

Knowledge

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between Christ and the believer, and highlights the Christian life as one of perfect safety, perfect standing, perfect strength, and perfect satisfaction.

Scripture: John 14:20, Romans 6:7, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Ephesians 3:12, Ephesians 3:17, Colossians 1:27, James 4:7, 1 Peter 3:15, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Christian Apologetics", "Divine Grace"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches about the importance of understanding the fundamental principles of Christianity and being able to explain and defend our faith. He highlights the different aspects of truth throughout Christian history, focusing on Christ as the Divine Redeemer, Perfect Justifier, and Complete Deliverer. The sermon emphasizes the believer's life in the divine grace and blessings of Christ, with a strong emphasis on the believer's relationship with God, assurance of salvation, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

This is preeminently a day of inquiry, of questioning as to fundamental principles. Several years ago, mainly under the guidance of the German scholar, Harnack, the question was very rife, "What is Christianity?" Such questioning is natural and inevitable, and ought to be heartily welcomed. The Jews were expected to tell their children the meaning of the Passover whenever the inquiry was made, "What mean ye by this service?" And the Apostle Peter bids us to be ready to give a reason to everyone who asks why we are what we are (1 Peter 3:15).

In matters Biblical, spiritual, and even ecclesiastical it is essential for us to be able to explain and vindicate our position. One thing, however, we must never forget, that truth is many-sided. It is like a crystal with several faces rather than like a piece of glass with one flat surface. As a diamond with various facets, so truth has its different aspects, and if only we realize this, we shall not go far wrong. Trouble arises if only one aspect is emphasized, for we are tempted to think that this is the only truth in existence.

During the Christian history there have been, perhaps, three main periods in which emphasis has been largely placed upon certain aspects of truth. During the early centuries the great thought was Christ as the Divine Redeemer. In the sixteenth century the stress fell on Christ as the Perfect Justifier. During the nineteenth century the chief point seems to have been, as it still is, on Christ the Complete Deliverer. So that we have in the early centuries, "My Saviour"; at the Reformation, "My Guilt"; and now, "My

Weakness".

The Christian life is concerned with the last of these three - My Weakness; Christ the Complete Deliverer. But, of course, the other two are presupposed. It is because Christ is the Divine Saviour, and because He is the Perfect Justifier, that we are enabled to contemplate Him as our complete Deliverance from sin; and thus to consider our weakness, our bondage, our defilement, everything that touches the life of the believer in relation to sin. It will therefore be wise and well to look a little at the fundamental implications and presuppositions of the Christian life, in order that we may thence proceed from stage to stage, from strength to strength, and from glory to glory.

This can best be done by concentrating attention on one of the numerous passages that reveal the believer's life in all the divine plenitude of grace and blessing: "In that day ye shall know that I am in My Father and ye in Me and I in you" (John 14:20). I. We may think first of our strong protection. "I am in My Father." This is the foundation, the relation of Christ to His Father. "What think ye of Christ?" is the question of questions today, and the union of the Lord Jesus Christ with His Father is the presupposition of everything.

A book was published some time ago entitled "Jesus in the Nineteenth Century and After". But we have to think of "Jesus in the First Century and Before"; this is where we must start. Now, our strong protection, "I am in My Father," means this first of all: the Lord Jesus as the Revelation of truth. He claimed to come from the Father, and He said He was the truth. He promised that the truth should make His disciples free. His constant word was, "I say unto you." This is the Lord Jesus Christ in His aspect as the Prophet of God.

Truth in the New Testament means two things, veracity and reality, and Christ is and reveals both. But it also means the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer from sin. He came not only to show, but to save; not only to teach, but to redeem. Sin has to be faced. We have to know what it is, and how it is to be removed. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." This means, in the third place, the Lord Jesus Christ in His Rule over life. He came preaching the Kingdom of God, and by this is to be understood the reign of God over human hearts and lives.

