

ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON.

The Christian's Death and the Christian's Life.

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For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Col. iii. 3, 4.

The Christian's death and life are set forth in this text, and it will be our object to ascertain as nearly as possible what is implied in each of them. The announcement that the Christian is dead, is at first a startling one, because it is directly contrary to the most common idea that is entertained of him. We have always supposed that if there was any class that had more life than another, it was that of God's people, but when from His own word comes the direct and unqualified assertion that the Christian is dead, our ideas must be changed and our opinions reshaped, unless this assertion which seems to contradict them, can be explained so as to accord with them. Happily for us; this can be done, and done in the clearest and most satisfactory of all ways, viz., by a comparison of scripture with itself. One thing is to be particularly remembered, and that is, that the word "death" in the New Testament does not always have its literal meaning; that is, it does not mean that the person has ceased to live and move and act, and is ready to be laid away in the grave. There are passages where the person is spoken of as being dead, and at the same time as possessing all the common principles of life and having them in active exercise. Death in such cases refers to some particular thing towards which, or for which, the individual has ceased to cherish desires and feelings, and which thing itself lives not in him. This is the nature of the word in our text: The Christian is represented as being dead, and common sense telling us that it is not literal death, we fall back upon the same meaning that the word has in other passages, that is, a cessation as regards some particular thing in connection with the individual or class of individuals referred to. The question now comes, what is that particular thing with reference to which the Christian is dead. To this we can find a plain and satisfactory answer in one or two passages, as follows: "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." And also in another passage, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein. Thus you see that the Apostle positively pronounces the sentence of death upon the Christian, and that, a death to sin. Now, if the text were translated in exact accordance with the original it would read, "For ye died;" and in fact this is the way it does read in the latest revision of the New Testament, the verb being in the past tense. This past tense is grammatically called the inceptive past; that is, expressing the inception or beginning of a continued rather than a finished act: consequently, to get the exact and full meaning, we must render it in accordance with this grammatical principle which makes the Apostle substantially say, "You began to die to sin at the time when you publicly renounced it and professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you have been true to your profession, you have been dying ever since." When we arrive at this meaning of the passage we see at once that it sets forth the model Christian,—the Christian who can say with the Apostle in another place, "I die daily."

Death to sin is one of the most important features of the Christian life, and has ever been a prominent characteristic of those who have the most fully realized that life on earth. Those whom we call the best Christians are they who struggle the hardest to die to sin; and in fact, no one who is not engaged in this warfare can in any scriptural sense be said to be living the Christian life. "Death to sin" is exceedingly comprehensive, and he who strives to attain thereunto will find himself battling against almost every existing form of opposition to Christian progress, but will have the satisfaction of knowing that he is walking pretty correctly in the path of Christian duty.

The important question that now arises is, "How can we most effectively die to sin?" A variety of answers at once suggest themselves to the mind, but not having time to mention them all we will simply emphasize the one that seems to us more direct and pertinent than any other, viz., "by the crucifixion of the sin that dwells within us."

But has it nothing to do with the sin that is without? It certainly has. The Christian is to die to sin of every kind, wherever found; but there is one thing certain, that if we succeed in crucifying the sin that dwells in us we shall not have much trouble with that which dwells without. External sin would never allure and conquer were it not for the internal sin for which it has such a mighty affinity. Temptations from without would have no power were it not that they find a response in the sinful principle within which invites them near and works in harmony with them. The first battle that the Christian has to fight is with himself. The nearest and most dangerous foe is in his own being—walks with him by day and abides with him by night;—struggles to overcome him in his waking hours, and haunts him in his sleep. The rebellion must be subdued at home before the campaign can be directed against the enemy abroad. No nation can wage an aggressive or even defensive warfare against an enemy with which a large proportion of its people are in sympathy. They may muster for the fight, but the enemy will gain the advantage, because there are those at home who are only too glad to have him come in and take possession. The rebellious spirit among its own people must be first crushed; and their sympathy with the enemy withdrawn, before that nation can extend its conquests outside. No Christian is safe until he conquers himself. A great mistake is made when we attempt to escape the danger of temptation only by withdrawing from the association of those by whom we are afraid that we shall be tempted;—we seek to run away from temptation. But we might as well try to run away from our own shadows. There is no sequestered spot in this world of ours into which we can withdraw and not meet temptation in one or another of its many features. It followed Christ even into the wilderness, but with Him it had no power, because in Him there was nothing to respond to it, nothing with which it could affiliate, and hence His signal victory over it. Every blow aimed at the root of the evil in any other way than by the suppression of the love for the evil, is wrongly and ineffectually directed. Draw the magnet through a stratum of steel clippings and it will come out loaded with them. Draw an ordinary piece of iron through, and it will leave them all behind; not one will cleave to it. Why the difference? Simply because the magnet possessed a property which caused them to adhere to it, while the iron did not. The individual who walks in the midst of temptation with a love for the evil, carries a magnetic power which will cause the evil to adhere to him, and he will never find it possible to shake that evil off until the magnetism is lost. Oh, then, let the nearest and worst enemy be first subdued; let the battle be waged against the lusts and passions which dwell in our hearts and are ever with us; let us remember that we cannot flee away from temptation, for we carry it with us as a part of ourselves, and we know that it is impossible for a man to get away from himself. But it may be asked, "Do not the general teachings of the Bible with reference to this subject urge us to move out of the way of evil? If we know that it exists in this street to take the other street;—if we cannot stand the present company, to leave it and seek some other;—to come out and be separate; to "walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful," and many other injunctions of the same kind? The Word of God certainly does teach all this; but the meaning of it is not to run away from the evil; it means not to endorse the evil;—not to sympathize with it, not to have any love for it, not to walk hand in hand with it, not even to countenance it, but to denounce it, condemn it, and seek to overthrow it. The Bible nowhere tells the Christian to walk on one side or the other side of

