

“WHY, SIR,
IT'S BETTER AND BETTER.”

WITH A WORD TO

THE STRIVING ONE,
THE DOUBTING ONE,
THE HAPPY ONE.

SECOND EDITION.

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“WHY, SIR, IT'S BETTER & BETTER.”

IN a village near the city of Gloucester, lived a poor aged woman, who had reached upwards of fourscore years and three. She was a truly honest soul. She felt that there was a God before whom she would one day have to stand and be judged; and knowing full well that she had sinned, and come short of His glory, she was therefore anxious about the issue of that judgment, and the salvation of her immortal soul became a matter of the greatest moment to her.

For some thirty-three years had her conscience been awakened to this solemn fact, and during that long time she had striven hard, and had done the best she could to make her peace with God, as people say. But with all her efforts and doings, she could not find the one thing needful. She was very religious, too; that is to say, she attended the chapel with the strictest regularity. Nothing but sickness would keep her from the proper observance of all such religious duties. Her neighbours, too, thought well of her, and would speak of her as a very respectable, moral sort of woman. And yet for all this, she was still doubting and fearing as to the eternal safety of her never-dying soul. She could not find rest to her troubled conscience. The fear of having to meet her God still held her in terrible bondage, and consequently she was always wretched and unhappy. Hers was, indeed, a very melancholy religion, and certainly did not commend the Gospel of God, which is joy and peace in the Holy Ghost.

One day, however, a preacher* of God's word visited this village, and preached in a room which had been opened for the purpose of declaring the gospel of the grace of God (Acts xx. 24); and it being something new to have preaching in a private house, many came to hear. This poor anxious soul, who for thirty-three years had been bound by Satan, was one of those who thronged the house, hoping, no doubt, that she would be able to obtain that which her soul so much longed for. Now it so happened that the preacher had been fully delivered from all his own sins and from the wrath to come. He knew it. His conscience, which was once convicted of sin, had, by God's grace, been purged. He had the assurance that the death of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb that God had provided for Himself, had put away his sins; that God, against whom he had sinned, had accepted the sacrifice of His own Son as his substitute. Consequently, he had peace with God. He experienced what the word of God calls a purged conscience. He had no doubts, no fears whatever as to the safety of his own soul, because God's word told him of sin put away, and he took God at His word. And more than this, his soul enjoyed what he knew. What liberty, what power there must have been, then, in his preaching! How clearly he must have been able to set forth the gospel. He knew the truth, not merely as a doctrine, but as a practical reality in his own soul. He could tell the people of the love of God as a divine existence, and that without any hesitation and doubt. The trumpet which he sounded

* Not the writer of this paper.

would give no uncertain sound, but it would be clear, distinct, and decided. Salvation was a real thing to him, and so he could and did proclaim it as such.

But was it not very presumptuous on the part of the preacher, to *know* that his sins were washed away, and to be free from all doubts and fears? Is it right to get beyond hoping that some day one might be saved? Some, yea, many professing Christians, think that it is presumption. But what saith the Lord? Is it His intention that His children should always be in a state of doubt about the most important of all things, even the salvation of their souls? Surely not; for He would have them to rejoice in the Lord *always*; and again He says, rejoice *evermore*. How can one do so while the question of the eternal safety of the soul be not settled? How can I rejoice, and not know whether I am a child of God or not? I cannot be happy and have doubts too. Oh, no; our God deals not so with His children. He means what He says, when He exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord always. He never would have them unhappy for a moment about their salvation. He would assure them again and again that that is a settled question; that He and His own Son, in their eternal purposes, counselled all about the putting away of sin and the salvation of the soul; and further, He would assure them that in due time He carried into execution and finished all according to His prudence and counsel; so that now He could say to him that believeth, Be still, and rejoice in the Lord always, without the least anxiety about that great question yea, rejoice evermore. Our God would never say

Rejoice, when by-and-by one might find oneself cast out into the lake of fire in companionship with the Devil and his angels. Oh, no! such a thought is most dishonouring to our God, who loved us and gave His Son to die for us. But, on the contrary, He has written certain things that we might *know* that we *have* eternal life—not one day, at some future time, but *now* that we might *know* that we *have* (a present blessing) eternal life (1 John v. 13). Thus, then, that preacher was not presumptuous in knowing that his sin was put away, and that God had given to him, in Christ, everlasting life. Strange, indeed, that a believer in Jesus should not know that he is a believer; strange that we should be born again by the Holy Ghost, and had passed from death unto life, and yet not know it. But so it is with many of the children of God. May the Lord, in His grace, help many to be delivered from the terrible bondage of doubts and such-like, and enable them to rejoice in the present and blessed liberty of the children of God.

