

THE  
CHILD OF GOD

*His Life*

*By*

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## CHAPTER I.

# THE NECESSITY FOR THE NEW BIRTH.

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MAN'S STATE BY NATURE THAT OF SPIRITUAL DEATH—  
NO POWER IN NATURE TO RISE ABOVE ITSELF—NO  
POWER IN NATURE TO PERCEIVE OR TO ENTER INTO  
THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

**M**AN'S state by nature is that of spiritual death; he has "no life" in him (John vi. 53), he is "alienated from the life of God." (Eph. iv. 18.) There is no pulsation in human nature which beats God-ward, no craving within for God, no thirst after God—the source of life and light and love; no seeking for rest in Him, who alone can satisfy the soul.

When Adam fell from his innocency, not only did he become a sinner, but the primary instincts of his fallen nature led him to shun

God, and to hide himself from His presence. Centuries have rolled on since that dark day, and men still are far from God ; not indeed farther from God, as to their nature, than Adam, their progenitor, for that would be impossible ; but, as regards the great mass of humanity, terribly farther off as to the knowledge of God, indeed utterly ignorant of Him, and living in the darkness of moral estrangement from Him.

Human nature may be amiable or disagreeable, but natural character is not the divine nature. Good temper in a horse does not give the creature a title to be anything more than a good-tempered horse. The fine and noble qualities existent in man are the remains of the beauty and perfection of the divinely-made creature before the fall. They may be likened to the fragments of sculpture and broken pieces of exquisite ornament which are dug out of ruined temples, and treasured in museums pertaining to civilized countries ; civilization admires the conceptions of ancient days, marvels at the skill that no longer exists, and seeks to imitate the fragmentary marbles it

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has dug out of their hiding-places; but at the same time lacks the mind and the hand which conceived and executed the works of its admiration.

Man has lost spiritual perception of God, and, as those creatures which, by reason of their dwelling in the darkness of the waters of subterranean caverns, have lost the organ as well as the sense of sight, he lives and moves in the darkness of his nature's distance from God, in a world, which, alas! has cast off God; and he is ignorant of the gloom in which he dwells.

In the second chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, two intensely solemn statements are made respecting man's state by nature. Men are there described as being dead in sins, and also as being the children of wrath:—"You . . . were dead in trespasses and sins . . . we . . . were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (v. 2, 3.) The apostle was writing to Gentiles, to people who had been "worshippers of the great goddess, Diana," and of the image which, poor idolaters as they

once were, they fancied had fallen "down from Jupiter." These Gentiles are the "you," and himself and other Hebrews the "we" of the solemn statement. But whether Gentiles or Jews, whether worshippers of Diana and her image, or of Jehovah the living God, still all men are described in the sacred record as of one stock and as in one state, their nature being precisely alike.

The course of man commenced with disobedience, it developed with human progress; till, by reason of human iniquity combined with Satanic energy, God sent the flood, and swept the face of the earth of its sciences and its cities, of its arts and its wickedness. After the flood, the re-peopled earth became, morally, like the side of the moon lying in the shroud of its own shadow; even then darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people. The world worshipped demons, and even Israel, redeemed from idolatrous Egypt, carried images of demons in their camp. The licentious acting of the human will led the heathen into every form of horrible self-indulgence

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(Rom. i. 23—31), till man became what beasts can never be—lower than himself. The Jews transgressed the law Jehovah gave them, and by transgression became more culpable than the Gentiles, who had but their consciences to accuse or to excuse them (Rom. ii. 15), and who, not having the restraint of divine authority, sinned with uncurbed wills.

“Dead in trespasses and sins,” “Sons of disobedience,” “Children of wrath,” such is the solemn record of God concerning man!

Let us look at another era in the world's history. Light shone in its darkness, the Son of God visited this world; but the darkness comprehended not the light. And what is the record of Him concerning man in his nature, His record who came from heaven, who is grace and truth, who Himself is the Life, and whose words are spirit and life?

A sample of the human race visited Jesus, the Son of God, one night. How does nature shrink from being seen in the presence of the Holy One! This religious man had the oracles of Jehovah in his mind and memory; he was

no ordinary theological master, but a noted teacher of the revealed will of God. He came to the lowly Man with a conviction of His greatness as being one sent from God, yet he was utterly ignorant of His person. There seemed, besides, something of the air of religious patronage in the words of Nicodemus as he presented himself to Jesus.

Now, how did He who came from heaven deal with him? Nicodemus would have been prepared for a religious discussion, but Jesus drew forth the sharp knife of truth, and with these words, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again," slew for ever all the religious teacher's hopes. Had Jesus spoken thus to a publican, or an outcast, the religious pride of man might have tolerated the sentence—that is, by shifting it on to the heads of others—but no, the record stands, concerning a sample of orthodox humanity, that new life is necessary in order to enter the kingdom of God. Poor Nicodemus, in the blindness of his understanding, staggered under the blow, saying, "How can these things be?"

The Lord had all men in His mind when He spake that night to the ruler of Israel, saying, first "ye"—that is, ye Jews—"must be born again," or anew; and later on, "Every one"—that is every man, Jew or Gentile—"that is born of the Spirit" (iii. 7, 8); thus shewing what we have seen the epistle to the Ephesians teaches.

*Nature produces nature; like begets like.* "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Human nature is human nature, whether cast in a Jew or a Gentile mould, whether amiable or offensive, courageous or cringing. Good never will be evolved out of evil, nor light be born of darkness, nor perfection issue uncreated out of chaos. The flesh is, and ever will be what it is; and this is true of all. Let us not, like restless waves, vainly beat against the iron rocks of truth.

It is terribly humbling to be told, even by the Lord Himself, that the flesh is flesh, and that we must be born anew, especially to those who, like the rabbi of Israel, have shot forth their religious branches and borne their religious fruit; but these few short words, "Ye

must be born again," cut us down for ever. Yes, many have they laid low spiritually, many an one have they slain as regards hope in self, in works, or in the vain belief that this old Adam-life can become fit for God, or that self, purged and sanctified, can be made to live anew. "Ye must be born anew"; yes, all must be new—a new life, a new nature. It is not the old conveniently white-washed, as the hypocrites advance; nor the old repaired and decorated, as moralists would have it; nor yet the fair garment of self-righteousness wrought out by a man on earth, that others would present to us; nor yet, again, the old changed and renovated by the Holy Ghost, as some say. No; it is what the word of God declares, "new creation." (Gal. vi. 15.)

Let us bow to God. The first element in faith is obedience. All man's death and misery began by disobedience; our only hope for blessing lies in heeding God's word. Let none begin the deadly occupation of self-excuse, such occupation ends not only in self-flattery, in commending ourselves to ourselves, but in

content of our nature-state of moral blindness. God save us, spiritually, from that which is one of His most benign favors naturally, contentment in blindness.

But if we enquire humbly and in His presence, "How can these things be?" He Himself will supply the answer. Yes, the cross of His Son will explain the enquiry, and, as it was with Nicodemus, so shall we yet learn to value the death of Jesus. Did not he "who at the first came to Jesus by night," when he saw the dead body of the Saviour, bring myrrh and aloes, and, with another—who was also a disciple, but secretly and in fear—wind the precious, priceless burden in the linen clothes and bury it in the new sepulchre? Yes, the death of Jesus, who died that we might live, not only opens our dull hearts to divine love; it also answers our questions concerning God and His kingdom. The body of the Holy One, laid in the grave, explains to us deep mysteries, and also divine possibilities, respecting ourselves. And where there is faith in Him there is love to Him, and a treasuring of His death in our hearts, which

the God of all grace never forgets. How carefully is the record given in His book of the weight of spices Nicodemus brought wherewith to honor the body of the Lord. The memory of this tribute of love and reverence to the crucified Redeemer will not grow dim throughout eternity. He will be seen in glory, who at the first came to Jesus by night, and we shall recognise in him a man whose soul was emboldened, as well as whose questions were answered, by the Saviour's shame and death.

*No spiritual perception of God's kingdom exists in us in our nature state.* We have no soul-eye to see what it is like. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nature itself teaches concerning perception, God having implanted in some of His creatures an inward vision, which others possess not. The autumn gathering of the swallows proclaims a power and perception of which man may take note, but which he cannot explain; how much more apparent is the principle of God giving spiritual perception to His own people! God has revealed

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to them by His Spirit that which natural eye has never seen, and natural heart never conceived. (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.) Education cannot make an eye or give sight to the blind, far less can education give to the flesh, the old nature of man, ability to see beyond the limits of vision natural to it. Cultivation does not change nature, it leaves the thorn bush and the thistle, thorn and thistle still. Man can develop things of earth's kingdom which exists, he cannot create. Cultivation never enables a man to see more than the kingdom of man; it neither generates a wish nor creates a desire in him for the kingdom of God. On the contrary, cultivation of the flesh usually ends in more potent pride than ever.

The seeker after God's kingdom sighs over himself; he who sees it is born anew. "I see now" is a constant expression of those who have just received sight of soul to perceive the truth revealed in the scriptures. The truth of the things of God is not altered because we by grace perceive it; it is what it was before we were born, but the difference is this: formerly

we were darkness, now we are light in the Lord. (Eph. v. 8.)

*There is no entrance into God's kingdom in our natural state.* Nature itself teaches a lesson again. The animal does not enter into the vegetable kingdom. God, the Creator, maintains the broad lines which distinguish creature from creature. Who ever planted a forest in the ocean? The laws of nature cannot be altered by the creature; the laws of the new creation are never set aside. Being born anew, a man has a new nature. The spiritual kingdom is the element, if we may so express it, of those who are born of the Spirit; and to enter this kingdom there must be the new birth: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

These words of the Lord do more than state a fact; they also explain how a man is born anew. There is an action within effected by two forces—water, *i.e.*, the word (1 Peter i. 23), and the Spirit. Let us not forget to whom the Lord was speaking—to a Jew well acquainted with the scriptures, *i.e.*, the Old Testa-

ment—"Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?" The Lord was not speaking to a christian possessing the New Testament scriptures, and acquainted with the use of the christian sacraments, which at the time of His words had not so much as an existence. Nicodemus assuredly knew, by the letter of the word, what "water" signified, and by the same word he knew what was meant by the Spirit. But he did not then know their spiritual force in his own soul. So may we understand intellectually and educationally what these things are, and yet be without their power.

We read that the Lord will gather again scattered Israel to their own land in the day of the kingdom on earth. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . And I will put my Spirit within you." (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.) The purifying water is the word of God, and the Spirit the Spirit of God; and at the time of the kingdom, Israel will be brought by means of the word into a new state by God, being purified thereby. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put

within you." The moral effect of the word of God is purifying. By the effect of the word upon the soul, repentance is produced—we are made to feel that what God says about ourselves is true.

The new nature, derived through the Spirit implanting the word in the soul, is divine as its source. Born of the Spirit, men are thereby partakers of the divine nature, and actually possess a life which is distinct from the life they have from Adam; a life absolutely new. Christ is the source, the pattern, the expression of this life; He is the life itself, we receive it from Him by the Spirit.

