

ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON.

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SPIRITUAL LIFE, A NECESSITY.

A SERMON DELIVERED BEFORE THE NOVA SCOTIA EASTERN ASSOCIATION.  
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TEXT—Psalm lvi. 6: "Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

It is to be feared that many Christians regard a religious life as a mere personal enjoyment, and do not fully appreciate that deeper life which God puts in the soul by his regenerative power. They desire greatly to have peace and comfort in this world, so when God smiles upon them they are peaceful like the calmed sea, but when he tries their faith by his providential discipline they are troubled like the tempestuous ocean. They give much attention to the emotional part of religion, and little to that deep and pure life which comes to the soul from union with God through Christ. They are governed more by feeling than by the influences of the Holy Spirit which brings the life of God to the soul. They are constantly looking at the horizon in search of more light, and so do not shine out upon the world the light of the glorious gospel of Christ.

The Psalmist says in his prayer, that God desires truth in the inward parts. Not a surface life, but a deep pure religious life which stirs the profoundest depths of his being, a life of honesty; truth placed in the soul of man by God himself. A mistake here is not only injurious, but fatal to the life which follows. It is like a mistake made at the beginning of a mathematical calculation, it only repeats and multiplies itself every step of the way. In the judgement of a certain class of thinkers, the philosophia prima was the most difficult problem that could be presented to the human mind, because it was the problem for solving all problems. So the life placed in the redeemed soul by God, may be called the philosophia prima of man's religious life. It is the general formula which the mathematician seeks, by means of which he can solve a number of peculiar questions. It is to a man's religious life what the master key is to all the locks it opens.

In calling attention to the necessity of a deep religious life, let us in the first place notice its origin.

I. IT COMES FROM GOD.

As the natural light comes from the sun, so the spiritual life comes from God, it is a divine life taking possession of the human life. It changes a sinner into a saint, an enemy into a friend, and a hater of God into a lover of holiness. It is God entering the soul of man, and the soul receiving into itself the life of God. Says Paul I am crucified with Christ, and no longer do I live but Christ lives 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." Paul declares that his old life is crucified with Christ, and the new life in his soul was Christ living in him, and that life was sustained by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him. So reasons David, since I am corrupt in my very nature and thou Jehovah canst be satisfied with nothing short of inward sincerity thou must bestow it upon me by imparting heavenly wisdom. Truth in the inward parts is opposite to falsehood and deceit, so he asks God for that wisdom without which no correct views of sin or holiness are possible. The life of God in the soul is something that every man requires to make him sincere, honest and God-like. It is the influence of a new life in the inward parts, it is unlike the surface heat that our earth receives from the sun which makes the seedling bud and blossom, but more like the centrifugal heat which keeps the earth warm in the coldest winter, and hottest summer. No tongue can tell the rich boon God gives man when he established truth in his inner life by imparting His own nature. None of the fanciful transformations of which Ovid sang could ever reveal the matchless worth of God to the new born soul. The distance is no less than infinite between a sinner and a saint, between one dead in trespasses and sins, and one quickened, and saved by divine grace. If God should speak to the Niagara and bid its floods suddenly stand still, it would be a trif-

ling demonstration of power compared with that which restores heavenly order in the soul of man. If He should speak to the Atlantic ocean, and it be suddenly wrapped in flames, we should not even then see such a manifestation of his greatness, as when he made the human heart a fit temple for his holy presence. When a man receives the life of God in his heart he shakes hands with his sins and sells them for the pearl of great price—he regardeth not sin in his heart—but respect to all God's commandments.

