

Christ or Antichrist?

by John Nelson Darby

The Lord Jesus presents Himself as the Subject of Testimony, the Giver of Life, and the Executor of Judgment, and man's rejection of His testimony leads to the appearance of Antichrist.

Scripture: Psalm 119:9, Isaiah 59:17, Luke 11:22, Romans 8:37, Ephesians 6:13

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Full Armor"

Description

The preacher discusses the concept of the full armor of God, emphasizing the importance of being fully equipped for spiritual warfare with offensive and defensive tools. This armor, originating from God and worn by believers, enables them to be more than conquerors through Christ's love, turning obstacles into victories. Just as a soldier must put on physical armor, Christians are called to put on the complete armor of God to face spiritual battles without fear. The preacher highlights the significance of hiding God's Word in our hearts as a crucial way to put on the full armor and be prepared for the challenges of spiritual warfare.

Transcript

CHRIST, OR ANTICHRIST

JOHN 5 : 17-47

There are three very important characters in which the Lord Jesus is presented to us in these verses: -

First, as THE SUBJECT OF TESTIMONY;

Second, as THE GIVER OF LIFE;

Third, as THE EXECUTOR OF JUDGMENT.

Now He stands in relation to all men in one or other of these positions.

First, He presents Himself as the SUBJECT OF TESTIMONY, but it is nevertheless as coming in the Father's name. "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true," v. 30-32. His own witness was also true ; but that which He states is, that He seeks not to glorify Himself, He demands not their confidence, He asks them not to believe. Just

as He says elsewhere, " He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." And this ever holds good. If a man is seeking to exalt self, he has a motive that is not truth, his witness is not true. At the same time there was a witness unto Himself, and as such He appeals to all the various testimony that existed for Him in the world. " Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth," v. 33. Again, " The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me," v. 36. Again, " The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me," v. 37. And again, " Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me," v. 39.

The Lord Jesus refers to these four witnesses: firstly, John; secondly, his works ; thirdly, the Father ; fourthly, the Scriptures: and yet He tells those to whom He spoke, " Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," v. 40. Presented with this full and adequate testimony to the consciences of men (not merely an abstract testimony, but that which was suited to their circumstances), they refused it all : they would not come to Him that they might have life. And mark the terrible conclusion, " Ye will receive " this evil one. " I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive," v. 43. What a testimony against man!

Another character in which we find the Lord Jesus presented here is in LIFE-GIVING POWER: " As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them ; even so the Son quickeneth whom he Will," V. 21. Life-giving is attributed both to the Father and the Son.

But there is marked distinction in that which follows, as to the third character of Christ-THE EXECUTOR OF JUDGMENT. " The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son," V. 22. As " Son of man," He has been dishonoured and rejected by men; therefore all judgment is committed into His hands, in order " that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father," v. 23. Here He stands alone. And see the point that is settled here.

When the Lord Jesus presents Himself as giving life, He also, and most graciously, shews us how we may count on the assurance of possessing life. Now this is of the very last importance. There is many a one that can with truth of heart own Him as the giver of divine life, who nevertheless is unable to say, I have that life. Our Lord does not leave the anxiety of such unanswered. After stating that all men (even those who had rejected Him, as we have seen) one day in His character of Judge should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father, He adds, " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment] ; but is passed from death unto life," V. 24

The question is one of judgment or of life. We have seen that the Father gives life, and the Son gives life. We have seen, too, that all judgment is committed unto the Son. But here Jesus shews who is to come under the judgment, and who is to have life. This answers the question at once. He says, He that believes " hath," not shall have, " everlasting life " ; and that such a one " shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." On this basis all happy feeling before God, all joy, is founded. Here begins the exercise of all holy affections and ways. A child cannot love its parent before it is born (there is no need to reason about that), though it may love long before it can express it, long before there is intellectual explanation.

Here is the difference between the law and the gospel. Law puts a man upon the acquisition of life, it sets him to do before he gets life. All Christian holiness, all Christian affections, flow from the fact of having life.

The voice of the good shepherd reaches the ear, and he who hears it, believing that the Father has sent the Son, has this assurance, he " shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." It would be to bring into doubt His own work were Christ to call such in question as to salvation. He ever keeps distinct His two offices of Life-giver and judge.

it might appear that in verses 28, 29, He confounds the two. But is it so ? No, He states a further truth. He had before been speaking of the quickening of the soul ; and now He says, " Marvel not at this," there is going to be a resurrection of the body also. It is in resurrection that He will fulfil the whole effect and result of His life-giving power. There will be a " resurrection of life," and also a " resurrection of judgment." The two things are kept most definite and distinct. But the honour of Christ as " Son of man " is secured from all. We (those who have believed) do not need judgment to oblige us to render Him honour; we honour Him now as the source of life; He has quickened us, forgiven us our sins ; through Him we have fellowship with the Father: He has done everything for us. The wicked shall also honour Him then.

There is a remarkable passage in Romans 8 in illustration of this distinction. The apostle, after speaking of the law, takes up the result of the work of Christ, and says, " the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," etc., and then in verse 11, " If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." That will not be true of the wicked at all ; they will not be raised in virtue of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them, they have it not. We see then, as it were, this great track of life. Christ is the Life-giver to His people ; first to soul, and then to body.