Old and new truth is bound up in what we have just looked at. Old, inasmuch as it is truth, which, speaking broadly, every child of God of all ages is subject to and formed by; for whether without the law in patriarchal days, or under the law from Moses to Christ, all the people of God were born anew, and all were partakers of the divine nature, and all had a new life. Still these things are new: for, until the Lord came to this earth, man had not

been taught his absolute inability in himself to enter the kingdom of God, and his state of entire estrangement from God in his nature; hence he could not know the need of a life wholly and entirely distinct from the life derived from Adam.

Having the life, and knowing what the nature and character of the life is which we have, are quite distinct. Many a child of God knows only that his sins are forgiven him; but does not know either that he has new life in Christ, or what the life is which he has obtained.

To ourselves, living in times since the death and resurrection of the Lord, His words on the water and the Spirit have still a fresh intensity. His death has marked the state of all men: "If one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. v. 14). We know what the dead state of our nature is, not only by the declaration of the scriptures, but also by the fact of Christ's death. Dead in sin is man's condition, and in that condition he cannot but remain, unless God communicate to him a life outside that condition.

The resurrection of our Lord evidences a life for man beyond death, a life which is freed from death's dominion (Rom. vi. 9) and from sin (v. 8); and the eternal life is now communicated to us who believe on the once crucified but now risen Son of God, in His present condition of resurrection. This is truth, new in the sense that it is christian truth, not jewish truth: and it is liberty, even as the Lord taught before His death, as is recorded for example in chapter viii. of John, of which we shall speak presently.

## CHAPTER II.

# A WORD ON THE NATURE OF GOD, AND ON MAN'S NATURE.



HUMAN THOUGHTS ABOUT HEAVEN — THE NATURE OF  
GOD — LIGHT AND LOVE ; AND THE NECESSITY FOR  
THE CROSS.

**M**AN'S thoughts concerning heaven too often are fashioned from earthly moulds. We take of things around us, and, subjecting what we have gathered to a process of mental purifying, cast it into a shape, which our imagination has formed out of the clay of this sin-stained earth, and then we call that which we have fashioned heavenly ! Vain are such thoughts ! No mere man hath ascended up to heaven. Ideas of heaven without a divine revelation are only things of earth, painted with

the colors of earth—the paradise of our inclinations, the fruition of the wishes of our fallen selves. Heaven is the dwelling-place of God, and can only be apprehended as God Himself is known ; “ Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” What is known of them is by revelation : “ God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.” (1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.) The earthly things of the kingdom of God may well interest true believers, but they do not directly pertain to us. Since Christ went to prepare a place for those who love Him, our place is where He is. We have to do with the heavenly part of God’s kingdom, or we have no lot in the matter. A christian is not a Jew; he has not an earthly but a heavenly inheritance.

If it is a divine necessity that the children of promise must be born anew in order to enter the kingdom of God in its earthly glory, it is none the less a divine necessity, that we Gentiles must be born anew in order to enter

that kingdom in its heavenly character. Shall we be deaf to the Lord's words, and be included amongst the self righteous? Shall we read our bibles, and have the Lord say of us also, "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

*How shall we reach heaven?* Heaven is beyond human attainment. The law given by Moses cried to man on earth, "Do this and thou shalt live," *i.e.* on the earth; but no law ever so much as whispered, "Do this and thou shalt ascend up to heaven." The holiness of heaven is above all our thoughts, its light and love are beyond all our ideas! None among men on earth but He, who came thence, knew what heaven was. Our natural thoughts of it are of the earth, earthy; and by the fact of our very being, cannot be otherwise. The Lord, a man upon earth, was yet in heaven. In His divine person He was there; He had been there from everlasting, and knew in Himself what it was; and upon earth He was the repository of heavenly things. We can only

know what heaven is, and the way thither, as He Himself teaches us who and what God is.

The eye of Jesus penetrated into man's innermost being. He "needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." (John ii. 25.) He was also declaring the Father, in whose bosom He was; and He teaches us heavenly things. He tells us not only what our nature is, He teaches us more, even what is the nature of God. He explains us to ourselves, and He reveals God to us.

The truth of God teaches us that we are by nature "dead in sins," and that our nature is alive to sinning. Every nerve of man's moral being is sensitive to sin; we do not now refer to our actions, which, when we yield ourselves to ourselves, are the expressions of the motions of our hearts, but to the principle within us by nature, which is really the energy of the system of the world. It is self, self-will, the creature pleasing itself—or trying to do so—it is that lawlessness, which is sin. We need to look deeper into ourselves, than is the wont of superficial morality. We need to judge of ourselves with

at least as much concern as an ordinarily careful man would of the house in which he was contemplating to dwell. He would not be satisfied with the evidence of mere painting and stucco; he would require to be acquainted with the soundness of the painted timber and the honesty of the stuccoed brick-work. Yet, how many pass from time into eternity in a state of deadly unconcern, without even the care and inquiry they would bestow upon a house which they purposed tenanting for seven short years ?

Suppose a little child having set at naught his father's direct word, and not having owned his wrong, unconcernedly playing with the daisies upon his father's lawn. A passer-by might say, "How innocently that child is amusing itself"; but the father, feeling the sin of his child's disobedience, would have far different thoughts: he would judge of his child not by its apparently innocent play, but by the state of its heart. We must not judge of ourselves by mere external evidence. Man calls his self-pleasing innocent amusement; but what is the state of

our hearts? Have we been to God? Have we owned our sin to Him? Hereby let us test our real state before Him. When the prodigal in the far country was with his companions, enjoying himself, and when he was alone in his misery, keeping swine, he was equally far off from his father; and it was only when he said, "I will arise and go to my father," that he expressed his first right thought in the far country. Whether our circumstances in the world render our lot happy or sorrowful is not the question for our souls: how do we stand in relation to God?

The truth of God gives us to think right thoughts about ourselves. We learn that we are "all gone out of the way," that there is "none that doeth good, no, not one," and we bow to God, our mouths are stopped, and we own our guilt before Him. (Rom. iii. 19.)

While the divinely-given pardon of sin, and the divine gift of life are quite distinct from each other, the self-same person receives both the pardon and the life. The life is not communicated to unpardoned sinners. The sense

of having the pardon does not always co-exist with the grace of the pardon, and we must not confound the gift of God with our realisation of it. God forgives us our sins, cleanses us from our defilement, and justifies us from all things; He also gives us a new life in His Son. This life is entirely distinct from our natural life; it is a holy life—in God and in Christ are its origin, and the Holy Spirit is its energy.

After the Lord had spoken to Nicodemus of the necessity for the new birth for man, He spoke of Himself as the crucified One for man. Now it is by His death we obtain full redemption and forgiveness, and His blood cleanses us from all sin. We need to have Him present to our souls, both as sacrifice and life-giver, as dying for our sins, and as giving life to sinners dead in sin; and, until we rejoice in His redemption, we cannot rejoice before God in the life He has given us.

The all-availing efficacy of our Lord's sacrifice is the truth which, if truly and fully recognised, enables us to rejoice in the forgiveness

of sins. It removes our questioning and our doubts, and opens the way for us to delight in Christ as our life. The Lord and the truth explain to us not only what we are, and what divine forgiveness is, but also what God is, and how we are brought into the joy of the nature of God.

*The nature of God* must be borne in mind, if we would understand what heavenly things are. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16), is an utterance which was never heard on earth until the Son of God proclaimed it. Prophets had been raised up and sent by God to testify of His dealing with men, but the joyful tidings of His heart of love towards the wide world of humanity was the secret reserved for ages and generations, and only to be made known by the Incarnate Son. "God is love" is a truth from heaven first revealed to man by Jesus.

God is light is a truth co-equal with it, and is taught also by the Lord. The law did not re-

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veal God's righteousness, though it witnessed to it—this the cross of Jesus does. The nature of God cannot tolerate sin. To speak only of His love, and to reject His light, would be to falsify the love and to rob God of half His character. "God is light," "God is love" are truths from heaven.

In the words of the Lord to Nicodemus, we perceive the nature of God—first, that God is light; next, that God is love.

First, God as LIGHT is seen in the CROSS of the Son of MAN. The Lord having in grace become a man, having taken the place of Son of Man before God, *must* needs go through to the end with the work undertaken. That work was redemption, in order to effect which, the sacrifice of Himself was required; therefore the necessity imposed upon Him, as Son of Man, to die in order that we might live. In the fulfilment of this necessity, so graciously undertaken, we see God as light magnified in the cross of Jesus.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted

up ; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Next, God as LOVE is seen in the GIFT of the Son of GOD. From the depths of His own heart, because He is love, God gave His eternal Son for a perishing world, gave Him to become a man, that, being a man, He might die in order that we might live.

“ For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The reader will observe the titles of the Lord: Son of Man ; Son of God. Son of Man given for man, and, on man's account, bearing the shame and spitting, enduring death and being forsaken on the cross. Son of God given from God's heart for a perishing world. The light required that the Son of Man should be lifted up; the love gave the Son of God for man.

*Because of the light and love there was a necessity for the cross of Christ ; and, by His once crucified Son, God draws men to Himself. Love loves because it is love. No man can ex-*

plain love; it is all-attractive and gathers to its own bosom. Certainly none can explain the love of God, and God by His love irresistibly draws to Himself.

Why should God give His Son for the world? There is but one reason, "God is Love." Does God love us? Us, sinners, haters of Him? "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 8.) It is not because there is anything loveable in the sinner that he is invited to come near to God, but because God has given His Son to die; a meeting place in the propitiatory has been divinely made. Has your heart been broken by a sight of the spotless Son of God dying for his enemies? Have you, by the sacrifice, learned that God is light and love?

The Son being given, and having come into the world as the love-gift of God, there was a necessity imposed upon Him. "Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up." But why this necessity? The answer is, because "God is Light." Righteousness required, and the Son alone could

answer, the claims of righteousness. In order that our sins might be blotted out and our state met in a way to glorify God ; in order that the light of God's nature should detect nothing in us, but that upon which it could shine in peace, the Son of Man must needs die. The more truly a believer dwells in this light, the more richly does the love fill his soul.

Like Israel in the wilderness, transgressing and sinning, and fallen under the power of the fiery serpents, we lay perishing beneath the judgment our sins had brought upon us. The remedy for their ruin was the death their sin had brought upon them, set forth before their eyes in divine judgment—the serpent of brass set upon a pole. Our hope, in our more hopeless death, is Him “made sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. v. 21); “Sin condemned in the flesh” (Rom. viii. 3); Christ crucified.

The word to Israel was, “It shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live”; and the effect of faith is thus described, “that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass,

he lived." (Num. xxi. 8, 9.) To us the word is, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me"; and the effect of faith in the once-crucified Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, is that whosoever believes on Him shall never perish, but receives everlasting life.

