

THE ESSENTIAL TRANSITION

A SERMON

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Preached on Sunday Morning 11th, September 1870

Volume 12 Number 618

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” 1 John 3:14

JOHN commences this epistle with the great subject of eternal life, because that department implies the end of sin, and therefore, its forgiveness; the abolition of death, and an indissoluble unity established between the Lord and the people; and he ends his epistle with the same subject, that of eternal life. “We know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true:” that is, that we may know him who has confirmed the sworn promise of the everlasting covenant; “and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God” this Jesus Christ is the true God, “and eternal life;” and whatever is contrary to this will be reckoned idolatry; therefore, he says, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” This divine life is a good life, and a very pleasant and fragrant life, and a sure life; which qualities or properties are set before us very beautifully in Psalm 133: “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity;” that is, by this eternal life, because here we have a life disassociated with death; here we have a life that puts an end to all our troubles, and therefore it is good; what a pleasant thing it is to be thus made holy, thus sanctified, thus justified, and brought into fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; and to know that greater is he that is for us than all that can be against us is a very pleasant thing. And then it is compared to the fragrant anointing of the high priest, to denote that this life is by the eternal priesthood of Christ; and then the refreshing’s of this life are compared to the dew of Hermon, to “the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” And yet such is our state by nature that we are not only ignorant of this life, but at war with it; all of us by nature are in enmity against it. Hence John says, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren:” there is the standing evidence thereof. Before I enter upon this all-important subject, I may just remind you that what is described in our text is essential to the salvation of every soul. There can be no salvation without this spiritual, vital transition from death unto life; there must be this personal experience, this state of things brought about. The Savior means the same thing when he says, “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Now John of course does not mean that love to the brethren is the only evidence the people of God have; they have other evidences as well as this; this is an evidence, but it is only one amidst the others which they have. I make this remark because not only shall I have to dwell upon this transition in the first part of our subject, but I shall in so doing describe many of the experiences of the people of God, and those spiritual evidences which they love, before I come to the second part, wherein brotherly love as here laid down is an evidence that we have passed from death unto life. I will therefore,

first notice *the transition from death to life*; and secondly, *the evidence here presented*, “because we love the brethren.”

First, *the transition from death to life*. Let us take the dear Savior’s words, wherein this is very beautifully set forth, John 5:24 “He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” Let us analyze this verse. Of course, the meaning is, he that so hears my word as to believe on him that sent me. Hence you read of some to whom the gospel was preached, but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Let us therefore be very careful here. “He that hears my word and believes on him that sent me.” You will perceive that this believing on God the Father must be by Christ Jesus. What is it then to believe on him that sent him? because if you believe on him that sent him, then you believe on him that is sent. Let us try and make it clear, then. First, if we hear the word aright, so as to produce that effect, to believe on him that sent the Savior, the first thing for us to believe in will be the love of God. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” First then it will be the love of God, and the love God, as he himself has said, is everlasting. “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” So that if we have heard the word aright, it will give us to see the love of God; it will give us to see the force of the reasoning of this same apostle, “Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins;” herein is the love. What is the kind of faith, then, if we so believe, as the Savior said, as to have everlasting life? If our faith be right, there will be such a conviction of the infinite and eternal contrast between the wrath and the love of God that our faith will fasten upon Jesus Christ as the way in which the great and eternal love of God is manifested, the way in which that love will be ultimately carried out in blessing the people. You will fasten upon that, and you will see that no people can by possibility be so well off as the people whom God has thus loved with an everlasting love; and you will see that the people hereby escape one death in order that they might escape another, which I will explain presently. Your faith will fasten upon this love of God in contrast to his wrath; and you will say, “Oh, what a great gulf is fixed between the lost and the saved; between those who are left in blindness, impenitence, and unbelief and die ignorant of this love and of these things, what a great gulf there is fixed between the two. Ah, says the soul, shall I be lost, or shall I be saved? Now I say, if we have so heard the word that our souls are quickened from the dead, we shall be led to believe in Jesus Christ as the gift of God’s love, and the way in which God’s love is manifested, and our confidence will fasten upon Christ as the way into God’s love, and we shall not get rid of that feeling. We shall think, what love is like the love of God? There is no other love can be so great, so lasting; no other love can make such provision for its objects as the love of God has done, the love of God by Christ Jesus! As he himself said, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” What does his lifting up mean? Why, it means his crucifixion. And what does that mean? That means atonement for your sin, the blotting out and putting away of your sin, delivering you from the wrath to come, bringing you into unity with God in his great and everlasting love; and you will say, There is nothing can so ennoble and dignify my existence, even in this world, as to have a knowledge of this love of God, to be brought into this love of God; and you will so believe it as to feel the force of the great testimonies concerning it; you will so believe it as to see the glory of it at Calvary’s cross, and in the ingathering of souls from Satan’s kingdom to the kingdom of Christ, and in that preservation with which the people are blessed, and in that resurrection and glorification that lies before them. Therefore, “he that thus hears my word and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life.” Now you are alive

