

The Truth in Jesus

by George MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of learning Christ from the primary sources of our knowledge of him, rather than from human opinions or theories.

Scripture: Matthew 7:24

Topics: "Following Christ", "True Discipleship"

Description

George MacDonald preaches about the importance of learning Christ as he truly taught himself, emphasizing the need to put away false teachings and corrupted lessons about him. He challenges the congregation to examine whether they have truly learned Christ as he intended or have been misled by human interpretations and doctrines. MacDonald stresses the significance of obedience to Christ's words and the necessity of trusting in the living, loving, and helping Christ rather than in doctrines or theories about him. He urges believers to focus on obeying Christ's teachings, walking in the light of truth, and allowing God to reveal deeper understanding as they continue to follow Christ.

Transcript

'But ye did not so learn Christ; if so be that ye heard him, and were taught in him, even as truth is in Jesus: that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit.'--Eph. iv. 20-22.

How have we learned Christ? It ought to be a startling thought, that we may have learned him wrong. That must be far worse than not to have learned him at all: his place is occupied by a false Christ, hard to exorcise! The point is, whether we have learned Christ as he taught himself, or as men have taught him who thought they understood, but did not understand him. Do we think we know him--with notions fleshly, after low, mean human fancies and explanations, or do we indeed know him--after the spirit, in our measure as God knows him? The Christian religion, throughout its history, has been open to more corrupt misrepresentation than ever the Jewish could be, for as it is higher and wider, so must it yield larger scope to corruption:--have we learned Christ in false statements and corrupted lessons about him, or have we learned himself? Nay, true or false, is only our brain full of things concerning him, or does he dwell himself in our hearts, a learnt, and ever being learnt lesson, the power of our life?

I have been led to what I am about to say, by a certain utterance of one in the front rank of those who assert that we can know nothing of the 'Infinite and Eternal energy from which all things proceed;' and the utterance is this:--

'The visiting on Adam's descendants through hundreds of generations dreadful penalties for a small transgression which they did not commit; the damning of all men who do not avail themselves of an alleged mode of obtaining forgiveness, which most men have never heard of; and the effecting a reconciliation by sacrificing a son who was perfectly innocent, to satisfy the assumed necessity for a propitiatory victim; are modes of action which, ascribed to a human ruler, would call forth expressions of abhorrence; and the ascription of them to the Ultimate Cause of things, even not felt to be full of difficulties, must become impossible.'

I do not quote the passage with the design of opposing either clause of its statement, for I entirely agree with it: almost it feels an absurdity to say so. Neither do I propose addressing a word to the writer of it, or to any who hold with him. The passage bears out what I have often said--that I never yet heard a word from one of that way of thinking, which even touched anything I hold. One of my earliest recollections is of beginning to be at strife with the false system here assailed. Such paganism I scorn as heartily in the name of Christ, as I scorn it in the name of righteousness. Rather than believe a single point involving its spirit, even with the assurance thereby of such salvation as the system offers, I would join the ranks of those who 'know nothing,' and set myself with hopeless heart to what I am now trying with an infinite hope in the help of the pure originating One--to get rid of my miserable mean self, comforted only by the chance that death would either leave me without thought more, or reveal something of the Ultimate Cause which it would not be an insult to him, or a dishonour to his creature, to hold concerning him. Even such a chance alone might enable one to live.

I will not now enquire how it comes that the writer of the passage quoted seems to put forward these so-called beliefs as representing Christianity, or even the creed of those who call themselves Christians, seeing so many, and some of them of higher rank in literature than himself, believing in Christ with true hearts, believe not one of such things as he has set down, but hold them in at least as great abhorrence as he: his answer would probably be, that, even had he been aware of such being the fact, what he had to deal with was the forming and ruling notions of religious society;--and that such are the things held by the bulk of both educated and uneducated calling themselves Christians, however many of them may vainly think by an explanatory clause here and there to turn away the opprobrium of their falsehood, while they remain virtually the same--that such are the things so held, I am, alas! unable to deny. It helps nothing, I repeat, that many, thinking little on the matter, use quasi mitigated forms to express their tenets, and imagine that so they indicate a different class of ideas: it would require but a brief examination to be convinced that they are not merely analogous--they are ultimately identical.

