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ESSENTIALS OF THE FAITH THAT SAVES.¹⁾

I. SINGULARITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

In the judgment of modern men everywhere Christianity occupies the foremost position among the religions of the world. As regards the number of its adherents, it is surpassed by some Oriental religions, but it is unquestionably the greatest as regards spiritual power, moral dynamic, and civilizing force.

Men whom extensive and close observation, protracted and exhaustive study, have enabled to form conclusive opinions on the matter have declared that the Christian religion, by reason of its basic principles, is in a class by itself. With the assurance that characterizes the matured conviction of the historian, Guizot declares: "Outside of Christianity there have been grand spectacles of activity and force, brilliant phenomena of genius and virtue, generous attempts at reform, learned philosophical systems, and beautiful mythological poems, but no real profound or fruitful regeneration of humanity and society. Jesus Christ from His cross accomplishes what erstwhile in Asia and Europe princes and philosophers, the powerful of the earth, and sages, attempted without success. He changes the moral and the social state of the world. He pours into the souls of men new enlightenment and new powers. For all classes, for all human conditions He prepares destinies before His advent unknown. He liberates them

1) Two lectures delivered before Lutheran students of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Wis. Published by request.

at the same time that He lays down rules for their guidance; He quickens them and stills them. . . . He offers an effectual remedy for the evil which weighs upon humanity; to sin He opens the path of salvation, to unhappiness the door of hope."

In a lecture before the British Bible Society, Max Mueller, the famous European scholar who opened the eyes of the world to the essential failure of the Oriental religions, said: "In the discharge of my duties for forty years as Professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford I have devoted as much time as any man living to the study of the Sacred Books of the East, and I have found the one keynote—the one diapason, so to speak—of all these so-called sacred books, whether it be the Veda of the Brahmans, the Puranas of Siva and Vishnu, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Zend-Avesta of the Parsees, the Tripitaka of the Buddhists—the one refrain through all—salvation by works. They all say that salvation must be bought with a price; and that the sole price, the sole purchase-money, must be our own works and deservings. Our own holy Bible, our Sacred Book of the East, is from beginning to end a protest against this doctrine. Good works are indeed enjoined upon us in that Sacred Book of the East far more strongly than in any other sacred book of the East; but they are only the outcome of a grateful heart,—they are only a thank-offering, the fruits of our faith. They are never the ransom-money of the true disciples of Christ. Let us not shut our eyes to what is excellent and true and of good report in these sacred books, but let us teach Hindus, Buddhists, Mohammedans, that there is only one Sacred Book of the East that can be their mainstay in that awful hour when they pass alone into the unseen world. It is the Sacred Book which contains that faithful saying worthy to be received by all men, and not merely of us Christians,—that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Two other college-men have voiced their belief in the singularity of the Christian religion. Mark Hopkins said: "No, there is nothing on the face of the earth that can, for

a moment, bear a comparison with Christianity as a religion for man. Upon this the hope of the race hangs. From the very first it took its position as the pillar of fire, to lead the race onward. The intelligence and power of the race are with those who have embraced it; and now, if this, instead of proving indeed a pillar of fire from God, should be found but a delusive meteor, then nothing will be left to the race but to go back to a darkness that may be felt, and to a worse than Egyptian bondage."

Thomas Arnold said: "The distinction between Christianity and all other systems of religion consists largely in this, that in these other, men are found seeking after God, while Christianity is God seeking after men."

In these striking utterances the consentient opinion of the great men whom I have quoted stands out strong and clear: Christianity occupies a solitary place, and demands an evaluation apart from that of all other religions. It does not belong in a Parliament of Religions; it is *the* religion. There is no substitute for it, for there is no equivalent in other religions for what Christianity offers. It cannot be improved upon; it is the last word in the matter of religion.

This conviction inheres in the earliest expounders of Christianity. Peter gives voice to it when before the highest tribunal of the Church of the Jews he says of Jesus: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."² Paul joins him with the declaration: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."³

2. THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION THE RELIGION OF SAVING GRACE.

The Christian religion comes before men as the religion of salvation. Its message is "the glad tidings of salvation."⁴ Its central figure is One who impressed men even on a short acquaintance as "the Savior of the world."⁵

2) Acts 4, 12.

3) 1 Cor. 3, 11.

4) Is. 52, 7.

5) John 4, 42.

Salvation implies the need of it. Christianity presupposes this need. It has to do only with those who admit this need. "They that be whole," says its Founder, "need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."⁶⁾

The need is universal. It is a mere delusion which causes some to ignore and deny it; "the truth is not in them"⁷⁾ when they say that they are not in need.

