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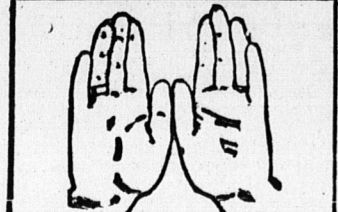
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"YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

Grow in Grace and be Changed From Glory to Glory by the Spirit of God

Text:—First Epistle of St. John, Chapter Five, Verse Eleven. "And the Witness is this, that God Gave Unto Us Eternal Life and this Life is in His Son."

(Sermon by Rev. Wm. Dobson.)

Text:—First Epistle of St. John, Chapter five, verse eleven. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

I want to talk to you to-night about what I think is one of the most important truths in God's word. There are subjects on which one can afford to be rhetorical, and there are others on which one must speak carefully, lest one say more than is warranted by the facts. They tell a story about a young Scotch minister, who was graduated from the Theological School in Edinburgh, and inducted into a church with a country congregation, who, three months after his induction, announced that he was going to give a course of lectures on the book of Revelation, because he thought it his duty to make this hitherto little understood book, plain to his people. At the close of the service, a motherly saint from the congregation, came up to him, and after shaking hands, said "And you are going to give us a course of lectures on the Revelation are you?" "Yes," he said, "I think it is my duty to explain this book to you all." "Well," she said, "I have no objection to listening to you discuss the Epistles to the seven churches, but when you get into the seals and among the beasts, tread canny my boy, or you'll make a fool of yourself." This is good advice even for old men when discussing certain subjects.

The first thing then I want to say to-night before discussing the text is that there are three, more or less well-defined theories of the hereafter, one of them known as the orthodox theory, especially to those who believe it, is that all men are immortal in virtue of their original constitution, and that from birth until death, life is a probation, that is, a time allotted for preparation for Eternity; and if a man succeeds during this time in making his calling and election sure, he will spend his Eternity in Heaven with God and angels. If he fails, between his birth and death to make his calling and election sure, he will spend his Eternity in Hell. This is the orthodox theory, and evidently the theory believed by Dr. Parkhurst, of the United States, for he is reported to have said that "if God do not damn a bad man, He ought to."

One feels on reading a statement like this, that it is almost a pity that the Doctor had not been in the Beginning with God for he might have given the Lord some useful suggestions as to what He ought to do. Another theory of the hereafter is, that no man in virtue of his nature is immortal, but becomes immortal only by being united through faith to Christ, in whom alone dwells immortality; and when this union takes place, the man becomes as immortal as Christ Himself. The man who is not thus united to Christ, when the pulses cease to beat, dies forevermore. This theory, however, runs out into several details. Some hold that while he may die of Christ, he will be raised at the Judgment, and then annihilated. This doctrine is generally called "Conditional Immortality." Another theory is that all men are immortal, and life is not a probation, that the provisions of the atonement extend into the other world and continue effective until the last man of Adam's race is saved in Christ. This theory, like the other, has its different details, but the fundamental principle is Universalism. While all these theories have been held and preached by different individuals for the last two thousand years, the last theory received a tremendous impetus in 1850, when Tennyson published his "In Memoriam" where you remember he says in the beginning of the fifty-fourth division:—"Oh yet we trust that somehow good Will be the final goal of ill, To pang of nature, sins of will, Defects of doubt, and taints of blood; That nothing walks with aimless feet That not one life shall be destroyed Or cast as rubbish to the void When God has made the pile complete;"

I do not know that this added anything to the strength of Universalism, but it caused a hush, so that Canon Farrer and others could be heard, while preaching what is now called "The doctrine of Eternal Hope."

These are the three thinkable theories in the hereafter, and have been held by men of equal ability, equal piety, and equal scholarship. Why I have spoken of them to-night, is because the teaching of the text leads necessarily toward the doctrine of the hereafter. Whichever theory we may accept, one thing is very clear to me, that Jesus of Nazareth and His Disciples after Him taught that there is a life, differing in kind and degree from the life which you and I have received by the law of heredity, from the human race; and this life is called throughout the New Testament, Eternal Life, and is the gift of Christ alone. "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." "He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that believeth on Me shall never die." Paul caught the same idea, and wrote it to the Romans saying, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." So in our text, "God gave unto us eternal life, and that life is in His Son;" and John further declares that "he that hath the Son

hath life, but he that hath not the Son, hath not life." This is the teaching of John at the close of his life, after a wonderful experience of divine things. In fact it is the teaching of the New Testament, and runs through it as the Gulf stream from one end of it to the other. This eternal life, as I have said, seems to differ in kind and degree from the life which we receive by the law of heredity from the race.

Now the life which we receive from the race, and which you and I are living to-day, if not obstructed in any way, brings us into perfect harmony with a material environment. It gives us eyes and ears, taste and smell, all the five senses with which to take knowledge of matter. It gives us an intellect with the powers of analysis, synthesis and judgment, with which to take knowledge of material things. The whole material universe, so far as our knowledge goes, lies open to the powers and possibilities of this present life. But if there be spirit at all, this life furnishes us with no powers with which to take knowledge of it. This life enables us to gather from the material environment all that is necessary to build up a perfect manhood and bring us into complete correspondence with that environment. On the other hand, the eternal life which is the gift of Christ to the soul, lays open a perfect spiritual environment, and enables us to condition our whole lives by the Unseen. It brings us into perfect harmony with the Spiritual, so that we may be consciously surrounded by God, enswathed by the Spirit of the Eternal.

"Speak to him thou, for he hearest, And spirit with spirit may meet, Nearer is he than breathing."

It is this wonderful surrounding by God that makes "these light afflictions here work out for us a far more excellent and eternal weight of glory."

It is this gift of eternal life that enables us to take out of our spiritual surroundings all that is necessary to build up a spiritual manhood, a manhood fashioned after the image of the Christ. This is why we grow in grace, are changed from glory into glory as by the Spirit of God.

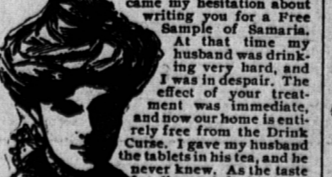
The next thing I want you to see is, that the life which we receive from Adam and which adjusts us to a material surrounding, can never be developed into eternal life. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." "Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again." This is the full philosophy of Christ's teaching to Nicodemus, and is the hallmark of Christianity. "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." So this life, which touches a man and brings him into these sublime relations to the spiritual world, is the life that is in Christ, the life eternal. The man who has not in the kingdom of God, and is not in the kingdom of the hereafter. This is why I have said before you the three different theories. But to return to what we were saying. It does not appear from the teachings of Christ and His Apostles that the natural life which we are now living, contains within the original parcel the germ of the eternal life. And by any theory of evolution that I know, you cannot evolve that which has not first been involved. So it would seem very clear, that by no process of culture can we pass from the natural to the spiritual life for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." Yet I know the seriousness of the question, for we love to cling to the thought that we can grow better and better by culture and refinement, until at last we can enter into the kingdom of God and become inheritors of eternal life. Much as we cherish the theory it is certainly not the teaching of the Christ. "Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you."

Now it appears from this that the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, is not a question between wealth and poverty, between scholarship and ignorance, between refinement and morality, but between life and death. It is the difference that exists between the crystal and the vegetable. Polish the diamond never so well, let it sparkle never so brilliantly, it is still a crystal and does not belong to the Kingdom of

Continued on page 3.

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