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THE
LOVE OF THE COMMANDMENT:

A

SERMON TO THE YOUNG

PREACHED TO THE SONS OF WESLEYAN MINISTERS

IN

WOODHOUSE GROVE SCHOOL,

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM BURT POPE,

AND 

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A SERMON.

PSALM cxix. 127, 128.

THEREFORE I LOVE THY COMMANDMENTS ABOVE GOLD, YEA, ABOVE FINE GOLD. THEREFORE I ESTEEM ALL THY PRECEPTS CONCERNING ALL THINGS TO BE RIGHT; AND I HATE EVERY FALSE WAY.

IN this psalm the Bible sings its own praise. Its longest, most elaborate, and most comprehensive hymn is devoted to the celebration of its own perfect excellence as the book of God's truth for man's salvation. The keynote was struck by David in the nineteenth psalm; but here another psalmist expands that earlier theme into variations as diversified as the changes of human life itself.

Like the Bible which it magnifies, this psalm has a body and a soul: a body framed by the art of Ezra; a soul breathed into it by the Holy Ghost.

Its mechanical framework is very remarkable. Every letter of the alphabet leads in a chorus of eight verses; and every verse—with few exceptions—pays its tribute to one of the distinctive names of Holy Writ. These names are precisely ten; and on them, recurring at free intervals, the sacred hymn rings all the changes of its music. It is THE LAW of the Lord: the first and the unchangeable name of Divine revelation. It is the Book of TESTIMONIES, bearing eternal and faithful witness to truths relating to God and man which otherwise could never have been known. It is the directory of WAYS, for man's universal guidance; these being further subdivided into ORDINANCES, PRECEPTS, and STATUTES, for the regulation

of life in every more private and more public relation. It is, moreover, the Book of JUDGMENTS, in which the Supreme Judge has given us His decisions and precedents for all contingencies of human duty. These make seven titles; three yet remain, which in themselves are a briefer summary of the whole. It is the WORD of God, wherein He utters to us His living voice for ever; it is the Book of COMMANDMENTS, telling us our duty and alas proving our guilt; but lastly, and best of all, it is the Divine RIGHTEOUSNESS, which, in its full Gospel meaning, reveals how man may be justified before God, and learn to keep His righteous law.

Throughout this artificial composition, the Spirit of God breathes His free and heavenly influence. The devout soul under His inspiration sings of the adaptation of God's word to all the fluctuations of spiritual experience and need, in strains changeful and fresh as the wind that bloweth where it listeth. The singer in the psalm is the man of God, rejoicing over his Bible as satisfying every desire of his converted heart, and as responding to every instinct of his new nature. Whilst listening to his song, we perceive that he represents and sings for us all; that not to himself only, but unto us also he ministered this gracious psalm of the Scriptures. We know that it is *our* Bible he is extolling; we lose sight of the Hebrew mechanism, and of the older revelation; we feel that the hymn is a tribute to the whole Bible,—a tribute offered by all men everywhere who live and move and have their being in it. The pious man of all times and places and circumstances is here blessing God for His word; for, somewhere or other in these hundred and seventy-six verses, every variety of religious experience, and that of every age, finds its fit expression. It gathers up all our testimonies—the testimonies of the youngest and of the oldest, of the beginners and of the mature—to the supreme sufficiency of the Scriptures. Thus it is not so much Ezra's psalm of rejoicing over the completed Old Testament, as the psalm of our general rejoicing over the completed Bible. Or rather it is the Inspiring Spirit rejoicing over His finished creation;

anticipating His rest from all His work which He had created and made, He blesses and sanctifies the Bible, and pronounces it *very good*.

In this testimony the Spirit beareth His witness *with our spirit*. He does not dictate to the pen of a ready writer the high praises of God's work; but makes the heart of man himself indite them. Every man that lives a religious life must set to his seal, and join in the song. But in order that we may worthily join in all these abundant praises, we must catch their keynote, which is struck in the words of my text. First, we must lose our natural enmity, and love the Bible as the Law of God; then we must yield an absolute submission to its rule; and finally we must feel its transforming influence. The three words I have chosen are the pith and heart of the whole psalm. *I love Thy commandments*—is the language of a soul at peace with God's law; *I esteem all Thy precepts in all things to be right*—is the language of a perfect submission to its authority; *I love Thy commandments more than gold, I hate every false way*—is the language of a soul weaned from all evil. To expound these three things in their order and in their unity is the purpose of my present discourse. I am sure, my young hearers, that they are things which most deeply concern you at your present stage of life; and while you are listening to the thoughts which I have prepared for this day of your renewed consecration, may the Holy Spirit deign to breathe His influence through my unworthy words into all your hearts!

