

Sunday Reading.

Obedience, the true path of knowledge.

A SERMON PREACHED IN GRANVILLE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH HALIFAX, ON LORD'S DAY, MARCH 5TH, 1882.

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"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."—JOHN vii. 17.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And yet some portions of Scripture may be, to us, more practical and important than others. It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of the teaching of this text. "If any man will do his will." A first view of the renowned Niagara Falls, is sometimes disappointing, but a fuller acquaintance with this grand display of the waters, often leads the beholder to exclaim, "Behold the half was not told me." Not half the meaning of these plain words of Jesus can be told by human tongue or pen, but a prayerful consideration of them may yield us some profit. May the Spirit who enlightens, help us as we proceed.

The term "doctrine," means the "teaching," or that which is taught. Jesus was the great Teacher. As He went from village to village, He taught. Sometimes of course He wrought miracles, but evidently teaching was the great work of his life. Some of the things taught were the same as the lessons found in the Old Testament scriptures, in fact the ordinary lessons of daily life, honesty, truthfulness, industry and kindness, are such as must commend themselves to all men, in any age or country. They need no commendation, because they commend themselves. They need no proof, for they are almost like the axioms of mathematics, self-evident. To attempt to prove, for instance, that honesty is better than dishonesty, that truthfulness is better than falsehood, that kindness is better than cruelty, is almost like attempting to prove that the sun shines when our eyes are already dazzled with his beams.

But all that Christ taught, was not of this simple and self-evident character. There are some very deep truths; some doctrines hard to be understood. Some things taught, which seem to stand opposed to our experience, some reach far on beyond the bounds of time, and there are no means, at least, many suppose that there are no means by which we can test them, or prove them. The natural result of this is doubt, a sort of uncertainty, a little misgiving in the mind. We have all of us at times experienced it. Some things in the Bible seem almost too dreadful to be true, others seem almost too good to be true, and many seem too wonderful to be true. And who is there among us, that have not, at times at least, said to ourselves, "O that all the mists and fogs, and darkness that rest upon human destiny could be removed; that we could only know for a certainty, what we are, and where we are, and whither we are bound, what there is that lies beyond the reach of our present vision. In such perplexities nothing of course can give us relief, except it be "trust in God." I know not, but God knows, and if He is my father and friend, I can safely leave it all in his hand, and wait for his further developments. While it is safe for us thus to trust, and to wait for more light, there are many among us, who would travel far to-day, to meet that teacher, if he could be found, who could so unfold the mysteries of life, and the destinies of our race, as to leave no doubts resting upon their minds. But no such teacher can be found, except it is the great teacher Christ; and we must come back, therefore, to "the word,"—the doctrines contained in the divine word.

And here in this verse we find the key by which the great store house may be unlocked. A test which we each of us may apply to the doctrines of Christ: "If any man will do his will," that is the will of God, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."

Now let us dwell a little upon this thought, and unfold some of its beauties. Here we are getting on to solid ground. Here we are finding our way out of the mists and fogs which may have surrounded us. Here we find why our faith has been so feeble, and why so many have no faith at all. Those who have been doing the will of God very imperfectly, have very imperfect faith, and those who haven't been doing the will of God at all, have no faith at all, while those whose daily prayer has been, "Teach me to do thy will, O God," and have been living in the spirit of that prayer, come to have great faith, of one such the Saviour said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Let us consider this principle in connection with some of the leading doctrines of Christ.

1st. The doctrine of regeneration. What is that doctrine? In the words of the prophet we meet it as a promise. "I" saith the Lord, "will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh," that is, a loving, sensitive, tender heart. In the words of Christ, it is given as a necessity. "Ye must be born again," "except a man is born again, or from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Now, can we know of this doctrine, whether it is of human or divine origin? Yes, but how? By reasoning about it? No. How shall we test it? By doing the will of God in reference to it. What is the will of God? "Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The will of God then is, that people should unlock and open the doors of their hearts, and let the blessed Spirit in. When this is done, they will not doubt that God can take away the heart of stone and give a heart of flesh. And yet there are thousands, nay, millions in the world who have no confidence in the doctrine of regeneration. They build up about them barricades of selfishness, of worldliness, of pride, of self-will, of self-importance, of self-righteousness, of disobedience, and every sin that God hates; and from behind these entrenchments, they cry out, "We don't believe in the doctrine of regeneration. People are born once, and that is enough, the new birth is all a delusion." To them it must ever seem to be a delusion, so long as the heart is bolted, barred and locked, against the Spirit, who regenerates. They may talk, read, study, think, enquire, argue, go over the matter, and try to get under the matter; yet it is not a subject for head and brains, but for heart and soul. And one hour of close communion with the Spirit that recreates, regenerates, and sanctifies, would give more knowledge of the doctrine of what Christ meant, and taught, than forty years of vain speculation upon the subject. There is a short road to deep knowledge, to extensive information. It is the path of obedience. Do the will of God, and you shall know of the doctrine. Apply it.

