced. Whilst the standard of excellence remains merely human, it is quite clear that a man may say, “I am as good as my neighbours; at least, I am no worse.” But put before him a holy God and a holy law! In this new light all becomes changed. Apart from that revelation, many flatter themselves that they have lived respectably. They are not conscious of any serious defection in the common, every-day duties of life. Let the great revelation come to them, and they must make wonderful self-discoveries. How many forgotten sins are then brought to mind! How many secret sins are then brought to light! How many temptations have been yielded to for convenience' sake! How much coldness and indifference towards the right, the true, and the good! How much selfishness! How much cowardice! How many meannesses! How many secret and contemptible dishonesties! What culpable ignorance of God! What rebellion against His known will! Is not all this enough to humble a man? Where is the man amongst us who would not rather die than have all his sins brought to light before his fellow-men? Thus, to make us humble,

God teaches us, first of all, truly to know ourselves. This is that “conviction of sin” which is wrought by His Holy Spirit.

God teaches us this in His law, but chiefly by the life of Christ His Son. Who can remain proud when he compares his own life with that? Before men we may, perhaps, hold our own; but before Him there is nothing left for us but self-abasement.

In presence of such a conviction as this, it is vain for the world to flatter a man, for he has learnt his own misery. He wants to know the truth, for it is only the truth that can save. He knows too much of himself to accept any teaching that would exalt *man*, for he could not accept that without dishonouring God. He wants a frank, firm voice that will trouble him, and to which his conscience will respond. The first question for us is: Have we so learnt to know ourselves, or do we obstinately shut our eyes against God’s light? Such a knowledge of sin brings with it a sense of deserved condemnation.

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