I. The love of the Bible as a book of commandments is both the effect and the sign of a renewed nature. It is that reconciliation with the Law through the Gospel which is the foundation of personal religion.

1. The unrenewed heart knows nothing of this love. It is alienated from God by wicked works, and is therefore at enmity with the Book of God's Law. Its hatred of holiness makes the Holy Book hateful; its dread of punishment makes the Holy Book dreadful. The wicked man, the wicked youth, shuns it

with a feeling of dislike and even hatred. To him it is a book of terrors, which repels him by its everlasting upbraidings; like its lost Paradise it is guarded by cherubim and the flaming sword. Should he nevertheless enter, and traverse its sacred pages, he is met everywhere by the sound of angry voices, the burden of which is for ever, *What doest thou here?* Look where he may, his guilt stares him in the face; wherever he turns the leaf, the shadow of gloomy Sinai falls instantly upon it; the promises fly from him, or fade before his eyes, while the threatenings are all written in fire. You remember the sad prophecy which Eli heard concerning his evil house: *Thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel.* The words are true of the sinner who opens the Bible. The book that contains the treasures of God's people is filled with the presence of an enemy, who tracks the sinful intruder from page to page with his cold and angry eye; so that even when perchance he may be reading the volume in momentary forgetfulness of his sin, he starts to meet that upbraiding look—*Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* He cannot love, he must needs dislike a Book that deals thus with him. Nay, what wonder of his feeling towards it be like that of Ahab to Micaiah: *I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but only evil.* Are there not some among you, young men and boys, whose secret feeling towards the Bible I have only too faithfully described? Let your conscience this day give its honest answer.

2. From such a state of discord and dislike to that of reconciliation and delight, the transition is not a sudden and abrupt one; between the hatred of the carnal, and the love of the renewed, mind, there is the midway state of conviction. When the Holy Spirit applies the law to the conscience—when He takes of the things of Moses and shows them unto us—there is a great change: not indeed a change from hatred to love—for, although the darkness of hatred is past, the true love does not yet shine,—but a change from enmity to desire. The hatred is utterly gone; and, although the fear may remain, it is

fear mingled with fervent longing. It is a wonderful combination of dread, inspired by the *judgments written*, and of desire, awakened by the beauty of holiness revealed. The sinner reads of his doom with anxious alarm, and the Book which records it is still an object of fear. But he reads also of commandments which are now felt to be good, and the Book which contains them stirs the pulses of desire after a better life. The Bible is no longer hated, but has begun its strong attraction: the soul that dreads the punishment is nevertheless drawn to the book which threatens it, and *though it slay him* cannot help reading; whilst its exhibition of the high and holy requirements of the law only excites an unutterable longing, and makes attractive the very sight that throws him into despair. This is the blending of fear and desire which throughout the Scriptures marks the Holy Spirit's blessed work of conviction.

Hear its language from the lips of the great penitent of the Seventh to the Romans: "The commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death;—I know that the law is spiritual;—I consent unto the law that it is good;—I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But, alas, the good that I would I do not;—I am carnal, sold under sin;—and how to perform that which is good I find not. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from my guilt? O wretched man that I am! who shall bring me into harmony with the law?"