His claim was absolute over men. "Come unto Me," "Learn of Me," "Follow Me," "Abide in Me" - these were His constant assertions and claims. This is the idea found in old-fashioned theology: "Jesus my Prophet, Priest and King". He is Prophet to reveal, Priest to redeem, King to rule. Here, then, is where we start - what I call our strong protection. This is what we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing short of this will satisfy either the New Testament teaching or the needs of any individual heart and life.

In the introduction to a book by Sir Robert Anderson, the Bishop of Durham (Dr. Moule) used these words, and they are worthy of constant repetition: "A Saviour not quite God is a bridge broken at the farther end." II. Then we can go on to think of our safe position. "Ye in Me." After thinking of Christ as in the Father, we consider ourselves as in Christ. "Ye in Me." We are in Christ, first of all, for pardon. Let us not be indifferent to these elementary truths. They are the presupposition of everything else.

Pardon is the first blessing associated with the Christian religion. There is no other religion in the world that has this message of pardon. Professor Huxley once said: "There is no forgiveness in nature," and all the great writers of fiction for the last fifty years have had for their theme the nemesis of broken law. Kipling says somewhere: "The sins ye do by two and two, Ye must pay for one by one." And yet all through the ages we have been expressing our belief in the forgiveness of sins because we rest upon the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His message of pardon makes forgiveness possible for everyone, perfect forgiveness, eternal forgiveness, assured forgiveness. Then we are in Christ for righteousness. Righteousness is much more than pardon. Pardon is like being stripped of old clothes. Righteousness is like receiving new clothes instead. Pardon is negative. Righteousness is positive. The King of England can bestow his royal pardon and manifest his royal clemency to a man who is in prison; and when that man goes out, he is a free man, with the King's pardon.

Yet as we see him going along the road, we know he is a pardoned criminal. What the King of England cannot do is to reinstate the man as if he had never broken the law. To the end of his days he will be a pardoned criminal. But the Christian is not only a pardoned criminal, he is a perfectly righteous man. What the King of England cannot do, the King of Kings can do. That is the meaning of righteousness. An old woman once said, "It is too good to be true, but, praise the Lord, it is true!"

We can heartily endorse that old woman's theology. We have righteousness, we are righteous in Christ, in the Lord who is our righteousness. That is what St. Paul means in the well-known passage: "He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him." And we are in Christ for peace. If pardon is safety from condemnation, and righteousness safety from guilt, peace is safety from fear. In some respects fear is the most terrible of all our daily experiences.

Yet the new blessing of pardon, and the new gift of righteousness, will always issue in the new relationship of peace. First comes peace with God, and out of that "the peace of God" filling our souls. This is exactly what our Lord said: "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace." On the day when Adam and Eve sinned, there were three immediate results. The moment they sinned there was a consciousness of guilt. They knew they had done wrong. That was immediately followed by a sentence of condemnation.

God condemned their sin. That in turn was followed by an act of separation. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Guilt; condemnation; separation. Now think of the Gospel. At the end of Romans 8 the Apostle asks three questions: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" There is no guilt. "Who is he that condemneth?" There is no condemnation. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" There is no separation. So that the very three things we lost through sin we more than gain in Christ.

This is our safe position, "Ye in Me." III. We proceed to notice our sure provision. "I in you." Christ in the Father is our protection; the believer in Christ is our position; and Christ in the believer is our provision. "I in you" is intended first of all for life. Christ provides more than pardon; He gives life. He provides more than peace; He bestows life. Our Lord Himself tells us this: "I am come that ye might have life," and all through the fourth Gospel the keynote of almost every chapter is life, until at length we have the purpose of the whole, "That ye might believe, and, believing, have life" (20:31).

So that the highest gift is life, and this means Christ in the believer as his life, just as St. Paul says: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Let us take time to dwell upon this, and when we are alone, let us spend a moment and say to ourselves perhaps aloud, "Christ lives in me." Christ is in us not only for life, but for grace. Grace in the New Testament is in some respects one of the greatest words. It always means two things. - God's favour and His blessing; His attitude and His action.