2nd To the doctrine of sanctification. What is this doctrine? As expressed by the prophet, "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." As expressed by Jesus in parable, "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." That is, both these figures point to a constant moving on toward perfection. As expressed by the Apostle Peter in timely advice, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To whom be glory both now and forever." As expressed by Paul, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." We gather from these passages and many others of similar import, that regeneration is only grace begun, not finished, that "they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, and mount up on wings like eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint." Are these life pictures? or are they poetical fancies? Are they the happy experiences of a large majority of professed Christians? or do the majority slide away back again into the world, and often lose the hope they once possessed, sighing as they go,

"Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or, am I not?"

Ask such persons, is there such a thing as growth in grace, growth in holiness, a getting nearer and still nearer to God? A fuller sense of his pardoning love, more deadness to the world, and more life in, and likeness to Christ? The answer must be, "I don't know," "I can't tell." Books say, "there is." But my experience says, "there is not." But he that doeth the will of God will know, and he is the only one who can know. Your entire sanctification, body, soul and spirit, is the will of God. "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." And he who fights and wins, knows that he does. He who runs, climbs, mounts, soars and gets further from earth, nearer to heaven, nearer to God, and breathes more and still more of the celestial atmosphere, knows the meaning of the doctrine of sanctification because he himself is undergoing the process of being sanctified.

Suppose now we apply this principle to the teachings of the Bible, in reference to prayer.

What is the doctrine of prayer? That men ought always to pray and not faint. That they ought to pray in faith, nothing doubting. That when they pray, they may approach God, as a Father. That if they pray in the right spirit, they are sure to receive a blessing in return. Christ's words are, "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." And lest this might be deemed a special promise to certain individuals, but not applicable to all, the Saviour goes on, and makes it general. "For" he says, "every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Here the door is thrown wide open to all, and heavenly blessings promised, for the asking. These principles, I mean the doctrine of prayer, is illustrated by Jesus himself, in so many parables, and other figures of speech, that there can be no doubt as to his meaning. He means, that real prayer will reach heaven and bring the blessings down.

Now then how shall we test this doctrine altogether; and say, "What profit shall we have, if we pray unto him? Work they say, and not prayer, brings bread. Pure air, wholesome food and proper exercise, and not prayer, give health and strength of body. Caution, and not prayer, will save from accidents. And so through the whole scale of human wants and necessities, they will say, they do not come through the channel of prayer. Therefore prayer is of no value.

But there are others, who would not say just this; and yet it is evident, that they do not know the value of prayer. There is doubt in reference to the matter. There is misgiving. There is uncertainty. They are not sure, that God answers prayer. When trouble comes they see no way out, and very frequently the more efforts they make, to get out of difficulty, the deeper they get in. Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee; are words to be repeated, but not a promise to be relied on. How shall this uncertainty be removed? How shall the doctrine of Christ in regard to prayer be tested? "He that doeth the will of God, shall know of the doctrine." And he is the only one who ever will know of the doctrine.

Several excellent books have been published of late, showing the wonderful answers to prayer, how sickness has been removed, dangers averted, financial embarrassments avoided, wants supplied, friends converted, in answer to earnest supplication. These records are good, and are no doubt reliable. For they are in harmony with the whole tenor of the Bible. It may do us good to read such things, and help to confirm our faith. But we may read and hear many such things of others, and never know of the doctrine of prayer, but by personally doing the will of God ourselves in the matter. There is no way to learn the value of prayer, but by praying. He who learns to take his great wants, and his little wants, his great sorrows and little ones, his great sins and his little ones, all to God and leave them there, and comes away lighter, happier, will not doubt the efficacy of prayer. He who prays much and often, and long, and earnestly, with importunity and with

faith, that is the man who will know of the doctrine. Because in this matter at least, he is doing the will of God. In other words, the only way to learn spiritual truth, is to learn it experimentally. There is a great treasure house of divine knowledge. But it is of no use to go around it and inspect the exterior, or under it, or over it. You must enter the building and handle the treasures for yourself. The flavor of the fruits can be judged of only by tasting. "O taste and see that the Lord is gracious; blessed is the man that trusteth in him." "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

We have taken these three doctrines, regeneration, sanctification and prayer to illustrate the principle of the text. All the other doctrines of the Bible may be dealt with in the same manner. They can all be tested and known, their truthfulness proved by simply doing the will of God in reference to them. Justification by faith, forgiveness of sin through the blood of the atonement, eternal life in Christ. All of these can be known simply by doing the will of God.