But we need not go to the New Testament for illustration. Our psalm describes with almost equal vividness this state of fear and desire. There is a penitent in it quite as evangelically touched with conviction as Saul was, and who utters its blended feelings quite as vehemently as he who groans out his agony from the heart of the Romans. Let us hear the cry of this penitent also: "My skin shivers at thy righteous judgments, O Lord!—O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!—My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath!—I will run in the ways of thy commandments, when thou shall enlarge my heart.—"

O burst these bonds; release me from this miserable restraint; unloose from me the grasp of the curse, deliver me from the bondage of my impotence, and I will run—O how will I run!—in the way of thy commandments. Let thy mercy come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to Thy word." These are the feelings that make the whole world of true penitents kin. So true is the song to the chapter, and the language of the older to that of the later penitent, that while we read the psalm we almost expect to hear the familiar cry, *O wretched man that am!* and almost wonder that it does not burst out at last, *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

But this cry of deliverance through Christ is the glory of the New Testament. The penitent of the psalm could not bless the name of his Deliverer; for *His hour was not yet come*. Thank God, it has come for us; we know whither to fly for refuge from the judgments of the law, and for deliverance from the weakness of our sinful nature. The same Spirit who makes the sinner feel the strength of the law and the weakness of the flesh, who preaches to the trembling soul the judgment to come and for a while fills it with fear and despair, opens the eye of praying faith to behold Him who is at once the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and the Risen Giver of the Spirit of Life. Faith in Jesus brings assurance of freedom from the curse, and the power of a renewed obedience. Righteousness is imputed to it for justification from the sentence of the past; and strength is obtained by it for the new holiness of the future. The faith of the Spirit's operation which unites us to Christ makes the virtue of His death and life ours: we come to the blessed knowledge that in Him we have died to the claims of the law, and that from Him we have the power of an abundant spiritual life. And thus the penitent believer finds that he is the *one* spoken of in the prophecy of Isaiah: *Surely, shall one say, In the Lord I have RIGHTEOUSNESS and STRENGTH.*

3. Then begins the pure and regenerate love of the commandments. The Holy Spirit, having taken of the things of

Christ, and shown them to the penitent's faith, sheds the pardoning mercy of God abroad in the heart, awakening in it a new love to God and to all the things of God. Reconciliation with God is reconciliation with the law of God; and this the Scripture describes as the writing of the law on the heart itself, whereby it is committed to the keeping and charge of love, as the best prompter to obedience. Not a copy of the law, but the very law itself, is placed in the ark within the sanctuary of the renewed heart. "I love Thy commandments" is thenceforth the very motto and watchword, the very definition and sign, of the regenerate nature. The converted believer begins his glorious career of the imitation of Christ, by adopting His earliest forewritten words: *Lo, I come*,—he can also say now,—*I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart*. It is blessed to feel that all sin is forgiven, but still more blessed to feel pleasure in the Divine law, and in obedience for its own sake; it is the purest, deepest, most ennobling, and most satisfying blessedness, to be conscious of a strengthening joy in the law of the Lord, and delight in its requirements. The soul once more finds its rest in God, it returns to that simple harmony with God's will which was the childlike, morning grace of Paradise before sin entered, and which shall be the consummate perfection of heaven when sin shall be forgotten.

And all this feeling is transferred or extended to the Book that unfolds the mystery of God's mercy. The whole Bible becomes precious, as containing the records and documents of the believer's treasures, whether of possession or of hope, and as revealing all that may be known upon earth of Him whose sorrows redeemed us, whose words instruct us, and whom to know is life eternal. The volume, with all the riches of its inheritance, is now all his own. The flaming sword, turning every way, is put up into its place—not thrown away, remember! for to disobedience it would soon be brandished again—and the angels who wielded it are transformed into shining ones, heralding the way into Paradise. The Christian becomes a dweller in God's habitation, and is made free of all the wealth which

God gives Israel. There is now no lurking enemy; everywhere the voice of rejoicing is heard in the land; the sun has risen upon Lot. The Bible has no longer an unsilenced terror in it. It is no longer shrouded in gloom; the shadow of angry Sinai no more falls upon its leaves; the threatenings now fade away, and the promises are written in light. Christ is in all the pages: found everywhere, and without any very diligent search; for, as in the Galilæan house, He cannot be hid. The Scriptures freely deliver up Him who was their ancient and blessed secret. Jesus sheds His transfiguring glory upon every part of the volume; makes its crooked places straight, its rough places plain, and reveals the fundamental unity of the whole. As to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, He begins at Moses, and carries His exposition through all the prophets. He gives the Scriptures, not indeed a new meaning, but a new and deeper blessedness. He leaves *no part dark*. He leaves no curse to be hopelessly feared, no impossible duty, no unattainable blessing, throughout the whole compass of the Bible. To His sincere disciple He makes it a book only to be loved.