But had I to do with the writer, I should ask how it comes that, refusing these dogmas as abominable, and in themselves plainly false, yet knowing that they are attributed to men whose teaching has done more to civilize the world than that of any men besides--how it comes that, seeing such teaching as this could not have done so, he has not taken such pains of enquiry as must surely have satisfied a man of his faculty that such was not their teaching; that it was indeed so different, and so good, that even the forced companionship of such horrible lies as those he has recounted, has been unable to destroy its regenerative power. I suppose he will allow that there was a man named Jesus, who died for the truth he taught: can he believe he died for such alleged truth as that? Would it not be well, I would ask him, to enquire what he did really teach, according to the primary sources of our knowledge of him? If he answered that the question was uninteresting to him, I should have no more to say; nor did I now start to speak of him save with the object of making my position plain to those to whom I would speak--those, namely, who call themselves Christians.

If of them I should ask, 'How comes it that such opinions are held concerning the Holy One, whose ways you take upon you to set forth?' I should be met by most with the answer, 'Those are the things he tells us himself in his word; we have learned them from the Scriptures;' by many with explanations which seem to them so to explain the things that they are no longer to be reprobated; and by others with the remark that better ideas, though largely held, had not yet had time to show themselves as the belief of the thinkers of the nation. Of those whose presentation of Christian doctrine is represented in the quotation above, there are two classes--such as are content it should be so, and such to whom those things are grievous, but who do not see how to get rid of them. To the latter it may be some little comfort to have one who has studied the New Testament for many years and loves it beyond the power of speech to express, declare to them his conviction that there is not an atom of such teaching in the whole lovely, divine utterance; that such things are all and altogether the invention of men--honest invention, in part at least, I grant, but yet not true. Thank God, we are nowise bound to accept any man's explanation of God's ways and God's doings, however good the man may be, if it do not commend itself to our conscience. The man's conscience may be a better conscience than ours, and his judgment clearer; nothing the more can we accept while we cannot see good: to do so would be to sin.

But it is by no means my object to set forth what I believe or do not believe; a time may come for that; my design is now very different indeed. I desire to address those who call themselves Christians, and expostulate with them thus:--

Whatever be your opinions on the greatest of all subjects, is it well that the impression with regard to Christianity made upon your generation, should be that of your opinions, and not of something beyond opinion? Is Christianity capable of being represented by opinion, even the best? If it were, how many of us are such as God would choose to represent his thoughts and intents by our opinions concerning them? Who is there of his friends whom any thoughtful man would depute to represent his thoughts to his fellows? If you answer, 'The opinions I hold and by which I represent Christianity, are those of the Bible,' I reply, that none can understand, still less represent, the opinions of another, but such as are of the same mind with him--certainly none who mistake his whole scope and intent so far as in supposing opinion to be the object of any writer in the Bible. Is Christianity a system of articles of belief, let them be correct as language can give them? Never. So far am I from believing it, that I would rather have a man holding, as numbers of you do, what seem to me the most obnoxious untruths, opinions the most irreverent and gross, if at the same time he lived in the faith of the Son of God, that is, trusted in God as the Son of God trusted in him, than I would have a man with every one of whose formulas of belief I utterly coincided, but who knew nothing of a daily life and walk with God. The one, holding doctrines of devils, is yet a child of God; the other, holding the doctrines of Christ and his Apostles, is of the world, yea, of the devil.

'How! a man hold the doctrine of devils, and yet be of God?'

Yes; for to hold a thing with the intellect, is not to believe it. A man's real belief is that which he lives by; and that which the man I mean lives by, is the love of God, and obedience to his law, so far as he has recognized it. Those hideous doctrines are outside of him; he thinks they are inside, but no matter; they are not true, and they cannot really be inside any good man. They are sadly against him; for he cannot love to dwell upon any of those supposed characteristics of his God; he acts and lives nevertheless in a measure like the true God.

What a man believes, is the thing he does. This man would shrink with loathing from actions such as he thinks God justified in doing; like God, he loves and helps and saves. Will the living God let such a man's

opinions damn him? No more than he will let the correct opinions of another, who lives for himself, save him. The best salvation even the latter could give would be but damnation. What I come to and insist upon is, that, supposing your theories right, and containing all that is to be believed, yet those theories are not what makes you Christians, if Christians indeed you are.

