

1 Timothy - Commentaries by Henry Allan Ironside

Daily Sacrifice, October 5 (1:19)

THE faith which we are here commanded to hold is not merely confidence in God but rather that faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. In other words, it is the form of doctrine which has been committed to us. This faith and a good conscience are intimately linked together. He who becomes careless as to his behavior and puts away a good conscience will soon become recreant concerning the faith. We hold the truth only as we walk in subjection to that truth; if we trifle with it we lose it. We can hold the mystery of the faith only as we maintain a pure conscience (3:9).

—Heath.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 13 (1:15)

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”
—1 Timothy 1:15.

NONE can be too bad for Christ. If the enemy of our souls cannot keep us from coming to Christ by deceiving us with the notion that we are good enough for God without Him as our Saviour, he will often attempt to make us believe we are too bad ever to be saved. But this is impossible, for “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom,” says Paul, “I am chief.” Surely, since the chief of sinners has been saved already, none need despair. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). God delights to show His grace to the lowest and the vilest, as well as to those who have fancied themselves to be righteous, but have learned that all their righteousness is but as filthy rags in His sight (Isa. 64:6).

There is no more successful way to influence others than by the personal testimony of one who has been saved himself. Mere theory, however true it may be, is not enough. There must be a personal experience of saving grace if one would be a winner of souls. To say, “Christ can save sinners,” is blessedly true, but it is not enough. To be able to say, “He has saved me,” gives power to the message and produces assurance in the hearts of the hearers as they realize that the speaker is bearing witness to what he has himself experienced.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 14 (2:5-6)

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom For all, to be testified in due time.” —1 Timothy 2:5, 6.

SINFUL, man feels the need of One who can stand for him in the presence of God. The lack of the realization of this troubled Job. He cried, “There is no daysman who can lay his hand upon us both!” (Job 9:33). This is exactly what we find in Christ Jesus, the Mediator whom God has provided. He is both God and Man in one glorious Person, hence He can act for both the offended Majesty of heaven and the guilty sinner. On the cross He gave Himself a ransom. It was for this He came into the world. “Not,” He says, “to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.” Yea, that ransom is available for all, both Jews and Gentiles, who will venture on Him in faith. If any are lost now, it is because they refuse to avail themselves of the provision made for their salvation. Through the One Mediator all may now draw nigh to God who desire to know His saving grace and power.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 15 (3:16)

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” —1 Timothy 3:16.

THE mysteries of the New Testament are sacred secrets, long unrevealed, but now made known by the Holy Spirit for the blessing and edification of the children of God. The mystery of godliness, or, as it might be rendered, the secret of piety, is Deity enshrined in Humanity in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has been manifested in flesh. This refers to His incarnation. Though He took the sinner’s place He was justified in the Spirit. His justification proved Him to be the suited One to make expiation for iniquity. Then we have His manifestation. Angels beheld their Creator clothed in the body of the Babe of Bethlehem! His proclamation to the nations in accord with the purpose of God tells of redemption accomplished. By faith He is received, believed on in the world, acceptance; and last of all we have His glorification at the Father’s right hand. He is the manifestation of the Father and the Center of all His counsels.

Mysteries of God, Chapter 6. (3:16)

The Mystery of Piety.

It should be cause for unfeigned thanksgiving that one mystery there is which has ever been cherished and contended for by the devout of all communions in Christendom. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Editors and translators differ considerably as to the exact rendering to be preferred; but the doctrine remains untouched in any reputable version. The excellent translation of J. N. Darby reads, "And confessedly the mystery of piety is great. God has been manifested in the flesh," etc., using the past-perfect tense through the balance of the verse. Some question the right of the word "God" to remain; but in that case we must understand, "And confessedly great is the mystery of piety [which] has been manifested in flesh;" and only in Immanuel, "God with us," is this fulfilled.

This is the battle-cry of the soldiers of the new dispensation. "The secret of piety has been manifested in flesh!" God has appeared on earth, taking manhood into indissoluble unity with Deity, or Godhead; and "we beheld His glory (as the glory of an only-begotten with a father), full of grace and truth." To deny this is to apostatize from the faith, and to surrender all rightful claim to the name Christian.

