

"By faith of the Son of God."

Gal. 2: 20.

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There is a character of truth in the Epistle to the Galatians, very seasonable at this present time, and very strengthening to the soul at all times.

It teaches us to know that the religion of faith is the religion of immediate personal confidence in Christ. A truth which is, again I say, seasonable in a day like the present; when the provisions and claims of certain earthly church forms, and a system of ordinances, suggested by the religious, carnal mind, are abundant and fascinating. To learn, at all times, that our souls are to have their immediate business with Christ is comforting and assuring. To be told this afresh, at such a time as the present, is needful.

The apostle is very fervent in this epistle — naturally and properly so — as we all should be, as we all ought to be, when some justly prized possession is invaded; when some precious portion of truth, the dearest of all possessions, is tampered with.

In this epistle, in the first instance, as at the beginning, the apostle lets us know, with great force and plainness, that he had received his apostleship immediately from God; not only his commission or his office, but his instructions also; that which he had to minister and testify, as well as his appointment and ministry itself. He was an apostle immediately from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; and what he knew and taught he had by direct, immediate revelation.

And, in connection with this, he tells us, that as God had thus dealt immediately with him, so had he, in answering confidence, dealt immediately with God. For, having received the revelation, having had the Son revealed in him, he at once withdrew from conversing with flesh and blood. He did not go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before him, but down to Arabia, carrying, as it were, his treasure with him; not seeking to improve it, but as one that was satisfied with it just as it was, that is, with the Christ who had now been given to him.

And, here, let me say, this brings to mind the Gospel by John, for that gives us, before this time of Paul, sample after sample of the soul finding its satisfaction in Christ. Every quickened one there illustrates it. Andrew, and Peter, and Philip, and Nathanael, in the first chapter, afterwards the Samaritan and her companions at Sychar, and then the convicted adulteress and the excommunicated beggar — all of them tell us, in language which cannot be misunderstood, that they had found satisfaction in Christ, that having been alone with Him in their sins, they were now independent — having had a personal immediate dealing with Him as the Saviour, they looked not elsewhere. Arabia will do for them as well as Jerusalem, just as in the experience of the Paul of the Galatians. They never appear to converse with flesh and blood. Ordinances are in no measure their confidence. Their souls are proving that faith is that principle which puts sinners into immediate contact with Christ, and makes them independent of all that man can do for them.

How unspeakably blessed to see such a state of soul illustrated in any fellow-sinner, in men "of like passions with ourselves," like corruptions, like state of guilt and condemnation. Such things are surely written for our learning, that by comfort of such scriptures we may have assurance and liberty.

And what is thus, in living samples, illustrated, for our comfort, in John's Gospel, is taught and

pressed upon us in this fervent Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. Having shown the churches in Galatia the character of his apostleship, how he got both his commission and his instructions immediately from God, and was not debtor to flesh and blood, to Jerusalem the city of solemnities, or to those who were apostles before him, for anything; and having discovered, as it were, his very spirit to them, telling them that the life he was now living was by the faith of the Son of God, he begins to challenge them; for they were not in this state of soul.

He calls them "foolish," and tells them they had been "bewitched." For how could he do less than detect the working of Satan in the fact, that they had been withdrawn from the place where the Spirit and the truth, the cross of Christ and faith, had once put them. But then he reasons with them, argues the matter, and calls forth his witnesses. He makes themselves their judges, appealing to their first estate. "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" He cites Abraham in proof that a sinner had immediate personal business with Christ, and through faith found justification. And he rehearses the character of the gospel which had been preached to Abraham, how it told of Christ and of the sinner and blessing being put together and alone. "In thee (Abraham's seed, which is Christ) shall all nations be blessed." Precious gospel! Christ and the sinner and blessing bound up together in one bundle. And he goes on to confirm and establish this, by teaching them how Christ bore the curse, and, therefore, surely was entitled to dispense the blessing.

Surely these are witnesses which may well be received, as proving; the divine character of the religion of faith, which is the sinner's immediate confidence in Christ.

But then, he does further and other service in this same cause. He goes on to tell us the glorious things faith works and accomplishes in us and for us. "After faith is come," he tells us in Galatians 3: 25-27, "we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For we are all sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized unto Christ have put on Christ." Here are precious deeds of faith! It dismisses the schoolmaster; it brings the soul to God as to a father, and then it clothes the believer with the value of Christ in the eye and acceptance of God. And "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4: 6). And "we are redeemed from under the law" (Gal. 4: 5). Can any more full and perfect sense of an immediate dealing between Christ and the soul be conceived, than is expressed and declared by such statements? We are brought from under the law — the schoolmaster, and, with him, tutors and governors are gone; we are "sons" at home in the Father's house, and have the rights and the mind of the First-born Himself put on us, and imparted to us! Can any condition of soul more blessedly set forth our independence of the resources of a religion of ordinances, and the poor sinner's personal and immediate connection with Christ Himself?

