10. IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.—John 8:31.

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31. To be a believer is one thing, to be a disciple is quite another thing, and the difference between the two may be the difference between the babe in its mother's arms, and the graduate of the university with the highest honors on his head. A single glance at Christ can save the soul: it takes a lifelong gaze at Christ to satisfy the soul.

Our Lord was speaking to those who had already believed, when He used this language. To believe is to be born of God, but there are many venerable babes in the church, old in years, but infantile in spiritual stature. And I doubt not that God grieves over dwarfs in His family even more than we should if we had such a misfortune in ours. And what is the remedy? He replies: "You have believed the Gospel and so been begotten again by 'the incorruptible seed of the word,' continue to feed upon this gospel so that you may be disciples or students of mine. Feeding
IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD

upon Holy Scripture, that ye may grow up in all things into him who is the Head." This is God's method of spiritual development. But as for man, he has sought out many inventions. Thousands of Christians depend for their religion on the reciting of the creeds and resting in the confessions of the Church. And what are confessions? The Bible is the sincere milk of the Word, and confessions are condensed milk of the Word: the gospels are the fruit of the tree of life; and creeds are the canned fruit. And what is the objection to making these creeds and confessions the staple of our religion? The objection is that God does not want us to live on canned fruit. It is not so healthful and nourishing as that which is gathered daily. In the Bible we have the tree of life, "which bears twelve manner of fruits and yields her fruit every month." What variety and freshness, twelve kinds and twelve crops in a year! There is not a question but if you will pick your basket full every day and eat, you will find the Scriptures always sweet and refreshing; that you will not have to complain of the lack of relish in reading the Word of God.

It is here, as with other books. What student would make any real progress in knowledge who should flit from page to page in his studies: picking here a sentence and there a sentence, here a line, and there a line? Diligent pursuit and patient continuance are absolutely essential to any real growth in knowledge. "If ye abide in my word then are ye my disciples indeed"—living in it, growing from it—"Ye shall be my disciples"—mastering my secrets, knowing my will, reliving my life and manifesting forth my glory. Be not content, my brother, to be a sinner saved merely; claim and appropriate your privilege of being a disciple sanctified.

When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me.
—MICAH 7:8.

What we need is a divine release and a divine re-enforcement. We need to be rid of the old burdens, and then to be subjects of the new birth. Christ gives both—a divine forgiveness and a divine heredity—His own blessed life comes into us to hold us up in right doing after He has lifted us up, to give a new ancestral law which impels us to do right as the old impelled us to do wrong. "When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me," "Shut your eyes in order that you may see"—This is what you do when you pray. You draw the curtains of the eyes, and enter into the closet of the soul, and shut the doors that you may see God. You realize instinctively that you must exclude the world in order to commune with God. The inward eye, in other words, sees most clearly when the outward eye is shut.

The whole secret of the power of self-denial and fasting lies just here. Why does the gardener cut off half the branches of an apple tree in order to make it more fruitful? Because in this way he can concentrate the vital forces of the tree in fewer branches, and so nourish the bud and fruit of these as to double their capacity for fruit-bearing. So, exactly, you cut off the fleshly senses from indulgence in order to make the spiritual senses more active and keen. In other words, the same amount of vital force is more powerful when concentrated in one sense than when divided between two. Therefore it is that a blind man has often so much keener hearing, and so much finer sense of touch, than he who is not so afflicted.

During a heavy London fog a few years since, so heavy
that it was impossible for one to see anything a foot beyond his eyes, a merchant got lost in trying to find his way home. Running against another man in the dark, he told him his dilemma. He replied, "Oh, come along, I will guide you home; the darkness does not trouble me, for I am blind." It is a significant story. The loss of one sense had strengthened the others, so that the sense of feeling had now come to fill the place of the sense of sight.

And what says the Scripture concerning the Christian? "For we walk by faith and not by sight." And faith looks "not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen." And the man of faith can lead the man of reason when the latter cannot find his way: "When I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light unto me." If you are willing to choose the darkness of faith instead of the illumination of reason, wonderful light will break out upon you from the Word of God.

The deepest things in Scripture can never be discovered by the natural understanding. This is what is meant by that saying, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love him." The sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the sense of feeling—these cannot grasp the mysteries of God contained in the Bible. "But," it is immediately added, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." And the eye of faith is the organ by which we appropriate what the Spirit reveals. If you have been brought into darkness through trial or chastisement, be assured that God can use it for the clearer illumination of the soul. "Unto the upright there ariseth a light in the darkness," says the Psalmist; and we have to add, that unto the worldly there ariseth darkness out of the light.

And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. —1 Timothy 6:8.

