Introductory Sermon by the Rev. W. H. Edwards.

PREACHED AT JACKSONTOWN, CARLETON CO., TO THE WESTERN N. B. BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, JUNE, 1889.

Subject, Christianity a Vital Power. Text, John's Gospel, 6th chap. and 63rd verse.—"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

Our Lord's teaching in this chapter implies that the Messiah's kingdom was not of this world; and they were to understand what he had said of a spiritual living upon him and his fulness by faith; as without the soul of man the flesh is of no value. So without the quickening spirit of God, all forms of religion are dead and worthless.

1st. A system of Philosophy which includes in it everything which belongs to Christ and to a Christian life, may and does have its uses; but, after all, it is not a living power; and Christ said that His religion was, that which He taught was not word forms, no matter however beautifully spoken, they would only be heard in the ear and never effect the heart; it is true, we may have natural and animal life, vital heat and motion; we may breathe, and speak, and use our bodily senses; we may have rational life, may apprehend, reason, judge, choose, and so forth, but we have not spiritual life, no title to it, no meetness for it, nor earnest of it, etc.

In the second place, the Apostle Paul declares the gospel explicitly to be, what? A history of the life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nay; for although all these things are in the gospel history, he declares that the essence of that gospel was the wisdom of God, and the power of God, unto salvation.

The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Regeneration is that spiritual change of the heart beyond the power of any created agent to effect; it is God who must take away the heart of stone; it is the spirit that quickeneth; the first step that the spirit takes in quickening the dead sinner is to say, let there be light and life, and light and life are at once produced. "Oh what a vital power is this," what a preparation for the entrance of Christ into the soul, a preparation performed not by the creature, but by the Spirit in the creature; and in what does the Spirit's preparation consist? Not in bettering the condition, but in exposing the depravity of our fallen nature, etc.

Not in concealing, but in uncovering the leprosy within, he goes before the Lord, to prepare his way, by discovering to the soul its extreme emptiness, poverty, and vileness. He creates a felt necessity for Christ's entrance. He brings the soul into such a position that none but Christ can meet its case. He inflicts a wound, which Christ alone can heal. He awakens grief, which Christ alone can assuage. He creates a void, which Christ alone can fill.

Christ represents His kingdom by a wind; the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

1. This comparison is here used to show that the Spirit in regeneration works as a free agent; the wind bloweth where it listeth. God directs it, it fulfills His word. (Psalms 148: 8). The Spirit dispenses His influence when and where, on whom and in what measure and degree He pleases. (1 Corinthians 12: 11.) Also, to show He works powerfully and with evident effects, thou hearest the sound thereof; though its causes are hidden, its effects are manifest.

When the soul is brought to mourn for sin, to groan under the burden of corruption, to breathe after Christ, to cry God be merciful to me a sinner, etc., then we hear the sound of the spirit, it is the sound of life.

2. He works mysteriously and in secret. hidden ways; thou canst not tell whence it comes, or whether it goes; the manner and methods of the Spirit's workings are a mystery, it wanders up and down the hills of the Soul, looks into the filthy recesses of the heart, it goes through all the valleys and makes itself known from the benefits which it brings. Yet no man can see the viewless course of the air; so it is with the Spirit of beneficence the true Christ like spirit in the human soul, it is universal, it is endless; it is bountiful as the summer and blessed as God; for it brings to the soul trying for mercy that great truth of the New Testment that Jesus died for sinners; not for the righteous, not for the worthy, but for sinners as sinners; for the unrighteous, for the unworthy, for the guilty, for the lost; precious moment when the Holy Spirit brings this truth with power to the heart, "I had believed," exclaims the transported soul, "that Jesus died only for those who were worthy of so rich a sacrifice, of such immense love." I thought to bring some piece of merit in my hands, some self-preparation, some previous fitness, something to render my case worthy of His notice, and to propitiate His kind regard. But now I see His salvation is for the vile, the poor, the outcast, the miserable; I read that when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly, that while we were sinners Christ died for us; that while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son; that it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that it is without money and without price; that it is by grace we are saved, and that it is of faith, that it might be by grace.

This good news these joyful tidings, this glorious message of free mercy for the vilest of the vile, believed, received, welcomed, in a moment the clouds all vanish, the fogs all disappear, the face of God beams in mild and softened lustre, and amidst light and joy, gladness and praise, the jubilee of the soul is ushered in. Surely the gospel is a vital power, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

How applicable are the words of the Apostle Paul. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the powerful prince of darkness, the Spirit now working in the children of disobedience among whom also we all took our course formerly in the inordinate desires of our flesh, gratifying the propensities of the flesh, and of the mind, were by nature children of wrath, even as others; but God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together, for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast."

