

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

had not been diminished by the fatigue of a long service immediately preceding, and his hearers, with their interest still keen, would give to a discourse of three-quarters of an hour, or even of a full hour, an attention which they now find it difficult to keep from wandering for twenty-five minutes. There are, no doubt, some ministers whose incapacity for preaching would be made conspicuous by this isolation of their sermons, but if they were induced in consequence to limit themselves to other forms of ministerial activity—and a properly organized church would have many ministerial functions outside the pulpit for which such men would be set apart to its great advantage—the cutting out of dead wood thereby effected would be not the least valuable gain resulting from this reform. (Let me remark, in parenthesis, on the curious fact that while the practitioner in almost every other occupation is becoming more and more of a specialist, the average minister of to-day has not only more things to do, but a greater variety of things, than his predecessor of fifty years ago.)

On the other hand, the man who was really able to say things worth hearing would have a much larger sphere of usefulness. He would no longer be prevented from undertaking those subjects, many of them of the greatest importance and interest, which it is quite useless to attempt to deal with within the conventional limits of a Sunday discourse. He would have an opportunity of stimulating and directing Biblical study by considering occasionally the significance of a prophecy or epistle as a whole, or by tracing the development of a doctrine or ethical principle through several periods of Scripture history. When once the character of this meeting became generally known, the well-qualified preacher would soon draw an audience, and his hearers would include many of that class which the various Churches are now lamentably unsuccessful in reaching—young men and women of fair education who find it so easy to secure skilful teaching in the things of the mind, and so difficult to obtain competent guidance and instruction in the things of the soul.

The Life of Faith.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. W. W. HOLDSWORTH, BIRMINGHAM.

The Consecration of Life.—JOHN xvii.

IN a recent work on the Fourth Gospel¹ it is claimed that this chapter is wholly ecclesiastical in aim. It is the culmination of the life of Jesus, and 'throws a light back on the whole intention of the Gospel.' That Gospel is the story of 'the up-building of the Church,' and its ecclesiastical purpose comes out in the 'doctrinal basis upon which the true Church must rest,' and in the view of the sacraments advanced in it, a view which 'arose out of contemporary discussion as to the nature of the Lord's Supper.' 'Contemporary,' it must be observed, denotes approximately the middle of the second century, an assumption for which no evidence is offered. There is, however, quite another view of 'the intention of the Gospel,' and it is this which forms the basis of these papers. It has the advantage of being in accordance with the clear statement of its author. 'These things are written that ye might believe, and that believing ye might

have life through His Name.' That is to say, faith to the believer passes into life, and both faith and life rest upon that Divine Person whom we have learned to see in Jesus Christ. It is true that this chapter is a culmination, but it is the culmination of the life described in these last sayings of our Lord, and that culmination is found in the consecration of life to the Father.

For the one idea which runs through the chapter and links together its many elemental conceptions and its one supreme purpose is consecration. The Son consecrates Himself in prayer. He has now been made perfect by obedience, and He brings His own perfect offering to the Father that His disciples may be offered in their turn, and through them the world be brought into that knowledge of God which means a perfect union with the Divine Nature, and a complete participation in the joy and love of the divine life. 'In the perfected work of the Saviour lies the consecration of humanity,'²

¹ *The Fourth Gospel*, by E. F. Scott, M.A. Published by T. & T. Clark.

² Westcott *in loco*.

and the Son now declares that work ready to be dedicated to God. The act of consecration would bring with it that glory which seems to be increasingly before the Saviour's vision during His later ministry, for it would be a revelation of the Son as one with the Father in nature. 'Glorify me with thyself; I have glorified thee; I have manifested thy name. Keep these my disciples in thy name. That they may be one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me.' It is in v.¹⁷ that we approach the climax of thought in this connexion, if indeed a climax may be found where every petition all but transcends human thought. 'Consecrate them in the truth. I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in truth,' so the words run. It is to be noticed that their consecration is to follow the type indicated by our Lord's own act, and He had consecrated Himself by yielding Himself up to the Father. In His obedience He had laid Himself upon the altar that sanctifies. In this later act the initial act of the Incarnation was repeated, and in the laying down of life, in the exercise of a free unfettered will, He was making a final offering of Himself. In that consummate act of 'obedience unto death' He waited for the answering self-committal of the Father. 'Glorify thou me with thyself'—the prayer rightly claims that the surrender of self, which is the obedience of faith, be followed by the Father's committing Himself in glory to the Son. And He did so in an atmosphere which continually encompassed Him; in it He breathed; from it He drew His life. That atmosphere was 'the truth,' that expression of the divine mind, which had found for men its perfect embodiment in the Christ Himself. Only in so far as they were consecrated in this truth could His disciples be truly consecrated to God. As an expression of the divine mind Christ was 'the Word'; as the sum of all that is absolute and eternal, the essence of that which was expressed in the 'Word,' He was the 'Truth.' The finite and the infinite are united in Him, and it is in a true relation to Himself that His disciples will be sanctified. What is that relation? 'In the truth,'—again the words come to us with the strange blend which they always bring of that which is native to our souls, yet transcends our experience. It is the fulness of a spiritual communion which is over and over again before us in the phrase 'in Christ.' We have seen this to be the description of our daily

life; it is now the condition of our final glory. And that there may be no question in our doubting mind as to the closeness of the fellowship which is indicated here, our Lord sets before us as its great prototype the communion which exists between the Father and Himself; 'even as thou art in me, and I in thee.'

