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A Dividing-Line Drawn by A Divine Hand

Sermon preached by Mr. H. Dawson at "Ebenezer" Chapel,
Hastings, on Wednesday evening, 21st July, 1954.

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."—ROMANS viii. 5.

IN our text there is a declaration which draws a solemn line of demarcation between the living and the dead. If you live and die in the first part of this text you will be lost. Remember that! No preacher can tell you what a calamity it will be, for it is beyond words to describe. If you should have the great mercy to be born again, and live, (as you will,) and then die, in the second half of the text, you will be saved; and no preacher can tell you in adequate words what that means,—the mercy of it.

"As long as God shall God remain,
So long shall last hell's lingering pain;
So long the joys of heaven shall be;
O long delights, long misery."

I would that it might please God with Whom you and I have to do, to help us to examine ourselves in the light of such a scripture as this is. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh."

Every sinner born begins to live his life like that; he possesses no other concern, but has a mind for what this earth affords, the things of the flesh, and his bent of mind is to be after these things as every opportunity arises. Solemn is what the word of God declares, "The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." What do you mind? Let your consciences tell you the truth about it. What is your bent of mind? Are you living for this life only? Are all your cares, your concerns, your ambitions, to do with this life and on this side of the grave? Are you still in the first half of the text, "after the flesh, the things of the flesh"? Or can you appeal to God with Whom you have to do that you desire such a mind as every sinner born again is the subject of, to mind the things of the Spirit, and for those blessed things to be the element in which you live and move? It is a wondrous mercy to be found "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

"The soul that with sincere desires
Seeks after Jesus' love,
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires,
With breathings from above."

Do look within as the Lord shall help you. Weigh matters up. Examine yourselves. Remember what you are and where you are. You are sinners with never-dying souls, and you are journeying through this life to an eternal destiny, either to heaven or hell. One of the two it must be. Which of the two will it be?

'Pause, my soul, and ask the question,
Am I ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?
Have I union
To the church's living Head?'

A very solemn consideration!

I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at this subject from the two viewpoints of it. I would say just a little, as the Lord shall enable me, about this first half of the text: "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." I said that there was a solemn line of demarcation drawn herein; and I want you to realize that it draws a line, not only between the professing and the profane, but between the professing and *the possessing*,—sinners who have the great mercy to have a little religion that is of God, who alone will be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." There are heaps of religious folk in the first half of the text. Do not call the preacher "narrow-minded." I am telling you the truth. The foolish virgins, having lamps with no oil, yet with names on the church roll, were in the first half of the text, and did only mind the things of the flesh; had a name to live, and were dead; had a form of godliness, no power. All who build up their hope of heaven on the great "I" and the doings of it are in the first half of the text; and if they live and die there, they will be lost. Yes, the word of God is very solemn and searching, and it will be a mercy if preacher and people alike realize the searching nature of it; "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh."

Now some of you can remember that you lived awhile in the first half of the text. A wonderful mercy if you can go back to when God began to deal with you, and you found a something living and moving within that you never felt before; and it brought you to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Great is the mercy when a sinner finds within an aching void which the world cannot fill.

"I cannot here contented live
With all the dainties earth can give."

Let us look into it a little, as the Lord shall help us, what it is to have such a mind. O, the mercy to have such a mind communicated, and to be numbered with them that are "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit!" It brings before us a very solemn consideration. You and I must have some religion wrought within by Him Who is the Author of the Holy Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." The Holy Ghost is the Author of it; and all religion which alone will do to live by and die by is likewise by inspiration of God. You cannot earn it, you cannot buy it, you cannot merit it; but it comes like this, "The gift of God is eternal life."

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." Maybe some of you are still in this first half of the text. O, what a solemn place to be in, and to be unconcerned about it! Yet you may step out of time into eternity ere another sun shall set. What then?

"Pause thou, my soul, and say,
'If I should die today,

What is my case?'