This need is summed up in one word: sin. That term embraces estrangement from God, in whom is not, and cannot be, sin; it embraces God's anger, which is felt in the accusations of the sinner's conscience; it embraces, as its last dire effect, the certain prospect of perdition. Moreover, sin, in the Christian conception, must be viewed, not only as an act, but as an inveterate condition in the human heart. Christianity recognizes not only sinful deeds, but also "a body of sin," in which "there dwelleth no good thing."⁸⁾ It views man born of the flesh as "flesh,"⁹⁾ as "evil from his youth also in the imaginations of his heart."¹⁰⁾ Sin in its true inwardness is a habitual proneness to evil and disinclination to good, that is, to what God regards so.

The pleasure of God is declared to men in God's holy Law; but this is to them sheer displeasure, while what God abhors is sinful man's delight. He may be the brightest genius in other respects, but he is as unable as were the philosophers of Greece in the days of Paul to understand the justice of God's verdict, *viz.*, that his reason is always a scorner of God. He may, like the Pharisees in the days of Christ, be a moral man in his own and other people's estimation, and may angrily spurn the charge that he is contaminated in his innermost being, unfree in his moral actions, that he does not love God with all his heart and all his soul and all his strength, and that his dealings with his fellow-men are governed by self-interest. His denial of these facts—which even the heathen have acknowl-

6) Matt. 9, 12, 13.

7) 1 John 1, 8.

8) Rom. 6, 6; 7, 18.

9) John 3, 6.

10) Gen. 8, 21.

edged—merely proves the reality of what he denies: sin has so blinded and hardened him that his judgment has become crooked and his will perverse on every question that has a bearing on his standing with God. Whether he feel and acknowledge his need or not, that need is as little disputed away by his boastful assertions as the defect in the iris ceases to exist when a purblind person claims that his sight is perfect. Paul concludes his moral survey of the race with these words: "There is here no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory"¹¹⁾ which they should have achieved for their God. Others see plainly what some fail to see, or pretend not to perceive. And God, who searches the truant and treacherous heart of man, and reads the thoughts of each down to the roots, knows them still better.

I have called this fatal element, sin, the presupposition of the Christian religion. All known religions recognize it, and all declare it a barrier to the free communication between the offended Deity, whose laws have been broken, and offending man, who has broken them. All religions, too, devise means for its removal, but only the Christian religion starts the removal aright.

The salvation which the Christian religion presents to the sinner exhibits God Himself as taking the first step toward a restoration of the original relation between Himself and man. God, who abominates sin, and has hurled His righteous curse at wrong-doers, of His own free determination makes overtures to rebel man by which He desires to establish a union of love with man. Besides righteousness, holiness, and justice, which make God the absolute contrary of sin,—besides truthfulness, which moves God to carry out every threat that He has uttered against the sinner,—there is in God a quality which Scripture terms "grace." It is a peculiar manifestation of His goodness which God displays, for instance, in His benevolent creation and in the kind providence with which He

11) Rom. 3, 22. 23.

governs the world. The grace of God, however, connects God's goodness with man, not in as far as he is man, or in as far as he is puny man, but in as far as he is sinful man. Grace surmounts the very barrier which divides man from God. Because of His grace God loves man despite man's sins, though He never loves man's sin.

"By grace are ye saved,"¹²⁾ Paul declares to the Ephesians twice in close succession. Out of this unlooked-for disposition of God toward the sinner springs the first thought and the possibility of a salvation for man. God, not man, starts this business. God proposes to restore man, and does not wait for man to rehabilitate himself with God. This is the *first essential* of the faith that saves.

The publication of this disposition on the part of God Scripture calls a "revelation."¹³⁾ The fact that God entertains a gracious thought within Himself toward the sinner is a mystery to man. No religion has anticipated or remotely guessed at the idea of saving grace in an offended God. When this idea was published to men, and when it assumed living reality in the Messenger who was sent to proclaim it in its fulness, the world beheld the greatest miracle in its history. With a shout of joy Paul hails this unexpected news: "The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared."¹⁴⁾ It had existed in God and had been declared to man already when the first sin was committed. God had, moreover, set apart an elect nation as the bearer of this revelation to the race. But, following blindly its own paths of reason and morality, the world had forgotten the revelation of saving grace. It had wrestled with the problem of man's restoration to the favor of God; but its failure is written into every religion which was invented by man. Every religion except the Christian is really a proposal which man makes to God, and in which man lays down terms to God with which He is to be satisfied. By revealing His grace, God declares to the sinner, in effect: You

12) Eph. 2, 5. 8.

13) Eph. 1, 9.

14) Titus 1, 11.

must leave this matter to Me; you begin wrong, and you will never get this problem to work out right. You lack the knowledge of the unknown factor, which only I can supply.