To accomplish this is the glory of the new Covenant in Christ, the Covenant which God has ratified with all believers, young and old, from the least to the greatest, and therefore young Christians to you: *I will put my law into their minds, and write them in their hearts, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more*. The latter blessing silences all the terrors of the Book, and the former blessing makes all its requirements possible. The one rids the Bible of its curse on transgression; the other takes away the bar to obedience. And, these two tremendous reasons for hating the Holy Book removed, what remains but the perfect love which casts out fear, and is the fulfilling of all the law?

I feel assured that I am now speaking to many who desire this reconciliation with the law of God; for the Divine Spirit is very earnest in His convincing work upon the young. He goes out everywhere *early in the morning*; that we may seek Him early, He seeks us early. But among so many of the children

of good men, and in a Seminary like this, with the blessing of fifty years' prayers resting upon it, I am very sure that He is effectually carrying on His gracious work of conviction. Many of you are dissatisfied with yourselves, fearing God's anger, and desiring to be at peace with His word. In some, perhaps, the fear may be stronger than the desire; in others, the desire stronger than the fear; but in all of whom I speak, there is a restless consciousness that the Bible is not to you all that it ought to be. This is the Spirit's work. O, for your soul's sake, slight it not, and trifle not with it. Determine never to rest until you have reconciliation with God and His Word. Take, my good youth, your Bible,—that little Bible which your mother gave you,—to the Holy Spirit, confess over it your sins, ask Him to enable you to cast your soul on the mercy of your Saviour; and then He will give you faith, and your Redeemer, —who is even now yearning over you, as your mother never yearned, behind the Veil—will assure you of your forgiveness; and give you back your Bible with His blessing, to be henceforward the supreme Rule of your life, and thought, and being.

II. Absolute submission to the Word of God follows hard upon the love of the commandments. *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.* Once reconciled to the law of God, the next great truth here impressed upon us is, that we must give it its supreme ascendancy over our faith and practice. The avowal of the text may be interpreted to mean: "I accept all Thy teaching with perfect confidence in its truths, and I resolve to render the full homage of my life to all Thy laws, greater and less, harder or more easy." This avowal, young men, you must by the grace of God make your own.

1. *I accept all Thy precepts as right;* I take the whole of the Volume of Revelation as the rule of my faith. That this meaning is included in the words, will be evident if we consider the state of things in Ezra's time;—a time when the written Law of God was almost forgotten, the faith delivered to the fathers was very loosely held, and the institutions of religion were all but

universally neglected. The people had, during their captivity, been rescued from idolatry, but on their return they were in danger of falling into the opposite extreme of scepticism. They had almost lost the very language of the Bible, and had never been so near becoming rationalists and infidels. How glorious was then the vocation of Ezra,—the second Moses! Standing by the Water Gate, reading the dishonoured Scriptures from morning to mid-day, to all that passed by, while those two noble companies of scribes gave the sense—labouring hard to retrieve the dignity of the Temple and its services, by reviving the people's respect for the written word,—he stands prominent in holy history as a spectacle and a pattern for all ages, and to none more noteworthy than our own. Here he speaks for himself and for all who were likeminded: "It is time for thee, O Lord, to work, for they have made void Thy law. As for me, I esteem all Thy precepts in all things to be right; in the midst of general forgetfulness of Thy services and ordinances, I will devote my life to making Thy law and worship honourable." Great was this great man's reward; for he soon made *the joy of Jerusalem to be heard even afar off*.