God not only comes to the soul to give it new life and restore the forfeited powers of the mind, but he desires to possess the inner life of man. Behold thou desirest truth in the inward parts. God desires that all his redeemed people should stand before him without spot or wrinkle. Be ye holy for I am the Lord your God. Holiness without which no man can see the Lord. For this reason God has united himself with man and desires man to stand before pure in heart and life. If God can make one who is truly God, become truly man, surely he will impart life and purity to man to make him God-like in nature and conduct. For this reason he has brought the holiness and purity of his own life to man, and by the agency of the Spirit weaves them into every Christian life. It brings God into the soul as Father to love and succour, as Saviour to redeem and pardon, as Holy Spirit to comfort and sanctify, and man's weakness becomes girded by God's omnipotence. Such a divine power makes man appreciate truth in the inward parts. Plutarch says that when the priests of Mercury were eating their holy things, they were wont to cry out, "Sweet is truth." Truth is sweet to the heaven-born soul. Jeremiah says, Thy words were found in me and I did eat them, and thy words were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart, says the Psalmist and in the hidden part shalt thou make me to know wisdom. It is God's will that the redeemed soul should become a centre of divine influence, and his people should bear the image of the heavenly.

His design in the work of grace is to make man a new creature, a creature in the image of God, in the image of the divine excellence, a partaker of the divine nature. Because God desires truth in the inward parts, he has come to man and made him the object of his love. This wonderful condescension of God was not seen until he desired truth in man, then mercy comes to a lost race in all its glorious heights and infinite depths, he has stooped an infinite distance to save man that man may ascend to an infinite height when saved. Even now each true Christian can say with the Apostle "I have been crucified with Christ, and no longer do I live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

II. THE EXPRESSION OF SUCH A LIFE.

This deep pure religious life lived between the redeemed soul and God must be brought over and lived between man and his fellowman. The tree lives two lives, the one a root life which makes the tree strike its roots deep into the soil, and the other a branch life makes the tree send its branches high in the air. It is as necessary for the Christian to have the life of God in his heart, as it is for the tree to have life in its roots, and as the hidden life of the tree is sustained secretly by the soil and air, so the secret life of the Christian must be sustained secretly by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit. A healthy tree has deep roots and high branches, so the Christian who has a deep spiritual life with God, will let his light so shine before men, that they shall see his good works and glorify his Father who is in heaven. The life he lives with God will enable him to send his faith deep in the promises and in the life he lives with men will be seen all the fruits of the Spirit. He will unfold his good works as the slate-quarryman lays open the slate along its structures and fractures. Such a life will be communicated to men through many channels, but the channel which runs the deepest and purest water is called love for souls. A desire for the conversion of men will become the passion of his new nature. As king Saul was head and shoulders above every man in Israel, so this desire will be seen above every other desire.

Such a one will not become a man with one idea, but will grow so exceedingly broad that every doctrine and truth of scripture will take its place in his mind, as every well-disciplined soldier takes his place in the army. "I have seen Michael Angelo, says a contemporary of the great artist, at work after he had passed his sixtieth year. Although he was not very robust, he cut away more scales from a block of hard marble in a quarter of an hour than many young sculptors would have done in three or four hours, such was the impetuosity and fire with which he pursued his labour that I almost thought the whole work would have gone to pieces; with one single stroke he brought down fragments three or four inches thick, and so close upon the line that had he passed it even in the slightest degree there would have been danger of ruining the whole." Such is the bold and safe power of mind that works by an idea and method. Similar earnestness and skill should be exhibited by the Christian in doing God's work. While he ever keeps in mind that God alone can convert and save, yet he can use all his influence to recommend Christ to the lost and perishing. He can go to God and plead for men and go to men and plead for God. He can show what Christ has done for him by holding his Christian life before men. Some may think such work is expected of the minister, for by virtue of his office he must agonize for the community in which he resides. Indeed, personal work for Christ is expected of every Christian. If every minister was as faithful as Hooper, every preacher as bold as Knox, and every missionary as zealous as Judson, the work is greater than the ministry can accomplish. This privilege of recommending Christ to men is free to all. No king can command it, yet a beggar may enjoy it, wealth cannot purchase it, yet the poor may possess it. The best defenders of truth are the most instrumental in the conversion of men. For after all the strongest bulwark of scepticism is sin, and the remedy for sin is not an argument to prove the gospel, but the gospel itself. Not the doctrines of Christ, but Christ a living, loving saviour and the soul saved from sin is the most convincing proof of Christianity, "a living epistle known and read of all men."

