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ESSENTIALS FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE

Sermon by the Rev. Wm. Dobson, Pastor of the First Methodist Church.

TEXT—The Second Epistle of Peter, Chapter I and Beginning at the Fifth Verse and Including the Seventh Verse.

Text:—II Epistle of Peter, Chapter 1, beginning at the 5th. verse and including the 7th. Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue, knowledge; and in your knowledge, temperance; and in your temperance, patience; and in your patience, Godliness, and in your Godliness, brotherly love; and in your love of the brethren, love.

The more I know of the Bible, and the more I know of my own soul, the more profoundly am I convinced that Christ and His apostles had a conception of Christianity which has faded, to some extent, from our vision in these latter days. When urged to strive toward the apostolic ideal, we are met with the argument, that this was not intended for present day life, but can only belong to a future state in the world beyond. But it seems to me that the apostolic ideal belongs to the present day, and to present circumstances, for we are called to be holy, because God is holy. This, I think, is clearly brought out in the text before us. To understand the text we must remember that Peter was writing to the Jews of Asia Minor, to strengthen them against the corruptions of society and the persecutions which Christianity was suffering everywhere. He explains to them their privileges in the Gospel and exhorts them in the text which we have quoted. He reminds them of their knowledge of Christ the Saviour, through which they had escaped the corruptions which are in the present world through lust. He explains to them how it is possible for them to condition circumstances and not be conditioned by circumstances. The explanation is very simple. It is this. There have been given unto them precious and exceeding great promises, through which they may become partakers of the Divine nature. This brings us face to face with Peter's conception of Christianity, which is God incarnated in human nature. This is Christianity and without it there is no Christianity. Every man and every woman who is a real Christian is a partaker of the divine nature. When we ask for the limitations of the Christain in his resistance to evil, we are asking for the limitations of Deity, manifesting Himself through the human soul. "There have been given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." These promises have to be appropriated by faith. Through this faith, the promises become the medium or channel through which God pours His nature into the Christian's soul.

The faith of which we are here speaking, when reduced to its lowest terms is a state of the soul. It is the soul laying itself open to God. It is a longing after God. We have the same thought in the sermon on the mount where our Lord says, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." So it seems to me that this state of the soul makes the promises the channel through which the soul comes into contact with God, through which the strength of God becomes our strength, and God's nature comes into our natures.

But grand as this conception is, it is only the initial stage of Christianity, where man becomes a son of God, an heir of eternal glory Because of this, in the New Testament, the double emphasis is always laid upon being, and the doing is always assumed to be the outcome of the being. Doing is the soul emphasizing itself in action. The next thing that Peter teaches us in this text, is, that added to this state of the soul, or in some way compounded with it, we on our part are to add virtue; for grand as the idea of Christianity is through man becoming a partaker of the Divine nature, it is not Christ's ideal of Christianity, it is not Peter's ideal; man was made for something more, he must add to his faith virtue. Perhaps the Apostle did not use the word virtue in the same sense as we use it to-day. It conveyed to his mind the idea of strength of character, manliness, moral courage, that which enables a man to stand forth in his manhood and say "It is wrong, I can't do it." Again, it is that strength of purpose, growing out of Christ within us, which enables us to shun every species of evil and cleave to that which is good. It is that divine power in the soul which enables a man to stand before evil, and say with Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other." This is one of the virtues that grows by cultivation, and without which you and I can never successfully fight life's battles. It is this virtue which enables us to say "No" to every form of evil, when we see it as an evil. "Add to your faith, virtue." Let us cultivate it, so that we may grow strong, and able to say under any circumstances, "I am a Christian, I cannot tamper with the wrong, I cannot unman myself, or be treacherous to my God." It is not enough for a man to be pious, to have his name on the church records, but he must have manhood, courage to face adverse circumstances and compel them to bend to him. He must be able to say "All things are mine, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or life or death; all things are mine, because I am Christ's and Christ is God's." When the Christian assumes this attitude toward the world, the world soon takes knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, and ceases its efforts to lure him into bye and forbidden paths. Oh for the Christian courage that will stand today and say to the world I am a Christian, I cannot, I will not do what I believe to be wrong!