It was in the happy consciousness of this liberty from sin and hell, that the preacher stood up to proclaim the good news of redemption by the blood of Christ, to poor perishing sinners. By the Holy Spirit he was able to show how that, without the shedding of blood there is not nor can be any remission of sin. Death was the penalty due to sin, and therefore nothing but death could meet it. He showed, too, the utter helplessness of man. How that he could do nothing for himself; and that when he was without strength, when he was in the horrible pit and the miry clay,

he could not, with all his efforts, get out, but rather got deeper and deeper into it; I say, he showed that it was just at this very time, and under such particular circumstances, when man was without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. Christ's work was a perfect work. His atonement for sin was a finished atonement. The one offering of Himself once for all, was a sufficient sacrifice,—sufficient to meet and satisfy all the claims of God's righteousness, and sufficient too to perfect for ever them that are sanctified. His blood cleanseth from all sin. By His death and resurrection God's Son has delivered the believer from the wrath to come, so that there is no need of fear,—delivered from sin, so that it shall not have dominion over us,—delivered from the power of darkness and from this present evil world.

The preacher, moreover, endeavoured to lead his attentive hearers into the thoughts of God about the sacrifice of Jesus. How that God was well pleased with Jesus as His Lamb, who had, as such, offered Himself by the eternal Spirit without spot and without blemish. God was satisfied with the offering of Christ, it was a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour to Him; and God raised Him from the dead, and seated Him on His own throne, crowning Him with glory and honour. Yes; blessed truth, glorious fact! God is well pleased with Jesus as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. To God the sinner owed a debt of death. Jesus by His death has paid it, and God is well pleased. God has declared His acceptance of that payment by raising

Jesus from the dead, and by seating Him in heaven at His own right hand. God has now declared His righteousness, and that He is now, in virtue of the death of Jesus, just in justifying him that believeth in Jesus.

Well, as this soul-stirring truth was being proclaimed by one who knew it in its reality, light broke in upon the soul of the aged woman. Never before had she heard such a clear statement of the gospel. It was indeed gospel—good news to her. As the preacher proceeded, still greater light shone about and within her. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and her ears were intently open to hear the wonderful things of God. For three-and-thirty years she had been groping her way through the dark, and had seen no light. All had been darkness to her soul. No light, no peace, no joy, though she had been trying and trying to get it for so many years. But now for the first time she heard that all she had been trying herself to do had been done—fully done and settled by God's own Son, and that more than eighteen hundred years since, on the cross. All finished. Reconciliation and peace with God made by the blood of His cross, having slain and abolished the enmity thereby—eternal redemption obtained by the blood of God's own Lamb. Behold the Lamb of God! Yes, it is God's Lamb, not man's. Oh what wondrous, unspeakable love! surely the love of Christ passeth all understanding. The old woman could not but listen—it was indeed good news to her. It was just what her poor, troubled soul needed, and so, as she heard, she believed; and as she believed, she received a blessing. She believed that Jesus had died for her, and that God

had accepted Jesus as a substitute for her, and so peace flowed into her soul, and out of the abundance of her illuminated heart she rejoiced and praised the Lord for His abounding love to her. Yes; as she believed, she received blessing—a full blessing—a free blessing,—free, because it flowed in upon her as she was, simply believing what she heard, without any effort or doing on her part. It was a full blessing, for she had received eternal life in Christ according to the promise of Jesus: “He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.” Peace she enjoyed, because, being justified by faith, she had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Yea, more than this, she received Christ Himself, and with Him she received all things: “As many as received HIM, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” The eternal life which she had received was Christ, for He is the life, and “he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” Christ also lived in her. Christ was formed in her, and she was a new creature, created in Him (2 Cor. v. 17; Eph. ii. 10). Christ was her peace too, for “He is our peace.” In a word, in Christ she received all things; all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells in Him, and she was complete in Him (Col. ii. 9, 10). Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ belonged to her as a present blessing (Eph. i. 3). Oh what a wonderful contrast! For three-and-thirty years that aged one had been doing the best she could, but could get nothing, not even one blessing. All her life was but a life of trouble