III. THE NEED OF SUCH A LIFE.

This deep religious life should fill and influence the whole man, it cultivates his heart, refines his nature, and makes him pure, sincere, and honest. It is to the Christian what the heart is to the animal, it sends life through every vein and nerve of the system, it makes a man powerful in the right place and right way. Sylvester Graham, the originator of the bread-bran system of diet, made people believe it was injurious to eat meat, and some were foolish enough to believe him, but his system of diet was not of long duration, because it put men at work with pale cheeks and weak muscles. That a healthy man should eat strong food is a law as irreversible as the law of gravitation. We find Christians in our churches with pale cheeks and weak spiritual nerves, because they are nourished by milk and not by meat. The apostle complains of the Christians at Corinth, not that they were infants, but because they remained in a state of infancy so long a time. He says we speak wisdom among them that are perfect, among them who are well instructed in Christ, and have come to maturity in divine things. Those who have received the doctrines of the cross as divine, and have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit to discover true wisdom, but not to you Corinthians, because ye are yet babes, and must be fed with weaker food. Those who do not have Christ living in them, remain dwarfs all the way through, they do not grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are not unlike a fashionable lady who engaged a teacher of language and requested him not to trouble her with verbs and participles. She was very anxious to speak French, but was not earnest enough to put forth the effort necessary for its accomplishment. So these Christians lacking genuine deep rooted aspirations after spirituality decline the only condition in which it can be gained. Hence their hearts remain like those pieces of land on which the indolent farmer has left unsightly stumps and innumerable stones, unproductive by the graces of the Spirit, unproductive of the fruits of holiness, uncomfortable in

their conscience, they neither enjoy God nor the world.

A healthy tree or plant sends its roots downward, and its branches upward, the roots are the mouth of the tree, through them it takes from the soil whatever is necessary for its growth. As the trunk and the branches of the tree increase, the roots spread out to absorb more nutritive salt. The earth and the air furnish the material with which the tree is built up. The soil contains substances, which, when loosened by the frost or plough or water is dissolved by it and prepared as food for the hungry tree. The leaves are the lungs of the tree which inhale the atmosphere and elaborate such gasses as the nature of the species require. The rain, the snow, the frost, the wind, and the sunshine, all help to mature the tree until it becomes the king of the forest, with buttressed roots and giant arms. So God has made all necessary provision in the plan of redemption for the Christian's growth in grace, church life, Christian action, religious truth, providential discipline, and the Lord's day. But we must have Christ before we can have Christianity, we must have the root, faith, before we can have the fruit holiness, and the man who keeps striking the roots of his faith deep into the soil of divine grace, will let his pure life shine before men, and they will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus. There will be more usefulness and less noise, more humility and less pride, more peace and less anxiety, more tenderness of conscience and less dishonesty in business. When the full corn is in the ear it is bent down, because it is full.

This deep religious life is needed for practical usefulness, it is needed in those who preach the gospel. For the want of truth in the inward parts, some of those handling sacred things have been justly exposed during the past year. For the want of honesty and veracity, a few men when handling the word of God have swerved from the truth. They have secretly gone into miry depths, to which an angel from heaven could not descend and return with his wings untarnished. But such men cannot take the pulpit with them, and there have power in the church to discipline men with unclean hands. The occasional fall of such persons, are illustrations of the subject of this sermon, showing that nothing but truth in the heart can make a man steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Men with pure lives and loving hearts invest the pulpit with irresistible power. God from the beginning has made use of truth and personality in bringing his gospel to man, and his means of reaching men will not change. A man called to stand before his fellowmen to preach the truth, which he hopes has saved him and believes will save others, need not fear that the people will forsake the sanctuary, such a man will present the gospel in all its fullness and power, to save men from sin and death. Every sermon will be so carefully prepared that it will only do for one congregation on a certain day, but on that day and to that congregation it will be a message from God. His words of truth will go to the hearts and consciences of men like polished javelins from the spirit world. He can present Christ with such power and beauty that men will fall in love with him. At the end of every sermon will be seen the sinner and the Saviour standing face to face, the one seeking salvation and the other anxious to save. Without this spirituality in the preacher, the best of preaching must fail in its results.

