

The Fruits of a Living Religion

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Thursday Evening, November 11, 1858

(A Posthumous Sermon.)

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the praise and glory of God." Phil. 1:9, 10, 11

A religion that does nothing for a man's soul is practically worthless, and a religion that never manifests itself in a man's life is as worthless as a religion that does nothing for the soul. Death is stamped upon both. Religion to be worth anything must be a living religion, a religion that proceeds from a work of grace upon the heart, communicating life to the soul, and exercising an influence wheresoever it exists, and in whomsoever it resides, for where there is a springing up of life in a man's soul it must be made manifest by his words and actions. What a cutting sentence issued from the truth-speaking lips of the Lord of life and glory against those branches that bear not fruit! How he declared that his Father would take them away, gather them in heaps, and cast them into the fire to be burned, and in what a decisive manner in the parable of the vine did he stamp the religion that brings forth no fruit unto God. When we read the Apostle Paul's epistles, we cannot help seeing how his heart panted for the spiritual edification of the church of God! What prayer and desire he had continually in his bosom that they might have not only every blessing, but that these blessings might be made manifest in the heart, lip, and life! How he threw his

whole soul into the matter! And when he wrote with his pen he only expressed the continual longings and breathings of his soul. He tells these Philippians, who had a choice place in his heart, what he prayed for.

I.—First, *"That their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."*

II.—Secondly, That they might *"approve things that are excellent,"* or, as we read in the margin, *"Try things that differ."*

III.—Thirdly, That they might be *"Sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."*

IV.—Fourthly, That they might be *"Filled with the fruits of righteousness,"* which he says, *"are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God."*

Who can say with these words staring him in the face and sounding in his ears that the Apostle was not for a godly life, when he speaks not only of faith in the heart, but also of the manifestation of that faith by the fruits of righteousness?

I shall, with God's blessing, open up the subject in the same order I have stated, in these four points in which I have recapitulated it.

I.—First, *That their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge.* In expressing this desire the Apostle assumed, I may say, he knew that they possessed love, that that grace of the Spirit had been communicated to their soul; that being born of God they knew what it was to love God and Jesus Christ, as revealed in the word of truth. He knew that they loved the things of God; for he felt a sweet union with them;

he loved them and they loved him. His love came from above and their love proceeded from the same source. As two small streams of water flowing down the pane of a window, when they get to the bottom mingle and form one drop; so their love mingled with his and became one. He assumed, therefore, that they possessed love, God's greatest and choicest gift. The best proof of a spiritual birth is love to God and his dear Son; and the best proof of having passed from death unto life is love to the brethren. The Apostle prays that their love might abound yet more and more, that they might not be satisfied with a little of it, but that they might have a large measure of it communicated and imparted to their soul, that they might possess and enjoy it in a far greater and richer measure than they had yet experienced. And he also desires that their love might abound in *knowledge*. We cannot love those whom we don't know. We cannot love God till we *know* him, nor the Son of God till we *know* him, nor the people of God till we *know* them, nor the truth of God till we *know* it; therefore there is a union between knowledge and love. It is not a letter knowledge, a speculative, dry doctrinal knowledge; but a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge communicated by a divine revelation, let down into the soul by spiritual manifestations, and divine acquaintance with divine things by a divine power. Now this is the only knowledge really worth possessing, to *know* God by his own manifestations and Jesus by his own revelations, sweet visits and affections, by tasting how sweet and precious they are. Head knowledge can never communicate spiritual love, it merely stands in the letter. A man may have his heart full of enmity to God and yet have his head full of the letter; he may hold the clearest creed, and possess the soundest theory, with a brain crammed with texts of Scripture, and all the while his heart may be hatred itself towards God, and as a necessary consequence, towards the people of God. But spiritual knowledge, divine teaching, and heavenly

acquaintance with the truth as it is in Jesus, must be the parent of spiritual love; for to know God is to love him. We cannot know him except he reveal himself, and he reveals himself not as the object of knowledge only, but of truth and love; and the more we know of God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, the more we know of his love, of his death, and his justifying obedience, the more we shall love him. The reason we are so cold is because we don't know him. Thus the Apostle prayed that their love might abound yet more and more in *knowledge* and in *judgment*.