Our own day is both like and unlike that of Ezra. We all know only too well the shameless attempts which are made to undermine the authority of the Word of God, and the foundation of the vital truths of religion. The youngest cannot be ignorant, nor need the youngest be kept in ignorance, that many of our modern Scribes, unlike Ezra's fellows, are siding with the infidel in weakening the people's reliance upon the precepts of the Bible, and in teaching them to dispense with all in it that seems hard. At such a time, we must, like Ezra, fall back upon the warm loyalty of our hearts, reconciled to the Scriptures by grace, and *therefore* full of reliance on the truth of all their teaching. While the learned are defending them in books, we must be content for ourselves with the still more effectual defence of our heart's love. For, after all, this is the language rather of the heart than of the head: "A Book which has done me so much good, which has

told me all things that ever I did, which has solved to me the deep mystery of my sin, delivered me from the hard bondage of my fears, which has given me a Saviour and the hope of heaven—may well be trusted by me in everything. Let others doubt, I cannot. If it be not a Bible,—an inspired book,—unto others, yet, doubtless, it is to me; for the seal of its divinity is my experience in the Lord.” True, the Word of God can make good its claims, and establish its evidences to everyone who is able honestly to weigh them. It requires no man to accept its teaching with blind submission. It can render a reason of every doctrine and of every hope that is in it. It can defend itself against all who are confederate against it, whether seven, or seventy times seven. Those who fight against it fight against God; and those who would divide it into fragments, putting a difference between what is to be received and what is not to be received, evermore find that its human vesture is like the vesture of Christ, seamless, woven from the top throughout,—from Genesis to Revelation,—and that the same Hand which wove, still restrains all who would desire to rend it. But here it is the heart that rises up in sovereign contempt against all the sophistries of infidelity. “I love thy commandments; and, therefore, thy precepts are to me in all things right: right in what they teach, right in what they omit. I believe what thou sayest to be right in all things; and I esteem thy silence to be right, when thou keepest silence. Thou hast the words of eternal life, and therefore the words of eternal truth!”

We must steadfastly believe, and boldly maintain, that the Scripture revelation is in all things right. But we need not be ashamed to admit that it does not teach all things. What it does teach is true; but it leaves many a void in its teaching: some which human science shall be honoured to fill up, but some also which shall never be filled up at all. When the chapters deficient in revelation shall have been written by Christian science, the human supplements will all be found strictly to confirm the book of God's truth. But there are some which

it is not given to science to write. So long as men need the written word upon earth, they must be content to receive it as containing only parts of His ways and only the beginnings of knowledge. The lines of truth everywhere go off into mystery. Wherever we read, we soon lose the words in the glory of excessive light. Mystery is the vanishing point on all sides; backward, beyond the first of Genesis, upward above the firmament, downward below the grave, and onward beyond the visions of the Apocalypse. But, between the four mysteries, at present darkly known, there is a plain revelation of truth and duty given to us in the Bible, and expounded to us by the Spirit.

Strong in the assurance of His teaching, young men, put your utmost trust and confidence in the written Word. Learn early to renounce the thought of being *wise above what is written*. Let the conviction grow with your growth that there will always be many things *hard to be understood* in revealed truth; that, finished as revelation is, our Master has yet many things to say which we could not bear now, but which he will tell us in another world, when the Two Testaments shall be glorified by a Third unwritten revelation face to face in heaven. Remember the words of St. Paul,—that perfect man among men, that perfect child before God,—*now I know in part*. Bear in mind whose sons you are, and the immense debt you owe to the people among whom you were born and baptized and nurtured, whose teaching God has sealed and ratified throughout this land and throughout the world. When you leave this place, leave it firm champions of the truth, which from them you have *learned and been assured of*,—sworn enemies of all idle speculation,—and thoroughly armed against those who would change the ancient landmarks of God. Above all, hold fast the Bible, with its Sacred Interpreter, and say through life, “while there are books many, and teachers many, to me there is but one book, the Book of God’s eternal truth.” Then, after having kept your integrity, and made the Divine testimonies your heritage through good and through evil report,

you will be able in the far distant time of failing strength to cry with humble boldness, *I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O Lord, put me not to shame.*

2. But the words still more expressly refer to the Word of God as containing a complete body of rules for the life; and you are required to pledge yourselves in a perfect, universal, and self-renouncing obedience:—an obedience to all of them, and in all things, without questioning.

