

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

The Excellence of Evangelical Faith.

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(CONTINUED.)

But there is yet another view of this new life. It is,

3. A life representing the very life of Christ.

"I live," says our apostle, "yet not I, but Christ lieth in me." So he says elsewhere, "For me to live is Christ." Now there should seem to be here something more than the dependence of the life of the believer upon the life of his Lord. That idea indeed pervades every part of our text. It is contained also in that beautiful expression, "Because I live, ye shall live also." But is there not here also this farther thought?—that Paul's new life represented the life itself of Christ. And that in two ways.

(1.) As a matter of demonstration.

Our apostle was earnestly desirous to "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection." The apostles were witnesses of the resurrection; and they who received their testimony admitted it as a fact, and felt it as an influence. That was New Testament Christianity; and these were New Testament Christians. They were so many proofs of the truth of the apostolic testimony. The Sanhedrim sought to cover up the resurrection of our Lord with their lies. Festus spoke lightly of "one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." But these men, as they spread over the Roman territory, refuted the lies of the Sanhedrim, and put to shame a scepticism like that of Festus. Yea, they carried their demonstration yet farther. They were so many specimens of the work of the risen Jesus. The person of Jesus, became invisible in the heavens, as applied to the renovation of men,—these were made manifest to all in the persons and character of his disciples. Men "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus; and were thus supplied with a mighty practical proof, that "Jesus and the resurrection" were grand realities, irrefragable facts. Thus "Christ lived" in Paul, and the early Christians. Thus he yet lives in the persons of all who tread in their steps. And so the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is carried down the stream of time, and will be borne yet onward until that stream shall cease to flow; gathering new force as it is still conveyed to generations unborn. But farther, Paul's new life represented the life of Christ himself,

(2.) As an actual and visible reflection of that life.

Take here these passages:—"He that receiveth you receiveth me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus—I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh." "From which passages we learn, that in the persons of Christians Christ is to be regarded as still present upon earth, though actually absent in the skies. Thus wherever a Christian carries his Christianity, thither he carries his Lord; and whoever gazes upon such a one may see his Master in him. Now this was especially true of Paul. Hence there is a peculiar emphasis in the passages from his pen just now cited. Himself had a modest consciousness of this, when he exhorted his brethren, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."—And in so far as we accept this exhortation, in so far shall we, like him, walk as Christ on earth while on our way to dwell with Christ in heaven. So Christ is not only published among men, but exemplified and seen. Thus too is he most effectually preached. If not thus preached, to little purpose is he preached at all. Ah! if Christ were but lived as well as he is preached among us, how much more largely would the beneficial ends of preaching be answered. Indeed, how much excellent preaching is lost and thrown away, so far as the salvation of souls is concerned, for want of the holy living which ought evermore to sustain and confirm it. Oh! then for more, and more, and more,—we cannot have too many,—of such as have a right to say with Paul, in this particular, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Thus once more is the excellence of "the faith of Jesus Christ" illustrated. It gives life; a new life; a holy life; a life like the life of Jesus. It joins man to Christ, and makes him fruitful in all the blessed fruits of the Gospel.—It is the sap of the "trees of righteousness." It

is the blood of the new man. Whatever we become by reason of our relationship to Christ, we become by means of our faith. Wherefore, be this still our cry, "Lord! increase our faith!"—But now again. From this same faith there springs,

Third. An untiring zeal for Christ and souls.

See how this is expressed in the text;—"And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." And what sort of a life was that? It was a life in full contrast with the life which our apostle had once lived. From Damascus onward this was his life,—"He who had persecuted the saints preached the faith which once he destroyed." We need not detain you with illustrations. Suffice it to say, that as Paul had once "persecuted the faith" with all his heart, so now with all his heart he "preached" it; and he who had made martyrs of others was well pleased to finish his course by becoming himself a martyr.

All which you see in the text,—the crucifixion of the old nature, the implantation of the new, and zeal for Christ and souls,—the apostle traces to his faith. That faith filled the whole man, to the exclusion of all beside. It gave him evermore to contemplate the "Son of God." And thus earth and its glories grew pale to his vision. Christ, and his cross, and his throne were lighted with a surpassing lustre and attraction. And so, raised above earth, and drawn heavenward, he moved on in his career, with the heart of a saint, and the grandeur of a hero, until he had come off "more than conqueror through him that loved him." What a faith!—what a noble principle must that be, which thus wrought in the bosom of our apostle, and lifted him to such a height of moral excellence!—to such a height from such a depth! And "this," in a wide sense, and on the largest scale, "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—Already has it shewn its fitness for this work; and that fitness shall be made more and more manifest, until the great cry of Christ on the cross, "It is finished!" shall find its echo and consummation in that other great cry from the throne, "It is done!" Another general remark:—

IV. The Gospel is intended to make men perfectly one with God in Christ, and Christ in God.

Such, in fact, is its last, its highest aim. Can we get farther than these, can the human mind, or the mind of angels, imagine any loftier privilege than that of becoming one with Christ, and one with God through him? Now,

First. What is this lofty privilege?