We are told of grace to "help in time of need"; that grace is "sufficient"; that "God is able to make all grace abound." There are no two people alike. It is probable there is no experience that can be paralleled exactly by any other experience. And yet, whatever may be our personal need, or our different hereditary

tendencies, or our actual experience, God's grace is sufficient; and it is really only a false pride that would hide itself saying, "There is no life like mine, and my needs are too exceptional to be supplied!"

Let us face Scripture when it says, "God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto all good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). Then Christ is in the believer for hope. This points to the future. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and hope is one of the three Christian graces, and a very prominent feature in New Testament Christianity. We find there not only faith and love, but hope. Hope is always associated with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason why people are not full of hope is because they are not concerned as they ought to be about the Lord's coming. In Scripture the Lord's coming is mentioned over three hundred times. This prominence shows its importance. Hope, in the New Testament, is never mere buoyancy of temperament, but a Christian grace centered on the coming of the Lord. This is what we mean by Christ in us for hope. "Christ in you the hope of glory." IV. We are also reminded of our satisfying privilege.

"Ye shall know." What does this mean? To know, in the New Testament, is far more than something merely intellectual; it is that which may be called the verifying faculty, including mind, heart, conscience and will. Knowledge in the New Testament is experience expressed in assurance. And the text promises that we shall "know" the very three things mentioned. "Ye shall know that I am in My Father." There shall be assurance in the believer's life that Christ is in the Father. This comes through the Resurrection.

From the time of the Resurrection onwards Christ is never said to have raised Himself. It is always the act of God. The Resurrection was not Christ's own act, but God's act in vindicating His Son, in bearing witness to what He thought about Christ. When the believer is assured that the Lord Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, he gets the assurance that God did it, and that this is what God thinks of His beloved Son. "Ye shall know" also that the believer is in Christ. This comes through the death of Christ.

We have the assurance that we are in Christ because of His death. That death in the New Testament always means these three things: Substitution - "He died instead of me"; Representation - "He died on behalf of me"; Identification - "I died when He died." We cannot properly understand the Atonement unless we take all these three together; and the assurance, "Ye shall know that ye are in Me," is the assurance that the death of Christ took place for our salvation, and covers all our need.

Then there is the assurance that Christ is in us: "Ye shall know that I am in you." This is associated with the life of Christ. We have the assurance that Christ is living. There is a well-known story of a man looking at a picture of the Crucifixion in a shop window, and a little ragged urchin also looking at it. The man pretended to know nothing about it, and said to the boy, "What's that?" The boy, astonished, replied, "Don't you know that is Jesus on the Cross who died?" And he told him the story of the Crucifixion.

"Oh," said the gentleman, "is it?" and walked away. In a little while he heard footsteps coming after him. It was the little boy, and he said, "Sir, I wanted to tell you that He is alive." Yes, this is the New Testament perspective, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore." The assurance of Scripture is, "Ye shall know that I am in you," the living Christ. So we have life and death and Resurrection as the guarantee of our assurance in Christ. This knowledge provides us with certainty.

"Ye shall know." St. Luke wrote his Gospel, "that thou mightest know the certainty." Certainty is what everyone desires. "That ye may know." There is so much uncertainty today. Someone has said that "Mystery involves all spiritual truths." But if this is so, it is not the mystery of vagueness and confusion, but

of truth's Divinity and glory. It is not the mystery of fog, but of sunshine, a mystery "dark with excess of light." The mystery is not in the truths, but in those associated with them.

