

## LIFE BY LOVE<sup>1</sup>

“Through Law I became dead to Law in order that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. Yet it is no longer I that live; it is Christ who lives in me.” *Galatians xi, 20* (*Twentieth Century New Testament*).

**T**O such height of utterance does the apostle rise in stating his thought of himself and his life. It is essentially and distinctively the Christian thought of life. As such I would consider it with you this morning as simply as may be.

Christianity, in any adequate conception of it,—and indeed all true religion,—is at once both a life and a love, a life which beginning in righteousness is fulfilled in love; it is a life of love. As a life its way is the way of all life, viz., dying to live; life anew and higher and more abundant and complete through death to life old and lower and limited and fragmentary. And as a love its way is the one way of love, viz., losing self in another self and in the losing finding a truer and nobler self.

“Among those who were going up for worship at the festival were some Greeks. They went to Philip, of Bethsaida in Galilee, and said: ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus!’ Philip went and told Andrew; and then together they went and told Jesus. This was his reply:

“ ‘In truth I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains solitary; but if it dies it becomes

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fruitful. He who loves his life loses it; while he who hates his life in the present world shall preserve it for Immortal Life!

“If any man wishes to walk in my steps, let him renounce self, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and whoever, for my sake, loses his life shall find it!”

Dying to live! Life through death! So all life proceeds uniformly. The process is that of a constant unveiling of life beneath life, the uncovering of ever-deepening mysteries of existence. The child sees and knows life only in outward objects, in concrete material things. He perceives only the life of form, outline, size, color. To him life consists in the beautiful color of the flower, the gay hue of the butterfly, the splendor of nature's robe; it is made up of concrete things and the sensible qualities of things. But after a while knowledge comes, as we say, and reveals a deeper life beneath these outward concrete forms. Then color, shape, size, foliage, become but expressions of a law and order which rules the universe. The child becomes alive to the deeper laws of created things. It is the same with the child's outlook upon the world of human life. His first thought of human greatness and glory is with the external trappings and coverings and manifestations of greatness. The gorgeous uniform and glittering decorations of place and office are the things which he delights in. But as time moves on growing knowledge unfolds to him the meaning of these outward things; and he comes to see and understand that they are but the outward tokens and expressions of a life of social and political order in which one day he must take his place and part. The life of duty is gradually disclosed to his view; and he comes to realize that he is no longer to play

with the colors of life but to help work out its true harmony by doing his work and duty where he is.

The result of this gradual unfolding of the deeper life is always the gradual displacement and ultimate destruction and death of the earlier view of life.

“When I was a child I thought as a child, I understood as a child, I talked as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things.”

The realization of the deeper and truer life makes us heedless of the other and earlier. In “pressing forward to the things which are before” we “forget the things which are behind.” The soldier thinks but little of the brass buttons and the uniform which were once his childish delight now that the real and serious work of his calling is before him. Discipline, drill, endurance, courage, are the elements of his new life of duty; these are his attractions now; and he is dead to the things which once absorbed his thought. The woman loses her delight in the bride’s orange-blossoms of yesterday in the deeper and richer delight of her motherhood and sweet home toil of to-day; her wedded life has unfolded to her new duties and privileges; in these she lives now; she is become dead to many things which once attracted and charmed her, yet she lives anew in the happy cares and welcome burdens of the wife and mother in her home. It is so that as life unfolds to us her deeper veins we die to the earlier childish joys.

That, I think, is something at least of the meaning of St. Paul’s experience of which he wrote. The old life had once been to him a great satisfaction and gladness. He had been proud of the blue blood of the aristocratic tribe of Benjamin to which he belonged, of the high moral integrity of the sect