But Paul finds the churches in Galatia in a backsliding state. They had turned again "to weak and beggarly elements." They were "observing days, and months, and times, and years." It was all but returning to their former idolatry, as he solemnly hints to them, "doing service to them which by nature are no gods," as they had been doing in the days of their heathen ignorance of the true God (Gal. 4: 8). What a connection does he here put the Christianity that is merely formal and observant of imposed ordinances into? Is it not solemn? Was it not enough to alarm him? And does it not do so? "I am afraid of you," says he to the Galatians in this state, "lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."

But, man of God as he was, gracious, patient, and toiling, according to the working of Him who was working in him mightily, he consents to labour afresh — yea, more painfully than ever — to travail in birth again of them. But all this was only to this end, that Christ might be formed in them; nothing less, or more, or other than this. He longed for restoration of soul in them, and that was, that they and Christ might be put immediately together again; that faith might be revived in them — the

simple, hearty, blessed religion of personal and direct confidence in God in Christ Jesus; that, as in himself, the Son might be revealed in them; that, regaining Christ in their souls, they might prove they needed nothing more.

How edifying it is to mark the path of such a spirit under the conduct of the Holy Ghost! How comforting to see the purpose of God, by such a ministry, with the souls of poor sinners! How it lets us learn what Christianity is in the judgment of God Himself! The going over to the observance of days and times, the returning to ordinances, is destructive of this religion; it is the world. "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" as the same apostle says in another place. Confidence in ordinances is not faith in Christ. It is the religion of nature, of flesh and blood; it is of man, and not of God.

And surely it carries in its train the passions of man. Man's religion leaves man as it found him — rather, indeed, cherishes and cultivates man's corruptions. This showed itself in Ishmael in earliest days — nay, in Cain before him — but in Ishmael, as the apostle in this same epistle goes on to show. And he declares that it was then, in his day, the same; and generations of formal corrupt Christianity in the story of Christendom, the prisons of Italy some few years since, and the prisons of Spain still later, declare the same. "As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so is it now." Man's religion, again I say, does not cure him; he is left by it a prey to the subtleties and violence of his nature, the captive still of the old serpent, who has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

The decree, however, has been pronounced. It was delivered in the days of Isaac and Ishmael, of Abraham and Sarah; it is rehearsed and re-sealed by the Spirit Himself in the day of the apostle Paul; and we are to receive it as established for ever. It is this: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son" (Gal. 4: 30).

What consolation to have this mighty question between God and man settled! And, according to this consolation, we listen to this further word: "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5: 1).

All, surely, is of one and the same character. The Holy Ghost, by the apostle, is preparing the principle, the great leading, commanding principle, of divine religion. It is faith; it is the sinner's personal and immediate confidence in Christ; it is the soul finding satisfaction in Him, and in that which He has done for it; and such a religion as this, the believer in possession of this faith is set, as I may express it, next door to glory. The apostle quickly tells us this, after commanding us to stand fast in the liberty of the gospel, for he adds, "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (v. 5). This hope is the glory that is to be revealed — "the glory of God," as a kindred passage has it (Rom. 5: 2). We do not wait for any improvement of our character, for any advance in our souls. Should we still live in the flesh, only fitting will it be to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." But such things are not needed in the way of title. Being Christ's by faith, we are next door to glory. "Whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Rom. 8). Being in the kingdom of God's dear Son, we are "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1: 12). As here, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, we wait only for glory; glory is the immediate object of our hope, as Christ is in us the hope of glory, and is the immediate confidence of our souls.

It is all magnificent in its simplicity, because it is all of God. No wonder that Scripture so abundantly discourses to us about faith, and so zealously warns us against religiousness. The "persuasion," as the apostle speaks, under which the Galatians had fallen, had not come of God who

had called then; and the apostle sounds the alarm, blows the blast of war on the silver trumpet of the sanctuary, uttering these voices in their ears — "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;" again, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (v. 8, 9, 18).

And in the happy structure of this epistle, as I may also speak of it, the apostle ends with himself as he begins with himself. We have seen how he told them, at the first, of the peculiarities of his apostleship, how he had received both his commission and his instructions immediately from God, and how he had then, with a faith that, was an answer to such grace, at once conducted himself in full personal confidence in Christ, and independently of all the resources of flesh and blood. And now, at the close, he tells them that, as for himself, he knew no glorying but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world was crucified to him, and he to the world; and he tells them further, that no one need meddle with or trouble him, neither fret him nor worry him, with their thoughts about circumcision and the law, or the doings of a carnal religiousness, the rudiments of a world to which he was now crucified, for that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He belonged to Him by personal individual tokens, immediately impressed on him as by the appropriating hand of Christ Himself; and no one had any right to touch the Lord's treasure.

Precious secret of the grace of God! Precious simplicity in the faith of a heaven-taught sinner! It is not, beloved, knowledge of Scripture, or ability to talk of it, or even teach it, from Genesis to Revelation — it is not the orderly services of religion — it is not devout feelings — but, oh! it is that guileless action of the soul that attaches our very selves to the Lord Christ in the calm and certainty of a believing mind. J. G. B.