Let us look into this character here, "After the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." You will be weighed down at times with the *reality* of the things of the Spirit, because that sums up what the things of the Spirit are, eternal realities; and when you look within and ponder the matter, that you are born for an eternal state, O, it is a weighty matter, and it gives urgency in one's spirit at times.

"Jesus is the one thing needful;
I without Him perish must.
Gracious Spirit, make me heedful;
Help me in His Name to trust."

Now the word of God tells us, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come," He will "reprove the world of sin." I would look at these things of the Spirit from this viewpoint, as to how the Spirit works in a sinner's breast. The subject could be regarded from other viewpoints, too, in setting forth what the things of the Spirit are, but my mind seems to dwell upon the work that the Holy Spirit begins, carries on, and completes in a sinner's breast.

"They that are after the Spirit." Is that what you are after, some of you? The Spirit? Maybe some of you feel you cannot say much about the things of God, as to having any part or lot therein, and yet this text here is so worded that it is encouraging to them that are asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. I like how it is worded, "After the Spirit." "Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord." You may feel like Peter who followed afar off, but you *are* following. Yes, and

"Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you *still seek*."

O, it is a wondrous mercy to be "after the Spirit."

Now I said the things of the Spirit are eternal realities; and when a sinner is born again and he begins to be "after the Spirit," then he realizes heaven is real, hell is real, life is real, death is real, time is real, eternity is real; and he knows this, that he must have some religion that is real, or he will miss the mark that he is aiming at, which is to "win Christ, and be found in Him." The Spirit convinces the sinner, when this good work is begun, of somewhat of his guiltiness before God, his sinnership, his undone state, his hell deserving, and the ruin which has been wrought by the Adam fall that he is the subject of. He has to appear before God like the woman in the gospel, (good it is to appear before God like it!) "Falling down at Jesus' feet, she told Him all the truth." When a sinner is born again and being convinced of sin as the Spirit convinces of sin, he appears before God to tell Him all the truth.—"Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." Yes, and like Isaiah said elsewhere, "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." And the Spirit makes known to that sinner under this solemn sense of his guiltiness before God,

"If my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

"By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and there is a word like this, "And all the people shall say, Amen." And every sinner taught of

God *does* say, Amen, sooner or later, to that truth, "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" This sinner comes to the place that the apostle Paul refers to, "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 19). The people of God are brought into that solemn experience in this life, and put their mouth in the dust of self abasement, if so be there may be hope; and they all, sooner or later, rejoice in hope as they find: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The rest of mankind (living and dying in the first half of the text) have their mouths stopped beyond the grave, when they appear guilty before God, and, self condemned, receive the due reward of their deeds, and go down into eternal misery. Can you remember when you appeared before God with a solemn sense of your guiltiness? The word of God declares, "And they shall be all taught of God;" and whether it be by terrible things in righteousness, or whether it be (as it often is) "Here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept," the Spirit will lead the sinner into the exact truth of what his condition is before God, and make him realize,

"Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfil Thy laws demands."

Now that is one of the things of the Spirit. I have said many times, and I shall keep saying it as I am helped, that it is the greatest need in our denominational life. O that the Spirit would pour out upon us a gracious conviction of sin, that they who possess it may be brought to humble themselves before God, search and try their ways, and turn unto Him as the sinner's Friend!

"They that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit." Remember, it is a great mercy if you are after the Spirit that He will make known to you your sinnership so that you learn it aright; not by dint of education and intellectual knowledge, but *as it is made known by the Spirit, which is revelation.*

"Sinner, if thou art taught to see
How great thy guilt and misery,
In every thought and act impure,
The blood of Christ thy soul can cure."

