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I.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FAITH.

EVERY intelligent reader of the Scriptures has observed how much they have to say about faith; how prominent a place they give it amongst the other graces of the Spirit. They say we are united to Christ by faith; that we are justified by faith; that we live by faith; that we walk by faith; that we are sanctified by faith; that we are saved by faith. They thus give to faith a prominence and ascribe to it an efficiency such as are asserted of no other grace in the long catalogue of the graces. As grand summaries of their teaching on this subject, they say, "According to your faith be it unto you;" "without faith it is impossible to please him;" "he that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

There are many, however, who do not understand why it is that so much is thus said about this grace, and why there is ascribed to it so much importance in the plan of salvation. They think there is something strange about it; something arbitrary; something that needs explanation; something that very much needs explanation; something that is derogatory to religion in the view of the intelligent; for, as they suppose, the faith so much insisted on is, to some extent at least, a blind faith, an unintelligent faith, an unreasoning, and therefore an unreasonable, faith; and so a faith that inevitably brings about a conflict between itself and reason, and thus forces the intelligent into the dilemma of choosing in religion whether they will be controlled by knowledge or by ignorance; by reason or by mere credulity. There can be no doubt that there are many who

artificial and unnatural. The stage is not permitted to be natural, for audiences demand that it be artificial. The more artificial it is, the better it is liked. But what is not allowed on the stage is demanded of the pulpit. We as preachers should indeed "hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature, suiting the action to the word, the word to the action." It should be forever remembered that the elocution of public speaking is not different from the elocution of private talking. If an incorrect and unintelligible method of pulpit utterance is natural, then assiduous effort should be made to correct nature, even if the patience of Demosthenes, in overcoming a defect of speech, be required.

A true and heart-involved earnestness is indispensable to the most effective pulpit manner and form of utterance. Whatever else the preacher of the gospel may lack, he must not be at fault here, if his pulpit ministrations are to tell. His is a high and noble purpose, and a burning earnestness in the fulfillment of that purpose should animate his speech. The purpose of the gospel to "open the eyes of men, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified," should fill his very soul. Then all pulpit manner and form of utterance will be his helpers in the proclamation of the truth.

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HOMILETIC NOTES.

LOVE LIKE THE SUN.

"Let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."—JUDGES v. 31.

THESE are the closing words of the song of Deborah. What a matchless poem it is, and what a marvellous light it throws upon those dark days of the judges in Israel! The history of those times is scant. For a period of two hundred and fifty years we have little more than these stories recorded in the Book of Judges. The country was in a chaotic condition; the people were disunited, and often oppressed by surrounding nations; there was no central organized government, and, for the most part, apparently, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges xxi. 25.)

From time to time a strong man would arise, organize an army, deliver the land from its oppressions, and, in large measure by per-

sonal prowess, maintain, for a few years, a semblance of government. One of those exploits, instigated by the Prophetess Deborah, and led by Barak, is described in the fourth and fifth chapters. In the fourth we have a prose account of the successful uprising of the people against the Canaanites, and in the fifth chapter the same event is celebrated in an elaborate and splendid poem. I will not pause to direct attention to the beauty and grandeur of this poem. It is a psalm of praise to the God of Israel, and a recognition of his guiding hand in all their previous history, and of his help in this wonderful deliverance from their enemies. The body of the poem is a picturesque description of the campaign, and of the death of Sisera, the Canaanite general, at the hands of Jael, the wife of Heber, and it closes with the prayer, "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

I am impressed with the designation of God's people here as "them that love him." It was early in the history of the church for this conception of the spiritual life to find such clear expression. It is true that the sum of the ten commandments had been revealed as consisting in supreme love to God and man, but apparently this had found little expression in the experience of the people. The struggle of God's people had been to preserve the authority of the law, and to save the church from a threatened deluge of idolatry which surrounded it, and the impression which we receive from the history of the times is that few could have attained to that attitude in spiritual experience which would have entitled them to a place among "them that love him." Nothing, however, is truer than that the experience of the justified is the same in all ages and climes. The faithful in Israel four thousand years ago were just as truly "them that love him" as the saints of God are to-day. The heart of warlike Deborah burned with the same fire of love to God as did that of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, "the beloved Persis," or any saint of modern times. The people of God may always be beautifully and truly described as "them that love him." The prayer of Deborah is, "Let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

I desire to call attention to some glorious truths suggested by this bold and splendid image. In what respects can those who love God be like the sun when he goeth forth in his might?