of the Pharisees, of the distinguished and honorable place he held in the Sanhedrim. But, when the dawn of a deeper, richer, nobler life broke on him, he died to the attractions which fascinated him before. When he came to see and know human life as Jesus Christ of Nazareth revealed it,—the life of helping to lighten the heavy burdens and soften the sorrows which ignorance and wilful folly bring upon men, of lifting up and elevating the characters of men, of teaching the downcast and despondent to know the unwearying and unending love of God, their Father, for them,—then those things which he once reckoned as gain became but dross to him. The deeper life of the spirit was uncovered to him; and he saw that the best and truest human life does not consist in pride and self-conceit and isolation, in the low selfish satisfaction of past privilege or present honors; but in growing daily more like to God by going forth among men with the thought and purpose of being helpful, not to man, but to men, to any man and every man, and to every woman and every little child, always in meekness and lowliness of heart, charged with the splendid enterprise of setting forward always and everywhere, in things great and in things small, fairness and justice and righteousness and brotherly love among men and women and children of all sorts and conditions, those that are far off as well as those that are nigh. This was his life now; and he was dead to the old. With Christ he had been crucified, put to death, to the old; nevertheless he lived,—lived as indeed he had never lived before.

AND here we must note the fact how that in this new life St. Paul was to find, and did find, as all others before had found, even as his Friend and Master, Jesus of Nazareth, had found, that the higher the life the more bitter the pain,

the loftier the duty the more perilous the performance. The old life had no cross in it such as the new brought to him. In following after the higher he met perils hitherto unknown, —“perils of robbers, perils of waters, perils of heathen, perils of false brethren.” It was even so. It is ever so. No man may ever step out of the life of lower satisfactions and delights, of earthly comfort and ease, without encountering both peril and pain. Suspicion and distrust, misunderstanding and misrepresentation, carping criticism and contemptuous sneer, envy and hatred, danger and suffering, wait ever upon the steps of all high-purposed life. Nevertheless, such life only is true life. Whatever the hardship and suffering, it is nobler than the idle, easy, flower-strewn life of self-indulgence that is left behind; and once embarked upon, the very sharpest and bitterest pangs would never cause the soul of any true man or woman to turn back. Like the sailor tossed upon the stormy deep, he would not change the dangers of the giant waves and the creaking timbers for the safe shore fringed by a smiling sea. This, now, is his life; and he lives more truly in danger and duty than in safety and delight. Even so it was with St. Paul. Though the cross was a real cross, heavy and hard to bear, yet the old uncrossed life had no longer any attraction for him.

“I have been crucified with Christ [he said], nevertheless I live! I have found my life’s largest and best work; and to that I go at whatever cost! Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press forward to the goal, to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, if I may only apprehend that for which I am apprehended! As compared with this, nothing else in life is worth while!”

So it was that with confident trust in the love and care of God, knowing that His fatherly hand was ever over him to guard and protect him, he was strong in a strength not his own to face all dangers and difficulties, even to the death of the block and sword on the Appian Way. The old dream-life of self was gone. The new, real, strong life of helpful service and sacrifice was his. And in realizing it, in living to work like God and so to grow like God, he found the one only real, true human life in all its fullness, even eternal life, the very life of God reproduced in a man.

SUCH, then, is human life as in Christian thought contained and in the great apostle to the Gentiles exemplified. How shall men and women rise up into it and walk along its lofty levels? Not merely the discovery, the vision, the knowledge of such life will send us forth into it. Human nature is still such that while we see and approve the good, we yet follow the evil. With clear vision of the higher and better, men and women yet give themselves to the lower and worse. And by some dreadful twist or defect—shall we say, of nature?—we, all of us, are too largely content to have it so. There must be some deeper and stronger motive than vision or knowledge to impel us. Is there such motive? Is there such power available? There is. It is to be found in that which the great Scotch preacher, Chalmers, called "*the expulsive power of a new affection*,"—the power of love to drive out the old and bring in the new. Just that is the meaning of the second part of St. Paul's words: "I live; no, not I, but Christ liveth in me!" "It is no longer I that live; it is Christ who lives in me."

That is the paradox of love, a self which is yet not a self, a self merged in another, an exchanged personality; a life surrendered and laid down and given up to another for the

other's guidance and direction and keeping,—a life lost in another and in the losing found again in nobler fullness.

With that experience, the experience of exchanged personality, true human life always begins. And not only human life, but life of whatever sort; for no living thing in all this world from bottom to top ever finds its true life until it has first lost its life in another.

