

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

Chapter 10

Christian Character

The character of the Christian is shown by his daily life.

Said Christ, "Every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit" (Matthew 7:17). Our Saviour compares Himself to a vine, of which His followers are the branches. He plainly declares that all who would be His disciples must bring forth fruit; and then He shows how they may become fruitful branches. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except you abide in me" (John 15:4).

The apostle Paul describes the fruit which the Christian is to bear. He says that it "is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9). And again, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22, 23). These precious graces are but the principles of God's law carried out in the life.

The law of God is the only true standard of moral perfection. That law was practically exemplified in the life of Christ. He says of Himself, "I have kept my Father's commandments" (John 15:10). Nothing short of this obedience will meet the requirements of God's word. "He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6).

We cannot plead that we are unable to do this, for we have the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). As we look into the divine mirror, the law of God, we see the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and our own lost condition as transgressors. But by repentance and faith we are justified before God, and through divine grace enabled to render obedience to His commandments.

Love for God and Man

Those who have genuine love for God will manifest an earnest desire to know His will and to do it. Says the apostle John, whose epistles treat so fully upon love, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 John 5:3). The child who loves his parents will show that love by willing obedience; but

the selfish, ungrateful child seeks to do as little as possible for his parents, while he at the same time desires to enjoy all the privileges granted to the obedient and faithful.

The same difference is seen among those who profess to be children of God.

Many who know that they are the objects of His love and care, and who desire to receive His blessing, take no delight in doing His will. They regard God's claims upon them as an unpleasant restraint, His commandments as a grievous yoke. But he who is truly seeking for holiness of heart and life delights in the law of God, and mourns only that he falls so far short of meeting its requirements.

We are commanded to love one another as Christ has loved us. He has manifested His love by laying down His life to redeem us. The beloved disciple says that we should be willing to lay down our lives for the brothers [and sisters]. For “every one that loves him that begat loves him also that is begotten of him” (verse 1). If we love Christ, we shall love those who resemble Him in life and character.

And not only so, but we shall love those who have “no hope,” and are “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). It was to save sinners that Christ left His home in heaven and came to earth to suffer and to die. For this He toiled and agonized and prayed, until, heartbroken and deserted by those He came to save, He poured out His life on Calvary.

Imitating the Pattern

Many shrink from such a life as our Saviour lived. They feel that it requires too great a sacrifice to imitate the Pattern, to bring forth fruit in good works, and then patiently endure the pruning of God that they may bring forth more fruit. But when the Christian regards himself as only a humble instrument in the hands of Christ, and endeavors to faithfully perform every duty, relying upon the help which God has promised, then he will wear the yoke of Christ and find it easy; then he will bear burdens for Christ, and pronounce them light. He can look up with courage and with confidence, and say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him” (2 Timothy 1:12).

If we meet obstacles in our path, and faithfully overcome them; if we encounter opposition and reproach, and in Christ's name gain the victory; if we bear responsibilities and discharge our duties in the spirit of our Master – then, indeed, we gain a precious knowledge of His faithfulness and power. We no

longer depend upon the experience of others, for we have the witness in ourselves. Like the Samaritans of old, we can say, "We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42).

The more we contemplate the character of Christ, and the more we experience of His saving power, the more keenly shall we realize our own weakness and imperfection, and the more earnestly shall we look to Him as our strength and our Redeemer. We have no power in ourselves to cleanse the soul temple from its defilement; but as we repent of our sins against God, and seek pardon through the merits of Christ, He will impart that faith which works by love and purifies the heart. By faith in Christ and obedience to the law of God we may be sanctified, and thus obtain a fitness for the society of holy angels and the white-robed redeemed ones in the kingdom of glory.

Union With Christ Our Privilege

It is not only the privilege but the duty of every Christian to maintain a close union with Christ and to have a rich experience in the things of God. Then his life will be fruitful in good works. Said Christ, "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8).

When we read the lives of men who have been eminent for their piety we often regard their experiences and attainments as far beyond our reach. But this is not the case. Christ died for all; and we are assured in His word that He is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. The prophets and apostles did not perfect Christian character by a miracle. They used the means which God had placed within their reach; and all who will put forth the same effort will secure the same results.

Paul's Prayer for the Church

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul sets before them the "mystery of the gospel" (Ephesus 6:19), the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesus 3:8), and then assures them of his earnest prayers for their spiritual prosperity:

"I bow my knees to the Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, . . . that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the

love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

He writes to his Corinthian brothers [and sisters] also, “to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus. . . . : Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the LORD Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing you are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2-7).

These words are addressed not only to the church at Corinth but to all the people of God to the close of time. Every Christian may enjoy the blessing of sanctification.

The apostle continues in these words: “Now I beseech you, brothers [and sisters], by the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment” (verse 10).

Paul would not have appealed to them to do that which was impossible. Unity is the sure result of Christian perfection.

In the Epistle to the Colossians also are set forth the glorious privileges vouchsafed to the children of God. “Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, . . . we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you might walk worthy of the LORD to all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, to all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col. 1:4-11).

The Standard of Holiness

The apostle himself was endeavoring to reach the same standard of holiness which he set before his brothers [and sisters]. He writes to the Philippians: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my LORD: . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to

his death; if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brothers [and sisters], I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:7-14).

There is a striking contrast between the boastful, self-righteous claims of those who profess to be without sin, and the modest language of the apostle. Yet it was the purity and faithfulness of his own life that gave such power to his exhortations to his brothers [and sisters].

The Will of God

Paul did not hesitate to enforce, upon every suitable occasion, the importance of Bible sanctification. He says: “You know what commandments we gave you by the LORD Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:2, 3). “Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:12-15).

He bids Titus instruct the church that while they should trust to the merits of Christ for salvation, divine grace, dwelling in their hearts, will lead to the faithful performance of all the duties of life. “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men. . . . This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men” (Titus 3:1-8).

Paul seeks to impress upon our minds the fact that the foundation of all acceptable service to God, as well as the very crown of the Christian graces, is love; and that only in the soul where love reigns will the peace of God abide.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. And above all these things put on

charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body; and be you thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the LORD. And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the LORD Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father of him” (Colossians 3:12-17).

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