It is a great thing for the Christian to have heroism, courage, manliness, but the apostle does not think this meets the requirements of Christianity, he urged those Christians of Asia Minor to add knowledge in their faith as well as virtue. Power is a good thing, to know how to use it is quite another thing. This is true everywhere. It is as true of the power of God in the human soul, as it is of a man handling a gun loaded with powder. It does not always follow because a man has power that he is always wise in using it. Power may be used for selfish purposes, where it will bring dishonor upon our own profession, and injure the cause of God. It may cause us to be egotistical and harsh to our fellow men. We must have knowledge mixed with it. This knowledge of which Peter speaks, is one of the most important things the Christian can possess. It enables him to distinguish the right from the wrong, not only in the great things but also in the little things of life. To obtain this knowledge we must study deeply into the character of the Christ, and learn how One who was interested in humanity and loved it with an intensity that we can never know and who possessed all power, used it for the redemption of the race. He who knows Christ in all His relations to humanity knows clearly the distinctions between right and wrong. Let us get rid of the idea that right and wrong are questions of arbitrary rule, they lie in the essential nature of things, and he who tampers with the wrong, does it at his peril. Let us then know Christ, whom to know is life eternal, so that we may learn from him how he would have us use the manhood and courage which he has placed at our disposal. Nor is it enough to have knowledge and virtue mixed in our faith, but the Apostle urges the Christian to add to these temperance. It seems almost a pity that this word is used in the Testament, for of late it has been used exclusively in relation to intoxicating drinks. The word Peter uses carries with it more of the idea of self-control. Keep all your passions under subjection, let none of them break forth contrary to what you know to be right. When a man insults you, do not swear; when a man grows angry with you, keep your temper; when you are reviled, revile not again. Keep yourself wholly in hand, then you have that self possession that always becomes a man who professes to be a Christian. Now this is one of the graces that it seems to me we have not sufficiently cultivated. At the present day we are too apt to think it manly to avenge ourselves by meeting injury with injury; and this seems the stranger because we are taught everywhere through the New Testament to be kindly affectioned one to another. "Dearly beloved avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst give him drink." You remember that we are to be imitators of the Christ, who when he was reviled, reviled not again, and who in his last agony upon the Cross, said "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." To imitate Christ is to have command of ourselves, and to condition our lives after his model. If Peter's advice were followed in all our relations to our fellow men, how easily we could adjust ourselves to one another. When someone offends us, instead of going to law we would be gentle and kind with him. When offended by some of the members of the Church, instead of saying that we would associate with the Church no more, we would go to them and tell them their faults between them and us alne, and so settle the matter in the spirit of the Master.

And then we are to add to our temperance, patience, that grace which enables us to be kind with the erring, to bear all things and endure all things so that thereby we may learn the strength of God's grace within us. It is living patiently amid tribulation that we learn our own strength of character, and the power of God to save, so when we come in contact with all that is disagreeable in the world, we are to be patient; when struck on the face we must not strike back, we must imitate the Christ in suffering for Christ's sake. This is the virtue that teaches us the power of God within us, which does not belong to unaided human nature. It is principally the grace by which the world takes knowledge that we have been with Jesus.

To all these Peter urges the Christian to add Godliness, which is only another form of God-like-ness. Now I am not making these things, but they are here in the text, and they are as true for you and me in Charlottetown, as they were for the Saints in Palestine. And as if to put a tremendous emphasis upon Peter's teaching, he who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews said "Be ye holy for I am holy." So it seems to me that all these graces blending into one character, develope into manhood and true Godliness, so that there can be no difficulty in distinguishing the Christian from one who is not a Christian.

And then we are to add to this Godliness, brotherly love, so that this love will dominate all our thoughts and all our words, when thinking or speaking about our fellow-Christian, and permeate all our actions in such a way that it will be our supremest delight "to do unto others as we would that others should do unto us." So it seems to me, this Christianity of Peter's was nothing more or less than a knowledge of the Eternal, coming with its moulding and sanctifying power into the human soul, and fashioning it into the image of the Lord's Christ.

Suppose it were to turn out to be true that this is essential Christianity, that through these exceeding great and precious promises we become partakers of the Divine nature, and that nature working within us while we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, add to our faith virtue and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, brotherly love, if this be true I say, what a revelation it would be to some of us when we discover that Christianity is not so much a question of doing as it is of being, not so much a creed as a state of the soul. Still I am quite clear that this is the Christianity taught by Christ and His Apostles, and toward which they urge you and me with all our redeemed powers to strive. It is the Christianity to which peace and joy are offered as a reward here in this world, and companionship with God through eternity.

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