The evidence to others of our having life is shewn in conduct, though that is not brought out here ; but the proof and the assurance to my own soul is based on this, " He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." Whilst fruits will flow, and must flow, from faith in Christ, it is of the utmost importance, in the midst of the evil with which we are conversant, to have the ground on which peace rests as simple as possible ; and this is just what God has made it. The work on which it is founded concerns all the Godhead. I see Christ coming out from the bosom of the Father, dying, and communicating life; that into which life so communicated brings, being all the Father's purposes in the Son, etc. The link to my own soul is as simple as possible, it is not a long process of reasoning which might tend to puzzle and perplex, but the evidence of the word, " He that heareth," etc. What is the effect of this ? Christ becomes everything to us. Surely this is practical sanctification. If I wanted to describe a holy man, I should describe one who was always thinking of the Father's love and the Son's grace, and never of self.

Here then there is comfort and peace (and what a comfort is the settled certainty of salvation!) in this setting to our seal that God is true. It is not in the searching of my own heart, but in the assurance of the word of God. There is nothing like the simple certainty of faith. " He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." I assume that I am a person in an anxious state of soul and wanting to get the certainty of life possessed. I look at the testimony of God. There I get absolute certainty. I say, God is true. This is faith. All that I discover in myself is not faith. I may be much exercised ; but there is not one thing in my own heart that can in the least assist me in finding out anything about this life. Faith rests upon the testimony of God. When I have received and rested upon His testimony, it is important for me to examine myself as to my ways and the like ; but I never go and search into my own heart for certainty as to whether the blessed Son of God has told me the truth, " He that heareth," etc. Observe, again, there is no searching any further than this : I believe on Him who sent the Son; in the presence of the Father and the Son, I have eternal life : who can give me more ? Life may be fed indeed here, and glorified hereafter ;

but there is no searching any deeper. There may be exercises of soul in bringing to it ; but the definition John gives of a Christian is this, " We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." " Hereby perceive

we love, because he laid down his life for us." There is another point: the written testimony of God has a higher place than any other.

A few words more upon the difference between life-giving and judgment. Now it is that Christ gives life. When He comes as judge, He will not give life at all, He will come for. judgment. There is no confounding or mingling of the two things, either as to time or act. If judgment comes in before grace has given life, who can stand ? Having seen the way of life, there is next the contrast of result, where testimony is not received. In the fall of our first parents we see sin in three distinct and principal elements. And these have continued to characterise man ever since. Man gives ear to Satan, or, in other words, is led of the serpent; exalts himself to be as God; follows his own lusts, and is disobedient.

Scripture gives us the development of this, in principle all through, and shews that it will be so at the end. Man, whilst in the enjoyment of blessing, listens to and trusts Satan. But mark the suggestion of the devil, " Ye shall be as gods." He can tell truth if it subserve sin. If we have the truth, nothing can harm us ; but Satan can tell truth, a great deal of truth, provided he can only win attention by it and so deceive. See his temptation of our Lord. There he quotes Scripture, gives a promise of God, quite rightly applicable in a certain sense, had Jesus listened. The first Adam did so, and came by the ways of Satan to know good and evil. But it was by disobedience, and he continued not with God. Satan told not all the truth-he did not say, You shall be a lost creature. Lust worked, disobedience followed, and, consequently, exclusion from God's presence.

But testimony of Christ has another element in it. It is not merely that man is a sinner; there has been the rejection of God in grace. What was the question when Christ was in the world ? Not whether man had sinned; but would man, a sinner, receive testimony from God in grace ? If you traced the history of man from the beginning until Christ came, you would say, his mouth must be stopped. Satan's power over the heart is revealed throughout. Away from Paradise, instead of becoming better, Cain kills his brother. Then comes the deluge, sweeping away the whole race except eight persons ; but afterwards they are as bad as ever. Noah gets intoxicated, Ham dishonours his father, and after that idolatry enters. Again, before Moses comes down from the mount the people have made a calf. Before the eight days of solemn purification are over, Aaron's sons take strange fire and offer before the Lord. In short, in all God's dealings with Israel as a nation, this truth is strongly marked. The principle of the heart is wrong. Nay more, the nearer man is to God externally, the worse is ever the character of his guilt, if there be not living fellowship with Him. When Jesus came into the world, though He could get joy out of the Samaritans, and out of a poor Syrophoenician woman, whose condition was as a " dog " in respect of Jewish privileges, " his own " were found full of pride of heart and " received him not." Judas was quite close to Christ, yet he betrayed Him. The development of evil is just in proportion to its nearness to good, if the power of good is not there. So with Christendom. The name of Christianity, where there is not the living power of it, is the very place in which the worst evil is to be looked for.

And observe, here, the awful manner in which conscience can deceive itself. " The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood " ; there had been no scruple in giving the money for that blood. The very same money wherewith they had bought Christ, they will not put into the treasury! What a picture of man's heart, of man's consistency_

-exact about external ceremonial points, callous as to moral depravity !