Who shall declare the mystery? Who shall tell us how there can be Father and Son separate in Person, yet one in Being. We humbly subscribe to the words of our Creeds, but the explanation of them awaits the day when all 'mirrors' shall be taken away, and, face to face with Deity, 'we shall know even as also we are known.'¹

So much as this, however, we can see, that while perhaps we shall never frame any adequate explanation of the great Doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, it suggests to us a fellowship of love, a union whose intimacy we dimly guess at, but can never explain. So close is our union to be with Him who is the Way, the Truth, the Life. When that union is consummated, then human life is consecrated, made divine, and our emptiness is filled unto all the fulness of God.

For man the consecrating element of life is the Person of Jesus Christ. In Him our human trust finds first a human person upon whom it may cast itself in the fulness of confidence, in the abandon of love. Our mortal feebleness leans upon Him 'Who was tempted in all points like as we are,' and is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities.'² But in Him we have much more than this; we have also the answering stoop of the grace of God to our human appeal. Our trust is justified by the power of God, which He is, and which is made perfect in our weakness. Only the Divine Man could thus both elicit and fulfil our faith. Only Christ can be its 'Author and Finisher.'³ And He is not one thing to one man and another to a second. He is not one thing to-day and something else to-morrow. We are prone to think of His life as though it was to be found in separate compartments; to-day He is the perfect Man to whom our enthusiasm goes out in reverence; but to-morrow He is God, remote and terrible, a searching Judge, a consuming flame. Christ is not divided. His Person gives us the unity we need. In Him we meet the sympathy of a heart as human as our own, and at the very same moment we come upon the God in whom our life

¹ 1 Co 13¹².² He 4¹⁵.³ He 12².

finds its only fulfilment. It is just because this human teacher, truest friend, who knelt in the Temple courts and poured out His soul in this prayer, in which a divine self-consciousness is blended with the tenderness of care, was also the Truth, the Word, which was in fellowship with God in the beginning,¹—it is just because He is the meeting-place of the human and the divine, that He becomes to man the sphere of a spiritual consecration, and in fellowship with Him man is consecrated to the glory of God. 'Out of his fulness we all received, and grace for grace.'

The doctrine of the Person of Christ has not received in the age that has just closed the attention that it deserves. Our thought is more easily held by a spiritual act than by a spiritual Person as the central idea in our schemes of Atonement. We have forgotten that it is 'in him that we have our redemption'; that 'He is the propitiation,' and that it is 'in him' that we are 'sealed with that Spirit,' who is but 'the earnest of our inheritance.'² It may be, too, that we have hesitated to speak of the personal union of the soul with the Person of Christ because we have feared to convey the idea that our life consisted in the impartation to us of that humanity which reached its highest in Him. But time always bring its remedial touch, and the thought of men turns with increasing longing to personal fellowship with God in Jesus Christ as that relation in which we shall know the fulness of our life. He saves us from the historic failures of the past. We shall not be deluded into the Nirvana of the Buddhist or accept as our destiny the obliteration of personality which has captivated the mind of India. That which they ignorantly feel after 'with hands that grope and gather dust and chaff,' we have given to us in the Divine Person in whom we know ourselves to be one with God. When that union has become the perfected experience of the individual and of the Church, the salvation of the world will at last draw nigh.

Once more, at the risk of wearying by repetition, we state the thought that lies close enfolded in this prayer of consecration. In a full recognition of God as seen in Christ, in obedience to all which that revelation claims or enjoins, making that obedience the law of our life, we place ourselves upon the consecrating altar of surrender to God, and know ourselves, as far as our wills can help us, one

with God in thought, in purpose, in readiness for prayer, in sacrifice. As in this obedience of faith we surrender ourselves to God, there rest upon us His gracious hands of acceptance, and in Christ we are consecrated. His by our own act of self-surrender, we are doubly His by His coming into our life. He 'commits himself'³ to us; man 'sees into the heart of God,' and in that perfect fellowship he knows the life which is life indeed, for the life of faith passes thus into the life of love. All dreams of knowledge, power, joy, become forthwith the proper object of our hope,⁴ for that hope is now embodied in Christ, and we move 'with the rays of morn on our white shields of expectation' to the fulness of our inheritance in God.⁵

We are not likely to understand the New Testament teaching of 'life in Christ' unless we first begin by clearing our minds as to the nature of saving faith. We say that life is given to us on condition that we exercise faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. But this is seen to follow directly only when we have grasped the great teaching of St. John, that faith is an act of will by which we yield ourselves up to Christ. The consequent effects of such a surrender are those that appear in all life. They are found in power, in knowledge, and in joy. The eyes of love look into the heart of God, and then it is that man truly lives, finding his life upon a plane upon which death has no place and cannot interrupt the life. Faith issues in 'the power of endless life.'⁶ But this follows not upon the assent of a satisfied reason, but rather upon the determination of a will which is content to run the risks of love and trust. We have emphasized too much the conviction of the mind in the act of faith. Such conviction, of course, there will ever be, for God asks from us an intelligent act in that which makes us His, and which is to elicit the answer of His fellowship with us.' But far beyond the mental grasp is that fling of the soul upon God, which makes it one with Him. And not infrequently that act is realized after faith has consecrated the very claim of reason to be satisfied. Not once alone has the consummate drama of faith's surrender been enacted. We in our turn wait not to see the print of the nails in the pierced hands, or to thrust our hands into the wounded side. 'It is enough,' 'If I perish, I perish in thy arms,' we cry, 'My Lord, and my God!'⁷

¹ Jn 1¹.² Eph 1⁷, 1 Jn 1², Eph 1¹³.³ Jn 1⁷, γνωσκειν.⁴ 1 Ti 1¹.⁵ Ro 8¹⁷.⁶ He 7¹⁶.⁷ Jn 20²⁸.