Expositions of Holy Scripture Second Corinthians Galatians Philippians Colossians Thessalonians and First

Timothy

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EXPOSITIONS OF

HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

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SECOND CORINTHIANS,

GALATIANS,

AND PHILIPPIANS

CHAPTERS I TO END

COLOSSIANS, THESSALONIANS,

AND FIRST TIMOTHY

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chaps. VII to End

GALATIANS AND

PHILIPPIANS

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II. CORINTHIANS

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HOPE AND HOLINESS

Having therefore these promises . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all

filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of

God.'--2 Cor. vii. 1.

It is often made a charge against professing Christians that their

religion has very little to do with common morality. The taunt has

sharpened multitudes of gibes and been echoed in all sorts of tones: it

is very often too true and perfectly just, but if ever it is, let it be

distinctly understood that it is not so because of Christian men's

religion but in spite of it. Their bitterest enemy does not condemn

them half so emphatically as their own religion does: the sharpest

censure of others is not so sharp as the rebukes of the New Testament.

If there is one thing which it insists upon more than another, it is

that religion without morality is nothing--that the one test to which,

after all, every man must submit is, what sort of character has he and

how has he behaved--is he pure or foul? All high-flown pretension, all

fervid emotion has at last to face the question which little children

ask, 'Was he a good man?'

The Apostle has been speaking about very high and mystical truths,

about all Christians being the temple of God, about God dwelling in

men, about men and women being His sons and daughters; these are the

very truths on which so often fervid imaginations have built up a

mystical piety that had little to do with the common rules of right and

wrong. But Paul keeps true to the intensely practical purpose of his

preaching and brings his heroes down to the prosaic earth with the

homely common sense of this far-reaching exhortation, which he gives as

the fitting conclusion for such celestial visions.

I. A Christian life should be a life of constant self-purifying.

This epistle is addressed to the church of God which is at Corinth with

all the saints which are in all Achaia.

Looking out over that wide region, Paul saw scattered over godless

masses a little dispersed company to each of whom the sacred name of

Saint applied. They had been deeply stained with the vices of their age

and place, and after a black list of criminals he had had to say to

them 'such were some of you,' and he lays his finger on the miracle

that had changed them and hesitates not to say of them all, 'But ye are

washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the

Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'

The first thing, then, that every Christian has is a cleansing which

accompanies forgiveness, and however his garment may have been 'spotted

by the flesh,' it is 'washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.'

Strange cleansing by which black stains melt out of garments plunged in

red blood! With the cleansing of forgiveness and justification comes,

wherever they come, the gift of the Holy Spirit--a new life springing

up within the old life, and untouched by any contact with its evils.

These gifts belong universally to the initial stage of the Christian

life and require for their possession only the receptiveness of faith.

They admit of no co-operation of human effort, and to possess them men

have only to 'take the things that are freely given to them of God.'

But of the subsequent stages of the Christian life, the laborious and

constant effort to develop and apply that free gift is as essential as,

in the earliest stage, it is worse than useless. The gift received has

to be wrought into the very substance of the soul, and to be wrought

out in all the endless varieties of life and conduct. Christians are

cleansed to begin with, but they have still daily to cleanse

themselves: the leaven is hid in the three measures of meal, but ''tis

a life-long task till the lump be leavened,' and no man, even though he

has the life that was in Jesus within him, will grow up 'into the

measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' unless, by patient and

persistent effort, he is ever pressing on to 'the things that are

before' and daily striving to draw nearer to the prize of his high

calling. We are cleansed, but we have still to cleanse ourselves.

Yet another paradox attaches to the Christian life, inasmuch as God

cleanses us, but we have to cleanse ourselves. The great truth that the

spirit of God in a man is the fontal source of all his goodness, and

that Christ's righteousness is given to us, is no pillow on which to

rest an idle head, but should rather be a trumpet-call to effort which

is thereby made certain of success. If we were left to the task of

self-purifying by our own efforts we might well fling it up as

impossible. It is as easy for a man to lift himself from the ground by

gripping his own shoulders as it is for us to rise to greater heights

of moral conduct by our own efforts; but if we can believe that God

gives the impulse after purity, and the vision of what purity is, and

imparts the power of attaining it, strengthening at once our dim sight

and stirring our feeble desires and energising our crippled limbs, then

we can 'run with patience the race that is set before us.'

We must note the thoroughness of the cleansing which the Apostle here

enjoins. What is to be got rid of is not this or that defect or vice,

but 'all filthiness of flesh and spirit.' The former, of course, refers

primarily to sins of impurity which in the eyes of the Greeks of

Corinth were scarcely sins at all, and the latter to a state of mind

when fancy, imagination, and memory were enlisted in the service of

evil. Both are rampant in our day as they were in Corinth. Much modern

literature and the new gospel of 'Art for Art's sake' minister to both,

and every man carries in himself inclinations to either. It is no

partial cleansing with which Paul would have us to be satisfied: 'all'

filthiness is to be cast out. Like careful housewives who are never

content to cease their scrubbing while a speck remains upon furniture,

Christian men are to regard their work as unfinished as long as the

least trace of the unclean thing remains in their flesh or in their

spirit. The ideal may be far from being realised at any moment, but it

is at the peril of the whole sincerity and peacefulness of their lives

if they, in the smallest degree, lower the perfection of their ideal in

deference to the imperfection of their realisation of it.

It must be abundantly clear from our own experience that any such

cleansing is a very long process. No character is made, whether it be

good or bad, but by a slow building up: no man becomes most wicked all

at once, and no man is sanctified by a wish or at a jump. As long as

men are in a world so abounding with temptation, 'he that is washed'

will need daily to 'wash his feet' that have been stained in the foul

ways of life, if he is to be 'clean every whit.'

As long as the spirit is imprisoned in the body and has it for its

instrument there will be need for much effort at purifying. We must be

content to overcome one foe at a time, and however strong may be the

pilgrim's spirit in us, we must be content to take one step at a time,

and to advance by very slow degrees. Nor is it to be forgotten that as

we get nearer what we ought to be, we should be more conscious of the

things in which we are not what we ought to be. The nearer we get to

Jesus Christ, the more will our consciences be enlightened as to the

particulars in which we are still distant from Him. A speck on a

polished shield will show plain that would never have been seen on a

rusty one. The saint who is nearest God will think more of his sins

than the man who is furthest from him. So new work of purifying will

open before us as we grow more pure, and this will last as long as life

itself.

II. The Christian life is to be not merely a continual getting rid of

evil, but a continual becoming good.

Paul here draws a distinction between cleansing ourselves from

filthiness and perfecting holiness, and these two, though closely

connected and capable of being regarded as being but the positive and

negative sides of one process, are in reality different, though in

practice the former is never achieved without the latter, nor the

latter accomplished without the former. Holiness is more than purity;

it is consecration. That is holy which is devoted to God, and a saint

is one whose daily effort is to devote his whole self, in all his

faculties and nature, thoughts, heart, and will, more and more, to God,

and to receive into himself more and more of God.

The purifying which Paul has been enjoining will only be successful in

the measure of our consecration, and the consecration will only be

genuine in the measure of our purifying. Herein lies the broad and

blessed distinction between the world's morality and Christian ethics.

The former fails just because it lacks the attitude towards a Person

who is the very foundation of Christian morality, and changes a hard

and impossible law into love. There is no more futile waste of breath

than that of teachers of morality who have no message but Be good! Be

good! and no motive by which to urge it but the pleasures of virtue and

the disadvantages of vice, but when the vagueness of the abstract

thought of goodness solidifies into a living Person and that Person

makes his appeal first to our hearts and bids us love him, and then

opens before us the unstained light of his own character and beseeches

us to be like him, the repellent becomes attractive: the impossible

becomes possible, and 'if ye love Me keep My commandments' becomes a

constraining power and a victorious impulse in our lives.

III. The Christian life of purifying and consecration is to be animated

by hope and fear.

The Apostle seems to connect hope more immediately with the cleansing,

and holiness with the fear of God, but probably both hope and fear are

in his mind as the double foundation on which both purity and

consecration are to rest, or the double emotion which is to produce

them both. These promises refer directly to the immediately preceding

words, 'I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and

daughters,' in which all the blessings which God can give or men can

receive are fused together in one lustrous and all-comprehensive whole.

So all the great truths of the Gospel and all the blessed emotions of

sonship which can spring up in a human heart are intended to find their

practical result in holy and pure living. For this end God has spoken

to us out of the thick darkness; for this end Christ has come into our

darkness; for this end He has lived; for this end He died; for this end

He rose again; for this end He sends His Spirit and administers the

providence of the world. The purpose of all the Divine activity as

regards us men is not merely to make us happy, but to make us happy in

order that we may be good. He whom what he calls his religion has only

saved from the wrath of God and the fear of hell has not learned the

alphabet of religion. Unless God's promises evoke men's goodness it

will be of little avail that they seem to quicken their hope. Joyful

confidence in our sonship is only warranted in the measure in which we

are like our Father. Hope often deludes and makes men dreamy and

unpractical. It generally paints pictures far lovelier than the

realities, and without any of their shadows; it is too often the

stimulus and ally of ignoble lives, and seldom stirs to heroism or

endurance, but its many defects are not due to itself but to its false

choice of objects on which to fix. The hope which is lifted from

trailing along the earth and twining round creatures and which rises to

grasp these promises ought to be, and in the measure of its reality is

the ally of all patient endurance and noble self-sacrifice. Its vision

of coming good is all directed to the coming Christ, and 'every man

that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure.'

In Paul's experience there was no contrariety between hope set on Jesus

and fear directed towards God. It is in the fear of God that holiness

is to be perfected. There is a fear which has no torment. Yet more,

there is no love in sons or daughters without fear. The reverential awe

with which God's children draw near to God has in it nothing slavish

and no terror. Their love is not only joyful but lowly. The worshipping

gaze upon His Divine majesty, the reverential and adoring contemplation

of His ineffable holiness, and the poignant consciousness, after all

effort, of the distance between us and Him will bow the hearts that

love Him most in lowliest prostration before Him. These two, hope and

fear, confidence and awe, are like the poles on which the whole round

world turns and are united here in one result. They who 'set their hope

in God' must 'not forget the works of God but keep His commandments';

they who 'call Him Father,' 'who without respect of persons judgeth'

must 'pass the time of their sojourning here in fear,' and their hopes

and their fears must drive the wheels of life, purify them from all

filthiness and perfect them in all holiness.

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SORROW ACCORDING TO GOD

'Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of:

but the sorrow of the world worketh death.'--2 Cor. vii. 10.

Very near the close of his missionary career the Apostle Paul summed up

his preaching as being all directed to enforcing two points,

'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' These

two, repentance and faith, ought never to be separated in thought, as

they are inseparable in fact. True repentance is impossible without

faith, true faith cannot exist without repentance.

Yet the two are separated very often, even by earnest Christian

teachers. The tendency of this day is to say a great deal about faith,

and not nearly enough in proportion about repentance; and the effect is

to obscure the very idea of faith, and not seldom to preach 'Peace!

peace! when there is no peace.' A gospel which is always talking about

faith, and scarcely ever talking about sin and repentance, is denuded,

indeed, of some of its most unwelcome characteristics, but is also

deprived of most of its power, and it may very easily become an ally of

unrighteousness, and an indulgence to sin. The reproach that the

Christian doctrine of salvation through faith is immoral in its

substance derives most of its force from forgetting that 'repentance

towards God' is as real a condition of salvation as is 'faith in our

Lord Jesus Christ.' We have here the Apostle's deliverance about one of

these twin thoughts. We have three stages--the root, the stem, the

fruit; sorrow, repentance, salvation. But there is a right and a wrong

kind of sorrow for sin. The right kind breeds repentance, and thence

reaches salvation; the wrong kind breeds nothing, and so ends in death.

Let us then trace these stages, not forgetting that this is not a

complete statement of the case, and needs to be supplemented in the

spirit of the words which I have already quoted, by the other part of

the inseparable whole, 'faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.'

I. First, then, consider the true and the false sorrow for sin.

The Apostle takes it for granted that a recognition of our own evil,

and a consequent penitent regretfulness, lie at the foundation of all

true Christianity. Now I do not insist upon any uniformity of

experience in people, any more than I should insist that all their

bodies should be of one shape or of one proportion. Human lives are

infinitely different, human dispositions are subtly varied, and because

neither the one nor the other are ever reproduced exactly in any two

people, therefore the religious experience of no two souls can ever be

precisely alike.

We have no right to ask--and much harm has been done by asking--for an

impossible uniformity of religious experience, any more than we have a

right to expect that all voices shall be pitched in one key, or all

plants flower in the same month, or after the same fashion. You can

print off as many copies as you like, for instance, of a drawing of a

flower on a printing-press, and they shall all be alike, petal for

petal, leaf for leaf, shade for shade; but no two hand-drawn copies

will be so precisely alike, still less will any two of the real buds

that blow on the bush. Life produces resemblance with differences; it

is machinery that makes facsimiles.

So we insist on no pedantic or unreal uniformity; and yet, whilst

leaving the widest scope for divergencies of individual character and

experience, and not asking that a man all diseased and blotched with

the leprosy of sin for half a lifetime, and a little child that has

grown up at its mother's knee, 'in the nurture and admonition of the

Lord,' and so has been kept 'innocent of much transgression,' shall

have the same experience; yet Scripture, as it seems to me, and the

nature of the case do unite in asserting that there are certain

elements which, in varying proportions indeed, will be found in all

true Christian experience, and of these an indispensable one--and in a

very large number, if not in the majority of cases, a fundamental

one--is this which my text calls 'godly sorrow.'

Dear brethren, surely a reasonable consideration of the facts of our

conduct and character point to that as the attitude that becomes us.

Does it not? I do not charge you with crimes in the eye of the law. I

do not suppose that many of you are living in flagrant disregard of the

elementary principles of common every-day morality. Some are, no doubt.

There are, no doubt, unclean men here; there are some who eat and drink

more than is good for them, habitually; there are, no doubt, men and

women who are living in avarice and worldliness, and doing things which

the ordinary conscience of the populace points to as faults and

blemishes. But I come to you respectable people that can say: 'I am not

as other men are, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican'; and

pray you, dear friends, to look at your character all round, in the

light of the righteousness and love of God, and to plead to the

indictment which charges you with neglect of many a duty and with sin

against Him. How do you plead, 'guilty or not guilty, sinful or not

sinful?' Be honest with yourselves, and the answer will not be far to

seek.

Notice how my text draws a broad distinction between the right and the

wrong kind of sorrow for sin. 'Godly sorrow' is, literally

rendered,'sorrow according to God,' which may either mean sorrow which

has reference to God, or sorrow which is in accordance with His will;

that is to say, which is pleasing to Him. If it is the former, it will

be the latter. I prefer to suppose that it is the former--that is,

sorrow which has reference to God. And then, there is another kind of

sorrow, which the Apostle calls the 'sorrow of the world,' which is

devoid of that reference to God. Here we have the characteristic

difference between the Christian way of looking at our own faults and

shortcomings, and the sorrow of the world, which has got no blessing in

it, and will never lead to anything like righteousness and peace. It is

just this--one has reference to God, puts its sin by His side, sees its

blackness relieved against the 'fierce light' of the Great White

Throne, and the other has not that reference.

To expand that for a moment,--there are plenty of us who, when our sin

is behind us, and its bitter fruits are in our hands, are sorry enough

for our faults. A man that is lying in the hospital a wreck, with the

sins of his youth gnawing the flesh off his bones, is often enough

sorry that he did not live more soberly and chastely and temperately in

the past days. That fraudulent bankrupt who has not got his discharge

and has lost his reputation, and can get nobody to lend him money

enough to start him in business again, as he hangs about the streets,

slouching in his rags, is sorry enough that he did not keep the

straight road. The 'sorrow of the world' has no thought about God in it

at all. The consequences of sin set many a man's teeth on edge who does

not feel any compunction for the wrong that he did. My brethren, is

that the position of any that are listening to me now?

Again, men are often sorry for their conduct without thinking of it as

sin against God. Crime means the transgression of man's law, wrong

means the transgression of conscience's law, sin is the transgression

of God's law. Some of us would perhaps have to say--'I have done

crime.' We are all of us quite ready to say: 'I have done wrong many a

time'; but there are some of us who hesitate to take the other step,

and say: 'I have done sin.' Sin has, for its correlative, God. If there

is no God there is no sin. There may be faults, there may be failures,

there may be transgressions, breaches of the moral law, things done

inconsistent with man's nature and constitution, and so on; but if

there be a God, then we have personal relations to that Person and His

law; and when we break His law it is more than crime; it is more than

fault; it is more than transgression; it is more than wrong; it is sin.

It is when you lift the shutter off conscience, and let the light of

God rush in upon your hearts and consciences, that you have the

wholesome sorrow that worketh repentance and salvation and life.

Oh, dear friends, I do beseech you to lay these simple thoughts to

heart. Remember, I urge no rigid uniformity of experience or character,

but I do say that unless a man has learned to see his sin in the light

of God, and in the light of God to weep over it, he has yet to know

'the strait gate that leadeth unto life.'

I believe that a very large amount of the superficiality and

easy-goingness of the Christianity of to-day comes just from this, that

so many who call themselves Christians have never once got a glimpse of

themselves as they really are. I remember once peering over the edge of

the crater of Vesuvius, and looking down into the pit, all swirling

with sulphurous fumes. Have you ever looked into your hearts, in that

fashion, and seen the wreathing smoke and the flashing fire there? If

you have, you will cleave to that Christ, who is your sole deliverance

from sin.

But, remember, there is no prescription about depth or amount or length

of time during which this sorrow shall be felt. If, on the one hand, it

is essential, on the other hand there are a great many people who ought

to be walking in the light and the liberty of God's Gospel who bring

darkness and clouds over themselves by the anxious scrutinising

question: 'Is my sorrow deep enough?' Deep enough! What for? What is

the use of sorrow for sin? To lead a man to repentance and to faith. If

you have as much sorrow as leads you to penitence and trust you have

enough. It is not your sorrow that is going to wash away your sin, it

is Christ's blood. So let no man trouble himself about the question,

Have I sorrow enough? The one question is: 'Has my sorrow led me to

cast myself on Christ?'

II. Still further, look now for a moment at the next stage here. 'Godly

sorrow worketh repentance.'

What is repentance? No doubt many of you would answer that it is

'sorrow for sin,' but clearly this text of ours draws a distinction

between the two. There are very few of the great key-words of

Christianity that have suffered more violent and unkind treatment, and

have been more obscured by misunderstandings, than this great word. It

has been weakened down into penitence, which in the ordinary

acceptation, means simply the emotion that I have already been speaking

about, viz., a regretful sense of my own evil. And it has been still

further docked and degraded, both in its syllables and in its

substance, into penance. But the 'repentance' of the New Testament and

of the Old Testament--one of the twin conditions of salvation--is

neither sorrow for sin nor works of restitution and satisfaction, but

it is, as the word distinctly expresses, a change of purpose in regard

to the sin for which a man mourns. I cannot now expand and elaborate

this idea as I should like, but let me remind you of one or two

passages in Scripture which may show that the right notion of the word

is not sorrow but changed attitude and purpose in regard to my sin.

We find passages, some of which ascribe and some deny repentance to the

Divine nature. But if there be a repentance which is possible for the

Divine nature, it obviously cannot mean sorrow for sin, but must

signify a change of purpose. In the Epistle to the Romans we read, 'The

gifts and calling of God are without repentance,' which clearly means

without change of purpose on His part. And I read in the story of the

mission of the Prophet Jonah, that 'the Lord repented of the evil which

He had said He would do unto them, and He did it not.' Here, again, the

idea of repentance is clearly and distinctly that of a change of

purpose. So fix this on your minds, and lay it on your hearts, dear

friends, that the repentance of the New Testament is not idle tears nor

the twitchings of a vain regret, but the resolute turning away of the

sinful heart from its sins. It is 'repentance toward God,' the turning

from the sin to the Father, and that is what leads to salvation. The

sorrow is separated from the repentance in idea, however closely they

may be intertwined in fact. The sorrow is one thing, and the repentance

which it works is another.

Then notice that this change of purpose and breaking off from sin is

produced by the sorrow for sin, of which I have been speaking; and that

the production of this repentance is the main characteristic difference

between the godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. A man may have

his paroxysms of regret, but the question is: Does it make any

difference in his attitude? Is he standing, after the tempest of sorrow

has swept over him, with his face in the same direction as before; or

has it whirled him clean round, and set him in the other direction? The

one kind of sorrow, which measures my sin by the side of the brightness

and purity of God, vindicates itself as true, because it makes me hate

my evil and turn away from it. The other, which is of the world, passes

over me like the empty wind through an archway, it whistles for a

moment and is gone, and there is nothing left to show that it was ever

there. The one comes like one of those brooks in tropical countries,

dry and white for half the year, and then there is a rush of muddy

waters, fierce but transient, and leaving no results behind. My

brother! when your conscience pricks, which of these two things does it

do? After the prick, is the word of command that your Will issues

'Right about face!' or is it 'As you were'? Godly sorrow worketh a

change of attitude, purpose, mind; the sorrow of the world leaves a man

standing where he was. Ask yourselves the question: Which of the two

are you familiar with?

Again, the true means of evoking true repentance is the contemplation

of the Cross. Law and the fear of hell may startle into sorrow, and

even lead to some kind of repentance. But it is the great power of

Christ's love and sacrifice which will really melt the heart into true

repentance. You may hammer ice to pieces, but it is ice still. You may

bray a fool in a mortar, and his folly will not depart from him. Dread

of punishment may pulverise the heart, but not change it; and each

fragment, like the smallest bits of a magnet, will have the same

characteristics as the whole mass. But 'the goodness of God leads to

repentance' as the prodigal is conquered and sees the true hideousness

of the swine's trough, when he bethinks himself of the father's love. I

beseech you to put yourselves under the influence of that great love,

and look on that Cross till your hearts melt.

III. We come to the last stage here. Salvation is the issue of

repentance. 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be

repented of.'

What is the connection between repentance and salvation? Two sentences

will answer the question. You cannot get salvation without repentance.

You do not get salvation by repentance.

You cannot get the salvation of God unless you shake off your sin. It

is no use preaching to a man, 'Faith, Faith, Faith!' unless you preach

along with it,'Break off your iniquities.' 'Let the wicked forsake his

way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the

Lord.' The nature of the case forbids it. It is a clear contradiction

in terms, and an absolute impossibility in fact, that God should save a

man with the salvation which consists in the deliverance from sin,

whilst that man is holding to his sin. Unless, therefore, you have not

merely sorrow, but repentance, which is turning away from sin with

resolute purpose, as a man would turn from a serpent, you cannot enter

into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But you do not get salvation for your repentance. It is no case of

barter, it is no case of salvation by works, that work being

repentance:

'Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears for ever flow,

All for sin could not atone,

Thou must save, and Thou alone.'

Not my penitence, but Christ's death, is the ground of the salvation of

every one that is saved at all. Yet repentance is an indispensable

condition of salvation.

What is the connection between repentance and faith? There can be no

true repentance without trust in Christ. There can be no true trust in

Christ without the forsaking of my sin. Repentance without faith, in so

far as it is possible, is one long misery; like the pains of those poor

Hindoo devotees that will go all the way from Cape Comorin to the

shrine of Juggernaut, and measure every foot of the road with the

length of their own bodies in the dust. Men will do anything, and

willingly make any sacrifice, rather than open their eyes to see

this,--that repentance, clasped hand in hand with Faith, leads the

guiltiest soul into the forgiving presence of the crucified Christ,

from whom peace flows into the darkest heart.

On the other hand, faith without repentance is not possible, in any

deep sense. But in so far as it is possible, it produces a superficial

Christianity which vaguely trusts to Christ without knowing exactly

what it is trusting Him for, or why it needs Him; and which has a great

deal to say about what I may call the less important parts of the

Christian system, and nothing to say about its vital centre; which

preaches a morality which is not a living power to create; which

practises a religion which is neither a joy nor a security. The old

word of the Master has a deep truth in it: 'These are they which heard

the word, and anon with joy received it.' Having no sorrow, no

penitence, no deep consciousness of sin, 'they have no root in

themselves, and in time of temptation they fall away.' If there is to

be a profound, an all-pervading, life-transforming-sin, and

devil-conquering faith, it must be a faith rooted deep in penitence and

sorrow for sin.

Dear brethren, if, by God's grace, my poor words have touched your

consciences at all, I beseech you, do not trifle with the budding

conviction! Do not seek to have the wound skinned over. Take care that

you do not let it all pass in idle sorrow or impotent regret. If you

do, you will be hardened, and the worse for it, and come nearer to that

condition which the sorrow of the world worketh, the awful death of the

soul. Do not wince from the knife before the roots of the cancer are

cut out. The pain is merciful. Better the wound than the malignant

growth. Yield yourselves to the Spirit that would convince you of sin,

and listen to the voice that calls to you to forsake your unrighteous

ways and thoughts. But do not trust to any tears, do not trust to any

resolves, do not trust to any reformation. Trust only to the Lord who

died on the Cross for you, whose death for you, whose life in you, will

be deliverance from your sin. Then you will have a salvation which, in

the striking language of my text, 'is not to be repented of,' which

will leave no regrets in your hearts in the day when all else shall

have faded, and the sinful sweets of this world shall have turned to

ashes and bitterness on the lips of the men that feed on them.

'The sorrow of the world works death.' There are men and women

listening to me now who are half conscious of their sin, and are

resisting the pleading voice that comes to them, who at the last will

open their eyes upon the realities of their lives, and in a wild

passion of remorse, exclaim: 'I have played the fool, and have erred

exceedingly.' Better to make thorough work of the sorrow, and by it to

be led to repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and so secure for

our own that salvation for which no man will ever regret having given

even the whole world, since he gains his own soul.

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GIVING AND ASKING

'Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on

the churches of Macedonia; 2. How that in a great trial of affliction

the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the

riches of their liberality. 3. For to their power, I bear record, yea,

and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 4. Praying us

with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the

fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5. And this they did, not

as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us

by the will of God: 6. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had

begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. 7.

Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and

knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us; see that ye

abound in this grace also. 8. I speak not by commandment, but by

occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of

your love. 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. 10. And herein I give my advice: for this is

expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to

be forward a year ago. 11. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that

as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also

out of that which ye have. 12. For if there be first a willing mind, it

is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he

hath not.'--2 Cor. viii. 1-12.

A collection from Gentile churches for their poor brethren in Jerusalem

occupied much of Paul's time and efforts before his last visit to that

city. Many events, which have filled the world with noise and been

written at length in histories, were less significant than that first

outcome of the unifying spirit of common faith. It was a making visible

of the grand thought, 'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' Practical help,

prompted by a deep-lying sense of unity which overleaped gulfs of

separation in race, language, and social conditions, was a unique

novelty. It was the first pulsation of that spirit of Christian

liberality which has steadily grown in force and sweep ever since.

Foolish people gibe at some of its manifestations. Wiser ones regard

its existence as not the least of the marks of the divine origin of

Christianity.

This passage is a striking example of the inimitable delicacy of the

Apostle. His words are full of what we should call tact, if it were not

manifestly the spontaneous utterance of right feeling. They are a

perfect model of the true way to appeal for money, and set forth also

the true spirit in which such appeals should be made.

In verses 1 to 5, Paul seeks to stimulate the liberality of the

Corinthians by recounting that of the Macedonian churches. His sketch

draws in outline the picture of what all Christian money-giving should

be. We note first the designation of the Macedonian Christians'

beneficence as 'a grace' given by God to them. It is twice called so

(vers. 1, 4), and the same name is applied in regard to the

Corinthians' giving (vers. 6, 7). That is the right way to look at

money contributions. The opportunity to give them, and the inclination

to do so, are God's gifts. How many of us think that calls for service

or money are troublesome obligations, to be got out of as easily as

possible! A true Christian will be thankful, as for a love token from

God, for every occasion of giving to Him. It would be a sharp test for

many of us to ask ourselves whether we can say, 'To me . . . is this

grace given,' that I should part with my money for Christ's sake.

Note, further, the lovely picture of these Macedonian givers. They were

plunged in sorrows and troubles, but these did not dry their fountains

of sympathy. Nothing is apt to be more selfish than grief; and if we

have tears to spare for others, when they are flowing bitterly for

ourselves, we have graduated well in Christ's school. Paul calls the

Macedonians' troubles 'proof of their affliction,' meaning that it

constituted a proof of their Christian character; that is, by the

manner in which it was borne; and in it they had still 'abundance of

joy,' for the paradox of the Christian life is that it admits of the

co-existence of grief and gladness.

Again, Christian giving gives from scanty stores. 'Deep poverty' is no

excuse for not giving, and will be no hindrance to a willing heart. 'I

cannot afford it' is sometimes a genuine valid reason, but oftener an

insincere plea. Why are subscriptions for religious purposes the first

expenditure to be reduced in bad times?

Further, Christian giving gives up to the very edge of ability, and

sometimes goes beyond the limits of so-called prudence. In all regions

'power to its last particle is duty,' and unless power is strained it

is not fully exercised. It is in trying to do what we cannot do that we

do best what we can do. He who keeps well within the limits of his

supposed ability will probably not do half as much as he could. While

there is a limit behind which generosity even for Christ may become

dishonesty or disregard of other equally sacred claims, there is little

danger of modern Christians transgressing that limit, and they need the

stimulus to do a little more than they think they can do, rather than

to listen to cold-blooded prudence.

Further, Christian giving does not wait to be asked, but takes the

opportunity to give as itself 'grace' and presses its benefactions. It

is an unwonted experience for a collector of subscriptions to be

besought to take them 'with much entreaty,' but it would not be so

anomalous if Christian people understood their privileges.

Further, Christian giving begins with the surrender of self to Christ,

from which necessarily follows the glad offering of wealth. These

Macedonians did more than Paul had hoped, and the explanation of the

unexpected largeness of their contributions was their yielding of

themselves to Jesus. That is the deepest source of all true liberality.

If a man feels that he does not own himself, much less will he feel

that his goods are his own. A slave's owner possesses the slave's bit

of garden ground, his hut, and its furniture. If I belong to Christ, to

whom does my money belong? But the consciousness that my goods are not

mine, but Christ's, is not to remain a mere sentiment. It can receive

practical embodiment by my giving them to Christ's representatives. The

way for the Macedonians to show that they regarded their goods as

Christ's, was to give them to Paul for Christ's poor saints. Jesus has

His representatives still, and it is useless for people to talk or sing

about belonging to Him, unless they verify their words by deeds.

Verse 6 tells the Corinthians that the success of the collection in

Macedonia had induced Paul to send Titus to Corinth to promote it

there. He had previously visited it on the same errand (chap. xii. 14),

and now is coming to complete 'this grace.' The rest of the passage is

Paul's appeal to the Corinthians for their help in the matter, and

certainly never was such an appeal made in a more dignified, noble, and

lofty tone. He has been dilating on the liberality of others, and

thereby sanctioning the stimulating of Christian liberality, in the

same way as other graces may legitimately be stimulated, by example.

That is delicate ground to tread on, and needs caution if it is not to

degenerate into an appeal to rivalry, as it too often does, but in

itself is perfectly legitimate and wholesome. But, passing from that

incitement, Paul rests his plea on deeper grounds.

First, Christian liberality is essential to the completeness of

Christian character. Paul's praise in verse 7 is not mere flattery, nor

meant to put the Corinthians into good humour. He will have enough to

say hereafter about scandals and faults, but now he gives them credit

for all the good he knew to be in them. Faith comes first, as always.

It is the root of every Christian excellence. Then follow two graces,

eminently characteristic of a Greek church, and apt to run to seed in

it,--utterance and knowledge. Then two more, both of a more emotional

character,--earnestness and love, especially to Paul as Christ's

servant. But all these fair attributes lacked completeness without the

crowning grace of liberality. It is the crowning grace, because it is

the practical manifestation of the highest excellences. It is the

result of sympathy, of unselfishness, of contact with Christ, of

drinking in of His spirit, Love is best. Utterance and knowledge and

earnestness are poor beside it. This grace is like the diamond which

clasps a necklace of jewels.

Christian giving does not need to be commanded. 'I speak not by way of

commandment.' That is poor virtue which only obeys a precept. Gifts

given because it is duty to give them are not really gifts, but taxes.

They leave no sweet savour on the hand that bestows, and bring none to

that which receives. 'I call you not servants, but friends.' The region

in which Christian liberality moves is high above the realm of law and

its correlative, obligation.

Further, Christian liberality springs spontaneously from conscious

possession of Christ's riches. We cannot here enter on the mysteries of

Christ's emptying Himself of His riches of glory. We can but touch the

stupendous fact, remembering that the place whereon we stand is holy

ground. Who can measure the nature and depth of that self-denuding of

the glory which He had with the Father before the world was? But, thank

God, we do not need to measure it, in order to feel the solemn, blessed

force of the appeal which it makes to us. Adoring wonder and gratitude,

unfaltering trust and absolute self-surrender to a love so

self-sacrificing, must ever follow the belief of that mystery of Divine

mercy, the incarnation and sacrifice of the eternal Son.