When the Spirit reveals the grace of the Gospel, He reveals also the full obligation and spiritual requirements of the law. The grace that bringeth salvation is a perfect discipline of obedience. The Saviour came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law: to fulfil it *for us*, by bearing its curse; and to fulfil it *in us*, by training us through the nurture and admonition of His Spirit in our hearts to a perfect conformity with the will of God. He gives us our Bible, delivered of its woes, to be the rule of our whole life; but He gives us the whole Bible, with its precepts *concerning all things*. He will not have one of its smallest injunctions contemned. As He threw the arm of His protection around the little children whom they would have kept from Him, so He threw the shield of His sanctions around what men had learned to call the *least commandments*: slight would He hold that man who should hold one of the least of these commandments slight, and teach men so. Two great commandments, indeed, He admitted that there were; but these were the greatest only as having *all the law* hanging upon them. Our text is the pledge of a perfect hatred to that false way which we call Antinomianism,—the abuse of reconciliation with the law into license to neglect its precepts. This is the lie of our hereditary abhorrence as a people; the lie that all true Christians have always loathed. This was the abominable thing which the Apostle in the Romans revolted from with such horror—*God forbid!* But here again, St. Paul is not more earnest than the Saint in our Psalm. He, likewise, has resolved that every precept, great and small, concerning all things, should have its rights. And you, young men, must adopt his words. Determine to

make perfect obedience your motto through life, remembering Who has commended to us faithfulness *in that which is least*. You may all, even the youngest, by the effectual grace of God, resolve, and stand to your resolution: "I will keep every single commandment of God, as if my life depended on it; I will forsake and renounce every the slightest evil practice, as if on peril of losing my soul." But the "as if" is needless; for *He is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him*, and to none but them.

Some of His precepts, however, are hard, and very grievous to flesh and blood. The Psalmist found it so, as he again and again testifies; and so everyone finds it, who is bent on a thorough obedience. Many of God's commandments, which the reason may approve, find much resistance from the will not yet fully sanctified; and sometimes the treacherous inclination may corrupt the judgment, and win it over to its own side. But the rule is absolute. We must neither reason nor revolt, but obey. No lesson was more impressively taught by our Master than this; and, what is of great importance to you, He taught it as one of His earliest precepts, and not as a precept reserved for more mature devotion. Many of His injunctions upon those who just came to Him seemed exceedingly and even rigorously hard; but he never relaxed their severity. He required from the youths and young men that they should at once and for ever renounce their own will, and take up the whole burden of His: meanwhile, *He Himself knew what He would do*, and that His grace would make everything easy to entire devotion. Remember the young man who was required to think right the precept to sell all that he had, and give all to the poor; and those three on the way to Jerusalem, who, in quick succession, were silenced when they would have remonstrated, and sent to do what to them was duty, because it was His will.

And, as it was then, it is now; the most difficult of the Lord's precepts are those which are taught in the school of His providential dealings with us, in the road from Samaria to Jerusalem, or on the highway of life. There are command-

ments not *contained in ordinances*, which are spoken to us, as it were, in the dispensations of His providence; and these sometimes strain our allegiance and faith more severely than the laws expressly written in the Book. He teaches us in *act* lessons sometimes harder to be learned than those which He teaches us in word. Duties will, in due time, be appointed to be done, sacrifices to be made, and sufferings to be endured, which at present lie wrapped up in the unwritten counsel of His will concerning us. O what a volume is the Book of God's providential precepts, and how hard to say concerning all of them that they are right—*Thy will be done!* This volume, my young hearers, is scarcely yet opened before you; as it unrolls, may it find you or make you perfect in your submission! But in order that it may be so, set out in your Christian life with the fixed principle that you will shrink from nothing that is clearly God's will. I am not, be sure of it, preaching to you a doctrine beyond your years. Young as you are, if your soul is renewed, you are what the Jews used to term *a son of the law*—a son of the Christian law. You have taken all its responsibilities upon you; look at those responsibilities steadily, and in God's name dare them all. If you think your strength is small, fix your eyes upon Him who in His twelfth year—when He is bidding farewell to childhood and entering upon youth—looks out upon you from the darkness of the thirty years that you may see Him once as a youth, and breaks the silence of thirty years that you may hear once His youthful voice—*I must be about my Father's business*. He remembers His own sacred youth, and He will make yours sacred; for He supremely loves the imitation that imitates Him early. I charge you this day, in His name and by His example and through His strength, with the vows of the new year still fresh upon you, to make your religious obedience the great business of your life.