But as to the question of the reception of testimony. Into this world of sin and iniquity, however bad man might have been proved it mattered not, the Son of man came down in grace. His testimony rejected-" Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life "-what is the consequence ? " I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Here is a new form of evil. Man shall set himself up and be received, because he comes in his own name. And yet it is but the ripeness and development of his sin in Eden, the same in principle-only, after Christ; he then exalted himself to be as God-to act after his own will, though in reality he was the tool of Satan. The same thing shall come to pass again, testimony having been rejected, as it is said, " because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," 2 Them. 2. There will be a licence, and more than a licence too, for man to set himself up, to seek his own name - and "him ye will receive."

If you trace man's evil, you will find, it is true, a testimony to it bad enough, whatever the restraints God in His supreme power may have placed upon it. But there has been restraint, especially since the flood. Government met this point in the world, first, directly exercised amongst the Jews, and afterwards extended to the Gentiles in the four great empires, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the first head-the Babylonish, Persian, Grecian, and Roman. Passing over their general history, it will suffice to say, that the fourth of these empires had just come out in prominence when our Lord appeared on the earth-" There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." The result of this, as well as of religion in man, was brought out in His rejection. All joined together-the heads both of civil and religious power -to crucify Christ. The cry of the Jews was, " We have no king but Caesar " ; and Pilate, representative of Gentile dominion, knowing His innocence, acquiesced in their malice.

Another thing was brought put, upon the accomplishment of all this evil in man: a testimony unto the heavenly blessedness of those who believe in Him whom the world had rejected. " Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." There are those who believe on a record given of God's Son, and eternal life belongs to them.

Well, now, if we find any religious form of evil, we find it here, in the profession of Christianity, not amongst the avowed haters of Christ. One special mark of the " perilous times " in " the last days," concerning which we have prophetic testimony, is the " having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," the same thing in principle as amongst the Jews. The Pharisees were a religious people ; they had the " form of godliness," but Christ, the " power," they " denied," Acts 3 : 13. Wherefore the testimony against them is " Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

One great principle of religious forms of evil is, that they are always suited to the flesh. There is a religious tendency in man : he will bow down to something. You may find a hard spirit here and there, rejecting everything ; but, as a general truth, man must have his religion. The " form of godliness " is just suited to this. Nature, through it, seeks to satisfy its holiness, whilst at the same time man's will comes in-man is exalted. Whatever the flesh can look at, or do, or cling to, as man's works, ordinances, etc., all these things will be esteemed. If it be but a " form of godliness," though the strictest sect of the Pharisees, a great deal of truth may be held there may be intellectual clearness of doctrine and the like all this is within the compass of the flesh, and will be accredited by it. But there is one thing the flesh can never do-it can never trust simply in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, and have " peace with God."

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of holiness. If truth (the form of it) comes to me without holiness, I cannot receive it as of the Spirit of God ; and, vice versa, if there be apparent holiness without truth. There is always thus, for the humble believer, a corrective or counter-check, whereby he may detect the evil-Satan's imitation.

But there is another thing testified of-the last form of wickedness-man's will exalting itself against God. The principle has been always the same, but now it will come out in full development. " The king shall do according to his own will," Dan. II :36. Truth having been rejected, this is the result. There will be a public avowal of independence of God, man acting against God, speaking against God, but at the same time, exalting himself to be as God; 2 Thess. 2 : 4. Herein Satan's agency will come out in manifest display. It is not merely the " form of godliness " (itself ensnaring enough, and liable to lead astray), nor yet even man's will alone ; no, it is declared to be a display of the " working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders," v. 9. Awful passage! And see what follows. When God's patience is exhausted, or rather has no more place, then He-yes, " God " Himself, " shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," v. ii ; " because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." God says, If you love a lie, you shall have a lie. His dealings with the Jews, upon their rejection of Him, are the same in principle. " Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," etc. Isaiah 6 ; John 12 ; Acts 28 : 26, 27.

But we find exactly the same testimony given about the profession of Christianity, as about the profession of Judaism. The " mystery of iniquity " had begun to work in Paul's time-" doth already work," says he ; it is followed by the " falling away," or apostasy; and consummated in the appearance of Antichrist-" that man of sin." Satan's power, seductive power, and man's self-will, in independence of God, will terminate in this-man given up to the devil. But it will not be until the long-suffering of God has been tried to the uttermost ; even as the sentence of judicial blindness on the Jews was pronounced 700 years before it was put in execution. At the present hour, that long-suffering has been 1800 years running on; but when the testimony of truth has been fully rejected, the doom will come.

People may deceive themselves, and say that these things are not to be looked for in a Christian land. It is just there, upon Christendom, that God's heaviest judgments will fall. After testimony God gave over the heathen to a " reprobate mind." (See Romans i.) The Jew, with his special light, is given over to a fat heart. Where Christianity is professed, it is the same thing; a "form of godliness," the "love of the truth " not received, " pleasure in unrighteousness "-God gives over to " strong delusion."