This would seem like a small allowance to be contented on, but it is all a person can have. Our capacity for acquirement and possession is strictly limited. The heavens are full of air, but no one can inhale more than a lungful at a time. The earth is covered with food, but no one can take in more than a stomachful of it at once. You can possess only according to your capacity. The moment you go beyond that you are possessed; your wealth has you instead of your having it; you have changed places with your property and consented to its owning you. You have become a slave instead of a master. Instead of being contented with what you have, what you have is more and more discontented with you, till it has utterly absorbed and possessed you.

It is a universal law that the greater controls the less. Put two drops of water on your finger tips and let them touch and immediately the greater will absorb the less. Put a man and his wealth side by side and let them grow, and as soon as the wealth becomes greater than the man it will master him; it will completely monetize him so that he will think in dollars and cents, and when appealed to will respond with a kind of metallic ring, as of a coin flung upon the counter, instead of in warm human terms.

It is clear what the discontent is which stands over against the godly contentment referred to here. Jesus has sketched it in the parable of the rich man: "I will tear down my barns and build greater," he says. It is discontent with sufficiency already in hand. "I will build greater." "I have a large estate but I wish to increase it, that I may be
called a millionaire. I have a house comfortable and ample for my needs, but I am going to build an ampler one in an aristocratic neighborhood. I have a farm in the country, but I am going to add field to field. I have one home; I am going to own two. I have a good coat but am going to cast it aside and get a better one.” It is the discontent that is always grasping after more for self instead of the content which says, “Enough for self, and more for Thee, my Lord, more for Thee who though rich for my sake became poor.”

Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow.—Matthew 6:34.

That means no anxious, fretful thought. Walk through today as well as you can, and God will take care of the future. When you go forward out of today to worry about tomorrow, you are over the fence, trespassing on God’s domain, and God may scourge you back into your own lot. When I have been fishing in a mountain stream I have found that so long as I kept a short line I could manage very well. But when I let my line run out, the stream took it along, and there I was, at the mercy of every stick in the water and every rock that jutted from the banks. I lost my fish and I tangled my line; very likely I lost my footing too and fell in.

Now many people cast their line into life forty years long, when it ought to be no longer than a day. In consequence they are unable to manage their tackle at all, but are pulled about after it, stumbling first into one hole and then into another, slipping up here and slipping down there, struggling and splashing about in far more distressed fashion than the fish at the other end of the line—and more times than a few there is no fish there. Haul in your line!

These words are used in the psalm to describe a good man. Our steadfastness, therefore, depends not on our knowledge of God or on our love for God but on our trust in God. Our knowledge is often clouded, and our love is subject to ebings and flowings like the tide; but trust keeps the soul stayed and immovable, because it is fastened to Him who is the “same yesterday, today and forever.” “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.”

Knowledge is, of course, a privilege and delight when it is granted, but it is not essential to trust. I saw a parlor clock which was enclosed in a glass case. All the mechanism and motion of the clock was clearly visible—every adjustment of the wheels, every click of the lever, every swing of the pendulum. But I did not need that the clock should be in a glass case in order to trust it to tell me the time. Ordinarily, only the hands and face are to be seen, and these are enough to go by. So an intimate knowledge of God’s ways is not necessary in order to warrant our trust in Him. I do not need to understand all the adjustments and relations of Divine Providence. On the dial-plate of Scripture I see the hands pointing to the promises and commands and the rewards of discipleship. That is sufficient. I believe and trust. God says it shall be and I ask for no more. Faith does not insist that it be told why it shall be or how.

This holds true especially in the matter of salvation. God says: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” One has only to take that promise and act upon it, and trust God for the issue. He need not know all the intricacies of the plan of salvation. He need not look
through the glass case to some system of theology to see how each wheel of doctrine fits into every other wheel—free-will and foreordination, faith and atonement, repentance, and forgiveness. The figure on the dial—God's gracious promise—the hand of God pointing clearly and unerringly to it, that suffices for confidence. He believes the promise, and the heart becomes "fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Does anyone whose religious life is as yet unsettled want rest? He cannot find it by investigation or speculation. If a boat is thumping and pitching and careening in the waves, a sounding line will not steady it, even if it tells the depth of the waters to an inch. So when the soul is in unrest, "carried about with every wind of doctrine," a deeper knowledge, a profounder speculation, a more searching investigation will not give peace to the soul. Trust will do it, for it fastens upon God, and makes us partaker of His unchangeableness. And that is God's first care in dealing with a soul—to establish it, that, being established, it may advance to higher blessing. "It is a good thing," says the Apostle, "that the heart be established with grace." He does not say "established with knowledge." Knowledge too often puffeth up, and whatever puffeth up a man unsteadies him. But grace is the pillow of the soul, by which it lies on the bosom of God and rests serenely in His wisdom and love.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms and of the laying on of hands and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal punishment. And this will we do if God permit.—Hebrews 6:1-3.
makes not only our happiness, but our usefulness depend on our daily appropriation of His inward life and light.