Then another thing of the Spirit will be made known. When the eyes of the blind are opened, when somewhat of the plague of the heart is known, when the sinner realizes somewhat of his sinnership, his hell-deserving, his guiltiness before God, and while he realizes under the law that he is helpless and hopeless, yet the Spirit will lead that sinner from being under the law to be before Calvary's cross, and there reveal to him *Christ* as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." And now there it will be demonstrated that the sinner is "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Under the law, as I have said, he is helpless and hopeless; he looks within and he sees nothing but what he is as a sinner, and he listens to the law in all its thunderings, "Pay me that which thou owest;" he trembles lest the curse of that law should be pronounced upon him, and he owns the justice of it. But when at length he is brought before Calvary's cross, when the blessed Spirit shows him Jesus

Christ,—

"A scene of matchless grace;
'Tis Jesus in the sinner's place;"—

something rises up in that sinner's breast, and it is, "Who can tell but what God will be gracious unto *me*?" There may be thoughts like this,

"My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes *her* guilt was *there*."

Now he begins to be "after the Spirit," if so be the Spirit will reveal Jesus Christ to his soul's joy, that he may say, "My Lord, my God."

"For me, O miracle of grace!
For me the Saviour bled."

And the Spirit is known in that sinner's breast as the Spirit of prayer. The grace of supplication wells up; there are sighs and cries, and hopes and longings and desires ascending, if so be the sinner may get a living interest in what was done on Calvary's cross. Much might be said along that line of thought, and it is a wondrous evidence of being "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit," when it can be said of any sinner, "Behold, he prayeth." When was that the truth about you? I like to stress this point in the pulpit. You may not be able to tell when you hope there was a good work begun in you, but you should be able to tell when you began to pray. Remember that! "Then began men to call upon the Name of the Lord." When did you begin to do it? Go back over the long years, some of you, to when you ventured to knock at mercy's door first of all, and you *began* to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

"Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood,
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret love of God."

The sinner is now alongside the publican: "God be merciful to me, a sinner;" and that is what he feels to be. He feels as he has never felt before. He may have been in a cause of truth from baby days onwards, and heard the gospel set forth, but now he feels it as he never felt it before. "Something must be known and felt." Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth is speaking: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour Thou bearest unto Thy people; O visit me with Thy salvation." It is a mercy if you can look back to when you began to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit," and you first of all appeared before the throne of grace to beg a Jabez' portion, a blessing indeed. You have evidence then that the good work was indeed begun, and the root of the matter is found in you, and the sap, even the grace of God, still rises up. Yes, and

"Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you *still seek*."

"After the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

Another thing of the Spirit will be separation from the world. I have thought many times,—looking at these things from the viewpoint

of a preacher, and especially a pastor,—that in our denominational life, ere there comes what some of us long to see, a reviving in the midst of the years, there has got to be much more separation from the world made known than is oftentimes to be seen amongst our people. I am not fitting caps on; I am telling the truth. When a sinner is wrought upon to be “after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit,” there is a feeling like this, “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Go back, if you can, to when you hope God began to deal with you, and you realized then what the world was as you had never found it to be before. You had been in it *and of it*, and you were content to be “after the flesh . . . the things of the flesh;” but now an aching void was wrought within, and you could not live as you had been living. What happened? You were brought to choose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;” and you looked on the world from another viewpoint altogether. You could echo the hymnwriter’s words,

“Let others stretch their arms like seas,
And grasp in all the shore,
Grant me the visits of Thy face,
And I desire no more.”

“After the Spirit.” And the Spirit will be, I say, a Spirit of separation from the world.

Then there will be love. “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” All the while you live in the first half of the text, you may listen to the truth, and be found in our causes and among our people, but though you listen to it, you do not love it. You are not concerned to live it. The truth that you listen to you do not receive as the word of God says about Jeremiah, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.” But when a sinner is wrought upon and is “After the Spirit, the things of the Spirit,” then he finds this wondrous feeling within that he loves the truth while he listens to it, and yet that truth at times may be searching, even cutting; but while you may be cut down, you will never be cut off by it. No, while you are “after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit,” you will be as the dear Saviour said, “He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” Sometimes you hear preachers who get help from God, and they put things very, very plainly, the word of God seems to be so searching, but you appear before God therein: “Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” “Make me right, O Lord; let me not be deceived, or deceive those amongst whom I live and move.” You will be “after the Spirit.”