"Impossible for any one to know, whether his sins are forgiven or not," you will hear some people say. But isn't forgiveness of sins through the merits of his own blood, one of the doctrines taught by Christ? Doesn't He say, "He that believeth hath everlasting life? "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." If they do his will and believe, if they do his will and give up self-righteousness; if they do his will, and lie low at the cross, they shall have such an inward consciousness of sins forgiven, and peace with God, that they wouldn't thank an angel from heaven to come and tell them that their names are written in heaven. Why, they know it. They feel it in every beat of their pulse, every throb of their heart, in every fibre of their being.

And so we may take it for granted, that if we do not know the doctrines of Christ, if we are in doubt, and are hanging over us in reference to our future destiny, then we are not doing the will of God. For the will of God is that through Christ, who is the light of the world, our path should be as the shining light, brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

But the doctrines of Christ embrace some which reach beyond this life. Here is the promise of the life, that is, and of that which is to come. Here are the doctrines of the Resurrection of the body, the final judgment, and the future condition of the good and the bad in another world. Very important and very solemn doctrines. Can they be tested too in the same way as doing the will of God? We think so. But as earth must be made the stepping stone to heaven, by beginning with the doctrines of Christ, we can only know of the higher ones, by beginning with the lower. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how all ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" We must begin with earthly things in order to attain to the heavenly things. The knowing the one doctrine, will aid us in knowing the other.

Shall the dead be raised? So Christ asks. But we can only know of doctrine personally now, by exercising in our own souls the power of Christ's resurrection. Being made alive from the dead by the power of a living Christ, there is no difficulty in believing in the general resurrection. For already a change wrought in our hearts, in our prospects and hopes, almost as that to be by and by wrought in our bodies. He who already in a new world, because of God's mercies easily expect also a new body. He walks by faith now and sees that which is invisible, and hears voices of earth, can easily anticipate when he shall walk also by sight and behold with his own eyes from him he has learned to love, and unseen. Those dead, in sins, in talk of resurrection.

Brethren, now may we begin to see something of the inner meaning, the depth of that clause in the

Lord's prayer, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Why it is the doing of the will of God, upon earth, that explains all the doctrines of Christ, that opens and unfolds all the mysteries of our being. It is the doing of the will of God on earth, that opens the flood-gates of light and life, to be poured into our darkened hearts. It is doing his will that brings God down, or raises us up (put it which way you will) so that we may walk with him as Enoch of old, and He with us. It will make life a joy, an anthem of praise, a short delightful run through gardens of roses and singing birds into the paradise of heaven, into the palace chamber of God.

O my friends, let us rush out of the fogs and mists of doubt and uncertainty, into the bright light of God's own glory, by running in the way of his commandments. If we never do his will we may still know of the doctrines when too late. Even the ungodly will know by and by that the resurrection of Christ is eternal ruin.

In Memoriam.

For the Christian Messenger.

Memoir of the late Rev. Samuel MacLeod.

For the last forty-five years there lived in the quiet settlement of Uigg, P. E. Island, a most elevated servant of Jesus Christ, the Rev. Samuel MacLeod, who, on the 23rd day of August last in the 86th year of his age was called to his reward. The papers announced his death, but said little of his life, and were it of an ordinary character it might be better to write no more; but "a great man has fallen amongst us;" his memory is cherished by all who knew him; his memoir ought to be written and should be studied by those who knew him not; would that an abler pen and a larger space were the gifts of the writer, for the subject of the sketch demands both.