On the contrary, they are, with not a few of you, just what keeps you from being Christians. For when you say that, to be saved, a man must hold this or that, then are you leaving the living God and his will, and putting trust in some notion about him or his will. To make my meaning clearer,--some of you say we must trust in the finished work of Christ; or again, our faith must be in the merits of Christ--in the atonement he has made--in the blood he has shed: all these statements are a simple repudiation of the living Lord, in whom we are told to believe, who, by his presence with and in us, and our obedience to him, lifts us out of darkness into light, leads us from the kingdom of Satan into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

No manner or amount of belief about him is the faith of the New Testament. With such teaching I have had a lifelong acquaintance, and declare it most miserably false. But I do not now mean to dispute against it; except the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus make a man sick of his opinions, he may hold them to doomsday for me; for no opinion, I repeat, is Christianity, and no preaching of any plan of salvation is the preaching of the glorious gospel of the living God.

Even if your plan, your theories, were absolutely true, the holding of them with sincerity, the trusting in this or that about Christ, or in anything he did or could do, the trusting in anything but himself, his own living self, is a delusion. Many will grant this heartily, and yet the moment you come to talk with them, you find they insist that to believe in Christ is to believe in the atonement, meaning by that only and altogether their special theory about the atonement; and when you say we must believe in the atoning Christ, and cannot possibly believe in any theory concerning the atonement, they go away and denounce you, saying, 'He does not believe in the atonement!'

If I explain the atonement otherwise than they explain it, they assert that I deny the atonement; nor count it of any consequence that I say I believe in the atoner with my whole heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. This they call contending for the truth! Because I refuse an explanation which is not in the New Testament, though they believe it is, because they can think of no other, one which seems to me as false in logic as detestable in morals, not to say that there is no spirituality in it whatever, therefore I am not a Christian!

What wonder men such as I have quoted refuse the Christianity they suppose such 'believers' to represent! I do not say that with this sad folly may not mingle a potent faith in the Lord himself; but I do say that the importance they place on theory is even more sadly obstructive to true faith than such theories themselves: while the mind is occupied in enquiring,

'Do I believe or feel this thing right?'--the true question is forgotten: 'Have I left all to follow him?' To the man who gives himself to the living Lord, every belief will necessarily come right; the Lord himself will see that his disciple believe aright concerning him. If a man cannot trust him for this, what claim can he make to faith in him? It is because he has little or no faith, that he is left clinging to preposterous and dishonouring ideas, the traditions of men concerning his Father, and neither his teaching nor that of his apostles. The living Christ is to them but a shadow; the all but obliterated Christ of their theories no soul can thoroughly believe in: the disciple of such a Christ rests on his work, or his merits, or his atonement!

What I insist upon is, that a man's faith shall be in the living, loving, ruling, helping Christ, devoted to us as much as ever he was, and with all the powers of the Godhead for the salvation of his brethren. It is not faith that he did this, that his work wrought that--it is faith in the man who did and is doing everything for us that will save him: without this he cannot work to heal spiritually, any more than he would heal physically, when he was present to the eyes of men. Do you ask, 'What is faith in him?' I answer, The leaving of your way, your objects, your self, and the taking of his and him; the leaving of your trust in men, in money, in opinion, in character, in atonement itself, and doing as he tells you. I can find no words strong enough to serve for the weight of this necessity--this obedience. It is the one terrible heresy of the church, that it has always been presenting something else than obedience as faith in Christ. The work of Christ is not the Working Christ, any more than the clothing of Christ is the body of Christ. If the woman who touched the hem of his garment had trusted in the garment and not in him who wore it, would she have been healed? And the reason that so many who believe about Christ rather than in him, get the comfort they do, is that, touching thus the mere hem of his garment, they cannot help believing a little in the live man inside the garment. It is not wonderful that such believers should so often be miserable; they lay themselves down to sleep with nothing but the skirt of his robe in their hand--a robe too, I say, that never was his, only by them is supposed his--when they might sleep in peace with the living Lord in their hearts. Instead of so knowing Christ that they have him in them saving them, they lie wasting themselves in soul-sickening self-examination as to whether they are believers, whether they are really trusting in the atonement, whether they are truly sorry for their sins--the way to madness of the brain, and despair of the heart. Some even ponder the imponderable--whether they are of the elect, whether they have an interest in the blood shed for sin, whether theirs is a saving faith--when all the time the man who died for them is waiting to begin to save them from every evil--and first from this self which is consuming them with trouble about its salvation; he will set them free, and take them home to the bosom of the Father--if only they will mind what he says to them--which is the beginning, middle, and end of faith. If, instead of searching into the mysteries of corruption in their own charnel-houses, they would but awake and arise from the dead, and come out into the light which Christ is waiting to give them, he would begin at once to fill them with the fulness of God.