It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing, the words that I speak, they are spirit, that is to be taken in a spiritual sense: and then you will find, that they are life to your souls, &c.

Whereas to take them in a literal sense, they are most unprofitable and monstrous. Christianity has nothing to do with the absurdities of Transubstantiation or the figurative phraseology of early Christain writers; it is not the doctrine which is employed, or the instrument; it is not the illustrations which are employed or the reasonings which may be deduced, it is not the cathedral with its long isle, and fretted roof, and pealing music, and burning incense, and fluttering robes, and wooden crosses, nor is it splended but empty "form of godliness," which distinguishes the religion of the many that gives to Christantiy its vital power, it is that something else besides, over and above all these interior and these external elements; these are what Christ called the flesh and he says that in and of themselves they profit nothing, the words that I speak unto you they are Spirit and they are life.

3. This vital power is the Holy Spirit accompanying the truth as revealed in the Word of God. We soon learn that we have neither taste or capacity for pure and spiritual religion till the Holy Spirit create it, nor life, nor saving light till He produce it; and thus the work of the Holy Spirit becomes to him who is the subject of its power, a great, a living and glorious truth, his quickener, his comforter. To him the Bible was once a dull and uninteresting volume, in which he could find little to enlighten his mind or interest his heart; he now discovers in it glorious truths; he has heard sounding in it celestial music, the very voice of God, the very accents of eternity. He sees it to be a storehouse of all his soul needs, a book that surpasses all in interest and importance; it is his study by day, his meditation by night; he regards it as the oracle God has erected for us; our pillar of cloud in the wilderness by day, and our pillar of fire by night. He tests all religious opinions, sentiments and theories by it, and what is not in the Bible, he is convinced, is not essential to our salvation, and what is there he reverences as if he saw God bow the heavens, and heard His words clearly and unequivocally from the sky saying unto him, Why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins. He confers not with flesh and blood, but yields obedience to the divine command, and says, in the language of the poet:

Should it rend some fond connection,
Should I suffer shame of loss,
Yet the fragrant blest reflection,
I have been where Jesus was,
Will revive me,
When I faint beneath the cross.

He goes down into the water and is buried with his Saviour by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies bathed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the profession of faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised (Hebrews 10th chapter, 19th to 24th verses).

4. Under such influence is developed a personal experience differing from any that have been otherwise developed.

A personal experience which awakens in us and finally perfects a character in some humble degree like that of Christ, which educates our nature and our habits into a likeness of Christ's nature and habits, and I think these may be stated in three words:

1, Purity. 2, Love. 3, Activity.

1. Purity, including all that is meant by righteousness, uprightness, integrity, truth, justice, fidelity.

2. Love, developing all that is taught by God, by Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, of goodness, of disposition or heart, kindness of nature, graciousness, actual goodness, beneficence and mercy.

3. Activity, the quality of being active; the habit of diligent and vigorous pursuit of the work God has given into our hands; we must employ all this resurrection power in the soul, as a force upon other men, and upon the world itself, etc.

As Christ was pure loving, and energetic, so every one that is born in God, has excited in him a tendency towards universal purity, universal love, and universal activity. This life not only begins by divine influence, but continues and developes itself all the way through by communion with God. As its indispensable cause, it is not a work that is completed and then left; that which began must continue, therefore Christ is called the "Author and the finisher of our faith."

He that awakens in us this new tendency is constantly nourishing it, and stimulates it day by day, and developes it into the perfect character of a man in Christ Jesus.

These are, then, the original elements of a Christian life; the power of God working in the human soul. Under that power the development of the soul into purity, love and activity, is natural as is also the continuity of natural life under such a disclosure and development, by the constant presence and influence of the Spirit of God.

5. In Christ you will become spiritual, but only in him; the words that I, your Lord speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life. Therefore no man can develope the spirituality except through the power which comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. No other name is given under heaven whereby he can do this. This is the only influence which has proved itself competent to do it, and it is declared that it is the only influence that ever will do it.

6. We see in Christ the true model of Christian character, by which it is to be moulded and fashioned, in all godliness; every soul recast into this model, every mind conformed to this pattern, and every life reflecting this image, brings a revenue of glory to Christ our Savour. There is no single practical truth in the word of God, on which the Spirit is more emphatic than the example Christ has set for the imitation of his followers, the church needed a perfect pattern, a flawless model, it wanted an impersonation, a living embodiment of those precepts of the gospel so strictly enjoined upon every believer. To whom should it look? to the holiest of mere men? Nay! Hear what one says who yearned to be a pattern of all that was noble in the Christian character:

"Be ye followers of me, even as I, also, am of Christ." Only as I am conformed to him as my copy, my pattern, my example.