But Paul would have us remember that the same mighty act of stooping

love, which is the foundation of all our hope, is to be the pattern for

all our conduct. Even in His divinest and most mysterious act, Christ

is our example. A dewdrop is rounded by the same laws which shape the

planetary spheres or the sun himself; and Christians but half trust

Christ if they do not imitate Him. What selfishness in enjoyment of our

'own things' could live in us if we duly brought ourselves under the

influence of that example? How miserably poor and vulgar the appeals by

which money is sometimes drawn from grudging owners and tight-buttoned

pockets, sound beside that heart-searching and heart-moving one, 'Ye

know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!'

Further, Christian liberality will not go off in good intentions and

benevolent sentiments. The Corinthians were ready with their 'willing'

on Titus's previous visit. Now Paul desires them to put their good

feelings into concrete shape. There is plenty of benevolence that never

gets to be beneficence. The advice here has a very wide application:

'As there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion

also.' We all know where the road leads that is paved with good

intentions.

Further, Christian liberality is accepted and rewarded according to

willingness, if that is carried into act according to ability. While

the mere wish to help is not enough, it is the vital element in the act

which flows from it; and there may be more of it in the widow's mite

than in the rich man's large donation--or there may be less. The

conditions of acceptable offerings are twofold--first, readiness, glad

willingness to give, as opposed to closed hearts or grudging bestowals;

and, second, that willingness embodied in the largest gift possible.

The absence of either vitiates all. The presence of both gives trifles

a place in God's storehouse of precious things. A father is glad when

his child brings him some utterly valueless present, not because he

must, but because he loves; and many a parent has such laid away in

sacred repositories. God knows how to take gifts from His children, not

less well than we who are evil know how to do it.

But the gracious saying of our passage has a solemn side; for if only

gifts 'according as a man hath' are accepted, what becomes of the many

which fall far short of our ability, and are really given, not because

we have the willing mind, but because we could not get out of the

unwelcome necessity to part with a miserably inadequate percentage of

our possessions. Is God likely to be satisfied with the small dividends

which we offer as composition for our great debt?

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RICH YET POOR

'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.'--2 Cor. viii. 9.

The Apostle has been speaking about a matter which, to us, seems very

small, but to him was very great viz., a gathering of pecuniary help

from the Gentile churches for the poor church in Jerusalem. Large

issues, in his estimation, attended that exhibition of Christian unity,

and, be it great or small, he applies the highest of all motives to

this matter. 'For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that

though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor.' The trivial

things of life are to be guided and shaped by reference to the highest

of all things, the example of Jesus Christ; and that in the whole depth

of His humiliation, and even in regard to His cross and passion. We

have here set forth, as the pattern to which the Christian life is to

be conformed, the deepest conception of what our Lord's career on earth

was.

The whole Christian Church is about to celebrate the nativity of our

Lord at this time. This text gives us the true point of view from which

to regard it. We have here the work of Christ in its deepest motive,

'The grace of our Lord Jesus.' We have it in its transcendent

self-impoverishment, 'Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became

poor.' We have it in its highest issue, 'That ye through His poverty

might become rich.' Let us look at those points.

I. Here we have the deepest motive which underlies the whole work of

Christ, unveiled to us.

'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Every word here is

significant. It is very unusual in the New Testament to find that

expression 'grace' applied to Jesus Christ. Except in the familiar

benediction, I think there are only one or two instances of such a

collocation of words. It is 'the grace of God' which, throughout the

New Testament, is the prevailing expression. But here 'grace is

attributed to Jesus'; that is to say, the love of the Divine heart is,

without qualification or hesitation, ascribed to Him. And what do we

mean by grace? We mean love in exercise to inferiors. It is infinite

condescension in Jesus to love. His love stoops when it embraces us.

Very significant, therefore, is the employment here of the solemn full

title, 'the Lord Jesus Christ,' which enhances the condescension by

making prominent the height from which it bent. The 'grace' is all the

more wonderful because of the majesty and sovereignty, to say the least

of it, which are expressed in that title, the Lord. The highest stoops

and stands upon the level of the lowest. 'Grace' is love that expresses

itself to those who deserve something else. And the deepest motive,

which is the very key to the whole phenomena of the life of Jesus

Christ, is that it is all the exhibition, as it is the consequence, of

a love that, stooping, forgives. 'Grace' is love that, stooping and

forgiving, communicates its whole self to unworthy and transgressing

recipients. And the key to the life of Jesus is that we have set forth

in its operation a love which is not content to speak only the ordinary

language of human affection, or to do its ordinary deeds, but is

self-impelled to impart what transcends all other gifts of human

tenderness, and to give its very self. And so a love that condescends,

a love that passes by unworthiness, is turned away by no sin, is

unmoved to any kind of anger, and never allows its cheek to flush or

its heart to beat faster, because of any provocation and a love that is

content with nothing short of entire surrender and self-impartation

underlies all that precious life from Bethlehem to Calvary.

But there is another word in our text that may well be here taken into

consideration. 'For your sakes,' says the Apostle to that Corinthian

church, made up of people, not one of whom had ever seen or been seen

by Jesus. And yet the regard to them was part of the motive that moved

the Lord to His life, and His death. That is to say, to generalise the

thought, this grace, thus stooping and forgiving and self-imparting, is

a love that gathers into its embrace and to its heart all mankind; and

is universal because it is individualising. Just as each planet in the

heavens, and each tiny plant upon the earth, are embraced by, and

separately receive, the benediction of that all-encompassing arch of

the heaven, so that grace enfolds all, because it takes account of

each. Whilst it is love for a sinful world, every soul of us may say:

'He loved me, and'--therefore--'gave Himself for me.' Unless we see

beneath the sweet story of the earthly life this deep-lying source of

it all, we fail to understand that life itself. We may bring criticism

to bear upon it; we may apprehend it in diverse affecting, elevating,

educating aspects; but, oh! brethren, we miss the blazing centre of the

light, the warm heart of the fire, unless we see pulsating through all

the individual facts of the life this one, all-shaping, all-vitalising

motive; the grace--the stooping, the pardoning, the self-communicating,

the individualising, and the universal love of Jesus Christ.

So then, we have here set before us the work of Christ in its--

II. Most mysterious and unique self-impoverishment.

'He was . . . He became,' there is one strange contrast. 'He was rich

. . . He became poor,' there is another. 'He was . . . He became.' What

does that say? Well, it says that if you want to understand Bethlehem,

you must go back to a time before Bethlehem. The meaning of Christ's

birth is only understood when we turn to that Evangelist who does not

narrate it. For the meaning of it is here; 'the Word became flesh, and

dwelt among us.' The surface of the fact is the smallest part of the

fact. They say that there is seven times as much of an iceberg under

water as there is above the surface. And the deepest and most important

fact about the nativity of our Lord is that it was not only the birth

of an Infant, but the Incarnation of the Word. 'He was . . . He

became.' We have to travel back and recognise that that life did not

begin in the manger. We have to travel back and recognise the mystery

of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

And these two words 'He was . . . He became,' imply another thing, and

that is, that Jesus Christ who died because He chose, was not passive

in His being born, but as at the end of His earthly life, so at its

beginning exercised His volition, and was born because He willed, and

willed because of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus.'

Now in this connection it is very remarkable, and well worth our

pondering, that throughout the whole of the Gospels, when Jesus speaks

of His coming into the world, He never uses the word 'born' but once,

and that was before the Roman governor, who would not have understood

or cared for anything further, to whom He did say,'To this end was I

born.' But even when speaking to him His consciousness that that word

did not express the whole truth was so strong that He could not help

adding--though He knew that the hard Roman procurator would pay no

attention to the apparent tautology--the expression which more truly

corresponded to the fact, 'and for this cause came I into the world.'

The two phrases are not parallel. They are by no means synonymous. One

expresses the outward fact; the other expresses that which underlay it.

'To this end was I born.' Yes! 'And for this cause came I.' He Himself

put it still more definitely when He said, 'I came forth from the

Father, and am come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go

unto the Father.' So the two extremities of the earthly manifestation

are neither of them ends; but before the one, and behind the other,

there stretches an identity or oneness of Being and condition. The one

as the other, the birth and the death, may be regarded as, in deepest

reality, not only what He passively endured, but what He actively did.

He was born, and He died, that in all points He might be 'like unto His

brethren.' He 'came' into the world, and He 'went' to the Father. The

end circled round to the beginning, and in both He acted because He

chose, and chose because He loved.

So much, then, lies in the one of these two antitheses of my text; and

the other is no less profound and significant. 'He was rich; He became

poor.' In this connection 'rich' can only mean possessed of the Divine

fulness and independence; and 'poor' can only mean possessed of human

infirmity, dependence, and emptiness. And so to Jesus of Nazareth, to

be born was impoverishment. If there is nothing more in His birth than

in the birth of each of us, the words are grotesquely inappropriate to

the facts of the case. For as between nothingness, which is the

alternative, and the possession of conscious being, there is surely a

contrast the very reverse of that expressed here. For us, to be born is

to be endowed with capacities, with the wealth of intelligent,

responsible, voluntary being; but to Jesus Christ, if we accept the New

Testament teaching, to be born was a step, an infinite step, downwards,

and He, alone of all men, might have been 'ashamed to call men

brethren.' But this denudation of Himself, into the particulars of

which I do not care to enter now, was the result of that stooping grace

which 'counted it not a thing to be clutched hold of, to be equal with

God; but He made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as

a man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.'

And so, dear friends, we know the measure of the stooping love of Jesus

only when we read the history by the light of this thought, that

'though He was rich' with all the fulness of that eternal Word which

was 'in the beginning with God,' 'He became poor,' with the poverty,

the infirmity, the liability to temptation, the weakness, that attach

to humanity; 'and was found in all points like unto His brethren,' that

He might be able to help and succour them all.

The last thing here is--

III. The work of Christ set forth in its highest issue.

'That we through His poverty might become rich.' Of course, the

antithetical expressions must be taken to be used in the same sense,

and with the same width of application, in both of the clauses. And if

so, just think reverently, wonderingly, thankfully, of the infinite

vista of glorious possibility that is open to us here. Christ was rich

in the possession of that Divine glory which Had had with the Father

before the world was. 'He became poor,' in assuming the weakness of the

manhood that you and I carry, that we, in the human poverty which is

like His poverty, may become rich with wealth that is like His riches,

and that as He stooped to earth veiling the Divine with the human, we

may rise to heaven, clothing the human with the Divine.

For surely there is nothing more plainly taught in Scriptures, and I am

bold to say nothing to which any deep and vital Christian experience

even here gives more surely an anticipatory confirmation, than the fact

that Christ became like unto us, that each of us may become like unto

Him. The divine and the human natures are similar, and the fact of the

Incarnation, on the one hand, and of the man's glorification by

possession of the divine nature on the other, equally rest upon that

fundamental resemblance between the divine nature and the human nature

which God has made in His own image. If that which in each of us is

unlike God is cleared away, as it can be cleared away, through faith in

that dear Lord, then the likeness as a matter of course, comes into

force.

The law of all elevation is that whosoever desires to lift must stoop;

and the end of all stooping is to lift the lowly to the place from

which the love hath bent itself. And this is at once the law for the

Incarnation of the Christ, and for the elevation of the Christian. 'We

shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.' And the great love,

the stooping, forgiving, self-communicating love, doth not reach its

ultimate issue, nor effect fully the purposes to which it ever is

tending, unless and until all who have received it are 'changed from

glory to glory even into the image of the Lord.' We do not understand

Jesus, His cradle, or His Cross, unless on the one hand we see in them

His emptying Himself that He might fill us, and, on the other hand,

see, as the only result which warrants them and satisfies Him, our

complete conformity to His image, and our participation in that glory

which He has at the right hand of God. That is the prospect for

humanity, and it is possible for each of us.

I do not dwell upon other aspects of this great self-emptying of our

Lord's, such as the revelation in it to us of the very heart of God,

and of the divinest thing in the divine nature, which is love, or such

as the sympathy which is made possible thereby to Him, and which is not

only the pity of a God, but the compassion of a Brother. Nor do I touch

upon many other aspects which are full of strengthening and teaching.

That grand thought that Jesus has shared our human poverty that we may

share His divine riches is the very apex of the New Testament teaching,

and of the Christian hope. We have within us, notwithstanding all our

transgressions, what the old divines used to call a 'deiform nature,'

capable of being lifted up into the participation of divinity, capable

of being cleansed from all the spots and stains which make us so unlike

Him in whose likeness we were made.

Brethren, let us not forget that this stooping, and pardoning, and

self-imparting love, has for its main instrument to appeal to our

hearts, not the cradle but the Cross. We are being told by many people

to-day that the centre of Christianity lies in the thought of an

Incarnation. Yes. But our Lord Himself has told us what that was for.

'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to

give His life a ransom for many.' It is only when we look to that Lord

in His death, and see there the very lowest point to which He stooped,

and the supreme manifestation of His grace, that we shall be drawn to

yield our hearts and lives to Him in thankfulness, in trust, and in

imitation: and shall set Him before us as the pattern for our conduct,

as well as the Object of our trust.

Brethren, my text was spoken originally as presenting the motive and

the example for a little piece of pecuniary liability. Do you take the

cradle and the Cross as the law of your lives? For depend upon it, the

same necessity which obliged Jesus to come down to our level, if He

would lift us to His; to live our life and die our death, if He would

make us partakers of His immortal life, and deliver us from death;

makes it absolutely necessary that if we are to live for anything

nobler than our own poor, transitory self-aggrandisement, we too must

learn to stoop to forgive, to impart ourselves, and must die by

self-surrender and sacrifice, if we are ever to communicate any life,

or good of life, to others. He has loved us, and given Himself for us.

He has set us therein an example which He commends to us by His own

word when He tells us that 'if a corn of wheat' is to bring forth 'much

fruit' it must die, else it 'abideth alone.' Unless we die, we never

truly live; unless we die to ourselves for others, and like Jesus, we

live alone in the solitude of a self-enclosed self-regard. So living,

we are dead whilst we live.

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WILLING AND NOT DOING

'Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness

to will so there may be a performance also.'--2 Cor. viii. 11.

The Revised Version reads: 'But now complete the doing also; that as

there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion also

out of your ability.' A collection of money for the almost pauper

church at Jerusalem bulked very largely in the Apostle's mind at the

date of the writing of the two letters to the Corinthian church. We

learn that that church had been the first to agree to the project, and

then had very distinctly hung back from implementing its promises and

fulfilling its good intentions. So the Apostle, in the chapter from

which my text is taken, with wonderful delicacy, dignity, and

profundity, sets forth the true principle, not only of Christian

giving, but of Christian asking. The text advises that the gushing

sentiments of brotherly sympathy and liberality which had inspired the

Corinthians a year ago should now bear some fruit in action. So Paul is

going to send Titus, his right-hand man at the time, to hurry up and

finish off the collection and have done with it. The text is in effect

the message which Titus was to carry; but it has a far wider

application than that. It is a needful advice for us all about a great

many other things: 'As there was a readiness to will, so let there be a

performance also.'

Resolutions, noble and good and Christlike, have a strange knack of

cheating the people who make them. So we all need the exhortation not

to be befooled by fancying that we have done, when we have only willed.

Of course we shall not do unless we will. But there is a wide gap, as

our experience witnesses, between the two things. We all know what

place it is to which, according to the old proverb, the road is paved

with good intentions; and the only way to pull up that paving is to

take Paul's advice here and always, and immediately to put into action

the resolves of our hearts. Now I desire to say two or three very plain

and simple things about this matter.

I. I would have you consider the necessity of this commandment.

Consider that the fault here warned against is a universal one. What

different men we should be if our resolutions had fruited in conduct!

In all regions of life that is true, but most emphatically is it true

in regard to religion. The damning tragedy of many lives, and I dare

say of those of some of my hearers, is that men have over and over

again determined that they would be Christians, and they are not

Christians yet; just because they have let 'the native hue of

resolution be sicklied over' by some paleness or other, and so have

resolved and resolved and resolved till every nerve of action is rotted

away, and they will die unchristian. I dare say that there are men or

women listening to me now, perhaps with grey hairs upon them, who can

remember times, in the springtide of their youth, when they said, 'I

will give my heart to Jesus Christ, and set my faith upon Him'; and

they have not done it yet. Now, therefore, 'as there was a readiness to

will, let there be also the performance.'

But it is not only in regard to that most important of all resolves

that I wish to say a word. All Christians, I am sure, know what it is,

over and over again, to have had stirrings in their hearts which they

have been able to consolidate into determination, but have not been

able to carry into act. 'The children have come to the birth, and there

is not strength to bring them forth.' That is true about all of us,

more or less, and it is very solemnly true of a great many of us

professing Christians. We have tried to cure--we have determined that

we will cure--manifest and flagrant defects or faults in our Christian

life. We have resolved, and some nipping frost has come, and the

blossoms have dropped on the grass before they have ever set into

fruit. I know that is so about you, because I know that it is so about

myself. And therefore, dear brethren, I appeal to you, and ask you

whether the exhortation of my text has not a sharp point for every one

of us--whether the universality of this defect does not demand that we

all should gravely consider the exhortation here before us?

Then, again, let me remind you how this injunction is borne in upon us

by the consideration of the strength of the opposition with which we

have always to contend, in every honest attempt to bring to act our

best resolutions. Did you ever try to cure some little habit, some mere

trifle, a trick of manner or twist of the finger, or some attitude or

tone that might be ugly and awkward, and that people told you that it

would be better to get rid of? You know how hard it is. There is always

a tremendous gulf between the ideal and its realisation in life. As

long as we are moving in vacuo we move without any friction or

difficulty; but as soon as we come out into a world where there are an

atmosphere and opposing forces, then friction comes in, and speed

diminishes; and we never become what we aim to be. We begin with grand

purposes, and we end with very poor results. We all start, in our early

days, with the notion that our lives are going to be radiant and

beautiful, and all unlike what the limitations of power and the

antagonisms that we have to meet make of them at last. The tree of our

life's doings has to grow, like those contorted pines on the slopes of

the Alps, in many storms, with heavy weights of snow on its branches,

and beaten about by tempests from every quarter of the heavens; and so

it gets gnarled and knotted and very unlike the symmetrical beauty that

we dreamed would adorn it. We begin with saying: 'Come! Let us build a

tower whose top shall reach to heaven'; and we are contented at last,

if we have put up some little tumble-down shed where we can get shelter

for our heads from the blast.

And the difficulty in bringing into action our best selves besets us in

the matter of translating our resolutions into practice. What are

arrayed against it? A feeble will, enslaved too often by passions and

flesh and habits, and all about us lie obstacles to our carrying into

action our conscientious convictions, our deepest resolutions;

obstacles to our being true to our true selves; to which obstacles,

alas, far too many of us habitually, and all of us occasionally,

succumb. That being the case, do not we all need to ponder in our

deepest hearts, and to pray for grace to make the motto of our lives,

'As there was a readiness to will, let there be a performance'?

II. Consider the importance of this counsel.

That is borne in upon mind and conscience by looking at the disastrous

effects of letting resolutions remain sterile. Consider how apt we are

to deceive ourselves with unfulfilled purposes. The quick response

which an easily-moved nature may make to some appeal of noble thought

or lofty principle is mistaken for action, and we are tempted to think

that willing is almost as good as if we had done what we half resolved

on. And there is a kind of glow of satisfaction that comes when such a

man thinks, 'I have done well in that I have determined.' The Devil

will let you resolve as much as you like--the more the better; only the

more easily you resolve, the more certainly he will block the

realisation. Let us take care of that seducing temptation which is apt

to lead us all to plume ourselves on good resolutions, and to fancy

that they are almost equivalent to their own fulfilment. Cheques are

all very well if there be bullion in the bank cellars to pay them with

when they fall due, but if that be not so, then the issuing of them is

crime and fraud. Our resolutions, made and forgotten as so many of our

good resolutions are, are very little better.

Note, too, how rapidly the habit of substituting lightly-made

resolutions for seriously-endeavoured acts grows.

And mark, further, how miserable and debilitating it is to carry the

dead weight of such unaccomplished intentions.

Nothing so certainly weakens a man as a multitude of resolves that he

knows he has never fulfilled. They weaken his will, burden his

conscience, stand in the way of his hopes, make him feel as if the

entail of evil was too firm and strong to be ever broken. 'O wretched

man that I am!' said one who had made experience of what it was to will

what was good, and not to find how to perform, 'who shall deliver me

from the body of this death?' It is an awful thing to have to carry a

corpse about on your back. And that was what Paul thought the man did

who loaded his own shoulders with abortive resolutions, that perished

in the birth, and never grew up to maturity. Weak and miserable is

always the man who is swift to resolve and slow to carry out his

resolutions.

III. And now let me say a word before I close about how this universal

and grave disease is to be coped with.

Well, I should say to begin with, let us take very soberly and

continually into our consciousness the recognition of the fact that the

disease is there. And then may I say, let us be rather slower to

resolve than we often are. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow

than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' The man who has never had

the determination to give up some criminal indulgence--say, drink--is

possibly less criminal, and certainly less weak, than the man who, when

his head aches, and the consequences of his self-indulgence are vividly

realised by him, makes up his mind to be a teetotaller, and soon

stumbles into the first dram-shop that is open, and then reels out a

drunkard. Do not vow until you have made up your minds to pay. Remember

that it is a solemn act to determine anything, especially anything

bearing on moral and religious life; and that you had far better keep

your will in suspense than spring to the resolution with thoughtless

levity and leave it with the same.

Further, the habit of promptly carrying out our resolves is one that,

like all other habits, can be cultivated. And we can cultivate it in

little things, in the smallest trifles of daily life, which by their

myriads make up life itself, in order that it may be a fixed custom of

our minds when great resolves have to be made. The man who has trained

himself day in and day out, in regard to the insignificances of daily

life, to let act follow resolve as the thunder peal succeeds the

lightning flash, is the man who, if he is moved to make a great resolve

about his religion, or about his conduct, will be most likely to carry

it out. Get the magical influence of habit on your side, and you will

have done much to conquer the evil of abortive resolutions.

But then there is something a great deal more than that to be said. The

Apostle did not content himself, in the passage already referred to,

with bewailing the wretchedness of the condition in which to will was

present, but how to perform he found not. He asked, and he triumphantly

answered, the question, 'Who shall deliver me?' with the great words,

'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' There is the secret; keep

near Him, trust Him, open your hearts to the influences of that Divine

Spirit who makes us free from the law of sin and death. And if thus,

knowing our weakness, recognising our danger, humbly trying to

cultivate the habit of prompt discharge of all discerned duty, we leave

ourselves in Jesus Christ's hands, and wait, and ask, and believe that

we possess, His cleansing Spirit, then we shall not ask and wait in

vain. 'Work out your own salvation, . . . for it is God that worketh in

you, both the willing and the doing.'

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ALL GRACE ABOUNDING

'God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always

having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good

work.'--2 Cor. ix. 8.

In addition to all his other qualities the Apostle was an extremely

good man of business; and he had a field for the exercise of that

quality in the collection for the poor saints of Judea, which takes up

so much of this letter, and occupied for so long a period so much of

his thoughts and efforts. It was for the sake of showing by actual

demonstration that would 'touch the hearts' of the Jewish brethren, the

absolute unity of the two halves of the Church, the Gentile and the

Jewish, that the Apostle took so much trouble in this matter. The words

which I have read for my text come in the midst of a very earnest

appeal to the Corinthian Christians for their pecuniary help. He is

dwelling upon the same thought which is expressed in the well-known

words: 'What I gave I kept; what I kept I lost.'

But whilst the words of my text primarily applied to money matters, you

see that they are studiously general, universal. The Apostle, after his

fashion, is lifting up a little 'secular' affair into a high spiritual

region; and he lays down in my text a broad general law, which goes to

the very depths of the Christian life.

Now, notice, we have here in three clauses three stages which we may

venture to distinguish as the fountain, the basin, the stream. 'God is

able to make all grace abound toward you';--there is the fountain.

'That ye always, having all-sufficiency in all things';--there is the

basin that receives the gush from the fountain. 'May abound in every

good work';--there is the steam that comes from the basin. The fountain

pours into the basin, that the flow from the basin may feed the stream.

Now this thought of Paul's goes to the heart of things. So let us look

at it.

I. The Fountain.

The Christian life in all its aspects and experiences is an outflow

from the 'the Fountain of Life,' the giving God. Observe how

emphatically the Apostle, in the context, accumulates words that

express universality: 'all grace . . . all-sufficiency for all things

. . . every good work.' But even these expressions do not satisfy Paul,

and he has to repeat the word 'abound,' in order to give some faint

idea of his conception of the full tide which gushes from the fountain.

It is 'all grace,' and it is abounding grace.

Now what does he mean by 'grace'? That word is a kind of shorthand for

the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which come to men through

Jesus Christ. Primarily, it describes what we, for want of a better

expression, have to call a 'disposition' in the divine nature; and it

means, then, if so looked at, the unconditioned, undeserved,

spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. That is grace,

in the primary New Testament use of the phrase.

But there are no idle 'dispositions' in God. They are always

energising, and so the word glides from meaning the disposition, to

meaning the manifestation and activities of it, and the 'grace' of our

Lord is that love in exercise. And then, since the divine energies are

never fruitless, the word passes over, further, to mean all the blessed

and beautiful things in a soul which are the consequences of the

Promethean truth of God's loving hand, the outcome in life of the

inward bestowment which has its cause, its sole cause, in God's

ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free.

That, very superficially and inadequately set forth, is at least a

glimpse into the fulness and greatness of meaning that lies in that

profound New Testament word, 'grace.' But the Apostle here puts

emphasis on the variety of forms which the one divine gift assumes. It

is 'all grace' which God is able to make abound toward you. So then,

you see this one [INS: transcendent :INS] gift from the divine heart,

when it comes into our human experience, is like a meteor when it

passes into the atmosphere of earth, and catches fire and blazes,

showering out a multitude of radiant points of light. The grace is

many-sided--many-sided to us, but one in its source and in its

character. For at bottom, that which God in His grace gives to us as

His grace is what? Himself; or if you like to put it in another form,

which comes to the same thing--new life through Jesus Christ. That is

the encyclop�diacal gift, which contains within itself all grace. And

just as the physical life in each of us, one in all its manifestations,

produces many results, and shines in the eye, and blushes in the cheek,

and gives strength to the arm, and flexibility and deftness to the

fingers and swiftness to the foot: so also is that one grace which,

being manifold in its manifestations, is one in its essence. There are

many graces, there is one Grace.

But this grace is not only many-sided, but abounding. It is not

congruous with God's wealth, nor with His love, that He should give

scantily, or, as it were, should open but a finger of the hand that is

full of His gifts, and let out a little at a time. There are no sluices

on that great stream so as to regulate its flow, and to give sometimes

a painful trickle and sometimes a full gush, but this fountain is

always pouring itself out, and it 'abounds.'

But then we are pulled up short by another word in this first clause:

'God is able to make.' Paul does not say, 'God will make.' He puts the

whole weight of responsibility for that ability becoming operative upon

us. There are conditions; and although we may have access to that full

fountain, it will not pour on us 'all grace' and 'abundant grace,'

unless we observe these, and so turn God's ability to give into actual

giving. And how do we do that? By desire, by expectance, by petition,

by faithful stewardship. If we have these things, if we have tutored

ourselves, and experience has helped in the tuition, to make large our

expectancy, God will smile down upon us and 'do exceeding abundantly

above all' that we 'think' as well as above all that we 'ask.'

Brethren, if our supplies are scant, when the full fountain is gushing

at our sides, we are 'not straitened in God, we are straitened in

ourselves.' Christian possibilities are Christian obligations, and what

we might have and do not have, is our condemnation.

I turn, in the next place, to what I have, perhaps too fancifully,

called

II. The Basin.

'God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, having

always all-sufficiency in all things, may,' . . . etc.

The result of all this many-sided and exuberant outpouring of grace

from the fountain is that the basin may be full. Considering the

infinite source and the small receptacle, we might have expected

something more than 'sufficiency' to have resulted.

Divine grace is sufficient. Is it not more than sufficient? Yes, no

doubt. But what Paul wishes us to feel is this--to put it into very

plain English--that the good gifts of the divine grace will always be

proportioned to our work, and to our sufferings too. We shall feel that

we have enough, if we are as we ought to be. Sufficiency is more than a

man gets anywhere else. 'Enough is as good as a feast.' And if we have

strength, which we may have, to do the day's tasks, and strength to

carry the day's crosses, and strength to accept the day's sorrows, and

strength to master the day's temptations, that is as much as we need

wish to have, even out of the fulness of God. And we shall get it, dear

brethren, if we will only fulfil the conditions. If we exercise

expectance, and desire and petition and faithful stewardship, we shall

get what we need. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' if the road is a

steep and rocky one that would wear out leather. 'As thy days so shall

thy strength be.' God does not hurl His soldiers in a blundering attack

on some impregnable mountain, where they are slain in heaps at the

base; but when He lays a commandment on my shoulders, He infuses

strength into me, and according to the good homely old saying that has

brought comfort to many a sad and weighted heart, makes the back to

bear the burden. The heavy task or the crushing sorrow is often the key

that opens the door of God's treasure-house. You have had very little

experience either of life or of Christian life, if you have not learnt

by this time that the harder your work, and the darker your sorrows,

the mightier have been God's supports, and the more starry the lights

that have shone upon your path. 'That ye, always having all-sufficiency

in all things.'

One more word: this sufficiency should be more uniform, is uniform in

the divine intention, and in so far as the flow of the fountain is

concerned. Always having had I may be sure that I always shall have. Of

course I know that, in so far as our physical nature conditions our

spiritual experience, there will be ups and downs, moments of

emancipation and moments of slavery. There will be times when the

flower opens, and times when it shuts itself up. But I am sure that the

great mass of Christian people might have a far more level temperature

in their Christian experience than they have; that we could, if we

would, have far more experimental knowledge of this 'always' of my

text. God means that the basin should be always full right up to the

top of the marble edge, and that the more is drawn off from it, the

more should flow into it. But it is very often like the reservoirs in

the hills for some great city in a drought, where great stretches of

the bottom are exposed, and again, when the drought breaks, are full to

the top of the retaining wall. That should not be. Our Christian life

should run on the high levels. Why does it not? Possibilities are

duties.

And now, lastly, we have here what, adhering to my metaphor, I call

III. The stream.

'That ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to

every good work.'

That is what God gives us His grace for; and that is a very important

consideration. The end of God's dealings with us, poor, weak, sinful

creatures, is character and conduct. Of course you can state the end in

a great many other ways; but there have been terrible evils arising

from the way in which Evangelical preachers have too often talked, as

if the end of God's dealings with us was the vague thing which they

call 'salvation,' and by which many of their hearers take them to mean

neither more nor less than dodging Hell. But the New Testament, with

all its mysticism, even when it soars highest, and speaks most about

the perfection of humanity, and the end of God's dealings being that we

may be 'filled with the fulness of God,' never loses its wholesome,

sane hold of the common moralities of daily life, and proclaims that we

receive all, in order that we may be able to 'maintain good works for

necessary uses.' And if we lay that to heart, and remember that a

correct creed, and a living faith, and precious, select, inward

emotions and experiences are all intended to evolve into lives, filled

and radiant with common moralities and 'good works'--not meaning

thereby the things which go by that name in popular phraseology, but

'whatsoever things are lovely . . . and of good report'--then we shall

understand a little better what we are here for and what Jesus Christ

died for, and what His Spirit is given and lives in us for. So 'good

works' is the end, in one very important aspect, of all that avalanche

of grace which has been from eternity rushing down upon us from the

heights of God.

There is one more thing to note, and that is that, in our character and

conduct, we should copy the 'giving grace.' Look how eloquently and

significantly, in the first and last clauses of my text, the same words

recur. 'God is able to make all grace abound, that ye may abound in all

good work.' Copy God in the many-sidedness and in the copiousness of

the good that flows out from your life and conduct, because of your

possession of that divine grace. And remember, 'to him that hath shall

be given.' We pray for more grace; we need to pray for that, no doubt.

Do we use the grace that God has given us? If we do not, the remainder

of that great word which I have just quoted will be fulfilled in you.

God forbid that any of us should receive the grace of God in vain, and

therefore come under the stern and inevitable sentence, 'From him that

hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath!'

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GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.'--2 Cor. ix. 15.

It seems strange that there should ever have been any doubt as to what

gift it is which evokes this burst of thanksgiving. There is but one of

God's many mercies which is worthy of being thus singled out. There is

one blazing central sun which shines out amidst all the galaxy of

lights which fill the heavens. There is one gift of God which, beyond

all others, merits the designation of 'unspeakable.' The gift of Christ

draws all other divine gifts after it. 'How should He not with Him also

freely give us all things.'