Saving grace is something in God. It is necessary to emphasize this because a tendency has developed very early even within the Christian Church to transfer a saving quality to man and to call that grace. This teaching of Pelagius, which has found its most consistent exposition in the Church of Rome, subverts the foundation of the Christian religion. Saving grace is not something which God requires in man, but which He offers man. Therefore Paul, when declaring: "By grace are ye saved," adds: "and that not of yourselves."¹⁵ Grace is never human merit winning the favor of God, but, as Luther said, it is a thought which God entertains in His own mind, and by which He prompts Himself to approach the sinner. Christianity relapses into paganism the moment this meaning of grace is inverted.

3. SAVING GRACE IS MEDIATED TO THE SINNER ONLY BY, JESUS CHRIST.

Occasionally, the grace that saves is represented as somewhat like the easy-going habit with which an indulgent father views and is ever ready to condone the reckless vagaries of a wild son. Thus understood, salvation by grace becomes an act that destroys the very essence of God and the foundation of all true morality. It treats sin with indifference, yea, with comparative complacency, and turns God into a doting old gentleman. How men can hold this view and still profess that they believe in a God of spotless holiness, of uncompromising justice, and of irrefragable veracity, and how they still can harbor any real dread of sin and any real love for virtue, — this passes comprehension.

The Christian religion declares that "grace came by Jesus Christ."¹⁶ "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son."¹⁷ That mysterious thought in God, grace,

15) Eph. 2, 8.

16) John 1, 17.

17) John 3, 16.

which started our salvation, led to another mystery — “the mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh.”¹⁸⁾ “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman.”¹⁹⁾ Saving grace became incorporated in a Savior. Him God declares His commissioned agent for communicating to men the message of salvation when He calls from heaven: “Hear ye Him!”²⁰⁾ And this Bearer of grace asserts that approach for the sinner to the affections of the Father is only through Him: “No one cometh to the Father but by Me.”²¹⁾ There is no saving grace for the sinner except such as He finds in Christ. This is the *second essential* of the faith that saves.

To the scientific thought of the modern man Christ is a most perplexing problem, and that in a twofold respect: first, as regards His singular personality; secondly, as regards the peculiar mission which brought Him among men. Not that the modern mind has discovered any new difficulties along these lines; for doubt regarding the personal characteristics of Christ, and disputes concerning His object in taking up an abode among men for a season, have harassed the souls of men in every century since the incarnation. The Christ-problem is the oldest problem with which the Christian Church in her contact with the men of this world has had to wrestle.

The divine records from which we draw our faith introduce Christ to us as a strangely composite being. He is called, and described, and exhibited in action, as “man,”²²⁾ and “the Son of man.”²³⁾ His birth, His conversation among men, His death, are truly-human. It was no phantom, no angelic vision drawn out unusually long to about thirty years, that men beheld passing up and down Palestine. It was no specter that addressed them, individually and in multitudes, on numerous and most varied occasions, with long intervals, between. On all these occasions Christ was the same. People recognized Him as we would an acquaintance. He wept human tears, and

18) 1 Tim. 3, 16.

19) Gal. 4, 4.

20) Matt. 17, 5.

21) John 14, 6.

22) 1 Tim. 2, 5.

23) Matt. 18, 11.

He felt human joy. Men observed Him angry and cheerful, calm and disturbed. The Creed of our Church squares with the Bible when it calls Him "true man, born of the Virgin Mary."

And yet, this man "spake as never man did speak."²⁴ One of the wisest of His race confessed Him "a teacher come from God, for no man did the miracles which He did."²⁵ A voice from heaven pronounced Him the Son of God,²⁶ and He Himself consistently sets up the claim that He "is in the bosom of the Father,"²⁷ that He "is in heaven,"²⁸ that "He and the Father are one."²⁹ He appeals to the convincing testimony of His superhuman works to corroborate His claim. Reviewing His personality, which is without equal among the sons of men, Paul asserts: "In Him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."³⁰ The transcendent virtues of the Deity had taken up an abode in this Christ. Though sojourning among His countrymen "in the form of a servant," and "being found in the likeness and fashion of men," He "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," He was "in the form of God."³¹ Our Creed, again, is in full harmony with the Scriptures when it confesses Him "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity."

Equally incomprehensible to the natural reason of men is His avowed mission. His first public act takes place on the banks of the Jordan, whither He has come asking baptism from John,—that baptism which by divine command had begun to be administered in those days "for the remission of sins."³² John, who had special knowledge through his parents of the wonderful origin of Christ, was aware that baptism could not be applied to Him for the ordinary purpose. For this applicant had come into the world by an immaculate conception. He was even then the Sinless One—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."³³ It seemed blasphemous to treat Him

24) John 7, 46.