to your need of this Mediator, of this divine love, of this eternal mercy. Such have everlasting life; they already have everlasting life; for being convinced of their need of Christ, believing on him, and being thus drawn to him by the manifestation of the immutable love of God, they are passed from death unto life; they have everlasting life. Where have they this everlasting life? Well first in the gift of the Father, for the gift of God is eternal life, and it is safe there; and secondly, they have this everlasting life in Christ Jesus; he is their life; and “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then,” by the perfection of his life, “we shall appear in glory with him.” Thirdly, they have this eternal life in the Holy Spirit; and it is said of the Spirit of life that “he shall be in you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.” And fourthly, they have this eternal life in the sworn promise of God; hence the covenant in Malachi 2 is called a covenant of life and of peace. Oh, then if we can say that we have so heard the word as to convince us of our need of this Christ, of this God, and to draw us towards him, what is this but the work of the Spirit of God? what is this but opening our eyes, turning us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, bringing us into the kingdom of God, that we might receive the first thing we need, the forgiveness of sin; and then the next thing, that we should enjoy an inheritance among all them that are sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus the Lord. But to believe in God by Christ Jesus is to believe not only in the love of God, but also in the counsel of God. I believe in the case of most of the Lord’s people, perhaps I may say all, the counsel of God is the last department they are brought to believe in or to understand. Here is a sinner; he simply knows he is a sinner; and he sees in the Lord’s own time that Jesus Christ did, in the greatness of his love, bear in his own person the penalty of sin, and has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and the soul thus convinced can see that this was an act of wonderful love to send such a Savior as this; and perhaps these two or three things amount to nearly all he knows. But if I am speaking to such, who are just beginning, as it were, to see men as trees walking, and with whom it is twilight, not full day-light; let me tell you two or three more things that you will learn in this great matter, as passed from death unto life. Not only will you believe in the substitution of Christ as the expression of the great; free, and immutable love of God; but also, you will believe in the counsel of the Father in this great matter of sending Christ into the world and saving us to eternity. Just look at it, it is not like the typical deliverances; they were providential, miraculous, physical, but temporal. But this matter of salvation is eternal, it goes on to all eternity. The more important any business is into which you enter, the more important it is you should think it well over beforehand, the more important it is that you should know what you are going about, and should understand, if you are going to build a tower, whether you have sufficient to finish it; lest, when you have laid the foundation, and are not able to finish it, men begin to mock and say, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Therefore, those who are taught of God, shall go on in their knowledge to the deep counsel of God, first concerning Christ, and then concerning the people by him; and the counsel of God concerning Christ I can give in very few words, where the apostle Peter reminds us that we are redeemed by a price of infinite value, namely, the precious blood of Christ; and then comes the counsel of God, “who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God,” in this eternal counsel, “that your faith and hope might be in God.” And this sending the Savior into the world being a matter of divine counsel and ordination, you see the unchangeability of the counsel. See what a number of years rolled over before the Savior came, but all that time the Lord did not change his mind, neither was the Lord waiting until the world got better. No; the Jews still hold that they have been so bad in their character that the Messiah has abstained from coming, and some of the Jews think that they have sinned the day of grace away altogether, and that now the Messiah never will come. All this, you

