

you have been baptized, and towards the spiritual pastor whom you ought to regard as "the minister of Christ, and steward of the mysteries of God." Be on your guard, therefore, against irregular teachers, who may unawares creep in; mark them which cause divisions and schism in the Church, and avoid them; "hold fast the form of sound words," in which you have been instructed from your youth; and endeavour quietly "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

## SERMON XII.

### HOLINESS THE DESIGN OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

EPHES. iv. 24.

That ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

It appears, from the whole tenor of the Scriptures, that the advancement of real practical holiness—the formation of good dispositions and conduct, and the correction of such as are bad—is the great object of religious instruction. This is strongly asserted by St. Paul, in that passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians, of which the text forms the conclusion. "Ye," says he, "have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."<sup>a</sup> Accordingly, if we would give correct notions of the Christian religion; if we would teach "the truth as it is in Jesus;" we must impress upon our hearers the necessity of getting

<sup>a</sup> Ephes. iv. 20—24.



the better of their corruptions and sins, and of acquiring the opposite virtues and graces of character; in one word, the necessity of becoming *holy*.

Holiness consists in such a conformity to the will and nature of God as is attainable by man. Its principal seat is in the heart and affections—we must be renewed, says St. Paul, in the spirit of our mind—where it shows itself in loving God and what he loves, and consequently in hating what he hates. Holiness, as it regards the general conduct, consists in “ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well;”<sup>b</sup> or, according to that comprehensive passage in the Epistle to Titus, in “denying ungodliness and “worldly lusts,” and living “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;”<sup>c</sup> in avoiding all iniquity, and being zealous of good works; not only *doing* good works, but being *zealous* of them, doing them with *zeal*, with readiness, and pleasure. It implies a constant and willing endeavour to do whatever we ought to do, and to leave undone whatever we ought not to do; a disposition to be guided in thought, word, and deed, entirely by the will of God.

The advancement of holiness appears to have been made by our gracious Creator the great object, both of the dispensation of his providence, and also of his supernatural revelations. “Ye shall be “holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,”<sup>d</sup> is the lesson which he has been continually enforcing upon his creatures.

When he was pleased to separate a particular family from the rest of mankind, it was that they might be a peculiar people, a *holy* nation; that among them might be maintained a *holy* worship; and that to them might be committed those oracles of God which contain the criterion and rule of

<sup>b</sup> Isaiah i. 16, 17.

<sup>c</sup> Titus ii. 12.

<sup>d</sup> Lev. xix. 2.

*holiness*. The moral laws which he gave to them were all designed to enforce *holiness*; and their many ceremonial observances were intended to keep them holy and undefiled, and separate from the sinful nations around them. They were intended to remind them constantly of the holy nature of God, of the holiness which he required in his worshippers, and to point forward to the great fulfiller of all holiness, who was to come into the world.

“The law,” however, “made nothing perfect.”<sup>e</sup> Its efficacy in producing practical holiness was comparatively small. But, “what the law could “not do, in that it was weak through the flesh;”<sup>f</sup> too weak effectually to subdue the corruption, the headstrong lusts and passions of the nature of man—“the bringing in of a better hope”<sup>g</sup>—that is, the Christian dispensation, accomplished in a far greater degree. Of that dispensation, *holiness* was the great end and intention; it is the object of all its promises, and of all its threatenings. Throughout the whole of our Saviour’s wonderful ministry for the restoration of man; in his life and in his death, in his resurrection and in his ascension, the advancement of holiness among men was the end which he constantly had in view. It was this that was the object of his excellent moral precepts, of his divine discourses, of his instructive parables; and the miracles which he wrought, were not only so many proofs that his mission was divine, that he indeed came forth from God, but many, if not all of them, had also a particular moral intention, and were designed for the recommendation of some right action or feeling, or for the correction of such as were evil. And in the whole of his life, he was a perfect pattern of every kind and branch of holiness; thus

<sup>e</sup> Heb. vii. 19.

<sup>f</sup> Rom. viii. 3.

<sup>g</sup> Heb. vii. 19.



“leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps,”<sup>h</sup> and walk continually “in all holy conversation and godliness.”<sup>i</sup> His piety and devotion to God, his self-denial, his humility and meekness, his universal benevolence, and readiness to do good both to the bodies and souls of men, were so many features of his holy character, which those who wish to be partakers of his resurrection must endeavour to imitate. And as every part of the life of our Redeemer was thus calculated to advance holiness among men, so most signally was the same great object promoted by his death. The death of Christ for the sins of the world, placed in the most striking point of view both the awful justice and the mercy of God, his hatred of sin, and his readiness to forgive sinners. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;”<sup>k</sup> and he so hated sin, that the blood of his dear Son was shed to wash away its guilt.

