

A LIFE OF FAITH.

Rev. Alfred Cookman.

(From The Higher Christian Life.)

We cannot too strongly insist upon the point that the higher Christian life, as it is sometimes denominated, is peculiarly a life of faith. There are very many who get their minds filled with the idea that there is a special experience in connection with this grace, and they are most earnestly and persistently in quest of this experience. Now there is an experience, of course, but this is not the main feature of the grace. Its main feature is faith in God; an acceptance of and a submission to the will of God. Such a constant acquiescence as makes us independent of experience. If God gives us a joyful experience, we accept as an indication of His will while it is given. If He withholds a joyful experience, we are satisfied, for we recognize that, too, as an indication of His will while it is withheld. The point is, to keep our will steady to the Divine will, to live a life of faith in God. This suggestion will be important, not only for those who are struggling for a higher life, but for some who are living that life. If all the Lord says is true, then why am I thus? I am often without joy; sometimes my mind is not perfectly composed; now and then my communion with God seems interrupted. Again, I suffer severe inward conflicts. I am frequently unconscious of anything like trouble; and again, in these distresses, I cannot always understand my condition, but am perplexed in regard to my state." First, observe you say, "I am often without joy." Now, let me ask, does sanctifying grace imply perpetual joy? I think the testimony of witnesses (living and dead) on this point is that their prevailing state of mind is not of high emotion. On the contrary, they have calmness, quietness and rest of soul. Second, ah, but you say, "My mind is not always perfectly composed." True, it may be hurried, through its connection with the body and the world around; through nervous influences and passing events. It may also be discomposed through ignorance or misconception, but observe, mental disquiet does not infer unsanctified affection. Third, but you say, "My communion with God sometimes seems interrupted." Mark, *seems* interrupted. You may be mistaken in this matter. What is communion with God? Is it unceasing rapture in prayer; is it an unvarying sense of God's presence; is it an equally distinct apprehension at all times of His love to us? Is it an unchanging degree of assurance? Nay, is it not rather steady faith in God; and may there not be this faith without much, if any, joy? Fourth, but "I suffer inward conflicts." Yes, and so do all the sanctified. We are sanctified to prepare us for conflict. Those who are most holy are often set in the front of the battle. Fifth, but "I am frequently unconscious of anything like triumph." Is thy triumph in the midst of the battle? The soldier first fights and then triumphs. Mark, in the midst, a joy of hope. Sixth, "I am sometimes perplexed respecting my religious state." This may involve the intellect rather than the affections. Entire sanctification does not imply perfect self-knowledge. We may wish to know too much. If we understood all we should have no need to trust. We may know, and we ought to know, our general state, and where we stand in Divine things.

This higher life, then, does not imply perpetual rejoicing. And now to confirm these propositions, glance at the blessed Redeemer.

In Him we have an example of perfect sanctification. Was he perfectly joyful? Hear Him say, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful." Yes, He was a man of sorrows. Did Christ enjoy undisturbed mental composure? Think of His scene of agony in the garden and on the cross. He was sore amazed. Did Jesus have uninterrupted communion with the Father? In the sense of confidence He had. Had the Saviour freedom from severe conflict? Nay, a life of conflict. Did Jesus always trust? He always withstood, never yielded. Triumph implies exultation. Was Jesus a man always aware of the necessity of His present sufferings? As He was, so are we—perfect resignation.

What poet is it says of the lark, "Whose nest is in the furrow, but whose soul is in the skies"?