see, is human conjecture. Come to God's blessed word, and there we see that there was a set time, called the fulness of time, the appointed time, and at that time the dear Savior came. And I do not know that the world could well be in a worse condition than it was when he came. Look at the professing world when he came; what does the Savior designate it? A generation of vipers; and says, "How can you escape the damnation of hell?" So that he did not wait until the world got better; he came at the appointed time. "The counsel of the Lord must stand, and he will do all his pleasure." And then his counsel concerning the people may be summed up in few words; he took knowledge of them; he was pleased to take knowledge of them before the world was; and those whom he thus took knowledge of, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son; and those whom he thus predestinated he at the appointed time called, and those whom he calls he justifies, and those whom he justifies he also glorifies. Now, "He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me," believes that I am sent of God, and believes herein in the love of God, and the counsel of God; the faith of such persons stands as an evidence that they belong to the Lord.

But here again I must stop, for it is an essential matter to know what kind of hold we have of God's truth. If I have a hold of his dear Son, and see that without him I eternally perish, then I know his value I shall not part with him; and if I so understand God's counsel that without his counsel, if he had not absolutely, unalterably decided upon my eternal welfare, if his counsel could be shaken or overturned, I could have no hope; but having hold of Jesus Christ and of the immutability of God's counsel, I feel I have that that I can part with anything for the sake of. If a man loses his life for the sake of these things, then he keeps it unto eternal life. Let us see that we have a right hold of these things. How many times I have lamented the false, I think, interpretation given to the words "Make your calling and election sure." The word "calling" there does not refer to regeneration, it does not refer to being called by grace; and the word "election" there does not mean God's eternal election of the people to salvation. The word "calling" there must be understood in the same sense as the word "avocation." We term our avocations in life our callings. Make your spiritual avocation sure; your spiritual avocation is that you are a servant of the Lord; make sure, see that you understand your business; because a man that does not understand his business is sure to break down sooner or later. But if you understand your business, and pray, and sing, and serve the Lord, with the understanding, and know the sweet privilege of serving God in his own way; then you make your calling, your avocation, sure; then you will be spiritually as the servant of old was literally when he said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, and it is well with me;" and because it was thus well with him he would not leave. And just so with you; you will see that if the Lord be on your side in his love, and by Jesus Christ, it must be well with you, for it shall be well with the righteous. And so you will understand your business, and thus make your calling sure; you see you can live by it; you see you can never break down, for your needs shall be supplied by the riches of his grace; you can never break down for want of wisdom, for if any man lack wisdom, let him ask, and the Lord will give it; and you can never break down through adverse circumstances. The adversaries of old thought they had made a kind of spiritual bankrupts of the apostles and the saints of that day. We have put them into prison, and we kill so many every day, one after the other, just as we kill sheep; so, the apostle said, "We are counted as sheep for the slaughter; we are killed all the day long," one after the other; but we do not break down by reason of these things; for "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "Make your calling and election sure." To make your calling sure is to make your profession sure, that you thoroughly understand it; not go through formalities, and not understand it; you must understand the truth. And then make your election sure; your election means your choice; that is,