It is restoration—a large and glorious one. The "work of the devil," which is sin, has separated between God and man, and placed us at an infinite distance from each other. And if this state of things continue, there must take place at last an eternal separation; God in heaven, and man in hell, with the great impassable gulf gaping between. But the work of Christ reverses all this. Man is now no longer driven from the presence of God, nor alienated from him. He is not only brought back to God, but made one with God. And so made one with him, that he can never be separated from him again. For, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" And then, "who," or what "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" So it is that the mischief wrought by sin is more than counterbalanced in Christ, and that

"In him the tribes of Adam boast, More blessings than their father lost."

Second. We proceed to observe, that the heart of Christ is intently set upon the effecting of this restoration.

Take here a few expressions from his great intercessory prayer. "Neither pray I for these alone," he there says, "but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us—that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one—I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." Now,

Third. Have we not this great idea in the text?

What else are we to make of the language, "I am crucified with Christ—Christ liveth in me?"—expressions dwelt on heretofore, but which here once more claim our attention. We cite here, as directly in point, just that one famous passage in the Ephesians:—"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Now have we not here the idea of a personal union between Christ and his people?

Is not this same idea emphatically conveyed to us in such Scriptures as these?—"Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. I am the Vine; ye are the branches. The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the church. We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. The church, which is his body, the fulness,—the completion, the filling up,—of Him that filleth all in all." This, then, we take to be the grand idea lying under the expressions, and intertwined with them, "I am crucified with Christ—Christ liveth in me."

But now mark the special effect of all this.—The Lord of heaven, in the very act of assuming our nature, took his people into intimate and indissoluble union with himself. Then were consummated in time the espousals which had been made in eternity. The oneness which before was in the heart of Christ is now wrought out into a fact. Thus they who indeed are his lived in his life; died in his death; rose again in his resurrection; ascended with him to the right hand of the Majesty on high; and are now "expecting" with him "until his enemies be made his footstool." His heart beats in theirs. His blood courses in their veins. His mind thinks through their organs. His affections animate their bosoms. His being, his home, his bliss, his future, his glory, his "God and Father," his ALL,—all are theirs; "heirs of God" as they are, yea "joint-heirs with Christ." Well, therefore, might our apostle say, "who loved me, and gave himself for me." He was one with Christ in life. In death he was not divided from him. And at the resurrection his oneness shall be perfected, when he "shall change his vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." So is it with all the friends of Jesus. Thus we may both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." For, as Naomi beautifully said to Ruth in regard to Boaz, "Sit still; for the man will not be at rest until he have finished the thing,"—so we may soothe and comfort our souls; just as the excellent Rowland Hill used to soothe and comfort his soul—singing away, or rather gently humming, as with a sweet unconsciousness,—

"And when I'm to die,
'Receive me!' I'll cry;
For Jesus hath lov'd me,
I cannot tell why:
But one thing I find,—
We two are so joined,
He'll not be in heaven, and leave me behind."

Fourth. Here, here then, once more, we delightfully trace the workings of faith, and mark its excellence.

These things were nothing to Paul while yet in his "ignorance and unbelief." One with Christ! why it was Paul's very religion to crush his name, and root up his sect. But mark the change,—the thrice-blessed change! His unbelief is put to shame by that memorable vision, and more than vision on the way to Damascus. With his fleshly eyes he beholds the lustre which beams from the person of the Lord. By faith he apprehends his inward beauty and glory.—These he regards "with open face," and ever renewed contemplation. And so at length he attains to the lofty expressions which he here unfolds; and, rapt into mystic and endless union with his Lord, he lets fall upon us these words, so strange, and yet so familiar—so paradoxical, and yet so profoundly true,—"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Oh! the excellencies and wonders, then, of this grace of faith!—See what it did for Paul.—And here is no apostolic monopoly. "This honour have all his saints." Behold we, therefore, brethren, our prize, and seize it, and render our Hallelujahs to Him who has made it ours.