'But I do not know how to awake and arise!'

I will tell you:--Get up, and do something the master tells you; so make yourself his disciple at once. Instead of asking yourself whether you believe or not, ask yourself whether you have this day done one thing because he said, Do it, or once abstained because he said, Do not do it. It is simply absurd to say you believe, or even want to believe in him, if you do not anything he tells you. If you can think of nothing he ever said as having had an atom of influence on your doing or not doing, you have too good ground to consider yourself no disciple of his.

Do not, I pray you, worse than waste your time in trying to convince yourself that you are his disciple notwithstanding--that for this reason or that you still have cause to think you believe in him. What though you should succeed in persuading yourself to absolute certainty that you are his disciple, if, after all, he say to you, 'Why did you not do the things I told you? Depart from me; I do not know you!' Instead of trying to persuade yourself, if the thing be true you can make it truer; if it be not true, you can begin at once to make it true, to be a disciple of the Living One--by obeying him in the first thing you can think of in which you are not obeying him.

We must learn to obey him in everything, and so must begin somewhere: let it be at once, and in the very next thing that lies at the door of our conscience! Oh fools and slow of heart, if you think of nothing but

Christ, and do not set yourselves to do his words! you but build your houses on the sand. What have such teachers not to answer for who have turned your regard away from the direct words of the Lord himself, which are spirit and life, to contemplate plans of salvation tortured out of the words of his apostles, even were those plans as true as they are false!

There is but one plan of salvation, and that is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; that is, to take him for what he is--our master, and his words as if he meant them, which assuredly he did. To do his words is to enter into vital relation with him, to obey him is the only way to be one with him. The relation between him and us is an absolute one; it can nohow begin to live but in obedience: it is obedience. There can be no truth, no reality, in any initiation of at-one-ment with him, that is not obedience.

What! have I the poorest notion of a God, and dare think of entering into relations with him, the very first of which is not that what he saith, I will do? The thing is eternally absurd, and comes of the father of lies. I know what he whispers to those to whom such teaching as this is distasteful: 'It is the doctrine of works!' But one word of the Lord humbly heard and received will suffice to send all the demons of false theology into the abyss. He says the man that does not do the things he tells him, builds his house to fall in utter ruin.

He instructs his messengers to go and baptize all nations, 'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Tell me it is faith he requires: do I not know it? and is not faith the highest act of which the human mind is capable? But faith in what? Faith in what he is, in what he says--a faith which can have no existence except in obedience--a faith which is obedience. To do what he wishes is to put forth faith in him. For this the teaching of men has substituted this or that belief about him, faith in this or that supposed design of his manifestation in the flesh.

It was himself, and God in him that he manifested; but faith in him and his father thus manifested, they make altogether secondary to acceptance of the paltry contrivance of a juggling morality, which they attribute to God and his Christ, imagining it the atonement, and 'the plan of salvation.' 'Do you put faith in him,' I ask, 'or in the doctrines and commandments of men?' If you say 'In him,'--'Is it then possible,' I return, 'that you do not see that, above all things and all thoughts, you are bound to obey him?'

Do you not mourn that you cannot trust in him as you would, that you find it too hard? Too hard it is for you, and too hard it will remain, while the things he tells you to do--the things you can do--even those you will not try! How should you be capable of trusting in the true one while you are nowise true to him? How are you to believe he will do his part by you, while you are not such as to do your part by him? How are you to believe while you are not faithful? How, I say, should you be capable of trusting in him?

The very thing to make you able to trust in him, and so receive all things from him, you turn your back upon: obedience you decline, or at least neglect. You say you do not refuse to obey him? I care not whether you refuse or not, while you do not obey. Remember the parable: 'I go, sir, and went not.' What have you done this day because it was the will of Christ? Have you dismissed, once dismissed, an anxious thought for the morrow? Have you ministered to any needy soul or body, and kept your right hand from knowing what your left hand did?