The connection in which this abrupt jet of praise stands is very

remarkable. The Apostle has been dwelling on the Christian obligation

of giving bountifully and cheerfully, and on the great law that a glad

giver is 'enriched' and not impoverished thereby, whilst the

recipients, for their part, are blessed by having thankfulness evoked

towards the givers. And that contemplation of the happy interchange of

benefit and thanks between men leads the fervid Apostle to the thoughts

which were always ready to spring to his lips--of God as the great

pattern of giving and of the gratitude to Him which should fill all our

souls. The expression here 'unspeakable' is what I wish chiefly to fix

upon now. It means literally that which cannot be fully declared.

Language fails because thought fails.

I. The gift comes from unspeakable love.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The love is

the cause of the gift: the gift is the expression of the love. John's

Gospel says that the Son which is in the bosom of the Father has

declared Him. Paul here uses a related word for unspeakable which might

be rendered 'that which cannot be fully declared.' The declaration of

the Father partly consists in this, that He is declared to be

undeclarable, the proclamation of His name consists partly in this that

it is proclaimed to be a name that cannot be proclaimed. Language fails

when it is applied to the expression of human emotion; no tongue can

ever fully serve the heart. Whether there be any thoughts too great for

words or no, there are emotions too great. Language is ever 'weaker

than our grief' and not seldom weaker than our love. It is but the

surface water that can be run off through the narrow channel of speech:

the central deep remains. If it be so with human affection, how much

more must it be so with God's love? With lowly condescension He uses

all sweet images drawn from earthly relationships, to help us in

understanding His. Every dear name is pressed into the service--father,

mother, husband, wife, brother, friend, and after all are exhausted,

the love which clothed itself in them all in turn, and used them all to

give some faint hint of its own perfection, remains unspoken. We know

human love, its limitations, its changes, its extravagances, its

shortcomings, and cannot but feel how unworthy it is to mirror for us

that perfection in God which we venture to name by a name so soiled.

The analogies between what we call love in man and love in God must be

supplemented by the differences between them, if we are ever to

approach a worthy conception of the unspeakable love that underlies the

unspeakable gift.

II. The gift involves unspeakable sacrifice.

Human love desires to give its most precious treasures to its object

and is then most blessed: divine love cannot come short of human in

this most characteristic of its manifestations. Surely the copy is not

to surpass the original, nor the mirror to flash more brightly than the

sun which, at the brightest, it but reflects. In such a matter we can

but stammer when we try to find words. As our text warns us, we are

trying to utter the unutterable when we seek to speak of God's giving

up for us; but however such a thought may seem to be forbidden by other

aspects of the divine nature, it seems to be involved in the great

truth that 'God is love.' Since He is, His blessedness too, must be in

imparting, and in parting with what He gives. A humble worshipper in

Jewish times loved enough to say that he would not offer unto God an

offering that cost him nothing, and that loving height of

self-surrender was at the highest, but a lowly imitation of the love to

which it looked up. When Paul in the Epistle to the Romans says, 'He

that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all,' he is

obviously alluding to, and all but quoting, the divine words to

Abraham, 'Seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from

Me,' and the allusion permits us to parallel what God did when He sent

His Son with what Abraham did when, with wrung heart, but with

submission, he bound and laid Isaac on the altar and stretched forth

his hand with the knife in it to slay him. Such a representation

contradicts the vulgar conceptions of a passionless, self-sufficing,

icy deity, but reflection on the facts of our own experience and on the

blessed secrets of our own love, leads us to believe that some shadow

of loss passed across the infinite and eternal completeness of the

divine nature when 'God sent forth His Son made of a woman.' And may we

not go further and say that when Jesus on the Cross cried from out of

the darkness of eclipse, 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?'

there was something in the heavens corresponding to the darkness that

covered the earth and something in the Father's heart that answered the

Son's. But our text warns us that such matters are not for our handling

in speech, and are best dealt with, not as matters of possibly erring

speculation, but as materials for lowly thanks unto God for His

unspeakable gift.

But whatever may be true about the love of the Father who sent, there

can be no doubt about the love of the Son who came. No man helps his

fellows in suffering but at the cost of his own suffering. Sympathy

means fellow-feeling, and the one indispensable condition of all rescue

work of any sort is that the rescuer must bear on his own shoulders the

sins or sorrows that he is able to bear away. Heartless help is no

help. It does not matter whether he who 'stands and says, "Be ye

clothed and fed,"' gives or does not give 'the things necessary,' he

will be but a 'miserable comforter' if he has not in heart and feeling

entered into the sorrows and pains which he seeks to alleviate. We need

not dwell on the familiar truths concerning Him who was a 'man of

sorrows and acquainted with grief.' All through His life He was in

contact with evil, and for Him the contact was like that of a naked

hand pressed upon hot iron. The sins and woes of the world made His

path through it like that of bare feet on sharp flints. If He had never

died it would still have been true that 'He was wounded for our

transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.' On the Cross He

completed the libation which had continued throughout His life and

'poured out His soul unto death' as He had been pouring it out all

through His life. We have no measure by which we can estimate the

inevitable sufferings in such a world as ours of such a spirit as

Christ's. We may know something of the solitude of uncongenial society;

of the pain of seeing miseries that we cannot comfort, of the horrors

of dwelling amidst impurities that we cannot cleanse, and of longings

to escape from them all to some nest in the wilderness, but all these

are but the feeblest shadows of the incarnate sorrows whose name among

men was Jesus. Nothing is more pathetic than the way in which our Lord

kept all these sorrows close locked within His own heart, so that

scarcely ever did they come to light. Once He did permit a glimpse into

that hidden chamber when He said, 'O faithless generation, how long

shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?' But for the most

part His sorrow was unspoken because it was 'unspeakable.' Once beneath

the quivering olives in the moonlight of Gethsemane, He made a pitiful

appeal for the little help which three drowsy men could give Him, when

He cried, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry ye

here and watch with Me,' but for the most part the silence at which His

judges 'marvelled greatly,' and raged as much as they marvelled, was

unbroken, and as 'a sheep before her shearers is dumb,' so 'He opened

not His mouth.' The sacrifice of His death was, for the most part,

silent like the sacrifice of His life. Should it not call forth from us

floods of praise and thanks to God for His unspeakable gift?

III. The gift brings with it unspeakable results.

In Christ are hid 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' When God

gave us Him, He gave us a storehouse in which are contained treasures

of truth which can never be fully comprehended, and which, even if

comprehended, can never be exhausted. The mystery of the Divine Name

revealed in Jesus, the mystery of His person, are themes on which the

Christian world has been nourished ever since, and which are as full of

food, not for the understanding only, but far more for the heart and

the will, to-day as ever they were. The world may think that it has

left the teaching of Jesus behind, but in reality the teaching is far

ahead, and the world's practise is but slowly creeping towards its

imperfect attainment. The Gospel is the guide of the race, and each

generation gathers something more from it, and progresses in the

measure in which it follows Christ; and as for the race, so for the

individual. Each of Christ's scholars finds his own gift, and in the

measure of his faithfulness to what he has found makes ever new

discoveries in the unsearchable riches of Christ. After all have fed

full there still remain abundant baskets full to be taken up.

He who has sounded the depths of Jesus most completely is ever the

first to acknowledge that he has been but as a child 'gathering pebbles

on the beach while the great ocean lies unsounded before him.' No

single soul, and no multitude of souls, can exhaust Jesus; neither our

individual experiences, nor the experiences of a believing world can

fully realise the endless wealth laid up in Him. He is the Alpha and

the Omega of all our speech, the first letter and the last of our

alphabet, between which lie all the rest.

The gift is completed in consequences yet unspeakable. Even the first

blessings which the humblest faith receives from the pierced hands have

more in them than words can tell. Who has ever spoken adequately and in

full correspondence with reality what it is to have God's pardoning

love flowing in upon the soul? Many singers have sung sweet psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs on which generations of devout souls have

fed, but none of them has spoken the deepest blessedness of a Christian

life, or the calm raptures of communion with God. It is easy to utter

the words 'forgiveness, reconciliation, acceptance, fellowship, eternal

life'; the syllables can be spoken, but who knows or can utter the

depths of the meanings? After all human words the half has not been

told us, and as every soul carries within itself unrevealable emotions,

and is a mystery after all revelation, so the things which God's gift

brings to a soul are after all speech unspeakable, and the words

'cannot be uttered' which they who are caught up into the third heavens

hear.

Then we may extend our thoughts to the future form of Christian

experience. 'It doth not yet appear what we should be.' All our

conceptions of a future existence must necessarily be inadequate.

Nothing but experience can reveal them to us, and our experience there

will be capable of indefinite expansion, and through eternity there

will be endless growth in the appropriation of the unspeakable gift.

For us the only recompense that we can make for the unspeakable gift is

to receive it with 'thanks unto God' and the yielding up of our hearts

to Him. God pours this love upon us freely, without stint. It is

unspeakable in the depths of its source, in the manner of its

manifestation, in the glory of its issues. It is like some great

stream, rising in the trackless mountains, broad and deep, and leading

on to a sunlit ocean. We stand on the bank; let us trust ourselves to

its broad bosom. It will bear us safe. And let us take heed that we

receive not the gift of God in vain.

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A MILITANT MESSAGE

'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted

against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity

to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all

disobedience, when your obedience shall be fulfilled.'--2 Cor. x. 5 and

6 (R.V.).

None of Paul's letters are so full of personal feeling as this one is.

It is written, for the most part, at a white heat; he had heard from

his trusted Titus tidings which on one hand filled him with a

thankfulness of which the first half of the letter is the expression;

but there had also been tidings of a very different kind, and from this

point onwards the letter is seething with the feelings which these had

produced. There was in the Corinthian Church a party, probably

Judaisers, which denied his authority and said bitter things about his

character. They apparently had contrasted the force of his letters and

the feebleness of his 'bodily presence' and speech. They insinuated

that his 'bark was worse than his bite.' Their language put into plain

English would be something like this, 'Ah! He is very bold at a

distance, let him come and face us and we shall see a difference.

Vapouring in his letters, he will be meek enough when he is here.'

These slanderers seem to have thought of Paul as if he 'warred

according to flesh,' and it is this charge, that he was actuated in his

opposition to the evils in Corinth by selfish considerations and

worldly interests, which seems to have set the Apostle on fire. In

answer he pours out quick, indignant questionings, sharp irony,

vehement self-vindication, passionate remonstrances, flashes of wrath,

sudden jets of tenderness. What a position for him to have to say, 'I

am not a low schemer; I am not working for myself.' Yet it is the

common lot of all such men to be misread by little, crawling creatures

who cannot believe in heroic self-forgetfulness. He answers the taunt

that he 'walked according to the flesh' in the context by saying, 'Yes,

I live in the flesh, my outward life is like that of other men, but I

do not go a-soldiering according to the flesh. It is not for my own

sinful self that I get the rules of my life's battle, neither do I get

my weapons from the flesh. They could not do what they do if that were

their origin: they are of God and therefore mighty.' Then the metaphor

as it were catches fire, and in our text he expands the figure of a

warfare and sets before us the destruction of fortresses, the capture

of their garrisons, and the leading of them away into another land, the

stern punishment of the rebels who still hold out, and the merciful

delay in administering it. It has been suggested that there is an

allusion in our text to the extermination of the pirates in Paul's

native Cilicia which happened some fifty or sixty years before his

birth and ended in destroying their robber-holds and taking some

thousands of prisoners. Whether that be so or no, the Apostle's kindled

imagination sets forth here great truths as to the effects which his

message is meant to produce and, thank God, has produced.

I. The opposing fortresses.

The Apostle conceives of himself and of his brother preachers of Christ

as going forth on a merciful warfare. He thinks of strong rock

fortresses, with lofty walls set on high, and frowning down on any

assailants. No doubt he is thinking first of the opposition which he

had to front in Corinth from the Judaisers to whom we have referred,

but the application of the metaphor goes far beyond the petty strife in

Corinth and carries for us the wholesome lesson that one main cause

which keeps men back from Christ is a too high estimate of themselves.

Some of us are enclosed in the fortress of self-sufficiency: we will

not humbly acknowledge our dependence on God, and have turned

self-reliance into the law of our lives. There are many voices, some of

them sweet and powerful, which to-day are preaching that gospel. It

finds eager response in many hearts, and there is something in us all

to which it appeals. We are often tempted to say defiantly, 'Who is

Lord over us?' And the teaching that bids us rely on ourselves is so

wholly in accord with the highest wisdom and the noblest life that what

is good and what is evil in each of us contribute to reinforce it.

Self-dependence is a great virtue, and the mother of much energy and

nobleness, but it is also a great error and a great sin. To be so

self-sufficing as not to need externals is good; to be so

self-sufficing as not to need or to see God is ruin and death. The

title which, as one of our great thinkers tells us, a humourist put on

the back of a volume of heterodox tracts, 'Every man his own redeemer,'

makes a claim for self-sufficiency which more or less unconsciously

shuts out many men from the salvation of Christ.

There is the fortress of culture and the pride of it in which many of

us are to-day entrenched against the Gospel. The attitude of mind into

which persons of culture tend to fall is distinctly adverse to their

reception of the Gospel, and that is not because the Gospel is adverse

to culture, but because cultured people do not care to be put on the

same level with publicans and harlots. They would be less disinclined

to go into the feast if there were in it reserved seats for superior

people and a private [INS: entrance :INS] to them. If the wise and

prudent were more of both, they would be liker the babes to whom these

things are revealed, and they would be revealed to them too. Not

knowledge but the superciliousness which is the result of the conceit

of knowledge hinders from God, and is one of the strongest fortresses

against which the weapons of our warfare have to be employed.

There is the fortress of ignorance. Most men who are kept from Christ

are so because they know neither themselves nor God. The most widely

prevailing characteristic of the superficial life of most men is their

absolute unconsciousness of the fact of sin; they neither know it as

universal nor as personal. They have never gone deeply enough down into

the depths of their own hearts to have come up scared at the ugly

things that lie sleeping there, nor have they ever reflected on their

own conduct with sufficient gravity to discern its aberrations from the

law of right, hence the average man is quite unconscious of sin, and is

a complete stranger to himself. The cup has been drunk by and

intoxicated the world, and the masses of men are quite unaware that it

has intoxicated them.

They are ignorant of God as they are of themselves, and if at any time,

by some flash of light, they see themselves as they are, they think of

God as if He were altogether such an one as themselves, and fall back

on a vague trust in the vaguer mercy of their half-believed-in God as

their hope for a vague salvation. Men who thus walk in a vain show will

never feel their need of Jesus, and the lazy ignorance of themselves

and the as lazy trust in what they call their God, are a fortress

against which it will task the power of God to make any weapons of

warfare mighty to its pulling down.

II. The casting down of fortresses.

The first effect of any real contact with Christ and His Gospel is to

reveal a man to himself, to shatter his delusive estimates of what he

is, and to pull down about his ears the lofty fortress in which he has

ensconced himself. It seems strange work for what calls itself a Gospel

to begin by forcing a man to cry out with sobs and tears, Oh, wretched

man that I am! But no man will ever reach the heights to which Christ

can lift him, who does not begin his upward course by descending to the

depths into which Christ's Gospel begins its work by plunging him.

Unconsciousness of sin is sure to lead to indifference to a Saviour,

and unless we know ourselves to be miserable and poor and blind and

naked, the offer of gold refined by fire and white garments that we may

clothe ourselves will make no appeal to us. The fact of sin makes the

need for a Saviour; our individual sense of sin makes us sensible of

our need of a Saviour.

Paul believed that the weapons of his warfare were mighty enough to

cast down the strongest of all strongholds in which men shut themselves

up against the humbling Gospel of salvation by the mercy of God. The

weapons to which he thus trusted were the same to which Jesus pointed

His disciples when, about to leave them, He said, 'When the Comforter

is come He will convict the world of sin because they believe not in

Me.' Jesus brought to the world the perfect revelation of the holiness

of God, and set before us all a divine pattern of manhood to rebuke and

condemn our stained and rebellious lives, and He turned us away from

the superficial estimate of actions to the careful scrutiny of motives.

By all these and many other ways He presented Himself to the world a

perfect man, the incarnation of a holy God and the revelation and

condemnation of sinful humanity. Yet, all that miracle of loveliness,

gentleness, and dignity is beheld by men without a thrill, and they see

in Him no 'beauty that they should desire Him,' and no healing to which

they will trust. Paul's way of kindling penitence in impenitent spirits

was not to brandish over them the whips of law or to seek to shake

souls with terror of any hell, still less was it to discourse with

philosophic calm on the obligations of duty and the wisdom of virtuous

living; his appeal to conscience was primarily the pressing on the

heart of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When the heart is

melted, the conscience will not long continue indurated. We cannot look

lovingly and believingly at Jesus and then turn to look complacently on

ourselves. Not to believe on Him is the sin of sins, and to be taught

that it is so is the first step in the work of Him who never merits the

name of the Comforter more truly than when He convicts the world of

sin.

For a Christianity that does not begin with the deep consciousness of

sin has neither depth nor warmth and has scarcely vitality. The Gospel

is no Gospel, and we had almost said, 'The Christ is no Christ' to one

who does not feel himself, if parted from Christ, 'dead in trespasses

and sins.' Our religion depends for all its force, our gratitude and

love for all their devotion, upon our sense that 'the chastisement of

our peace was laid upon Him, and that by His stripes we are healed.'

Since He gave Himself for us, it is meet that we give ourselves to Him,

but there will be little fervour of devotion or self-surrender, unless

there has been first the consciousness of the death of sin and then the

joyous consciousness of newness of life in Christ Jesus.

III. The captives led away to another land.

The Apostle carries on his metaphor one step further when he goes on to

describe what followed the casting down of the fortresses. The enemy,

driven from their strongholds, have nothing for it but to surrender and

are led away in captivity to another land. The long strings of

prisoners on Assyrian and Egyptian monuments show how familiar an

experience this was. It may be noted that perhaps our text regards the

obedience of Christ as being the far country into which 'every thought

was to be brought.' At all events Paul's idea here is that the end of

the whole struggle between 'the flesh' and the weapons of God is to

make men willing captives of Jesus Christ. We are Christians in the

measure in which we surrender our wills to Christ. That surrender rests

upon, and is our only adequate answer to, His surrender for us. The

'obedience of Christ' is perfect freedom; His captives wear no chains

and know nothing of forced service; His yoke is easy, not because it

does not press hard upon the neck but because it is lined with love,

and 'His burden is light' not because of its own weight but because it

is laid on us by love and is carried by kindred love. He only commands

himself who gladly lets Christ command him. Many a hard task becomes

easy; crooked things are straightened out and rough places often made

surprisingly plain for the captives of Christ, whom He leads into the

liberty of obedience to Him.

IV. Fate of the disobedient.

Paul thinks that in Corinth there will be found some stiff-necked

opponents of whom he cannot hope that their 'obedience shall be

fulfilled,' and he sees in the double issue of the small struggle that

was being waged in Corinth a parable of the wider results of the

warfare in the world. 'Some believed and some believed not'; that has

been the brief summary of the experience of all God's messengers

everywhere, and it is their experience to-day. No doubt when Paul

speaks of 'being in readiness to avenge all disobedience,' he is

alluding to the exercise of his apostolic authority against the

obdurate antagonists whom he contemplates as still remaining obdurate,

and it is beautiful to note the long-suffering patience with which he

will hold his hand until all that can be won has been won. But we must

not forget that Paul's demeanour is but a faint shadow of his Lord's,

and that the weapons which were ready to avenge all disobedience were

the weapons of God. If a man steels himself against the efforts of

divine love, builds up round himself a fortress of self-righteousness

and locks its gates against the merciful entrance of convictions of sin

and the knowledge of a Saviour, and if he therefore lives, year in,

year out, in disobedience, the weapons which he thinks himself to have

resisted will one day make him feel their edge. We cannot set ourselves

against the salvation of Jesus without bringing upon ourselves

consequences which are wholly evil and harmful. Torpid consciences,

hungry hearts, stormy wills, tyrannous desires, vain hopes and not vain

fears come to be, by slow degrees, the tortures of the man who drops

the portcullis and lifts the bridge against the entrance of Jesus.

There are hells enough on earth if men's hearts were displayed.

But the love which is obliged to smite gives warning that it is ready

to avenge, long before it lets the blow fall, and does so in order that

it may never need to fall. As long as it is possible that the

disobedient shall become obedient to Christ, He holds back the

vengeance that is ready to fall and will one day fall 'on all

disobedience.' Not till all other means have been patiently tried will

He let that terrible ending crash down. It hangs over the heads of many

of us who are all unaware that we walk beneath the shadow of a rock

that at any moment may be set in motion and bury us beneath its weight.

It is 'in readiness,' but it is still at rest. Let us be wise in time

and yield to the merciful weapons with which Jesus would make His way

into our hearts. Or if the metaphor of our text presents Him in too

warlike a guise, let us listen to His own gentle pleading, 'Behold, I

stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the

door, I will come in to him.'

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SIMPLICITY TOWARDS CHRIST

'But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his

subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is

in Christ.'--2 Cor. xi. 3.

The Revised Version, amongst other alterations, reads, 'the simplicity

that is towards Christ.'

The inaccurate rendering of the Authorised Version is responsible for a

mistake in the meaning of these words, which has done much harm. They

have been supposed to describe a quality or characteristic belonging to

Christ or the Gospel; and, so construed, they have sometimes been made

the watchword of narrowness and of intellectual indolence. 'Give us the

simple Gospel' has been the cry of people who have thought themselves

to be evangelical when they were only lazy, and the consequence has

been that preachers have been expected to reiterate commonplaces, which

have made both them and their hearers listless, and to sink the

educational for the evangelistic aspect of the Christian teacher's

function.

It is quite true that the Gospel is simple, but it is also true that it

is deep, and they will best appreciate its simplicity who have most

honestly endeavoured to fathom its depth. When we let our little

sounding lines out, and find that they do not reach the bottom, we

begin to wonder even more at the transparency of the clear abyss. It is

not simplicity in Christ, but towards Christ of which the Apostle is

speaking; not a quality in Him, but a quality in us towards Him. I

wish, then, to turn to the two thoughts that these words suggest. First

and chiefly, the attitude towards Christ which befits our relation to

Him; and, secondly and briefly, the solicitude for its maintenance.

I. First, then, look at the attitude towards Christ which befits the

Christian relation to Him.

The word 'simplicity' has had a touch of contempt associated with it.

It is a somewhat doubtful compliment to say of a man that he is

'simple-minded.' All noble words which describe great qualities get

oxidised by exposure to the atmosphere, and rust comes over them, as

indeed all good things tend to become deteriorated in time and by use.

But the notion of the word is really a very noble and lofty one. To be

'without a fold,' which is the meaning of the Greek word and of its

equivalent 'simplicity,' is, in one aspect, to be transparently honest

and true, and in another to be out and out of a piece. There is no

underside of the cloth, doubled up beneath the upper which shows, and

running in the opposite direction; but all tends in one way. A man with

no under-currents, no by-ends, who is down to the very roots what he

looks, and all whose being is knit together and hurled in one

direction, without reservation or back-drawing, that is the 'simple'

man whom the Apostle means. Such simplicity is the truest wisdom; such

simplicity of devotion to Jesus Christ is the only attitude of heart

and mind which corresponds to the facts of our relation to Him. That

relation is set forth in the context by a very sweet and tender image,

in the true line of scriptural teaching, which in many a place speaks

of the Bride and Bridegroom, and which on its last page shows us the

Lamb's wife descending from Heaven to meet her husband. The state of

devout souls and of the community of such here on earth is that of

betrothal. Their state in heaven is that of marriage. Very beautiful it

is to see how this fiery Paul, like the ascetic John, who never knew

the sacred joys of that state, lays hold of the thought of the

Bridegroom and the Bride, and of his individual relation to both as

indicating the duties of the Church and the solicitude of the Apostle.

He says that he has been the intermediary who, according to Oriental

custom, arranged the preliminaries of the marriage, and brought the

bride to the bridegroom, and, as the friend of the latter, standing by

rejoices greatly to hear the bridegroom's voice, and is solicitous

mainly that in the tremulous heart of the betrothed there should be no

admixture of other loves, but a whole-hearted devotion, an exclusive

affection, and an absolute obedience. 'I have espoused you,' says he,

'to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

But I fear lest . . . your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity

that is towards Him.'

Now that metaphor carries in its implication all that anybody can say

about the exclusiveness, the depth, the purity, the all-pervasiveness

of the dependent love which should knit us to Jesus Christ. The same

thought of whole-hearted, single, absolute devotion is conveyed by

other Scripture metaphors, the slave and the soldier of Christ. But all

that is repellent or harsh in these is softened and glorified when we

contemplate it in the light of the metaphor of my text.

So I might leave it to do its own work, but I may perhaps be allowed to

follow out the thought in one or two directions.

The attitude, then, which corresponds to our relation to Jesus Christ

is that, first, of a faith which looks to Him exclusively as the source

of salvation and of light. The specific danger which was alarming Paul,

in reference to that little community of Christians in Corinth, was one

which, in its particular form, is long since dead and buried. But the

principles which underlay it, the tendencies to which it appealed, and

the perils which alarmed Paul for the Corinthian Church, are perennial.

He feared that these Judaising teachers, who dogged his heels all his

life long, and whose one aim seemed to be to build upon his foundation

and to overthrow his building, should find their way into this church

and wreck it. The keenness of the polemic, in this and in the

contextual chapters, shows how real and imminent the danger was. Now

what they did was to tell people that Jesus Christ had a partner in His

saving work. They said that obedience to the Jewish law, ceremonial and

other, was a condition of salvation, along with trust in Jesus Christ

as the Messiah. And because they thus shared out the work of salvation

between Jesus Christ and something else, Paul thundered and lightened

at them all his life, and, as he tells us in this context, regarded

them as preaching another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel.

That particular error is long dead and buried.

But is there nothing else that has come into its place? Has this old

foe not got a new face, and does not it live amongst us as really as it

lived then? I think it does; whether in the form of the grosser kind of

sacramentarianism and ecclesiasticism which sticks sacraments and a

church in front of the Cross, or in the form of the definite denial

that Jesus Christ's death on the Cross is the one means of salvation,

or simply in the form of the coarse, common wish to have a finger in

the pie and a share in the work of saving oneself, as a drowning man

will sometimes half drown his rescuer by trying to use his own limbs.

These tendencies that Paul fought, and which he feared would corrupt

the Corinthians from their simple and exclusive reliance on Christ, and

Christ alone, as the ground and author of their salvation, are

perennial in human nature, and we have to be on our guard for ever and

for ever against them. Whether they come in organised, systematic,

doctrinal form, or whether they are simply the rising in our own hearts

of the old Adam of pride and self-trust, they equally destroy the whole

work of Christ, because they infringe upon its solitariness and

uniqueness. It is not Christ and anything else. Men are not saved by a

syndicate. It is Jesus Christ alone, and 'beside Him there is no

Saviour.' You go into a Turkish mosque and see the roof held up by a

forest of slim pillars. You go into a cathedral chapter-house and see

one strong support in the centre that bears the whole roof. The one is

an emblem of the Christless multiplicity of vain supports, the other of

the solitary strength and eternal sufficiency of the one Pillar on

which the whole weight of a world's salvation rests, and which lightly

bears it triumphantly aloft. 'I fear lest your minds be corrupted from

the simplicity' of a reasonable faith directed towards Christ.

And in like manner He is the sole light and teacher of men as to God,

themselves, their duty, their destinies and prospects. He, and He

alone, brings these things to light. His word, whether it comes from

His lips or from the deeds which are part of His revelation, or from

the voice of the Spirit which takes of His and speaks to the ages

through His apostles, should be 'the end of all strife.' What He says,

and all that He says, and nothing else than what He says, is the creed

of the Christian. He, and He only, is 'the light which lighteth every

man that cometh into the world.' In this day of babblements and

confusions, let us listen for the voice of Christ and accept all which

comes from Him, and let the language of our deepest hearts be, 'Lord,

to whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life.'

Again, our relation to Jesus Christ demands exclusive love to Him.

'Demands' is an ugly word to bracket with love. We might say, and

perhaps more truly, permits or privileges. It is the joy of the

betrothed that her duty is to love, and to keep her heart clear from

all competing affections. But it is none the less her duty because it

is her joy. What Christ is to you, if you are a Christian, and what He

longs to be to us all, whether we are Christians or not, is of such a

character as that the only fitting attitude of our hearts to Him in

response is that of exclusive affection. I do not mean that we are to

love nothing but Him, but I mean that we are to love all things else in

Him, and that, if any creature so delays or deflects our love as that

either it does not pass, by means of the creature, into the presence of

the Christ, or is turned away from the Christ by the creature, then we

have fallen beneath the sweet level of our lofty privilege, and have

won for ourselves the misery due to distracted and idolatrous hearts.

Love to one who has done what He has done for us is in its very nature

exclusive, and its exclusiveness is all-pervasive exclusiveness. The

centre diamond makes the little stones set round it all the more

lustrous. We must love Jesus Christ all in all or not at all. Divided

love incurs the condemnation that falls heavily upon the head of the

faithless bride.

Dear friends, the conception of the essence of religion as being love

is no relaxation, but an increase, of its stringent requirements. The

more we think of that sweet bond as being the true union of the soul

with God, who is its only rest and home, the more reasonable and

imperative will appear the old commandment, 'Thou shalt love Him with

all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.'

But, further, our relation to Jesus Christ is such as that nothing

short of absolute obedience to His commandment corresponds to it. There

must be the simplicity, the single-mindedness that thus obeys, obeys

swiftly, cheerfully, constantly. In all matters His command is my law,

and, as surely as I make His command my law, will He make my desire His

motive. For He Himself has said, in words that bring together our

obedience to His will and His compliance with our wishes, in a fashion

that we should not have ventured upon unless He had set us an example,

'If ye love Me, keep My commandments. If ye ask anything in My name I

will do it.' The exclusive love that binds us, by reason of our faith

in Him alone, to that Lord ought to express itself in unhesitating,

unfaltering, unreserved, and unreluctant obedience to every word that

comes from His mouth.

These brief outlines are but the poorest attempt to draw out what the

words of my text imply. But such as they are, let us remember that they

do set forth the only proper response of the saved man to the saving

Christ. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Anything short of a faith

that rests on Him alone, of a love that knits itself to His single,

all-sufficient heart, and of an obedience that bows the whole being to

the sweet yoke of His commandment is an unworthy answer to the Love

that died, and that lives for us all.

II. And now I have only time to glance at the solicitude for the

maintenance of this exclusive single-mindedness towards Christ.

Think of what threatens it. I say nothing about the ferment of opinion

in this day, [INS: for :INS] one man that is swept away from a thorough

whole-hearted faith by intellectual considerations, there are a dozen

from whom it is filched without their knowing it, by their own

weaknesses and the world's noises. And so it is more profitable that we

should think of the whole crowd of external duties, enjoyments,

sweetnesses, bitternesses, that solicit us, and would seek to draw us

away. Who can hear the low voice that speaks peace and wisdom when

Niagara is roaring past his ears? 'The world is too much with us, late

and soon. Buying and selling we lay waste our powers,' and break

ourselves away from our simple devotion to that dear Lord. But it is

possible that we may so carry into all the whirl the central peace, as

that we shall not be disturbed by it; and possible that 'whether we eat

or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to His glory,' so that we

can, even in the midst of our daily pressing avocations and cares be

keeping our hearts in the heavens, and our souls in touch with our

Lord.

But it is not only things without that draw us away. Our own weaknesses

and waywardnesses, our strong senses, our passions, our desires, our

necessities, all these have a counteracting force, which needs

continual watchfulness in order to be neutralised. No man can grasp a

stay, which alone keeps him from being immersed in the waves, with

uniform tenacity, unless every now and then he tightens his muscles.

And no man can keep himself firmly grasping Jesus Christ without

conscious effort directed to bettering his hold.

If there be dangers around us, and dangers within us, the discipline

which we have to pursue in order to secure this uniform, single-hearted

devotion is plain enough. Let us be vividly conscious of the

peril--which is what some of us are not. Let us take stock of ourselves

lest creeping evil may be encroaching upon us, while we are all

unaware--which is what some of us never do. Let us clearly contemplate

the possibility of an indefinite increase in the closeness and

thoroughness of our surrender to Him--a conviction which has faded away

from the minds of many professing Christians. Above all, let us find

time or make time for the patient, habitual contemplation of the great

facts which kindle our devotion. For if you never think of Jesus Christ

and His love to you, how can you love Him back again? And if you are so

busy carrying out your own secular affairs, or pursuing your own

ambitions, or attending to your own duties, as they may seem to be,

that you have no time to think of Christ, His death, His life, His

Spirit, His yearning heart over His bride, how can it be expected that

you will have any depth of love to Him? Let us, too, wait with

prayerful patience for that Divine Spirit who will knit us more closely

to our Lord.