25) John 3, 2.

26) Matt. 3, 17.

27) John 1, 18.

28) John 3, 13.

29) John 10, 30.

30) Col. 2, 9.

31) Phil. 2, 6—8.

32) Luke 3, 3.

33) Heb. 7, 26.

as a common Jew. He was in a class by Himself. John voices his scruples: "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" But he is told: "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."³⁴⁾ The crowds have gathered about Him to hear Him explain His doctrine. "Think not," He tells them, "that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."³⁵⁾ His public career is literally punctuated with the ever recurring assertion that He was come not to do His own will, but "the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."³⁶⁾ God's will, the holy and righteous will of God, the good Law, which had been written in man's heart at the creation, which men had broken in the fall, and were continually breaking ever since, the Law which had become an indictment against them through their manifold transgressions, and whose terrors were visited upon them by their accusing conscience,—this Law had become the rule of His life and its complete fulfilment the achievement for which He strove with passionate zeal.

His was a marvelous life. God from heaven declared Himself "well pleased" with Him.³⁷⁾ From this one Man He had received that all-surpassing love which all the rest had failed to render Him. Men, too, extolled His numberless acts of love. In the last night which He spent on earth, the disciple who had studied the fathomless depths of His being and His incomparable works better than the others looks back, as it were, over His past life, and sums up his judgment of Him in these words: "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end."³⁸⁾

This life of serving love had been full of self-abnegation, self-abasement, self-forgetfulness. It had entailed great hardships, had forced upon Him unusual humiliations, had led Him into frequent danger. It was a life grossly misunderstood and filled with the pathos of unmerited sorrow. It ended in seeming

34) Matt. 3, 14. 15.

35) Matt. 5, 17.

36) John 4, 34.

37) Matt. 17, 5.

38) John 13, 1.

failure when His nation turned against Him, and His best friends forsook Him, yea, when God Himself rejected Him. For we see Him writhing in agony in the garden and pleading: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me,"³⁹⁾ only to be refused. Through the gloom of an unnatural eclipse we are startled by hearing Him cry from the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"⁴⁰⁾ He ends like a criminal on the gallows, after His very judges have pronounced Him innocent. And even in His last moments that overmastering thought which had engrossed Him through life is still in His mind: "Not what I will, but what Thou wilt!"⁴¹⁾ He prays for His slayers, He shrives a penitent thief, and arranges for the future welfare of His widowed mother from His very cross. When a twelve-year-old boy, He had said to His bewildered parents who had found Him sitting among the doctors in the Temple: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"⁴²⁾ That is the first utterance that is recorded of Him. The last one, His parting word, is a shout of intense satisfaction, "It is finished!"⁴³⁾ His life-work was accomplished by His death.

The most popular solution of the Christ-problem that has been attempted is unsatisfactory. It is held that Christ is the perfect man and His life the highest type of morality. He is the pattern of excellence which we are to copy in our conduct. This solution disappoints, first, because it denies the divinity of Christ. It shuts its eyes to half the record which we have of His life. Christ the Perfect Man is at best half the Christ of the Bible, and that means, practically, He is not the Christ of revelation at all; He is a product of human fancy, not the result of comprehensive and exhaustive Bible-study. Secondly, if the divinity of Christ is admitted, it seems cruel to parade Him to us as the perfect man. Our logic will argue: It was easy for Christ to be perfect: His divine power upheld Him against the forces of evil. We who are mere men

39) Luke 22, 42.

40) Mark 15, 34.

41) Mark 14, 36.

42) Luke 2, 49.

43) John 19, 30.

have not the chance that He had. Thirdly, it is impossible to find in Christ's work any saving element if His whole mission was to show men by a practical example what God demands of them in the way of holy living. Did not the Law show this clearly enough to all men, and had not the lives of the saints proved that the lessons of the Law were unachievable even by the best of men? Christ as the perfect man only deepens the impression of man's utter disability under the Law, but He cannot be in any real sense man's Savior.

There is only one satisfactory solution for the Christ-problem—the Biblical one; and this connects directly with the thought of salvation. Christ declares that He came to "give His life a ransom for many";⁴⁴⁾ that He had come "to seek and save that which was lost";⁴⁵⁾ that He would "give His life for the sheep."⁴⁶⁾ The work of Christ is substitutive work. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."⁴⁷⁾ "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."⁴⁸⁾ The element of obedience which is made so prominent in His life—"He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"⁴⁹⁾—is necessary to complete the picture of Him as the Savior. Actively fulfilling the demands of the Law, passively submitting to every punishment of the Law, He has obtained salvation for men. His life and death have sacrificial and atoning virtue. He is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."⁵⁰⁾ Our sins were made His by imputation; in the same way His righteousness is imputed to us. He died because of our sins; we live because of His atonement for sin.