By this confession spirits are tried and the claims of teachers weighed. "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:2, 3).

No truth has been more bitterly denied than this; no teaching more relentlessly assailed by Satan's ministers, oftentimes transformed as angels of light. Not only Jews, but heretics of all ages since the cross, have leveled their venom darts at this most precious mystery of godliness; but it abides to-day the cherished ark borne by the people of the Lord through the wilderness of this world, on their pilgrimage from the cross to the glory.

And, indeed, it was this very truth that the ark set forth. There the gold spoke of the divine nature; and the acacia wood—the incorruptible wood of the desert—pictured the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here was God's throne. Here He could rest: in no mere creature, surely, but in His own eternal Son become flesh, and accomplishing His will perfectly in the scene where He had been so terribly dishonored.

It is on no equivocal statements of Scripture the believer rests his faith that Jesus is very God and very Man, two natures in one person, inseparable and indissoluble.

Of this mystery the former revelation speaks, though in such a way that only when Christ had come could its statements and predictions be clearly understood. The second psalm minutely portrayed beforehand His rejection by the nations and the people of Israel, and then adds, "I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee" (vs. 7). Jehovah could not so address a creature. Between the Creator and the greatest of His creation there is an immeasurable gulf. It is the deity of the Son that the psalm makes known. So Zechariah declares the reality of His manhood, while asserting His equality with Jehovah, when he writes, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith Jehovah Tsebaoth: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn My hand upon the little ones" (ch. 13:7). Micah similarly testifies that He who should be the smitten Judge of Israel, and who should be born in Bethlehem Ephratah, was the One "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (chs. 5:1,2). The holy Babe of Bethlehem and the eternal Son who was before all things are one and the same person.

Nor can Isaiah's words in chapter 50 be made to bear any other meaning. He who came to redeem could say, "Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness:... I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering." It is no different person, but the very same, who goes on to declare: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary"; and who further adds: "I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting." In this solemn chapter, He who of old had dried up the Red Sea and driven back Jordan is shown to be identical with Him who on earth had the opened ear, the smitten back and the flinty face—*all*, all fulfilled in Jehovah-Jesus, He who was both the Root and the Offspring of David.

Many other passages there are which at first sight might not seem to refer to the Son, but which the Holy Spirit in the New Testament makes plain, declaring His eternal power and Godhead. A number of such are quoted and applied to the Lord Jesus in the first chapter of the treatise addressed to the Hebrews. Passing over the opening verses, which are meaningless if they are not to be understood as maintaining the full equality of the Son with the Father, we find in verse 6 that Psalms 97:7 is to have its fulfillment "when He bringeth again¹ the First-begotten into the world"; that is, when God sends Jesus the second time; "whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20, 21). This throws a flood of light upon the psalm in question. At once it becomes evident that it is a millennial paean of praise upon the return of the once-rejected Jesus to take His great power and reign. verse 7, in the Hebrew, is, "Worship Him, all ye gods," which the Septuagint, as quoted by Paul, renders, "all ye angels." Now we know it is written in the law, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Manifestly then, when the Father calls upon all angelic intelligences, good and evil, to bow in worship at the feet of Jesus, He is asserting in the fullest possible way His true deity. If all other proof were lacking, here is incontestable evidence that in Jesus we see "God manifest in flesh."

But the other passages quoted are equally striking. verse 8 and 9 show us that it was "unto the Son" the Father was speaking in the 45th psalm, which is devoted to "things touching the King." verses 6, 7 are addressed to Jesus. "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."² The first verse asserts His true Godhead; the next, the reality of His manhood. It is the "mystery of piety" in all its preciousness.