Have you begun to leave all and follow him? Did you set yourself to judge righteous judgment? Are you being ware of covetousness? Have you forgiven your enemy? Are you seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness before all other things? Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you given to some one that asked of you? Tell me something that you have done, are doing, or are trying to do

because he told you. If you do nothing that he says, it is no wonder that you cannot trust in him, and are therefore driven to seek refuge in the atonement, as if something he had done, and not he himself in his doing were the atonement.

That is not as you understand it? What does it matter how you understand, or what you understand, so long as you are not of one mind with the Truth, so long as you and God are not at one, do not atone together? How should you understand? Knowing that you do not heed his word, why should I heed your explanation of it? You do not his will, and so you cannot understand him; you do not know him, that is why you cannot trust in him. You think your common sense enough to let you know what he means?

Your common sense ought to be enough to know itself unequal to the task. It is the heart of the child that alone can understand the Father. Would you have me think you guilty of the sin against the Holy Ghost--that you understand Jesus Christ and yet will not obey him? That were too dreadful. I believe you do not understand him. No man can do yet what he tells him aright--but are you trying? Obedience is not perfection, but trying. You count him a hard master, and will not stir.

Do you suppose he ever gave a commandment knowing it was of no use for it could not be done? He tells us a thing knowing that we must do it, or be lost; that not his Father himself could save us but by getting us at length to do everything he commands, for not otherwise can we know life, can we learn the holy secret of divine being. He knows that you can try, and that in your trying and failing he will be able to help you, until at length you shall do the will of God even as he does it himself.

He takes the will in the imperfect deed, and makes the deed at last perfect. Correctest notions without obedience are worthless. The doing of the will of God is the way to oneness with God, which alone is salvation. Sitting at the gate of heaven, sitting on the footstool of the throne itself, yea, clasping the knees of the Father, you could not be at peace, except in their every vital movement, in every their smallest point of consciousness, your heart, your soul, your mind, your brain, your body, were one with the living God.

If you had one brooding thought that was not a joy in him, you would not be at peace; if you had one desire you could not leave absolutely to his will you would not be at peace; you would not be saved, therefore could not feel saved. God, all and in all, ours to the fulfilling of our very being, is the religion of the perfect, son-hearted Lord Christ.

Well do I know it is faith that saves us--but not faith in any work of God--it is faith in God himself. If I did not believe God as good as the tenderest human heart, the fairest, the purest, the most unselfish human heart could imagine him, yea, an infinitude better, higher than we as the heavens are higher than the earth--believe it, not as a proposition, or even as a thing I was convinced of, but with the responsive condition and being of my whole nature; if I did not feel every fibre of heart and brain and body safe with him because he is the Father who made me that I am--I would not be saved, for this faith is salvation; it is God and the man one.

God and man together, the vital energy flowing unchecked from the creator into his creature--that is the salvation of the creature. But the poorest faith in the living God, the God revealed in Christ Jesus, if it be vital, true, that is obedient, is the beginning of the way to know him, and to know him is eternal life. If you mean by faith anything of a different kind, that faith will not save you. A faith, for instance, that God does not forgive me because he loves me, but because he loves Jesus Christ, cannot save me, because it is a falsehood against God: if the thing were true, such a gospel would be the preaching of a God that was not love, therefore in whom was no salvation, a God to know whom could not be eternal life.

Such a faith would damn, not save a man; for it would bind him to a God who was anything but perfect. Such assertions going by the name of Christianity, are nothing but the poor remnants of paganism; and it is only with that part of our nature not yet Christian that we are able to believe them--so far indeed as it is possible a lie should be believed. We must forsake all our fears and distrusts for Christ. We must receive his teaching heartily, nor let the interpretation of it attributed to his apostles make us turn aside from it.

I say interpretation attributed to them; for what they teach is never against what Christ taught, though very often the exposition of it is--and that from no fault in the apostles, but from the grievous fault of those who would understand, and even explain, rather than obey. We may be sure of this, that no man will be condemned for any sin that is past; that, if he be condemned, it will be because he would not come to the light when the light came to him; because he would not cease to do evil and learn to do well; because he hid his unbelief in the garment of a false faith, and would not obey; because he imputed to himself a righteousness that was not his; because he preferred imagining himself a worthy person, to confessing himself everywhere in the wrong, and repenting.