Men love something. Trace the course of Judas: what was it that led him astray ? He loved money, not so uncommon an evil. In this he was the world's prudent man-" men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." But observe the progress of corrupt nature ; a little circumstance in John 12 : 3, 6, may help us to see the connection. The lust there, Satan suggests a way to gratify it. Well, he goes on, and what is his next step ? Satan puts it into his heart to betray his Master. Judas (it may be, thinking that the blessed One would have been delivered in some way, as at other times, and thus he get his money, and yet save his character) consents. Man will excuse himself by any folly. Sin has its progress with a defiled conscience. Hypocrisy now enters ; he sits with Jesus at the table (goes on with religiousness), even after he had sold Him. Mark, too, it was " after the sop " that Satan entered, never nearer to Christ in form. Now he is hardened against even the relentings of nature, goes out and betrays the Son of man with a kiss. Here then is the progress of corrupt nature towards this fearful consummation-firstly, lust; secondly, a means of gratifying it in his office of bearer of the bag ; all this goes on along with religiousness, in the very company of Christ, from day to day ; thirdly, he is led to the ultimate character of his crime, at a time and in

circumstances of most blessing to a true disciple ; fourthly, the heart is hardened, so that the betrayal takes place even with a kiss, the token of affection. Sinning and religiousness go on together. Again we say, and here we have an illustration of it, that where the power of godliness is not, nearness to godly things is only the more dangerous.

Well, we have the solemn declaration that such shall be the history of Christendom. " And I saw three unclean spirits ... which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty," Rev. 16. That day, when the long-suffering of God shall have closed, and shall have no more place, when in fact a longer delay would become the allowance of unrighteousness ; judgment will then be according to this nearness. Its full tide will roll in upon Christendom.

We speak not of the judgment of the dead, but of the living. Where, then, is the resource from this dreadful progress and consummation of wickedness, in the place where righteousness is expected ? It is not in man's will, for through that he is the slave of Satan ; nor in forms of religiousness : Satan can enter in with the sop. Neither the one nor the other will keep him out. Man's natural power, his capacity to do great things, may be vaunted on the one hand; and on the other a reliance upon ordinances and observances may be insisted upon. For a time these may seem the most opposing schools, but a connecting link will be found in man's corrupt nature, managed by the craft of the great enemy ; and at last both will subserve his purposes, who is to exalt " himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped : so that he sitteth in the temple of God , shewing himself that he is God." Where then is deliverance from the evil ? where is the escape ? The answer is most simple : In the fellowship of God's love. The place of special privileges unheeded, of special light, will be the place of special judgment.

A word in passing: Satan does not come all at once and say, I seek to turn you from God. He usually works by introducing that which would lead away from simplicity of reliance on the death of Christ-some " form of godliness "-and so ensnares. How are we to detect all this ? In the first place the believer must be set in heaven (not in body but in spirit) in the presence of God Himself. That is now his true place. " The way into the holiest of all was not yet manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." God was not revealed in His own full estimate of good and evil, before Christ and the cross. But now the holiest is open. The veil is rent. " The true light shineth." There is nothing between us and God. All is worthless that cannot stand in the light of His holiness. There were many things before which God did not approve, but which He permitted-Jewish divorcement, for instance (Mark 10 : 5). But at the death of Christ the full light of God's holiness, against the darkness of man's fully developed sin, was brought out. The veil was rent from top to bottom.

Divine goodness had come into the world, and displayed itself with every witness : what had man shewn himself to be ? A hater of divine goodness, in deliberate judgment. The full evil of the world, and, in the accomplishment of righteousness for us, the full grace of God, both came out at the cross. All the pains God had taken to reclaim man, as culture to a good-for-nothing tree, only resulted in his bearing more bad fruit, until the deliberate evil of his nature in hatred to God, was shewn in the death of Christ. This was the climax of his sin. But here also was shewn God's perfect love. Man's hatred to God come in goodness is one side of the cross, and the other is God in His highest act of love towards man in vileness.

God's own holiness has now come completely out. Since the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is no longer a question of coming up step by step to God. If man stand before God at all, he must stand in contact with the full light of His holiness. How did that light burst forth ? In the absolute putting

away of the sin of every believer, and that by the worst act of man's sin. The very sin that was detected by the light, that would have hindered the soul's approach, was put away through the blow that brought Jesus to the death ; and now the sinner stands in the absolute and full enjoyment of God's love. Such is His goodness! The more the searching eye of God rests on me, trusting to the perfect work of Christ, the more, as it were, does He discover the perfect value of the blood of Christ. The clearer the light, the more is it to shew that not a spot or stain is on me. What does He see ? The efficacy of the blood of His own provided Lamb-that which has put away my sin. The same light that detects the sin manifests its being utterly, and for ever, put away ; yea, has burst forth and shone in the putting it away. Here then is the safeguard. It is the knowledge of God's full putting away of sin-peace through the blood. I can have no thought of getting up to God, etc., when standing where Himself has brought me, even in His very presence.