It seems to me that is a just description of the entirely sanctified disciple. "His soul disdains on earth to dwell; he only sojourns here." His home is in the empyrean, in the pure atmosphere and surpassing glories of the Divine presence. The Hindoos talk about a bird so ethereal that it lives in the upper air, feeding on the moonbeams and drinking the virgin shower. This is a fable, of course, but is it not true of the believer, that living a life of faith he lives above the world, feeding on the shining of the Sun of Righteousness and refreshing himself with the virgin waters of the Holy Spirit? Believe me, dear friends, if we are in the world we must not be of it, partaking of its spirit, and following its customs and maxims. Earthliness debilitates, defiles, degrades, and, sooner or later, destroys all vitality in the Divine life. You remember the ancient fable of the giant who could not be subdued because every time he fell his mother, the earth, let such power into him that he sprang up at the moment and killed his antagonist, until Hercules, discovering the secret, held him in his grasp, not allowing him to touch the earth, and so crushed him. Exactly contrary is it with the Christian. The earth is not his mother. He is the child of the Sun of Righteousness, and if he descends to settle on the earth his strength vanishes. Now, brethren, if we would ascend into our native region, the region God has prepared for the soul, we must lay aside every weight. We must sever all the ties that unduly bind us to the earth. Not even right hands or right eyes must be spared. Selfishness and self-indulgence must be no more for us. We must get entirely away, and clearly and gloriously up—coming down no more. We must lift up everything we do in it, and hope from it, into that purer life of sacrifice and trust in which we abide with the Master. It must be with us as it was with Noah when he made the ark. He did not expect partly to wade and partly to float, but he went in, he and his, taking all the freight of his world's stock with him. The Lord shut him in, and the Lord lifted him up, and the Lord took care of Him. The waters now became his element, and he had no other. So, when we go out into faith we renounce every human trust. Our expectation must be alone on God, resting there, not on any human pillars.

Dear, precious friends, we have been talking together for nearly three years, and yet we feel that we have much to say—more, very much more, than we shall have time to communicate. Some of you, during our pastorate in Wilmington, have felt it your duty and privilege to devote yourselves in a fuller sense to the service and glory of Jesus. I am concerned that you should be steadfast and im-

movable. If, however, you should fall from the experience to which the Spirit of God has lifted you, you may recover it again, but you will find it has lost its virgin freshness. It will then, as now, be sanctification through the blood, but there will be the tormenting memory of loss, of unfaithfulness, that will sometimes flit like a cloud across your sky. Oh, friends, do not carelessly part with this summer bloom of Christian character and religious experience. Sacrifice, suffer, die, but be true to this grace.

First, refuse to comply with temptation under any circumstances, or to any degree. The slightest compliance will soil your garments. Do not ever parley with the enemy. Avoid the very appearance of evil. Second, live in the use of all the ordinary means of grace and prayer. The more I pray the happier I am. The mightiest men, Luther, Bramwell, Collins, Hewittson, Jesus, prayed without ceasing. Third, meditation. We must sometimes stop to take our reckoning. Fourth, searching the Scriptures with a humble, honest, teachable spirit, and oh, the joy you will feel as you find some great nugget of gold, as you dig around the roots of these great trees of Heaven's planting will make this exercise a rich privilege and an exceeding joy. Fifth, Christian communion with those who are intrusted to live the higher Christian life. This communion you may find in conversation, religious biography, meetings for the promotion of holiness. Sixth, cherish the spirit of entire sanctification. Seventh, live a life of faith. Not a life of painful endeavor. It operates when we do not think of it. It is that mysterious hand by which the holy soul clings to God amid all temptation, and so is kept from sin. Eighth, learn to live by the minute. Take care of the moment while you have it, and the next when it comes. You can live the minute without sin. Do it then. The days are made of moments. In all these counsels remember God is the efficient agent. He gives you power to will, and then you are kept by His power.

GRACE SUFFICIENT.

One evening says C. H. Spurgeon, I was riding home after a happy day's work, weary and sore depressed, when, suddenly, as a lightning flash, came: "My grace is sufficient for thee." And I said: "I should think it is, Lord," and burst out laughing. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd.

It was as if some little fish, being very thirsty, was troubled about drinking the river dry; and Father Thames said: "Drink away, little fish, my stream is sufficient for thee." Or it seemed like a little mouse in the granaries of Egypt after seven years of plenty, fearing it might die of famine, and Joseph might say: "Cheer up, little mouse, my granaries are sufficient for thee." Again I imagined a man away up yonder on the mountain saying to himself: "I fear I shall exhaust all the oxygen in the atmosphere. But the earth might say: "Breathe away, O man, and fill thy lungs ever; my atmosphere is sufficient for thee."

O brethren, be great believers! Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to you. —*Sel.*

They who navigate little streams and shallow creeks know but little of the God of tempests. Among the huge Atlantic waves of bereavement, poverty, temptation, and reproach, we learn the power of Jehovah because we feel the littleness of man.—*Spurgeon*.