But God has graciously set before us our true model, whom he did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. "Therefore Christ has left us an example that we should follow His steps."

In His lowly spirit, meek, humble deportment, and patient endurance of suffering:- "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." In the disinterestedness of His love, His pure benevolence in the unselfishness of his religion. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others; let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; for even Christ pleased not Himself.

Let us not be self-willed in matters involving the peace and comfort of others. Let us not form favorite theories or individual opinions to the hazard of a church's prosperity, or a family's happiness. Let us yield, sacrifice and give place rather than carry a point to the detriment of others. Let us, with a generous, disinterested spirit in all things, imitate Jesus, who "pleased not himself." Let us seek the good of others, honoring their gifts, respecting their opinions, nobly yielding when they correct and overrule our own. Let us promote the peace of the church, consult the honor of Christ, and seek the glory of God above and beyond all private and selfish ends; this is to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son, to which high calling we are predestinated.

7. Let the love of God be shed abroad in our souls by the Holy Spirit, which is given unto us, and there is not one power of the mind nor in all the imagination, that is not willing to twine around about love and say love rules; and it truly inspires pride and vanity, and all the ambitious forces of the soul will bow down in the train of love. When man is actuated by this spirit, how easy it is for him to go to others and tell them kindly their faults, and help them rid themselves of them. Men usually will bear to be told their faults by a person that has this diposition, but never by a person who has it not. It is the only feeling around which you can reconstruct the human character. I think there is no question but that a minister may speak what he thinks it is necessary to speak. The question is, can he love enough to be a faithful speaker?

A man who, hating sin, is always thinking how hateful it is, if not well adapted to benefit those who are sinful, by preaching to them against it. We are commanded to abhor that which is evil, but that is not the whole nor the half of it. We are not only to abhor that which is evil, but we are to love our fellow-men, and a minister must not only abhor evil, but he must love his people. So that when he thunders to them disagreeable truths from the pulpit, he will leave the impression on their minds that he does it because he loves them, that he sympathizes with them, desires to do them good, and is willing suffer for them. Let him do this, and he can say anything to them that needs to be said. I do not wonder that men do not want a minister to preach disagreeable truths to them out of a heart of coldness, or even judicial purity; but let him talk to them in a spirit of Christian love, and they will bear a great deal of hard speaking from him. If a man has not this spirit he had better not be a public teacher, for it is this alone that can give him that divine power of sympathy which he needs to have for sinful fellow-men.

True Christian love is the grain that is to be the bread of life; it is that which is to transform man, and lead him in his treatment of his fellow-men, to imitate Him who bowed His majesty and laid His head in the grave, giving His life to show His love for us, and to rescue us from eternal death.

Without this vital power a church bears the same relation to Christianity as the chaff to the wheat, or the husk to the corn.

8. There are multitudes of persons who are asking for argument, asking for reasoning upon the great truths of Christianity. "The words that I spake unto you," says your Master, "are Spirit, they are Life." Christ's argument to you is this: My son, give me your heart, and you shall never doubt if you ask me to reason upon the great truths of Christianity with you. I say to you, give your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and see if those effects which he has promised do not follow, and see if they do not amount to an argument transcending in power and validity any other argument that can be produced.

Some will deny all this, but we have a succession of witnesses coming through a period of more than two thousand years down to us, that there is such a fact as Christ in the Soul, and the hope of glory; that there is such an experience as that the Holy Ghost descends into the soul, cleanses it, inspires it, reorganizes it, fills it with faith, and hope, and joy, and that it abides with us.

Bearing witness in every possible emergency, they come from the stake, from the dungeon, from the battle-field, from the mountain cave, from sick-chambers. When we see human life transformed and made magnificent and glorious through suffering, etc.

Characters effulging from weakness and obscurity when all the record of the past is made luminous with the memorials of what has been done in man's souls by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Are we to take this long cloud of witnesses that have lived, but are now passed away, and all that now live and bear the same testimony and count it all as nothing? No! For we feel this day that Christianity is a vital power, that the words that Jesus has spoken unto us they are spirit, and they are life.

Lastly. There may be some here to-day with whom God's Spirit is now striving. Grieve not the Spirit of God, by which you are to be saved, and without which you shall never see the Kingdom of Heaven! Oh, come thou Holy Spirit likened to the wind, from thy celestial chambers, blow not only on these dry bones in this congregation, but far as the curse of sin is found, so that a mighty army may be raised up to call the Redeemer blessed.