I. *In the possession of power.*

The sun going forth in his might is the most striking image in the natural world of power. It is not a symbol of infinite power; for

even the sun is a created object, limited in size and strength, and subject to the control of the almighty arm of God; but it is the best symbol which we have among natural objects of power. There is, therefore, much force in this image, that the church of God is like the sun when he goeth forth in his might.

The strength of the individual Christian and the strength of the whole body of believers is one and the same. It is the life of God in one and in all. In themselves they are weak, but in Christ Jesus they are strong. Without him they can do nothing, in him they can do all things.

There is one thing characteristic of the Christian, whether it appears in the individual or in the organized church, and that is power. The actual possession of it is altogether out of proportion to appearances. Israel in bondage in Egypt appeared to be helpless, but because God was in the midst of them they were possessed of tremendous power, and their exodus from Egypt was like the sun when he goeth forth in his might. The apostles of our Lord were few in number, and but "a feeble folk;" they were destitute of all the ordinary elements supposed to be necessary for the successful accomplishment of a great enterprise; but, at the bidding of the Master, they remained in Jerusalem "until endued with power from on high," and who can read their history, and contemplate the results of their labors without feeling the force of the image that their progress was like the sun when he goeth forth in his might? All of God's true people have this power. Power is characteristic of them. It is the power of love—the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto them. Nothing constrains like love, nothing inspires and energizes like love. Love is uncomplaining, love is self-sacrificing, love is bold and persistent, love is courageous, love is indefatigable, love is invincible. Show me a man who truly loves God, and I will show you a man of power—a man the strength of whose character is recognized by his fellows, and who stands for something good and useful in this world.

II. Again those who love God are like the sun in *the exercise of beneficent influence*.

1. Like the sun, *they give light to the world*. The sun's exercise of power is most beneficent as the centre of light. When he goeth forth in his might, darkness flees before him. Those who love God are "the light of the world." That is because they bring the knowledge of God to men. Of course, the true and original source of light is Christ himself. He is the true light that lighteth every man that

cometh into the world—the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ; but his disciples receive that light and transmit it to the world. The light that shines in him shines in them. The knowledge that they have of God they receive from him, and they represent him in the world. The lovers of God have always been the teachers of the world in divine knowledge. They have preserved alive the knowledge of God, and have taught it to men. Paul exhorts Christians to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.” (Phil. ii. 15, 16.) The world is dependent upon the church for the light of knowledge—the most important and valuable of all knowledge—the knowledge of God. This is the purport of our Lord’s teaching, when he said, “Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. v. 14–16.)

2. Lovers of God are like the sun in their *purifying influence* upon the world. When the sun goeth forth in his might, he not only enlightens the earth, but he purifies it. His bright, warm rays dispel the mists, and gloom, and dampness; they dry up the bogs and marshes; they drive away miasma, and remove many causes of disease. Nothing is more health-giving, invigorating, and purifying than sunshine.

If you wish to keep well and strong, let in the sunshine into your home, and live in the sunshine as much as possible. So the lovers of God bring the purifying, sanctifying sunshine of holy living into the world. This would be a dark and wicked world, indeed—a more troubled and dangerous place to live in than it is—if there were no lovers of God in it. They bring to it blessings untold. The Saviour not only said, “Ye are the light of the world,” but he also said, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” They are the preservative, curative influence, the element which prevents the earth from being entirely destroyed by the putrefying power of sin. The earth owes much, yea, more than tongue can tell, to the lovers of God in it.