Now we come to appreciate the two natures in Christ. This wonderful personality is necessary for His office as Mediator between God and the sinner. His twofold consubstan-

44) Matt. 20, 28.

47) Gal. 4, 4. 5.

50) John 1, 29.

45) Luke 19, 10.

48) 2 Cor. 5, 21.

46) John 10, 11.

49) Phil. 2, 8.

tiality — on the one hand, with God; on the other, with man — equips Him for the work of salvation. If He had been God alone, He could not have suffered and died; if He had been man alone, He could not have appeased the divine anger against sin, and overcome the consequences of sin, death, hell, and the devil. As the God-man He has achieved all that was needed for our reconciliation with God.

This Christ is “set forth as the propitiation,”⁵¹⁾ the exponent of saving grace to men. In Christ, God turns His countenance of love to the sinner. In Christ alone God meets the sinner as a God before whom the sinner can stand, without being abashed and consumed. Augustine said: “I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are very wise and very beautiful; but I never read in either of them, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.’” Augustine’s experience is the experience of all men.

The salvation which Jesus Christ wrought by His holy living and innocent death is a finished product of the redeeming grace of God. It has been stamped with the divine approval by the resurrection of Christ. Careful readers of the New Testament have been struck with the frequent and emphatic reference to the Easter miracle. Christ throughout His public ministry views, not His entering the grave, but His return from the grave as the true goal of His mission. “I lay down my life,” He declares, “that I may take it again; I have power to lay it down, and power to take it again.”⁵²⁾ So persistently had He instructed His disciples to look for His rising that He could justly chide them for their self-inflicted ignorance and their slowness of heart to believe His words when He appeared again among them in His glorified body.

Why is this one miracle of Christ stressed so exceedingly? As a proof for the possibility of the dead rising it is not the only nor the first instance on record. Dead persons had been restored to life by Christ Himself in three instances. The

51) Rom. 3, 25.

52) John 10, 18.

resurrection of Christ differs indeed from all others in this that He rose by His own power. The resurrection is a proof of His divinity, but it is only an additional proof alongside of the many other miracles which He performed. The resurrection also establishes the truth of His predictions. He had said that He would rise, and He did. He is a true prophet; His doctrine receives confirmation from His resurrection. Still, this does not exhaust the meaning of the miracle.

The resurrection of Christ becomes the fundamental fact in the creed of the new Church that is named after Christ. In their sermons and writings all the apostles dwell with great force on this one fact. The sacred day for the public assembling of Christians, Sunday, is made to commemorate this event. The sacred rites of Christians, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are related to the resurrection: they are represented as drawing their salutary virtue from it. The conversion of sinners, their holy living, their cheerful death, are derived from this event. Paul stakes Christianity's right to exist on this miracle alone, when he says: "If Christ be not raised, then is our faith vain; we are yet in our sins; then they also which are fallen asleep in Jesus are perished."⁵³) Dr. Uhlhorn, after surveying these facts, reaches the correct conclusion that without the resurrection of Christ Christianity is unthinkable. Guy Thorne, in his novel *When It Was Dark*, has hardly overwrought this fact by his fiction when he pictures the collapse of organized Christianity at the news that the resurrection of Christ was a fraud.

The true import of this event is understood only by means of the bearing it has on our salvation. "Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification,"⁵⁴) — that is Paul's thesis on the real meaning of the resurrection of Christ. That event has redemptive value. It was the world's proxy that was laid to rest in the tomb on Good Friday; it was the world's proxy that came forth from the sepulcher on Easter morning. God, the righteous Judge,

53) 1 Cor. 15, 17, 18.

54) Rom. 4, 25.

had accepted the offering which humanity's Great Brother had made for the atonement of the world's guilt. The greeting of the risen Lord to the disciples is a greeting of peace. What the angels had sung over His rude cradle in His birth-hour, "Peace on earth!" that He dispenses as a gratuity of His reconciling mercy, as a trophy of His victory over death. God is at peace with sinners through Christ. Christ, the heralded Prince of Peace, is become "our Peace."⁵⁵⁾ The handwriting of our transgressions is canceled; the indictment of the guilty world has been quashed in the chancery of divine grace for Christ's sake.