evil simply for the sake of getting rid of it, as did the priest and the Levite to get rid of the wounded man who lay in their road. If this were the course to follow, how should the sinful multitudes be reached. How could the salutary influence of Christianity be felt? The heaven which was assigned to leave the whole lump could never accomplish its object simply because it was not in the lump. This is not the truth taught us in the example of Christ. He did not fly around our world on celestial wing, keeping high enough to escape our misery and degradation and casting only a look of compassion upon us; but He descended to our very level. He walked in our very midst; came in contact with the worst forms of our wretched condition. He moved around among diseased and filthy humanity, not partaking of their evils, but diffusing through them a soul-healing and life-restoring influence. Though "tempted in all points like unto us" he had no inward love for that with which he was tempted, and as a result, temptations had no power. This is the position into which the Christian should strive with all his might to get. Let Christ, who himself overcame, rule in the heart, let all the affections be subject and loyal to him, and he will give us the victory over every besetting sin, for

"Temptations loose their power When He is nigh."

In this strength we can go out into the world and meet its evils, not to be overcome thereby, but to overcome them. With our thirst for the tempting glass subdued we can go in safety to the very place where the ruinous liquid is dealt out to the unwary youth, and urge rum-seller and rum-drinker to abandon their dreadful course. We can mingle with the debauched and those cast out by society, not to follow their pernicious ways, but to win them back to the paths of rectitude and make them acquainted with the Saviour. We can go into the worst forms of vice to rescue those who are given up to it, and come out as free from its infection as does the physician from the house of physical disease. And all this, by having Christ's religion in our hearts. As the sickly plant which has grown up in the shade withers and droops when the scorching rays of the mid-day sun beat down upon it, so will the weeds of sin which have taken root in a wicked heart and grown under the covert of darkness, wither and die when the Sun of Righteousness beams in, transforming the sterile desert into a lovely fruitful garden. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." And the only way to keep the heart is to let Christ rule in it, let his authority be dominant; let him sway the sceptre, and the evil cannot long exist; either the one or the other must be supreme; because they will neither enter into any form of partnership nor even live in harmony. If we love the evil, Christ will withdraw; if we hate the evil and are willing to die to sin and to be made alive unto God, Christ will execute the sentence of death upon the rebellious sin and give us the vigor of his own life, the blessedness of which will demonstrate the truth of the apostle's words when taken from their connection and applied here, "To die is gain." Life can advance no faster than sin recedes. Room must be made, by the removal of sin, for the implantation of holiness. No one vessel can receive or contain the two at the same time. Life can flow in no faster than sin flows out; hence the continued reception of life necessitates the continued process of death, and it is probable that the apostle had this principle in mind when he declared that he "died daily." To conquer one besetting sin; to subdue and keep under subjection a violent temper; to check and overcome the evil passions whenever they attempt to rise, is a greater victory than any ever gained by the warriors of world-wide fame. "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city."

Now let us turn to the Christian's life. He has life, and he has it more abundantly on account of death. As the seed planted in the soil gradually but surely dies, the germ of life steadily expands, coming forth in new and strengthened form. But except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." Death to sin is a resurrection to a new life, and continual death is the archway under which the Christian passes to the most sublime

realization of that life. We will now notice three of its leading features:

1. Its character.
  2. Its security.
  3. Its future manifestation.
2. Its character. "Your life," says the apostle, addressing those who possessed the same kind that he did. Now, the most correct way of ascertaining the character of the life in question is to study it as it existed in him, and we find his explanation of it to be simply this, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." How beautiful this representation of Christian life; Christ living in us; we knowing no other life than his; every thought the thought of Christ; every desire his desire; every ambition his pleasure; every effort his strength; every act his nature; yea, the whole life of the individual expressing the Divine life,—the life of the Son of God.