Let the sinner look straight away to Jesus on the cross. The light of divine righteousness requiring death from the transgressor by the wounds and woe of the spotless Saviour, reveals how vile we are—what a state is by nature ours. All the suffering and sorrow, all that being forsaken of His God, were necessary—our sins called for every grief and every pain borne by the Lord; our sins called for every drop of woe wherewith His bitter cup was filled. The light shows us what sin is and what we are; in it we read divine righteousness in relation to sin. But the light shows more—shining from heaven, where the risen Christ sits on the throne of the divine majesty—divine righteousness manifests that all our sins are gone; that we, too, in our flesh, are unseen

by God, and that we stand before Him in His Christ. Righteousness required of the Son of Man all that He had undertaken to accomplish; and when He had done all that had to be done, God in righteousness raised Him from the dead. This light explains the love of God to us, which love breaks the hardest heart, and forces the greatest sinner down upon his knees.

The cross of Christ is the divine necessity of divine light and love. Jesus crucified will ever attract to God; so long as the world endures will this marvel stand, that the story of the sufferings and the death of Jesus shall draw men from the glory and the glitter of the world, from its fame and its shame, even to God Himself. By Christ's death we understand that God is light, and by His death we understand that God is love. God's nature is expressed to us by the cross of the Son of Man, and by God's gift to us of Him; and the Lord having taken up the work, we see, in the willing offering and sacrifice of Himself, the all-constraining necessity, the "must" of the Saviour's own heart of love for sinners. "And I, if I be lifted

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up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die." (John xii. 32, 33.) Jesus crucified—the sacrifice for sin, the friend of sinners—is the mighty magnet by which God draws us to His heart of love; Christ crucified is the irresistible force which no power of Satan nor of the world can withstand. And by that cross God is glorified beyond all human thought and utterance, even to the utmost of the infinite extent of His own nature.

## CHAPTER III.

# THE MEANS WHEREBY THE NEW BIRTH IS PRODUCED.



THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE—THE MEANS USED BY  
GOD TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO MAN—BORN ANEW OF  
THE WORD.

**T**HE promise of eternal life was made before the world was or ever man had his being. God made it. To whom? Was it to angels? The angels are servants, the ministers of the Almighty who do His pleasure; and it is not to servants that such secrets are entrusted or such promises made. There are certain scriptures which lift the veil from that, which for lack of language we term a past eternity, and which display to us the things of God before this world began. In those ages "from

everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was," the Son was before the Father, "daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him," and out of the depths of that unutterable joy—the joy of the Son with the Father from everlasting—the Son was "rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth," and His "delights were with the sons of men." (*See* Prov. viii.) Such were not only the thoughts, but the joy of the Son; men—poor, frail, sinful worms of the earth—were to be associated with Himself, to have His life, and to live in His joy in His Father's presence.

And now, in this age of grace, that which God promised is manifested. All eternity is one continuous present with God; but in His ways with men, ages and periods have rolled on, the dispensation of law and its testing of men have come to a close, and the time has arrived for the word of God respecting eternal life to be made good. This, His word, is unfolded through the preaching, as we read in Titus i. 1—3, and by the proclamation of life to sinners dead in their sins, God, by His

Spirit, quickens those whom it is His purpose to associate in life with His own Son.

Vast as is the favor of being brought into the enjoyment of the knowledge of pardon, and deep as is the grace of God in forgiving sinners and in giving peace to His people, still, when we contemplate His purpose in bringing men into association with Himself, communicating to them eternal life—the life which is in His Son—so overwhelming is the consideration, that we are lost in wonder. The life which we receive when born into this world, is that of Adam—it is of the earth, earthy; and its character and its enjoyments are like its source, but the new life is the “life of God.” (Eph. iv. 18.)

This life was expressed in this world, in the person of the Son of God, who is “the Life,” and having this life, we are associated with the Son in such a way that it is ours to enjoy fellowship with Him, and with His God and His Father; and to rejoice in His joys in which He rejoices before the Father. Angels cannot know God as we, whom He has made

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**His children ; we are partakers of His nature, being born of God.**

Let us ponder over such words as the following, familiar indeed to our ears, but which, even if filling our hearts, our minds cannot adequately grasp : “ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word ; that they all may be one ; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us.” (John xvii. 20, 21.) The favored people of whom the Lord thus speaks are brought into the closest moral association possible with the Father and the Son, and also with one another, for the children form one family, and are bound up in the same bundle of life. We must not use such words of our Lord merely to assure our souls of our security. Let us seek to enter into His thoughts, and to understand what the life is which He has given to us ; what are the depths of intimacy with the Father and the Son and what fellowship is ours. It is the truth of the scriptures working within the heart which teaches us who the Son is, and believing on

Him, we know that we have the eternal life. The true reception of the truth marks off the people of God from the world. Wherever it is received, Jesus, of whom it speaks, is received by its means, and he that hath the Son hath life.

And being thus quickened by the truth, through the Spirit, the believer has an intelligence given him. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true: and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ." The believer has the truth, he consciously knows the true God, and is in the true One, the Son of God. The world, on the other hand, lies in the wicked one, and knows not God; and by ignorance of God is estranged from the life of God. "This is the true God, and eternal life," adds the apostle (1 John v. 20), connecting together the life and Him, even Jesus, who is the true God; and bringing us, once utterly estranged from the life by our ignorance of God, into this marvellous intimacy and moral association with the Son and with the Father.

The truth, and the true God, cannot be disconnected. God is what He reveals Himself to be, and when the Son is revealed in us we truly receive the revelation of God. Christ, the eternal Word, is the perfect expression of the mind of God, and the written word is the revelation of Christ. The word is the means used by God to communicate His thoughts to man, and by it, He, through His Spirit, communicates to us eternal life.

*The word, we say, is the instrument* by which God works in moral things with man. Entering into our hearts, it changes our thoughts, produces repentance, and leads to faith in God, and by it life becomes ours, "He that heareth my word," says our Lord, "and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." "The hour . . . now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God : and they that hear shall live." (John v. 25.)

God does not deal with our hearts and consciences by the means of His laws which govern the wind and the storm ; the book of nature teaches us His divinity, but not His nature ; and

those who believe are "partakers of the divine nature." (2 Pet. i. 4.) The written word unfolds God to us, by it He speaks to our inmost souls, makes us feel in ourselves our state of moral death before Him, and brings us to know Himself.

*The word of God is incorruptible seed*—such is its character. The seed which produces earthly glory is corruptible. What will be the value of present human opinion a hundred years hence? The march of progress will have rendered our modern wisdom old-fashioned lumber by that time. This present will be the past to the future race of human beings. "All the glory of man is as the flower of grass; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." (1 Pet. i. 24, 25.) A hundred thousand years will not affect it: "and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Take the truth, the word of God, from man, and he is without the means of having either the light or the life. Then the only candle which shows man his state, and who and what God is, is removed from man. Then nothing

is left in the human heart, save that which pertains to nature's darkness, and which, despite the greatness of human intellect, must decay and pass away.

Remove the truth of God, and man is a rudderless ship without compasses on the ocean of doubt. He knows not whither he is going, nor whence he came. He is the sport of variable winds, one of which blows him into the fierce heats of demon worship to stifle him with horrid fears, another drives him into the shallows, and wrecks him upon mussel-covered rocks. Could such molluscs reason, they would hardly debase their powers by seeking for their origin, and the spring of their life, in creatures ten thousand times lower than themselves! How Satan plays with man's intellect where man dares toy with the word of God.

The word of God produces a moral effect in our souls when it truly enters them, and it does so by its own force, because it is the word of God. It commands, and more, it causes repentance; it passes the sentence of death upon man in his natural state; it makes the sinner bow

to the sentence. In a court of justice, the judge, who passes sentence upon the criminal, cannot make the offender rightly feel how he deserves that which the law inflicts upon him; but where the word of God, by the force and energy of the Holy Spirit, enters the soul, it causes the sinner to bow absolutely to God, and to own that what God says is just and true. Thus repentance is produced; the sinner turns to God. The very word, which works within the soul the sentence of death in self, and faith in God, is a life-giving word, for the eternal life becomes theirs who believe on Him who gives the word.

Where infidelity presumes to sit in judgment upon the word of God, it is simply the criminal judging the judge. This temerity will meet its awful doom in the day which is at hand; the folly of it is apparent now to every one who has within him the sense of who God is.

*The word of God is that by which we are born anew.* "Being born again—not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible—by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Pet. i. 23.) This living and abiding word

has not only a moral effect upon us, making us to write the sentence of our spiritual death upon ourselves ; it has also, in the hands of God, a life-giving power. Using it as a means, God brings us by it into His family ; “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth.” (James i. 18.) In His sovereignty, and of His free grace, God chose to give us the new life by His word. The apostle Paul says, that through the word which he preached, his spiritual children were begotten. “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Cor. iv. 15.) God used the word spoken by His servant to give life to sinners dead in their sins, and, we may add that thus a peculiar tie of spiritual affection bound the apostle to those to whom he was so used—a tie which will be recognised in eternity.

*We are cast entirely upon the Scriptures for all spiritual knowledge.* They teach us the truth, and in them, in the testimony concerning the Son of God, we find eternal life. “Search the Scriptures” are our Lord’s own words ; “for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they

are they which testify of Me" (John v. 39); for the truth of God directs us to the Son, who is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life."

We earnestly appeal to any reader of this page, who may be sceptical as to the absolute truth of the word of God. Satan, whose very personality some would deny, whose active energy so many disbelieve, is undermining men's faith in the truth of God's word. "Hath God said?" he mutters constantly in these closing days of the world's history, even as before sin had entered the world, and death by sin, he insinuated the same doubt to Eve. "Yea, hath God said?" is his prevailing suggestive enquiry in bible-reading countries, and in almost all religious circles. Before long he will say, "God hath not said"; he will turn his question into a statement, and then man will say, "There is no revelation from God, no word of God." After that Satan will say, "There is no God," and then man will worship himself, the world, and the enemy. God has not left His children in ignorance of the way in which Satan leads. Where the Scriptures are

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no longer recognised as authority, such as is the case in the circle of infidel christianity, these insinuations are unnecessary; in heathendom, where no authority over man's conscience exists, but merely the dread following demon worship or man adoration, Satan's suggestion has long since produced his desired result. Listening to questions as to the truth of God's word—rejecting the authority of the word over the conscience—rejecting God altogether, are the three downward steps, which so many call progress.

Beware, immortal soul, lest you sport away the shortening limits of your lifetime, seeking with your human powers to fathom the unfathomable depths of Divine light and love! Must it be that you wait till eternity to awake to the realities of the truth of God's word? To do so will be to awake to endless despair.

## CHAPTER IV.

# THE AGENT BY WHOM THE NEW BIRTH IS EFFECTED.



THE SPIRIT OF GOD EFFECTS THE NEW BIRTH—HIS VARIED WAYS—HE WORKS BY THE TRUTH, QUICKENS AND GAINS MAN, CONSCIENCE, HEART AND MIND, FOR GOD.

**H**AVING glanced at the truth of man's condition of spiritual death by nature, and at the character of the word of God as affecting man in his natural condition, we now come to the consideration of the One who gives effect within the heart to the truth of God.

The Holy Spirit is the gracious agent who accomplishes the new birth of men dead in sin. In His sovereignty He is pleased to work in us, and to give the words of truth, which our outward ears hear. energy within us,

and so to render the word of God the word of life to us individually.