A modern writer said not long ago that in the old days the prophets were absolutely certain, and said, "Here I am," but nowadays the people say, "Where am I?" The New Testament has no such uncertainty. It has been acutely pointed out that there are two notes of modern life not found in the New Testament - wistfulness and pensiveness. There is nothing wistful and nothing pensive about New Testament Christianity: "I know," "I have," "I believe." "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

It is usual to find out on enlistment a man's religious denomination. A soldier was once asked, "What is your persuasion?" He replied, "I am persuaded that nothing shall separate me from the love of Christ." Just so; and this is the assurance of the New Testament. V. But the Word does not leave us without telling of our spiritual power. "In that day ye shall know." What does this mean? "In that day" - we find the phrase three times in these chapters - once here, and twice in the sixteenth.

"In that day" means, of course, the Christian dispensation, from the day of Pentecost onwards. "In that day" is in the day when the Holy Spirit should come. "Ye shall know," and therefore all our Christian life is to be associated with the Holy Spirit. First, the Holy Spirit is a Divine gift. Pentecost was a kind of watershed. It looked back upon the time when the Lord Jesus was upon earth, and looked forward to the time when the disciples should be influenced and empowered by the Lord Christ above.

The Holy Ghost was the gift of the Father to the Son, and the Son shed forth that gift on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit of God was not given before, in that sense, because Jesus Christ was not yet glorified. It was necessary for Him to go up before the Holy Spirit could come down. But when He ascended and received the gift, He poured it forth, and the Divine Spirit has been with the Church ever since. "In that day," therefore, means the whole of this dispensation, including the present moment.

From this comes the thought of the Holy Spirit as an inward witness. The Divine Gift of Pentecost becomes the inward possession of every individual believer who accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour; for, on believing, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit becomes his, and at once the Holy Spirit begins to work in his soul and to give him assurance. Then there is the Holy Spirit as an outward power in the life, manifesting itself in character and service.

This is the meaning of "In that day". Every gift in Christianity is associated with the Holy Spirit. This is the unique feature of the Christian religion, contrasted with which all other religions are as nothing. Other religions have their books, their ethics, their philosophy, but not one of them has a Holy Spirit, as Christianity has, "And every virtue we possess, And every victory won, And every thought of holiness - Are His alone." This, then, is the New Testament life - these four things: perfect safety, perfect standing, perfect strength, and perfect satisfaction.

Perfect safety - "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation"; perfect standing - "accepted in the Beloved"; perfect strength - "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"; perfect satisfaction - "satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord". Let us rest upon these, let us rejoice in them, because they are ours in Christ. But now comes the question whether we "know" these things. Are they ours? Does anything hinder us from enjoying this Christianity?

Shall we not ask ourselves this question? We have our needs, and our difficulties, but God will meet and overcome our difficulties, and satisfy all our needs, if we will just face this question, and get right with Him. There are perhaps only five possibilities in explanation of the reason why we do not enjoy our Christian religion. The first, and in some respects the greatest, is sin. Yet that need not trouble us, because "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

The Lord Jesus Christ is able to deal with "sins" (Rom. 3:25), and also "sin" (Rom. 6:7) - the root of sin and its fruit in sins. He can deal with every one of them under all circumstances. It may not be sin, but sorrow. There are some who are weighed down with a burden of sorrow, sorrow in their hearts, sorrow in their homes, sorrow in their church, sorrow among their acquaintances - some sorrow that is terribly burdensome. To all such God says, "Be of good cheer." A man wrote a postcard to a friend, and on that side of the postcard where it says "Address only" he wrote the words, "Be of good cheer."

When the friend received the postcard, he was compelled to pay extra postage, and was not particularly pleased. He looked to see what the reason was, and on the "Address" side he saw the words, "Be of good cheer," and underneath the postal authorities' stamp, "Contrary to regulation". There are many Christians who think that to be of good cheer is contrary to regulation. That is why they are doleful and sad. They look, as it has been said, as if their religion did not agree with them.

Cheerfulness and smiles ought to belong to the Christian religion; these are not contrary to the regulations. "These things write I unto you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Then there are some people whom circumstances keep from enjoyment of religion. And yet what are these? Just think of the word "circumstances" - those things that "stand round" us. But if they stand round, they cannot keep out the sky. And so we must not trouble about things around us, but keep looking up.