and anxiety to her ; but now that she sat still, believing what the word of God said about Jesus, and God being well pleased in Him, blessing upon blessing flowed into her soul. All her burdens fell off, and she was happy in Jesus. Indeed, her strength was to sit still and see the salvation of God. Surely then it is worth while to take the place of empty sinners—surely it is worth our while to be nothing in ourselves—surely it is the truest policy to put aside all our doings and strivings, when by so doing such blessings come to us from the living God.

Having thus given up her three-and-thirty years' efforts, and having looked to Jesus, she went home rejoicing, for she knew that all her sins were pardoned ; that as far as the east is from the west, so far had God Himself put all her sins away. Yes, she went home praising God for His sovereign love and grace, and for that she had found the Lord, or rather had been found of Him.

It need scarcely be said that it soon became known that old Betty, for that was her name, had got peace with God, and that she was rejoicing in the Lord, who now was *her* God, and *her* Lord. Her heart was now full. She was overflowing with love to Jesus, of whom she could now say, Who loved ME, and gave Himself for ME. Her heart was so full that she could not but bless the Lord. Her feelings could not but express themselves on her happy face. As she confessed Jesus with her mouth, and believed from the heart on Him who raised Him, her eyes shone with joy, and her whole face beamed with delight. All who

knew her could not but see the great change that had come over her. It could not be concealed. Her neighbours had always looked upon her as a moral and religious woman; but still she had never till now known deliverance from sin and death and the wrath to come. She had been working and looking to herself for salvation, but now she had seen Jesus and the salvation of God: hence her soul did magnify the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour. But, ah! how vastly different the two states. In the one she was a miserable sinner, in the other a happy Christian. In the one state she was full of herself and her doings, and got no blessing; in the other she had done with her doings, and in Christ she obtained unbounded blessings.

After a time the Holy Ghost gathered her around the name and person of the Lord Jesus at His table, and there she learned more and more of His blest ways. There He became more precious to her, there His name was as ointment poured forth, so fragrant, so sweet, so refreshing.

Thus, as she sat in subjection to Christ as her Lord, by the Spirit, the things of Jesus were shown unto her, and her soul was led out in praise, thanksgiving, and worship to Him who delivered her from so great a death, and brought her to so blessed a place.

One day, as she was leaving the Lord's table, a friend of mine said to her, "Well, Betty, and how are you getting on now?" "Why, sir, it's better and better." And so it is. The more we know of Jesus, the more precious He is to us. THE MORE INTI-

MATELY WE BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH HIM, THE MORE BEAUTY WE SEE IN HIM, AND THE DEEPER THE PERFECTIONS OF HIS PERSON AND CHARACTER ARE OPENED OUT TO OUR SOULS.

“ And sure, if in His presence,
My soul still constant were,
Mine eye would, more familiar,
Its brighter glories bear.

And thus His deep perfections
Much better should I know,
And, with adoring fervour,
In this His nature grow.”

When this aged one had found peace with God, and knew that all her sins were fully and for ever put away, and that by God Himself, her thought was that she had obtained the very height of all blessing, but she soon found it very different. The more she went on with the Lord, the greater was her joy and blessing; indeed, she found that there was no end of the blessing wherewith the Lord blessed her. Her heart was too small, too narrow to receive the fulness with which God was willing to fill her. Grace had more, yea, much more, abounded than her sins. The life she had in Christ, as she went on with Christ, became more and more abundant. The peace which at first was boisterous, now had taken deep root, and was flowing as calmly and as deeply as a river, and her righteousness she found to be as boundless as the waves of the sea. Hope, too, she had; for she had been instructed that her proper hope was the second

coming of the Lord Jesus; but there was an abounding in that hope by the power of the Holy Ghost. Indeed, her heart was too straitened to contain the full measure of blessing the Lord was wont to pour out upon her. Her cup did truly run over. There was no language to express how she was really getting on, and so all she could say, and that with intense astonishment at the goodness of God, to him who inquired of her, was, "*Why, sir, it's better and better.*"