The bare letter of God's truth, apart from the Spirit's work in us, does not give us life. The word of God does not take root in our old fallen nature ; on the contrary, that word only condemns our old and fallen nature, and teaches us the truth about ourselves. Apart from the Spirit of God, the letter kills. What more could it do? for the word tells us that we are in our sins and require life, and shows to us that life is the gift of God. "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." (2 Cor. iii. 6.) The words which Jesus spoke, He said were spirit and life (John vi. 63), but the souls of the hearers were rendered receptive by the Holy Ghost. To deal with the word of God as if a man could take it up and make it his own in his natural strength, is practically to assume for man a power which the truth of God denies that man possesses. Whether religious or profane, learned or ignorant, the flesh is flesh in itself, just as an oak is an oak, though there are varieties of the tree. It is written, "It is

the Spirit who quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." (John vi. 63.)

*The absolute necessity for the quickening power of the Holy Ghost* in sinners dead in sins is indicated by the fact that where the word "quicken" is used in Scripture it generally relates to giving life at the resurrection to the body in its state of physical death. God will exercise a power, by which the dust of the dead will be raised to life, and He now exercises a power by which man in his death of sin becomes alive to Himself.

The Lord says of man in his state of spiritual death, "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25); and now the power put forth by God in giving life to sinners dead in their sins, is after the same sort as that which He exercised in raising from the dead the body of His Son, who had died for sinners. "The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead."

(Eph. i. 18—20.) Life is given to the spiritually dead, who are raised from their spiritual state of death, according to the mighty power of God, even as the Lord's body was raised up from among the physically dead.

*The ways of the Spirit of God*, when working in souls, are exceedingly varied. We never find in the work of God in nature, or in grace, anything of a stereotyped character; but we do find general characteristics marking every group of His workings. There are not two clouds alike, yet the classes of clouds invariably preserve their character, whether they be that of the sweeping rain-cloud, or the mountain-like mass, or the far-off tracery. No two ears of wheat are exactly the same, but every ear of wheat bears the common stamp of a general character. Divine diversity in no way denies divine unity. The Holy Spirit bows or breaks men as He pleases; He is sovereign, and works as He will. He moves some souls, as the rustling corn is moved by the gentle summer breeze; He breaks others, as the forests are broken by the whirlwind. How tenderly are some hearts af-

fectured by His work, while others, by the effect of His operations, are driven almost into despair! But all in whom He works, implanting the divine life, have the general features of the family of God; and what we have to do is simply to believe and to yield ourselves to the fashioning influence of the truth. Why the Spirit of God should bring some souls so swiftly into peace with God, and seal them unto the day of redemption, and why He should permit others to groan for weary years in the spirit of bondage and fear, teaching them deep lessons as to self, we know not; but we do know that there is divine wisdom in all His gracious ways, and that the word of truth is the means whereby the happy deliverance of every soul is produced.

There are this day, amongst those whom He has quickened, some in throes of sorrow, who have been thus for months, yes, and in some instances, for years together; there are others, who have broken forth into peace and joy, with a suddenness to be compared to the spring of the arctic regions, where snows melt

and winter flees away almost immediately, and where myriads of blossoms within a few days burst forth into life out of the long dreary months of death. No two souls have the identical tale to tell of God's work in them, but all have the same life; Christ is the life of all, and all have a "common salvation." The remarkable manner in which strong characters are often gently overcome, and weak ones forced into obedience of the truth, in which a high intellect is subdued by the most absolute simplicity, and a rough brute nature broken down by the most tender grace, all witness to divine wisdom, and the working "as He will" of the Spirit of God.

The sovereignty of the Spirit of God in His acting is evident in every soul, who is born from above. Not only in the case of individuals, but also in that of localities, do we see Him working as He will. It may please Him to pour out on a town or congregation during a few days such showers of blessing, perhaps by the means of a servant of God, as had not been known there during previous years of

waiting and of hope ; “ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (John iii. 8.)

The difficulties of truly awakened souls are often such, that they simply are shut up to God, and how well this is ! Those who would seek to help them, find their distress and burden so intense that the presence of the trouble makes the servant of God silent in the sense of his utter inability to relieve the sin stricken soul. In others, again, dryness and barrenness of soul exist, and of so hopeless a kind, that it seems like the ground parched with long heat and east wind ; the seed has been sown but shows no sign of life. It appeals, as it were, by its very desolation, for the rain from heaven as its only hope. The sole power which a believer has in truly bringing souls to God is that which flows out of him by the Holy Ghost ; and most deeply important it is at all times, and particularly in days of human zeal and materialistic thought, to stir up the hearts of christian

workers to faith in a present Holy Ghost, whose power in souls is identical with that which He displayed at Pentecost. Unless there be faith in the operations of the Holy Ghost we do not look for His actings, but go on as if our own strength or the truth alone could give men life. Let the christian worker learn practical lessons from the ploughman and the sower, who both do their duty, fulfilling their work to the best of the ability God has given them, and who, having done all, wait in faith for the quickening powers of the sun and rain of heaven. Neither sowers nor ploughmen make the seed they sow or the soil they plough fruitful; this is the effect of the rain or the sun of heaven.

Is a soul seeking Christ saying, "But what am I to do?" We reply, "Believe, do not reason." Man has no more right to reason than has the soil into which the seed is cast. The character of the soil may be a great hindrance to the prosperity of the growth of the seed, but both seed and soil are necessary for the life of the flower; our hearts are fruitful as we believe.

Receptiveness, not reasoning, is what is required.

Does the christian worker say, " And what shall I do ? " Sow on, sow beside all waters, sow in the morning and in the evening, plant the truth in the hearts of the young and of the old, sow and pray, work and believe God, and He will give the increase. The word laid carefully and prayerfully in the heart in early childhood may give signs of its presence in youth, or perhaps not till old age; but follow the steps of the Master, who cast abroad the seed of the word of God. It is not for us to complain that the soil is adverse and the birds of the air are many; results are in God's hands, but the responsibility of spreading abroad the word of God has been committed to us.

*The Spirit of God works in human hearts through the word.* Such is His way; He does not act independently of the truths of the written volume. He takes that which He Himself has inspired, and which is the revelation of God in Christ, and He inscribes its truth upon the fleshy tables of the heart. He

engraves it in us, as words are cut into the rock, to remain there for all time, so that the word becomes part of our very moral being. The truth thus made ours by the work of the Holy Ghost. is no longer like a history of some ancient nation, the record of whose deeds stirs the mind and feelings ; but it has become in us the living utterance of the living God. Then the truth to us is the voice of God to ourselves, heard by our inner man.

When the truth is thus received, it is no mere opinion about the truth which we have formed ; far from it, it is the word of God working within us, which works energetically in those who believe. (Thess. ii. 13.) To the believer, God is verily his God, Christ verily his Saviour ; for he is born anew and has a new nature. And the desires of the new nature rise up to the source of the nature, even to God and to His Son.

We need to maintain most carefully that it is the word of God itself which the Holy Ghost gives us to hear and to believe, for in our day the fact of the exactness of the letter of the

truth is made light of. God has given man a revelation of Himself in His word, and by that revelation He gives us light. The Holy Spirit does not inscribe upon our hearts things untaught in the Scriptures. A text of Scripture, a line of a hymn, or a word dropped by the wayside, may be what He takes up wherewith to quicken the soul, but whatever He uses is invariably truth of the revelation of God. The gracious way of the Spirit of God is to speak what He hears (see John xvi. 13); this is the attitude which the Son took when on earth, and is now assumed by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. He does not speak from Himself, He does not speak apart from the Father and the Son, He speaks according to what is revealed in the word of God, which word reveals the Son to us by whom we know the Father.

*How man is gained for God* shall now briefly occupy us. We have had before us the consideration of the word of God and the Spirit of God in His gracious activity; what shall we say of man? We begin with *man's conscience*, which

is the moral point where the work of the Holy Ghost is most deeply felt. The conscience is man's perception of good and evil, and where the truth is known, it is this perception enlightened by the candle of the word of the living God. Every man has a conscience, but every man has not an enlightened conscience. Knowledge of good and evil exists in each human being, but it is only where the truth of God shines that a sense, in any way exact according to the standard of truth, exists.

A man's conscience may speak to him of good and evil, and more, it does witness to him of a Being with whom he has to do ; but it cannot speak to him of God in His nature, save so far as God has been made known to him. Conscience, while a light within, is derived from the fall; it is not a revelation of God to man, by the truth. And it is only when the light of the truth enters the conscience that the experimental knowledge of good and evil is forced upon the convictions.

The Spirit of God lays bare and exposes man to himself. We do not say that this action

of the Holy Spirit is His quickening power. Conviction is not conversion. A criminal may be convicted of his crime, but in no sense be turned from his guilt ; a sinner may be made to feel by the word used by the Holy Ghost what he is, and yet not be turned to God. The hearers of Stephen were "cut to the heart," yet they added sin to sin, and stoned to death the witness to their souls. But the making us feel in ourselves what we are, is a frequent accompaniment of life. When the soil begins to be upheaved over the spot where the seed is laid, we say the seed shows signs of life. Where God is dealing with the heart, we find the conscience laid bare, and, as a consequence, repentance—turning from sin and turning to God.

Even the infidelity peculiar to christendom has not robbed its votaries of conscience, though it has seared it as with a hot iron. When scepticism has done its deadly work, the sensitiveness of the conscience in relation to the truth of God is gone. And as infidelity continues to leaven christian doctrine

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we may expect more of this evidence of its presence. The pioneer of this christianized infidelity is religion apart from the truth of God, which produces in souls religiousness without reality, and coats over consciences with a moral thickness that resists the edge of the truth. Where religion has its own theories, and does not bow to the truth, it levels a road over the consciences of men for the advance of infidelity. It is this kind of work in which Satan is now largely engaged in our own land, and he has many a sapper and miner road-making by means of religious teaching, which denies the truth, and all the truth, and nothing but the truth of the Scriptures. In a short time the infidel army will come marching along this road.

There is another kind of conscience hardness, which is too common in our land, favored as it is with gospel truth. Those who have often heard the truth, and have as often trifled with it, become insensible to its thunderings, as workmen working where hammers ring continually upon iron become physically deaf.

Still every man has a conscience, and when the Spirit of God works in him, his conscience is laid bare ; he feels in himself what good and evil is, and by the light of the truth of God reads the evil of his ways, repents, and does works meet for repentance.

We place *the heart* after the conscience. Man's heart was captured first by Satan—a deceived heart turned him aside, then the act of disobedience followed ; that which was forbidden was taken, and the eyes of the conscience were opened. Man knew within himself, by the light of the commandment he had broken, what good and evil were. In the state of innocency man's conscience was like a sleeping babe ; he fell, and his conscience awoke like a giant, never to close the eye again. The sense of good and evil is acquired, never for all ages to be lost ; but, with the sense of good and evil, man, in his fallen state, has no power to attain to righteousness, no power in himself to rise out of the state of evil in which he is.

