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→*SERMONS*←

DOWNFALL OF CHRISTIANITY.

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The sun shall be turned into darkness.—ACTS ii., 20.

SOLAR eclipse is here prophesied to take place about the time of the destruction of ancient Jerusalem. Josephus, the historian, says that the prophecy was literally fulfilled, and that about that time there were strange appearances in the heavens. The sun was not destroyed, but for a little while hidden.

Christianity is the rising sun of our time, and men have tried with the uprolling vapors of scepticism and the smoke of their blasphemy to turn the sun into darkness. Suppose the archangels of malice and horror should be let loose a little while and be allowed to extinguish and destroy the sun in the natural heavens. They would take the oceans from other worlds and pour them on this luminary of the planetary system, and the waters go hissing down amid the ravines and the caverns, and there is explosion after explosion, until there are only a few peaks of fire left in the sun, and these are cooling down and going out until the vast continents of flame are reduced to a small acreage of fire, and that whitens and cools off until there are only a few coals left, and these are whitening and going out until there is not a spark left in all the mountains of ashes and the valleys of ashes and the chasms of ashes. An extinguished sun. A dead sun. A buried sun. Let all worlds wail at the stupendous obsequies.

on Saturday was an effort to rival the theatres. Too often had the Gospel lost its power, and too often did men who (to the Church's confusion) had bowed before the altar turn away upon forbidden themes. They announced the remedy, but, like cowards, they did not denounce the vices that the remedy cured. But the Word of God still possesses its assurance and strength, and here in this beautiful temple where caste, that bane of Christianity, is not recognized, may the true spirit of Christ breathe its hallowed influence, and true love and friendship welcome stranger as well as acquaintance.

The Christian's Surrender to Christ.

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They glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ.—II. Cor. IX., 13.

The apostle expresses his thought in military language. He speaks of the confession of Christ which the Corinthian Christians have made as a surrender, in which they grounded the arms of their opposition and enlisted under his banner. He speaks of their subjection as a subordination to military authority, by reason of which they are now soldiers under Christ and under the subordinate officers whom he has appointed. This is Paul's idea of church membership—the subjection to the Gospel which was implied when the sinner surrendered to Christ as his Saviour. There are many views in which this subjection may be presented.

I. The Gospel is a great body of truth received from heaven by immediate revelation, and for this reason of a higher order, and a more binding authority than any truth which comes to us in a natural way. To this system of revealed truth we are to subject our understandings. We are to receive it as the Word of God. What we can understand we are to investigate for ourselves and explain to others. What we cannot understand or explain we are to receive upon the testimony of God. We are to say: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

II. The Gospel is the revelation of a

method of salvation, a new method—one of which man never could have conceived—an exclusive method, so that a man must discard all others if he accepts this. He must consent to rest in faith upon the atonement of Christ, and so believe to the salvation of his soul. Church membership implies, in this second sense, subjection of the heart to the method of redemption revealed in the Gospel—the renunciation of all self-righteousness to rest alone in the merits of Christ.

III. The Gospel prescribes a rule of practical living. By the cross the world is crucified to the believer, and the believer to the world. The life which he henceforth lives he lives by the faith of the Son of God. The aim of that life is to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, patience, etc. This he is to do, not by his own strength, but by the grace and through the power of the Holy Ghost. So, then, he is to subject his life to the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit—to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and so to live in the world, but not of it, having his conversation in heaven.

IV. The Gospel is God's great agency for the regeneration, the purification, the enlightenment of the world. Its mission is to give light to them that sit in darkness; to comfort the mourner; to discountenance vice and eradicate sin. To accomplish these results there are needed both men and means. Church membership involves the subjection of one's resources to the service of Christ. A man's time, his influence, his money, all are to be consecrated—laid upon the altar to be used as the Lord has need.

This is the kind of church membership we need to-day. In these times, when many of the advocates of advanced science are so dogmatic and many theologians so weak-kneed, when the mere inductions of science are made the reason and the Bible is forever to be warped and twisted to suit these hypotheses of scientific men, we need a church membership whose understandings are subjected to the Gospel as a body of revealed truth. We need a thorough subjection of the heart to Christ and of the life to the Holy Spirit. And certainly

we need a subjection of our trials and our means, our purses and our bank deposits to Him whose we are and whom we profess to serve as our only King and Lord.

The Christian's Security.

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Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.—I. PETER I., 5.

It is related that several German princes were extolling the glory of their realms. One boasted of his vineyards; another of his hunting grounds; another of his mines. At last Abelard, Duke of Wurtemberg, said: "I own that I am a poor prince and can vie with none of these things, nevertheless I, too, possess a noble jewel in my dominion; for, were I to be without attendants, I could ask the first of my subjects that I met to stretch himself upon the ground, and confidently could I place my head upon his bosom and fall to sleep without the slightest fear of danger." He would not exchange this security for all the possessions of his fellow princes, for they knew not when the traitor's knife would rob them of these; but his nights were never disturbed by the shadow of ill-fated dreams. He rested in peace and security. There stands an humble child of God. He may not be able to join in the boasting of this world; but he has a jewel that adorns his spirit and brightens his life. Amid the shifting scenes and blighted hopes of life he exclaims, "I can rest my head and heart upon the bosom of omnipotent God, and neither man nor devil can harm me." "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

I. *From what is the Christian kept?* As the shadows of His earthly life were gathering around Him, listen to the Master's valedictory prayer for His disciples: "I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil." It was not His purpose that they should be kept out of the furnace of persecution, and temptation, and affliction. Peter was sifted by Satan. Paul was buffeted by Satan, and Christ passed into the ministry under the tutelage

of Satan. "We glory in tribulation," Paul writes to the Romans, "knowing that tribulation worketh endurance." "Who are these which are arrayed in white robes and whence came they? These are they which came out of great tribulation." "Therefore count it all joy that ye fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh endurance, and let endurance have her perfect work." It was the Spirit that led Christ into the wilderness. When we enter the wilderness of temptation let us see that we have the Spirit with us and then we shall be kept from sinning.

II. *By what is the Christian kept?* "Kept by the power of God." What depth of consolation here! We have not been led into the Christian life and then left alone. The arms of one who is infinite in power, infinite in wisdom, infinite in love, are about us. Have you felt that you could not hold out? Resting in your own strength, have you been overcome? Were you in despair? This bitter experience should teach you that you cannot be kept by any power that is in your own poor, weak self. "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!"

III. *Through what is the Christian kept?* "Kept by the power of God through faith." Faith is simply the reception of God's power into our emptiness. We do not create the power, we merely receive it. A frail child goes to the gurgling fountain in the market-place, and with trembling hand holds her pitcher under the flowing stream, and soon it is full. The pitcher may not be very beautiful, or very clean; but it is filled. I am the vessel; my faith is the hand which holds it; Christ is the stream of life. The vessel cannot be filled unless the stream flows; and although the stream flows, the vessel will never be filled unless it be placed under the stream. Thus I am kept by the power of God through faith. Faith is the instrument. If you put money into the hand of a poor man it is not his hand that he thanks, but you. If you give bread to a starving man, he does not thank the trencher on which it lies, but the donor. When you obtain the power of God through faith, it is not your faith that you thank, but the one who