Then again, this is eternal life; just what man wants; just what sin had treacherously robbed him of, leaving him with an aching void, longing after his lost possession with no possibility of ever regaining it. Not being created to die but rather to live, the race keenly felt the loss of that essential part of its creation, and though blindly, yet earnestly reached out after a restorative in order that the current of life, originally designed to flow forever, but interrupted and turned from its course by sin, might again refresh their sinking spirits and satisfy their longings after immortality. In fulness of time this life came; not as an outgrowth of advanced thought, nor as a sequence of progress in literature and invention, but by the incorporation of the Divine life into the human,—the Son of God in the flesh; "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

"Dear suffering Lamb, thy bleeding wounds With cords of love Divine Have drawn our willing hearts to Thee, And linked our lives with Thine."

2. Its security. This life can never be taken from us. It is hid with Christ in God. In the secure and eternal Bank of heaven it has been deposited, safe from the inroads of disease and accident and calamity which are ever threatening and not unfrequently destroying the life of the body. God is too wise to commit this life to us for safe keeping. He has too thorough a knowledge of our weakness to entrust us with what we never would be able to keep. In our wrestlings against "principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and against spiritual wickedness in high places," we would be more than likely to lose the priceless boon, for the destroyer of souls would snatch it from our possession. No man of immense or even moderate earthly wealth feels that it is safe for him to carry his money anywhere and everywhere on his person; but that money is deposited for safe keeping either in the vaults of the bank or in some investment by which he is both exempted from the danger of loss, and secured in the possession and use of it. But while that property is not borne around by the individual in such a manner that it could be stolen from him or in any wise spoiled, it is nevertheless giving him a standing, and an influence, and a power; he represents so much wealth; it is his; he is entitled to all the consideration which it is capable of giving; he is drawing from it all the time; his plans and undertakings are based upon and supported by it; in short, his secure possession of it makes him what he is, and this security exists in the fact that the property is not immediately in his hands but in other hands. So with the Christian's life; it is in the hands, yea, in the very Being of Christ and Christ is in the hands, yea, in the very Being of God. "For all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death or things present or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

Yes, brethren, our life is "hid with Christ in God." It is beyond the reach of the adverse elements of this world or of the world beneath us. It is beyond the grasp of those who, working in the interests of the kingdom of darkness would seize it away, and rejoice in the

misery which would follow the loss of it. It is safe in the Bank, and the interest which we draw is sufficient to keep us. The supply is always commensurate with the demand. The increasing desire for more is ever abundantly satisfied, inasmuch as he who has charge of the supply deals it out according to the rule of giving which he announced in the days of his flesh: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance." While all the hosts of Satan on earth, with fiendish shriek and ravenous look have prowled around the camp of God's saints, baffled in their attempts to destroy their assurance of a blissful immortality, and wondering by what mysterious power the ransomed ones sustained and repelled their hellish onslaughts, Christ has stood at the open door of the heavenly treasure-house, and directing the attention of the enemies of the Cross to the flock redeemed by his blood has explained the secret of the perpetuity of their life and happiness in the words, "I am the good Shepherd and know my sheep and am known of mine: My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

3. Its future manifestation.

"When Christ [who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Or, in exact accordance with the original, "When Christ our life shall be manifested, then will ye also with him be manifested in glory."

The second coming of Christ to this world is one of the plainest truths taught in the Holy Scriptures. It is set forth in the parables, in the exhortations of the earliest disciples, in the writings of the apostles, and in the Apocalypse. But perhaps the clearest presentation of it is to be found in the first chapter of Acts, in the words addressed to the disciples as they stood looking toward heaven whither their Lord and Master had ascended out of their sight. We read that while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." This is one of the most glorious and comforting facts with which the Christian church has to do. Having received liberally and abundantly of the measureless blessings which have flown from heaven to earth through the first advent of our blessed Lord, we await the fullest and grandest manifestations of them through the second. The great absorbing and vitalizing and energizing thought of the church is, that the Lord is coming; the Bridegroom is to return for the Bride and lead Her to the marriage hall. I shall not foolishly attempt to define the exact time of his coming or even to calculate approximately, seeing that it is "not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." Neither shall I discuss the subject which of late has occupied so much attention as to whether the preponderance of Bible teaching supports the theory of the pre-millennial or past-millennial advent; for it is not my object to present pre-millennialism or past-millennialism, but to present the great truth of the text, that Christ is coming back to the world,—that he is coming to the church,—that he is coming with life, with our life, and with the highest consummation of it. Brethren, I verily believe that we fail to dwell upon this grand and blessed truth as we ought. It does not enter into our life and our very being and inspire us with the gratitude and joy and enthusiasm with which it inspired the apostles as they proclaimed the glad tidings of a Saviour come, and gone, and yet to come again. To them it seemed to be the brightest germ of the new dispensation,—the crowning truth of all the others. They talked about it, they preached it, they set it forth in their exhortations and epistles as the most powerful incentive to Christian faithfulness and activity and a continued perseverance in well doing unto the end. "Looking for and hastening the coming of the