In entire distinction from man in innocency, or man knowing good and evil and being under

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the power of sin, the believer is of the new creation, and is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph.iv.24.) His conscience is now God's servant, and in the glory to come will have not a word to say, for righteousness and holiness of truth then will be his native air. There is no return to innocency—to the state in which Satan found man and deceived him; but God makes all things new. The state of innocency in Paradise was not absolute perfection; the state of being as gods, and knowing good and evil, and yet having no power to live to God, was development, indeed, but development into death. The new creation is the knowledge of good and evil, together with the life of God and His indwelling Spirit, and, as a consequence, dwelling in the light and love of the nature of God. This new creation is perfect, and when the people of God are before Him in bodies of glory their state will be perfection.

In a state of sin, man's heart is estranged from God, and when God, working within us, brings us back to the sense of our departure

from Himself, and of our sinfulness, He opens our hearts to receive His word and to turn to Himself. When the heart of man is reached, the citadel of his moral being is gained, and this is usually won by gaining first the out-works of his conscience. When the heart is gained, the sinner is saved: "If thou shalt believe in thine heart" . . . "with the heart man believeth." (Rom. x. 9, 10.) Where the word of God is believed as the truth of God, and not as the word of men, God Himself is believed, and Christ received.

*The mind follows the heart.* It is given to God as the heart is filled with Christ, and God the Holy Ghost gives eyes to the understanding. The believer looks upon the truth not, as once was the case, as with the eye of one who belongs not to the kingdom upon which he looks, but with the eye of one whose spirit is in unison with the truth. A nature is communicated to the believer which is of the truth, so that he is as a child who has not only the life of his father, but his father's nature.

Until there be life, there cannot be living

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activity of the mind for God. The natural man receiveth not the things of God, for they are foolishness unto him. (Cor. ii. 14.) The natural man may examine the things of God through the telescope of his reason, as the astronomer the stars which he never will reach, and which are worlds with which the men of this planet have no communion. The truth is outside the natural man; the true believer is of it. On the other hand, the simplest believer on the Son of God has life in Him, and also wisdom given to know the things of God. "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, . . . . the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." (1 John ii. 27.)

In a professing day like the present, it behoves all to be most earnest with themselves, not to rest in nominal christianity, which is not life, but at the best only a name to live. Satisfaction ensuing from acquaintance with religious doctrines, with creeds, with the letter of the Scriptures, is resting short of Christ.

Many thronged Jesus on that day, when but one in faith touched His clothes. Need of Him drew that poor sufferer to the Saviour, and so it is also in our times; need draws us to Jesus. Thousands are evangelical, alas, few believe the gospel; tens of thousands are nominally christians, but small is the number of those who have been to Christ for themselves! May God give each reader to come to His Son for life, for the Lord has said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out"; and more, "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life." (John vi. 37—40.)

## CHAPTER V.

# THE ETERNAL LIFE.



THE ETERNAL LIFE DIVINE—ITS DISPLAY EXPRESSES WHAT IT IS—NOT COMPREHENDED BY MEN—LIFE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS—A FEW OF ITS RAYS.

WE have endeavoured to lay before our readers the main truths of man's state by nature; of the necessity for the new birth; and of the means God uses to effect the new birth in man, namely, His word and His Spirit. We now approach the consideration of the life itself, which he that is born anew possesses. We will first occupy ourselves with the nature of this life; in future chapters we will consider the communication of this life to men—the possession of this life—then the bondage and the liberty—walk on earth—and the glory to come, of those who possess it.

The subject is exhaustless ; it reaches right into eternity and our everlasting blessedness. We merely touch upon it in a suggestive manner. At the very commencement of this theme, let us express the earnest hope that these pages may be the means of leading our readers to search into the scriptures, and to dig out for themselves its truths upon this subject. We can hope to do no more than does the finger-post by the wayside, which merely points the traveller to the city where he would rest.

*The everlasting life is divine.* This is our starting point. We begin with God, the source and the giver of life. The nature of God Himself is the explanation of the nature and the character of the life ; and we cannot understand what the eternal life is unless we know God. The life is that of "the everlasting God" (Rom. xvi. 26), His, who was and is, and is to come ; we read also, "The Father hath life in Himself" (John v. 26), hence our meditations upon the eternal life lead our thoughts to God and the Father.

It is not only God in His sovereignty that we think of when we are occupied with the life, but God in His gracious relationship with men, for it is not said God, but, "the Father hath life in Himself"; and again, when the Lord is spoken of as manifesting the life, the scriptures thus speak, "That eternal life which was with the Father." (1 John i. 2.) The name "Father," carries the idea of relationship with it, nor such a relationship as exists between the Creator and the creature, but that which marks the intimacy and communion of a family.

We cannot have too emphatically before us the divine character and nature of the eternal life, which is ours, who believe on the Son; and at the very outset, let us state distinctly that all who truly believe on Him have the life; as we read, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii. 36.) This life is divine, it is not the old Adam life renewed, not fallen human nature renovated; it is that life, which ever was with the

Father, which was before angels were, before sin was, or man was created. Neither is this life an intermingling of good with the life we received from Adam, the first man ; he was of the earth ; the new life is obtained from the Lord who came from heaven.

As we have the truths connected with divine life before us, we see clearly that no intellectual culture, no moral training, no religious exercise, can produce in man a life which was from everlasting, which was manifest upon this earth in the person of the Son of God, and which is communicated to man by the act of God. The possessor of the life is born of God, and God dwells in him, and he in God. (1 John iv. 15, 16.)

There is a measureless gap separating man in his natural state from God. The Gentiles, says the scripture, are estranged from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. God is unknown to man in the flesh, and human knowledge, however great, only rears its altar "to the Unknown God." (Acts xvii. 23.) Ignorance of God is stamped upon all man's religious

thought, which has not Christ for its spring. Human minds expand, and learning flourishes in the moral wastes of this earth where God is unknown, and where demons are worshipped. Intellectual development has nothing to say to this holy life; each pursues its separate course, neither approaches the other. Indeed, we may say that so far as human progress in its intellectual character is in view, Satan, the god of this world, is its main-spring. The ideal of it is, "Ye shall be as gods," and the personification of modern intellectualism is man independent of God. The motive of one life is the will of God, the motive of the other is the will of man; the energy of the one is the Spirit of God, that of the other is self-pleasing, and sometimes Satan. To comprehend what the eternal life is we must go to Christ and learn the truth as it is in Jesus, whose ways and words on earth manifested this life to man. If the truth as it is in Jesus, be unseen by the soul, the eternal life is unknown, for the Son declares who God the Father is.

"In Him was life" (John i. 4), is recorded of

the Son of God. Each man's life has a beginning, and human life in itself has a commencement. When a man begins to exist human life is then his, but when the Lord is presented to us, we find One in whom life eternal ever was, and in whom it had no commencement. Life was from everlasting in Him ; yet having the eternity of the life before us, we have more—the Son of the Father Himself, the everlasting Word, and by His person we gain an understanding of the life in its character.

*The display, the manifestation of the life, teaches us what it is.* Unless the life had been manifested, man must ever have remained in ignorance of it. In natural things, without testimony, we cannot know what kind of life men live who dwell in other parts of the world. For example : the heathen in the centre of Africa have no notion of the nature of a christian home in England, and to gain any conception of such a home they must first hear of it ; while to rejoice in it, the heathen would have to leave and to abhor his life of heathenism. The eternal life, being in itself divine, distinct from and

above man, can only be known by man as it is revealed to him.

The second Man, the life-giving Spirit, came from above; "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John i. 14); the incarnate Son of God tabernacled among men; and the record of what He was here reveals to the heart of man springs of heavenly love and holiness, which are as distinct from the springs of mere human action as is earth from heaven. Eternal life has been displayed in the Son of God the Father; "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." (1 John i. 2.) The Son ever was with the Father, but in time He appeared amongst men, and thus taking upon Him the form of a servant, "was seen of angels," and in Him the life was manifested. The everlasting repose of the Father's presence was ever the dwelling-place of Him, the Life; but in divine love the Son revealed the Father to men on this earth in the body God prepared for Him.

The Holy Babe was born into this world, and then to human eyes, and ears, and hands, "the eternal life which was with the Father" became visible, audible, tangible. Then to man, the creature of God, the Life was present in the presence of the Son : thus the apostle writes, "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life." (1 John i. 1.)

A great sovereign might traverse a part of his dominions in pomp and state, and be seen for a moment by his subjects when on his journey, and in this distant manner be manifested before them ; but if he left his regal glory and came and abode amongst them, mixed with them, entered into their trials and joys, and expressed by words and deeds his character in the midst of them, the manifestation would possess quite another meaning to their hearts. Now, the disciple who teaches most of the life was he whose head had lain upon the bosom of Jesus, in holy but loving familiarity ; his eyes had seen the Lord, and his hands had handled

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of the Word of Life. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, dwelling in the love, teaches us of that Eternal Life which was with the Father.

Even as pertaining to His divinity, the Lord had no beginning (John i. 1), so as to His humanity, it is reckoned "from the beginning." (1 John i. 1.) The beginning of the display of that which is really life dates from the manifestation of the Son. Those who believe on Him delight to turn to Him, the second Man, the last Adam, as their first as well as their last. True, as men on earth, they may trace back their history up to Adam, and sigh over human departure from God and lost earthly happiness, but in Him who came from heaven, the Eternal Life, they have a life which is perfect, and with which are bound up holiness and happiness for all ages. How mean are the sceptic's thoughts concerning the origin of man and human development, in the presence of the Eternal Life in its divine origin and its future glory! How vain present speculations as to man's future, as we consider

the divinely unfolded end which lies before the children of God!

That which was true in Christ even the shining out of the eternal life in Him when on earth, is now true of all His people, "true in Him and in you." The characteristics of the life are the same in His people as they were in Him; no doubt too feebly expressed, and this because self, alas, is allowed so much sway; but "the darkness is past (or passing), and the true light now shineth." (1 John ii. 8.) What was true of the Lord in His ways on earth is true of His people, for Christ is our life, and He is in us. If by reason of allowed sin, or of self indulgence, the expression of the life of Christ is hindered in us—and how often it is hindered—let us take shame to ourselves, but on no account let us doubt the plain statements in the word of God as to the character of the eternal life which has been communicated to us.

"Light, more light," the sceptic cries, as he gropes about in his darkness; "Life, perfect life," rejoices the believer, as he dwells in God

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and God in him. He has the perfect life, but he longs that the Holy Spirit of God, who abides in him, may so work that this eternal life may be unhindered in its expression in him. This life is perfect immediately we receive it, but it is capable of measureless practical unfoldings: the nature of which we are made partakers is divine, but the treasure is at present in earthen vessels, in bodies which too often serve sin. The very circumstances of this world militate against the blossoming and fruit-bearing of the life by the Spirit; and more, self, the old man, is too frequently asserting itself, so that the wild stock of the old man is rampant, and the life of the new man thereby hindered in its action. The only way by which the truth as it is in Jesus can be expressed by the people of God, is by the believer taking God's side against himself. The daily life of the believer should be lived out on the principle of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, having been put off according to the former conversation; and the new man, which is created according to God in righteousness and holiness

of truth, having been put on, and the spirit of the mind being renewed. The time was when the people of God were darkness, but now they are light in the Lord, therefore they are to walk as children of the light. (See Eph. iv. 17 ; v. 8.)