Says an eminent divine, "During the first part of my Christian ministry, I was travelling by rail one day, and while looking over some sermons and tracts I had prepared, a thoughtful looking man said to me in perfect good faith, sir, have you a tract to spare, that would help a friend of mine who is anxious about his soul, well, I thought I had something written on almost every doctrine of scripture. I had a sermon on the unity and personality of God. A most convincing argument for original sin, and future punishment. I had some clear statements on the second coming of Christ and the judgment, and some eloquent sentences to show the harmony between science and revelation, but with shame I had to acknowledge that I had not a sermon or tract in my possession to help a man who was anxious about his soul." The most successful preacher in our age, is the man who preaches Christ, it is not a worn out subject, nor

can we wear it out. From every town, village, and hamlet in England there is a road to London, so from every passage of scripture there is a road to the metropolis of scripture, and when we get a text it is our business to find the road that leads to Christ, and preach a sermon running along that road. For if a son shall ask bread of any of you, who is a father, will ye give him a stone.

Again this deep religious life is needed in every Christian. For the want of it the plane of Christian life has been lowered and the members of a Christian church live much like the men of the world. There is too much of a margin on each side of the line which separates the professor of religion from the non professor. The moral man places his life on this margin, because it is respectable, and the Christian who lacks truth in the inward parts places his life upon it, lest he should be called righteous over much by his worldly companions. The moral man places his life upon it with no Christ in his heart, and believes himself to be as virtuous as some who profess religion; and the shallow minded Christian lives upon the same margin and believes religion does not interfere with his pleasure. The one steals the Christian virtues and copies them, the other lowers the standard of Christian life that religion and pleasure may succeed each other, like the ebb and flow of the tide. The one works himself up as high as he can without professing Christ, the other lets himself down as far as he can to be friendly with some besetting sin. It is not enough for a man to purchase a new bible, learn a few passages of scripture, talk and chat about the great doctrines of Christianity, think he is bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. He who lives a true Christian life and works the fruits of righteousness must have a firmer hold of divine things, or divine things must have a firmer hold of him. Those who live such a surface life don't experience true soul hunger and thirst for the imperishable bread and living water. They know nothing of godly sorrow for sin, nor of the heavenly music which fills the redeemed soul. They have never tasted the bitterness of sin nor the gladness of the new song. They have never felt the agonies of dying with Christ, nor the joys of the new-birth. Our Lord seeks to win such from shallow emptiness of spirit to make them partakers of his glorious life. He desires truth in the inward parts, that nothing may separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I have brought this subject before you at our annual meeting to be reminded once more of our great strength in God, the secret of the Christian life. This deep pure religious life is to the Christian what the keel is to the ship, what the foundation is to the house, and what the heart is to the animal. We see enough of surface piety in our churches, but we want more of that complete consecration of body, soul and spirit to sacred things. This shallow religious life is like the shallow water, easily agitated and rolled, but a pure religious life is like the ocean depths which is never moved by the highest wind or severest storm. Christ came to put away sin from us, and we should put away sin from ourselves. He has begun a good work in us, that will not be completed until we stand before him perfect. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your souls." Neither mental, moral, nor physical impurities should be tolerated in the Christian. Let no one tolerate in himself what he condemns in his neighbours. Every habit and appetite which tend to defile should be cut off as a branch, to be buried. All tricks in business and acts of crookedness and narrowness should be removed from the man of God. "Let all who name the name of Christ depart from all iniquity. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. For this cause says the great Apostle, I bow my knee unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church throughout all ages, world without end, Amen."