The moral or practical effects which this wonderful dispensation of “mercy and truth,” of “righteousness and peace,”<sup>l</sup> ought to produce upon our hearts and conduct, the tendency which it has to promote holiness, are almost self-evident. They are earnestly and affectionately set forth by the Apostles in a variety of passages. Christ “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”<sup>m</sup> Being thus “bought with a price”<sup>n</sup>—being “not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ,”<sup>o</sup> we should

<sup>h</sup> 1 Peter ii. 21.

<sup>l</sup> Psalm lxxxv. 10.

<sup>o</sup> 1 Peter i. 18, 19.

<sup>i</sup> 2 Peter iii. 11.

<sup>m</sup> 2 Cor. v. 15.

<sup>k</sup> John iii. 16.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.

consider that we “are no longer our own,” are no longer at liberty to follow our own corrupt wills, but belong unto him who has thus bought us, and should consequently “glorify God in our body, and in our spirit, which are God’s.”<sup>p</sup> “Knowing this,” says St. Paul in another place, “that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”<sup>q</sup> That is, the death of Christ furnishes the most prevailing motive for forsaking those sins to which, by our unrenewed nature, here called the old man, we are inclined: we should be no more capable of committing sin, than a man actually dead. St. Peter, to whom I have already referred, uses similar language to St. Paul—“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust”—and why?—“that he might bring us to God,”<sup>r</sup> that he might make us *holy*. And again, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree”—and for what end?—“that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”<sup>s</sup>

In like manner does the great doctrine of the resurrection of Christ tend to advance practical holiness. “To you first,” says St. Peter to the Jews, “God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you”—but how?—“in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”<sup>t</sup> St. Paul, in a variety of passages, points out and insists on the practical efficacy—the moral tendency—of the resurrection of Christ. When, in his Epistle to the Philippians, he expresses his wish to know the power of Christ’s resurrection,<sup>u</sup> as well as “the fellowship of his sufferings;” his meaning appears to be, that a lively belief in the resurrection

<sup>p</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.

<sup>q</sup> 1 Peter ii. 24.

<sup>r</sup> Rom. vi. 6.

<sup>s</sup> Acts iii. 26.

<sup>t</sup> 1 Peter iii. 18.

<sup>u</sup> Philip. iii. 10.



of Christ, aided by the influence of the Spirit, might effectually excite him to a higher degree of holiness. So again he says, in the Epistle to the Romans, "therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."<sup>x</sup> As Christ rose from death to life, so should we rise from that state of sin in which we are by nature, but to which we are now supposed to have died, to that holiness of living which Christianity requires, and to which it furnishes such powerful inducement.

The same practical lesson is again enforced by St. Paul, from the "ascension" of our Lord, and his sitting at the right hand of God. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God: set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."<sup>y</sup>

And, that the awful doctrine of Christ's coming again to judgment was intended to promote holiness of living, is so plain, that the most thoughtless must immediately perceive it. For when we are told that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"<sup>z</sup>—when we are assured that our Lord will sit on the throne of his glory, and will judge every man according to his works; and that then those who have done evil will go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal;<sup>a</sup> both our hopes and our fears must be most powerfully acted upon, and must both lead us to endeavour to acquire such a disposition

<sup>x</sup> Rom. vi. 4.  
<sup>a</sup> Matt. xxv.

<sup>y</sup> Col. iii. 1—3.

<sup>z</sup> Eccles. xii. 14.

of heart, and to adopt such a line of conduct, as will enable us, through faith in the atonement, to look forward to that awful judgment without dismay.

The same course of argument might be carried much farther; but I trust that the observations which I have made are sufficient to convince you, that the advancement of real practical holiness is the main design of Christianity, and of all its fundamental doctrines; and is impressed upon our consciences by all the leading circumstances in the life and death of Christ, by his humiliation and his glorification. Accordingly, the Apostle assures us, in that noble passage which contains the sum and substance of Christianity, and which can hardly be too often repeated—"The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity"—might rescue us from the power and dominion of sin—"and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."<sup>b</sup> And you must recollect, that the passage from which my text is taken tells us, that the true Christian doctrine, "the truth as it is in Jesus," is that which admonishes us to "put off the old man," that is, to avoid, to forsake, to get rid of the sins to which by nature we are inclined, and "to put on the new man"—to acquire the virtues, the temper, and disposition of a real Christian. Of such affections, the most important are THE LOVE OF GOD;<sup>c</sup> which is styled by our Lord the first and great command-

<sup>b</sup> Titus ii. 11—14.

<sup>c</sup> Serm. xiii.



ment; and, as second, and like unto it, THE LOVE OF MAN.<sup>d</sup> It is worth your while to turn to the chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians<sup>e</sup> from which the text is taken, and to see what particular virtues St. Paul there thought it expedient especially to inculcate as marks or instances of Christian holiness, of having put off the old man, and put on the new. They are—a sacred regard to truth<sup>f</sup> in our intercourse with each other; strict honesty,<sup>g</sup> and industry, and a readiness to administer to the wants of others; chastity and purity in heart and in language; the due restraint of anger,<sup>h</sup> and the acquiring of the graces of humility,<sup>i</sup> meekness, gentleness, and a willingness to forgive injuries.<sup>k</sup> In the following chapter, he again enforces some of the same virtues, and then goes on particularly to recommend attention to all the relative duties of life, together with fervency in prayer, and the use of the other means of grace. In short, we find from the language of St. Paul himself, that “putting off the old man,” and “putting on the new,” means nothing more nor less than the ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well; the getting rid of bad dispositions of heart, and the acquiring of such as are good; it means, in short, the becoming holy.