*The eternal life was not understood by men.*

The world did not recognize Jesus when He was in it. His life was of a character diverse from that which is natural to mankind. The fallen life derived from Adam and the eternal life that was with the Father, have nothing in common. The motions of His heart, the principle of His actions, the object of His words, were all from another source, not of this world. The world knew Him not, and to this day remains in its ignorance of Him.

The Jews, to whom the Lord said, "Ye have no life in you" (John vi. 53), were likewise estranged from God, for though they could trace their descent from Abraham, the descent was merely natural; they were not, in truth, of the Father of the faithful, of faith, which, if vital, is personal, not hereditary. The light shone

amongst them, but they perceived not its character.

And how is it in our day? The profession of christianity does not entail the possession of life. Educational belief in the doctrine of the atonement, however important, is not new and divinely-given life; neither is the ability to discern between evangelical and superstitious teaching life. No human strength of any kind renders life our own; it is the gift of God.

*We cannot disassociate life from its characteristics even in nature.* To live is one thing; the character of the life lived is another. A tree has its life, an animal has its life, but the life of each pertains to a different kingdom in nature. When we speak of the eternal life we cannot rightly mentally disassociate that life from its characteristics, for it is not simply that eternal life is a life without a beginning, and having an endless duration, but it pertains to God, and therefore to His character. The way to perceive what the eternal life is which was with the Father is to receive Him who is the Life and also the Light of men.

Light and life are so intermingled, as we see in John's gospel and epistles, that they cannot be separated morally; the light demonstrates the presence of the life; by the light the life is made evident, at least, where there are eyes to see; for what is impossible physically, is true of the Light of life—"The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." (John i. 5.) Light and love are characteristics of the life eternal, and are united in the person of the Son of God, and are manifested to us by Him.

Take such a word as this, which relates to the essential glory of the Lord, "In Him was life," we read on, "and the life was the light of men;" here we have the eternity of the life in Him, who is everlasting, and also the objects of the love of God, to whom, and for whom, the life had its manifestation — even men! He was not the light of the angelic hosts, but of the weak worm, man. The nature of God is given in these two short texts, "God is Light," "God is Love," and both the light and the love are before us in the life manifested

upon this earth. The life in its manifestation is, if we may so express it, light and love—the very nature of God, and that nature revealed to men.

*A few rays of this light* shall briefly occupy us. Holiness is one of its component parts. The light which our natural eyes enjoy is composed of variously colored rays, all of which are blended into the pure light in which we live and move. As the spiritual ray of divine holiness penetrates into our darkness, it discovers to us, by its own brilliancy, our moral state. The holiness of God makes manifest man's sin. The Lord Jesus, the Light, demonstrates to us what we are.

How the Pharisees all left Him when He shone into their hearts, saying, "He that is without sin among you." (John viii. 7.) They could not stand in their sinfulness, in the presence of His holiness. "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor" (Luke xviii. 22), revealed the heart of the ruler, as again did the Lord's words to those Pharisees who watched Him

in the synagogue to see whether He would heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath day. (Mark iii. 1, 6.) The rays of the light were not comprehended.

The light acts in two ways on men's hearts. On the one hand, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved;" on the other hand, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John iii. 20, 21.)

In the Pharisees rejecting the counsel of God against themselves (Luke vii. 30), we see the light hated. These men would not submit to take the place of guilty sinners, and so remained in their natural darkness. Thus also was it with the council before which Stephen was brought: the men of it were cut to the heart, convicted of their sinfulness; but they did not seek salvation; they gnashed on the preacher with their teeth (Acts vii. 54). The truth was hated and darkness loved; the light only brought out what was within the hearts of the hearers of the truth.

In Saul, the persecutor, we see the light approached, for he owned his ways and was obedient (Acts xxvi. 19); and the same principle is evident in the case of the jailor of Philippi (Acts xvi.), and indeed in all who are really Christ's. The Lord's words are, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness" (John xii. 46); and those who follow Him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John viii. 12.)

*Love* is a component of this light. How love, His own divine love, shone into the weak heart of her who came behind Him in the press, and touched the hem of His garment! She thought she might steal away the good she sought for herself and escape; but He came not only to heal but to satisfy. The Lord brought the poor woman into His presence and taught her His comforts. He shone into her soul as she told Him all the truth. So was it with the blind beggar, of whom we read in the ninth chapter of John's gospel. The Lord opened his eyes; but He did far more,

He revealed Himself to the poor man's heart. The Lord healed him and satisfied him with the shining into his heart of the knowledge that He was the Son of God. We may say, that these were rays of the light of life which entered the souls of men, and filled their hearts with the sense of divine love.

*Holiness and Love* combined penetrated into Peter's soul when Jesus, turning and looking upon him, recalled to the over-confident apostle his assertions and His Master's words, and Peter wept bitterly. A similar ray shone into Martha's cumbered and distracted heart, and made manifest to her, that the more than necessary household carefulness robbed her of her highest privilege, and not only so, but hindered the Lord in His grace of bestowing blessings upon her.

*The life in its character* is explained by the path of the Son of God when upon this earth. In deed and in truth a very man, but also the very God, we see in Him the life unknown in its abundance before His advent. Creatures had seen in the works of creation the witness of God's power and divinity, but when the Son was

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manifested in the form of a man He expressed the Father's heart and the love of God. It may be, because John's gospel and epistles treat so largely on this subject that the children of God are so greatly attracted to them : for, being possessors of the life, there is that in God's children which, by reason of the nature they possess, delights in the nature of God. The life is presented to us in a peculiar way in John's gospel and epistles, and is perhaps more easily entered into in spirit, than the counsels and purposes of God of which the apostle Paul principally treats. All the children of God have the life, but all may not have the knowledge of the counsels of God.

Let the gospels be read with the moral beauties of Christ as the object of search, and then that which is the eternal life, which was with the Father, will be more readily apprehended. This life given to us is in its nature divine, as we have said—it is the life of God, but, in a peculiar way, it is also connected with God as the Father. "God" brings before us the divine nature; "Father," the peculiar character in which

God now reveals Himself to His people. The life connects us with God. We are partakers of the divine nature, and the life delights in its source and in the character of Him of whose nature it is. Having the life, we are connected with God; He is our Father; we are His children; His heart is toward us, and we delight in Him by the Spirit in this marvellous relationship. He who has eternal life has the very life of the Son of God, and is a child of God; to have eternal life is to be in intimate and holy relationship with God.

However, we may be in a relationship and yet not know the relationship in which we are; many of God's children are in this position, therefore let us seek to know what is the life which we have. Philip, though having had the Lord so long with him, said, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Are there not still many Philips? But what is to answer such enquirers? The same Person who had been with him from the beginning, the same words, the same works—Jesus, the Son of God the Father—"Hast thou not known Me?" (John xiv. 7—11.)

## CHAPTER VI.

# ETERNAL LIFE COMMUNICATED.

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LIFE GIVEN—CHRIST THE LIFE-GIVER—THE SON AND THE FATHER GIVING LIFE—CHRIST CAME INTO THIS WORLD THAT WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE ABUNDANTLY.

**W**E have sought to indicate what the eternal life is, and by so doing find ourselves in the presence of the Son of God. As we consider Him in His ways, and study the motives of His heart when He was here amongst men, we feel how immeasurable is the distance, speaking morally, which lies between God and man in his nature state. There is no bridging this gap, neither can the vastest cycles of time develop in man that which shall fit him for God. The life of man fallen, and the life eternal, are absolutely distinct.

As to life itself, the creature can neither give nor acquire it. In the presence of life we are in the presence of that which marks our place in creation, and proclaims the finger of God. If we speak of divine life, we know that we are far off from God, and must ever so remain in ourselves. God is the giver of life to His creatures whatever the character or condition of their life may be. He creates His people anew in Christ Jesus, and gives them eternal life in His Son; the character of this life is made manifest in what Jesus was as a man on earth; the condition of it in its present communication, His life as a man risen from the dead.

*Eternal life is bestowed on man by God*—it comes to us solely by way of gift—there is none other way of obtaining it, “The gift of God is eternal life.” He bestows it as it pleases Him, yet the gift is “in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. vi. 23), it is not given by God to us except as in Christ. “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” (1 John v. 11.) It is not the believer’s in any sense apart from or independently of the Son. If we have Christ

we have the life of Christ: "He that hath the Son hath life." If we have not Christ we are dead in our sins: "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John v. 12.) The life and the Son go together; the gift of life is communicated with the Son.

If any one inquire, "Have I eternal life?" the answer lies in the reply to such questions as, "Have you the Son?" "Do you believe on the Son who came from heaven?" "Has your heart received Him?" To look within ourselves in order to trace whether we possess this life, is to continue in a state of dread; to look to Christ, who is the Life, is for doubts and difficulties to vanish.

*Christ is the life-giver* in a peculiar way. God the Father has committed to Him the right, the authority over all flesh—all mankind. Every human being is under His sway, whether obedient or not; and though He may allow infidelity to run its rampant course, and heathenism to continue its allegiance to demons, yet every man, woman and child is under His authority. (John xvii. 2.)

It was when looking up to heaven and speaking to His Father anticipatively as having finished the work given Him to do, even to death, that the Son spoke of His authority over all flesh. Little did the princes of this world know whom they were crucifying: the Lord of glory, the Lord of all, yet suffering the crown of thorns and the mockery of the gorgeous robes. But through His death life comes to us; He died that we might have the life eternal. He put away our sins, accomplished perfect redemption by His death, and pardoned sinners, redeemed by His own blood to God, have this new life.

In exercise of His authority the Son gives eternal life to as many as God the Father has given Him. To Him man must go for life eternal—to Him, now crowned with glory and honour, the Man in heaven, once suffering and dying, the Man of sorrows on earth. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul, he was made of the dust of the earth; the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, is a life-giving Spirit; He “quickens whom He will.” (John v. 21.)

As He is, so are His. Those of the first man are of the earth, earthy; those who are of Christ are as He is, heavenly.

Apart from the Son of God, man lives on in this world for his few years in moral separation from God, then passes out of this condition of human existence into eternity. Death cuts short the career on earth, but death does not change the nature, which is alienated from the life of God, and, leaving the world Christless, the sinner is Christless for ever, and ever remains without eternal life.

“*I give* unto them eternal life’ (John x. 28), are our Lord’s words. He acts in His divine sovereignty. He died for the flock, and gives life to those for whom He died. “The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world,” and “Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life.” (John vi. 51, 54). None shall say Him nay in the bestowal of this life to every poor sinner who believes on Him. Do we believe on Him really and in our hearts? It is not enough to believe that He died, or to accredit

the fact of His being in glory, we have to believe on Himself ; to make the death of Jesus, as it were, our own, eating and drinking spiritually of Him in His death. Food does not feed us unless we partake of it, neither is Christ, the bread of life, spiritually ours, unless by faith we eat thereof.

*The Lord associates His Father's name with Himself* when He speaks of giving life : " My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven ; for the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John vi. 32, 33.) The life is not bestowed by either the Father or the Son alone, but is jointly given, the Spirit implanting it by means of the word of truth.