Waft, waft, ye winds his story,
And you ye waters roll,
Till like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole;
'Till o'er our ransomed nature,
The Lamb for sinner's slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In blest return to reign.

To the ministers and delegates of this Association, I say unto you, give Christ the pre-eminence in your love, desires, delights, conversation, in your homes, in the church, and in all our educational institutions, Home and Foreign Missionary Boards, and then you will be able to write the errors of your brethren and sisters on the sands, that some friendly wave may wash them all away, but engrave their virtues on the tablets of endearing memory. And when heart and flesh shall faint and fail, be thou "Oh Lamb of God the strength of our hearts," and our portion forever. Amen.

For Jesus' Sake.

Annie Grim stood on the dunce stool for the third time that week. The offence was twisting her tangled brown curls into horns so that little Lottie May laughed outright and disturbed the school. The hands of the clock were pointing to four and the other children were marching two and two out of the school-house, most of them looking wistfully over their shoulers at the shabby figure standing on the stool and wearing a pair of wornout men's boots. Annie was a general favorite; the older children would miss her merry chatter and romps which brightened the long way home, and the little ones would miss the strong young arm in crossing fences and ditches. When the last child had gone out Miss Laura turned to her pupil and said, wearily: "You may sit down, Annie, and study the lesson you missed this morning." The big boots came down heavily from the stool and their owner dragged them slowly across the room to her seat, into which she carelessly dropped, bending her curly head over a greasy spelling book. For some moments not a sound broke the stillness save the occasional snapping of the coals in the stove. The schoolmistress leaned her head on the desk and closed her tired eyes. From time to time two brown eyes glanced at her from over the greasy spelling book, and suddenly they flashed in astonishment, for tears were stealing down the teacher's cheeks. Poor Laura was disheartened. The children had been hard to manage. A letter had come from home saying her precious father was not at all well, and added to his anxiety was the certainty that her salary would not be paid in time for her to go home to spend Christmas. Her head ached and her heart ached, but she knew Him who was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and her lips moved silently in prayer for strength and comfort. As the watching eyes in the corner gazed, a mist gathered slowly in them, quenching their defiant sparkle. Two dirty little feet were drawn from the boots and crept noiselessly across the room, a little arm was wound around schoolmistress' waist and a sweet voice said, hesitatingly, "Please don't cry, Miss Laura, and I'll never make horns or trouble you again." Her teacher drew the child towards her and in broken tones told her of the cares that burdened her and of how she tried through all to bear them for Jesus' sake and do her duty faithfully.

"Miss Laura," said Annie, "I have troubles, too; but I cut up and try to forget them. How can you be so sweet and good?"

Then Laura lifted the child to her lap and told in simple language how the dear Saviour loves and cares for every one, and how he wants us to take up our cross and bear it patiently, looking to him for strength and guidance. When she finished, Annie was sitting bolt upright, a hopeful light shining in her great brown eyes as she said:

"Oh I am so glad you told me that. I'll tell Tim to-night, and father, too. We used to be better and go to church till mother died, and then father took to drinking, and Tim and I don't say our prayers or try to do anything for Jesus' sake. Tim rides with the mail bags, rain or shine, and he's sick, and father takes the money and spends it as fast as Tim gets it, and that's what's breaking my heart. But I ought to be good and help them to remember, instead of being so wild and naughty."

Miss Laura again urged the little girl to go to Jesus with these troubles, and assured her of His loving comfort, and and then Annie pulled on the old boots and they walked home in the gathering twilight. It was a precious influence the teacher had left with this little girl, who through her example and teaching had been led to see Jesus. Soon Annie had made the poor home cheerful with firelight, and set the evening meal. Then with hope in her heart, but with anxious eyes, she watched for the home-coming of her father and brother. Soon her face brightened, for some one rode up to the door of the postoffice and handed the mail-bag to the postmaster; then on to the stables, for Tim took care of the horses, too. The moments seemed ages to the girl at the window, and she thought she had never known Tim to walk so slowly as he came towards the house. She could wait no longer, but rushed out and caught him by the arm. As the rays from the fire fell through the open door into the boy's face, it showed a hopeless, almost despairing look, and when the door was reached he fell helpless into the room; other footsteps came rapidly up the path, and in a moment Mr. Grim was bending over his boy with a pale face. An anxious week followed and then the mail carrier was better. During the nights of silent watching, Annie told her father of her conversation with her teacher, and with tears had begged him for her sake and Tim's, but most of all for "Jesus' sake," to lead a better life, and when Tim was better she told him too, and it was beautiful to see the pale face light up as he whispered "Yes, for Jesus' sake, we will lead better lives, trusting all to Him." And they were faithful to the end. Tim became a minister of the gospel and won many souls to his Master, and years after we find Annie a happy wife and mother. The old gray haired man the children call "grandpa," often gathers the little ones round him and tells him how the sweet duty of living for "Jesus' sake," planted in the heart of a child by her teacher, worked a miracle in the home and lives of three of their nearest and dearest.