We may be sure also of this, that, if a man becomes the disciple of Christ, he will not leave him in ignorance as to what he has to believe; he shall know the truth of everything it is needful for him to understand. If we do what he tells us, his light will go up in our hearts. Till then we could not understand even if he explained to us. If you cannot trust him to let you know what is right, but think you must hold this or that before you can come to him, then I justify your doubts in what you call your worst times, but which I suspect are your best times in which you come nearest to the truth--those, namely, in which you fear you have no faith.

So long as a man will not set himself to obey the word spoken, the word written, the word printed, the word read, of the Lord Christ, I would not take the trouble to convince him concerning the most obnoxious doctrines that they were false as hell. It is those who would fain believe, but who by such doctrines are hindered, whom I would help. Disputation about things but hides the living Christ who alone can teach the truth, who is the truth, and the knowledge of whom is life; I write for the sake of those whom the false teaching that claims before all to be true has driven away from God--as well it might, for the God so taught is not a God worthy to be believed in. A stick, or a stone, or a devil, is all that some of our brethren of mankind have to believe in: he who believes in a God not altogether unselfish and good, a God who does not do all he can for his creatures, belongs to the same class; his is not the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water--not the God revealed in Christ. If a man see in God any darkness at all, and especially if he defend that darkness, attempting to justify it as one who respects the person of God, I cannot but think his blindness must have followed his mockery of 'Lord! Lord!' Surely, if he had been strenuously obeying Jesus, he would ere now have received the truth that God is light, and in him is no darkness--a truth which is not acknowledged by calling the darkness attributed to him light, and the candle of the Lord in the soul of man darkness. It is one thing to believe that God can do nothing wrong, quite another to call whatever presumption may attribute to him right.

The whole secret of progress is the doing of the thing we know. There is no other way of progress in the spiritual life; no other way of progress in the understanding of that life: only as we do, can we know.

Is there then anything you will not leave for Christ? You cannot know him--and yet he is the Truth, the one thing alone that can be known! Do you not care to be imperfect? would you rather keep this or that, with imperfection, than part with it to be perfect? You cannot know Christ, for the very principle of his life was the simple absolute relation of realities; his one idea was to be a perfect child to his Father. He who will not

part with all for Christ, is not worthy of him, and cannot know him; and the Lord is true, and cannot acknowledge him: how could he receive to his house, as one of his kind, a man who prefers something to his Father; a man who is not for God; a man who will strike a bargain with God, and say, 'I will give up so much, if thou wilt spare me'! To yield all to him who has only made us and given us everything, yea his very self by life and by death, such a man counts too much. His conduct says, 'I never asked thee to do so much for me, and I cannot make the return thou demandest.' The man will have to be left to himself. He must find what it is to be without God! Those who know God, or have but begun to catch a far-off glimmer of his gloriousness, of what he is, regard life as insupportable save God be the All in all, the first and the last.

To let their light shine, not to force on them their interpretations of God's designs, is the duty of Christians towards their fellows. If you who set yourselves to explain the theory of Christianity, had set yourselves instead to do the will of the Master, the one object for which the Gospel was preached to you, how different would now be the condition of that portion of the world with which you come into contact! Had you given yourselves to the understanding of his word that you might do it, and not to the quarrying from it of material wherewith to buttress your systems, in many a heart by this time would the name of the Lord be loved where now it remains unknown. The word of life would then by you have been held out indeed. Men, undeterred by your explanations of Christianity, for you would not be forcing them on their acceptance, and attracted by your behaviour, would be saying to each other, as Moses said to himself when he saw the bush that burned with fire and was not consumed, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight!' they would be drawing nigh to behold how these Christians loved one another, and how just and fair they were to every one that had to do with them! to note that their goods were the best, their weight surest, their prices most reasonable, their word most certain! that in their families was neither jealousy nor emulation! that mammon was not there worshipped! that in their homes selfishness was neither the hidden nor the openly ruling principle; that their children were as diligently taught to share, as some are to save, or to lay out only upon self--their mothers more anxious lest a child should hoard than lest he should squander; that in no house of theirs was religion one thing, and the daily life another; that the ecclesiastic did not think first of his church, nor the peer of his privileges.