Unless we do so, we shall get no happiness out of our religion, and it

will bring no praise to Christ or profit to ourselves. I do not know a

more miserable man than a half-and-half Christian, after the pattern

of, I was going to say, the ordinary average of professing Christians

of this generation. He has religion enough to prick and sting him, and

not enough to impel him to forsake the evil which yet he cannot

comfortably do. He has religion enough to 'inflame his conscience,' not

enough to subdue his will and heart. How many of my hearers are in that

condition it is for them to settle. If we are to be Christian men at

all, let us be it out and out. Half-and-half religion is no religion.

'One foot in sea, and one on shore;

To one thing constant never!'

That is the type of thousands of professing Christians. 'I fear lest by

any means your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is towards

Christ.'

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STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from

me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My

strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I

rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon

me.'--2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

This very remarkable page in the autobiography of the Apostle shows us

that he, too, belonged to the great army of martyrs who, with hearts

bleeding and pierced through and through with a dart, yet did their

work for God. It is of little consequence what his thorn in the flesh

may have been. The original word suggests very much heavier sorrow than

the metaphor of 'a thorn' might imply. It really seems to mean not a

tiny bit of thorn that might lie half concealed in the finger tip, but

one of those hideous stakes on which the cruel punishment of impalement

used to be inflicted. And Paul's thought is, not that he has a little,

trivial trouble to bear, but that he is, as it were, forced quivering

upon that tremendous torture.

Unquestionably, what he means is some bodily ailment or other. The

hypothesis that the 'thorn in the flesh' was the sting of the animal

nature inciting him to evil is altogether untenable, because such a

thorn could never have been left when the prayer for its removal was

earnestly presented; nor could it ever have been, when left, an

occasion for glorifying. Manifestly it was no weakness removable by his

own effort, no incapacity for service which in any manner approximated

to being a fault, but purely and simply some infliction from God's hand

(though likewise capable of being regarded as a 'messenger of Satan')

which hindered him in his work, and took down any proud flesh and

danger of spiritual exaltation in consequence of the largeness of his

religious privileges.

Our text sets before us three most instructive windings, as it were, of

the stream of thoughts that passed through the Apostle's mind, in

reference to this burden that he had to carry, and may afford wholesome

contemplation for us to-day. There is, first, the instinctive shrinking

which took refuge in prayer. Then there is the insight won by prayer

into the sustaining strength for, and the purposes of, the thorn that

was not to be plucked out. And then, finally, there is the peace of

acquiescence, and a will that accepts--not the inevitable, but the

loving.

I. First of all we see the instinctive shrinking from that which

tortured the flesh, which takes refuge in prayer.

There is a wonderful, a beautiful, and, I suppose, an intentional

parallel between the prayers of the servant and of the Master. Paul's

petitions are the echo of Gethsemane. There, under the quivering

olives, in the broken light of the Paschal moon, Jesus 'thrice' prayed

that the cup might pass from Him. And here the servant, emboldened and

instructed by the example of the Master, 'thrice' reiterates his human

and natural desire for the removal of the pain, whatever it was, which

seemed to him so to hinder the efficiency and the fulness, as it

certainly did the joy, of his service.

But He who prayed in Gethsemane was He to whom Paul addressed his

prayer. For, as is almost always the case in the New Testament, 'the

Lord' here evidently means Christ, as is obvious from the connection of

the answer to the petition with the Apostle's final confidence and

acquiescence. For the answer was, 'My strength is made perfect in

weakness'; and the Apostle's conclusion is, 'Most gladly will I glorify

in infirmity,' that the strength or 'power of Christ may rest upon me.'

Therefore the prayer with which we have to deal here is a prayer

offered to Jesus, who prayed in Gethsemane, and to whom we can bring

our petitions and our desires.

Notice how this thought of prayer directed to the Master Himself helps

to lead us deep into the sacredest and most blessed characteristics of

prayer. It is only telling Christ what is in our hearts. Oh, if we

lived in the true understanding of what prayer really is--the emptying

out of our inmost desire and thoughts before our Brother, who is

likewise our Lord--questions as to what it was permissible to pray for,

and what it was not permissible to pray for, would be irrelevant, and

drop away of themselves. If we had a less formal notion of prayer, and

realised more thoroughly what it was--the speech of a confiding heart

to a sympathising Lord--then everything that fills our hearts would be

seen to be a fitting object of prayer. If anything is large enough to

interest me, it is not too small to be spoken about to Him.

So the question, which is often settled upon very abstract and deep

grounds that have little to do with the matter--the question as to

whether prayer for outward blessings is permissible--falls away of

itself. If I am to talk to Jesus Christ about everything that concerns

me, am I to keep my thumb upon all that great department and be silent

about it? One reason why our prayers are often so unreal is, because

they do not fit our real wants, nor correspond to the thoughts that are

busy in our minds at the moment of praying. Our hearts are full of some

small matter of daily interest, and when we kneel down not a word about

it comes to our lips. Can that be right?

The difference between the different objects of prayer is not to be

found in the rejection of all temporal and external, but in remembering

that there are two sets of things to be prayed about, and over one set

must ever be written 'If it be Thy will,' and over the other it need

not be written, because we are sure that the granting of our wishes is

His will. We know about the one that 'if we ask anything according to

His will, He heareth us.' That may seem to be a very poor and shrunken

kind of hope to give a man, that if his prayer is in conformity with

the previous determination of the divine will, it will be answered. But

it availed for the joyful confidence of that Apostle who saw deepest

into the conditions and the blessedness of the harmony of the will of

God and of man. But about the other set we can only say, 'Not my will,

but Thine be done.' With that sentence, not as a formula upon our lips

but deep in our hearts, let us take everything into His

presence--thorns and stakes, pinpricks and wounds out of which the

life-blood is ebbing--let us take them all to Him, and be sure that we

shall take none of them in vain.

So then we have the Person to whom the prayer is addressed, the

subjects with which it is occupied, and the purpose to which it is

directed. 'Take away the burden' was the Apostle's petition; but it was

a mistaken petition and, therefore, unanswered.

II. That brings me to the second of the windings, as I have ventured to

call them, of this stream--viz. the insight into the source of strength

for, and the purpose of, the thorn that could not be taken away. The

Lord said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee. For My strength'

(where the word 'My' is a supplement, but a necessary one) 'is made

perfect in weakness.'

The answer is, in form and in substance, a gentle refusal of the form

of the petition, but it is a more than granting of its essence. For the

best answer to such a prayer, and the answer which a true man means

when he asks, 'Take away the burden,' need not be the external removal

of the pressure of the sorrow, but the infusing of power to sustain it.

There are two ways of lightening a burden, one is diminishing its

actual weight, the other is increasing the strength of the shoulder

that bears it. And the latter is God's way, is Christ's way, of dealing

with us.

Now mark that the answer which this faithful prayer receives is no

communication of anything fresh, but it is the opening of the man's

eyes to see that already he has all that he needs. The reply is not, 'I

will give thee grace sufficient,' but 'My grace' (which thou hast now)

'is sufficient for thee.' That grace is given and possessed by the

sorrowing heart at the moment when it prays. Open your eyes to see what

you have, and you will not ask for the load to be taken away. Is not

that always true? Many a heart is carrying some heavy weight; perhaps

some have an incurable sorrow, some are stricken by disease that they

know can never be healed, some are aware that the shipwreck has been

total, and that the sorrow that they carry to-day will lie down with

them in the dust. Be it so! 'My grace (not shall be, but) is sufficient

for thee.' And what thou hast already in thy possession is enough for

all that comes storming against thee of disease, disappointment, loss,

and misery. Set on the one side all possible as well as all actual

weaknesses, burdens, pains, and set on the other these two words--'My

grace,' and all these dwindle into nothingness and disappear. If

troubled Christian men would learn what they have, and would use what

they already possess, they would less often beseech Him with vain

petitions to take away their blessings which are in the thorns in the

flesh. 'My grace is sufficient.'

How modestly the Master speaks about what He gives! 'Sufficient'? Is

not there a margin? Is there not more than is wanted? The overplus is

'exceeding abundant,' not only 'above what we ask or think,' but far

more than our need. 'Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient

that every one may take a little,' says Sense. Omnipotence says, 'Bring

the few small loaves and fishes unto Me'; and Faith dispensed them

amongst the crowd; and Experience 'gathered up of the fragments that

remained' more than there had been when the multiplication began. So

the grace utilised increases; the gift grows as it is employed. 'Unto

him that hath shall be given.' And the 'sufficiency' is not a bare

adequacy, just covering the extent of the need, with no overlapping

margin, but is large beyond expectation, desire, or necessity; so

leading onwards to high hopes and a wider opening of the open mouths of

our need that the blessing may pour in.

The other part of this great answer, that the Christ from Heaven spoke

in or to the praying spirit of this not disappointed, though refused,

Apostle, unveiled the purpose of the sorrow, even as the former part

had disclosed the strength to bear it. For, says He, laying down

therein the great law of His kingdom in all departments and in all

ways, 'My strength is made perfect'--that is, of course, perfect in its

manifestation or operations, for it is perfect in itself already. 'My

strength is made perfect in weakness.' It works in and through man's

weakness.

God works with broken reeds. If a man conceits himself to be an iron

pillar, God can do nothing with or by him. All the self-conceit and

confidence have to be taken out of him first. He has to be brought low

before the Father can use him for His purposes. The lowlands hold the

water, and, if only the sluice is open, the gravitation of His grace

does all the rest and carries the flood into the depths of the lowly

heart.

His strength loves to work in weakness, only the weakness must be

conscious, and the conscious weakness must have passed into conscious

dependence. There, then, you get the law for the Church, for the works

of Christianity on the widest scale, and in individual lives. Strength

that conceits itself to be such is weakness; weakness that knows itself

to be such is strength. The only true source of Power, both for

Christian work and in all other respects, is God Himself; and our

strength is ours but by derivation from Him. And the only way to secure

that derivation is through humble dependence, which we call faith in

Jesus Christ. And the only way by which that faith in Jesus Christ can

ever be kindled in a man's soul is through the sense of his need and

emptiness. So when we know ourselves weak, we have taken the first step

to strength; just as, when we know ourselves sinners, we have taken the

first step to righteousness; just as in all regions the recognition of

the doleful fact of our human necessity is the beginning of the joyful

confidence in the glad, triumphant fact of the divine fulness. All our

hollownesses, if I may so say, are met with His fulness that fits into

them. It only needs that a man be aware of that which he is, and then

turn himself to Him who is all that he is not, and then into his empty

being will flow rejoicing the whole fulness of God. 'My strength is

made perfect in weakness.'

III. Lastly, mark the calm final acquiescence in the loving necessity

of continued sorrow. 'Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my

infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' The will is

entirely harmonised with Christ's. The Apostle begins with instinctive

shrinking, he passes onwards to a perception of the purpose of his

trial and of the sustaining grace; and he comes now to acquiescence

which is not passivity, but glad triumph. He is more than submissive,

he gladly glories in his infirmity in order that the power of Christ

may 'spread a tabernacle over' him. 'It is good for me that I have been

afflicted,' said the old prophet. Paul says, in a yet higher note of

concord with God's will, 'I am glad that I sorrow. I rejoice in

weakness, because it makes it easier for me to cling, and, clinging, I

am strong, and conquer evil.' Far better is it that the sting of our

sorrow should be taken away, by our having learned what it is for, and

having bowed to it, than that it should be taken away by the external

removal which we sometimes long for. A grief, a trial, an incapacity, a

limitation, a weakness, which we use as a means of deepening our sense

of dependence upon Him, is a blessing, and not a sorrow. And if we

would only go out into the world trying to interpret its events in the

spirit of this great text, we should less frequently wonder and weep

over what sometimes seem to us the insoluble mysteries of the sorrows

of ourselves and of other men. They are all intended to make it more

easy for us to realise our utter hanging upon Him, and so to open our

hearts to receive more fully the quickening influences of His

omnipotent and self-sufficing grace.

Here, then, is a lesson for those who have to carry some cross and know

they must carry it throughout life. It will be wreathed with flowers if

you accept it. Here is a lesson for all Christian workers. Ministers of

the Gospel especially should banish all thoughts of their own

cleverness, intellectual ability, culture, sufficiency for their work,

and learn that only when they are emptied can they be filled, and only

when they know themselves to be nothing are they ready for God to work

through them. And here is a lesson for all who stand apart from the

grace and power of Jesus Christ as if they needed it not. Whether you

know it or not, you are a broken reed; and the only way of your ever

being bound up and made strong is that you shall recognise your

sinfulness, your necessity, your abject poverty, your utter emptiness,

and come to Him who is righteousness, riches, fulness, and say,

'Because I am weak, be Thou my strength.' The secret of all noble,

heroic, useful, happy life lies in the paradox, 'When I am weak, then

am I strong,' and the secret of all failures, miseries, hopeless

losses, lies in its converse, 'When I am strong, then am I weak.'

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NOT YOURS BUT YOU

'I seek not yours, but you.'--2 Cor. xii. 14.

Men are usually quick to suspect others of the vices to which they

themselves are prone. It is very hard for one who never does anything

but with an eye to what he can make out of it, to believe that there

are other people actuated by higher motives. So Paul had, over and over

again, to meet the hateful charge of making money out of his

apostleship. It was one of the favourite stones that his opponents in

the Corinthian Church, of whom there were very many, very bitter ones,

flung at him. In this letter he more than once refers to the charge. He

does so with great dignity, and with a very characteristic and delicate

mixture of indignation and tenderness, almost playfulness. Thus, in the

context, he tells these Corinthian grumblers that he must beg their

pardon for not having taken anything of them, and so honoured them.

Then he informs them that he is coming again to see them for the third

time, and that that visit will be marked by the same independence of

their help as the others had been. And then he just lets a glimpse of

his pained heart peep out in the words of my text. 'I seek not yours,

but you.' There speaks a disinterested love which feels obliged, and

yet reluctant, to stoop to say that it is love, and that it is

disinterested. Where did Paul learn this passionate desire to possess

these people, and this entire suppression of self in the desire? It was

a spark from a sacred fire, a drop from an infinite ocean, an echo of a

divine voice. The words of my text would never have been Paul's if the

spirit of them had not first been Christ's. I venture to take them in

that aspect, as setting forth Christ's claims upon us, and bearing very

directly on the question of Christian service and of Christian

liberality.

I. So, then, first of all, I remark, Christ desires personal surrender.

'I seek not yours, but you,' is the very mother-tongue of love; but

upon our lips, even when our love is purest, there is a tinge of

selfishness blending with it, and very often the desire for another's

love is as purely selfish as the desire for any material good. But in

so far as human love is pure in its desire to possess another, we have

the right to believe the deep and wonderful thought that there is

something corresponding to it in the heart of Christ, which is a

revelation for us of the heart of God; and that, however little we may

be able to construe the whole meaning of the fact, He does stretch out

an arm of desire towards us; and for His own sake, as for ours, would

fain draw us near to Himself, and is 'satisfied,' as He is not without

it, when men's hearts yield themselves up to Him, and let Him love them

and lavish Himself upon them. I do not venture into these depths, but I

would lay upon our hearts that the very inmost meaning of all that

Jesus Christ has said, and is saying, to each of us by the records of

His life, by the pathos of His death, by the miracle of His

Resurrection, by the glory of His Ascension, by the power of His

granted Spirit, is, 'I seek you.'

And, brethren, our self-surrender is the essence of our Christianity.

Our religion lies neither in our heads nor in our acts; the deepest

notion of it is that it is the entire yielding up of ourselves to Jesus

Christ our Lord. There is plenty of religion which is a religion of the

head and of creeds. There is plenty of religion which is the religion

of the hand and of the tongue, and of forms and ceremonies and

sacraments; external worship. There is plenty of religion which

surrenders to Him some of the more superficial parts of our

personality, whilst the ancient Anarch, Self, sits undisturbed on his

dark throne, in the depths of our being. But none of these are the

religion that either Christ requires or that we need. The only true

notion of a Christian is a man who can truly say, 'I live, yet not I,

but Christ liveth in me.'

And that is the only kind of life that is blessed; our only true

nobleness and beauty and power and sweetness are measured by, and

accurately correspond with, the completeness of our surrender of

ourselves to Jesus Christ. As long as the earth was thought to be the

centre of the planetary system there was nothing but confusion in the

heavens. Shift the centre to the sun and all becomes order and beauty.

The root of sin, and the mother of death, is making myself my own law

and Lord; the germ of righteousness, and the first pulsations of life,

lie in yielding ourselves to God in Christ, because He has yielded

Himself unto us.

I need not remind you, I suppose, that this self-surrender is a great

deal more than a vivid metaphor: that it implies a very hard fact;

implies at least two things, that we have yielded ourselves to Jesus

Christ, by the love of our hearts, and by the unreluctant submission of

our wills, whether He commands or whether He sends sufferings or joys.

And, oh, brethren, be sure of this, that no such giving of myself away,

in the sweet reciprocities of a higher than human affection, is

possible, in the general, and on the large scale, if you evacuate from

the Gospel the great truth, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' I

believe--and therefore I am bound to preach it--that the only power

which can utterly annihilate and cast out the dominion of self from a

human soul is the power that is lodged in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ

on the Cross for sinful men.

And whilst I would fully recognise all that is noble, and all that is

effective, in systems either of religion, or of irreligious morality,

which have no place within their bounds for that great motive, I am

sure of this, that the evil self within us is too strong to be

exorcised by anything short of the old message, 'Jesus Christ has given

His life for thee, wilt thou not give thyself unto Him?'

II. Christ seeks personal service.

'I seek . . . you'; not only for My love, but for My tools; for My

instruments in carrying out the purposes for which I died, and

establishing My dominion in the world. Now I want to say two or three

very plain things about this matter, which lies very near my heart, as

to some degree responsible for the amount of Christian activity and

service in this my congregation. Brethren, the surrender of ourselves

to Jesus Christ in acts of direct Christian activity and service, will

be the outcome of a real surrender of ourselves to Him in love and

obedience.

I cannot imagine a man who, in any deep sense, has realised his

obligations to that Saviour, and in any real sense has made the great

act of self-renunciation, and crowned Christ as his Lord, living for

the rest of his life, as so many professing Christians do, dumb and

idle, in so far as work for the Master is concerned. It seems to me

that, among the many wants of this generation of professing Christians,

there is none that is more needed than that a wave of new consecration

should pass over the Church. If men who call themselves Christians

lived more in habitual contact with the facts of their redeeming

Saviour's sacrifice for them, there would be no need to lament the

fewness of the labourers, as measured against the overwhelming

multitude of the fields that are white to harvest. If once that flood

of a new sense of Christ's gift, and a consequent new completeness of

our returned gifts to Him, flowed over the churches, then all the

little empty ravines would be filled with a flashing tide. Not a

shuttle moves, not a spindle revolves, until the strong impulse born of

fire rushes in; and then, all is activity. It is no use to flog, flog,

flog, at idle Christians, and try to make them work. There is only one

thing that will set them to work, and that is that they shall live

nearer their Master, and find out more of what they owe to Him; and so

render themselves up to be His instruments for any purpose for which He

may choose to use them.

This surrender of ourselves for direct Christian service is the only

solution of the problem of how to win the world for Jesus Christ.

Professionals cannot do it. Men of my class cannot do it. We are

clogged very largely by the fact that, being necessarily dependent on

our congregations for a living, we cannot, with as clear an emphasis as

you can, go to people and say, 'We seek not yours, but you.' I have

nothing to say about the present ecclesiastical arrangements of modern

Christian communities. That would take me altogether from my present

purposes, but I want to lay this upon your consciences, dear brethren,

that you who have other means of living than proclaiming Christ's name

have an advantage, which it is at your peril that you fling away. As

long as the Christian Church thought that an ordained priest was a man

who could do things that laymen could not do, the limitation of

Christian service to the priesthood was logical. But when the Christian

Church, especially as represented by us Nonconformists, came to believe

that a minister was only a man who preached the Gospel, which every

Christian man is bound to do, the limitations of Christian service to

the official class became an illogical survival, utterly incongruous

with the fundamental principles of our conception of the Christian

Church. And yet here it is, devastating our churches to-day, and making

hundreds of good people perfectly comfortable, in an unscriptural and

unchristian indolence, because, forsooth, it is the minister's business

to preach the Gospel. I know that there is not nearly as much of that

indolence as there used to be. Thank God for that. There are far more

among our congregations than in former times who have realised the fact

that it is every Christian man's task, somehow or other, to set forth

the great name of Jesus Christ. But still, alas, in a church with, say,

400 members, you may knock off the last cypher, and you will get a

probably not too low statement of the number of people in it who have

realised and fulfilled this obligation. What about the other 360 'dumb

dogs, that will not bark'? And in that 360 there will probably be

several men who can make speeches on political platforms, and in

scientific lecture-halls, and about social and economical questions,

only they cannot, for the life of them, open their mouths and say a

word to a soul about Him whom they say they serve, and to whom they say

they belong.

Brethren, this direct service cannot be escaped from, or commuted by a

money payment. In the old days a man used to escape serving in the

militia if he found a substitute, and paid for him. There are a great

many good Christian people who seem to think that Christ's army is

recruited on that principle. But it is a mistake. 'I seek you, not

yours.'

III. Lastly, and only a word. Christ seeks us, and ours.

Not you without yours, still less yours without you. This is no place,

nor is the fag end of a sermon the time, to talk about so wide a

subject as the ethics of Christian dealing with money. But two things I

will say--consecration of self is extremely imperfect which does not

include the consecration of possessions, and, conversely, consecration

of possessions which does not flow from, and is not accompanied by, the

consecration of self, is nought.

If, then, the great law of self-surrender is to run through the whole

Christian life, that law, as applied to our dealing with what we own,

prescribes three things. The first is stewardship, not ownership; and

that all round the circumference of our possessions. Depend upon it,

the angry things that we hear to-day about the unequal distribution of

wealth will get angrier and angrier, and will be largely justified in

becoming so by the fact that so many of us, Christians included, have

firmly grasped the notion of possession, and utterly forgotten the

obligation of stewardship.

Again, the law of self-surrender, in its application to all that we

have, involves our continual reference to Jesus Christ in our

disposition of these our possessions. I draw no line of distinction, in

this respect, between what a man spends upon himself, and what he

spends upon 'charity,' and what he spends upon religious objects. One

principle is to govern, getting, hoarding, giving, enjoying, and that

is, that in it all Christ shall be Master.

Again, the law of self-surrender, in its application to our

possessions, implies that there shall be an element of sacrifice in our

use of these; whether they be possessions of intellect, of acquirement,

of influence, of position, or of material wealth. The law of help is

sacrifice, and the law for a Christian man is that he shall not offer

unto the Lord his God that which costs him nothing.

So, dear friends, let us all get near to that great central fire till

it melts our hearts. Let the love which is our hope be our pattern.

Remember that though only faintly, and from afar, can the issues of

Christ's great sacrifice be reproduced in any actions of ours, the

spirit which brought Him to die is the spirit which must instruct and

inspire us to live. Unless we can say, 'He loved me, and gave Himself

for me; I yield myself to Him'; and unless our lives confirm the

utterance, we have little right to call ourselves His disciples.

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GALATIANS

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FROM CENTRE TO CIRCUMFERENCE

'The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son

of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'--Gal. ii. 20.

We have a bundle of paradoxes in this verse. First, 'I am crucified

with Christ, nevertheless I live.' The Christian life is a dying life.

If we are in any real sense joined to Christ, the power of His death

makes us dead to self and sin and the world. In that region, as in the

physical, death is the gate of life; and, inasmuch as what we die to in

Christ is itself only a living death, we live because we die, and in

proportion as we die.

The next paradox is, 'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' The

Christian life is a life in which an indwelling Christ casts out, and

therefore quickens, self. We gain ourselves when we lose ourselves. His

abiding in us does not destroy but heightens our individuality. We then

most truly live when we can say, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me'; the

soul of my soul and the self of myself.

And the last paradox is that of my text, 'The life which I live in the

flesh, I live in' (not 'by') 'the faith of the Son of God.' The true

Christian life moves in two spheres at once. Externally and

superficially it is 'in the flesh,' really it is 'in faith.' It belongs

not to the material nor is dependent upon the physical body in which we

are housed. We are strangers here, and the true region and atmosphere

of the Christian life is that invisible sphere of faith.

So, then, we have in these words of my text a Christian man's frank

avowal of the secret of his own life. It is like a geological cutting,

it goes down from the surface, where the grass and the flowers are,

through the various strata, but it goes deeper than these, to the fiery

heart, the flaming nucleus and centre of all things. Therefore it may

do us all good to make a section of our hearts and see whether the

strata there are conformable to those that are here.

I. Let us begin with the centre, and work to the surface. We have,

first, the great central fact named last, but round which all the

Christian life is gathered.

'The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' These two

words, the 'loving' and the 'giving,' both point backwards to some one

definite historical fact, and the only fact which they can have in view

is the great one of the death of Jesus Christ. That is His giving up of

Himself. That is the signal and highest manifestation and proof of His

love.

Notice (though I can but touch in the briefest possible manner upon the

great thoughts that gather round these words) the three aspects of that

transcendent fact, the centre and nucleus of the whole Christian life,

which come into prominence in these words before us. Christ's death is

a great act of self-surrender, of which the one motive is His own pure

and perfect love. No doubt in other places of Scripture we have set

forth the death of Christ as being the result of the Father's purpose,

and we read that in that wondrous surrender there were two givings up

The Father 'freely gave Him up to the death for us all.' That divine

surrender, the Apostle ventures, in another passage, to find dimly

suggested from afar, in the silent but submissive and unreluctant

surrender with which Abraham yielded his only begotten son on the

mountain top. But besides that ineffable giving up by the Father of the

Son, Jesus Christ Himself, moved only by His love, willingly yields

Himself. The whole doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been

marred by one-sided insisting on the truth that God sent the Son, to

the forgetting of the fact that the Son 'came'; and that He was bound

to the Cross neither by cords of man's weaving nor by the will of the

Father, but that He Himself bound Himself to that Cross with the 'cords

of love and the bands of a man,' and died from no natural necessity nor

from any imposition of the divine will upon Him unwilling, but because

He would, and that He would because He loved. 'He loved me, and gave

Himself for me.'

Then note, further, that here, most distinctly, that great act of

self-surrendering love which culminates on the Cross is regarded as

being for man in a special and peculiar sense. I know, of course, that

from the mere wording of my text we cannot argue the atoning and

substitutionary character of the death of Christ, for the preposition

here does not necessarily mean 'instead of,' but 'for the behoof of.'

But admitting that, I have another question. If Christ's death is for

'the behoof of' men, in what conceivable sense does it benefit them,

unless it is in the place of men? The death 'for me' is only for me

when I understand that it is 'instead of' me. And practically you will

find that wherever the full-orbed faith in Christ Jesus as the death

for all the sins of the whole world, bearing the penalty and bearing it

away, has begun to falter and grow pale, men do not know what to do

with Christ's death at all, and stop talking about it to a very large

extent.

Unless He died as a sacrifice, I, for one, fail to see in what other

than a mere sentimental sense the death of Christ is a death for men.

And lastly, about this matter, observe how here we have brought into

vivid prominence the great thought that Jesus Christ in His death has

regard to single souls. We preach that He died for all. If we believe

in that august title which is laid here as the vindication of our faith

on the one hand, and as the ground of the possibility of the benefits

of His death being world-wide on the other--viz. the Son of God--then

we shall not stumble at the thought that He died for all, because He

died for each. I know that if you only regard Jesus Christ as human I

am talking utter nonsense; but I know, too, that if we believe in the

divinity of our Lord, there need be nothing to stumble us, but the

contrary, in the thought that it was not an abstraction that He died

for, that it was not a vague mass of unknown beings, clustered

together, but so far away that He could not see any of their faces, for

whom He gave His life on the Cross. That is the way in which, and in

which alone, we can embrace the whole mass of humanity--by losing sight

of the individuals. We generalise, precisely because we do not see the

individual units; but that is not God's way, and that is not Christ's

way, who is divine. For Him the all is broken up into its parts, and

when we say that the divine love loves all, we mean that the divine

love loves each. I believe (and I commend the thought to you) that we

do not fathom the depth of Christ's sufferings unless we recognise that

the sins of each man were consciously adding pressure to the load

beneath which He sank; nor picture the wonders of His love until we

believe that on the Cross it distinguished and embraced each, and,

therefore, comprehended all. Every man may say, 'He loved me, and gave

Himself for me.'

II. So much, then, for the first central fact that is here. Now let me

say a word, in the second place, about the faith which makes that fact

the foundation of my own personal life.

'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself

for me.' I am not going to plunge into any unnecessary dissertations

about the nature of faith; but may I say that, like all other familiar

conceptions, it has got worn so smooth that it glides over our mental

palate without roughening any of the papill� or giving any sense or

savour at all? And I do believe that dozens of people like you, who

have come to church and chapel all your lives, and fancy yourselves to

be fully au fait at all the Christian truth that you will ever hear

from my lips, do not grasp with any clearness of apprehension the

meaning of that fundamental word 'faith.'

It is a thousand pities that it is confined by the accidents of

language to our attitude in reference to Jesus Christ. So some of you

think that it is some kind of theological juggle which has nothing to

do with, and never can be seen in operation in, common life. Suppose,

instead of the threadbare, technical 'faith' we took to a new

translation for a minute, and said 'trust,' do you think that would

freshen up the thought to you at all? It is the very same thing which

makes the sweetness of your relations to wife and husband and friend

and parent, which, transferred to Jesus Christ and glorified in the

process, becomes the seed of immortal life and the opener of the gate

of Heaven. Trust Jesus Christ. That is the living centre of the

Christian life; that is the process by which we draw the general

blessing of the Gospel into our own hearts, and make the world-wide

truth, our truth.

I need not insist either, I suppose, on the necessity, if our Christian

life is to be modelled upon the Apostolic lines, of our faith embracing

the Christ in all these aspects in which I have been speaking about His

work. God forbid that I should seem to despise rudimentary and

incomplete feelings after Him in any heart which may be unable to say

'Amen' to Paul's statement here. I want to insist very earnestly, and

with special reference to the young, that the true Christian faith is

not merely the grasp of the person, but it is the grasp of the Person

who is 'declared to be the Son of God,' and whose death is the

voluntary self-surrender motived by His love, for the carrying away of

the sins of every single soul in the whole universe. That is the

Christ, the full Christ, cleaving to whom our faith finds somewhat to

grasp worthy of grasping. And I beseech you, be not contented with a

partial grasp of a partial Saviour; neither shut your eyes to the

divinity of His nature, nor to the efficacy of His death, but remember

that the true Gospel preaches Christ and Him crucified; and that for

us, saving faith is the faith that grasps the Son of God 'Who loved me

and gave Himself for me.'

Note, further, that true faith is personal faith, which appropriates,

and, as it were, fences in as my very own, the purpose and benefit of

Christ's giving of Himself. It is always difficult for lazy people (and

most of us are lazy) to transfer into their own personal lives, and to

bring into actual contact with themselves and their own experience,

wide, general truths. To assent to them, when we keep them in their

generality, is very easy and very profitless. It does no man any good

to say 'All men are mortal'; but how different it is when the blunt end

of that generalisation is shaped into a point, and I say 'I have to

die!' It penetrates then, and it sticks. It is easy to say 'All men are

sinners.' That never yet forced anybody down on his knees. But when we

shut out on either side the lateral view and look straight on, on the

narrow line of our own lives, up to the Throne where the Lawgiver sits,

and feel 'I am a sinful man,' that sends us to our prayers for pardon

and purity. And in like manner nobody was ever wholesomely terrified by

the thought of a general judgment. But when you translate it into 'I

must stand there,' the terror of the Lord persuades men.

In like manner that great truth which we all of us say we believe, that

Christ has died for the world, is utterly useless and profitless to us

until we have translated it into Paul's world, 'loved me and gave

Himself for me.' I do not say that the essence of faith is the

conversion of the general statement into the particular application,

but I do say that there is no faith which does not realise one's

personal possession of the benefits of the death of Christ, and that

until you turn the wide word into a message for yourself alone, you

have not yet got within sight of the blessedness of the Christian life.

The whole river may flow past me, but only so much of it as I can bring

into my own garden by my own sluices, and lift in my own bucket, and

put to my own lips, is of any use to me. The death of Christ for the

world is a commonplace of superficial Christianity, which is no

Christianity; the death of Christ for myself, as if He and I were the

only beings in the universe, that is the death on which faith fastens

and feeds.

And, dear brother, you have the right to exercise it. The Christ loves

each, and therefore He loves all; that is the process in the divine

mind. The converse is the process in the revelation of that mind; the

Bible says to us, Christ loves all, and therefore we have the right to

draw the inference that He loves each. You have as much right to take

every 'whosoever' of the New Testament as your very own, as if on the

page of your Bible that 'whosoever' was struck out, and your name,

John, Thomas, Mary, Elizabeth, or whatever it is, were put in there.