It is a very blessed thing to have a spiritual *judgment*, and there is scarcely any gift or grace in which the people of God are for the most part more deficient. You will find many of the true saints of God are simple-hearted people, and very deficient in judgment. Give them a book or pamphlet to read, and they know not whether it be true or false, they have so little judgment in these matters. And it may be as well perhaps that the majority are like a flock of sheep; it may be a good thing that the children of God have little judgment. As in an army, it would not be good for all to be leaders and officers; there must be the common soldiers to obey as well as leaders and officers to command, so in the church there are and should be pastors and guides to proclaim salvation to the people and point out the paths of peace and righteousness. But still it is a blessed thing if God has been pleased to bestow a little judgment on the soul; for, for the want of it, we are apt to be led astray, and find it hard work to direct our works and words aright.

But there is a marginal reading, which seems to give another meaning. It is *experience*. And we may assign that meaning to it; for the word in the original means both. So he prays that "their love might abound in knowledge and in *experience*," tasting it and perceiving it, having a sensible

feeling toward it, and a sweet realization of it. This is the best way of cultivating spiritual love. God may have given you a liberal spirit in order that you may minister to the wants of those among his people who are poor in this world's goods, and thus in setting you in the body has assigned you the place of the hand; or perhaps he has made you a foot, and a willing one, ready to toil in the dust for the benefit of the church, and to run on her errands, and this he can do without making you an eye, an ear, or even a nose to smell the scent of truth, as Isaac smelt the smell of the raiment of his son. But you may possess what is better still, and that is a sweet perception in your soul of the truth of God, and have a blessed experience in your heart of the love of God, and thus your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all perception, taste, and experience of God's truth, and that is the best way whereby we can know what the love of God is. It must be shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and then there is an inward acquaintance with it, a blessed realization of its power and unction. Do you feel your love very deficient? How cold your heart often is, and how lifeless, stupid, fond of these earthly toys you are, and quite unable and even unwilling to raise up a thought God-ward? But are there not times and seasons when you mourn and lament it should be so, that you cannot be what you would, and love the Lord as you would? Yet, how the Lord seems to drop down love to himself, which draws your affections up to him! Oh! may our love abound yet more and more, if the Lord has given any measure of his grace, in knowledge and in all judgment! May both our love to God and to the saints abound, not as a shallow, scanty brook, but like a flowing river. But I pass on to our

II.—Second point, Where the Apostle prays for our Philippian brethren, that they *"might approve things that are excellent."* It is a blessed thing to have a standard of divine truth in the

soul; just as when the judge sits upon the bench and has to administer the laws of the land, he has above him a standard, which is the statutes of his country, wherever he administers justice. Now if he had no standard his decisions must be ever faulty and wrong. But being guided by a certain standard, he is able to administer the laws of the country justly. So in grace, if we had no spiritual standard of what is right and what is wrong, of what is good and what is evil, how could we walk in any way before God or his people? The Lord said to Jeremiah, "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." And ministers, of all men, should have a standard in their consciences so as to approve things that are excellent, which we only can do as we have a spiritual mind to discern things that are excellent. The things that are excellent are the things of God; whatever he has illuminated by his glory is excellent, but whatever springs of and from man, is vile. Now if a man carries about with him a blessed standard in his own judgment, heart, and conscience, when he looks at things that God hath stamped with his grace, he will say, "These are excellent;" but of the things of man he will say, "These are vile." How it turns things topsy-turvy, and sets up God's will and the ways of God as the only things godly, and overturns every thing that man has set up, and everything that God despises as vile. This is just contrary to what the world does. They despise the things that God loves, and love the things that God hates; for the carnal eye can only see carnal objects, and approve of carnal things. But the spiritual eye sees spiritual things, the spiritual judgment discerns spiritual objects, and the spiritual affections cleave to spiritual things. Now this will influence our lives and act upon our conduct. If we consider the truth of God to be excellent in which salvation is, we shall approve it by delighting in and walking thereby, by maintaining it wherever we go, and showing by all our actions that we approve of it as a thing most excellent. Now if an officer of