We are called unto holiness, but what character does Christian holiness take ? Not the character of our own nature at all, nothing is recognised as of us. It is, " that we might be partakers of his holiness." Man's nature has been proved to be incorrigibly bad, it has hated and crucified Christ : God cannot own it, He seeks nothing from it. He has satisfied Himself in the cross about our evil ; and now He says, Be partakers of my good. Here again is a safeguard for the saints at the present hour. Those who, through the teaching of the Spirit of God, have learned this great and blessed truth, and through grace walk in fellowship with God, will be preserved from all legal attempts at holiness. They say, We want nothing before God, but only to glorify Him in our bodies. They are Christ before God, and they know it. Nothing else is wanted; nay, God would -repudiate anything else. It would be to call in question the sufficiency of Christ. Faith rests where God rests. What we have to do is to glorify Him by our life down here. But our walk down here is, nevertheless, not our standing before God in righteousness, though it be a testimony in man's sight to it.

Reader, have you rested where God rests ? What does God think about Christ ? Does your soul say, That is sufficient ? God rests in Him as having made peace through the blood of the cross. Is that peace consciously yours ? Salvation is the guard set up of God against the deceits of Satan.

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Now He stands in relation to all men in one or other of these positions.

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myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true," v. 30-32. His own witness was also true ; but that which He states is, that He seeks not to glorify Himself, He demands not their confidence, He asks them not to believe. Just as He says elsewhere, " He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." And this ever holds good. If a man is seeking to exalt self, he has a motive that is not truth, his witness is not true. At the same time there was a witness unto Himself, and as such He appeals to all the various testimony that existed for Him in the world. " Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth," v. 33. Again, " The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me," v. 36. Again, " The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me," v. 37. And again, " Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me," v. 39.

The Lord Jesus refers to these four witnesses: firstly, John; secondly, his works ; thirdly, the Father ; fourthly, the Scriptures: and yet He tells those to whom He spoke, " Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," v. 40. Presented with this full and adequate testimony to the consciences of men (not merely an abstract testimony, but that which was suited to their circumstances), they refused it all : they would not come to Him that they might have life. And mark the terrible conclusion, " Ye will receive " this evil one. " I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive," v. 43. What a testimony against man!

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When the Lord Jesus presents Himself as giving life, He also, and most graciously, shews us how we may count on the assurance of possessing life. Now this is of the very last importance. There is many a one that can with truth of heart own Him as the giver of divine life, who nevertheless is unable to say, I have that life. Our Lord does not leave the anxiety of such unanswered. After stating that all men (even those who had rejected Him, as we have seen) one day in His character of Judge should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father, He adds, " Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment] ; but is passed from death unto life," V. 24

The question is one of judgment or of life. We have seen that the Father gives life, and the Son gives life. We have seen, too, that all judgment is committed unto the Son. But here Jesus shews who is to come under the judgment, and who is to have life. This answers the question at once. He says, He that believes " hath," not shall have, " everlasting life " ; and that such a one " shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." On this basis all happy feeling before God, all joy, is founded. Here begins the exercise of all holy affections and ways. A child cannot love its parent before it is born (there is no need to reason about that), though it may love long before it can express it, long before there is intellectual explanation.

Here is the difference between the law and the gospel. Law puts a man upon the acquisition of life, it sets him to do before he gets life. All Christian holiness, all Christian affections, flow from the fact of having life. The voice of the good shepherd reaches the ear, and he who hears it, believing that the Father has sent the Son, has this assurance, he "shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." It would be to bring into doubt His own work were Christ to call such in question as to salvation. He ever keeps distinct His two offices of Life-giver and judge.

it might appear that in verses 28, 29, He confounds the two. But is it so ? No, He states a further truth. He had before been speaking of the quickening of the soul ; and now He says, " Marvel not at this," there is going to be a resurrection of the body also. It is in resurrection that He will fulfil the whole effect and result of His life-giving power. There will be a " resurrection of life," and also a " resurrection of judgment." The two things are kept most definite and distinct. But the honour of Christ as " Son of man " is secured from all. We (those who have believed) do not need judgment to oblige us to render Him honour; we honour Him now as the source of life; He has quickened us, forgiven us our sins ; through Him we have fellowship with the Father: He has done everything for us. The wicked shall also honour Him then.

There is a remarkable passage in Romans 8 in illustration of this distinction. The apostle, after speaking of the law, takes up the result of the work of Christ, and says, " the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death," etc., and then in verse 11, " If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." That will not be true of the wicked at all ; they will not be raised in virtue of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them, they have it not. We see then, as it were, this great track of life. Christ is the Life-giver to His people ; first to soul, and then to body.

The evidence to others of our having life is shewn in conduct, though that is not brought out here ; but the proof and the assurance to my own soul is based on this, " He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." Whilst fruits will flow, and must flow, from faith in Christ, it is of the utmost importance, in the midst of the evil with which we are conversant, to have the ground on which peace rests as simple as possible ; and this is just what God has made it. The work on which it is founded concerns all the Godhead. I see Christ coming out from the bosom of the Father, dying, and communicating life; that into which life so communicated brings, being all the Father's purposes in the Son, etc. The link to my own soul is as simple as possible, it is not a long process of reasoning which might tend to puzzle and perplex, but the evidence of the word, " He that heareth," etc. What is the effect of this ? Christ becomes everything to us. Surely this is practical sanctification. If I wanted to describe a holy man, I should describe one who was always thinking of the Father's love and the Son's grace, and never of self.

