

CHAIR TALK.

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Perfection.

In my previous talk I was speaking of perfection as not a matter, primarily, of conduct, i. e., Christian Perfection does not consist in good behaviour and that strict and legal moral conduct would never be likely, if indeed possible. I said that right doing is ever conditioned on (1) a standard of right, (2) a knowledge of that standard, and (3) conforming to it; that since we would not always know what the standard is, hence would violate it without intending it.

To look at the lives of Jesus and of Paul, we, it would seem, have illustrations of the answer I have given. Jesus lived a human life. An every-day-like life. He was a boy among boys, a youth among youths, a man among men. He was subject to both human and divine law. He lived in this practical, human world of ours for three and thirty years, and died. How, in relation to God and divine law did He live? Perfectly. He lived without sin; without sinning once.

See Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, the great mind of the New Testament and the master-writer of the great epistles. View his life from the beginning of its Christian part to its close and no recorded living is comparable to his; in suffering, patience, self-denial, labor, faith and everything that goes to make up Christianhood, where is Paul's equal? How did he live?

Think of a straight line. A line absolutely straight. Not a line straighter than some other line, but so perfect in straightness that it could not be improved. Let that line stand for God's law. A perfect law. Not a law more perfect than some other law, merely, but a law so perfect that it could not be more so.

Think now of these two men—Jesus and Paul—walking alongside this law. All the Thou shalts, and the Thou shalt-nots of divine law emphasized in their lives, pointing to them.

What is sin? "Sin," John says, "is the transgression of the law." Transgression, (trans-gradi; trans, over; gradi, to step), means to step over the law. To cross over it. To violate it.

What was the relation of Jesus to this law for the whole of His life as to walking by its prohibitions and requirements? Did He step over at any point? The question is its own answer. Never! Why not? Because of His light and of His love—His knowledge and His purpose. He knew what the requirements was, always; knew which way the law pointed, ever; and, He had a perfect heart to choose it.

I want, now, to suppose that Paul had as true a heart as Jesus. This I most certainly believe. If he did, it was not that he had it by the same method; for Jesus had His by nature, while Paul had his by super-nature. His was a gift from Him who only could give.

Jesus can give that kind of a heart. "As He is, so are we in this world." Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

As now Paul comes to walk by and before the divine standard of a perfect law, he more or less often crosses it—steps

over it—violates it. Why? Because he did not have a perfect heart? No, but because he did not have a perfect head; he did not always see where the law pointed and what it required.

To observe Paul's living is to see a perfection of living not common—indeed, see what is scarce among men—but not a living equal to that of Jesus Christ in all particulars. And, for the reason we have given.

But when we suggest that Paul's living was imperfect, we, (I certainly) will be unable to point to a given place where it was not. Still, the logic of the situation forces me to this finding. When Paul himself teaches that "sin is not imputed when there is no law," he is saying for all mankind and must include himself.

Under what head do such violations of law come which we have mentioned were in Paul's life?

What is a mistake? and how does it differ from sin?

A mistake, is a miss-take: It is a miss in taking,—a not taking, at all, or a taking amiss, or wrongly. It is something un-right; it is wrong.

But a mistake does not take on the seriousness that sin does. The wrongness of it was not meant; in sin, the wrongness is meant. The difference is vital. Mr. Jones says, "I saw Mr. Fowler smoking a cigar yesterday and I was sorry. I did not think he would do that." Mr. Smith says, "I saw Mr. Fowler smoking a cigar yesterday, and I was glad; it is just what I thought he would do behind the scenes."

Now, what were the facts? Neither saw me smoking a cigar yesterday, or any other day, for the reason that I did not do it.

Every person has his double. Both these men said the thing that was not true. Did they lie? One did; the other did not. One thought the man he saw smoking was Mr. Fowler; the other knew it was not; one intended to tell the truth; the other intended to tell an untruth.

The difference was in the intention.

Where now must we place the violations of the law that Paul committed? Under the head of mistakes.

All, more or less often, are doing that which is a violation of strict law. They are wrong acts. Why are not such people condemned by conscience and God?

Years ago there lived in Amherst, New Hampshire, an elect woman by the name of Richardson. Quite a remarkable woman for both natural gifts and spiritual grace. Her home was, what in the older times used to style a "Methodist Tavern."

A minister was sent to the Methodist Church of that country village by the name of Ruland. They had a baby in their family. As the parsonage was not ready for the minister, they went to Mrs Richardson's home for a few days. This baby was taken ill, with something like colic. Mrs. Richardson had bought a few days before of a medicine "peddler," as was the custom in the country in those days, some medicines, among which was rhubarb (as she supposed). She gave the baby a small dose, which evidently proved harmful and it caused its death in a few hours. But, it was not rhubarb, at all, but laudanum she had given. This the peddler had sold her for rhubarb.

This woman had killed the baby. Was

she arrested by the civil authorities? No. Was she blamed, even, by the neighbors? No. Did Mrs. Ruland blame her? No. Did she blame herself? No. That she was full of sorrow, regret and even distress goes without saying, as were the good neighbors, and of course the mother of the babe, but blame—censure—was not laid against her.

Why not? Because of the evident intention of this godly woman; she thought and wanted to help and save the child.

Intention, is everything in determining virtue or vice. A poor and worthy man in the community has been long ill and is suffering for the common comforts of life as is his whole family. One man gives him five dollars because he pities him and out of his heart wants to help; another man gives him the same amount because he wants the credit for it as he is running for a town office and hopes by it to get votes. In one case, the gift is commendable; in the other, condemnable. Why? Because of the intention of these two men. Intention is everything.

Just here is the place for large charity toward those who oppose us and the truth we love so much. People sometimes, are as sincere in their opposition to truth, for a time, as we are in its support. I am saying "for a time." Paul tells us that he verily thought that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" and did them. Others may; but like Paul, if sincere they will have more and sufficient light to see error; and if they do not like the Apostle yield to it, even then he tells us that "the servant of the Lord should be gentle toward all, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; in God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Not only are the real violations of law such as mistakes not condemnable, either by conscience or God, their intention which protects them is a ground of commendation and reward.

One is not judged by what he does, but by what he intended to do. This obtains in human and divine courts. Jesus says distinctly, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." What is this teaching other than intention and the treatment that intention has? that if one thought a person was a prophet, or a righteous man and treated him as such, he is rewarded for it though the man proved a scamp. When God settles life's affairs, He will reward Mrs. Richardson for what she meant to do—not for her mistake in killing the child, but for her purpose to save it.

But this must not make one indifferent about his acts. And, if one is serious, it will not.

Conduct, with the most of us can be improved. And should be. Certainly it should be if it can be, and in many cases it needs to be. Perfect conduct can be more nearly reached than it is, or with many is thought to be possible. Christ says that we may by

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