3. They are also like the sun in bringing *comfort to the world*. This world would be desperately cold but for the warm rays of the sun, and nothing could live here. Suppose that the sun only emitted light, and no heat with it; what a different planet this would be! But it brings to us warmth and comfort. Suppose that in the religion of Christ there were only knowledge, and no love, how could

our souls live by it? But we not only know God, but we know his love for us; and we not only know him, but we also love him; and it is the love of God which brings warmth and comfort to the souls of men.

The lovers of God make known his love to the world. They are always talking about it, and rejoicing in it, and commending it to the sinful and the broken-hearted. As Christians, we should strive to bring comfort to the world. I take it that the only true and abiding comfort is to be found in the consciousness of God's love, and there is a very deep sense in which the lovers of God must exhibit his love to the world. As partakers of his nature, his people must reflect upon others his love for them. As the Lord Jesus lives in you, and goes about in you doing good, you carry comfort to the afflicted and the sorrowing.

4. Again, the lovers of God, like the sun, make the earth *fruitful*. The bright sunshine ripens the fruit until it falls to the ground; and then it beams down upon the seed in the rich soil, and makes it germinate and spring up and bear fruit. All through the whole history of the plant, from the time the little seed leaves the hand of the husbandman until the day the ripening grain yields it into his hand again, the sunshine warms and blesses its life. There would be no fruit in the earth without the sunshine.

So the people of God make the earth fruitful of good works. Unless the lovers of God do good in the world, who will do any? How absolutely is the world dependent upon them! In those parts of the world where the spirit of Christ has not penetrated, how little is done for the amelioration of human suffering, and for the elevation and purification of human character! Hospitals, asylums, and all eleemosynary institutions go hand in hand with the gospel. The lovers of God are like the sun, when he goeth forth in his might to bless the world. They bear healing and comfort, light and blessing on their wings. The most beneficent institution the world has ever known is the church of God. If the church and its work could be eliminated from the history of the world, precious little that is worthy of admiration and preservation would be left.

III. Again, those who love God are like the sun *in assured victory*.

When the sun goes forth in his might, there is only one hand in the universe that can arrest his course, and that is the hand of Almighty God. He rides triumphantly over all opposition. Winds and clouds, rocks, rivers, and plains, the great sandy desert, and even the vast expanse of the sea, and the loftiest mountain ranges that

skirt the shore, all are powerless to prevent his progress. The darkest caves of Erebus blush beneath his penetrating gaze, the highest peaks of the Himalayas glitter like burnished gold in his smile, and he hides his beaming face in the bosom of

"Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste";

and yet none can stay his hand, or say unto him, "What doest thou?" What a conquering hero the sun is when he goeth forth in his might!

So it is with the mighty host of the people of God on earth. The lovers of God can never be suppressed. The church is invincible. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." (Psalm xlv. 5.) The church cannot die while God lives and reigns. "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." (Zech. ii. 5.) The conquering Christ dwells in the midst of her; therefore is she like the sun when he goeth forth in his might.

How helpful and stimulating this is to all true lovers of God! They sometimes feel weak and discouraged. The odds against them are so great; the opposition is so fierce; men are so depraved and vicious; the progress of Christ's cause appears to be so slow. But we are enlisted in God's cause; we are doing God's work. "We are co-workers together" with him, and confidently look for victory, not because of our own efforts, but because it is his work, and he is interested in it. "We are conquerors, and more than conquerors, through him that loved us."

Nothing can separate us from the love of God, and nothing can destroy that love.

"Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;
They see the triumph from afar
With faith's discerning eye."

Friend, do you count yourself as among "them that love God?" I should not like to think of myself, or of any of you, as among those that hate him. Paul described the heathen world as "haters of God." There may be some excuse for the heathen, by reason of their ignorance and lack of opportunity; but how can any human being in the midst of Christian light and privilege be a "hater of God"? The lovers of God only have any claim upon him. They only have a right to wait for his blessing. Shall we count you among those that love him?