And, that this is not only our duty, but in every point of view our interest; that the becoming holy is the most effectual way of becoming happy, a little serious reflection will, I trust, convince you. Holiness is essential to happiness both in this world and the next. Holiness, as was said, consists in conformity to the will of God. Now, since that will is the result of infinite wisdom, goodness, and truth, and supported by infinite power, it seems to

<sup>d</sup> Serm. xviii.

<sup>g</sup> Serm. xx.

<sup>k</sup> Serm. xxii.

<sup>e</sup> Ephes. iv. latter part.

<sup>h</sup> Serm. xxi.

<sup>f</sup> Serm. xix.

<sup>i</sup> Serm. xvii.

stand to reason, that conformity to that will must be the surest source of happiness, and that any opposition to it must be attended with uneasiness and pain. And your own observation and experience—observation of what occurs in the world around you, experience of what passes in your own breast—will tell you, that most of the unhappiness and misery among men is occasioned by their unruly wills, their headstrong appetites, their ungoverned passions. Where the will is submitted to the will of God, and the appetites and passions are guided by his laws, peace and tranquillity of mind are the happy result. And if holiness is essential to happiness here, it is still more essential to happiness hereafter. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.<sup>1</sup> An unholy soul will not be admitted into heaven, and, indeed, could not be happy if it was admitted there; for it would have no enjoyment, no taste for that nearness and likeness to God which constitute the happiness of that blessed place; no feeling in common with the holy fellowship, the spirits of just men made perfect, which are there assembled. From all that we can learn of the nature of the blessedness of heaven, it is plain, that in order to be fit for it, in order to be able to enjoy it, a particular character must be acquired during our continuance on earth, and that character is the character of holiness.

Let the attainment of holiness, then, my friends, the putting on of the new man, be the great object of our endeavour and of our prayers. Remember, that “this is the will of God, even your sanctification;”<sup>m</sup> and that, according to the passage just now quoted, without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Unless we are in some measure holy, and have the seeds and principles of holiness planted

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 14.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 3.



within us, we shall not, we *cannot* go to heaven. That we should at once attain it, we cannot indeed hope. The habit of holiness, like other habits, is acquired, generally speaking, by degrees, and step by step. And that we should ever literally perfect "holiness in the fear of God,"<sup>a</sup> we can hardly expect while we remain in this world. In many things we offend all, and shall too probably go on to offend, so long as the "corruptible body" continues to "press down the soul." But still we must strive to acquire higher degrees of holiness; must strive to "abound continually more and more;"<sup>b</sup> to "press" on "toward the mark,"<sup>c</sup> to go on toward perfection; humbly lamenting our manifold failings, and imploring pardon for them through the merits of our Redeemer.

It is hardly necessary to state, that our holiness must be founded and built upon faith in Christ. This has been implied, and more than implied, through the whole of this discourse. If our hearts are purified, they are purified "through faith:"<sup>d</sup> if our souls are sanctified, they are sanctified through the faith that is in Christ Jesus. No religion but the religion of Christ furnishes motives sufficiently powerful for the production of real sanctification. One of the principal outward means of producing holiness is the study of the Scriptures. Our Lord, in his prayer for his chosen followers, says, "sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."<sup>e</sup> The word of God points out to us all the parts and branches of holiness, and the means by which we may acquire it; it is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths.<sup>f</sup> Let us, therefore, make the Scriptures our frequent study; let us read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. The great au-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 1.  
<sup>b</sup> Acts xv. 9.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 1.  
<sup>d</sup> John xvii. 17.

<sup>e</sup> Phil. iii. 14.  
<sup>f</sup> Psa. cxix. 105.

thor and giver of holiness is the blessed Spirit. His peculiar office it is to renew our corrupted nature, to purify our hearts and affections, and, in one word, to *sanctify* us, or make us holy. Let us seek his sanctifying influence by the diligent use of the means of grace; especially let us beg them of him with unwearied earnestness; "praying all ways," says the Apostle in this same Epistle, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."<sup>g</sup>

Thus through the use of prayer and of the other means of grace, may we be enabled to acquire that holiness of heart and of conduct which is necessary to prepare us for heaven:—thus may we be assisted and sanctified; thus may we be more and more renewed in the spirit of our minds, and, in the full sense of the word, put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

#### THE PRAYER. (Collect for Christmas.)

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him; Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

<sup>g</sup> Ephes. vi. 18.