The manna was sweet and fresh if gathered every day, so with Christian experience that is new every morning and fresh every evening. How beautiful that saying of the Apostle, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.” This can be true only as we are in daily contact with Christ by prayer, and are daily feeding on Christ through study of the Word. Oh, my soul, fail not morning by morning to look into the face of Christ before thou hast looked into the face of any man: breakfast with Him before thou break the fast of thy body: come forth from His presence into the presence of men, then truly shalt thou be a sweet savor of Christ; all thy garments “shall smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces whereby he hath made thee glad.”

The Christian is a “gospeller,” to use a name given in derision to the followers of Wickliffe; but since Gospel means “good news,” Christians are Christ’s newsmen to the world. And is it not a reasonable requirement that our news shall be news, gained by direct communication with heaven, and not the rehearsal of fifty-year-old experiences revamped and retold? If we are in living communication with Christ we shall have answered prayers to speak of every day, good tidings from heaven, confirming His faithfulness, fresh evidence that Christ lives at the right hand of God and is doing for His people and through His people just what He promised to do before He went away.

Observe the things which we are to leave behind: the fundamentals—repentance and faith. Do not dwell forever on your conversion years ago, but tell us about your conquests over sin today. The doctrine of baptism and laying on of hands—beautiful and blessed as it is—do not let it take us back forever to the day of your espousal when you were baptized into Christ, and received the hand of fellowship or confirmation. Can’t you tell us something about your baptism of the Holy Ghost today? Can’t you report that only lately you have had faith to lay hands on the sick and see them recovered? The latest news is what the world wants to hear from Christians. If you haven’t such, then make it your study to get it. If you know your privilege you will have a private telephone connecting you with the throne, and will not have to depend on the weekly bulletin of the religious newspapers or even upon the announcements of the pulpit. Daily manna gives a daily message.

Now thanks be to God which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ.—2 Corinthians 2:14 (R.V.).

Self-denial is only one-half of consecration, useless without the other half, which is appropriation of Christ. “Thanks be to God who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ.” This last word, “in Christ,” is a note of victory.
The great value of our weakness and defeat is that it lets us down solidly upon Christ. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh," says Paul. And again, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." The only place where God is weak is in us; the only place where we are strong is in God. The "in Christ" is the coupling which attaches us to God. All the strength of His omnipotence becomes ours when this coupling is fastened. Here is the secret of a victorious Christian life. "If we abide in him and he in us" we have a divine element in which to live and move and act, and having that, nothing can resist us. One who is not in Christ has reason to be afraid of sin, of death and of the devil, for he has no temptation-proof armor. But if we abide in Christ nothing can harm us, since He becomes to us a protecting environment.

You may have heard of the startling experiment of thrusting the naked hand into a mass of molten iron without being burned. It can be done. But when a man connected with the foundry proposed to perform the operation before a company of ladies and gentlemen they begged him to desist. They were frightened at such a daring attempt. Nevertheless, he bared his arm and having immersed it in water plunged it to the elbow in the liquid fire and experienced no harm. What was the secret? The water in which the arm had been immersed, being instantly vaporized by the heat formed a surrounding atmosphere which furnished a momentary protection. If we are in Christ the Holy Spirit forms an atmosphere of defense round about us. Temptations cannot hurt us; sin cannot touch us; death cannot fasten upon us; we lead a victorious life. "Led in triumph in Christ," we shall also overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. Here is the secret of victory, surrender to Christ that we may find supremacy through Christ, losing ourselves in Him that we may be altogether used by Him. Simple and true-hearted answer was that of the Chinese when, having told the wonderful story of his deliverance from the opium habit, he was asked, "And what did you use to cure you?" "Only my two knees," was his artless reply. And one of the wisest of Christian philosophers, Sir Thomas Browne, said the same thing when asked how he had overcome his doubts and skepticism. "Not in any martial posture, but on my knees," was his answer. Ah! this is the great divine recipe: "praying in the Holy Ghost." Our very activity for Christ may become a snare to us unless we are careful, and we may neglect our Master when most busy for our Master. I sorrowfully own that I make many failures in the Christian life; but the secret has often been too much work and too little prayer. I believe in the maxim of John Eliot: "Prayer and pains through faith in Christ can do all things." Yes, if we only keep the two yoked together, and always moving with equal step. But let pains outrun prayer, and then comes an inevitable breakdown. How often have I found it so! In the rush and pressure of the train of Christian activity there comes a sudden stop. Symptoms? Hot boxes—the head burning with fever, and the brain smoking with friction! The cause? Too much work with too little prayer! Too high speed and too little oil of the Spirit! Daily, must there be theunction of the Holy One if we would do all things as well as know all things.