“I hold it true, whate'er befall;  
I feel it when I sorrow most:  
'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.”

So sang Tennyson with a depth of poetic insight reaching to the very “heart of things as they are.” And we, every one of us, feel and know the truth of his word, though it may have to be even in bitterest heart-ache. And our acceptance of that truth is but acknowledgment that our own human life at least would have missed its fullness if it had never gone forth and lost itself in another.

Losing life, and in the losing finding richer and truer life! Nature herself teaches us that in a thousand illustrations. The waters of the sea teem with minute fugitive life which only begins to put forth strength when it has taken hold of the rock and knit itself to it. The seed begins its own real life only when it has lost itself in the bosom of the earth. The insects building up the reef on the island, the worms giving new vigor to the soil, tell the same story, the story of life found only when and after it has been lost, of the power of existence breaking forth into strength and beauty from life given up into the keeping of another.

That is the secret of power—the only abiding power it has—in a nation's life. The statesman finds his might and

strength only in a life given up to and absorbed in his country's life. "I live; no, not I, but my country lives in me," might well be his language. Patriotism is a power; yes, but only when patriotism really means the heart of the nation beating in the heart of the individual, and the individual identifying himself absolutely with his country's well-doing and well-being, dying to self and every interest of self, that he may live for and in the highest and best life of his country.

Even more clearly is this truth seen in the experience of the human heart, the deepest of all our experience.

"At the first sight  
They have changed eyes!"

So Shakespeare describes the dawning love of Ferdinand and Miranda. It is the life of self absorbed in another. The love of wedded life is just that exchange of personality which finds its expression in the mutual cry: "Not I, but she! Not I, but he!" And the moving years of united lives only serve to deepen the truth. All work outside in the great busy world is no longer for himself when the worker has a home. And all home work to the wife is wrought in the thought of the bread-winner. This love brightens all interest with new light; and the older and earlier joys are trifling and nothing now as compared with the new and richer joys of that life which is one, yet two; which is the life of neither, but of both; which can no longer be the life of self, but of the other. And the years pass again, and reveal the truth at even deeper depth. The mother's life is lost in the life of her child; and she can say,—every true mother does say,—"I no longer live; but my child's life is the life I am living!" And that is the very glory of motherhood. And the years pass still again, and the children come to learn



the same truth. Growing knowledge and experience teach them the meaning of the father's and the mother's life. They begin to understand somewhat the toil, the peril, the pain, the sacrifice, which surround their parents' life; the bond of a common sympathy and a common interest is created; they live in the parents' life; they feel with their feeling; they are moved by their danger;—and all because they are absorbed in the love of them. The sweet and blessed bonds of love bind them into that union which has no other voice than the "Not I; but father, mother, sister, brother, the family!"

It is so that in the one best and strongest thing of all we know in this world, viz., the oneness, the unity, and solidarity of the home life, we have entirely clear illustration of the truth of St. Paul's saying: "It is no longer I that live; it is Christ who lives in me; for the love of Christ constrains me!"

THIS principle of exchanged personality lies at the root of all the forms and ministries of human life. It has ever been and is the moving force in all true religion,—*i.e.*, in life related to God, to God however conceived, at whatever stage and in whatever form revealed and thereby known. From the beginning clear through to the end the one first and great commandment of all true religion is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul, with all thy strength";—absolute devotion of self to God; the unconditional surrender of the inmost citadel of personality:

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours to make them Thine!"

It was just such surrender, such abandonment and loss of self, such giving away of life into the keeping of another,

such love, as we call it, that made possible the lifting up and ennobling of the man Moses from a common cowherd to one of the greatest and noblest leaders of men and witnesses for God and righteousness of whom this world has record. His strength,—so he himself declared,—his wisdom, his very life, were not his own. From the day when he first met Jehovah at the Burning Bush until the day when he went up to that solemn mount where he met Him once again, never to return alive,—when he was left “on Nebo’s lonely heights,”—his one word was: “*I cannot go unless Thy Presence go with me!*” It was the love of God that constrained him. He lived and moved and wrought and had his very being in God. Again, in the later and larger development of the religious life of the children of Israel, its basic thought finds noble utterance in the Psalmist’s song:

“Like as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, so longeth  
my soul after Thee, O God!  
My soul is athirst for God; yea, even for the Living God;  
my flesh also longeth after Thee in a barren and dry  
land where no water is.  
I will love Thee, O Lord, my Strength, my Saviour, my God,  
and my Might; in Thee will I trust!”