Paul speaks of those who “did receive the love of the truth.” Have you received it? Think how many thousands of sermons some of you have heard all your days under the gospel, hearing preachers sent with “Thus saith the Lord” to preach. What have you gained by trading? What evidence can you find that you have indeed grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? The word of God tells us in a parable that the Saviour came

to see what every man had gained by trading. Now, this is heaven’s market-place, when you appear in the attitude of worship. “In all places where I record My Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” Yet, O what solemn reflections you will have when you look back over life’s journey and realize how little you have learned of the things of God with all the opportunities afforded you! Preacher and people alike must all plead guilty here. Remember this, “The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” Do not baulk at the word, “diligent.” It is scripture. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*.” O, this wondrous love which is known and felt when a sinner is “after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit!” “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.” “He that loveth is born of God.” Do you love the truth, then, that you listen to? Do you love the house of prayer, and come with willing feet, if so be you can get in touch with Him Whose house it is?

“We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thy honour dwells;
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joy excels.”

O blessed grace of love! O that preacher and people alike knew much more about it than any of us does!

“God only knows the love of God,
O that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart.”

This is a blessed evidence, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” That will help you to ascertain if you are “after the Spirit.” “He that is joined to the Lord is *one spirit*.” There is a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, so that they that are after the Spirit come together in a blessed fellowship. “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” I like that word of the Saviour’s, “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.” Fruit. A very solemn word to contemplate. Can you look at a tree loaded with fruit at harvest time and not feel condemned before God because in your life, your profession of Jesus’ Name, there seems to be just the opposite? You have to lament, “My leanness! my leanness!” “Leave not my soul destitute.” But there will be this:

“Quickened by Thee, and kept alive,
I’d flourish and bear fruit.
My life I’d from Thy sap derive,
My vigour from Thy root.”

You will be after the spirit of fruitfulness, desiring to be fruitful in every good word and work. You will echo that word of the psalmist: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.” “After the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”

One more thing of the Spirit as I come to the Amen. All the people on the right side of this line of demarcation, “after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit,” will know what it is as they journey on through life to go through much tribulation, and they will know also

what it is for that tribulation to be overruled to their souls' eternal good. It is a great mercy, when "trouble, like a gloomy cloud, gathers thick and thunders loud," if you can feel to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." I do like this word,—I wish I could live in the light of it,—"Exercise thyself unto godliness." "For godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Remember this, there is no trouble that can come into your life, whatever the nature of it may be, but *godliness can make it profitable* to you, and you can say then, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." You will find that "out of the eater shall come forth meat, and out of the strong shall come forth sweetness. It is a mercy when you can be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit," when your heart is sore because of this trouble or that which has come upon you; to feel

"Lord, I would indeed submit,
Gladly yield my all to Thee.
What Thy wisdom sees most fit,
Must be surely best for me."

I would hope some of you do know what this is, because one of the things of the Spirit I have no time to touch upon will be sanctification, and that means to be set apart for God; and that is what you want to be if you are "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

"This prayer and this ambition mine,
Living and dying, to be Thine."

"They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

The Spirit will be to you at times a Remembrancer. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee." Sometimes when the light of heaven shines on the way that you have journeyed along, you can look back and see Ebenezers and Hill Mizars, and feel, "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life;" and you realize, although you have said, "All these things are against me," Jacob-like, you have to re-word what you say: "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the *lovingkindness of the Lord*." And you solemnly confess, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?" And you have this feeling deep down that, as you journey on through life, you might be more earnest and more urgent in being "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

"O Lord, I would seek the charms of Thy mind,
The grace to be meek and lowly and kind,
Forbearing, forgiving and loving always,
And only be living to publish Thy praise."

There you get a summary, a beautiful summary, in a petition put together by the hymnwriter, of what it is to be "after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." "And let all the people say, Amen."

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