mind what you choose. The Savior says in one place, "Take heed how you hear," and in another, "Take heed what you hear." Mind that you choose God's truth, God's Christ, God's covenant. "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keeps the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer." So, then, where there is this saving faith there will be a knowledge of the infinite and eternal value of these things; you will make your calling sure, you will not be content without understanding it; and no man can make his calling sure without understanding it; and you will make your election sure; you will make a sure choice. If therefore we have passed from death to life, there will be this laying hold of Christ, this recognition of the immutable love of God; there will be, sooner or later, this recognition of his counsel; there will be, sooner or later, this making your calling sure; that is, make sure you understand your business, and then, when you understand it, attend to it; for if a man understand his business ever so well, if laziness gets the mastery, and he does not attend to it, he will make a very poor hand of it. "He that believes on him that sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation." That means two things; it means that there is nothing to condemn him; there is nothing left to condemn him, because the work of Christ is set to that man's account; there is no condemnation to them that are thus believers in Christ Jesus, and that walk in this precious faith and love to God, which is there called walking after the Spirit; and to walk in the flesh is to walk in unbelief and enmity against God's truth. That is one reason why they shall not come into condemnation; and the other reason is because he that began the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ, and they shall continue steadfast, where there is no condemnation, namely, in Christ; they shall keep where they have righteousness and strength; they shall keep where they have that spiritual Aaron that can speak well for them, who pleads their cause, and will bring them off more than conquerors at the last. You know how emphatic the Scriptures are upon this point. "Abide in me," said the Savior, "for without me you can do nothing;" and says John, "He that abides in him sins not." There is no harm in abiding there; no, you do not sin in abiding in him. You would sin if you began to cast away his truth, if you began to apostatize from him; but you do not sin in abiding in the faith, for thereby it is we are pleasing to God; as says John, "You have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth;" "and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him." What shall I say to this blessed truth, brought thus to believe in God; and he will not suffer us to be moved; he has established a Mount Zion that cannot be moved, and he said of these people that trust in the Lord that they shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed. If, then, we are convinced of the awfulness of being lost, and that Jesus Christ is a perfect Savior; if we are convinced of the love and counsel of God, and if these things are in our eyes and to our hearts too valuable ever to be parted with, neglected, or trifled with, if these be our experiences and feelings, then we have the dear Savior's words, "you are passed from death unto life."

Now these people are passed from the first death in order that they may, amongst other advantages, enjoy this one escape from the second death. What is the first death? The death of the body? No. The death of the body is included in the first death, but the death of the body is only a part of the first death. What is the first death, then? Here it is; "In the day you eat thereof you shall die" and man did by the fall become dead in trespasses and in sins. And did man by that first death cease to be? No; man became alienated from God through the ignorance that is in him; and thus, he died the first death. The literal death of the body is included in that death, because the death of the body

results from this spiritual death. Doctors can find no reason, scientifically speaking, why the human subject should die at all; they can find no reason in the mechanical or even the chemical properties and structure of the body. But the word of God shows it. We had in us before the fall a principle of perfect purity, and that principle would have kept us alive to all eternity; the body never would have grown old, never would have died, if that principle had remained. But sin came in, and overcame that principle, destroyed that purity, that holiness, that integrity, that up-righteousness, which we had, and that caused our souls to be dead to God, alienated us from God; the principle is gone. Now we want another principle, pertaining to a higher life and to a better scene of things; and we have that higher and better principle beautifully described in the words of the apostle: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." Now the creation principle was not too strong for sin, sin could overcome it; but the regenerational principle is too strong for sin; sin cannot corrupt, injure, much less destroy it. Hence the man that is born of God has in him, as it were, the immortality of the Most High; the Spirit of God dwells in him, the Christ of God dwells in him; God dwells there, and there is a principle that can neither die nor depart, for it lives and abides forever. But without the implantation of this new principle in the soul by the Holy Ghost, why, even I was going to say scientifically speaking, which is wrong in these things, you must see that the soul must remain dead, alienated from God. But this new work, this new principle, brings in that divine life by which the soul lives, and Christ and God are the strength of that life; therefore, it cannot die.