That—nothing less than that—was the moving force in the religious life of God’s people of old. They had “a passion for God.” And it wrought out in them a religion of righteousness so righteous, built upon foundations so deep and so broad, that it has stood through all the centuries, and still stands. It has put all the generations of men under obligation to them for such moral and spiritual leadership that even to this very day we go back to their laws for the fundamental principles of social righteousness and back to their prophets for the fundamental principles of divine life.

THIS, again, was the secret of John Baptist's zeal. He was content to lose himself in Him to whom he came to bear witness. His joy was fulfilled in the glowing glory of Christ, even though his own star sank out of sight. "He must increase; I must decrease," was his language. It was but the anticipation of St. Paul's utterance: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

AND, as of all the lesser ministries, so is it true of that one highest and divinest ministry this world has ever seen,—the life and ministry of Him who, though alive in the glory of His Father, yet, compelled by the almighty power of divine love, humbled Himself and became dead to His own glory that He might live for and in men for their gain. He came and took our human nature that He might see the world with our human eyes, meet and contend with our human trials and temptations, and share with us our human life's sorrows and griefs. He became one of us. He identified Himself with us. He lost Himself in us in His great love wherewith He loved us, that so He might lift us up to see all life with His eyes of divine love and tenderness, that no longer the spirit of self should rule in us, but that His spirit of love and self-surrender should dwell in us and send us forth into life even as He Himself went forth to bring men into the kingdom of love, which is the kingdom of God, for God is love and nothing else.

Religion? Life related to God? There it is; lived in its fullness openly in the sight of men; and uncovering to us the very heart of God, so that in its terms only do we now think of God and know God. And its one and only sign is the sign of the Cross, the symbol of self-denial, of self-renunciation, of self-sacrifice, of "love to the end," of loss of self in an-

other, of death of self and through that death a new birth unto both man and God!

BUT, some man will say: "How can these things be? The preacher speaks to us in the high and difficult language of a far-away and impracticable idealism!"

In what other language could he to-day fitly speak? In the low and easy language of a grovelling utilitarianism? He thinks not so.

My brother-men, listen to me! In days not long gone even their harshest critics could not but recognize in the American people an idealism at times sublime; and great was their praise among the people of all the earth because of it. Are there not those—and not a few—among us yet who would above all else rise up in thought and purpose and aspiration and effort into the lofty realms of idealism? Surely, surely, we have not become altogether a people "of the earth earthy."

God have mercy upon America—well may that be our prayer—when her preachers can ever speak in aught else than the language of idealism to the young men and young women of her universities and colleges!

For one at least, young men and young women of this first graduating class of the Rice Institute, coming at this solemn hour, when we have gathered together in the Name and Presence of God, called to speak to you as one who would speak for God, the only word I would speak—and the only word I know you yourselves would have me speak—is the one highest word possible. Judge ye, therefore, what I say:

"I know a bush that fire cannot destroy;  
 I know an altar that unbinds the hand;  
 I know a sacrifice whose root is joy;  
 I know a flower that heat does but expand.

Love is that altar; in its cleansing fires  
The tree of life grows green with youth again,  
And in the rapture which its flame inspires  
The captive heart forgets its former pain.

Put on my fetters, and thou shalt be free;  
Embrace my altar, and thy cords shall fall;  
Become Christ's captive, and thy soul shall be  
Lord of itself and master over all!"

Young men and women, follow after Him; give yourself to Him in complete abandonment of love and devotion; and in the splendid fullness of His humanity you will find your highest and best life.

PETER GRAY SEARS.