Judgment is vested in the sole hands of the Son, for He was despised and rejected of men, and set at naught as the Son of man. He will execute judgment in the day that is to come ; and this renders exceedingly solemn the position of all who have not really believed on Him. For with Christ, every man must have to do, if not as the Life, then as the Judge.

(See John v.) In this present time He is giving life to the spiritually dead; the words which He speaks are spirit and life; but in the future He will judge the lifeless sinners whom He will raise from the dead. When so raised they will be as lifeless as they were when alive in this world, in the sense that they are Christless, though made immortal as to the body then, even as now immortal as to the soul.

The manna fell from heaven in the desert place for Israel only; in the barren wastes, which afforded their tens of thousands no nourishment, the chosen nation ate of angels' meat; but the Bread of God is given to the broad world of sinners, of every clime and of every tongue. Now, in this greater wilderness, in this place of soul-hunger and of moral death, all who come to Jesus receive life. Oh! come, every hungry soul, feed on the Bread of God; eat and live for ever.

*Christ came into this world that we might have life.* He said, "I am come that they might have life." He came from the glory above into this world of estrangement from God and ignorance of the Father, to commu-

nicate life to such as knew not God; and He came not only that they might have it, but "that they might have it more abundantly. (John x. 10.)

Every believer from the earliest days of faith on this earth had life; having life from God, and having faith in Christ, are united by God never to be separated till faith is lost in sight. But life in abundance is the sole portion of believers since Christ came. Life and liberty are now joined together. Not until the Lord's death was openly taught by Himself, was the wonder of the eternal life made manifest to men; and not until we rejoice in the fulness of this redemption can we rejoice in the liberty of the life He has communicated. It may be that all who believe do not enjoy the liberty, but all may do so: faith in the Lord's redeeming work introduces the soul into liberty.

The capacity in the individual believer for the enjoyment of the life, and the moral ability to live for God, may lessen or increase in the individual believer, according to his practical walk—may be smaller or greater, according to

his conscious knowledge of God and occupation with Christ; but the life in itself is divinely perfect. Being brought by grace into the most intimate relationship with God the Father, it is the believer's portion to have the joy of the Son fulfilled in him, and for his joy to be full. The way to let the water into the basin of the lock is to open the lock gates, but too often the believer is using his endeavours to keep them shut, and is all the while wondering and complaining of the smallness of what is his practically.

*What the life is in its abundance we perceive in Jesus on earth; His joy in His Father, His peace from the Father, testify to it. Before He came the people of God were under the law; theirs was the spirit of bondage, legal restraint, and God not fully known: this was not the life in its abundance. Never till our Lord was here was there seen on earth the perfect dependence of a man on God, the perfect obedience of a man to God, and the perfect joy of a man in God. The people of God have the life of Christ, they have also their own fallen natures; but the purpose of God is, that on this earth, and while*

having a fallen nature, the life of Christ should manifest itself in them, and that their joy should be full. The life in its abundant character is the present possession of all believers now, but its practical blessedness is ours in so far as we abide in Christ.

The Lord is now on the resurrection side of death, having gone down into it and annulled its strength, and being risen from among the dead, He now communicates His life to us from Himself in resurrection; hence we receive His life in the condition of resurrection. We know our Life where He now is—in heaven, and the abundance becomes ours in a peculiar way. Life is the believer's now in a different condition from that which characterised the people of God under the law. Now redemption is accomplished, the sins of believers are put away, and, standing in the favor of God, there is nothing to hinder the full action of the life in the child of God.

The eternal life is not any kind of improved condition of our Adam nature, let us most earnestly remember, nor an infusion of the divine

into the natural—no sort of change of nature, but a new thing absolutely. Just as Adam fallen and the Lord from heaven are distinct, so the life derived from Adam, and the life received from Christ, are distinct. It will be our effort in future chapters to show how this great fact works within us spiritually, but first let us emphasize the fact. In divine things we always do well to begin with God. Too often we begin with our measure of faith in divine facts or with our feelings and experiences about ourselves, and so long as we continue with the gauge of experience in our hands we cannot rightly know the truth of God. A distinct reality is before us,—a new life communicated, which is in no sense whatever the life which is ours by birth into this world. Let us keep this clear, and shape our souls by the truth, and not seek to shape the truth to our souls.

Having Christ Himself present both as the life and the life-giver, the vital question for us is simple and clear: "Have we Christ?" He will in no wise cast out those who come to Him, whosoever they may be. God forbid that one

solitary reader of these pages should seek life elsewhere save in Christ. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John vi. 68.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEW BIRTHDAY.

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CHRIST UNRECOGNIZED, AND ALSO REJECTED—CHRIST RECEIVED—CHRIST BELIEVED—WARNINGS FROM GOD—ENCOURAGEMENT FROM GOD.

THE life which is everlasting in God's Son has a beginning in God's children; they all have for themselves their spiritual birthday.

The time having arrived in the counsels of God when His Son should come to this earth, He, being the Maker of this world, was made a man. He took upon Him the form of a servant, yet not the angelic form, but the likeness of men; such was His stoop from the highest glory, in His willing obedience to the Father and in His grace towards sinners.

*But Christ was unrecognized.* Man, the ob-

ject of His grace, understood not who He was that had come into this world. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." (John i. 10.) It was utterly ignorant of its Creator, who trod its paths. What a comment is this upon human wisdom! How it explains the thoroughness of the difference between the life of man fallen and the life which is in the Son of God!

*Christ rejected.* The Lord had a special mission from heaven to earth to Israel, to His own people, whom He had led out of Egypt, and with whom He had travelled over the desert, and whom He, Jehovah-Jesus, had planted in Canaan. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The world did not know Him; Israel would not have Him. He was despised and rejected of men. When He was born a babe in David's city, there was no room for Him in the wayfarers' inn, as afterwards there was no place for Him in Jerusalem, or in its temple. Even amongst His own people the Lord of all had not where to lay His head. What a comment upon human

religiousness ! What an explanation of the fact that, however human nature may be trained, even should the training be that of the law of God, still fallen humanity has no heart for that life which was ever with the Father, and which was manifested in the person of Jesus.

*Christ received.* But some received the rejected Son of God—they received Him in their hearts. And still, to this day, in this world, which has cast out the Lord, there is in some hearts a place where there is room for Jesus. Happy are they in whose hearts He dwells—such are highly privileged. But it must be heart-work. It is one thing to know a person by sight and by name, and to see him passing the window ; it is another to open the door of the house and to welcome him in. With many the Lord is one whose name is well known, but He is a stranger to their affections, they have never once in their whole lifetime opened their hearts' doors to receive Him. Yet, if we would know what the life of God is, we must receive the Lord.

“ *As many as received Him, to them gave*

He power to become the children (*lit.*) of God, even to them that believe on His name." (John i. 12.) The people who received Him, whether of the wide world or of the Jewish nation, became marked off from the rest of mankind—became, by the privilege of the Lord's grace, of God's family. And so it is to this very hour—the child of God is he who in his heart has received the Son of God. How the Lord answers our questions, "Am I a child of God?" "He that hath the Son hath life." The whole revealed will of God is expressed in the eternal Word; having Him, all is ours.

*Christ believed.* "They believed on His name." Here was their beginning as God's children; this was their spiritual birthday. Thenceforth the life eternal was theirs. Once the children of wrath, even as others, believers on His name they became children of God. The children of God have the life of God. Let us reiterate that this is heart-belief. "If thou shalt believe in thine heart on the Lord Jesus Christ," says the scripture. Intellectualism, or education into a respectful adhesion to a creed,

is not heart-belief. To believe on His name is to accept Himself. His name carries with it all that He is ; accepting Him, He and all that He is, is ours. Believing on Him, we are saved from our sins, otherwise we are dead in sins.

*Warnings from God.* The Spirit of God is careful to explain to us what is *not* being born anew. They “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,”—three things, from each of which men consider that they may make the start for God and become His children. But it is not parentage, “not of blood,” such as Israel boasted in saying, “Are not we the children of Abraham?” Neither is it human “will” choosing Christ, as people now-a-days select their religious belief, and elect to be of this or of that denomination. Neither is it “the will of man”; no kind of choice common to nature, nor such a work as one man may accomplish in another by his own force—as, for example, by circumcision or baptism.

No, it is none of these things, but those

who really do believe on the Lord's name are born "of God." None of these three things can communicate a new and divine nature to man, and to be born of God is to have His nature. *Blood-birth* is but humanity. Men are all of one blood; all are related to each other, and are of the one family of Adam. "The blood is the life thereof," and upon this life God has recorded the sentence of death. Let no man dream that because he is sprung from Adam fallen, he is therefore of the family of God. The *will* of this fallen nature cannot possibly produce divine life in man. The will is the worst part of man; it is the mainspring of his disobedient energy: no man becomes a child of God by the will of his flesh. The *will of man* is helpless to effect in others that which it cannot possibly produce in itself. We are shut up to God, and, being shut up to Him, find Him love and the life-giving God.

*Encouragement from God.* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (1 John v. 1.) Whosoever is a word which, like a circle as vast as the circumference of the earth,

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embraces all humanity. Each living human being is within the compass of the gracious encouraging divine "whosoever." And believing, we are of God's family. Less than a child no believer can be. There may be special honors for some members of the family which do not fall to the lot of others, but the youngest and the feeblest, in common with the most matured and the strongest believer, is a child of God. All the king's sons and daughters are royal children, though some have nobler titles than others; but by no possibility can one of them be less than of the royal family. But who shall describe such eternal royalty as this, "To them gave He the power to become the children (*lit.*) of God"?

Let us rejoice in our privilege, and, seeking to grow into the knowledge of God's thoughts more fully, enter into our wondrous relationship with Him. We know, alas, that there are in the family of God children who, because of their feebleness, hesitate to own their relationship. In the home circle such a thing could not be, for the infant is unable to reason upon its weak-

ness. It is an impossibility for a babe to say, "I am not a child, because I am a babe." Trembling believer, lie still and trust. Learn love's lesson from the tender infant nestling in its parent's bosom.

The difficulty lies in this: that in the babe in Christ is combined the weakness and ignorance of the infant with the strength and wilfulness of age—he is a new man in Christ; he has the flesh in him; and the lesson is slowly, ah! how slowly, practically learned that the flesh profiteth nothing: hence the flesh is too frequently listened to, instead of the plain and simple utterance of God's word. Have we indeed believed on His name, who is the life, who is Jesus our Saviour? then we have the eternal life by grace. Away then with speculations and fleshly confidence, or falsely so-called humility, and "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Pet. ii. 2.) The prime need of our souls is simplicity.

## CHAPTER VIII.

# ETERNAL LIFE RECEIVED.



HOW RECEIVED—WHAT IS FAITH?—LIFE THE POSSESSION  
OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF GOD—NEVER LGST—TRACE-  
ABLE TO ITS SOURCE—LIFE AND CHRIST HIMSELF THE  
PORTION OF ALL BELIEVERS.