Isaiah 41:10: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: look not around thee, for I am thy God" (Hebrew). Circumstances should never overcome us. "How is Mrs. So-and-So?" "She is pretty well," was the reply, "under the circumstances." Then came the rejoinder, "What is she doing under the circumstances? The circumstances ought to be under her." But someone says that it is Satan; not sin or sorrow or circumstances, but Satan. And yet Satan is a defeated foe. The Lord said, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me."

And the Apostle said, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." If we resist him, he will go. He can never overcome your individuality, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is more than sufficient to meet every onslaught. "I give you power over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you." Someone else says that it is due to self. That is, in many cases, the greatest trouble of all. Yet the Apostle says, "Not I, but Christ"; "Not I, but the grace of God that is with me"; "Not I, but the Lord."

Three times over he says, "Not I, but ..." If we face self in that way, self shall never have the victory. "It is just as different as can be," said a young believer. "What is so different?" "Being a Christian. Everything is so different from what I expected." "What did you expect?" "When you used to talk to me about being a Christian, I used to say to myself, 'No, I cannot, for I shall have to do so many hard things, and I never can do them. If I become a Christian, I shall have to attend church, and pray, and read my Bible.'

It is so different from what I thought." "What do you mean? You go to church, and you pray, and you read your Bible." "Yes, but then I love to do them. That makes all the difference. I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore love to do all that He wishes me to do." A man said to another, "Did you not say that if a man became a Christian he could do as he liked?" "Yes, I did." "Well, come with me tonight to the theatre." "Ah!

but I don't like." I once heard a friend say, "Faith makes all things possible, and love makes all things easy."

I would venture to add that hope makes all things bright. Here is Christianity; and if you want to know how to become a Christian, and enjoy Christianity to the full, it is all summed up in the little word "trust". It means, first, the acceptance of God's Word; secondly, surrender to Christ; and thirdly, the reception of His grace. In Ephesians 3:12 we find four words; and if we reverse them, we get Christianity in the proper order. "In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence, through the faith of Him."

First faith, then confidence, then access, and then boldness; and there we have the whole of the Christian life. That is the meaning of "trust," of which we read so much in the New Testament. It means taking God at His word, surrendering to Him, receiving His grace, and, of course, living in His presence. Some will perhaps remember the story of the two friends of the great painter, Turner. They visited him in order to see his pictures. When they arrived, Turner kept them for a short while in a closely-shaded room before he sent the servant to take them up to the studio.

Arrived in the studio, he apologized for his apparent rudeness by telling them that it was necessary for their eyes to be emptied of any glare before they could appreciate the colours in his pictures. We need to live in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that we may be emptied of everything that is common and earthly, and in order also that we may see and rejoice in His beauty. Living with the Lord Jesus Christ, living a life of trust and fellowship will give us all this true Christian experience.

"Live every day with Jesus,

And tell Him everything;

A life of richest blessing

Thy months and years will bring;

Tell Him thy aims and wishes,

Tell Him thy hopes and fears;

The sunshine of His presence

Illumines smiles and tears.

"Live every day with Jesus;

Let Him thy life control,

His voice of love inspiring

Each impulse of the soul;

Lean on His word for guidance,

Speak to Him of each grief,

Telling all things to Jesus

Brings gladness and relief.

"Live every day for Jesus;

Oh, happy, restful lot!

His watchful care about Thee;

Never by Him forgot;

In darkest hour still with thee,

In loneliest hour thy Friend,

Who never will forsake thee

Unto thy journey's end.

"And then? to live with Jesus

In the full sunlight, where

No pain, or loss, or sorrow

Will need thy trust and prayer;

But joy - His joy - forever

Will crown His work of grace,

And thou shalt serve, beholding

The glory of God's face."

- J. H. S.

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