

John 20:31

WHY WRITTEN.

A BIBLE-READING.

NOTHING is more important for us than the discovery that the word of God is the absolute resting-place for our faith. Christ is indeed the supreme object of faith; but, since we know him only through the Scriptures, we must believe the word in order to believe on Christ. There are many ways through which the temptation comes to us to take our eyes off from the written testimony of Scripture, and to fasten them on something else,—upon tradition, or religious experience, or the testimony of consciousness; but a glance at the matter will show us how absolutely God shuts us up to his word for all that we need to know for our salvation and life.

Let us consider four passages from the Gospel and Epistles of John, as showing the purpose of his writing:—

"But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name" (John xx. 31).

Here is the evidential purpose of the word. Christ proved himself the Son of God by many signs and wonders before his crucifixion; and "he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs." Record was made of these things, that we might have the strongest possible evidence of the sonship of Jesus Christ. "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." This is the first thing we are required to believe. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John v. 1). "But how may I know that he is the Christ?" it may be asked. Not from tradition, not by some extraordinary revelation of the Spirit to your heart, but by the record of facts which God has caused to be written. The first look of faith is fastened to evidence. There are things which we are required to believe without evidence, as we shall see later; but this truth of the sonship of Jesus rests solely on the record of the miraculous facts by which he proved himself the Christ. Believing, on the testimony of what is written, that Jesus is the Christ, we "have life through his name." But how do we know that we have life when we have believed?

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life," and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John v. 13).

Here the thought is taken up exactly where the previous text dropped it. Believing the record, we know that Jesus is the Christ; believing that Jesus is the Christ, we have life. And now these things are written that we may know that we have life.

The constant tendency is for believers to search in their own hearts for the evidence of their renewal and sonship. No doubt there are such evidences to be found, if they are truly born of God; but God does not send us these chiefly or first of all. The testimony of the word is first: the testimony of consciousness is secondary. The "inward witness" we would not deny; but this can be trustworthy only as the transcript and facsimile of the written witness of Scripture. From what is written, we know Jesus Christ to be the Son of God; from what is written, we know ourselves to be sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And to every temptation to doubt and distrust we should oppose the same weapon that Christ thrice used against the Tempter: "It is written" (John i. 12, 13, iii. 30, v. 24, vi. 47; 1 John v. 11, 12).

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John i. 4).

What things? These: that the life was manifested; and through this life we have not only sonship, but fellowship one with another, and pre-eminently "with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Even our joy must have its spring in the record. We rejoice, because from God's word we know that we are sons. We do not know that we are sons because of the joy which we have in our own heart. Joy comes from the great and wonderful truth which God tells us in his writings, but which we could never have found out ourselves alone, that we have fellowship, actual birth-kindredship, with Christ and the Father. This joy will be perennial and full, because, instead of being pumped up from the shallow reservoir of our own feelings, it flows down from God himself through the channel of his word. "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full,"—full, because the

<sup>1</sup> The true reading is, "That ye may know that ye have eternal life, ye that believe on the name of the Son of God" (vide Lange).

fountain is in God and Christ, and not in self. "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Phil. i. 26, iv. 4; John xvi. 22, xvii. 13).

"My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not" (1 John ii. 1).

Does it give license to sin, to know, that, by the atonement of our Saviour, our sins can all be taken away and freely forgiven? So it has often been said; but not so does it seem to the Holy Ghost and to us. One sight or remembrance of the blood that was shed for the remission of our sins is mightier than all other arguments combined for dissuading us from sin. To be told that Jesus Christ has so settled the whole question of sin between us and God, that now not the mercy only, but the very justice of God, demands that we should be forgiven when we confess our transgressions, — what motive against continuing in sin can be more powerful? We have fellowship with the Father and the Son indeed, and, through them, "with one another" (i. 7). That is for our joy. But instantly occurs the thought of sin, the sense of which may well mar our joy, and check our rejoicings. Yes; but "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (i. 7); and, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "My little children, these things will I write you that ye sin not." Where can we find such dissuasions against sin as in the record of what Christ has suffered and accomplished to put away sin? (Rom. vi. 1, 2, 6, 15; Heb. vi. 6.)

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#### HINDERANCES TO ASSURANCE.

As Satan often takes self-respect, the best thing of human nature, to deceive the unconverted and keep them away from Christ, so he takes humility, the best quality of grace, to keep Christians in a state of darkness and misery. And what we think is humility is in many cases only pride turned wrong side out.

You say, "I believe in Christ; but I am so unworthy, that I don't dare to believe that I am a saved man." Unworthy? Most assuredly you are. And, if you live to be the veriest saint, you will be so still. And that is the reason why God has chosen to save you by One who is worthy. It is

not a question of what you deserve, but of what Christ deserves. And for you, after accepting Christ, to refuse to take the place which God assigns you in redemption, because of a sense of unfitness, is not humility, but unbelief. It is putting *self* in the place of the cross; and that is always to set aside Christ. It matters not whether it be a proud self or a humble self, a self-righteous self or a self-condemning self: the moment you put it in the place of the cross, you throw the atonement into eclipse, and Christ is made of none effect.

It is a fact that we are slow to comprehend; that the gospel is designed and just fitted to meet men at the zero point of their moral degeneracy. It names no degree of improvement that we must attain before it can help us. It prescribes no dispensation of self-preparation. It has no betterment act which must be enforced in order to get us ready for calling on Jesus. It stipulates to take men at their worst or at their best. And it matters little which. It has to do the same work for both. You know it costs our Government just as much to uniform a well-dressed recruit as it does a ragged one. In either case the recruit must put off his citizen's dress, and put on the army blue; and so it is not worth while for a volunteer to spend his labor and pains to get a new suit to enlist in. There is likewise no necessity for a sinner's waiting to get a better moral garb, a more respectable wardrobe of frames and feelings, before he may come to Christ; for in any event he must put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

THERE are two shipwrecks against which the Christian is warned in Scripture, — the wreck of faith, and the wreck of himself. Who "*concerning the faith have made shipwreck*" is Paul's sad allusion to certain ones, — the faith which, like a richly-freighted ship, they were appointed to guide and keep amid the storm and tempest of unbelief, wrecked in their hands, though they possibly may have escaped safe to shore on broken pieces of the ship. "Lest, having preached to others, *I myself should be a cast-away*," is a yet sadder suggestion of the apostle, — the shipmaster who has faithfully guided the vessel of faith, yet himself swept overboard and lost.