**E**TERNAL life and immortality are distinct from each other. Every human being has an immortal soul, and is destined to exist for ever ; those, and those only, who are the children of God have eternal life. It is a grievous error to confound immortality with eternal life, and the error ends in denying the real character of both the one and the other. We receive our immortality together with our natural life ; we receive the eternal life when we are born again. The one is derived through

Adam, and is part of our humanity; the other comes to us from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*How is the eternal life received?* We have already shown that we are dead to God and divine life by nature, and, therefore, that no works of ours can obtain us eternal life; for the works of the spiritually dead are useless in this question. The eternal life becomes ours by gift, and God gives the life freely: "Eternal life is the gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. vi. 23.) What, then, has man to say to this? He cannot do anything to reach this life. It is not and cannot be his of merit, nor of works. Let the scripture supply the answer: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." (John iii. 36.) We have not to seek to work for life—self is not the source of life; we have not to wait to see if the Spirit of God has wrought in us—the work of the Spirit of God is not the object of faith: Christ is both the source of life and the object of faith, and, believing on Him, we live. Too many of God's people are digging into themselves all day long to see if the root of the matter be in them, and many are unbelievingly folding their

hands and saying, "If we are to have life the Holy Spirit will show us whether such is to be the case." But the scriptures present Christ, the life, for us as the object for faith, not our faith in the Holy Spirit's work in us, as the evidence of life; far less do the scriptures teach us to go about to establish a righteousness of our own, as if we could earn eternal life by "dead works."

The faith that receives Christ is not merely belief in a fact, it is belief on a person—many accredit the fact that Christ died, but comparatively few who believe this fact have faith in Himself and in His Father who sent Him. "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life." (John vi. 47.) "He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life." (v. 24.) "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.) In these and kindred scriptures, faith in God and His Son is clearly presented to us. Let the reader note how seldom, comparatively speaking, faith in the work of Christ is set before the soul, and

how that in by far the greater number of passages where faith is put before the sinner, it is faith in the Son of God, or faith in God, that is presented.

As we lay hold of the divine truth that faith rests in a person, many difficulties are cleared away, the affections are set in action, and the working of the mind is relegated to its right place. The mind may assent to accomplished facts without the heart being touched by them, but when the person who did the work is believed, the work is accepted not only for its own sake, but because of him who did it.

However important doctrine may be, still true faith rests in the subject of all divine doctrine, God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; and we cannot truly receive doctrine until we have received Christ. If we rightly read the scriptures we shall, by them, become better and better acquainted with the Lord. True religion is true dealing with God; it is not the mind mastering what God says. A son might understand what his father told him, and yet lack obedience: and who then would value his knowledge

of his father's will? Knowledge of the truth apart from faith in God and His Son only adds to the sinner's condemnation; to know all about what God is, and what He has done for man, and still not to believe God Himself, is double death.

*What is faith?* Faith is the eye of the soul. The eye, simply by looking, appropriates that which is outside itself, taking in the fashion of the object before its vision. Through its liquid window the appearance of that upon which the gaze is fixed enters the marvellous chamber called the retina, and straightway the form of that which is without is written in living shape and color within the eye's chamber. Then that which is seen is conveyed to the understanding, and by appropriation becomes our own. This window of the eye simply allows the character of the objects outside entrance into the chamber of which it is the light. The word of God is that wherein the Son of God is presented to us. There we see Him. The eye does not create, it receives. Such is faith. It toils not, labors not, it receives. "Look unto Me,"

says the Lord, and whosoever looks, lives; he has received Christ whom his faith has seen.

Faith occupies itself with that which is outside the believer, and by so doing Christ is formed in the believer's heart. As we look on Him, He becomes our own. There is thus set up an answer within the heart to Him whom faith sees outside. What we gaze upon is, as it were, formed in our hearts, Christ is appropriated. Too many, who would really "see Jesus," see Him not, because their thoughts are turned inwards to find that which can only be discovered by their faith, looking outwards. They close the eye of faith, and then use the mind to seek to discover that which can never be seen so long as the eye is blinded.

In natural things, very many of the concerns of life run on the wheels of faith. Every child has faith in man—it believes what it is told; because men are so unworthy of trust the faith of little children so early fades away. A little child having learnt by bitter disappointment to distrust his parents' word is a melancholy ex-

ample of the fruits of sin. On the other hand, accepting the parent as worthy of confidence, or the friend of trust, the doubting child or mistrustful friend are unhappy instances of the badness of the unbelieving heart. It is "impossible for God to lie," (Heb. vi. 18.) He is ever faithful, never changes, in Him is no variableness, neither the shadow of turning, and if there exist one single doubt in our hearts as to His word, the reason of the doubt lies in the evil of our nature. If we believe God, we accept what He says, and "without faith it is impossible to please Him." (Heb. xi. 6.)

Perhaps nothing more strikingly instances what believing really is than the recollection of the time when we heard the word of life with our outward ears merely. We then heard the letter, the sound of the words, even as men asleep hear the sound of music, and, because of it, dream, and awaking, remember that they have dreamed, but know not what made them dream. Thus for years together do many hear the sound of the words of truth; but such hearing is not that which results in life. There is

nothing more melancholy amongst professing christians than this spiritual dreamland. The realities of heaven and of hell, of God's love in sending His Son to die for sinners, and of the agony and death and sin-bearing of Jesus, are all believed, after a sort, by these sleepers. Sunday by Sunday these things are reiterated in their ears; it is part of a religious education to believe them, but the belief has no more effect upon these sleeping hearers than has the tale of the invasion of their country a thousand years ago to stir them to meet the foe.

The ploughshare of conviction has never cut up the hard soil of these adamantine hearts; the point of the sword of the Spirit has never pierced these leathern consciences, it is only educational assent to a national creed or the religion of parents. The belief may induce respectability, perhaps morality; but the dead are dead still, and dead asleep. The words "everlasting life" and "everlasting death" have not bitten right into their souls, and God, the holy God, is neither feared nor loved. "Awake, awake," poor dreamers, eternity and its realities will

soon burst upon you. God Himself loves you. He has sent His Son to die that you may be saved for glory and for Himself. "Hear, and your soul shall live."

*Eternal life is the possession of all God's children.* Even as the new-born babe lives as truly as the grown son, so is the life God gives His people as much the possession of the feeblest babe in Christ as of the young man or father. It is quite true that some are more vigorous than others, for in some the evidence of life is very feeble, but there is no disconnecting believers on the Son from the life they have in Him. God speaks; we hear His word; we believe God; our faith is like the out-stretched hand of a hungry child when bread is offered it, and our giving God never denies to any that for which He Himself, by His Spirit, has created a longing. As Christ is believed, the life is received. "He that hath the Son hath life." (1 John v. 12.)

*Eternal life is never lost by its possessors.* In things natural we receive life once, and surrender it up once on earth, to live on endlessly in

eternity. There is no such possibility as to be alive one day, dead the next, and alive again the day after! But this is precisely what those think of the eternal life who say we are saved to-day, and may be lost to-morrow, and then be saved again! He who is born of God has the life which is eternal, for it is the life of the Son of God. The word to Adam respecting natural life was, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 17), and Adam, by disobedience to the plain direction of God, forfeited his life. But the eternal life has not been given upon the principle of human responsibility, it is secured to believers in Christ, who died and rose again out of death, and can never be forfeited. What language can more forcibly express the security of the life of those who are Christ's than these words: "Your life is hid with Christ in God"? (Col. iii. 3.) Neither flesh, nor sin, nor Satan, can reach up to "Christ in God." No failure of the believer can, in any sense, touch the security of this life.

In the tenth chapter of the gospel by John, the Lord sets forth most perfect assurances of the believer's security. In the 28th verse He says, "I give unto them eternal life"—He Himself, emphatically, gives—the eternal Son of God gives—this is one assurance. His un-failing word is another. "And they shall never perish"—they shall not ever—thus the Lord's "not" stands between His sheep and "ever perish," therefore, if one were to perish the word of the Lord would have failed—an utter impossibility, an impossibility so impossible that we may lay us down upon our beds and sleep into eternity, satisfied in its security, depending upon His own character and glory. Yet further, the Lord says, "neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." His own power will keep His own against all enemies; no man, no devil, shall ever catch one of the least out of His keeping. As for the sheep slipping out of His hand, such thoughts are bred and born out of the corruption of self-confidence; they have their origin in the vain presumption that a man can keep himself, and in the denial of

scripture, which tells us we are kept by the power of God.

But the Lord says more to us still. Already in three ways His words have assured us in relation to Himself : first, His "I" —His own personal giving of life to us ; second, His un-failing word—His "*never* perish"; third, His unquestionable power—"neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." But He says more still : "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." The Lord sets the Father's power before us as well as His own, so that there may not be the faintest shadow of question in any heart; the Father holds the sheep as firmly as the Son. Still more assurance follows, lest one heart should have one doubt remaining. Jesus says, "I and My Father are one"; the united will and power of God the Father and of God the Son assure the sheep of Christ of their unquestionable security; thus the glory of the Son and the glory of the Father singly, and the glory of the Father and Son unitedly is the safety of all who believe.

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*Eternal life is traceable to its source.* The moral characteristics of the life of Christ, and the life derived from Adam as seen in man upon this earth, are widely different—each is traceable to its own head. “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” (1 Cor. xv. 47, 48.) It is not merely that the life of those who are earthy is in certain qualities different from that of those who are heavenly, but we see in the vegetable and the animal worlds life pertaining to different kingdoms, and the physical helps us to see the difference in the spiritual kingdom—each has its own nature, each its own origin. Now, until the fact of the absolute distinctness of the eternal life be realised in the soul, the believer is frequently in spiritual distress, by reason of the painful sense within him of contrary workings and affinities; for he has in himself the life he received when born into the world, and he has also the eternal life. The practical effect of this in causing con-

flict, we shall touch upon later; we merely note the fact now.

*Eternal life and Christ Himself are the portion of every believer.* Life is inseparable from the Son, who is the Life. Those who have Christ have life, and if we have life we assuredly have Christ. The condition of the life, in its communication to the believer, depends upon the position Christ occupies. We comprehend not only what the life is, but also its character, as we apprehend Christ. He is now in heaven, having risen from among the dead; He has gone out of the world to the Father; and the divine life now communicated to the believer flows from Him, the head in glory of the heavenly family, who will soon be glorified with Him.

The risen Lord lives to die no more; He is our life in His position of glory on high, therefore there is in the children of God in this day a reaching-out to Christ who is in heaven, and a dwelling with Him in spirit beyond death. When death comes, it finds in the child of God one who has already passed from death unto life,

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and whose life-source is in glory. Very beautifully was this expressed by a dear youth, now with the Lord, in his dying moments. His mother was watching him with that tearful solicitude which none but a mother's heart can know; she was leave-taking, when her beloved boy, fixing his eyes upon hers and looking into them, said, with increasing emphasis, "Mother, I have everlasting life, everlasting life, everlasting life." He had already in spirit passed beyond death, and being on the very borderland of eternity, and death to the body being present to him, this dear youth fully realised life was his where Christ is. There is no severance of the Life from those who live in Him. "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (1 John v. 11.)