Here then there is comfort and peace (and what a comfort is the settled certainty of salvation!) in this setting to our seal that God is true. It is not in the searching of my own heart, but in the assurance of the word of God. There is nothing like the simple certainty of faith. " He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." I assume that I am a person in an anxious state of soul and wanting to get the certainty of life possessed. I look at the testimony of God. There I get absolute certainty. I say, God is true. This is faith. All that I discover in myself is not faith. I may be much exercised ; but there is not one thing in my own heart that can in the least assist me in finding out anything about this life. Faith rests upon the testimony of God. When I have received and rested upon His testimony, it is important for me to examine myself as to my ways and the like ; but I never go and search into my own heart for certainty as to whether the blessed Son of God has told me the truth, " He that heareth," etc. Observe, again, there is

no searching any further than this : I believe on Him who sent the Son; in the presence of the Father and the Son, I have eternal life : who can give me more ? Life may be fed indeed here, and glorified hereafter ; but there is no searching any deeper. There may be exercises of soul in bringing to it ; but the definition John gives of a Christian is this, " We have known and believed the love that God hath to us." " Hereby perceive

we love, because he laid down his life for us." There is another point: the written testimony of God has a higher place than any other.

A few words more upon the difference between life-giving and judgment. Now it is that Christ gives life. When He comes as judge, He will not give life at all, He will come for. judgment. There is no confounding or mingling of the two things, either as to time or act. If judgment comes in before grace has given life, who can stand ? Having seen the way of life, there is next the contrast of result, where testimony is not received. In the fall of our first parents we see sin in three distinct and principal elements. And these have continued to characterise man ever since. Man gives ear to Satan, or, in other words, is led of the serpent; exalts himself to be as God; follows his own lusts, and is disobedient.

Scripture gives us the development of this, in principle all through, and shews that it will be so at the end. Man, whilst in the enjoyment of blessing, listens to and trusts Satan. But mark the suggestion of the devil, " Ye shall be as gods." He can tell truth if it subserve sin. If we have the truth, nothing can harm us ; but Satan can tell truth, a great deal of truth, provided he can only win attention by it and so deceive. See his temptation of our Lord. There he quotes Scripture, gives a promise of God, quite rightly applicable in a certain sense, had Jesus listened. The first Adam did so, and came by the ways of Satan to know good and evil. But it was by disobedience, and he continued not with God. Satan told not all the truth-he did not say, You shall be a lost creature. Lust worked, disobedience followed, and, consequently, exclusion from God's presence.

But testimony of Christ has another element in it. It is not merely that man is a sinner; there has been the rejection of God in grace. What was the question when Christ was in the world ? Not whether man had sinned; but would man, a sinner, receive testimony from God in grace ? If you traced the history of man from the beginning until Christ came, you would say, his mouth must be stopped. Satan's power over the heart is revealed throughout. Away from Paradise, instead of becoming better, Cain kills his brother. Then comes the deluge, sweeping away the whole race except eight persons ; but afterwards they are as bad as ever. Noah gets intoxicated, Ham dishonours his father, and after that idolatry enters. Again, before Moses comes down from the mount the people have made a calf. Before the eight days of solemn purification are over, Aaron's sons take strange fire and offer before the Lord. In short, in all God's dealings with Israel as a nation, this truth is strongly marked. The principle of the heart is wrong. Nay more, the nearer man is to God externally, the worse is ever the character of his guilt, if there be not living fellowship with Him. When Jesus came into the world, though He could get joy out of the Samaritans, and out of a poor Syrophenician woman, whose condition was as a " dog " in respect of Jewish privileges, " his own " were found full of pride of heart and " received him not." Judas was quite close to Christ, yet he betrayed Him. The development of evil is just in proportion to its nearness to good, if the power of good is not there. So with Christendom. The name of Christianity, where there is not the living power of it, is the very place in which the worst evil is to be looked for.

And observe, here, the awful manner in which conscience can deceive itself. " The chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood " ;

there had been no scruple in giving the money for that blood. The very same money wherewith they had bought Christ, they will not put into the treasury! What a picture of man's heart, of man's consistency_ -exact about external ceremonial points, callous as to moral depravity !

But as to the question of the reception of testimony. Into this world of sin and iniquity, however bad man might have been proved it mattered not, the Son of man came down in grace. His testimony rejected-" Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life "-what is the consequence ? " I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Here is a new form of evil. Man shall set himself up and be received, because he comes in his own name. And yet it is but the ripeness and development of his sin in Eden, the same in principle-only, after Christ; he then exalted himself to be as God-to act after his own will, though in reality he was the tool of Satan. The same thing shall come to pass again, testimony having been rejected, as it is said, " because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," 2 Them. 2. There will be a licence, and more than a licence too, for man to set himself up, to seek his own name - and "him ye will receive."