our Queen were to see her Majesty insulted, his profession would call upon him to start up, meet and avenge the offence; so in a spiritual sense, wherever you are and Jesus is mocked, you should draw your sword, like the soldier, and cut the mocker down with the truth, whether it be in a railway carriage or wherever it may be; wherever the word of God is trodden upon in your presence you must manifest your disapprobation against it. Whenever you hear any word against the people of God, the truth of God, the servants of God, and do not draw your sword, how can you be true soldiers, when cowardice is stamped upon your actions? Never think of sneaking through life as a coward. You know what is reserved for cowards, that their portion is with dogs! Never be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ; for he that is ashamed of him and of his gospel before men, he will be ashamed of before his heavenly Father. *"Approve things that are excellent,"* and if you do you will make it manifest. The books that you read will be books written by men of God, while the ministers you hear will be men sent of God to preach the gospel, and who will be commended to your conscience.

But the margin gives another reading: *"Try things that differ."* Many things differ. There are different opinions on different points, different ways of having the subject brought before our notice, different courses to take upon different matters. Now the Apostle calls upon us to try these things that differ, to weigh them in the balance, and see whether they bear the stamp of God. As a person in a shop has to examine different articles to see which are good and which are bad; or a person, who receives coins, has to see whether they are all legitimate coinage and of proper weight, whether the notes are of the right authorities, to try which is right and which is wrong, which is valuable and which is worthless, so in grace, we are continually called upon to exercise our

judgment. Here are different doctrines which you are to try by the word of God, by your own experience, by the feelings produced by them, and by the way in which they are commended to your conscience, you must exercise your judgment in these matters as a man taught of God. Thus you "*try things that differ*" and as different things come before you in the exercise of your judgment you are called upon to try them, weigh them up, and see how far they are consistent with God's truth and the walk of a godly man, and the more we are exercised the more we shall try these things. Passages of Scripture may seem to come with power to the soul, we have to try them, whether they are applied by the Holy Ghost, or are merely the result of memory. In weighing the word, we are to try whether it comes with a blessing from God or whether it may not be the stirring up of the natural feelings and passions. In talking with God's people all may *try things that differ*, whether they be of God, or those things they have learned from and through men. Not in a capricious spirit, nor in a censorious manner as if we set up ourselves as judges, and thus break the command of Jesus,—"*Judge not that ye be not judged;*" but in a way of soul concern, desirous of knowing what to do, and wishing to have some light upon our path that we may do the will of God. In all these points there will be much room to try the things that differ. A Christian is not to go through life blindfold, but must have his eyes open, for he will be called upon to exercise his judgment on a variety of subjects. If then the Christian has to do so, I advise you to follow that course. But you may say, "*Is he to take everybody's views and examine them in the light of Scripture?*" Yes, surely, for he is not to be like the poor Papists, under the guidance of the Priests; but he must exercise his judgment: I for my part, should be very sorry for any of my people, to pin their faith to my sleeve. Try the matters, search the Scriptures and seek for light in your conscience. I desire to bring

nothing before you for which I have not good ground, let it be believed upon the testimony of God; for that is the only testimony worth having. But I pass on to our next point.