The next quotation might never have been noticed in its true bearing, were it not for the Holy Spirit's use of it here. In Psalms 102 we have the suffering Saviour, undergoing the agonies of the cross. It is the cry "of the afflicted [One] when He is overwhelmed, and poureth out His complaint before the Lord." (See the Heading.) Touchingly He portrays His desolate condition when He was "as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." In verse 23 He says, "He weakened My strength in the way; He shortened My days." And in the first clause of verse 24 He adds, "I said, O My God, take Me not away in the midst of My days." Now in our Bibles a colon follows this, and the next words apparently finish the sentence. According to the inspired use of the passage in Hebrews, however, a period would follow what has just been quoted, for the next words are seen to be the answer of God to the holy Sufferer's cry. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands: they shall perish, but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years fail not."

How marvelous the recognition of the mystery of piety here! The anguished Sufferer on the cross is the One-who laid the foundation of the earth, and whose years shall never fail! And this is the uniform testimony of Scripture.

If we turn to Matthew, Jesus is Immanuel, the virgin's son, "which being interpreted is, God with us" (ch. 1:23). Mark takes care to show us that John the Baptizer was sent to prepare the way of Jehovah, for such is the original for "the Lord" in Isaiah 40:3, which he quotes in chapter 1:3. Who else than He could baptize with the Holy Ghost? Think of a creature, even though the greatest of all creatures, attempting so to do it would be to make Deity subservient to creaturehood.

Gabriel's message to Zacharias, as recorded by Luke, coincides with this. Of John it is declared that "many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before HIM in the spirit and power of Elias," etc. (chs. 1:16, 17). What other antecedent expression can the pronoun Him refer to but "the Lord their God"? Oh, how marvelously do angels, prophets, and apostles, with holy men and women of all ages, unite to ascribe the highest honor to the Crucified, and own that in Him is revealed this wondrous secret of piety!

The entire Gospel of John shines with this truth of all truths. Every chapter bears witness to it. The first starts with the oft-quoted statement that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." Here, His eternity of being, distinctness of person, unity of nature, and eternal Sonship, are all alike maintained. And it was the same uncreated Word, Himself the Creator, who "became flesh, and tabernacled among us." He was as truly man as He was God. And such Nathanael owns Him, ere the chapter closes, as he adoringly cries, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel" (vs. 49).

In the second chapter He asserts His deity when He says to the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (vs. 19). "He spake of the temple of His body." Deity was there enshrined; and when that temple should be destroyed, of His own power He would raise it again. What creature could so speak without blaspheming? John 3:16— "Luther's miniature Bible"— makes known to Nicodemus that He who was supposed to be, at the most, "a teacher come from God," is really "His Only-begotten Son"; therefore one with Him in life and nature.

But space forbids our going from chapter to chapter. I only pause to note that He who could say, "Before Abraham was, I AM," could be no other than that holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts whose glory Isaiah saw, as John 12:41 declares: "These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him." He it was who "came from God, and went to God," and who could speak so familiarly to His Father of "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (ch. 13:3; 17:5). Is it any wonder that Thomas, convinced at last of truth long doubted, cries out in holy ecstasy, "My Lord and My God!" (ch. 20:28.) Nor is he rebuked by Jesus, as he must have been if he were applying to a creature the titles of Deity.

Angels refuse worship (Rev. 22:8, 9); Jesus accepted it, because He is "God over all, blessed forever."

From the balance of the New Testament, of which it can be truly said, as of the temple of old, "every whit of it uttereth His glory," I select only three scriptures, ere passing on to consider the next great mystery that claims our attention. I notice first the touching words of 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Let those who deny the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, and blasphemously assert that He is but a creature, whose course began when He was born in Bethlehem, tell us when He was ever rich down here! "He was rich," but when? Poverty surrounded His lowly birth.

His childhood and young manhood were not spent amid wealth and luxury; and as He went about on His mission of love, He was poorer than the beasts and the birds, for He had no place to lay His head. At last He died in ignominy and shame on a malefactor's cross, and was laid in a borrowed tomb. Tell us, O unbelieving Socinian, who deniest His preexistence in glory, tell us, when was He rich? We wait in vain for an answer if the truth be not owned that He was rich in the glory that He had with the Father in the past eternity, when, "subsisting in the form of God, [He] did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God." Then He was rich! The next verses show the poverty to which He descended: He "emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, taking His place in the likeness of man; and having been found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, and [that the] death of the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8—J. N. Darby's translation).