"O Sir, I Can't!"

The hot sun of a July morning was pouring down upon the backs of the busy berry pickers. Under the spreading branches of an apple tree in the midst of the berry patch was a long table of rough boards, on which the berries, gathered in wooden boxes, were placed, and from which they were transferred to iron-bound crates by Charles McIntosh, a boy of fifteen.

He was so busily engaged that he did not notice the approach of Mr. Millard, the owner of the fruit farm, who stood for some time silently watching him, as with deft fingers he arranged the quart boxes. A box had fallen short of the full measure, so he evened it full. "I must speak to Bob Sackett," he thought to himself. "He's not picking fair."

"These boxes are much too full," said Mr. Millard's gruff voice beside him, which so startled Charlie that he nearly let the box fall out of his hand. "You must take out a few of these berries."

Charlie looked up at the stern face of his master.

"O sir, I can't!" he faltered, "it would be dishonest."

Mr. Millard's face flushed. "You dare to speak so to me. Very well, I discharge you immediately. Those who work for me are to do as I say. To-day is Saturday, so I will pay you in full. You can go home. Send Bob Sackett to me at once," he said to a little fellow who had just brought his box to the table.

Charlie walked slowly away, while Mr. Millard, after a few hurried words to Bob Sackett, unfastened his ponies, which had been impatiently waiting, and drove away. Somehow, he did not feel in a very comfortable frame of mind. The macadamized roads, over which the light carriage bowled so smoothly, and the brisk gait of the high-stepping ponies, failed to give the usual satisfaction. The sorrowful yet manly look of the boy's eyes haunted him, and the clear voice rang again in his ears, "O sir, I can't."

"Hold on there, Mr. Millard!" shouted Mr. Banks, the grocer, as he drove through the city streets in an absent-minded manner.

Mr. Millard pulled up his horses at the pavement.

"You may send me half-a-dozen more crates of your raspberries, Mr. Millard. I have never before found them in so good a condition and the boxes so well filled. I do not mind telling you now that I was dissatisfied last year; the measure was scant, and my customers grumbled. Of course you we aware of it," he went on hastily, "and I had some thought of telling you. So this year I am much pleased, and if the rest of the berries are in the same good condition, I will raise the price a cent a quart."

"Very well," said Mr. Millard. "I will send them to you, but I must drive on now, for I have pressing business."

He turned the carriage around as he spoke, and gave the loose rein to his ponies, rather to Mr. Banks' surprise, who thought he surely must be going the wrong way.

More swiftly than he came he drove back, but swifter than the wheels flew his thought. Mr. Millard was not an intentionally dishonest man, but he had done a dishonest thing that morning. Once really convinced of wrong, Mr. Millard was a man who would confess his wrong and right it as far as he could. That the berries had been, according to Mr. Banks' statement, short in measure before, had not been by his orders, and his remarks this morning had not been a forethought.

As he turned down the road toward his farm, he saw a boy with downcast head walking slowly along absorbed in thought. He reined up his horses so suddenly that he nearly threw them on their haunches.

"Hello, Charlie," he called "hop in here."

The boy looked up as he heard the cheery voice. Past grief, present surprise and joy, were all pictured in his face as he obeyed the command. As soon as he was seated, Mr. Millard said: "Charlie, I beg your pardon for what I did this morning. You were right. It was a dishonest thing, although I did not fully intend it to be so. I thank you for your courage in standing up for the right."

Then Mr. Millard briefly told of his encounter with Mr. Banks that morning. In ending he said, "I know you are working very hard to get an eduction. Because I was wrong, and not because of the bribe of an additional cent a quart for doing right, and because, above all, I appreciate your manliness, I shall give you that extra penny for the rest of the season."

Charlie tried to thank him, but the words stuck in his throat. They were now at the berry patch, and there found Bod Sackett busily scanting the measure according to his instructions. He did not look over pleased to see Charlie returning in so triumphant a manner.

Mr. Millard saw the sullen expression on the boy's face, and after a few earnest words of explanation, he said kindly, "I know it is hard, Bob, to go back to berry picking. Do your work well, be honest and fair, and perhaps another season you may stand in Charlie's shoes. A boy who can say bravely, 'I can't,' has better things in store for him."—*The Advance.*

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