What do I hear you say?--'How then shall the world go on?' The Lord's world will go on, and that without you; the devil's world will go on, and that with you. The objection is but another and overwhelming proof of your unbelief. Either you do not believe the word the Lord spake--that, if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things needful will be added to us; or what he undertakes does not satisfy you; it is not enough; you want more; you prefer the offers of Mammon.

You are nowise anxious to be saved from the too-much that is a snare; you want what you call a fortune--the freedom of the world. You would not live under such restrictions as the Lord might choose to lay upon you if he saw that something might be made of you precious in his sight! You would inherit the earth, and not by meekness; you would have the life of this world sweet, come of the life eternal, the life that God shares with you, what may: so much as that comes to, you would gladly leave God to look after, if only you might be sure of not sharing with the rich man when you die.

But you find that, unable to trust him for this world, neither can you trust him for the world to come. Refusing to obey him in your life, how can you trust him for your life? Hence the various substitutes you seek for faith in him: you would hold him to his word, bind him by his promises, appeal to the atonement, to the satisfaction made to his justice, as you call it--while you will take no trouble to fulfil the absolutely reasonable and necessary condition, yea, morally and spiritually imperative condition--condition and

means in one--on which he offers, and through which alone he can offer you deliverance from the burden of life into the strength and glory of life--that you shall be true, and to him obedient children.

You say 'Christ has satisfied the law,' but you will not satisfy him! He says, 'Come unto me,' and you will not rise and go to him. You say, 'Lord I believe; help mine unbelief,' but when he says, 'Leave everything behind you, and be as I am towards God, and you shall have peace and rest,' you turn away, muttering about figurative language. If you had been true, had been living the life, had been Christians indeed, you would, however little, have drawn the world after you. In your churches you would be receiving truest nourishment, yea strength to live--thinking far less of serving God on the Sunday, and far more of serving your neighbour in the week.

The sociable vile, the masterful rich, the deceitful trader, the ambitious poor, whom you have attracted to your communities with the offer of a salvation other than deliverance from sin, would not be lording it over them and dragging them down; they would be the cleaner and the stronger for their absence; while the publicans and the sinners would have been drawn instead, and turned into true men and women; and the Israelite indeed, who is yet more repelled by your general worldliness than by your misrepresentations of God, showing him selfish like yourselves who is the purity of the creation--the Israelite in whom is no guile would have hastened to the company of the loving men and true, eager to learn what it was that made them so good, so happy, so unselfish, so free of care, so ready to die, so willing to live, so hopeful, so helpful, so careless to possess, so undeferential to possession.

Finding you to hold, from the traditional force of false teaching, such things as you do, he would have said, 'No! such beliefs can never account for such mighty results!' You would have answered, 'Search the Scriptures and see.' He would have searched, and found--not indeed the things you imagine there, but things infinitely better and higher, things that indeed account for the result he wondered at; he would have found such truth as he who has found will hold for ever as the only gladness of his being.

There you would have had your reward for being true Christians in spite of the evil doctrines you had been taught and teaching: you would have been taught in return the truth of the matter by him whom your true Christianity had enticed to itself, and sent to the fountainhead free of the prejudices that disabled your judgment. Thus delivered from the false notions which could not fail to have stunted your growth hitherto, how rapid would it not have become!

If any of you tell me my doctrine is presumptuous, that it is contrary to what is taught in the New Testament, and what the best of men have always believed, I will not therefore proceed to defend even my beliefs, the principles on which I try to live--how much less my opinions! I appeal to you instead, whether or not I have spoken the truth concerning our paramount obligation to do the word of Christ. If you answer that I have not, I have nothing more to say; there is no other ground on which we can meet.

But if you allow that it is a prime, even if you do not allow it the prime duty, then what I insist upon is, that you should do it, so and not otherwise recommending the knowledge of him. I do not attempt to change your opinions; if they are wrong, the obedience alone on which I insist can enable you to set them right; I only pray you to obey, and assert that thus only can you fit yourselves for understanding the mind of Christ. I say none but he who does right, can think right; you cannot know Christ to be right until you do as he does, as he tells you to do; neither can you set him forth, until you know him as he means himself to be known, that is, as he is.