In Col. 1 There is a passage the full force of which is obscured in our English rendering of the Authorized Version. We read that "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell" (vs. 19). It is really, "In Him all the Fullness was pleased to dwell." The connection makes it plain that it is the divine Fullness the apostle is writing of. All the Fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus. Of what creature could this be said, however holy and exalted? It is the peculiar glory of Him "who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him were all things created that are in the heavens, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or authorities: all things were created through Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:15-17, Newberry's rendering).

The last scripture I notice now is the scene of Rev. 5. The Lamb once slain is there beheld in the midst of the throne of God—a place no creature shall ever take. The moment He takes the book of judgment, all the redeemed, together with angels and all other created intelligences, "fall down before the Lamb," and worship Him as Saviour and Head. It is the bringing-in of the glory, and is a wondrous and glorious picture. Could anything more be needed to show that in Him all recognize the supreme Object of worship? If He be not God, heaven

will be filled with idolaters 1 But with hearts won by His bloody passion, and minds illuminated by the word of God, all saints join in rendering to the once-slain Lamb all homage and adoration, worship and glory and blessing, both now and throughout eternity.

The “mystery of piety” is confessedly great. God has been manifested in flesh, and the divine and human will nevermore be separated.

If any deny this, he is to be refused as an antichrist, and neither received into the house nor given greeting, “for he that greeteth him is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 10, 11, literal translation). God cannot tolerate neutrality when the doctrine of Christ is in question. Oh that His beloved people everywhere were aroused to the importance of uncompromisingly standing for this cardinal truth, now so frequently and unblushingly denied even among professed Christians!

Daily Sacrifice, October 6 (4:8)

“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” —1 Timothy 4:8.

WE all know something of the value of physical exercise. If we would keep our bodies in health we must avoid sloth and lack of energy. The same principle applies to spirituality. As we exercise ourselves unto godliness by study of the Word, by prayer and by witnessing for Christ, we grow in grace and advance in knowledge. We value physical strength which, after all, is but for a time; how much greater value should we put upon godliness, which is profitable both for time and for eternity.

—Jean F. Oberlin.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 16 (4:4-5)

“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” —1 Timothy 4:4, 5.

BLESSED it is to recognize in the temporal, creative mercies of each day, the evidences of a loving Father’s care. “He giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” To receive all as from His own hand, giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus, is to honor the Giver in the use of His gifts.

There is a golden mean between fleshly asceticism on the one hand which discounts many of God’s gifts and thus throws discredit on Him who provides them, and carnal self-indulgence on the other hand which uses the mercies of God with no regard to Him from whom they come, and in such a way as to turn even our blessings into curses. We should ever recognize the bounty of our Father in these things, and whether we eat or drink do all to His glory, our hearts going out to Him in adoring gratitude.

—Joseph Addison.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 17 (5:24-25)

“Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid” —1 Timothy 5:24, 25.

THE unsaved do not always manifest all that they are in this life, but in the day of judgment every hidden thing will be brought to light and men will be judged every man according to his works. And so with the children of God. Some who are rich in good works go through life so quietly that few ever dream of all they are doing for the blessing of their fellows. These are the people who let not the right hand know what the left hand doeth. But at the judgment-seat of Christ all shall be made manifest, and there will be a rich reward for everything that was done in accordance with the Word of God. No one is competent now to judge others. That is the prerogative of the Lord alone.

—J. Oxenham.

Daily Sacrifice, October 7 (6:15)

“Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”— Tim. 6:15.

THE Lord Jesus is to be made known in the fullness of times as the blessed and only Potentate. The word rendered blessed might just as well have been rendered happy. Earth has known few happy potentates, but when Jesus reigns He will be manifested in that character, because with Him is omnipotent authority. Moreover, He will then be the only Potentate, for all other rulers will bow before Him and acknowledge Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. Happy are they who in this day of His rejection by the world, recognize in Him earth’s rightful King and yield Him loyal obedience as the Lord of their lives.

—Frances R. Havergal.