If you trace man's evil, you will find, it is true, a testimony to it bad enough, whatever the restraints God in His supreme power may have placed upon it. But there has been restraint, especially since the flood. Government met this point in the world, first, directly exercised amongst the Jews, and afterwards extended to the Gentiles in the four great empires, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the first head-the Babylonish, Persian, Grecian, and Roman. Passing over their general history, it will suffice to say, that the fourth of these empires had just come out in prominence when our Lord appeared on the earth-" There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." The result of this, as well as of religion in man, was brought out in His rejection. All joined together-the heads both of civil and religious power -to crucify Christ. The cry of the Jews was, " We have no king but Caesar " ; and Pilate, representative of Gentile dominion, knowing His innocence, acquiesced in their malice.

Another thing was brought put, upon the accomplishment of all this evil in man: a testimony unto the heavenly blessedness of those who believe in Him whom the world had rejected. " Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." There are those who believe on a record given of God's Son, and eternal life belongs to them.

Well, now, if we find any religious form of evil, we find it here, in the profession of Christianity, not amongst the avowed haters of Christ. One special mark of the " perilous times " in " the last days," concerning which we have prophetic testimony, is the " having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof," the same thing in principle as amongst the Jews. The Pharisees were a religious people ; they had the " form of godliness," but Christ, the " power," they " denied," Acts 3 : 13. Wherefore the testimony against them is " Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

One great principle of religious forms of evil is, that they are always suited to the flesh. There is a religious tendency in man : he will bow down to something. You may find a hard spirit here and there, rejecting everything ; but, as a general truth, man must have his religion. The " form of godliness " is just suited to this. Nature, through it, seeks to satisfy its holiness, whilst at the same time man's will comes in-man is exalted. Whatever the flesh can look at, or do, or cling to, as man's works, ordinances, etc., all these things will be esteemed. If it be but a " form of godliness," though the strictest sect of the Pharisees, a great deal of truth may be held there may be intellectual clearness of doctrine and the like all this is within the compass of the flesh, and will be accredited by it. But there is one thing the flesh can never do-it can never trust simply in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, and have " peace with God."

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of holiness. If truth (the form of it) comes to me without holiness, I cannot receive it as of the Spirit of God ; and, vice versa, if there be apparent holiness without truth. There is always thus, for the humble believer, a corrective or counter-check, whereby he may detect the evil-Satan's imitation.

But there is another thing testified of-the last form of wickedness-man's will exalting itself against God. The principle has been always the same, but now it will come out in full development. " The king shall do according to his own will," Dan. II :36. Truth having been rejected, this is the result. There will be a public avowal of independence of God, man acting against God, speaking against God, but at the same time, exalting himself to be as God; 2 Thess. 2 : 4. Herein Satan's agency will come out in manifest display. It is not merely the " form of godliness " (itself ensnaring enough, and liable to lead astray), nor yet even man's will alone ; no, it is declared to be a display of the " working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders," v. 9. Awful passage! And see what follows. When God's patience is exhausted, or rather has no more place, then He-yet, " God " Himself, " shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," v. ii ; " because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." God says, If you love a lie, you shall have a lie. His dealings with the Jews, upon their rejection of Him, are the same in principle. " Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes," etc. Isaiah 6 ; John 12 ; Acts 28 : 26, 27.

But we find exactly the same testimony given about the profession of Christianity, as about the profession of Judaism. The " mystery of iniquity " had begun to work in Paul's time-" doth already work," says he ; it is followed by the " falling away," or apostasy; and consummated in the appearance of Antichrist-" that man of sin." Satan's power, seductive power, and man's self-will, in independence of God, will terminate in this-man given up to the devil. But it will not be until the long-suffering of God has been tried to the uttermost ; even as the sentence of judicial blindness on the Jews was pronounced 700 years before it was put in execution. At the present hour, that long-suffering has been 1800 years running on; but when the testimony of truth has been fully rejected, the doom will come.

People may deceive themselves, and say that these things are not to be looked for in a Christian land. It is just there, upon Christendom, that God's heaviest judgments will fall. After testimony God gave over the heathen to a " reprobate mind." (See Romans i.) The Jew, with his special light, is given over to a fat heart. Where Christianity is professed, it is the same thing; a "form of godliness," the "love of the truth " not received, " pleasure in unrighteousness "-God gives over to " strong delusion."

Men love something. Trace the course of Judas: what was it that led him astray ? He loved money, not so uncommon an evil. In this he was the world's prudent man-" men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." But observe the progress of corrupt nature ; a little circumstance in John 12 : 3, 6, may help us to see the connection. The lust there, Satan suggests a way to gratify it. Well, he goes on, and what is his next step ? Satan puts it into his heart to betray his Master. Judas (it may be, thinking that the blessed One would have been delivered in some way, as at other times, and thus he get his money, and yet save his character) consents. Man will excuse himself by any folly. Sin has its progress with a defiled conscience. Hypocrisy now enters ; he sits with Jesus at the table (goes on with religiousness), even after he had sold Him. Mark, too, it was " after the sop " that Satan entered, never nearer to Christ in form. Now he is hardened against even the relents of nature, goes out and betrays the Son of man with a kiss. Here then is the progress of corrupt nature towards this fearful consummation-firstly, lust; secondly, a means of gratifying it in his office of bearer of the bag ; all this goes on along with religiousness, in the very company of Christ, from day to day ; thirdly, he is led to the ultimate character of his crime, at a time and in

circumstances of most blessing to a true disciple ; fourthly, the heart is hardened, so that the betrayal takes place even with a kiss, the token of affection. Sinning and religiousness go on together. Again we say, and here we have an illustration of it, that where the power of godliness is not, nearness to godly things is only the more dangerous.