This view of the resurrection is the only one that does full justice to the event: the Judge of the whole earth pronounces criminal mankind "Not guilty!" This view caused Paul to raise that magnificent paean of victory: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right of God, who also maketh intercession for us."⁵⁶⁾ The mighty significance of the Lord's resurrection cheered Luther in his struggles. "Vivit!" "He lives!" he wrote on his desk, and pointed to the fact in hours of despondency. "*Male egerim, bene egerim: nihil ad me; ecce Christus*"—"Whether I have done well or ill is of no consequence; behold, here is Christ!"—that was his appeal to the glorious meaning of the resurrection.

4. NO SAVING GRACE WITHOUT THE MEANS OF GRACE.

The world of sinners is—*is*—is reconciled to God,—this now becomes the message of salvation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," says Paul; and to show how this reconcilia-

⁵⁵⁾ Eph. 2, 14.

⁵⁶⁾ Rom. 8, 31—34.

tion is to be transferred to the individual, he adds: "And hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God."⁵⁷⁾ This places before us *the third essential* of the faith that saves. God has erected an instrument of power by which He makes appeals to the sinner's heart, and induces him to accept what Christ has done for all sinners. This instrument is variously termed in Scripture—"Word of Reconciliation," "Word of Life," simply "Word," etc. Its most common designation is "Gospel."

There is a wider meaning for this term, which occurs, for instance, in the opening verse of Mark. There it stands for "record" or "account." It is almost the same as biography. But besides this sense, Scripture uses the term "Gospel" in a sense which makes "Gospel" mean the contrary of "Law." "The Law," says John, "was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."⁵⁸⁾ Between these two revelations of God there is an immense difference. The Law states what demands God makes upon man; it holds out promises of reward for good conduct, and threatens man with dire retribution if he fails to do all that is written in the commandments of God. The Gospel states what God has done, and is always bent upon doing, in order to restore the sinner to a condition of righteousness in Christ, to reclaim him from the tyranny of sin, and to bring him ultimately into the life everlasting in a heaven full of joy and glory. The Gospel lays down no condition for the sinner to fulfil, but is a free, gratuitous offer of all that the sinner needs to be rid of sin and saved here and hereafter.

Paul has called the Gospel, thus understood, "a power of God unto salvation."⁵⁹⁾ He has observed that by means of the Gospel God "effectually worketh"⁶⁰⁾ in men. It is, therefore, an inferior, a wrong view of the Gospel to regard it as a historical narrative of the events in the life of Christ and

57) 2 Cor. 5, 19, 20.

59) Rom. 1, 16.

58) John 1, 17.

60) 1 Thess. 2, 13.

the early Church, or as the new law which Christ has laid down for the conduct of His people and the government of His Church. The Gospel is a means of grace, by which God seeks entrance into the hearts of men, causing them to understand His gracious purposes concerning them, to conceive a delight in such knowledge, to acquiesce in His declaration of peace, and to appropriate the work of Christ as their own, because rendered in their place. From the Gospel there issue strong persuasive influences, which attack the natural deadness, coldness, indifference of the sinner's heart over and against affairs of the soul and spiritual matters. The power of rescuing love is exerted upon the human reason to make it grasp the divine logic of the plan of salvation which runs counter to all human logic, to overcome all its finely thought-out reasonable scruples about the correctness, the validity, the ethics of this plan. This same power lays hold upon the human will, which is full of self-conceit and pride, and stubbornly opposes the proposition that man can be saved only like a beggar by the mercy of God. It overcomes the reluctance, the diffidence, the doubts of the alarmed sinner, who imagines he is not worthy of such grace, and makes out of the unwilling men joyously willing to accept the pardon of their Father in heaven.

The promises of the Gospel have been attached also to certain ordinances of Christ's appointment in which there is, besides the spoken word of grace, some visible element connected with the word. These ordinances—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—are meant for the same purpose as the written or spoken word: they convey, confirm, and seal saving grace to the sinner. God seeks entrance into the human heart by every possible means of approach: through the eye, the ear, the touch, the taste. He makes multitudinous efforts to win the sinner's affection.

At no time, indeed, does God exert His irresistible power of majesty, compelling the sinner by main force to yield to His entreaties. This would be a self-contradiction, and would leave the sinner, convinced against his will, to be of the same

opinion still. But there is a mighty moral suasion exerted through the Gospel and Gospel ordinances, and the sinner who comes under this influence feels that "the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁶¹⁾

This conception of the Gospel is wholly at variance with the notion that the Gospel opens up a possibility for the sinner to save himself, if he will try. In this view an effort is demanded of the sinner: he must experience a sorrow over sin, he must pass through the agonies of remorse and contrition, and form the resolution to amend his conduct. Only then may he dare to hope for mercy in God and take comfort in Christ. This view vitiates the entire Gospel. Paul emphasizes the fact that Christ "died for the ungodly," that God sacrificed His Son for us "while we were yet sinners."⁶²⁾ God looks for no preparation which the sinner is to effect before His grace is extended to him. Gospel grace is never conditioned grace: it is the simple announcement that God is reconciled; it is the offer of a salvation that is already accomplished, not one that must first be started by the sinner. The call of grace is issued, not in this form: "If you are properly prepared by penitence, prayer, and holy resolves, and are thus ready, you may come," but thus: "Come; for all things are now ready."⁶³⁾ "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."⁶⁴⁾ That means: Come unconditionally; come just as you are!