III. Then, finally, the influence of the Scripture is a transforming influence. It sanctifies our affection by its blessedness, and makes itself dearer than fine gold; it sanctifies all the

powers of our life by its holiness, and makes every false way hateful.

1. *I love thy commandments more than gold, yea, more than fine gold.* This is the testimony of the Psalmist, and of every devout lover of God's word, to the supreme sufficiency of religion to satisfy all the wants of the soul:—it is better to me than all earthly possessions. And when he says elsewhere, *it is sweeter to my taste than honey or the honeycomb*, he bears witness to its supreme sufficiency to make the soul happy: it is better to me than all earthly pleasures. The fine gold stands for all that man can desire of this world's wealth; the honeycomb for all that man can desire of this world's joy. From both his soul is rescued by the secret, effectual power of the Word of God, as representing religious obedience, with all its treasures and blessings. He may have lusted after gold, and heaped it up; he may have sought the honeycomb of carnal pleasure, and too keenly relished it; but now he has found more enduring and satisfying riches, more enduring and satisfying pleasures. Such is the experience of everyone who yields himself up to the unhindered influence of the Word of God. Gradually and surely, if not suddenly and at once, he finds his worldliness departing; the gold of this world grows dim to him, the honey of this world loses its sweetness; and sooner or later he sets his seal to the eternal truth, that *man liveth by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*. His religion reveals within him a new capacity of blessedness. He proves in the service of God a peace that passeth understanding; the promises of His Book are to him exceeding precious; and the light of God's countenance, shining into his heart, is to him a first or lower heaven. He has found in the revelation of God in Christ rest to his soul. He is weaned from other happiness; the old cry *Who will shew me any good?* is silenced, and instead of it his rejoicing spirit, unsatisfied even in its satisfaction, cries still with reverent longing, *Show me thy glory!* And all this delight in God must needs become delight in God's Book; for it is there that he found first and is ever finding all his hid treasure.

But, in regard to you, young Christians, it is not so much the transforming as the preventing power of the Bible that I would speak of. You are not so much to be weaned as to be kept by the power of the truth from the carnal pleasures of the world. You have not as yet been brought into bondage to this world's good, or this world's pleasure; the gold has not yet entered your soul, nor has the honeycomb of carnal joys much perverted your taste. The work of the Bible in your case is to take full possession of you before the evil day come; to pre-occupy your soul with the happiness of true religion; so that you may go forth into the world armed against all its unholy attractions,—your heart, with its affections, *a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed*.

Learn then to seek and to find your true happiness in your religion. Let your duty to God be your joy; and give the Book which tells you how to perform it the first place in your affections. Keep the favour of God in your heart, and let your religion gladden your whole life, with all its pursuits and engagements. You will not love your other books less for loving the Bible more; nor will you make less advancement in learning for serving God with all your might. God will honour you in your studies, and in your preparation for the active work of life, if you honour Him with the first-fruits of your time. Seek the Lord's blessing on the day in the morning; think of Him as watching you with a Father's love all the day; and go to Him every night for His forgiveness and blessing. So will the outgoings of the mornings and evenings of your youth rejoice; and when you go out into a world of temptation, the Lord will be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever. He will make that wonderful word true: His hard *statutes* shall be your *songs* throughout your pilgrimage.

2. The Word of God will also transform your life. *I hate every false way*: this is the Psalmist's testimony to the effect of the truth in releasing his soul from the entanglement of all sin. He has come to regard sin as falsehood, and as such to hate it with perfect hatred, and this is the sure effect of living

in the Word of God: all sin is regarded as vanity and a lie, but it is a vanity and a lie which is to be abhorred.

All the deceitfulness of sin, you cannot at your age, know; and by God's grace will never know. You have not yet had much experience of the lie and the deceit that lurks in all iniquity, nor how miserably it disappoints those who trust it. Of that, therefore, I will not speak; but of the effect of the Truth in working a noble disdain of sin, as being unfaithfulness to your vows. The falsehood of sin is to you rather its falsehood to God. You have pledged yourselves to be Christians, you have uttered solemn vows to the Most High, and you must accustom yourselves to regard every temptation to do wrong, as a temptation to break your word to God. Resolve, at all costs, to keep faith with your Saviour and Lord. The generous soul of a Christian youth scorns the idea of lying to man; with what boundless abhorrence should he regard the thought of being false to his God. O the depth of the indignation of that young man in the early Bible—*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!* And if you live under the constant influence of the Book, you will always feel the same resolute loyalty; and your whole soul will go with your lips when you cry, "I hate every *false way*."