And now, dear reader, how is it with you? Is your experience the same as that of this aged woman? Is it better and better with you in the things of God? It may be, however, that you are one of the striving ones,—one of those who are looking to their own doings for salvation and peace with God. It may be you are like this old woman was, before she was set at liberty by the Spirit of the Lord. She was for thirty-three years bemoaning her sinfulness, and was trying to do all and the best she could to obtain rest to her soul. Well, if that be the case, oh, do give all that up as hopeless, and do as she did—believe in Jesus. Never, never will any efforts of ours, however good they may seem to be in our eyes and those of our neighbours, help us one bit; but, on the contrary, they will hinder very much our obtaining rest. "In me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." What good thing can that do which is totally bad? None whatever. It is impossible for a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit—it is contrary to nature. Well, then, dear reader, let me say once more, that Christ has done all for us, which we could not do for

ourselves. He has obtained eternal redemption. He has got it in His possession—HE has obtained it. It is HIS, and that by purchase. It cost HIM the sacrifice of Himself; and by the shedding of His own precious blood, He has redeemed those who believe in Him from sin and judgment and the wrath to come. I say again, that Jesus has got this redemption—it is HIS. Therefore it is no use our attempting to look to ourselves for it, or to try and obtain by our doings that which cost the Son of God His life's blood to obtain. Jesus has got the very thing you need: you must, therefore, go to Him for it. "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved," than the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; "neither is there salvation in any other." You *must* look, then, to Jesus, and to Him only. Let me persuade you, then, to "cast all your deadly doings down, down at Jesus' feet," and look unto Him, and believe in Him, and what He has done for poor sinners. Accept HIM, receive HIM. Believe on Him and you shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.

If you are thirsting for salvation, come empty—come without money and without price, and He will fill you. Spend not your strength for nought, neither labour in vain. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out," saith Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us. The word is nigh thee, and "if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

But it may be, dear reader, you are one of those who have come up to the cross, and there have seen that Jesus loved you, and hath given Himself for you; that He bore your sins in His own body on the tree. Well, bless the Lord for that. But can you say, "It's better and better"? I ask this, because I find so many of God's children so satisfied with the progress they have already made in the divine life, and quite careless as to progressing and increasing in the knowledge of God. It is, alas, too much the case; there is little or no *desire* to go on to know the Lord Jesus. Surely we ought to become more and more acquainted, *intimately acquainted*, with Him and His character, His grace and His beauty. Surely our affections should go out after Him with increased and increasing ardency, seeing His love towards us is so great and so practical.

It is indeed very lamentable to observe this coldness towards Christ and this indifference as to the deep things of God. The Holy Ghost has been given to us that He might lead us into a deeper knowledge of Jesus. It is His office to guide our souls into the deeper and fuller and richer understanding of what Christ is in Himself. He dwells in us to direct us into all truth. Oh, how responsible we are to our God for His great and unspeakable gift. We ought to be alive to this, and to have a real anxiety to use ALL He has bestowed upon us.

Oh, what height and depth, what lengths and breadths there are in Jesus we as yet know nothing about. What fulness in Him we have not yet grasped; all the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells in Him. What

wisdom we have not yet attained to ; in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Oh, what beauty, what loveliness, what grace in Jesus our eyes have not yet beheld. He is chiefest of ten thousand, yea, He is altogether lovely.

To what a place of nearness, too, we have been brought. Christ hath once suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Brought to God. Oh, how little realized ! The Holy Ghost dwelling in us in order that we may experience the most intimate communion with Him, to whom we have been brought in the person of Jesus. Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Oh how little known by us ! And in that place of nearness and fellowship there is fulness of joy. But how little this fulness of joy is practical with Christians !

May the Lord in His grace, then, lead our souls into a deeper and fuller apprehension of the knowledge of God. Oh may we have our capacities enlarged, so as to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ! " that we might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." (Col. i. 10, 11.)

E. C.

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