'He loved me.' Can you say that? Have you ever passed from the region

of universality, which is vague and profitless, into the region of

personal appropriation of the person of Jesus Christ and His death?

III. And now, lastly, notice the life which is built upon this faith.

The true Christian life is dual. It is a life in the flesh, and it is

also a life in faith. These two, as I have said, are like two spheres,

in either of which a man's course is passed, or, rather, the one is

surface and the other is central. Here is a great trailing spray of

seaweed floating golden on the unquiet water, and rising and falling on

each wave or ripple. Aye! but its root is away deep, deep, deep below

the storms, below where there is motion, anchored upon a hidden rock

that can never move. And so my life, if it be a Christian life at all,

has its surface amidst the shifting mutabilities of earth, but its root

in the silent eternities of the centre of all things, which is Christ

in God. I live in the flesh on the outside, but if I am a Christian at

all, I live in the faith in regard of my true and proper being.

This faith, which grasps the Divine Christ as the person whose

love-moved death is my life, and who by my faith becomes Himself the

Indwelling Guest in my heart; this faith, if it be worth anything, will

mould and influence my whole being. It will give me motive, pattern,

power for all noble service and all holy living. The one thing that

stirs men to true obedience is that their hearts be touched with the

firm assurance that Christ loved them and died for them.

We sometimes used to see men starting an engine by manual force; and

what toil it was to get the great cranks to turn, and the pistons to

rise! So we set ourselves to try and move our lives into holiness and

beauty and nobleness, and it is dispiriting work. There is a far

better, surer way than that: let the steam in, and that will do it.

That is to say--let the Christ in His dying power and the living energy

of His indwelling Spirit occupy the heart, and activity becomes

blessedness, and work is rest, and service is freedom and dominion.

The life that I live in the flesh is poor, limited, tortured with

anxiety, weighed upon by sore distress, becomes dark and gray and

dreary often as we travel nearer the end, and is always full of

miseries and of pains. But if within that life in the flesh there be a

life in faith, which is the life of Christ Himself brought to us

through our faith, that life will be triumphant, quiet, patient,

aspiring, noble, hopeful, gentle, strong, Godlike, being the life of

Christ Himself within us.

So, dear friends, test your faith by these two tests, what it grasps

and what it does. If it grasps a whole Christ, in all the glory of His

nature and the blessedness of His work, it is genuine; and it proves

its genuineness if, and only if, it works in you by love; animating all

your action, bringing you ever into the conscious presence of that dear

Lord, and making Him pattern, law, motive, goal, companion and reward.

'To me to live is Christ.'

If so, then we live indeed; but to live in the flesh is to die; and the

death that we die when we live in Christ is the gate and the beginning

of the only real life of the soul.

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THE EVIL EYE AND THE CHARM

'Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before

whose eye Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among

you?'--Gal. iii. 1.

The Revised Version gives a shorter, and probably correct, form of this

vehement question. It omits the two clauses 'that ye should not obey

the truth' and 'among you.' The omission increases the sharpness of the

thrust of the interrogation, whilst it loses nothing of the meaning.

Now, a very striking metaphor runs through the whole of this question,

which may easily be lost sight of by ordinary readers. You know the old

superstition as to the Evil Eye, almost universal at the date of this

letter and even now in the East, and lingering still amongst ourselves.

Certain persons were supposed to have the power, by a look, to work

mischief, and by fixing the gaze of their victims, to suck the very

life out of them. So Paul asks who the malign sorcerer is who has thus

fascinated the fickle Galatians, and is draining their Christian life

out of their eyes.

Very appropriately, therefore, if there is this reference, which the

word translated 'bewitched' carries with it, he goes on to speak about

Jesus Christ as having been displayed before their eyes. They had seen

Him. How did they come to be able to turn away to look at anything

else?

But there is another observation to be made by way of introduction, and

that is as to the full force of the expression 'evidently set forth.'

The word employed, as commentators tell us, is that which is used for

the display of official proclamations, or public notices, in some

conspicuous place, as the Forum or the market, that the citizens might

read. So, keeping up the metaphor, the word might be rendered, as has

been suggested by some eminent scholars, 'placarded'--'Before whose

eyes Jesus Christ has been placarded.' The expression has acquired

somewhat ignoble associations from modern advertising, but that is no

reason why we should lose sight of its force. So, then, Paul says, 'In

my preaching, Christ was conspicuously set forth. It is like some

inexplicable enchantment that, having seen Him, you should turn away to

gaze on others.' It is insanity which evokes wonder, as well as sin

which deserves rebuke; and the fiery question of my text conveys both.

I. Keeping to the metaphor, I note first the placard which Paul had

displayed.

'Jesus Christ crucified has been conspicuously set forth before you,'

he says to these Galatians. Now, he is referring, of course, to his own

work of preaching the Gospel to them at the beginning. And the vivid

metaphor suggests very strikingly two things. We see in it the

Apostle's notion of what He had to do. His had been a very humble

office, simply to hang up a proclamation. The one virtue of a

proclamation is that it should be brief and plain. It must be

authoritative, it must be urgent, it must be 'writ large,' it must be

easily intelligible. And he that makes it public has nothing to do

except to fasten it up, and make sure that it is legible. If I might

venture into modern phraseology, what Paul means is that he was neither

more nor less than a bill-sticker, that he went out with the placards

and fastened them up.

Ah! if we ministers universally acted up to the implications of this

metaphor, do you not think the pulpit would be more frequently a centre

of power than it is to-day? And if, instead of presenting our own

ingenuities and speculations, we were to realise the fact that we have

to hide ourselves behind the broad sheet that we fasten up, there would

be a new breath over many a moribund church, and we should hear less of

the often warrantable sarcasms about the inefficiency of the modern

pulpit.

But I turn from Paul's conception of the office to his statement of his

theme. 'Jesus was displayed amongst you.' If I might vary the metaphor

a little, the placard that Paul fastened up was like those that modern

advertising ingenuity displays upon all our walls. It was a

picture-placard, and on it was portrayed one sole figure--Jesus, the

Person. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is Christianity; and

wherever there is a pulpit or a book which deals rather with doctrines

than with Him who is the Fountain and Quarry of all doctrine, there is

divergence from the primitive form of the Gospel.

I know, of course, that doctrines--which are only formal and orderly

statements of principles involved in the facts--must flow from the

proclamation of the person, Christ. I am not such a fool as to run

amuck against theology, as some people in this day do. But what I wish

to insist upon is that the first form of Christianity is not a theory,

but a history, and that the revelation of God is the biography of a

man. We must begin with the person, Christ, and preach Him. Would that

all our preachers and all professing Christians, in their own personal

religious life, had grasped this--that, since Christianity is not first

a philosophy but a history, and its centre not an ordered sequence of

doctrines but a living person, the act that makes a man possessor of

Christianity is not the intellectual process of assimilating certain

truths, and accepting them, but the moral process of clinging, with

trust and love, to the person, Jesus.

But, further, if any of you consult the original, you will see that the

order of the sentence is such as to throw a great weight of emphasis on

that last word 'crucified.' It is not merely a person that is portrayed

on the placard, but it is that person upon the Cross. Ah! brethren,

Paul himself puts his finger, in the words of my text, on what, in his

conception, was the throbbing heart of all his message, the vital point

from which all its power, and all the gleam of its benediction, poured

out upon humanity--'Christ crucified.' If the placard is a picture of

Christ in other attitudes and in other aspects, without the picture of

Him crucified, it is an imperfect representation of the Gospel that

Paul preached and that Christ was.

II. Now, think, secondly, of the fascinators that draw away the eyes.

Paul's question is not one of ignorance, but it is a rhetorical way of

rebuking, and of expressing wonder. He knew, and the Galatians knew,

well enough who it was that had bewitched them. The whole letter is a

polemic worked in fire, and not in frost, as some argumentation is,

against a very well-marked class of teachers--viz. those emissaries of

Judaism who had crept into the Church, and took it as their special

function to dog Paul's steps amongst the heathen communities that he

had gathered together through faith in Christ, and used every means to

upset his work.

I cannot but pause for a moment upon this original reference of my

text, because it is very relevant to the present condition of things

amongst us. These men whom Paul is fighting as if he were in a sawpit

with them, in this letter, what was their teaching? This: they did not

deny that Jesus was the Christ; they did not deny that faith knit a man

to Him, but what they said was that the observance of the external

rites of Judaism was necessary in order to entrance into the Church and

to salvation. They did not in their own estimation detract from Christ,

but they added to Him. And Paul says that to add is to detract, to say

that anything is necessary except faith in Jesus Christ's finished work

is to deny that that finished work, and faith in it, are the means of

salvation; and the whole evangelical system crumbles into nothingness

if once you admit that.

Now, is there anybody to-day who is saying the same things, with

variations consequent upon change of external conditions? Are there no

people within the limits of the Christian Church who are reiterating

the old Jewish notion that external ceremonies--baptism and the Lord's

Supper--are necessary to salvation and to connection with the Christian

Church? And is it not true now, as it was then, that though they do not

avowedly detract, they so represent these external rites as to detract,

from the sole necessity of faith in the perfected work of Jesus Christ?

The centre is shifted from personal union with a personal Saviour by a

personal faith to participation in external ordinances. And I venture

to think that the lava stream which, in this Epistle to the Galatians,

Paul pours on the Judaisers of his day needs but a little deflection to

pour its hot current over, and to consume, the sacramentarian theories

of this day. 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?' Is it not

like some malignant sorcery, that after the Evangelical revival of the

last century and the earlier part of this, there should spring up again

this old, old error, and darken the simplicity of the Gospel teaching,

that Christ's work, apprehended by faith, without anything else, is the

means, and the only means, of salvation?

But I need not spend time upon that original application. Let us rather

come more closely to our own individual lives and their weaknesses. It

is a strange thing, so strange that if one did not know it by one's own

self, one would be scarcely disposed to believe it possible, that a man

who has 'tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to

come,' and has known Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend, should decline

from Him, and turn to anything besides. And yet, strange and sad, and

like some enchantment as it is, it is the experience at times and in a

measure, of us all; and, alas! it is the experience, in a very tragical

degree, of many who have walked for a little while behind the Master,

and then have turned away and walked no more with Him. We may well

wonder; but the root of the mischief is in no baleful glitter of a

sorcerer's eye without us, but it is in the weakness of our own wills

and the waywardness of our own hearts, and the wandering of our own

affections. We often court the coming of the evil influence, and are

willing to be fascinated and to turn our backs upon Jesus. Mysterious

it is, for why should men cast away diamonds for paste? Mysterious it

is, for we do not usually drop the substance to get the shadow.

Mysterious it is, for a man does not ordinarily empty his pockets of

gold in order to fill them with gravel. Mysterious it is, for a thirsty

man will not usually turn away from the full, bubbling, living

fountain, to see if he can find any drops still remaining, green with

scum, stagnant and odorous, at the bottom of some broken cistern. But

all these follies are sanity as compared with the folly of which we are

guilty, times without number, when, having known the sweetness of Jesus

Christ, we turn away to the fascinations of the world. Custom, the

familiarity that we have with Him, the attrition of daily cares--like

the minute grains of sand that are cemented on to paper, and make a

piece of sandpaper that is strong enough to file an inscription off

iron--the seductions of worldly delights, the pressure of our daily

cares--all these are as a ring of sorcerers that stand round about us,

before whom we are as powerless as a bird in the presence of a serpent,

and they bewitch us and draw us away.

The sad fact has been verified over and over again on a large scale in

the history of the Church. After every outburst of renewed life and

elevated spirituality there is sure to come a period of reaction when

torpor and formality again assert themselves. What followed the

Reformation in Germany? A century of death. What followed Puritanism in

England? An outburst of lust and godlessness.

So it has always been, and so it is with us individually, as we too

well know. Ah, brethren! the seductions are omnipresent, and our poor

eyes are very weak, and we turn away from the Lord to look on these

misshapen monsters that are seeking by their gaze to draw us into

destruction. I wonder how many professing Christians are in this

audience who once saw Jesus Christ a great deal more clearly, and

contemplated Him a great deal more fixedly, and turned their hearts to

Him far more lovingly, than they do to-day? Some of the great mountain

peaks of Africa are only seen for an hour or two in the morning, and

then the clouds gather around them, and hide them for the rest of the

day. It is like the experience of many professing Christians, who see

Him in the morning of their Christian life far more vividly than they

ever do after. 'Who hath bewitched you?' The world; but the

arch-sorcerer sits safe in our own hearts.

III. Lastly, keeping to the metaphor, let me suggest, although my text

does not touch upon it, the Amulet.

One has seen fond mothers in Egypt and Palestine who hang on their

babies' necks charms, to shield them from the influence of the Evil

Eye; and there is a charm that we may wear if we will, which will keep

us safe. There is no fascination in the Evil Eye if you do not look at

it.

The one object that the sorcerer has is to withdraw our gaze from

Christ; it is not illogical to say that the way to defeat the object is

to keep our gaze fixed on Christ. If you do not look at the baleful

glitter of the Evil Eye it will exercise no power over you; and if you

will steadfastly look at Him, then, and only then, you will not look at

it. Like Ulysses in the legend, bandage the eyes and put wax in the

ears, if you would neither be tempted by hearing the songs, nor by

seeing the fair forms, of the sirens on their island. To look fixedly

at Jesus Christ, and with the resolve never to turn away from Him, is

the only safety against these tempting delights around us.

But, brethren, it is the crucified Christ, looking to whom, we are safe

amidst all seductions and snares. I doubt whether a Christ who did not

die for men has power enough over men's hearts and minds to draw them

to Himself. The cords which bind us to Him are the assurance of His

dying love which has conquered us. If only we will, day by day, and

moment by moment, as we pass through the duties and distractions, the

temptations and the trials, of this present life, by an act of will and

thought turn ourselves to Him, then all the glamour of false

attractiveness will disappear from the temptations around us, and we

shall see that the sirens, for all their fair forms, end in loathly

fishes' tails and sit amidst dead men's bones.

Brethren, 'looking off unto Jesus' is the secret of triumph over the

fascinations of the world. And if we will habitually so look, then the

sweetness that we shall experience will destroy all the seducing power

of lesser and earthly sweetness, and the blessed light of the sun will

dim and all but extinguish the deceitful gleams that tempt us into the

swamps where we shall be drowned. Turn away, then, from these things;

cleave to Jesus Christ; and though in ourselves we may be as weak as a

humming-bird before a snake, or a rabbit before a tiger, He will give

us strength, and the light of His face shining down upon us will fix

our eyes and make us insensible to the fascinations of the sorcerers.

So we shall not need to dread the question, 'Who hath bewitched you?'

but ourselves challenge the utmost might of the fascination with the

triumphant question, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'

Help us, O Lord! we beseech Thee, to live near Thee. Turn away our eyes

from beholding vanity, and enable us to set the Lord always before us

that we be not moved.

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LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

'Have ye suffered so many things in vain?'--Gal. iii 4.

Preached on the last Sunday of the year.

This vehement question is usually taken to be a reminder to the fickle

Galatians that their Christian faith had brought upon them much

suffering from the hands of their unbelieving brethren, and to imply an

exhortation to faithfulness to the Gospel lest they should stultify

their past brave endurance. Yielding to the Judaising teachers, and

thereby escaping the 'offence of the Cross,' they would make their past

sufferings vain. But it may be suggested that the word 'suffered' here

is rather used in what is its known sense elsewhere, namely, with the

general idea of feeling, the nature of the feeling being undefined. It

is a touching proof of the preponderance of pain and sorrow that by

degrees the significance of the word has become inextricably

intertwined with the thought of sadness; still, it is possible to take

it in the text as meaning experienced or felt, and to regard the

Apostle as referring to the whole of the Galatians' past experience,

and as founding his appeal for their steadfastness on all the joys as

well as the sorrows, which their faith had brought them.

Taking the words in this more general sense they become a question

which it is well for us to ask ourselves at such a time as this, when

the calendar naturally invites us to look backwards and ask ourselves

what we have made of all our experiences in the past, or rather what,

by the help of them all, we have made of ourselves.

I. The duty of retrospect.

For almost any reason it is good for us to be delivered from our

prevailing absorption in the present. Whatever counterpoises the

overwhelming weight of the present is, so far, a blessing and a good,

and whatever softens the heart and keeps up even the lingering

remembrance of early, dewy freshness and of the high aspirations which,

even for a brief space, elevated our past selves is gain amidst the

dusty commonplaces of to-day. We see things better and more clearly

when we get a little away from them, as a face is more distinctly

visible at armslength than when held close.

But our retrospects are too often almost as trivial and degrading as is

our absorption in the present, and to prevent memory from becoming a

minister of frivolity if not of sin, it is needful that such a question

as that of our text be urgently asked by each of us. Memory must be in

closest union with conscience, as all our faculties must be, or she is

of little use. There is a mere sentimental luxury of memory which finds

a pensive pleasure in the mere passing out from the hard present into

the soft light, not without illusion in its beams, of the 'days that

are no more.' Merely to live over again our sorrows and joys without

any clear discernment of what their effects on our moral character have

been, is not the retrospect that becomes a man, however it might suit

an animal. We have to look back as a man might do escaping from the

ocean on to some frail sand-bank which ever breaks off and crumbles

away at his very heels. To remember the past mainly as it affected our

joy or our sorrow is as unworthy as to regard the present from the same

point of view, and robs both of their highest worth. To remember is

only then blessed and productive of its highest possible good in us,

when the question of our text insists on being faced, and the object of

retrospect is not to try to rekindle the cold coals of past emotions,

but to ascertain what effect on our present characters our past

experiences have had. We have not to turn back and try to gather some

lingering flowers, but to look for the fruit which has followed the

fallen blossoms.

II. The true test for the past.

The question of our text implies, as we have already suggested, that

our whole lives, with all their various and often opposite experiences,

are yet an ordered whole, having a definite end. There is some purpose

beyond the moment to be served. Our joys and our sorrows, our gains and

our losses, the bright hours and the dark hours, and the hours that are

neither eminently bright nor supremely dark, our failures and our

successes, our hopes disappointed or fulfilled, and all the infinite

variety of condition and environment through which our varying days and

years have led us, co-operate for one end. It is life that makes men;

the infant is a bundle of possibilities, and as the years go on, one

possible avenue of development after another is blocked. The child

might have been almost anything; the man has become hardened and fixed

into one shape.

But all this variety of impulses and complicated experiences need the

co-operation of the man himself if they are to reach their highest

results in him. If he is simply recipient of these external forces

acting upon him, they will shape him indeed, but he will be a poor

creature. Life does not make men unless men take the command of life,

and he who lets circumstances and externals guide him, as the long

water weeds in a river are directed by its current, will, from the

highest point of view, have experienced the variations of a lifetime in

vain.

No doubt each of our experiences has its own immediate and lower

purpose to serve, and these purposes are generally accomplished, but

beyond these each has a further aim which is not reached without

diligent carefulness and persistent effort on our parts. If we would be

sure of what it is to suffer life's experiences in vain, we have but to

ask ourselves what life is given us for, and we all know that well

enough to be able to judge how far we have used life to attain the

highest ends of living. We may put these ends in various ways in our

investigation of the results of our manifold experiences. Let us begin

with the lowest--we received life that we might learn truth, then if

our experience has not taught us wisdom it has been in vain. It is

deplorable to have to look round and see how little the multitude of

men are capable of forming anything like an independent and intelligent

opinion, and how they are swayed by gusts of passion, by blind

prejudice, by pretenders and quacks of all sorts. It is no less sad for

us to turn our eyes within and discover, perhaps not without surprise

and shame, how few of what we are self-complacent enough to call our

opinions are due to our own convictions.

If we ever are honest enough with ourselves to catch a glimpse of our

own unwisdom, the question of our text will press heavily upon us, and

may help to make us wiser by teaching us how foolish we are. An

infinite source of wisdom is open to us, and all the rich variety of

our lives' experiences has been lavished on us to help us, and what

have we made of it all?

But we may rise a step higher and remember that we are made moral

creatures. Therefore, whatever has not developed infant potentialities

in us, and made them moral qualities, has been experienced in vain.

'Not enjoyment and not sorrow is our destined end and way.' Life is

meant to make us love and do the good, and unless it has produced that

effect on us, it has failed. If this be true, the world is full of

failures, like the marred statues in a bad sculptor's studio, and we

ourselves have earnestly to confess that the discipline of life has too

often been wasted upon us, and that of us the divine complaint from of

old has been true: 'In vain have I smitten thy children, they have

received no correction.'

There is no sadder waste than the waste of sorrow, and alas! we all

know how impotent our afflictions have been to make us better. But not

afflictions only have failed in their appeal to us, our joys have as

often been in vain as our sorrows, and memory, when it turns its lamp

on the long past, sees so few points at which life has taught us to

love goodness, and be good, that she may well quench her light and let

the dead past bury its dead.

But we must rise still higher, and think of men as being made for God,

and as being the only creatures known to us who are capable of

religion. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for

ever.' And this chief end is in fullest harmony with the lower ends to

which we have just referred, and they will never be realised in their

fullest completeness unless that completeness is sought in this the

chief end. From of old meditative souls have known that the beginning

of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and that that fear is as certainly

the beginning of goodness. It was not an irrelevant rebuke to the

question, 'What good thing shall I do?' when Jesus set the eager young

soul who asked it, to justify to himself his courteous and superficial

application to Him of the abused and vulgarised title of 'Good,' and

pointed him to God as the only Being to whom that title, in its

perfectness, could be given. If 'there is none good but one, that is

God,' man's goodness must be drawn from Him, and morality without

religion will in theory be incomplete, and in practice a delusion. If,

then, men are made to need God, and capable of possessing Him, and of

being possessed by Him, then the great question for all of us is, has

life, with all its rapid whirl of changing circumstance and varying

fortunes, drawn us closer to God, and made us more fit to receive more

of Him? So supreme is this chief end that a life which has not attained

it can only be regarded as 'in vain' whatever other successes it may

have attained. So unspeakably more important and necessary is it, that

compared with it all else sinks into nothingness; hence many lives

which are dazzling successes in the eyes of men are ghastly failures in

reality.

Now, if we take these plain principles with us in our retrospect of the

past year we shall be launched on a very serious inquiry, and brought

face to face with a very penitent answer. Some of us may have had great

sorrows, and the tears may be scarcely dry upon our cheeks: some of us

may have had great gladnesses, and our hearts may still be throbbing

with the thrill: some of us may have had great successes, and some of

us heavy losses, but the question for us to ask is not of the quality

of our past experiences, but as to their effects upon us. Has life been

so used by us as to help us to become wiser, better, more devout? And

the answer to that question, if we are honest in our scrutiny of

ourselves, and if memory has not been a mere sentimental luxury, must

be that we have too often been but unfaithful recipients alike of God's

mercies and God's chastisements, and have received much of the

discipline of life, and remained undisciplined. The question of our

text, if asked by me, would be impertinent, but it is asked of each of

us by the stern voice of conscience, and for some of us by the lips of

dear ones whose loss has been among our chiefest sufferings. God asks

us this question, and it is hard to make-believe to Him.

III. The best issue of the retrospect.

The world says, 'What I have written I have written,' and there is a

very solemn and terrible reality in the thought of the irrevocable

past. Whether life has achieved the ends for which it was given or no,

it has achieved some ends. It may have made us into characters the very

opposite of God's intention for us, but it has made us into certain

characters which, so far as the world sees, can never be unmade or

re-made. The world harshly preaches the indelibility of character, and

proclaims that the Ethiopian may as soon be expected to change his skin

or the leopard his spots as the man accustomed to do evil may learn to

do well. That dreary fatalism which binds the effects of a dead past on

a man's shoulders, and forbids him to hope that anything will

obliterate the marks of 'what once hath been,' is in violent

contradiction to the large hope brought into the world by Jesus Christ.

What we have written we have written, and we have no power to erase the

lines and make the sheet clean again, but Jesus Christ has taken away

the handwriting 'that was against us,' nailing it to His cross. Instead

of our old sin-worn and sin-marked selves, He proffers to each of us a

new self, not the outcome of what we have been, but the image of what

He is and the prophecy of what we shall be. By the great gift of

holiness for the future by the impartation of His own life and spirit,

Jesus makes all things new. The Gospel recognises to the full how bad

some who have received it were, but it can willingly admit their past

foulness, because it contrasts with all that former filth their present

cleanness, and to the most inveterately depraved who have trusted in

Christ rejoices to say, 'Ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were

justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

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THE UNIVERSAL PRISON

'But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by

faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.'--Gal. iii.

22.

The Apostle uses here a striking and solemn figure, which is much

veiled for the English reader by the ambiguity attaching to the word

'concluded.' It literally means 'shut up,' and is to be taken in its

literal sense of confining, and not in its secondary sense of

inferring. So, then, we are to conceive of a vast prison-house in which

mankind is confined. And then, very characteristically, the Apostle

passes at once to another metaphor when he goes on to say 'under sin.'

What a moment before had presented itself to his vivid imagination as a

great dungeon is now represented as a heavy weight, pressing down upon

those beneath; if, indeed, we are not, perhaps, rather to think of the

low roof of the dark dungeon as weighing on the captives.

Further, he says that Scripture has driven men into this captivity.

That, of course, cannot mean that revelation makes us sinners, but it

does mean that it makes us more guilty, and that it declares the fact

of human sinfulness as no other voice has ever done. And then the

grimness of the picture is all relieved and explained, and the office

ascribed to God's revelation harmonised with God's love, by the strong,

steady beam of light that falls from the last words, which tell us that

the prisoners have not been bound in chains for despair or death, but

in order that, gathered together in a common doleful destiny, they may

become recipients of a common blessed salvation, and emerge into

liberty and light through faith in Jesus Christ.

So here are three things--the prison-house, its guardian, and its

breaker. 'The Scripture hath shut up all under sin, in order that the

promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given unto all them that

believe.'

I. First, then, note the universal prison-house.

Now the Apostle says two things--and we may put away the figure and

look at the facts that underlie it. The one is that all sin is

imprisonment, the other is that all men are in that dungeon, unless

they have come out of it through faith in Jesus Christ.

All sin is imprisonment. That is the direct contrary of the notion that

many people have. They say to themselves, 'Why should I be fettered and

confined by these antiquated restrictions of a conventional morality?

Why should I not break the bonds, and do as I like?' And they laugh at

Christian people who recognise the limitations under which God's law

has put them; and tell us that we are 'cold-blooded folks who live by

rule,' and contrast their own broad 'emancipation from narrow

prejudice.' But the reality is the other way. The man who does wrong is

a slave in the measure in which he does it. If you want to find

out--and mark this, you young people, who may be deceived by the false

contrasts between the restraints of duty and the freedom of living a

dissolute life--if you want to find out how utterly 'he that committeth

sin is the slave of sin,' try to break it off, and you will find it out

fast enough. We all know, alas! the impotence of the will when it comes

to hand grips with some evil to which we have become habituated; and

how we determine and determine, and try, and fail, and determine again,

with no better result. We are the slaves of our own passions; and no

man is free who is hindered by his lower self from doing that which his

better self tells him he ought to do. The tempter comes to you, and

says, 'Come and do this thing, just for once. You can leave off when

you like, you know. There is no need to do it a second time.' And when

you have done it, he changes his note, and says, 'Ah! you are in, and

you cannot get out. You have done it once; and in my vocabulary once

means twice, and once and twice mean always.'

Insane people are sometimes tempted into a house of detention by being

made to believe that it is a grand mansion, where they are just going

to pay a flying visit, and can come away when they like. But once

inside the walls, they never get past the lodge gates any more. The

foolish birds do not know that there is lime on the twigs, and their

little feet get fastened to the branch, and their wings flutter in

vain. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin--shut up,' dungeoned,

'under sin.'

But do not forget, either, the other metaphor in our text, in which the

Apostle, with characteristic rapidity, and to the horror of rhetorical

propriety, passes at once from the thought of a dungeon to the thought

of an impending weight, and says, 'Shut up under sin.'

What does that mean? It means that we are guilty when we have done

wrong; and it means that we are under penalties which are sure to

follow. No deed that we do, howsoever it may fade from the tablets of

our memory, but writes in visible characters, in proportion to its

magnitude, upon our characters and lives. All human acts have perpetual

consequences. The kick of the rifle against the shoulder of the man

that fires it is as certain as the flight of the bullet from its

muzzle. The chalk cliffs that rise above the Channel entomb and

perpetuate the relics of myriads of evanescent lives; and our fleeting

deeds are similarly preserved in our present selves. Everything that a

man wills, whether it passes into external act or not, leaves, in its

measure, ineffaceable impressions on himself. And so we are not only

dungeoned in, but weighed upon by, and lie under, the evil that we do.

Nor, dear friends, dare I pass in silence what is too often passed in

silence in the modern pulpit, the plain fact that there is a future

waiting for each of us beyond the grave, of which the most certain

characteristic, certified by our own forebodings, required by the

reasonableness of creation, and made plain by the revelation of

Scripture, is that it is a future of retribution, where we shall have

to carry our works; and as we have brewed so shall we drink; and the

beds that we have made we shall have to lie upon. 'God shut up all

under sin.'

Note, again, the universality of the imprisonment.

Now I am not going to exaggerate, I hope. I want to keep well within

the limits of fact, and to say nothing that is not endorsed by your own

consciences, if you will be honest with yourselves. And I say that the

Bible does not charge men universally with gross transgressions. It

does not talk about the virtues that grow in the open as if they were

splendid vices; but it does say, and I ask you if our own hearts do not

tell us that it says truly, that no man is, or has been, does, or has

done, that which his own conscience tells him he should have been and

done. We are all ready to admit faults, in a general way, and to

confess that we have come short of what our own consciousness tells us

we ought to be. But I want you to take the other step, and to remember

that since we each stand in a personal relation to God, therefore all

imperfections, faults, negligences, shortcomings, and, still more,

transgressions of morality, or of the higher aspirations of our lives,

are sins. Because sin--to use fine words--is the correlative of God.

Or, to put it into plainer language, the deeds which in regard to law

may be crimes, or those which in regard to morality may be vices, or in

regard to our own convictions of duty may be shortcomings, seeing they

all have some reference to Him, assume a very much graver character,

and they are all sins.

Oh, brethren, if we realise how intimately and inseparably we are knit

to God, and how everything that we do, and do not do, but should have

done, has an aspect in reference to Him, I think we should be less

unwilling to admit, and less tinged with levity and carelessness in

admitting, that all our faults are transgressions of His law, and we

should find ourselves more frequently on our knees before Him, with the

penitent words on our lips and in our hearts, 'Against Thee, Thee only

have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.'

That was the prayer of a man who had done a foul evil in other people's

sight; who had managed to accumulate about as many offences to as many

people in one deed as was possible. For, as a king he had sinned

against his nation, as a friend he had sinned against his companion, as

a captain he had sinned against his brave subordinate, as a husband he

had sinned against his wife, and he had sinned against Bathsheba. And

yet, with all that tangle of offences against all these people, he

says, 'Against Thee, Thee only.' Yes! Because, accurately speaking, the

sin had reference to God, and to God alone. And I wish for myself and

for you to cultivate the habit of connecting, thus, all our actions,

and especially our imperfections and our faults, with the thought of

God, that we may learn how universal is the enclosure of man in this

dreadful prison-house.

II. And so, I come, in the second place, to look at the guardian of the

prison.

That is a strange phrase of my text attributing the shutting of men up

in this prison-house to the merciful revelation of God in the

Scripture. And it is made still more striking and strange by another

edition of the same expression in the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul

directly traces the 'concluding all in disobedience' to God Himself.

There may be other subtle thoughts connected with that expression which

I do not need to enter upon now. But one that I would dwell upon, for a

moment, is this, that one great purpose of Scripture is to convince us

that we are sinful in God's sight. I do not need to remind you, I

suppose, how that was, one might almost say, the dominant intention of

the whole of the ceremonial and moral law of Israel, and explains its

many else inexplicable and apparently petty commandments and

prohibitions. They were all meant to emphasise the difference between

right and wrong, obedience and disobedience, and so to drive home to

men's hearts the consciousness that they had broken the commandments of

the living God. And although the Gospel comes with a very different

guise from that ancient order, and is primarily gift and not law, a

Gospel of forgiveness, and not the promulgation of duty or the

threatening of condemnation, yet it, too, has for one of its main

purposes, which must be accomplished in us before it can reach its

highest aim in us, the kindling in men's hearts of the same

consciousness that they are sinful men in God's sight.

Ah, brethren, we all need it. There is nothing that we need more than

to have driven deep into us the penetrating point of that conviction.