If you are serving and trusting in Mammon, how can you know the living God who, the source of life, is alone to be trusted in! If you do not admit that it is the duty of a man to do the word of Christ, or if, admitting the duty, you yet do not care to perform it, why should I care to convince you that my doctrine is right? What is it to any true man what you think of his doctrine? What does it matter what you think of any doctrine? If I could convince your judgment, your hearts remaining as they are, I should but add to your condemnation.

The true heart must see at once, that, however wrong I may or may not be in other things, at least I am right in this, that Jesus must be obeyed, and at once obeyed, in the things he did say: it will not long imagine to obey him in things he did not say. If a man do what is displeasing to Christ, believing it his will, he shall yet gain thereby, for it gives the Lord a hold of him, which he will use; but before he can reach liberty, he must be delivered from that falsehood. For him who does not choose to see that Christ must be obeyed, he must be left to the teaching of the Father, who brings all that hear and learn of him to Christ, that they may learn what he is who has taught them and brought them.

He will leave no man to his own way, however much he may prefer it. The Lord did not die to provide a man with the wretched heaven he may invent for himself, or accept invented for him by others; he died to give him life, and bring him to the heaven of the Father's peace; the children must share in the essential bliss of the Father and the Son. This is and has been the Father's work from the beginning--to bring us into the home of his heart, where he shares the glories of life with the Living One, in whom was born life to light men back to the original life.

This is our destiny; and however a man may refuse, he will find it hard to fight with God--useless to kick against the goads of his love. For the Father is goading him, or will goad him, if needful, into life by unrest and trouble; hell-fire will have its turn if less will not do: can any need it more than such as will neither enter the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer them to enter it that would? The old race of the Pharisees is by no means extinct; they were St Paul's great trouble, and are yet to be found in every religious community under the sun.

The one only thing truly to reconcile all differences is, to walk in the light. So St Paul teaches us in his epistle to the Philippians, the third chapter and sixteenth verse. After setting forth the loftiest idea of human endeavour in declaring the summit of his own aspiration, he says--not, 'This must be your endeavour also, or you cannot be saved;' but, 'If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk by that same.'

Observe what widest conceivable scope is given by the apostle to honest opinion, even in things of grandest import!--the one only essential point with him is, that whereto we have attained, what we have seen to be true, we walk by that. In such walking, and in such walking only, love will grow, truth will grow; the soul, then first in its genuine element and true relation towards God, will see into reality that was before but a blank to it; and he who has promised to teach, will teach abundantly.

Faster and faster will the glory of the Lord dawn upon the hearts and minds of his people so walking--then his people indeed; fast and far will the knowledge of him spread, for truth of action, both preceding and following truth of word, will prepare the way before him. The man walking in that whereto he has attained, will be able to think aright; the man who does not think right, is unable because he has not been walking right; only when he begins to do the thing he knows, does he begin to be able to think aright; then God comes to him in a new and higher way, and works along with the spirit he has created.

The soul, without its heaven above its head, without its life-breath around it, without its love-treasure in its heart, without its origin one with it and bound up in it, without its true self and originating life, cannot think to any real purpose--nor ever would to all eternity. When man joins with God, then is all impotence and discord cast out. Until then, there can be but jar; God is in contest with the gates of hell that open in the man, and can but hold his own; when the man joins him, then is Satan foiled.

For then first nature receives her necessity: no such necessity has she as this law of all laws--that God and man are one. Until they begin to be one in the reality as in the divine idea, in the flower as in the root, in the finishing as in the issuing creation, nothing can go right with the man, and God can have no rest from his labour in him. As the greatest orbs in heaven are drawn by the least, God himself must be held in divine disquiet until every one of his family be brought home to his heart, to be one with him in a unity too absolute, profound, far-reaching, fine, and intense, to be understood by any but the God from whom it comes, yet to be guessed at by the soul from the unspeakableness of its delight when at length it is with the only that can be its own, the one that it can possess, the one that can possess it.

For God is the heritage of the soul in the ownness of origin; man is the offspring of his making will, of his life; God himself is his birthplace; God is the self that makes the soul able to say I too, I myself. This absolute unspeakable bliss of the creature is that for which the Son died, for which the Father suffered with him. Then only is life itself; then only is it right, is it one; then only is it as designed and necessitated by the eternal life-outgiving Life.

Whereto then we have attained let us walk by that same!

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