

Taste and See

Sermon by the late A. J. Gordon, D. D.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good."—Ps. 34: 8



OD'S religion is preëminent in this—that it puts itself to the test of our experience. Practical men are demanding very strongly to-day a religion of fact and demonstration, and they are often heard complaining of Christianity, as though it did not meet this demand. Because it says so much about believing

and trusting, they imagine that it is a theoretical system, founded on dogma and doctrine rather than on demonstration. "Give us a religion that can appeal to the five senses," they say. Theologians may deal with the supernatural, but the common people want something practical and tangible—something that they can test and take in with the eye and ear, with the touch and taste. The pale moonbeams of mystery, the nebulous vapor of supernaturalism—this we cannot grasp. Let us have some solid realities, that can be seen and handled, and we will believe.

I want to show you that this is exactly what the Gospel does. Christianity is a supernatural religion; but the most remarkable fact about it is the frequency with which it appeals to the human senses. It appeals to the eye: "*Behold and see,*" says Jesus. It appeals to the touch: "*Handle me and see,*" says the risen Lord. It appeals to the taste: "*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*" Surely, it could hardly come nearer appealing to the five senses than this. It ought never to be forgotten that John, the apostle of the Supernatural, opens his epistle with these words: "That which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have *handled* of the Word of life." The true way, then, to understand God's goodness is to experience it. "*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*"

God's goodness, in the truest sense of the word, is the inward manifestation of His love. It must be tasted, therefore, in order to be known, since taste is the only one of the five senses that is an inward sense. The doors of all the other senses open out upon the world. Sight and hearing and smell and touch—these all have to do with external objects; but taste deals with what has been taken into the man. It is an internal sense, and therefore is alone capable of dealing with an internal experience. For the senses have each their separate duty, to which they must strictly attend. They cannot change works, as we say in common phrase. Neither is provided with the organs or instruments for performing the other's functions. The eye cannot scent the sweet odor of the rose; the ear cannot take in the exquisite color and tint of the lily; and the hand cannot taste the delicate flavor of the fruit. The eye is for seeing, and the ear is for hearing, and the hand

is for handling. So God's goodness, revealed in the sweet flavor of the fruits of the Spirit, must be tasted in order to be known. The soul must eat of the fruit of the tree of life in Christ Jesus, before it can be understood or even imagined how sweet that fruit is. Hence it is not, I am sure, an accident that this expressive word *taste* is so often applied to the things of God. If you allow that the highest manifestations of God's goodness are in the hills and trees and vines and flowers, in the sounds and sights and odors of Nature, then the eye is enough and the ear is enough; but because religion is an indescribable inner life, we find the writers of the Bible using other organs to apprehend it: "If so be ye have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious," says Peter. And the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Christian, almost sublimely, as one who has "*tasted* the heavenly gift," and again as one who has "*tasted* the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come." Would God that this description applied more truly to all Christians of the present day. Alas, how many look upon that "gift of God which is eternal life," only as an external object; how few have had their whole being so sweetened and transfused by its inward flavor that they can say that they have tasted the heavenly gift. How many handle the Word of God to gaze admiringly upon its outward beauties; but how few have so "*tasted* the good Word of God" that they can say admiringly with the Psalmist, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth." And how many have sung of the world to come—its joys, its triumphs and its beatitudes; but how few have so reached out to that tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God, and feasted on its fruits, that they can be described as those who have "*tasted* the power of the world to come." O Thou who to give us life didst Thyself "*taste* death for every man," forgive us that we have so coldly handled and looked upon and talked about that life, but so little tasted it!

And this leads us out into the great thought suggested by my subject, that the religion of Christ must be known as an inner experience before it can be appreciated. If you stand in the world and attempt to look into Christianity, you may not see much of what it really contains. If you stand in Christianity and look out upon the world, you will see what you never could have conceived of before. I stood, not long since, before what I had heard of as being one of the most magnificent cathedrals of Europe. I was disappointed at its appearance. Its walls were stained and dingy, its surroundings were cold and squalid, its windows were dull and sombre, and altogether it was quite disappointing. When once I had stepped inside, how all was changed! Standing under those majestic arches they seemd almost to lift me out of myself; and those windows, a moment before so dull and sombre, became transfigured with such varied glory that it seemed almost as though they had been wrought from the gorgeous pattern of the rainbow. So, said I, it is of Christ. To those who look upon Him as mere cold spectators from without, He is often "without form or comeliness, and having no beauty that we should desire Him"; but to those who are in Him by faith, within the sacred inclosure of His grace and love, how glorious He is! How majestic do His protecting and overarching attributes appear to them! How resplendently does the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shine in His face!

And His Church is like Him in this respect. This Church is called the "temple of God"; but, like the ancient temple, her glory is within, not without. Only the priests that entered the Holy Place saw the rich tapestry of her curtains, with its beautiful colors, and its thread of inwrought gold. Only the priests of Christ who commune in the Holy of Holies of His presence, know the beauty of His person. The Church, too, is the bride of Christ, the daughter of God. And how beautifully says the Psalmist, "The king's daughter is all glorious within. Her clothing is of wrought gold." Glorious within is the Church of Christ! Her loveliness is not hung out to the rude gaze of the critic and the spectator. Her adorning is not the outward adorning of external splendor, but "the hidden man of the heart."

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