There must be some external standard by which men may be convinced of

their sinfulness, for they carry no such standard within them. Your

conscience is only you judging on moral questions, and, of course, as

you change, it will change too. A man's whole state determines the

voice with which conscience shall speak to him, and so the worse he is,

and the more he needs it, the less he has it. The rebels cut the

telegraph wires. The waves break the bell that hangs on the reef, and

so the black rocks get many a wreck to gnaw with their sharp teeth. A

man makes his conscience dumb by the very sins that require a

conscience trumpet-tongued to reprehend them. And therefore it needs

that God should speak from Heaven, and say to us, 'Thou art the man,'

or else we pass by all these grave things that I am trying to urge upon

you now, and fall back upon our complacency and our levity and our

unwillingness to take stock of ourselves, and front the facts of our

condition. And so we build up a barrier between ourselves and God, and

God's grace, which nothing short of that grace and an omnipotent love

and an all-powerful Redeemer can ever pull down.

I wish to urge in a few words, yet with much earnestness, this thought,

that until we have laid to heart God's message about our own personal

sinfulness we have not got to the place where we can in the least

understand the true meaning of His Gospel, or the true work of His Son.

May I say that I, for one, am old-fashioned enough to look with great

apprehension on certain tendencies of present-day presentations of

Christianity which, whilst they dwell much upon the social blessings

which it brings, do seem to me to be in great peril of obscuring the

central characteristic of the Gospel, that it is addressed to sinful

men, and that the only way by which individuals can come to the

possession of any of its blessings is by coming as penitent sinners,

and casting themselves on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ? The

beginning of all lies here, where Paul puts it, 'the Scripture hath

herded all men,' in droves, into the prison, that it might have mercy

upon all.

Dear friend, as the old proverb has it, deceit lurks in generalities. I

have no doubt you are perfectly willing to admit that all are sinful.

Come a little closer to the truth, I beseech you, and say each is

sinful, and I am one of the captives.

III. And so, lastly, the breaker of the prison-house.

I need not spend your time in commenting on the final words of this

text. Suffice it to gather their general purport and scope. The

apparently stern treatment which God by revelation applies to the whole

mass of mankind is really the tenderest beneficence. He has shut them

up in the prison-house in order that, thus shut up, they may the more

eagerly apprehend and welcome the advent of the Deliverer. He tells us

each our state, in order that we may the more long for, and the more

closely grasp, the great mercy which reverses the state. And so how

shallow and how unfair it is to talk about evangelical Christianity as

being gloomy, stern, or misanthropical! You do not call a doctor unkind

because he tells an unsuspecting patient that his disease is far

advanced, and that if it is not cured it will be fatal. No more should

a man turn away from Christianity, or think it harsh and sour, because

it speaks plain truths. The question is, are they true? not, are they

unpleasant?

If you and I, and all our fellows, are shut up in this prison-house of

sin, then it is quite clear that none of us can do anything to get

ourselves out. And so the way is prepared for that great message with

which Jesus opened His ministry, and which, whilst it has a far wider

application, and reference to social as well as to individual evils,

begins with the proclamation of liberty to the captives, and the

opening of the prison to them that are bound.

There was once a Roman emperor who wished that all his enemies had one

neck, that he might slay them all at one blow. The wish is a fact in

regard to Christ and His work, for by it all our tyrants have been

smitten to death by one stroke; and the death of Jesus Christ has been

the death of sin and death and hell--of sin in its power, in its guilt,

and in its penalty. He has come into the prison-house, and torn the

bars away, and opened the fetters, and every man may, if he will, come

out into the blessed sunshine and expatiate there.

And if, brethren, it is true that the universal prison-house is opened

by the death of Jesus Christ, who is the Propitiation for the sins of

the whole world, and the power by which the most polluted may become

clean, then there follows, as plainly, that the only thing which we

have to do is, recognising and feeling our bound impotence, to stretch

out chained hands and take the gift that He brings. Since all is done

for each of us, and since none of us can do sufficient for himself to

break the bond, then what we should do is to trust to Him who has

broken every chain and let the oppressed go free.

Oh, dear friend, if you want to get to the heart of the sweetness and

the blessedness and power of the Gospel, you must begin here, with the

clear and penitent consciousness that you are a sinful man in God's

sight, and can do nothing to cleanse, help, or liberate yourself. Is

Jesus Christ the breaker of the bond for you? Do you learn from Him

what your need is? Do you trust yourself to Him for Pardon, for

cleansing, for emancipation? Unless you do, you will never know His

most precious preciousness, and you have little right to call yourself

a Christian. If you do, oh, than a great light will shine in the

prison-house, and your chains will drop from your wrists, and the iron

door will open of its own accord, and you will come out into the

morning sunshine of a new day, because you have confessed and abhorred

the bondage into which you have cast yourselves, and accepted the

liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.

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THE SON SENT

'When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a

woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under

the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.'--Gal. iv. 4, 5

(R.V.).

It is generally supposed that by the 'fulness of time' Paul means to

indicate that Christ came at the moment when the world was especially

prepared to receive Him, and no doubt that is a true thought. The Jews

had been trained by law to the conviction of sin; heathenism had tried

its utmost, had reached the full height of its possible development,

and was decaying. Rome had politically prepared the way for the spread

of the Gospel. Vague expectations of coming change found utterance even

from the lips of Roman courtier poets, and a feeling of unrest and

anticipation pervaded society; but while no doubt all this is true and

becomes more certain the more we know of the state of things into which

Christ came, it is to be noted that Paul is not thinking of the fulness

of time primarily in reference to the world which received Him, but to

the Father who sent Him. Our text immediately follows words in which

the air is described as being 'under guardians and stewards' until the

time appointed of His Father, and the fulness of time is therefore the

moment which God had ordained from the beginning for His coming. He,

from of old, had willed that at that moment this Son should be born,

and it is to the punctual accomplishment of His eternal purpose that

Paul here directs our thoughts. No doubt the world's preparedness is

part of the reason for the divine determination of the time, but it is

that divine determination rather than the world's preparedness to which

the first words of our text must be taken to refer.

The remaining portion of our text is so full of meaning that one

shrinks from attempting to deal with it in our narrow space, but though

it opens up depths beyond our fathoming, and gathers into one

concentrated brightness lights on which our dim eyes can hardly look,

we may venture to attempt some imperfect consideration even of these

great words. Following their course of thought we may deal with

I. The mystery of love that sent.

The most frequent form under which the great fact of the incarnation is

represented in Scripture is that of our text--'God sent His Son.' It is

familiar on the lips of Jesus, but He also says that 'God gave His

Son.' One can feel a shade of difference in the two modes of

expression. The former bringing rather to our thoughts the

representative character of the Son as Messenger, and the latter going

still deeper into the mystery of Godhead and bringing into view the

love of the Father who spared not His Son but freely bestowed Him on

men. Yet another word is used by Jesus Himself when He says, 'I came

forth from God,' and that expression brings into view the perfect

willingness with which the Son accepted the mission and gave Himself,

as well as was given by God. All three phases express harmonious,

though slightly differing aspects of the same fact, as the facets of a

diamond might flash into different colours, and all must be held fast

if we would understand the unspeakable gift of God. Jesus was sent;

Jesus was given; Jesus came. The mission from the Father, the love of

the Father, the glad obedience of the Son, must ever be recognised as

interpenetrating, and all present in that supreme act.

There have been many men specially sent forth from God, whose personal

existence began with their birth, and so far as the words are

concerned, Jesus might have been one of these. There was a man sent

from God whose name was John, and all through the ages he has had many

companions in his mission, but there has been only one who 'came' as

well as 'was sent,' and He is the true light which lighteth every man.

To speak in theological language of the pre-existence of the Son is

cold, and may obscure the truth which it formulates in so abstract a

fashion, and may rob it of power to awe and impress. But there can be

no question that in our text, as is shown by the juxtaposition of

'sent' and 'born,' and in all the New Testament references to the

subject, the birth of Jesus is not regarded as the beginning of the

being of the Son. The one lies far back in the depths of eternity and

the mystery of the divine nature, the other is a historical fact

occurring in a definite place and at a dated moment. Before time was

the Son was, delighting in the Father, and 'in the beginning was the

word and the word was with God,' and He who in respect of His

expression of the Father's mind and will was the Word, was the Son in

respect of the love that bound the Father and Him in one. Into the

mysteries of that love and union no eyes can penetrate, but unless our

faith lays hold of it, we know not the God whom Jesus has declared to

us. The mysteries of that divine union and communion lie beyond our

reach, but well within the grasp of our faith and the work of the Son

in the world, ever since there was a world, is not obscurely declared

to all who have eyes to see and hearts to understand. For He has

through all ages been the active energy of the divine power, or as the

Old Testament words it, 'The Arm of the Lord,' the Agent of creation,

the Revealer of God, the Light of the world and the Director of

Providence. 'He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the

world knew Him not.'

Now all this teaching that the Son was long before Jesus was born is no

mere mysterious dogma without bearing on daily needs, but stands in the

closest connection with Christ's work and our faith in it. It is the

guarantee of His representative character; on it depends the

reliableness of His revelation of God. Unless He is the Son in a unique

sense, how could God have spoken unto us in Him, and how could we rely

on His words? Unless He was 'the effulgence of His glory and the

express image of His person': how could we be sure that the light of

His countenance was light from God and that in His person God was so

presented as that he who had seen Him had seen the Father? The

completeness and veracity of His revelation, the authoritative fulness

of His law, the efficacy of His sacrifice and the prevalence of His

intercession all depend on the fact of His divine life with God long

before His human life with men. It is a plain historical fact that a

Christianity which has no place for a pre-existent Son in the bosom of

the Father has only a maimed Christ in reference to the needs of sinful

men. If our Christ were not the eternal Son of God, He will not be the

universal Saviour of men.

Nor is this truth less needful in its bearing on modern theories which

will have nothing to say to the supernatural, and in a fatalistic

fashion regard history as all the result of an orderly evolution in

which the importance of personal agents is minimised. To it Jesus, like

all other great men, is a product of His age, and the immediate result

of the conditions under which He appeared. But when we look far beyond

the manger of Bethlehem into the depths of Eternity and see God so

loving the world as to give His Son, we cannot but recognise that He

has intervened in the course of human history and that the mightiest

force in the development of man is the eternal Son whom He sent to save

the world.

II. The miracle of lowliness that came.

The Apostle goes on from describing the great fact which took place in

heaven to set forth the great fact which completed it on earth. The

sending of the Son took effect in the birth of Jesus, and the Apostle

puts it under two forms, both of which are plainly designed to present

Christ's manhood as His full identification of Himself with us. The Son

of God became the son of a woman; from His mother He drew a true and

complete humanity in body and soul. The humanity which He received was

sufficiently kindred with the divinity which received it to make it

possible that the one should dwell in the other and be one person. As

born of a woman the Son of God took upon Himself all human experiences,

became capable of sharing our pure emotions, wept our tears, partook in

our joys, hoped and feared as we do, was subject to our changes, grew

as we grow, and in everything but sin, was a man amongst men.

But the Son of God could not be as the sons of men. Him the Father

heard always. Even when He came down from Heaven and became the Son of

Man, He continued to be 'The Son of Man which is in Heaven.' Amid all

the distractions and limitations of His earthly life, the continuity

and depth of His communion with the Father were unbroken and the

completeness of His obedience undiminished. He was a Man, but He was

also the Man, the one realised ideal of humanity that has ever walked

the earth, to whom all others, even the most complete, are fragments,

the fairest foul, the most gracious harsh. In Him and in Him only has

been 'given the world assurance of a man.'

The other condition which is here introduced is 'born under the law,'

by which it may be noted that the Apostle does not mean the Jewish law,

inasmuch as he does not use the definite article with the word. No

doubt our Lord was born as a Jew and subject to the Jewish law, but the

thought here and in the subsequent clause is extended to the general

notion of law. The very heart of our Lord's human identification is

that He too had duties imperative upon Him, and the language of one of

the Messianic psalms was the voice of His filial will during all His

earthly life; 'Lo! I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of

Me, I delight to do Thy will and Thy law is within My heart.' The very

secret of His human life was discovered by the heathen centurion, at

whose faith He marvelled, who said, 'I also am a man under authority';

so was Jesus. The Son had ever been obedient in the sweet communion of

Heaven, but the obedience of Jesus was not less perfect, continual and

unstained. It was the man Jesus who summed up His earthly life in 'I do

always the things that please Him'; it was the man Jesus who, under the

olives in Gethsemane, made the great surrender and yielded up His own

will to the will of the Father who sent Him.

He was under law in that the will of God dominated His life, but He was

not so under it as we are on whom its precepts often press as an

unwelcome obligation, and who know the weight of guilt and

condemnation. If there is any one characteristic of Jesus more

conspicuous than another it is the absence in Him of any consciousness

of deficiency in His obedience to law, and yet that absence does not in

the smallest degree infringe on His claim to be 'meek and lowly in

heart.' 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' would have been from any

other man a defiance that would have provoked a crushing answer if it

had not been taken as a proof of hopeless ignorance of self, but when

Christ asks the question, the world is silent. The silence has been all

but unbroken for nineteen hundred years, and of all the busy and often

unfriendly eyes that have been occupied with Him and the hostile pens

that have been eager to say something new about Him, none have

discovered a flaw, or dared to 'hint a fault.' That character has

stamped its own impression of perfectness on all eyes even the most

unfriendly or indifferent. In Him there is seen the perfect union and

balance of opposite characteristics; the rest of us, at the best, are

but broken arcs; Jesus is the completed round. He is under law as

fully, continuously and joyfully obedient; but for Him it had no

accusing voice, and it laid on Him no burden of broken commandments. He

was born of a woman, born under law, but he lived separate from sinners

though identified with them.

III. The marvel of exaltation that results.

Our Lord's lowliness is described in the two clauses which we have just

been considering. They express His identification with us from a double

point of view, and that double point of view is continued in the final

clauses of our text which state the double purpose of God in sending

His Son. He became one with us that we might become one with Him. The

two elements of this double purpose are stated in the reverse order to

the two elements of Christ's lowliness. The redemption of them that

were under law is presented as the reason for His being born under law,

and our reception of the 'adoption of sons' is the purpose of the Son's

being sent and born of a woman. The order in which Paul here deals with

the two parts of the divine purpose is not to be put down to mere

rhetorical ornament, but corresponds to the order in which these two

elements are realised by men. For there must be redemption from law

before there is the adoption of sons.

We have already had occasion to point out that 'law' here must be taken

in the wide sense and not restricted to the Jewish law. It is a

world-wide redemption which the Father's love had in view in sending

His Son, but that all-comprehending, fatherly love could not reach its

aim by the mere forth-putting of its own energy. A process was needed

if the divine heart was to accomplish its desire, and the majestic

stages in that process are set forth here by Paul. The world was under

law in a very sad fashion, and though Jesus has come to redeem them

that are under law, the crushing weight of commandments flouted, of

duties neglected, of sins done, presses heavily upon many of us. And

yet how many of us there are who do not know the burden that we carry

and have had no personal experience like that of Bunyan's Christian

with the pack on his back all but weighing him down? Jesus Christ has

become one of us, and in His sinless life has 'magnified the law and

made it honourable,' and in His sinless death He endures the

consequences of sin, not as due to Himself, but because they are man's.

But we must carefully keep in view, that as we have already pointed

out, we are to think of Christ's mission as His coming as well as the

Father's sending, and that therefore we do not grasp the full idea of

our Lord's enduring the consequences of sin unless we take it as

meaning His voluntary identification of Himself in love with us sinful

men. His obedience was perfect all His life long, and His last and

highest act of obedience was when He became obedient unto death, even

the death of the Cross.

This is the only means by which the burden of law in any of its forms

can be taken away from us. For a law which is not loved will be heavy

and hard however holy and just and good it may be, and a law which we

have broken will become sooner or later its own avenger. Faithful in

Pilgrim's Progress tells how 'So soon as a man overtook me he was but a

word and a blow, for down he knocked me and laid me for dead. . . . He

struck me another deadly blow on the breast and beat me down backward,

so I lay at his foot as dead as before, so when I came to myself again

I cried him "Mercy," but he said, "I know not how to show mercy," and

with that knocked me down again; he had doubtless made an end of me but

that one came by and bid him forbear. . . . I did not know him at

first, but as he went by I perceived the holes in his hands and in his

sides.' He was born under law that He might redeem them that were under

law.

The slaves bought into freedom are received into the great family. The

Son has become flesh that they who dwell in the flesh may rise to be

sons, but the Son stands alone even in the midst of His identification

with us, and of the great results which follow for us from it. He is

the Son by nature; we are sons by adoption. He became man that we might

share in the possession of God. When the burden of law is lifted off it

is possible to bestow the further blessing of sonship, but that

blessing is only possible through Him in whom, and from whom, we derive

a life which is divine life. There is a profound truth in the prophetic

sentence, 'Behold I and the children which God hath given me!' for, in

one aspect, believers are the children of Christ, and in another, they

are sons of God.

We have been speaking of the Son's identification with us in His

mission, and our identification with Him, but that identification

depends on ourselves and is only an accomplished fact through our

faith. When we trust in Him it is true that all His--His righteousness,

His Sonship, His union with the Father--is ours, and that all ours--our

sins, our guilt, our alienation from God and our dwelling in the

far-off land of rags and vice--is His. In His voluntary identification

with us, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. It is for us

to determine whether we will lay on Him our iniquities, as the Father

has already laid the iniquities of us all. Are we by faith in Him who

was born of a woman, born under law, making our very own the redemption

from the law which He has wrought and the adoption of sons which He

bestows?

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WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN: CIRCUMCISION OR FAITH?

'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor

uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'--Gal. v. 6.

It is a very singular instance of imaginative misreading of plain facts

that the primitive Church should be held up as a pattern Church. The

early communities had apostolic teaching; but beyond that, they seem to

have been in no respect above, and in many respects below, the level of

subsequent ages. If we may judge of their morality by the exhortations

and dehortations which they received from the Apostle, Corinth and

Thessalonica were but beginners in holiness. If we may judge of their

intelligence by the errors into which they were in danger of falling,

these first congregations had indeed need that one should teach them

which were the first principles of the oracles of God. It could not be

otherwise. They were but just rescued from heathenism, and we need not

wonder if their spirits long bore the scars of their former bondage. If

we wish to know what the apostolic churches were like, we have but to

look at the communities gathered by modern missionaries. The same

infantile simplicity, the same partial apprehensions of the truth, the

same danger of being led astray by the low morality of their heathen

kindred, the same openness to strange heresy, the same danger of

blending the old with the new, in opinion and in practice, beset both.

The history of the first theological difference in the early churches

is a striking confutation of the dream that they were perfect, and a

striking illustration of the dangers to which they were exposed from

the attempt, so natural to us all, to put new wine into old bottles.

The Jewish and the Gentile elements did not coalesce. The point round

which the strife was waged was not whether Gentiles might come into the

Church. That was conceded by the fiercest Judaisers. But it was whether

they could come in as Gentiles, without first being incorporated into

the Jewish nation by circumcision, and whether they could remain in as

Gentiles, without conforming to Jewish ceremonial and law.

Those who said 'No' were members of the Christian communities, and,

being so, they still insisted that Judaism was to be eternal. They

demanded that the patched and stiff leathern bottle, which had no

elasticity or pliability, should still contain the quick fermenting new

wine of the kingdom. And certainly, if ever man had excuse for clinging

to what was old and formal, these Judaising Christians held it. They

held by a law written with God's own finger, by ordinances awful by

reason of divine appointment, venerable by reason of the generations to

which they had been of absolute authority, commended by the very

example of Christ Himself. Every motive which can bind heart and

conscience to the reverence and the practice of the traditions of the

Fathers, bound them to the Law and the ordinances which had been

Israel's treasure from Abraham to Jesus.

Those who said 'Yes' were mostly Gentiles, headed and inspired by a

Hebrew of the Hebrews. They believed that Judaism was preparatory, and

that its work was done. For those among themselves who were Jews, they

were willing that its laws should still be obligatory; but they fought

against the attempt to compel all Gentile converts to enter Christ's

kingdom through the gate of circumcision.

The fight was stubborn and bitter. I suppose it is harder to abolish

forms than to change opinions. Ceremonies stand long after the thought

which they express has fled, as a dead king may sit on his throne stiff

and stark in his golden mantle, and no one come near enough to see that

the light is gone out of his eyes, and the will departed from the hand

that still clutches the sceptre. All through Paul's life he was dogged

and tormented by this controversy. There was a deep gulf between the

churches he planted and this reactionary section of the Christian

community. Its emissaries were continually following in his footsteps.

As he bitterly reproaches them, they entered upon another man's line of

things made ready to their hand, not caring to plant churches of

circumcised Gentiles themselves, but starting up behind him as soon as

his back was turned, and spoiling his work.

This Epistle is the memorial of that foot-to-foot feud. It is of

perennial use, as the tendencies against which it is directed are

constant in human nature. Men are ever apt to confound form and

substance, to crave material embodiments of spiritual realities, to

elevate outward means into the place of the inward and real, to which

all the outward is but subsidiary. In every period of strife between

the two great opponents, this letter has been the stronghold of those

who fight for the spiritual conception of religion. With it Luther

waged his warfare, and in this day, too, its words are precious.

My text contains Paul's condensed statement of his whole position in

the controversy. It tells us what he fought for, and why he fought,

against the attempt to suspend union to Christ on an outward rite.

I. The first grand principle contained in these words is that faith

working by love makes a Christian.

The antithesis of our text appears in somewhat varied forms in two

other places in the Apostle's writings. To the Corinthians he says,

'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the

keeping of the commandments of God.' His last word to the

Galatians--the gathering up into one strong sentence of his whole

letter--is, 'In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything,

nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.'

Now, all these assertions embody substantially the same opposition

between the conception of Christianity as depending upon a ceremonial

rite, and as being a spiritual change. And the variations in the second

member of the contrast throw light on each other. In one, the essential

thing is regarded from the divine side as being not a rite performed on

the body, but a new nature, the result of a supernatural regeneration.

In another, the essential thing is set forth as being not an outward

act, but an inward principle, which produces appropriate effects on the

whole being. In yet another the essential thing is conceived as being

not a mere ceremonial, but practical obedience, the consequence of the

active principle of faith, and the sign of the new life. There is an

evident sequence in the three sayings. They begin with the deepest, the

divine act of a new creation--and end with the outermost, the last

result and object of both the others--deeds of conformity to God's law.

This one process in its triple aspects, says Paul, constitutes a man a

Christian. What correspondence is there between it, in any of its

parts, and a carnal ordinance? They belong to wholly different

categories, and it is the most preposterous confusion to try to mix

them up together. Are we to tack on to the solemn powers and qualities,

which unite the soul to Christ, this beggarly addition that the

Judaisers desire, and to say, the essentials of Christianity are a new

creature, faith, obedience--and circumcision? That is, indeed, sewing

old cloth on a new garment, and huddling together in grotesque chaos

things which are utterly diverse. It is as absurd bathos as to say the

essentials of a judge are integrity, learning, patience--and an ermine

robe!

There would be less danger of being entangled in false notions of the

sort which devastated Galatia and have afflicted the Church ever since,

if people would put a little more distinctly before their own minds

what they mean by 'religion'; what sort of man they intend when they

talk about 'a Christian.' A clear notion of the thing to be produced

would thin away a wonderful deal of mist as to the way of producing it.

So then, beginning at the surface, in order to work inward, my first

remark is that religion is the harmony of the soul with God, and the

conformity of the life to His law.

The loftiest purpose of God, in all His dealings, is to make us like

Himself; and the end of all religion is the complete accomplishment of

that purpose. There is no religion without these

elements--consciousness of kindred with God, recognition of Him as the

sum of all excellence and beauty, and of His will as unconditionally

binding upon us, aspiration and effort after a full accord of heart and

soul with Him and with His law, and humble confidence that that

sovereign beauty will be ours. 'Be ye imitators of God as dear

children' is the pure and comprehensive dictate which expresses the aim

of all devout men. 'To keep His commandments' goes deeper than the mere

external deeds. Were it not so, Paul's grand words would shrink to a

very poor conception of religion, which would then have its shrine and

sphere removed from the sacred recesses of the inmost spirit to the

dusty Babel of the market-place and the streets. But with that due and

necessary extension of the words which results from the very nature of

the case, that obedience must be the obedience of a man, and not of his

deeds only, and must include the submission of the will and the

prostration of the whole nature before Him; they teach a truth which,

fully received and carried out, clears away whole mountains of

theoretical confusion and practical error. Religion is no dry morality;

no slavish, punctilious conforming of actions to a hard law. Religion

is not right thinking alone, nor right emotion alone, nor right action

alone. Religion is still less the semblance of these in formal

profession, or simulated feeling, or apparent rectitude. Religion is

not nominal connection with the Christian community, nor participation

in its ordinances and its worship. But to be godly is to be godlike.

The full accord of all the soul with His character, in whom, as their

native home, dwell 'whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are

lovely,' and the full glad conformity of the will to His sovereign

will, who is the life of our lives--this, and nothing shallower,

nothing narrower, is religion in its perfection; and the measure in

which we have attained to this harmony with God, is the measure in

which we are Christians. As two stringed instruments may be so tuned to

one keynote that, if you strike the one, a faint ethereal echo is heard

from the other, which blends undistinguishably with its parent sound;

so, drawing near to God, and brought into unison with His mind and

will, our responsive spirits vibrate in accord with His, and give forth

tones, low and thin indeed, but still repeating the mighty music of

heaven. 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but

the keeping of the commandments of God.'

But our text tells us, further, that if we look backwards from

character and deed to motive, this harmony with God results from love

becoming the ruling power of our lives. The imitation of the object of

worship has always been felt to be the highest form of worship. Many an

ancient teacher, besides the Stoic philosopher, has said, 'He who

copies the gods worships them adequately.' One of the prophets lays it

down as a standing rule, 'The people will walk every one in the name of

his God.' But it is only in the Christian attitude towards God that the

motive power is found which makes such imitation more than an

impossible duty, even as it is only in the revealed character of God

that a pattern is found, to imitate which is to be perfect. Everywhere

besides, harmony with the gods meant discord with conscience and

flagrant outrages of the commonest moralities. Everywhere else, the

task of copying them was one lightened by no clear confidence in their

love, and by no happy consciousness of our own. But for us, the love

revealed is the perfect law, and the love evoked is the fulfilling of

the law.

And this is the might and nobleness of the Christian love to God; that

it is no idle emotion or lazy rapture, no vague sentiment, but the root

of all practical goodness, of all strenuous effort, of all virtue, and

of all praise. That strong tide is meant to drive the busy wheels of

life and to bear precious freightage on its bosom; not to flow away in

profitless foam. Love is the fruitful mother of bright children, as our

great moralist-poet learned when he painted her in the House of

Holiness:

'A multitude of babes about her hung,

Playing their sport that joyed her to behold.'

Her sons are Strength and Justice, and Self-control and Firmness, and

Courage and Patience, and many more besides; and her daughters are Pity

with her sad eyes, and Gentleness with her silvery voice, and Mercy

whose sweet face makes sunshine in the shade of death, and Humility all

unconscious of her loveliness; and linked hand in hand with these, all

the radiant band of sisters that men call Virtues and Graces. These

will dwell in our hearts, if Love their mighty mother be there. If we

are without her, we shall be without them.

There is discord between man and God which can only be removed by the

sweet commerce of love, established between earth and heaven. God's

love has come to us. When ours springs responsive to Him, then the

schism is ended, and the wandering child forgets his rebellion, as he

lays his aching head on the father's bosom, and feels the beating of

the father's heart. Our souls by reason of sin are 'like sweet bells

jangled, out of tune and harsh.' Love's master hand laid upon them

restores to them their part in 'the fair music that all creatures make

to their great Lord,' and brings us into such accord with God that

'We on earth with undiscording voice

May rightly answer'

even the awful harmonies of His lips. The essential of religion is

concord with God, and the power which makes that concord is love to

God.

But this text leads to a still further consideration, namely, the

dominion of love to God in our hearts arises from faith.

We thus reach the last link, or rather the staple, of the chain from

which all hangs. Religion is harmony with God; that harmony is produced

by love; and that love is produced by faith. Therefore the fundamental

of all Christianity in the soul is faith. Would this sound any fresher

and more obvious if we varied the language, and said that to be

religious we must be like God, that to be like Him we must love Him,

and that to love Him we must be sure that He loves us? Surely that is

too plain to need enlarging on.

And is it not true that faith must precede our love to God, and affords

the only possible basis on which that can be built? How can we love Him

so long as we are in doubt of His heart, or misconceive His character,

as if it were only power and wisdom, or awful severity? Men cannot love

an unseen person at all, without some very special token of his

personal affection for them. The history of all religions shows that

where the gods have been thought of as unloving, the worshippers have

been heartless too. It is only when we know and believe the love that

God hath to us, that we come to cherish any corresponding emotion to

Him. Our love is secondary, His is primary; ours is reflection, His the

original beam; ours is echo, His the mother-tone. Heaven must bend to

earth before earth can rise to heaven. The skies must open and drop

down love, ere love can spring in the fruitful fields. And it is only

when we look with true trust to that great unveiling of the heart of

God which is in Jesus Christ, only when we can say, 'Herein is

love--that He gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,' that

our hearts are melted, and all their snows are dissolved into sweet

waters, which, freed from their icy chains, can flow with music in

their ripple and fruitfulness along their course, through our otherwise

silent and barren lives. Faith in Christ is the only possible basis for

active love to God.

And this thought presents the point of contact between the teaching of

Paul and John. The one dwells on faith, the other on love, but he who

insists most on the former declares that it produces its effects on

character by the latter; and he who insists most on the latter is

forward to proclaim that it owes its very existence to the former.

It presents also the point of contact between Paul and James. The one

speaks of the essential of Christianity as faith, the other as works.

They are only striking the stream at different points, one at the

fountain-head, one far down its course among the haunts of men. They

both preach that faith must be 'faith that worketh,' not a barren

assent to a dogma, but a living trust that brings forth fruits in the

life. Paul believes as much as James that faith without works is dead,

and demands the keeping of the commandments as indispensable to all

true Christianity. James believes as much as Paul that works without

faith are of none effect. So all three of these great teachers of the

Church are represented in this text, to which each of them might seem

to have contributed a word embodying his characteristic type of

doctrine. The threefold rays into which the prism parts the white light

blend again here, where faith, love, and work are all united in the

comprehensive saying, 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth

anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'

The sum of the whole matter is this--He who is one in will and heart

with God is a Christian. He who loves God is one in will and heart with

Him. He who trusts Christ loves God. That is Christianity in its

ultimate purpose and result. That is Christianity in its means and

working forces. That is Christianity in its starting-point and

foundation.

II. But we have to consider also the negative side of the Apostle's

words. They affirm that in comparison with the essential--faith, all

externals are infinitely unimportant.

Paul's habit was always to settle questions by the widest principles he

could bring to bear upon them--which one may notice in passing is the

very opposite to the method that has been in favour with many Church

teachers and guides since, who have preferred to live from hand to

mouth, and to dispose of difficulties by the narrowest considerations

that would avail to quiet them. In our text the question in hand is

settled on a ground which covers a great deal more than the existing

dispute. Circumcision is regarded as one of a whole class--namely, the

class of outward rites and observances; and the contrast drawn between

it and faith extends to all the class to which it belongs. It is not

said to be powerless because it is an Old Testament rite, but because

it is a rite. Its impotence lies in the very nature which it has in

common with all external institutions, whether they be of the Old

Testament or of the New, whether they be enjoined of God or invented by

men. To them all the same characteristic cleaves. Compared with faith

they are of no avail. Not that they are absolutely useless. They have

their place, but 'in Christ Jesus' they are nothing. Union to Him

depends on quite another order of facts, which may or may not exist

along with circumcision, or with baptism, or with the Lord's Supper.

However important these may be, they have no place among the things

which bind a soul to its Saviour. They may be helps to these things,

but nothing more. The rite does not ensure the faith, else the

antithesis of our text were unmeaning. The rite does not stand in the

place of faith, or the contrast implied were absurd. But the two belong

to totally different orders of things, which may co-exist indeed, but

may also be found separately; the one is the indispensable spiritual

experience which makes us Christians, the other belongs to a class of

material institutions which are much as helps to, but nothing as

substitutes or equivalents for, faith.

Keep firm hold of the positive principle with which we have been

dealing in the former part of this sermon, and all forms and externals

fall as a matter of course into their proper place. If religion be the

loving devotion of the soul to God, resting upon reasonable faith, then

all besides is, at the most, a means which may further it. If loving

trust which apprehends the truth, and cleaves to the Person, revealed

to us in the Gospel, be the link which binds men to God, then the only

way by which these externals can be 'means of grace' is by their aiding

us to understand better and to feel more the truth as it is in Jesus,

and to cleave closer to Him who is the truth. Do they enlighten the

understanding? Do they engrave deeper the loved face carven on the

tablets of memory, which the attrition of worldly cares is ever

obliterating, and the lichens of worldly thoughts ever filling up? Do

they clear out the rubbish from the channels of the heart, that the

cleansing stream may flow through them? Do they, through the senses,

minister to the soul its own proper food of clear thought, vivid

impressions, loving affections, trustful obedience? Do they bring

Christ to us, and us to Him, in the only way in which approach is

possible--through the occupation of mind and heart and will with His

great perfectness? Then they are means of grace, precious and helpful,

the gifts of His love, the tokens of His wise knowledge of our

weakness, the signs of His condescension, in that He stoops to trust

some portion of our remembrance of Him to the ministry of sense. But in

comparison with that faith which they cannot plant, though they may

strengthen it, they are nothing; and in the matter of uniting the soul

to God and making men 'religious,' they are of no avail at all.