Well, we have the solemn declaration that such shall be the history of Christendom. " And I saw three unclean spirits ... which go forth unto the kings of the earth, and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty," Rev. 16. That day, when the long-suffering of God shall have closed, and shall have no more place, when in fact a longer delay would become the allowance of unrighteousness ; judgment will then be according to this nearness. Its full tide will roll in upon Christendom.

We speak not of the judgment of the dead, but of the living. Where, then, is the resource from this dreadful progress and consummation of wickedness, in the place where righteousness is expected ? It is not in man's will, for through that he is the slave of Satan ; nor in forms of religiousness : Satan can enter in with the sop. Neither the one nor the other will keep him out. Man's natural power, his capacity to do great things, may be vaunted on the one hand; and on the other a reliance upon ordinances and observances may be insisted upon. For a time these may seem the most opposing schools, but a connecting link will be found in man's corrupt nature, managed by the craft of the great enemy ; and at last both will subserve his purposes, who is to exalt " himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped : so that he sitteth in the temple of God , shewing himself that he is God." Where then is deliverance from the evil ? where is the escape ? The answer is most simple : In the fellowship of God's love. The place of special privileges unheeded, of special light, will be the place of special judgment.

A word in passing: Satan does not come all at once and say, I seek to turn you from God. He usually works by introducing that which would lead away from simplicity of reliance on the death of Christ-some " form of godliness "-and so ensnares. How are we to detect all this ? In the first place the believer must be set in heaven (not in body but in spirit) in the presence of God Himself. That is now his true place. " The way into the holiest of all was not yet manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." God was not revealed in His own full estimate of good and evil, before Christ and the cross. But now the holiest is open. The veil is rent. " The true light shineth." There is nothing between us and God. All is worthless that cannot stand in the light of His holiness. There were many things before which God did not approve, but which He permitted-Jewish divorcement, for instance (Mark 10 : 5). But at the death of Christ the full light of God's holiness, against the darkness of man's fully developed sin, was brought out. The veil was rent from top to bottom.

Divine goodness had come into the world, and displayed itself with every witness : what had man shewn himself to be ? A hater of divine goodness, in deliberate judgment. The full evil of the world, and, in the accomplishment of righteousness for us, the full grace of God, both came out at the cross. All the pains God had taken to reclaim man, as culture to a good-for-nothing tree, only resulted in his bearing more bad fruit, until the deliberate evil of his nature in hatred to God, was shewn in the death of Christ. This was the climax of his sin. But here also was shewn God's perfect love. Man's hatred to God come in goodness is one side of the cross, and the other is God in His highest act of love towards man in vileness.

God's own holiness has now come completely out. Since the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is no longer a question of coming up step by step to God. If man stand before God at all, he must stand in contact with the full light of His holiness. How did that light burst forth ? In the absolute putting

away of the sin of every believer, and that by the worst act of man's sin. The very sin that was detected by the light, that would have hindered the soul's approach, was put away through the blow that brought Jesus to the death ; and now the sinner stands in the absolute and full enjoyment of God's love. Such is His goodness! The more the searching eye of God rests on me, trusting to the perfect work of Christ, the more, as it were, does He discover the perfect value of the blood of Christ. The clearer the light, the more is it to shew that not a spot or stain is on me. What does He see ? The efficacy of the blood of His own provided Lamb-that which has put away my sin. The same light that detects the sin manifests its being utterly, and for ever, put away ; yea, has burst forth and shone in the putting it away. Here then is the safeguard. It is the knowledge of God's full putting away of sin-peace through the blood. I can have no thought of getting up to God, etc., when standing where Himself has brought me, even in His very presence.

We are called unto holiness, but what character does Christian holiness take ? Not the character of our own nature at all, nothing is recognised as of us. It is, " that we might be partakers of his holiness." Man's nature has been proved to be incorrigibly bad, it has hated and crucified Christ : God cannot own it, He seeks nothing from it. He has satisfied Himself in the cross about our evil ; and now He says, Be partakers of my good. Here again is a safeguard for the saints at the present hour. Those who, through the teaching of the Spirit of God, have learned this great and blessed truth, and through grace walk in fellowship with God, will be preserved from all legal attempts at holiness. They say, We want nothing before God, but only to glorify Him in our bodies. They are Christ before God, and they know it. Nothing else is wanted; nay, God would -repudiate anything else. It would be to call in question the sufficiency of Christ. Faith rests where God rests. What we have to do is to glorify Him by our life down here. But our walk down here is, nevertheless, not our standing before God in righteousness, though it be a testimony in man's sight to it.

Reader, have you rested where God rests ? What does God think about Christ ? Does your soul say, That is sufficient ? God rests in Him as having made peace through the blood of the cross. Is that peace consciously yours ? Salvation is the guard set up of God against the deceits of Satan.

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