V. And finally: The Gospel leads us to lay all the glory of our salvation at the feet of the Triune Jehovah.

Here is its doctrine:—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." To every man, as to Israel of old, Jehovah makes this announcement,— "Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help." And here is the anthem which every ransomed soul delights to pour forth before his Lord,— "Soul unto us, O Lord! not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." Now here again comes out another illustration of the excellence of "the faith of Jesus Christ." It is that grace which emphatically and peculiarly gives to the God of salvation the glory which he peculiarly and emphatically claims. This it does,

First. From its very nature.

"By grace are ye saved," says Paul. Not because ye deserve it, but because God wills it; in that one only way in which sinners can be saved—"freely, by grace." And again he says, "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." That is our thought here. The very nature of faith, as the instrument of salvation, makes it no more than an instrument, and gives unrestricted scope to the claims of God as the one source of salvation. For what does faith here? It is simply receiving grace. It originates nothing. It merely accepts what God is pleased to bestow. And just as the eye receives the light which it does not create—as the ear admits the sounds which it does not produce—as the hand lays hold of the gift which it does not frame—and as the body takes in and digests the food which it does not organize,—and the above, be it remembered, are all Scripture illustrations on the point before us,—so faith looks to Christ, and listens to his voice, and grasps his gifts, and feeds upon his flesh and blood; thus appropriating the bestowments of heaven, and rendering back to heaven all the praise. So salvation is of faith, that it might be by grace." And let us farther remember here,

Second. The origin of faith.

It is not of man, but of God. So are we decisively taught by the evangelist John:—"He came unto his own, but his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God." There is the genealogy of faith, both negatively and positively: of the faith of a gentle Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul, "no less than that of the rude and fierce Philistian jailor, whose heart was rent asunder as by whirlwind and storm. "It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." So it is to the end. Our Jesus is not "the Author alone, but also the "Finisher of our faith." Therefore it is that the good man still looks up and cries, "Forsake not the work of thine own hands." And when that cry has received its ultimate fulfilment, this will be our song in heaven,— "Salvation," from first to last, "Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." So again, our salvation is "of faith," thus wrought and maintained, that it might be, and appear to be "of grace." Then,

Third. There are what we would call the instincts of faith.

Now instinct, we just explain, is, in nature, spontaneous action, either in the lower orders, or in man. It is called forth by emergencies.—And spontaneous as it is, flowing neither from thought on the part of the creature, nor from volition, it points to God as its source, and renders to him an offering of exclusive praise. It is, in fact, wherever seen, the reason, the thought, the mind of God; and, as such, does honour to him from whom it proceeds. Farther:—Mind has its instincts. The sanctified mind has its instincts. The graces of the Spirit have their instincts. Faith thus has its instincts—the instincts of which we now speak. And these, like all other instincts, are called forth by emergencies; and being thus called forth, like them too, they accord to their Author their tribute of peculiar praise. For instance. When a new-born soul struggles into its new life—or when that soul, in its subsequent career, is exposed to sudden and overwhelming danger—or when, again, that soul trembles upon the verge of both worlds,—here are striking and impressive emergencies; and here the soul is thrown directly upon its instincts. Now then mark the promptings and direction of these instincts, while you listen to some of its utterances.— "Lord! what wilt thou have me to do? How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? Lord Jesus receive my spirit! I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!—Lord, save us! we perish!—Lord, help me!—I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." These should seem to be some of the instinctive utterances of faith. The Psalms are full of them. And it is instructive to observe,—brethren, have you not often seen such cases?—how a believing instinct, fairly aroused, will shake itself clear of sophistries, and teach men, in spite of their own cherished mistakes, to lay their souls in the arms of Jesus. Is it not thus that many a poor Romanist, notwithstanding the errors of his religious system, gropes his way to the foot of the cross, limps along the narrow path, and at last blunders into heaven? The dying experience of the venerable Harris Harding is strikingly in point here. During his last illness he would still complain, "I can't see Jesus!—I can't see Jesus!" Looking too much to himself and his religious emotions, and too little to his Lord, and the love of that Lord,—his life-long error;—would that it had died with him!—he knew not how to gaze upward, and draw his consolations immediately from heaven. Yet, as his end approached, his faith, true to its instincts, pierced the clouds which had obscured his vision, and made him at last victorious over death through the blood of the Lamb.

From the whole we see how "the faith of Jesus Christ," when summoned to put forth its instincts, turns still and ever towards heaven and Christ, and thus places the crown of redeeming love and power on the head of Him to whom it alone belongs. Such was the faith which wrought in the experience of our apostle when he expressed himself as in the words before us; and when again, in the immediate prospect of martyrdom, he triumphantly exclaimed,— "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Conclusion next week.