And such thoughts as these have a very wide sweep, as well as a very

deep influence. Religion is the devotion of the soul to God. Then

everything besides is not religion, but at most a means to it. That is

true about all Christian ordinances. Baptism is spoken about by Paul in

terms which plainly show that he regarded it as 'nothing' in the same

sense, and under the same limitations, as he thought that circumcision

was nothing. 'I baptized some of you,' says he to the Corinthians; 'I

scarcely remember whom, or how many. I have far more important work to

do--to preach the Gospel.' It is true about all acts and forms of

Christian worship. These are not religion, but means to it. Their only

value and their only test is--Do they help men to know and feel Christ

and His truth? It is true about laws of life, and many points of

conventional morality. Remember the grand freedom with which the same

Apostle dealt with questions about meats offered to idols, and the

observance of days and seasons. The same principle guided him there

too, and he relegated the whole question back to its proper place with,

'Meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat are we the

better, neither if we eat not are we the worse.' 'He that regardeth the

day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to

the Lord he doth not regard it.' It is true, though less obviously and

simply, about subordinate doctrines. It is true about the mere

intellectual grasp of the fundamental truths of God's revelation.

These, and the belief of these, are not Christianity, they are helps

towards it.

The separation is broad and deep. On one side are all externals, rites,

ceremonies, politics, Church arrangements, forms of worship, modes of

life, practices of morality, doctrines, and creeds--all which are

externals to the soul: on the other is faith working through love, the

inmost attitude and deepest emotion of the soul. The great heap is

fuel. The flame is loving faith. The only worth of the fuel is to feed

the flame. Otherwise it is of no avail, but lies dead and cold, a mass

of blackness. We are joined to God by faith. Whatever strengthens that

faith is precious as a help, but is worthless as a substitute.

III. There is a constant tendency to exalt these unimportant externals

into the place of faith.

The whole purpose of the Gospel may be described to be our deliverance

from the dominion of sense, and the transference of the centre of our

life to the unseen world. This end is no doubt partly accomplished by

the help of sense. So long as men have bodily organisations, there will

be need for outward helps. Men's indolence, and men's sense-ridden

natures, will take symbols for [INS: royalties :INS] , bank-notes for

wealth. The eye will be tempted to stay on the rich colours of the

glowing glass, instead of passing through them to heaven's light

beyond. To make the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to heaven by,

will be perilously likely to end in the soul going down the ladder

instead of up. Forms are sure to encroach, to overlay the truth that

lies at their root, to become dimly intelligible, or quite unmeaning,

and to constitute at last the end instead of the means. Is it not then

wise to minimise these potent and dangerous allies? Is it not needful

to use them with the remembrance that a minute quantity may strengthen,

but an overdose will kill--ay, and that the minute quantity may kill

too? Christ instituted two outward rites. There could not have been

fewer if there was to be an outward community at all, and they could

not have been simpler; but look at the portentous outgrowth of

superstition, and the unnumbered evils, religious, moral, social, and

even political, which have come from the invincible tendency of human

nature to corrupt forms, even when the forms are the sweet and simple

ones of Christ's own appointment. What a lesson the history of the

Lord's Supper, and its gradual change from the domestic memorial of the

dying love of our Lord to the 'tremendous sacrifice,' reads us as to

the dangerous ally which spiritual religion--and there is no other

religion than spiritual--enlists when it seeks the help of external

rites!

But remember that this danger of converting religion into outward

actions has its root in us all, and is not annihilated by our rejection

of an elaborate ceremonial. There is much significance in the double

negation of my text, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.' If the

Judaisers were tempted to insist on the former, as indispensable, their

antagonists were as much tempted to insist on the latter. The one were

saying, 'A man cannot be a Christian unless he be circumcised.' The

other would be in danger of replying, 'He cannot be a Christian if he

is.' There may be as much formalism in protesting against forms as in

using them. Extremes meet; and an unspiritual Quaker, for instance, is

at bottom of the same way of thinking as an unspiritual Roman Catholic.

They agree in their belief that certain outward acts are essential to

worship, and even to religion. They only differ as to what these acts

are. The Judaiser who says, 'You must be circumcised,' and his

antagonist who says, 'You must be uncircumcised,' are really in the

same boat.

And this is especially needful to be kept in mind by those who, like

the most of us, hold fast by the free and spiritual conception of

Christianity. That freedom we may turn into a bondage, and that

spirituality into a form, if we confound it with the essentials of

Christianity, and deny the possibility of the life being developed

except in conjunction with it. My text has a double edge. Let us use it

against all this Judaising which is going on round about us, and

against all the tendency to it in our own hearts. The one edge smites

the former, the other edge the latter. Circumcision is nothing, as most

of us are forward to proclaim. But, also, remember, when we are tempted

to trust in our freedom, and to fancy that in itself it is good,

uncircumcision is nothing. You are no more a Christian for your

rejection of forms than another man is for his holding them. Your

negation no more unites you to Christ than does his affirmation. One

thing alone does that,--faith which worketh by love, against which

sense ever wars, both by tempting some of us to place religion in

outward acts and ceremonies, and by tempting others of us to place it

in rejecting the forms which our brethren abuse.

IV. When an indifferent thing is made into an essential, it ceases to

be indifferent, and must be fought against.

Paul proclaimed that circumcision and uncircumcision were alike

unavailing. A man might be a good Christian either way. They were not

unimportant in all respects, but in regard to being united to Christ,

it did not matter which side one took. And, in accordance with this

noble freedom, he for himself practised Jewish rites; and, when he

thought it might conciliate prejudice without betraying principle, had

Timothy circumcised. But when it came to be maintained as a principle

that Gentiles must be circumcised, the time for conciliation was past.

The other side had made further concession impossible. The Apostle had

no objection to circumcision. What he objected to was its being forced

upon all as a necessary preliminary to entering the Church. And as soon

as the opposite party took that ground, then there was nothing for it

but to fight against them to the last. They had turned an indifferent

thing into an essential, and he could no longer treat it as

indifferent.

So whenever parties or Churches insist on external rites as essential,

or elevate any of the subordinate means of grace into the place of the

one bond which fastens our souls to Jesus, and is the channel of grace

as well as the bond of union, then it is time to arm for the defence of

the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and to resist the attempt to bind

on free shoulders the iron yoke. Let men and parties do as they like,

so long as they do not turn their forms into essentials. In broad

freedom of speech and spirit, which holds by the one central principle

too firmly to be much troubled about subordinate matters--in tolerance

of diversities, which does not spring from indifference, but from the

very clearness of our perception of, and from the very fervour of our

adherence to, the one essential of the Christian life--let us take for

our guide the large, calm, lofty thoughts which this text sets forth

before us. Let us thankfully believe that men may love Jesus, and be

fed from His fulness, whether they be on one side of this undying

controversy or on the other. Let us watch jealously the tendencies in

our own hearts to trust in our forms or in our freedom. And whensoever

or wheresoever these subordinates are made into things essential, and

the ordinances of Christ's Church are elevated into the place which

belongs to loving trust in Christ's love, then let our voices at least

be heard on the side of that mighty truth that 'in Jesus Christ neither

circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which

worketh by love.'

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'WALK IN THE SPIRIT'

'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the

flesh.'--Gal. v. 16.

We are not to suppose that the Apostle here uses the familiar contrast

of spirit and flesh to express simply different elements of human

nature. Without entering here on questions for which a sermon is

scarcely a suitable vehicle of discussion, it may be sufficient for our

present purpose to say that, as usually, when employing this antithesis

the Apostle means by Spirit the divine, the Spirit of God, which he

triumphed in proclaiming to be the gift of every believing soul. The

other member of the contrast, 'flesh,' is similarly not to be taken as

equivalent to body, but rather as meaning the whole human nature

considered as apart from God and kindred with earth and earthly things.

The flesh, in its narrower sense, is no doubt a predominant part of

this whole, but there is much in it besides the material organisation.

The ethics of Christianity suffered much harm and were degraded into a

false and slavish asceticism for long centuries, by monastic

misunderstandings of what Paul meant by the flesh, but he himself was

too clear-sighted and too high-toned to give his adhesion to the

superficial notion that the body is the seat and source of sin. We need

look no further than the catalogue of the 'works of the flesh' which

immediately follows our text, for, although it begins with gross sins

of a purely fleshly kind, it passes on to such as hatred, emulations,

wrath, envyings and suchlike. Many of these works of the flesh are such

as an angel with an evil heart could do, whether he had a body or not.

It seems therefore right to say that the one member of the contrast is

the divine Spirit of holiness, and the other is man as he is, without

the life-giving influence of the Spirit of God. In Paul's thought the

idea of the flesh always included the idea of sin, and the desires of

the flesh were to him not merely rebellious, sensuous passion, but the

sinful desires of godless human nature, however refined, and as some

would say, 'spiritual' these might be. We do not need to inquire more

minutely as to the meaning of the Apostle's terms, but may safely take

them as, on the one hand, referring to the divine Spirit which imparts

life and holiness, and on the other hand, to human nature severed from

God, and distracted by evil desires because wrenched away from Him.

The text is Paul's battle-cry, which he opposed to the Judaising

disturbers in Galatia. They said 'Do this and that; labour at a round

of observances; live by rule.' Paul said, 'No! That is of no use; you

will make nothing of such an attempt nor will ever conquer evil so.

Live by the spirit and you will not need a hard outward law, nor will

you be in bondage to the works of the flesh.' That feud in the Galatian

churches was the earliest battle which Christianity had to fight

between two eternal tendencies of thought--the conception of religion

as consisting in outward obedience to a law, and consequently as made

up of a series of painful efforts to keep it, and the conception of

religion as being first the implanting of a new, divine life, and

needing only to be nourished and cared for in order to drive forth

evils from the heart, and so to show itself living. The difference goes

very far and very deep, and these two views of what religion is have

each their adherents to-day. The Apostle throws the whole weight of his

authority into the one scale, and emphatically declares this as the one

secret of victory, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the

lusts of the flesh.'

I. What it is to walk in the Spirit.

The thought which is but touched upon here is set forth more largely,

and if we may so say, profoundly, in the Epistle to the Romans (chap.

viii.). There, to walk after the flesh, is substantially the same as to

be carnally minded, and that 'mind of the flesh' is regarded as being

by fatal necessity not 'subject to the law of God,' and consequently as

in itself, with regard to future consequences, to be death. The fleshly

mind which is thus in rebellion against the law of God is sure to issue

in 'desires of the flesh,' just as when the pressure is taken off, some

ebullient liquid will bubble. They that are after the flesh of course

will 'mind the things of the flesh.' The vehement desires which we

cherish when we are separated from God and which we call sins, are

graver as a symptom than even they are in themselves, for they show

which way the wind blows, and are tell-tales that betray the true

direction of our nature. If we were not after the flesh we should not

mind the things of the flesh. The one expression points to the

deep-seated nature, the other to the superficial actions to which it

gives rise.

And the same duality belongs to the life of those who are 'after the

Spirit.' 'To walk,' of course, means to carry on the practical life,

and the Spirit is here thought of not so much perhaps as the path on

which we are to travel, but rather as the norm and direction by which

we are to travel on life's common way. Just as the desires of the flesh

were certain to be done by those who in their deepest selves belonged

to the flesh, so every soul which has received the unspeakable gift of

newness of life through the Spirit of God will have the impulses to

mind and do the things of the Spirit. If we live in the Spirit we shall

also--and let us also--walk in the Spirit.

But let us make no mistakes, or think that our text in its great

commandment and radiant hope has any word of cheer to those who have

not received into their hearts, in however feeble a manner and minute a

measure, the Spirit of the Son. The first question for us all is, have

we received the Holy Ghost?--and the answer to that question is the

answer to the other, have we accepted Christ? It is through Him and

through faith in Him that that supreme gift of a living spirit is

bestowed. And only when our spirits bear witness with that Spirit that

we are the children of God, have we a right to look upon the text as

pointing our duty and stimulating our hope. If our practical life is to

be directed by the Spirit of God, He must enter into our spirits, and

we shall not be in Him but in the measure that He is in us. Nor will

our spirits be life because of righteousness unless He dwells in us and

casts forth the works of the flesh. There will be no practical

direction of our lives by the Spirit of God unless we make conscience

of cultivating the reception of His life-giving and cleansing

influences, and unless we have inward communion with our inward guide,

intimate and frank, prolonged and submissive. If we are for ever

allowing the light of our inward godliness to be blown about by gusts,

or to show in our inmost hearts but a faint and flickering spark, how

can we expect that it will shine safe direction on our outward path?

II. Such walking in the Spirit conquers the flesh.

We all know it as a familiar experience that the surest way to conquer

any strong desire or emotion is to bring some other into operation. To

concentrate attention on any overmastering thought or purpose, even if

our object is to destroy it, is but too apt to strengthen it. And so to

fix our minds on our own desires of the flesh, even though we may be

honestly wishing to suppress them, is a sure way to invest them with

new force; therefore the wise counsels of sages and moralists are, for

the most part, destined to lead those who listen to them astray. Many a

man has, in good faith, set himself to conquer his own evil lusts and

has found that the nett result of his struggles has been to make the

lusts more conspicuous and correspondingly more powerful. The Apostle

knows a better way, which he has proved to his own experience, and now,

with full confidence and triumph, presses upon his hearers. He would

have them give up the monotonous and hopeless fight against the flesh

and bring another ally into the field. His chief exhortation is a

positive, not a negative one. It is vain to try to tie up men with

restrictions and prohibitions, which when their desires are stirred

will be burst like Samson's bonds. But if once the positive exhortation

here is obeyed, then it will surely make short work of the desires and

passions which otherwise men, for the most part, do not wish to get rid

of, and never do throw off by any other method.

We have pointed out that in our text to walk in the Spirit means to

regulate the practical life by the Spirit of God, and that the 'desires

of the flesh' mean the desires of the whole human nature apart from

God. But even if we take the contrasted terms in their lower and

commonly adopted sense, the text is true and useful. A cultivated mind

habituated to lofty ideas, and quick to feel the nobility of

'spiritual' pursuits and possessions, will have no taste for the gross

delights of sense, and will recoil with disgust from the indulgences in

which more animal natures wallow. But while this is true, it by no

means exhausts the great principle laid down here. We must take the

contrasted terms in their fullest meaning if we would arrive at it. The

spiritual life derived from Jesus Christ and lodged in the human spirit

has to be guarded, cherished and made dominant, and then it will drive

out the old. If the Spirit which is life because of righteousness is

allowed free course in a human spirit, it will send forth its powers

into the body which is 'dead because of sin,' will regulate its

desires, and if needful will suppress them. And it is wiser and more

blessed to rely on this overflowing influence than to attempt the

hopeless task of coercing these desires by our own efforts.

If we walk in the Spirit, we shall thereby acquire new tastes and

desires of a higher kind which will destroy the lower. They to whom

manna is sweet as angel's food find that they have lost their relish

for the strong-smelling and rank-flavoured Egyptian leeks and garlic. A

guest at a king's table will not care to enter a smoky hovel and will

not be hungry for the food to be found there. If we are still dependent

on the desires of the flesh we are still but children, and if we are

walking in the Spirit we have outgrown our childish toys. The enjoyment

of the gifts which the Spirit gives deadens temptation and robs many

things that were very precious of their lustre.

We may also illustrate the great principle of our text by considering

that when we have found our supreme object there is no inducement to

wander further in the search after delights. Desires are confessions of

discontent, and though the absolute satisfaction of all our nature is

not granted to us here, there is so much of blessedness given and so

many of our most clamant desires fully met in the gift of life in

Christ, that we may well be free from the prickings of desires which

sting men into earnest seeking after often unreal good. 'The fruit of

the Spirit is love, joy, peace,' and surely if we have these we may

well leave the world its troubled delights and felicities. Christ's joy

remains in us and our joy is full. The world desires because it does

not possess. When a deeper well is sunk, a shallower one is pretty sure

to give out. If we walk in the Spirit we go down to the deepest

water-holding stratum, and all the surface wells will run dry.

Further, we may note, that this walking in the Spirit brings into our

lives the mightiest motives of holy living and so puts a bridle on the

necks and a bit in the mouths of our untamed desires. Holding

fellowship with the divine Indweller and giving the reins into His

strong hand, we receive from Him the spirit of adoption and learn that

if we are children then are we heirs. Is there any motive that will so

surely still the desires of the flesh and of the mind as the blessed

thought that God is ours and we His? Surely their feet should never

stumble or stray, who are aware of the Spirit of the Son bearing

witness with their spirit that they are the children of God. Surely the

measure in which we realise this will be the measure in which the

desires of the flesh will be whipped back to their kennels, and cease

to disturb us with their barks.

The whole question here as between Paul and his opponents just comes to

this; if a field is covered with filth, whether is it better to set to

work on it with wheel-barrows and shovels, or to turn a river on it

which will bear away all the foulness? The true way to change the fauna

and flora of a country is to change the level, and as the height

increases they change themselves. If we desire to have the noxious

creatures expelled from ourselves, we must not so much labour at their

expulsion as see to the elevation of our own personal being and then we

shall succeed. That is what Paul says, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye

shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

III. Such a life is not freed from the necessity of struggle.

The highest condition, of course, would be that we had only to grow,

not to fight. It will come some day that all evil shall drop away, and

that to walk in the Spirit will need no effort, but that time has not

come yet. So in addition to all that we have been saying in this

sermon, we must further say that Paul's exhortation has always to be

coupled with the other to fight the good fight. The highest word for

our earthly lives is not 'victory' but 'contest.' We shall not walk in

the Spirit without many a struggle to keep ourselves within that

charmed atmosphere. The promise of our text is not that we shall not

feel, but that we shall not fulfil, the desires of the flesh.

Now this is very commonplace and threadbare teaching, but it is none

the less important, and is especially needful to be strongly emphasised

when we have been speaking as we have just been doing. It is a

historical fact, illustrated over and over again since Paul wrote, and

not without illustration to-day, that there is constant danger of lax

morality infecting Christian life under pretence of lofty spirituality.

So it must ever be insisted upon that the test of a true walking in the

Spirit is that we are thereby fitted to fight against the desires of

the flesh. When we have the life of the Spirit within us, it will show

itself as Paul has said in another place by the righteousness of the

law being fulfilled in us, and by our 'mortifying the deeds of the

body.' The gift of the Spirit does not take us out of the ranks of the

combatants, but teaches us to fight, and arms us with its own sword for

the conflict. There will be abundant opportunities of courage in

attacking the sin that doth so easily beset us, and in resisting

temptations which come to us by reason of our own imperfect

sanctification. But there is all the difference between fighting at our

own hand and fighting with the help of God's Spirit, and there is all

the difference between fighting with the help of an unseen ally in

heaven and fighting with a Spirit within us who helpeth our infirmities

and Himself makes us able to contend, and sure, if we keep true to Him,

to be more than conquerers through Him that loveth us.

Such a conflict is a gift and a joy. It is hard but it is blessed,

because it is an expression of our truest love; it comes from our

deepest will; it is full of hope and of assured victory. How different

is the painful, often defeated and monotonous attempt to suppress our

nature by main force, and to tread a mill-horse round! The joyous

freedom and buoyant hope taught us in the gospel way of salvation have

been cramped and confined and all their glories veiled as by a mass of

cobwebs spun beneath a golden roof, but our text sweeps away the foul

obstruction. Let us learn the one condition of victorious conflict, the

one means of subduing our natural humanity and its distracting desires,

and let nothing rob us of the conviction that this is God's way of

making men like angels. 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil

the lusts of the flesh.'

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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering,

gentleness, goodness, faith, 23. Meekness, temperance'--Gal. v. 22, 23.

'The fruit of the Spirit,' says Paul, not the fruits, as we might more

naturally have expected, and as the phrase is most often quoted; all

this rich variety of graces, of conduct and character, is thought of as

one. The individual members are not isolated graces, but all connected,

springing from one root and constituting an organic whole. There is

further to be noted that the Apostle designates the results of the

Spirit as fruit, in strong and intentional contrast with the results of

the flesh, the grim catalogue of which precedes the radiant list in our

text. The works of the flesh have no such unity, and are not worthy of

being called fruit. They are not what a man ought to bring forth, and

when the great Husbandman comes, He finds no fruit there, however full

of activity the life has been. We have then here an ideal of the

noblest Christian character, and a distinct and profound teaching as to

how to attain it. I venture to take the whole of this list for my text,

because the very beauty of each element in it depends on its being but

part of a whole, and because there are important lessons to be gathered

from the grouping.

I. The threefold elements of character here.

It is perhaps not too artificial to point out that we have here three

triads of which the first describes the life of the Spirit in its

deepest secret; the second, the same life in its manifestations to men;

and the third, that life in relation to the difficulties of the world,

and of ourselves.

The first of these three triads includes love, joy, and peace, and it

is not putting too great a strain on the words to point out that the

source of all three lies in the Christian relation to God. They regard

nothing but God and our relation to Him; they would be all the same if

there were no other men in the world, or if there were no world. We

cannot call them duties or virtues; they are simply the results of

communion with God--the certain manifestations of the better life of

the Spirit. Love, of course, heads the list, as the foundation and

moving principle of all the rest. It is the instinctive act of the

higher life and is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is

the life sap which rises through the tree and given form to all the

clusters. The remaining two members of this triad are plainly

consequences of the first. Joy is not so much an act or a grace of

character as an emotion poured into men's lives, because in their

hearts abides love to God. Jesus Christ pledged Himself to impart His

joy to remain in us, with the issue that our joy should be full. There

is only one source of permanent joy which takes possession of and fills

all the corners and crannies of the heart, and that is a love towards

God equally abiding and all-pervasive. We have all known joys so

perturbed, fragmentary and fleeting, that it is hard to distinguish

them from sorrows, but there is no need that joys should be like green

fruits hard and savourless and ready to drop from the tree. If God is

'the gladness of our joy,' and all our delights come from communion

with Him, our joy will never pass and will fill the whole round of our

spirits as the sea laves every shore.

Peace will be built upon love and joy, if our hearts are ever turning

to God and ever blessed with the inter-communion of love between Him

and us. What can be strong enough to disturb the tranquillity that

fills the soul independent of all externals? However long and close may

be the siege, the well in the castle courtyard will be full. True peace

comes not from the absence of trouble but from the presence of God, and

will be deep and passing all understanding in the exact measure in

which we live in, and partake of, the love of God.

The second triad is long-suffering, kindness, goodness. All these three

obviously refer to the spiritual life in its manifestations to men. The

first of them--long-suffering--describes the attitude of patient

endurance towards inflictors of injury or enemies, if we come forth

from the blessed fellowship with God, where love, joy, and peace reign

unbroken, and are met with a cold gust of indifference or with an icy

wind of hate. The reality of our happy communion and the depth of our

love will be tested by the patience of our long-suffering. Love

suffereth long, is not easily provoked, is not soon angry. He has

little reason to suppose that the love of God is shed abroad in his

heart, or that the Spirit of God is bringing forth fruit in him, who

has not got beyond the stage of repaying hate with hate, and scorn with

scorn. Any fool can answer a fool according to his folly, but it takes

a wise and a good man to overcome evil with good, and to love them that

hate; and yet how certainly the fires of mutual antagonism would go out

if there were only one to pile on the fuel! It takes two to make a

quarrel, and no man living under the influence of the Spirit of God can

be one of such a pair.

The second and third members of this triad--kindness, goodness, slide

very naturally into one another. They do not only require the negative

virtue of not retaliating, but express the Christian attitude towards

all of meeting them, whatever their attitude, with good. It is possible

that kindness here expresses the inward disposition and goodness, the

habitual actions in which that disposition shows itself. If that be the

distinction between them, the former would answer to benevolence and

the latter to beneficence. These three graces include all that Paul

presents as Christian duty to our fellows. The results of the life of

the Spirit are to pass beyond ourselves and to influence our whole

conduct. We are not to live only as mainly for the spiritual enjoyments

of fellowship with God. The true field of religion is in moving amongst

men, and the true basis of all service of men is love and fellowship

with God.

The third triad--faithfulness, meekness, temperance--seems to point to

the world in which the Christian life is to be lived as a scene of

difficulties and oppositions. The rendering of the Revised Version is

to be preferred to that of the Authorised in the first of the three,

for it is not faith in its theological sense to which the Apostle is

here referring. Possibly, however, the meaning may be trustfulness just

as in 1 Corinthians xiii. it is given as a characteristic of love that

it 'believeth all things.' More probably, however, the meaning is

faithfulness, and Paul's thought is that the Christian life is to

manifest itself in the faithful discharge of all duties and the honest

handling of all things committed to it. Meekness even more distinctly

contemplates a condition of things which is contrary to the Christian

life, and points to a submissiveness of spirit which does not lift

itself up against oppositions, but bends like a reed before the storm.

Paul preached meekness and practised it, but Paul could flash into

strong opposition and with a resonant ring in his voice could say 'To

whom we gave place by subjection, No! not for an hour.' The last member

of the triad--temperance--points to the difficulties which the

spiritual life is apt to meet with in the natural passions and desires,

and insists upon the fact that conflict and rigid and habitual

self-control are sure to be marks of that life.

II. The unity of the fruit.

We have already pointed out the Apostles remarkable use of the word

'fruit' here, by which he indicates that all the results of the life of

the Spirit in the human spirit are to be regarded as a whole that has a

natural growth. The foundation of all is of course that love which is

the fulfilling of the law. It scarcely needs to be pointed out how love

brings forth both the other elements of the first triad, but it is no

less important to note that it and its two companions naturally lead on

to the relations to men which make up the second triad. It is, however,

worth while to dwell on that fact because there are many temptations

for Christian people to separate between them. The two tables of the

law are not seldom written so far apart that their unity ceases to be

noted. There are many good people whose notions of religious duties are

shut up in churches or chapels and limited to singing and praying,

reading the Bible and listening to sermons, and who, even while they

are doing good service in common life, do not feel that it is as much a

religious duty to suppress the wish to retaliate as it is to sit in the

sunshine of God's love and to feel Christ's joy and peace filling the

heart. On the other hand many loud voices, some of them with great

force of words and influence on the popular mind, are never wearied of

preaching that Christianity is worn out as a social impulse, and that

the service of man has nothing to do with the love of God. As plainly

Paul's first triad naturally leads to his third. When the spiritual

life has realised its deepest secret it will be strong to manifest

itself as vigorous in reference to the difficulties of life. When that

heart is blessed in its own settled love, abounding joy and untroubled

peace, faithfulness and submission will both be possible and

self-control will not be hard.

III. The culture of the tree which secures the fruit.

Can we suppose that the Apostle here is going back in thought to our

Lord's profound teaching that every good tree bringeth forth good

fruit, but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit? The obvious

felicity of that metaphor often conceals for us the drastic force of

its teaching, it regards all a man's conduct as but the outcome of his

character, and brushes aside as trifling all attempts at altering

products, whilst the producer remains unaltered. Whether Paul was here

alluding to a known saying of Jesus or no, he was insisting upon the

very centre of Christian ethics, that a man must first be good in order

to do good. Our Lord's words seemed to make an impossible demand--'Make

the tree good'--as the only way of securing good fruit, and it was in

accordance with the whole cast of the Sermon on the Mount that the

means of realising that demand was left unexpressed. But Paul stood on

this side of Pentecost, and what was necessarily veiled in Christ's

earlier utterances stood forth a revealed and blessed certainty to him.

He had not to say 'Make the tree good' and be silent as to how that

process was to be effected; to him the message had been committed, 'The

Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.' There is but one way by which a

corrupt tree can be made good, and that is by grafting into the wild

briar stock a 'layer' from the rose. The Apostle had a double message

to proclaim, and the one part was built upon the other. He had first to

preach--and this day has first to believe that God has sent His own Son

in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin--and then he

had to proclaim that, through that mission, it became possible that the

ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who 'walk not after the

flesh but after the spirit.' The beginning, then, of all true goodness

is to be sought in receiving into our corrupt natures the uncorrupted

germs of the higher life, and it is only in the measure in which that

Spirit of God moves in our spirits and, like the sap in the vine,

permeates every branch and tendril, that fruit to eternal life will

grow. Christian graces are the products of the indwelling divine life,

and nothing else will succeed in producing them. All the preachings of

moralists and all the struggles after self-improvement are reduced to

impotence and vanity by the stern, curt sentence--'a corrupt tree

cannot bring forth good fruit.' Surely it should come to us all as a

true gospel when we feel ourselves foiled by our own evil nature in our

attempts to be better, that the first thing we have to do is not to

labour at either of the two impossible tasks of the making our bad

selves good, or of the getting good fruits from bad selves, but to open

our spirits through faith in Jesus for the entrance into us of His

Spirit which will change our corruption into incorruption, and cleanse

us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Shall we not seek to become

recipient of that new life, and having received it, should we not give

diligence that it may in us produce all its natural effects?

These fruits, though they are the direct results of the indwelling

Spirit and will never be produced without its presence, are none the

less truly dependent upon our manner of receiving that Spirit and on

our faithfulness and diligence in the use of its gifts. It is, alas!

sadly too true, and matter of tragically common experience that instead

of 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord' heavy with ruddy

clusters, there are but dwarfed and scrubby bushes which have scarcely

life enough to keep up a little show of green leaves and 'bring no

fruit to perfection'. Would that so-called Christian people would more

earnestly and searchingly ask themselves why it is that, with such

possibilities offered to them, their actual attainments should be so

small. They have a power which is able to do for them exceeding

abundantly above all that they can ask or think, and its actual effects

on them are well on this side of both their petitions and their

conceptions. There need be no difficulty in answering the question why

our Christian lives do not correspond more closely to the Spirit that

inspires them. The plain answer is that we have not cultivated, used,

and obeyed Him. The Lord of the vineyard would less often have to ask

'Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it

forth wild grapes?' if we listened more obediently to the pathetic

command which surely should touch a grateful heart--'Grieve not the

holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

IV. How this is the only worthy fruit.

We have already pointed out that the Apostle in the preceding context

varies his terms, and catalogues the actions that come from the godless

self as works, whilst those which are the outcome of the Spirit are

fruit. The distinction thus drawn is twofold. Multiplicity is

contrasted with unity and fruit with works. The deeds of the flesh have

no consistency except that of evil; they are at variance with

themselves--a huddled mob without regularity or order; and they are

works indeed, but so disproportionate to the nature of the doer and his

obligations that they do not deserve to be called fruit. It is not to

attach too much importance to an accidental form of speech to insist

upon this distinction as intended to be drawn, and as suggesting to us

very solemn thoughts about many apparently very active lives. The man

who lives to God truly lives; the busiest life which is not rooted in

Him and directed towards Him has so far missed its aim as to have

brought forth no good fruit, and therefore to have incurred the

sentence that it is cut down and cast into the fire. There is a very

remarkable expression in Scripture, 'The unfruitful works of darkness,'

which admits the busy occupation and energy of the doers and denies

that all that struggling and striving comes to anything. Done in the

dark, they seemed to have some significance, when the light comes in

they vanish. It is for us to determine whether our lives shall be works

of the flesh, full, perhaps, of a time of 'sound and fury,' but

'signifying nothing,' or whether they shall be fruits of the Spirit,

which we 'who have gathered shall eat in the courts of His holiness.'

They will be so if, living in the Spirit, we walk in the Spirit, but if

we 'sow to the flesh' we shall have a harder husbandry and a bitterer

harvest when 'of the flesh we reap corruption,' and hear the awful and

unanswerable question, 'What fruit had ye then of those things whereof

ye are now ashamed?'

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BURDEN-BEARING

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. . . .

5. For every man shall bear his own burden.'--Gal. vi. 25.

The injunction in the former of these verses appears, at first sight,

to be inconsistent with the statement in the latter. But Paul has a way

of setting side by side two superficially contradictory clauses, in

order that attention may be awakened, and that we may make an effort to

apprehend the point of reconciliation between them. So, for instance,

you remember he puts in one sentence, and couples together by a 'for,'

these two sayings: 'Work out your own salvation'; 'It is God that

worketh in you.' So here he has been exhorting the Galatian Christians

to restore a fallen brother. That is one case to which the general

commandment, 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' is applicable.

I cannot here enter on the intervening verses by which he glides from

the one to the other of these two thoughts which I have coupled

together, but I may just point out in a word the outline of his course

of thought. 'Bear ye one another's burden,' says he; and then he

thinks, 'What is it that keeps men from bearing each other's burdens?'

Being swallowed up with themselves, and especially being conceited

about their own strength and goodness. And so he goes on: 'If a man

think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.'