The first death, then, is our alienation from God in the first Adam, and thus we have all become, at the best, poor, miserable creatures; we patch things up as well as we can; but all our solid, real pleasure flows from God himself, from his love, mercy, and salvation; all our solid hopes rest upon that foundation which can never be moved. This is the first death. And what is the second death? Why, analogous to the first; not the very image, but analogous; enough likeness to form the solemn analogy. In the first death we did not cease to be; in the second death we do not cease to be. In the first death we were alienated from God, severed from him, and cast into sin; by the second death we are alienated from God, and cast into hell, cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; this is the second death, and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into this lake, this second death. But those who are thus brought into the faith of Christ shall not, as the Lord said to the Smyrnaean church, be hurt of the second death. See how solemnly important it is that we should know what this transition is, should understand our own religion, and be able to give a scriptural reason for the hope that is in us.

Secondly, I notice *the evidence here presented*, because we love the brethren. Of course, where there is this knowledge and experience of which I have spoken, it does give us a unity of soul to the brethren, because it enables us to judge what true experience is, and thereby to distinguish the man who is a Christian, in most cases, at least, from the man who is not. I have in this part a very difficult subject to handle; for while you read a great deal about brotherly love in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, when you look abroad among churches, even churches of truth, you see dreadful drawbacks. I shall quote a few scriptures, and get ourselves into all the trouble we can, and then see how we can get out of that trouble; it is no use denying facts, you know. I think most of us do come, in this question of brotherly love, sometimes upon very dangerous ground, speaking after the manner of men. Let us hear what the Savior said about it, and what John said about it. The Savior says, "He that is angry with his brother without a cause," that is, without a just cause; we can often make a cause just in our own estimation, in order to justify ourselves,

“is in danger of the judgment.” What judgment? The judgment of God’s truth going against him. “He that shall say Raca!” “vain fellow,” a word of contempt, “shall be in danger of the council,” What is the council? The holy prophets; they have born certain testimonies; we are in danger of that council going against us. “But whosoever shall say, you fool,” maliciously cut off a man that he knows or believes to be a child of God, “shall be in danger of hell fire.” Now, if all were tested by these rules, how many would escape? Not many, I think; I think we all of us, more or less, should be found guilty. John says, “he that hates his brother walks in darkness and knows not whither he go, because that darkness has blinded his eyes.” Again, “he that loves not his brother abides in death.” Again, “he that hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Why, look at the hatred, the prejudice, the reviling, the slandering, the cruel way in which one party deals with another and acts towards another. Where is this brotherly love, say the world; we do not see it. If we look at you high-doctrine people, where is your brotherly love? What is to be done? Here is a plight we are in, say you: in danger of judgment, of the council, and of hell fire; and in the dark, and in death, and murderers; what can we do, then? Well, I know of only two ways of getting out of it; strictly speaking, of one way. Let us bring in the great example of brotherly love and bless God for the perfection that is in him; and that is the way we get out of our trouble. Was Jesus ever angry with his brother without a cause? No, say you, nor with a cause: he was never angry with his brethren. The disciples could never make him angry by anything they did. That is perfect love, if you like; love that could not be moved. Did Jesus Christ ever treat his brethren with contempt? Ah, no; he always honored them, always held them in infinitely high esteem. Well, say you, but the Savior did call his disciples fools. He did, lovingly. I like to be called a fool like that; just as though the Lord should say, You, silly things, to see all you have seen, and yet question whether it is real or not, and think you have been deceived. I do not mind the Lord calling me a fool in that way when I have made a mistake; I like it. The meaning is, if you call a man a fool in the way of hatred, malice, and contempt. Did the Savior ever do this? Never, he always called his brethren by good names, “little children,” “little faith.” I am always glad when he calls them by little names, because I have a chance of coming in with them then. And I have often been glad there was the colt, the foal of the ass, as well as the ass itself; because the parent ass might have been rather a high one, as some are in the east, pretty tall; but he rode upon the colt in order to be low enough for the little children to shake hands with him; and the little children knew it was done for them, and so they cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” So, the lower he comes the better for me. He never called his brethren by evil names; “not a single particle of wrath could ever his bosom move.” Joseph receives his brethren most kindly. You sold me, but I would not sell you; you would have slain me, but I would not slay you; you cast me away, but I would not cast you away; you cared not what became of me, but I cared what became of you, for I am sent before to save much people alive. Then again, Jesus Christ did not abide in darkness; he always knew where he went; no darkness could blind his eyes, for he never hated his brethren, but always loved them; therefore, he could abide in death only three days and three nights, and that not three days and three nights complete, but three days and three nights current. As he loved his brethren, he could not abide in death, rose triumphant, re-appeared, gathered them in, demonstrated his love and his care. Here, then, is a perfection of example; he never hated his brethren, nor could anything make him hate them. There never was a person before, and never will be again, whose love to the people was so tried as was the love of Christ; and yet the many waters of our sins and of God’s wrath, the many waters that rolled upon him from the powers of darkness, could not quench his love, neither could the floods drown it. That is how I get out of my trouble; but that is not all. Now you see Jesus Christ has met these precepts perfectly,