III.—*That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.* Sincerity lies at the base of all true religion, and a man who has not a religion in his conscience to give him a grain of sincerity has very little religion. So that to be sincere is a main thing in religion; for it runs through the whole of a man's course. If he is not sincere in the beginning we have no reason to believe that he will be sincere in the middle, and if he is not sincere in the middle we have no ground to hope that he will be sincere in the end. What do you think of men and women taking them apart from religion if they are not sincere? Ah! the insincerity that is stamped upon the life and actions of men! but what a black and fatal mark it is if stamped upon religion! you may have very little experience, faith, hope or love, your evidences may be cloudy; but are you honest, before God, can you and do you say,—"Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts?" Is your soul lying open and naked before the eyes of him with whom you have to do? "*And without offence;*" that is without a *stumbling block*; without meeting with a stumbling block *in yourselves, or putting* a stumbling block in the way of *others*. It is very good to walk and not to stumble in the way of other people, and so adorn the doctrine you profess. But, have not persons been deterred from coming to this chapel, by the conduct of parties resorting here? Have we not had great drunkards here, men who will come to chapel on a Sunday morning and get drunk in the evening? What can cause greater reproach than this? The world expects consistency, and if our life is contrary to our profession the world sees it. I can of course perceive we give offence in the ordinary sense of the term; but it means here putting a stumbling block in their way and so they stumble at

God's truth; because they have seen conduct in persons who have come here that they could not sanction, and thus they take offence against the truth preached here. They might have known that no such conduct was sanctioned in this place; but the stumbling block was so palpable that they stumbled over it; therefore, we are bound so to act as not to put a stumbling block in the way of others. That there are many things going on in us that we must condemn, we cannot deny, but still may it be our desire to walk so as not to give offence to the people of God, nor stumble those who are seeking the way to the city of God. But I pass on to

IV.—My last point, *"That they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which as he says, are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God."* He was like a farmer, that wanted a good crop. He was not satisfied with 14, 16, or 18 bushels to the acre; but he wanted 40 or 50, that would make the very stalks crack with the load put upon them, that so they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness. Or to adopt another figure; he was not satisfied to see two or three pecks of apples upon his fruit tree; but he wanted to see the boughs bend as if ready to break under their burden. This is what he wished to see religion doing for them. That its inward fruits which are faith, hope, love, peace in believing, humility, meekness, temperance, patience, and every other gift of the Holy Ghost might abound richly in them. These are the fruits of righteousness externally; godly love, self-denial, and a living to the honour and glory of his great name. If men despise the saints of God, whatever contempt they may pour upon them, be it known unto them that only the saints of God bring forth fruit, and in the great day it will be declared that they alone have brought forth good works, and if heaven were to be gained by good works the saints alone can produce them, so that the rest are justly condemned; because they never brought forth good fruits. They have

lacked motive; therefore, condemnation will be stamped upon their best and most glorious works; but the works of the saints of God having been done from right *motives* are good. Not that any man will stand before God upon the footing of his good works; for the best works are inherently sinful; therefore, what justification can there be in them? But it will be declared before men and angels that the righteous have done good works; for the whole is the work of God in them, and he will say of them, "I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me, sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me." Then the Apostle's desire was that they might be full of the work of righteousness, the crowning point of all which was the praise and glory of God. Who can say with these words standing before his eyes or sounding in his ears that the religion which I preach and you hear leads to unrighteousness, that you or I countenance things ungodly, or do not desire to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight; therefore we repel as libels the charge that we do not contend for the fruits of righteousness. We might use a harsher term for all who declare that we who profess the fruits of righteousness, preach ungodliness, but we will content ourselves with that term; and say they are libellers, and we challenge them to produce good works, and while they produce theirs we will produce ours, being subjects of the work of grace upon the heart to the praise and glory of God. Then we may well bear any reproach. We shall ever have to feel and bemoan our slips and falls, infirmities and shortcomings, and be obliged to adopt the language and spirit of the Apostle—"That which I would I do not, and that which I would not that I do."—This is one thing; but to continue in sin that grace may abound is another. The Lord, if it be his gracious will, impress these realities with a divine power on our hearts, so that we may bring forth those fruits

in our lives which are to his honour and glory.