61) Heb. 4, 12.

63) Luke 14, 17.

62) Rom. 5, 6. 8.

64) Is. 55, 1. 2.

Christians are sometimes asked to state the exact circumstances of their conversion. I doubt whether any are ever able to do that. Most men can say no more about the great change that has come into their lives than the blind man in the Gospel, whose sight Christ had restored: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."⁶⁵ Dr. Torrey well described the silent operations of saving grace in a recent number of *The King's Business*:—

You ask me *how* I ever came to Christ?

I do not know.

There came a yearning for Him in my soul

So long ago.

I found earth's flowers would fade and die—

I wept for something that could satisfy;

And then—and then—somehow I seemed to dare

To lift my broken heart to Him in prayer.

I do not know—I cannot tell you how;

I only know He is my Savior now.

You ask me *when*, what time, I came to Christ?

I cannot tell.

The day, or just the hour, I do not now

Remember well.

It must have been when I was all alone

The light of His forgiving Spirit shone

Into my heart, so clouded o'er with sin;

I think—I think—'t was then I let Him in.

I do not know—I cannot tell you when;

I only know He is so dear since then.

You ask me *where* I found the Savior Christ?

I cannot say.

That sacred place has faded from my sight

As yesterday.

Perhaps He thought it better I should not

Remember where. How I should love that spot!

I think I could not tear myself away,

For I should wish forever there to stay.

I do not know,—I cannot tell you where,—

I only know He came and blessed me there.

65) John 9, 25.

You ask me *why* I came to Jesus Christ?
 I can reply.
 It is a wondrous story; listen while
 I tell you why.
 My heart was drawn at length to seek His face.
 I was alone; I had no resting-place;
 I heard how He had loved me with a love
 Of depth so great — of height so far above
 The human ken; I longed such love to share,
 And sought it then upon my knees in prayer.

You ask me why I thought this loving Christ
 Would heed my prayer?
 I knew He died upon the cross for me, —
 I nailed Him there.
 I heard His dying cry, "Father, forgive!"
 I saw Him drain death's cup that I might live;
 My head was bowed upon my breast in shame!
 He called me, and in penitence I came.
 He heard my prayer! I cannot tell you how,
 Nor when, nor where: only — I love Him now.

That is the common experience of every sinner on whom the grace of God has laid hold: God came, and saw, and conquered. He found me; He picked me up; I followed. He did it all; I did nothing but resist, but His love was too strong for me. That is what it means to be saved by grace.

5. NO SAVING GRACE RECEIVED EXCEPT BY FAITH.

There remains a *fourth essential of saving faith* to be noted: How does the sinner "come" to Christ? How does he "buy without money" from Christ? How does he "taste and see" that the Lord is good? How does he "take," "eat," what God's grace offers? We are here not dealing with material objects. It is all spiritual business of the highest order, affairs of the heart, that we have been reviewing. Yet, Scripture in its practical way and descending to our common intelligence speaks of these affairs in physical terms. What is meant by all such expressions as "coming to Christ" is the act of believing. When the intellect grasps the message of salvation and credits it as true, when the will of the individual sinner accepts it as

designed for him and acquiesces therein,—that is believing, that is personal faith.

Faith establishes for the individual that right relation to God which the work of Christ has established for the entire world of men. By believing, each one of the redeemed appropriates for himself the merits procured by Christ. He knows that he is credited by God with all the holiness and innocence of Christ. He is righteous for Christ's sake; Christ's righteousness is reckoned as his own. It is like pronouncing a criminal "Not guilty" in a court of justice. In Scriptural parlance we call this justification. Paul tells us what he abandoned and what he embraced in his justification, when he quit the Pharisees and joined the Christians: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."⁶⁶

Justification is the primal and basic fact in personal Christianity. It represents the spiritual crisis in our lives. It is the passing away of the old and the advent of the new. It restores to the sinner a good conscience before God. He faces God with no dread of His displeasure; on the contrary, he knows that God is pleased with him. He is become the child of God through the adoption of grace. He enjoys child's privileges with God: he communes with Him, speaks to Him, and is answered. He is installed as heir of God and coheir with Jesus Christ. The distant future, his fate after death, death itself and the grave, and the final judgment, hold no terrors for him. His fate is secured in Christ.