and that is where I hide myself; he is to be a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm. Ah, say some, and that is the way you settle it. Yes; but I have one more item yet to make it complete, and that is this, that while we are the subjects of a thousand drawbacks, and Christ is the remedy for them all, on the other hand we must not destroy personal character. I must in my degree walk in love to the brethren. I shall never do so in perfection; but I will as far as I can and pray for grace to do so more and more. Brotherly love in the people of God, towards the people of God, the cause of God, does exist, associated with a thousand drawbacks, but Christ is the remedy for all those drawbacks. I know what our adversaries would wish me to say, that as Jesus Christ has met every precept it does not matter about ourselves; we may hate, and murder, and do as we like, and it does not matter; he is the remedy for all. Well, that would be the devil all over; you must go to the very bottom of hell to get up such a sentiment as that. Love produces love, and with all our drawbacks we love the people of God sincerely, we love the truth of God, and we love the God of the people, too much stress is laid upon this in this epistle, that if we know nothing of brotherly love we are strangers to the love of God, the Christ of God, and the mercy of God. We will be honest and admit those two things: first, that with us there are a great many drawbacks; secondly, that Christ has met all those drawbacks, swallowed the whole up; but not hereby to set aside brotherly love; but hereby to establish and hereby to increase brotherly love in us; for it is the great truth that everything is done for us, and we shall find everything complete at last; this is the great truth that brings about brotherly love, and endears the people of God, and the God of the people, and the ways of the Lord. Whatever gospel has not this tendency is not the gospel of God. So that, bless the Lord, then, do not let us stop until we can serve the Lord without infirmity before we serve him; do not let us refrain from showing our brotherly love to the brethren until we can be perfect in that; let us do as well as we can. And you know in many cases the Lord accepts the will for the deed; he knows what poor creatures we are, how many drawbacks we have; but with all these drawbacks there is a reigning power in the mind of the Christian, that he loves the people of God, and feels a unity to them, thereby proving that he belongs to the family, and is passed from death unto eternal life.

Does not the thought that, while we are the subjects of so many drawbacks, and we can but feel reproved from a consciousness thereof, yet only the good, but none of the evil, will be mentioned unto us. "Cornelius, your prayers and your alms," not your sins and your faults, "are come up for a memorial before me." And again, "I was hungry," and so of the rest, "and you gave me meat;" "As much as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me" Then shall they possess the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him."

We have a collection today for the Christian blind, to show our sympathy with these afflicted brethren. Time, is short; so, what our hand finds to do, we may well do with all our heart, and soul, and might, and strength. Does not the love of Christ constrain us? "And all such shall be blessed in their deed." And so, we are to show our faith by our works. This may we never cease to do. Amen.