But we must not pass too hastily over the hatred itself. Nothing is more noble than holy hatred; directed against its proper object,—all that is evil,—it is a beautiful and holy grace. Hence, He who is our great Example was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, because *He loved righteousness, and hated iniquity*. There is no definition of sin more terrible than this, *the thing that God hateth*. And your Bible will nourish in you this wholesome abomination of all that is evil; it will not merely keep you from it, but it will make you hate it. Your soul will come to shudder at the very thought of any impurity in imagination, or desire, or word, or action. Cultivate, young Christians, this abhorrence of evil: let God's word nurture it within you, and restrain it not. Read no book, enter into no conversation, look at no object that would tend to

soften the hideous loathsomeness of sin. If evil ever enters your thoughts, let it be only that you may feed your abomination of it. There is nothing nobler in all this world than a young man's holy contempt of vice. Never is scorn more beautiful than in Christ's young servants who spurn the tempter. Nor will I forbear to say what springs to my lips, that you may in your temptation feel very much as He felt, and look very much as He looked, when He cried in the majesty of His holiness, *Get thee behind me Satan!*

But hatred is only the converse of love; and love to holiness is the opposite pole of the axis on which the soul revolves. The holy word transforms us *from* the false way of sin, *to* the love and pursuit of perfect holiness. It nourishes in the soul, through the operation of the Divine Spirit, a constant and ever growing passion of desire to be holy. All its promises, precepts, admonitions, examples, tend to stimulate this love. Above all, it feeds this desire by the exhibition of the glory of holiness in the character of the Lord. The renewed soul has caught a view of that Faultless Person in the mirror of the Bible; and having seen it once, beholds it ever, contemplates it, loves it, adores it, and is changed into it from glory to glory. O love and glory in that sacred Form. Yours is the age for enthusiastic wonder and imitation; spend it all upon this Being; let it be your lifelong pursuit to be like Him. Keep His holy Person always before you; and say with one whose view of Christ was far more distant than yours, *I shall be satisfied when I awake up*—from my dream of sin, and ignorance, and vanity—*after Thy likeness*. Satisfied then, but never till then!

And now, young men, I commend you to God and the *Word of his grace*, which is able to save your soul. Of all that has been said, this is the sum. The Book of God is given to every one of you for your guidance to the glory of heaven, after you have served your generation upon earth. But in order to your full trust in it, and your full experience of its power, three things are necessary:—First, you must be reconciled to it, as a Book

of Laws, and learn to love its commandments: the grace of the Gospel alone can accomplish that. Secondly, having obtained this regenerate love to the Scripture, you must remember that it is still a law, and yield to its teaching and precepts a perfect obedience: this you can do by the help of God. Lastly, you must yield yourselves up to its transforming influence, sanctifying your hearts and lives: and this you shall experience through the secret agency of the Spirit of God. Here is the beginning, progress, and end of religion: reconciliation to the law, perfect submission to it, and entire transformation into the image of Christ, who is the law incarnate. This is religion; and there is but one religion for the old and the young: this is the whole work of the Word of God,—a work which it performs for all ages of life, and can begin to effect at any period, but which it performs most perfectly when it begins its function early. For it is the mission and the glory of the Bible to sanctify life from its earliest period. When it takes the child and trains it up for God; when it cleanses the way of the young man; when the adult, beginning his pilgrimage, takes it as his heritage; when the aged saint, whose grey hairs are radiant with the dawning glory of heaven, makes it his stay and prop, and preparation for the end,—then does the Bible, then pre-eminently, then most gloriously, fulfil the Divine intention, and *make full proof of its ministry* for the soul of man. Through the Holy Spirit, it has begun its ministry in you; may the same Spirit finish it, through all the processes of His grace, unto your full perfection and eternal blessedness! And to Him, with the Father and the Word, shall be ascribed praise for ever. Amen.

10 MH 62