An effect of this, which in point of time coincides with justification, is a moral change that comes over the powers of

66) Phil. 3, 7—9.

the soul. God and all things divine have now become lovable objects to the sinner who before loathed them. His judgment on the value of things is changed, completely reversed. He feels different impulses impelling him to action, and gladly follows them. Life has assumed a new meaning to him: it is become a grand opportunity for service to the Redeemer-God according to His expressed will. Christ Himself is become a living reality in the person's existence, and Christ's word and example the principle that determines his likes and dislikes, his every action. So Paul pictures the new state when he says: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."⁶⁷⁾ This life, too, is nothing else than the same faith which at first grasped the pardoning hand of God, and always holds that hand. It is manifested in a thousand forms in the routine of our daily tasks. It determines every view of duty; it prompts every holy, generous, charitable resolve; it develops a prolific activity along the line of everything that is true, everything that is honest, everything that is just, everything that is pure, everything that is lovely, everything that is of good report, everything virtuous and praiseworthy.⁶⁸⁾ It "teaches men that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."⁶⁹⁾

Here, in the faith which day by day and hour by hour lays hold of the redemption by Christ, and which filled the commonest actions of believers with the spirit of gratitude and love, lie the mainsprings of true morality. It is this faith that overcame the world in the days of the apostles, and that has since changed the face of human affairs. Its silent influences have gone out into all ranks and occupations of men. Innumerable times its decadence has been asserted, because in its visible forms this faith exists in much weakness. It still bears

67) Gal. 2, 20.

68) Phil. 4, 8.

69) Titus 2, 12. 13.

the image of its despised Master. The pride of reason and self-conscious probity scorns it. But it proceeds quietly, unostentatiously, with its work of remolding men. It possesses perennial youth, immortal vitality, unconquerable strength.

Some years ago the assertion that the influence of Christianity was waning drew from Edward Thomson this eloquent rejoinder: "While Christianity is speaking in languages more numerous, by tongues more eloquent, in nations more populous than ever before; marshaling better troops, with richer harmony; shrinking from no foe, rising triumphant from every conflict; shaking down the towers of old philosophies that exalt themselves against God; making the steam-press rush under the demand for her Scriptures, and the steam-horse groan under the weight of her charities; emancipating the enslaved, civilizing the lawless, refining literature, inspiring poetry; sending forth art and science no longer clad in soft raiment to linger in king's palaces, but as hardy prophets of God to make the earth bud and blossom as the rose, giving godlike breadth and freedom and energy to the civilization that bears its name, elevating savage islands into civilized states, leading forth Christian martyrs from the mountains of Madagascar, turning the clubs of cannibals into the railings of the altars before which Fiji savages call upon Jesus; repeating the Pentecost 'by many an ancient river and many a palmy plain'; thundering at the seats of ancient paganism; sailing all waters, cabling all oceans, scaling all mountains in the march of its might, and ever enlarging the diameter of those circles of light which it has kindled on earth,—you call it a failure?" Nay, indeed, this faith never fails. Its merciful mission to the disconsolate, wherever they languish, goes on despite the hypocrisy of false adherents, the feebleness of its true disciples, and the might of earth's powers that are arrayed against it. It will continue winning souls, even from the ranks of its most outspoken opponents, until with the return of the Lord it will pass into the vision beatific and the peace and glory which it has promised its followers.

The only question that any person should entertain regarding this faith that saves is: What is my personal relation to it? The smallest portion of the grace that brings salvation has been regarded as a priceless guerdon of the heart's longing by one of the great thinkers of the race, who even perpetuated his conviction on his gravestone. You have no doubt heard of the beautiful inscription on the tomb of Copernicus in Germany:⁷⁰⁾

Not such grace crave I as to Paul Thou grantedst,
Nor ask I Peter's pardon; only such grace
As on the cross Thou on the thief bestowedst
I pray with longing.

It is a noble confession. Would that among earth's wisest sons and daughters many were found to repeat it! Jesus has said: "Whosoever will confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in heaven."⁷¹⁾ What a prospect this word opens up! Jesus will before the company of heaven declare to His Father: "This person is My friend; I vouch for him; I own him; I want him for Mine own." Verily, that is a goal worth coveting; that is a thought that deserves to engage the absorbing study of the wisest and the intense affection of the sincerest. May it be the subject of our profoundest meditations and the object of our abiding love! May we respond to the call of saving grace in the words of Charlotte Elliott:

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

D.

70) Non parem Pauli gratiam requiro,
Veniam Petri neque posco, sed quam
In crucis ligno dederas latroni
Sedulus oro.

71) Matt. 10, 32.