Mr. MacLeod was born in Uigg, Isle of Skye, Scotland, in the year 1795, and from his boyhood gave evidence of more than ordinary powers of mind and ardent thirst for knowledge. Having received all the education the schools of his native place could impart, he spent some time in the Grammar School of Partree, and when prepared for college, and on the eve of leaving, in the providence of God, he took suddenly ill, and thus his plans in this respect, were frustrated. His desire for education, however, continued and while teaching school in his native place, he made the best possible improvement of the advantages already received. It was his good fortune, in the early period of his manhood to attend the ministry of the ever-memorable Haldanes of Scotland, under whose efficient labors for Christ and humanity he was converted to God. His conversion was soon followed by a change of views on the subject of Christian Baptism, and possessing the devotion of a consecrated soul, and the courage of his convictions, he was baptised, in harmony with the teachings of Jesus Christ, by the father of the Rev. Malcolm Ross. Having been brought up strictly in the Kirk of Scotland, his union with the then despised sect of the Baptists brought upon him the usual persecution, which first appeared in depriving him of the school in which he was a most efficient teacher. His submission, independence and pious will appeared at the time of his dismission. Owning the chair whereon he sat he quietly placed it upon his shoulder, saying, "My position is better than that of England's King, were he dethroned he must leave his throne, but I take mine with me." Nothing daunted by this attempt of the enemy to discourage a new-born soul, but rather driven nearer to Jesus, as is always the effect of persecution on the regenerate, he devoted himself unreservedly to the cause of Christ, improving his gifts on all proper occasions in exhorting his fellow men to be reconciled to God. He was then but a mere youth, not out of his teens, yet the influence of his holy life was most marked and extensive. The following may be cited in illustration of this fact. The Rev. Mr. Fraser, now of Ontario, on a certain occasion heard a young man using improper language. The man of God sought to check him in his sin and lead him to repentance by

propounding the following questions, "What would you do if the day of judgment should now come?" The reply was, "If I could get inside of Samuel McLeod I would feel safe." The reply may appear silly, but it taught at least one fact, viz., that the holy life of Samuel McLeod made a profound impression on the ungodly youth, and such was the influence of his life wherever he was known both in the land of his birth, and in the land of his adoption.

Mr. MacLeod came to this Island in the year 1829, and for seven years taught school in Belfast, and preached to the people publicly and from house to house, complete salvation through the merit of Jesus. As in Scotland, so here the people were impressed by his Christian integrity, and so taught by his faithful words that in many pious lives in that community to-day he lives again.

In the year 1836 Mr. MacLeod was called of God to live among his countrymen at Uigg, where, with a great soul aglow with love to Jesus and a heart devoted to the people with whom he linked his destinies, he settled down in the dense forest, and with consecrated heart and strong arm determined to provide for himself and family, and preach the gospel to the people free of charge, ambitious only to please God and benefit his fellowmen, and not a few, among them the writer, will bless God forever for the decision of that eventful hour. With his characteristic fidelity to God and to the souls of men he preached the gospel in barns and dwellings, and in the year 1840 was ordained as the esteemed pastor of the Baptist Church at Uigg and Belfast. With the modesty which characterized the whole life of this man of God, and was visible in his every movement, he speaks of this step in the following words, "The Lord knows with what feelings I yielded to the wishes of the people, endeavoring to stand in the breach until the Lord would send a better, and then ready to resign." The union thus formed, most harmoniously and with untold blessings to the people of his charge, continued, until, in the year 1867, a sense of failing health caused him to press his resignation which was reluctantly accepted by the people. Although he thus formally severed his connection he continued to be virtually their pastor in the true sense of the term, visiting their sick, burying their dead, sharing their sorrows, counselling in difficulties, sympathizing in every trial, and in the absence of other preachers, which was frequent, preaching the gospel which he loved so much. Thus he continued to labor as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed until within a few months of his departure.

The influence of so long a pastorate (nominally twenty-seven years but virtually fifty-two) in one community by a man so self-sacrificing, so devoted, so wise, so pious—in a word, so Christ-like—in forming character and moulding life cannot be written by human pen—the great reckoning day alone can reveal it. In the lives of Revs. John A. MacDonald, late of Nebraska, John A. MacLean of Hillsburg, John A. Gordon of Milton, and others in the gospel ministry, to say nothing of a host of strong and true laymen such as Deacon M. S. MacLeod, his son, Deacon Wm. MacLeod of Dundas, Deacon A. A. McLean and bro. N. J. MacDonald of Montague, and many others who are doing good service in the cause of God, nearly all of whom heard from him their first gospel sermon and all of whom sat as learners at his feet, this moulding power has been and is now being seen, and though he is dead, in these lives, he yet speaketh.

One of the above named brethren—a true Christian man, in a letter to the writer speaks of Father MacLeod's religious life and of himself as one of his spiritual children, and says:—"Compare us as trees: we disciples do not seem to have got over the operation of transplanting into Christ's vineyard. Although grown quite tall we still require propping, and the shelter of the hedge of exclusion from certain phases of Christian trial. Our fruit still displays too much of the flavor of the wild olive. But he needed no propping. His roots seemed to be imbedded in the soil beyond the power of storms, and his fruit was as the fruit of the trees of Paradise." Were all the