And what is the best cure for all these fancies inside us of how strong

and good we are? To look at our work with an impartial and rigid

judgment. It is easy for a man to plume himself on being good, and

strong, and great; but let him look at what he has done, and try that

by a high standard, and that will knock the conceit out of him. Or, if

his work stands the test, then 'he shall have rejoicing in himself, and

not' by comparing himself with other people. Two blacks do not make a

white, and we are not to heighten the lustre of our own whiteness by

comparing it with our neighbour's blackness. Take your act for what it

is worth, apart altogether from what other people are. Do not say,

'God! I thank thee that I am not as other men are . . . or even as this

publican'; but look to yourself. There is an occupation with self which

is good, and is a help to brotherly sympathy.

And so the Apostle has worked round, you see, to almost an opposite

thought from the one with which he started. 'Bear ye one another's

burdens.' Yes, but a man's work is his own and nobody else's, and a

man's character is his own and nobody else's, so 'every man shall bear

his own burden.' The statements are not contradictory. They complete

each other. They are the north and the south poles, and between them is

the rounded orb of the whole truth. So then, let me point out that:

I. There are burdens which can be shared, and there are burdens which

cannot.

Let us take the case from which the whole context has arisen. Paul was

exhorting the Galatians, as I explained, in reference to their duty to

a fallen brother; and he speaks of him--according to our version--as

'overtaken in a fault.' Now, that is scarcely his idea, I think. The

phrase, as it stands in our Bibles, suggests that Paul is trying to

minimise the gravity of the man's offence; but just in proportion as he

minimised its gravity would he weaken his exhortation to restore him.

But what he is really doing is not to make as little as possible of the

sin, but to make as much of it as is consistent with the truth. The

word 'overtaken' suggests that some sin, like a tiger in a jungle,

springs upon a man and overpowers him by the suddenness of the assault.

The word so rendered may perhaps be represented by some such phrase as

'discovered'; or, if I may use a 'colloquialism,' if a man be caught

'red-handed.' That is the idea. And Paul does not use the weak word

'fault,' but a very much stronger one, which means stark staring sin.

He is supposing a bad case of inconsistency, and is not palliating it

at all. Here is a brother who has had an unblemished reputation; and

all at once the curtain is thrown aside behind which he is working some

wicked thing; and there the culprit stands, with the bull's-eye light

flashed upon him, ashamed and trembling. Paul says, 'If you are a

spiritual man'--there is irony there of the graver sort--'show your

spirituality by going and lifting him up, and trying to help him.' When

he says, 'Restore such an one,' he uses an expression which is employed

in other connections in the New Testament, such as for mending the

broken meshes of a net, for repairing any kind of damage, for setting

the fractured bones of a limb. And that is what the 'spiritual' man has

to do. He is to show the validity of his claim to live on high by

stooping down to the man bemired and broken-legged in the dirt. We have

come across people who chiefly show their own purity by their harsh

condemnation of others' sins. One has heard of women so very virtuous

that they would rather hound a fallen sister to death than try to

restore her; and there are saints so extremely saintly that they will

not touch the leper to heal him, for fear of their own hands being

ceremonially defiled. Paul says, 'Bear ye one another's burdens'; and

especially take a lift of each other's sin.

I need not remind you how the same command applies in relation to

pecuniary distress, narrow circumstances, heavy duties, sorrows, and

all the 'ills that flesh is heir to.' These can be borne by sympathy,

by true loving outgoing of the heart, and by the rendering of such

practical help as the circumstances require.

But there are burdens that cannot be borne by any but the man himself.

There is the awful burden of personal existence. It is a solemn thing

to be able to say 'I.' And that carries with it this, that after all

sympathy, after all nestling closeness of affection, after the

tenderest exhibition of identity of feeling, and of swift godlike

readiness to help, each of us lives alone. Like the inhabitants of the

islands of the Greek Archipelago, we are able to wave signals to the

next island, and sometimes to send a boat with provisions and succour,

but we are parted, 'with echoing straits between us thrown.' Every man,

after all, lives alone, and society is like the material things round

about us, which are all compressible, because the atoms that compose

them are not in actual contact, but separated by slenderer or more

substantial films of isolating air. Thus there is even in the sorrows

which we can share with our brethren, and in all the burdens which we

can help to bear, an element which cannot be imparted. 'The heart

knoweth its own bitterness', and neither 'stranger' nor other

'intermeddleth' with the deepest fountains of 'its joy.'

Then again, there is the burden of responsibility which can be shared

by none. A dozen soldiers may be turned out to make a firing party to

shoot the mutineer, and no man knows who fired the shot, but one man

did fire it. And however there may have been companions, it was his

rifle that carried the bullet, and his finger that pulled the trigger.

We say, 'The woman that Thou gavest me tempted me, and I did eat.' Or

we say, 'My natural appetites, for which I am not responsible, but Thou

who madest me art, drew me aside, and I fell', or we may say, 'It was

not I; it was the other boy.' And then there rises up in our hearts a

veiled form, and from its majestic lips comes 'Thou art the man'; and

our whole being echoes assent--Mea culpa; mea maxima culpa--'My fault,

my exceeding great fault.' No man can bear that burden.

And then, closely connected with responsibility there is another--the

burden of the inevitable consequences of transgression, not only away

yonder in the future, when all human bonds of companionship shall be

broken, and each man shall 'give account of himself to God,' but here

and now; as in the immediate context the Apostle tells us, 'Whatsoever

a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' The effects of our evil deeds

come back to roost; and they never make a mistake as to where they

should alight. If I have sown, I, and no one else, will gather. No

sympathy will prevent to-morrow's headache after to-night's debauch,

and nothing that anybody can do will turn the sleuth-hounds off the

scent. Though they may be slow-footed, they have sure noses and

deep-mouthed fangs. 'If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself,

and if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it.' So there are burdens

which can, and burdens which cannot, be borne.

II. Jesus Christ is the Burden-bearer for both sorts of burdens.

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,' not

only as spoken by His lips, but as set forth in the pattern of His

life. We have, then, to turn to Him, and think of Him as Burden-bearer

in even a deeper sense than the psalmist had discerned, who magnified

God as 'He who daily beareth our burdens.'

Christ is the Burden-bearer of our sin. 'The Lord hath laid'--or made

to meet--'upon Him the iniquity of us all.' The Baptist pointed his

lean, ascetic finger at the young Jesus, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of

God which beareth'--and beareth away--'the sin of the world.' How heavy

the load, how real its pressure, let Gethsemane witness, when He clung

to human companionship with the unutterably solemn and plaintive words,

'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here and

watch with Me.' He bore the burden of the world's sin.

Jesus Christ is the bearer of the burden of the consequences of sin,

not only inasmuch as, in His sinless humanity, He knew by sympathy the

weight of the world's sin, but because in that same humanity, by

identification of Himself with us, deeper and more wonderful than our

plummets have any line long enough to sound the abysses of, He took the

cup of bitterness which our sins have mixed, and drank it all when He

said, 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Consequences still

remain: thank God that they do! 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them,

and Thou didst inflict retribution on their inventions.' So the

outward, the present, the temporal consequences of transgression are

left standing in all their power, in order that transgressors may

thereby be scourged from their evil, and led to forsake the thing that

has wrought them such havoc. But the ultimate consequence, the deepest

of all, separation from God, has been borne by Christ, and need never

be borne by us.

I suppose I need not dwell on the other aspects of this burden-bearing

of our Lord, how that He, in a very deep and real sense, takes upon

Himself the sorrows which we bear in union with, and faith on, Him. For

then the griefs that still come to us, when so borne, are transmitted

into 'light affliction which is but for a moment.' 'In all their

afflictions He was afflicted.' Oh, brethren! you with sad hearts, you

with lonely lives, you with carking cares, you with pressing, heavy

duties, cast your burden on the Christ, and He 'will sustain you,' and

sorrows borne in union with Him will change their character, and the

very cross shall be wreathed in flowers.

Jesus bears the burden of that solemn solitude which our personal being

lays upon us all. The rest of us stand round, and, as I said, hoist

signals of sympathy, and sometimes can stretch a brotherly hand out and

grasp the sufferer's hand. But their help comes from without; Christ

comes in, and dwells in our hearts, and makes us no longer alone in the

depths of our being, which He fills with the effulgence and peace of

His companionship. And so for sin, for guilt, for responsibility, for

sorrow, for holiness, Christ bears our burdens.

Yes! And when He takes ours on His shoulders, He puts His on ours. 'My

yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' As the old mystics used to say,

Christ's burden carries him that carries it. It may add a little

weight, but it gives power to soar, and it gives power to progress. It

is like the wings of a bird, it is like the sails of a ship.

III. Lastly, Christ's carrying our burdens binds us to carry our

brother's!

'So fulfil the law of Christ.' There is a very biting sarcasm, and, as

I said about another matter, a grave irony in Paul's use of that word

'law' here. For the whole of this Epistle has been directed against the

Judaising teachers who were desirous of cramming Jewish law down

Galatian throats, and is addressed to their victims in the Galatian

churches who had fallen into the trap. Paul turns round on them here,

and says, 'You want law, do you? Well, if you will have it, here it

is--the law of Christ.' Christ's life is our law. Practical

Christianity is doing what Christ did. The Cross is not only the ground

of our hope, but the pattern of our conduct.

And, says Paul in effect, the example of Jesus Christ, in all its

sweep, and in all the depth of it, is the only motive by which this

injunction that I am giving you will ever be fulfilled. 'Bear ye one

another's burdens.' You will never do that unless you have Christ as

the ground of your hope, and His great sacrifice as the example for

your conduct. For the hindrance that prevents sympathy is

self-absorption; and that natural selfishness which is in us all will

never be exorcised and banished from us thoroughly, so as that we shall

be awake to all the obligations to bear our brother's burdens, unless

Christ has dethroned self, and is the Lord of our inmost spirits.

I rejoice as much as any man in the largely increased sense of mutual

responsibility and obligation of mutual aid, which is sweetening

society by degrees amongst us to-day, but I believe that no Socialistic

or other schemes for the regeneration of society which are not based on

the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ will live and grow. There

is but one power that will cast out natural selfishness, and that is

love to Christ, apprehending His Cross as the great example to which

our lives are to be conformed. I believe that the growing sense of

brotherhood amongst us, even where it is not consciously connected with

any faith in Christianity, is, to a very large extent, the result of

the diffusion through society of the spirit of Christianity, even where

its body is rejected. Thank God, the river of the water of life can

percolate through many a mile of soil, and reach the roots of trees far

away, in the pastures of the wilderness, that know not whence the

refreshing moisture has come. But on the wide scale be sure of this: it

is the law of Christ that will fight and conquer the natural

selfishness which makes bearing our brother's burdens an impossibility

for men. Only, Christian people! let us take care that we are not

robbed of our prerogative of being foremost in all such things, by men

whose zeal has a less heavenly source than ours ought to have. Depend

upon it, heresy has less power to arrest the progress of the Church

than the selfish lives of Christian professors.

So, dear friends, let us see to it that we first of all cast our own

burdens on the Christ who is able to bear them all, whatever they are.

And then let us, with lightened hearts and shoulders, make our own the

heavy burdens of sin, of sorrow, of care, of guilt, of consequences, of

responsibility, which are crushing down many that are weary and heavy

laden. For be sure of this, if we do not bear our brother's burdens,

the load that we thought we had cast on Christ will roll back upon

ourselves. He is able to bear both us and our burdens, if we will let

Him, and if we will fulfil that law of Christ which was illustrated in

all His life, 'Who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,'

and was written large in letters of blood upon that Cross where there

was 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

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DOING GOOD TO ALL

'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto

all. . . .'--Gal. vi. 10.

'As we have therefore'--that points a finger backwards to what has gone

before. The Apostle has been exhorting to unwearied well-doing, on the

ground of the certain coming of the harvest season. Now, there is a

double link of connection between the preceding words and our text; for

'do good' looks back to 'well-doing,' and the word rendered

'opportunity' is the same as that rendered 'season.' So, then, two

thoughts arise--'well-doing' includes doing good to others, and is not

complete unless it does. The future, on the whole, is the season of

reaping; the present life on the whole is the season of sowing; and

while life as a whole is the seed-time, in detail it is full of

opportunities, openings which make certain good deeds possible, and

which therefore impose upon us the obligation to do them. If we were in

the habit of looking on life mainly as a series of opportunities for

well-doing, how different it would be; and how different we should be!

Now, this injunction is seen to be reasonable by every man, whether he

obeys it or not. It is a commonplace of morality, which finds assent in

all consciences, however little it may mould lives. But I wish to give

it a particular application, and to try to enforce its bearing upon

Christian missionary work. And the thought that I would suggest is just

this, that no Christian man discharges that elementary obligation of

plain morality, if he is indifferent to this great enterprise. 'As we

have an opportunity, let us do good to all.' That is the broad

principle, and one application is the duty of Christian men to diffuse

the Gospel throughout the world.

I. Let me ask you to look at the obligation that is thus suggested.

As I have said, well-doing is the wider, and doing good to others the

narrower, expression. The one covers the whole ground of virtue, the

other declares that virtue which is self-regarding, the culture which

is mainly occupied with self, is lame and imperfect, and there is a

great gap in it, as if some cantle had been cut out of the silver disc

of the moon. It is only full-orbed when in well-doing, and as a very

large constituent element of it, there is included the doing good to

others. That is too plain to need to be stated. We hear a great deal

to-day about altruism. Well, Christianity preaches that more

emphatically than any other system of thought, morals, or religion

does. And Christianity brings the mightiest motives for it, and imparts

the power by which obedience to that great law that every man's

conscience responds to is made possible.

But whilst thus we recognise as a dictate of elementary morality that

well-doing must necessarily include doing good to others, and feel, as

I suppose we all do feel, when we are true to our deepest convictions,

that possessions of all sorts, material, mental, and all others, are

given to us in stewardship, and not in absolute ownership, in order

that God's grace in its various forms may fructify through us to all,

my present point is that, if that is recognised as being what it is, an

elementary dictate of morality enforced by men's relationships to one

another, and sealed by their own consciences, there is no getting away

from the obligation upon all Christian men which it draws after it, of

each taking his share in the great work of imparting the gospel to the

whole world.

For that gospel is our highest good, the best thing that we can carry

to anybody. We many of us recognise the obligation that is devolved

upon us by the possession of wealth, to use it for others as well as

for ourselves. We recognise, many of us, the obligation that is

devolved upon us by the possession of knowledge, to impart it to others

as well as ourselves. We are willing to give of our substance, of our

time, of our effort, to impart much that we have. But some of us seem

to draw a line at the highest good that we have, and whilst responding

to all sorts of charitable and beneficent appeals made to us, and using

our faculties often for the good of other people, we take no share and

no interest in communicating the highest of all goods, the good which

comes to the man in whose heart Christ rests. It is our highest good,

because it deals with our deepest needs, and lifts us to the loftiest

position. The gospel brings our highest good, because it brings eternal

good, whilst all other benefits fade and pass, and are left behind with

life and the dead flesh. It is our highest good, because if that great

message of salvation is received into a heart, or moulds the life of a

nation, it will bring after it, as its ministers and results, all

manner of material and lesser benefit. And so, giving Christ we give

our best, and giving Christ we give the highest gift that a weary world

can receive.

Remember, too, that the impartation of this highest good is one of the

main reasons why we ourselves possess it. Jesus Christ can redeem the

world alone, but it cannot become a redeemed world without the help of

His servants. He needs us in order to carry into all humanity the

energies that He brought into the midst of mankind by His Incarnation

and Sacrifice; and the cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Cavalry are

not sufficient for the accomplishment of the purpose for which they

respectively came to pass, without the intervention and ministry of

Christian people. It was for this end amongst others, that each of us

who have received that great gift into our hearts have been enriched by

it. The river is fed from the fountains of the hills, in order that it

may carry verdure and life whithersoever it goes. And you and I have

been brought to the Cross of Christ, and made His disciples, not only

in order that we ourselves might be blessed and quickened by the gift

unspeakable, but in order that through us it may be communicated, just

as each particle when leavened in the mass of the dough communicates

its energy to its adjacent particle until the whole is leavened.

I am afraid that indifference to the communication of the highest good,

which marks sadly too many Christian professors in all ages, and in

this age, is a suspicious indication of a very slight realisation of

the good for themselves. Luther said that justification was the article

of a standing or a falling church. That may be true in the region of

theology, but in the region of practical life I do not know that you

will find a test more reliable and more easy of application than this,

Does a man care for spreading amongst his fellows the gospel that he

himself has received? If he does not, let him ask himself whether, in

any real sense, he has it. 'Well-doing' includes doing good to others,

and the possession of Christ will make it certain that we shall impart

Him.

II. Notice the bearing of this elementary injunction upon the scope of

the obligation.

'Let us do good to all men.' It was Christianity that invented the word

'humanity'; either in its meaning of the aggregate of men or its

meaning of a gracious attitude towards them. And it invented the word

because it revealed the thing on which it rests. 'Brotherhood' is the

sequel of 'Fatherhood,' and the conception of mankind, beneath all

diversities of race and culture and the like, as being an organic

whole, knit together by a thousand mystical bands, and each atom of

which has connection with, and obligations to, every other--that is a

product of Christianity, however it may have been in subsequent ages

divorced from a recognition of its source. So, then, the gospel rises

above all the narrow distinctions which call themselves patriotism and

are parochial, and it says that there is 'neither circumcision nor

uncircumcision, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,' but

all are one. Get high enough up upon the hill, and the hedges between

the fields are barely perceptible. Live on the elevation to which the

Gospel of Jesus Christ lifts men, and you look down upon a great

prairie, without a fence or a ditch or a division. So my text comes

with profound significance, 'Let us do good to all,' because all are

included in the sweep of that great purpose of love, and in the

redeeming possibilities of that great death on the Cross. Christ has

swept the compass, if I may say so, of His love and work all round

humanity; and are we to extend our sympathies or our efforts less

widely? The circle includes the world; our sympathies should be as wide

as the circle that Christ has drawn.

Let me remind you, too, that only such a world-wide communication of

the highest good that has blessed ourselves will correspond to the

proved power of that Gospel which treats as of no moment diversities

that are superficial, and can grapple with and overcome, and bind to

itself as a crown of glory, every variety of character, of culture, of

circumstance, claiming for its own all races, and proving itself able

to lift them all. 'The Bread of God which came down from heaven' is an

exotic everywhere, because it came down from heaven, but it can grow in

all soils, and it can bring forth fruit unto eternal life everywhere

amongst mankind. So 'let us do good to all.'

And then we are met by the old objection, 'The eyes of a fool are in

the ends of the earth. Keep your work for home, that wants it.' Well! I

am perfectly ready to admit that in Christian work, as in all others

there must be division of labour, and that one man's tastes and

inclinations will lead him to one sphere and one form of it; and

another man's to another; and I am quite ready, not to admit, but

strongly to insist, that, whatever happens, home is not to be

neglected. 'All men' includes the slums in England as well as the

savages in Africa, and it is no excuse for neglecting either of these

departments that we are trying to do something in the other. But it is

not uncharitable to say that the objection to which I am referring is

most often made by one or other of two classes, either by people who do

not care about the Gospel, nor recognise the 'good' of it at all, or by

people who are ingenious in finding excuses for not doing the duty to

which they are at the moment summoned. The people that do the one are

the people that do the other. Where do you get your money from for home

work? Mainly from the Christian Churches. Who is it that keeps up

missionary work abroad? Mainly the Christian Churches. There is a vast

deal of unreality in that objection. Just think of the disproportion

between the embarrassment of riches in our Christian appliances here in

England and the destitution in these distant lands. Here the ships are

crammed into a dock, close up against one another, rubbing their yards

upon each other; and away out yonder on the waters there are leagues of

loneliness, where never a sail is seen. Here, at home, we are drenched

with Christian teaching, and the Churches are competing with each

other, often like rival tradespeople for their customers; and away out

yonder a man to half a million is considered a fair allowance. 'Let us

do good to all.'

III. Lastly, note the bearing of this elementary precept on the

occasions that rise for the discharge of the duty.

'As we have opportunity.' As I have already said, the Christian way to

look at our circumstances is to regard them as openings for the

exercise of Christian virtue, and therefore summonses to its discharge.

And if we regarded our own position individually, so we should find

that there were many, many doors that had long been opened, into which

we had been too blind or too lazy, or too selfishly absorbed in our own

concerns, to enter. The neglected opportunities, the beckoning doors

whose thresholds we have never crossed, the good that we might have

done and have not done--these are as weighty to sink us as the positive

sins, the opportunities for which have appealed to our worse selves.

But I desire to say a word, not only about the opportunities offered to

us individually, but about those offered to England for this great

enterprise. The prophet of old represented the proud Assyrian conqueror

as boasting, 'My hand hath gathered as a nest the riches of the peoples

. . . and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or

peeped.' It might be the motto of England to-day. It is not for nothing

that we and our brethren across the Atlantic, the inheritors of the

same faith and morals and literature, and speaking the same tongue,

have had given to us the wide dominion that we possess, I know that

England has not climbed to her place without many a crime, and that in

her 'skirts is found the blood of poor innocents,' but yet we have that

connection, for good or for evil, with subject races all over the

earth. And I ask whether or not that is an opportunity that the

Christian Church is bound to make use of. What have we been intrusted

with it for? Commerce, dominion, the impartation of Western knowledge,

literature, laws? Yes! Is that all? Are you to send shirting and not

the Gospel? Are you to send muskets that will burst, and gin that is

poison, and not Christianity? Are you to send Shakespeare, and Milton,

and modern science, and Herbert Spencer, and not Evangelists and the

Gospels? Are you to send the code of English law and not Christ's law

of love? Are you to send godless Englishmen, 'through whom the name of

God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles,' and are you not to send

missionaries of the Cross? A Brahmin once said to a missionary, 'Look

here! Your Book is a good Book. If you were as good as your Book you

would make India Christian in ten years.'

Brethren! the European world to-day is fighting and scrambling over

what it calls the unclaimed corners of the world; looking upon all

lands that are uncivilised by Western civilisation either as markets,

or as parts of their empire. Is there no other way of looking at the

heathen world than that? How did Christ look at it? He was moved when

He saw the multitudes as 'sheep having no shepherd.' Oh! if Christian

men, as members of this nation, would rise to the height of Christ's

place of vision, and would look at the world with His eyes, what a

difference it would make! I appeal to you, Christian men and women, as

members of this nation, and therefore responsible, though it may be

infinitesimally, for what this nation is doing in the distant corners

of the world, and urge on you that you are bound, so far as your

influence goes, to protest against the way of looking at these heathen

lands as existing to be exploited for the material benefit of these

Western Powers. You are bound to lend your voice, however weak it may

be, to the protests against the savage treatment of native

races--against the drenching of China with narcotics, and Africa with

rum; to try to look at the world as Christ looked at it, to rise to the

height of that great vision which regards all men as having been in His

heart when He died on the Cross, and refuses to recognise in this great

work 'Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free.' We have awful

responsibilities; the world is open to us. We have the highest good.

How shall we obey this elementary principle of our text, unless we help

as we can in spreading Christ's reign? Blessed shall we be if, and only

if, we fill the seed-time with delightful work, and remember that

well-doing is imperfect unless it includes doing good to others, and

that the best good we can do is to impart the Unspeakable Gift to the

men that need it.

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THE OWNER'S BRAND

'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'--Gal. vi. 17.

The reference in these words is probably to the cruel custom of

branding slaves as we do cattle, with initials or signs, to show their

ownership. It is true that in old times criminals, and certain classes

of Temple servants, and sometimes soldiers, were also so marked, but it

is most in accordance with the Apostle's way of thinking that he here

has reference to the first class, and would represent himself as the

slave of Jesus Christ, designated as His by the scars and weaknesses

which were the consequences of his apostolic zeal. Imprisonment,

beating by the Jewish rod, shipwrecks, fastings, weariness, perils,

persecutions, all these he sums up in another place as being the tokens

by which he was approved as an apostle of Jesus Christ. And here he, no

doubt, has the same thought in his mind, that his bodily weakness,

which was the direct issue of his apostolic work, showed that he was

Christ's. The painful infirmity under which, as we learn, he was more

especially suffering, about the time of writing this letter, may also

have been in his mind.

All through this Epistle he has been thundering and lightning against

the disputers of this apostolic authority. And now at last he softens,

and as it were, bares his thin arm, his scarred bosom, and bids these

contumacious Galatians look upon them, and learn that he has a right to

speak as the representative and messenger of the Lord Jesus.

So we have here two or three points, I think, worth considering. First,

think for a moment of the slave of Christ; then of the brands which

mark the ownership; then of the glory in the servitude and the sign;

and then of the immunity from human disturbances which that service

gives. 'From henceforth let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the

marks of the Lord Jesus.'

I. First, then, a word or two about that conception of the slave of

Christ.

It is a pity that our Bible has not rendered the title which Paul ever

gives himself at the beginning of his letters, by that simple word

'slave,' instead of the feebler one, 'servant.' For what he means when

he calls himself the 'servant of Jesus Christ' is not that he bore to

Christ the kind of relation which servants among us bear to those who

have hired and paid them, and to whom they have come under obligations

of their own will which they can terminate at any moment by their own

caprice; but that he was in the roughest and simplest sense of the

word, Christ's slave.

What lies in that metaphor? Well, it is the most uncompromising

assertion of the most absolute authority on the one hand, and claim of

unconditional submission and subjection on the other.

The slave belonged to his master; the master could do exactly as he

liked with him. If he killed him nobody had anything to say. He could

set him to any task; he could do what he liked with any little

possession or property that the slave seemed to have. He could break

all his relationships, and separate him from wife and kindred.

All that is atrocious and blasphemous when it is applied to the

relations between man and man, but it is a blessed and magnificent

truth when it is applied to the relations between a man and Christ. For

this Lord has absolute authority over us, and He can do what He likes

with everything that belongs to us; and we, and our duties, and our

circumstances, and our relationships, are all in His hands, and the one

thing that we have to render to Him is utter, absolute, unquestioning,

unhesitating, unintermittent and unreserved obedience and submission.

That which is abject degradation when it is rendered to a man, that

which is blasphemous presumption when it is required by a man, that

which is impossible, in its deepest reality, as between man and man, is

possible, is blessed, is joyful and strong when it is required by, and

rendered to, Jesus Christ. We are His slaves if we have any living

relationship to Him at all. Where, then, in the Christian life, is

there a place for self-will; where a place for self-indulgence; where

for murmuring or reluctance; where for the assertion of any rights of

my own as against that Master? We owe absolute obedience and submission

to Jesus Christ.

And what does the metaphor carry as to the basis on which this

authority rests? How did men acquire slaves? Chiefly by purchase. The

abominations of the slave market are a blessed metaphor for the deep

realities of the Christian life. Christ has bought you for His own. The

only thing that gives a human soul the right to have any true authority

over another human soul is that it shall have yielded itself to the

soul whom it would control. We must first of all give ourselves away

before we have the right to possess, and the measure in which we give

ourselves to another is the measure in which we possess another. And so

Christ our Lord, according to the deep words of one of Paul's letters,

'gives Himself for us, that He might purchase unto Himself a people for

His possession.' 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.'

Therefore the absolute authority, and unconditional surrender and

submission which are the very essence of the Christian life, at bottom

are but the corresponding and twofold effects of one thing, and that is

love. For there is no possession of man by man except that which is

based on love. And there is no submission of man to man worth calling

so except that which is also based therein.

'Thou hearts alone wouldst move;

Thou only hearts dost love.'

The relation in both its parts, on the side of the Master and on the

side of the captive bondsman, is the direct result and manifestation of

that love which knits them together.

Therefore the Christian slavery, with its abject submission, with its

utter surrender and suppression of mine own will, with its complete

yielding up of self to the control of Jesus, who died for me; because

it is based upon His surrender of Himself to me, and in its inmost

essence it is the operation of love, is therefore co-existent with the

noblest freedom.

This great Epistle to the Galatians is the trumpet call and clarion

proclamation of Christian liberty. The breath of freedom blows

inspiringly through it all. The very spirit of the letter is gathered

up in one of its verses, 'I have been called unto liberty,' and in its

great exhortation, 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith

Christ hath made you free.' It is then sufficiently remarkable and

profoundly significant that in this very letter, which thus is the

protest of the free Christian consciousness against all limitations and

outward restrictions, there should be this most emphatic declaration

that the liberty of the Christian is slavery and the slavery of the

Christian is freedom. He is free whose will coincides with his outward

law. He is free who delights to do what he must do. He is free whose

rule is love, and whose Master is Incarnate Love. 'If the Son make you

free, ye shall be free indeed.' 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, Thou

hast loosed my bands.' 'I bear in my body' the charter of my liberty,

for I bear in my body the 'brand of the Lord Jesus.'

II. And so now a word in the next place about these marks of ownership.

As I have said, the Apostle evidently means thereby distinctly the

bodily weaknesses, and possibly diseases, which were the direct

consequences of his own apostolic faithfulness and zeal. He considered

that he proved himself to be a minister of God by his stripes,

imprisonments, fastings, by all the pains and sufferings and their

permanent consequences in an enfeebled constitution, which he bore

because he had preached the Cross of Christ. He knew that these things

were the result of his faithful ministry. He believed that they had

been sent by no blundering, blind fate; by no mere secondary causes;

but by his Master Himself, whose hand had held the iron that branded

into the hissing flesh the marks of His ownership. He felt that by

means of these he had been drawn nearer to his Master, and the

ownership had been made more perfect. And so in a rapture of contempt

of pain, this heroic soul looks upon even bodily weakness and suffering

as being the signs that he belonged to Christ, and the means of that

possession being made more perfect.

Now, what is all that to us Christian people who have no persecutions

to endure, and none of whom I am afraid have ever worked hard enough

for Christ to have damaged our health by it? Is there anything in this

text that may be of general application to us all? Yes! I think so.

Every Christian man or woman ought to bear, in his or her body, in a

plain, literal sense, the tokens that he or she belongs to Jesus

Christ. You ask me how? 'If thy foot or thine hand offend thee, cut it

off, and cast it from thee.'

There are things in your physical nature that you have to suppress;

that you have always to regulate and coerce; that you have sometimes

entirely to cast away and to do without, if you mean to be Jesus

Christ's at all. The old law of self-denial, of subduing the animal

nature, its passions, appetites, desires, is as true and as needful

to-day as it ever was; and for us all it is essential to the loftiness

and purity of our Christian life that our animal nature and our fleshly

constitution should be well kept down under heel and subdued. As Paul

himself said in another place, 'I bring under my body, and I keep it in

subjection, lest by any means I should myself, having proclaimed to

others the laws of the contest, be rejected from the prize.' Oh, you

Christian men and women! if you are not living a life of self-denial,

if you are not crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts, if

you are not bearing 'about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,

that the life also of Christ may be manifested in your mortal body,'

what tokens are there that you are Christ's slaves at all?

Then, besides this, we may expand the thought even further, and say

that, in a very real sense, all the pains and sorrows and

disappointments and afflictions that mainly touch our mortal part

should be taken by us as, and made by us to be, the tokens that we

belong to the Master.

But it is not only in limitations and restrictions and self-denials and

pains that Christ's ownership of us ought to be manifested in our daily

lives, and so by means of our mortal bodies, but if there be in our

hearts a deep indwelling possession of the grace and sweetness of

Christ, it will make itself visible, ay! even in our faces, and 'beauty

born of' our communion with Him 'shall pass into' and glorify even

rugged and care-lined countenances. There may be, and there ought to

be, in all Christian people, manifestly visible the tokens of the

indwelling serenity of the indwelling Christ. And it should not be left

to some moment of rapture at the end of life, for men to look upon us,

to behold our faces, 'as it had been the face of an angel,' but by our

daily walk, by our countenances full of a removed tranquillity, and a

joy that rises from within, men ought to take knowledge of us that we

have been with Jesus, and it should be the truth--I bear in my body the

tokens of His possession.

III. Now, once more notice the glorying in the slavery and its signs.

'I bear,' says Paul; and he uses, as many of you may know, a somewhat

remarkable word, which does not express mere bearing in the sense of

toleration and patient endurance, although that is much; nor mere

bearing in the sense of carrying, but implies bearing with a certain

triumph as men would do who, coming back victorious from conflict, and

being received into the city, were proud to show their scars, the

honourable signs of their courage and constancy. So, with a triumph

that is legitimate, the Apostle solemnly and proudly bears before men

the marks of the Lord Jesus. Just as he says in another place:--'Thanks

be unto God, which always leadeth us about in triumph in Jesus Christ,'

He was proud of being dragged at the conqueror's chariot wheels,

chained to them by the cords of love; and so he was proud of being the

slave of Christ.

It is a degradation to a man to yield abject submission, unconditional

service to another man. It is the highest honour of our natures so to

bow before that dear Lord. To prostrate ourselves to Him is to lift

ourselves high in the scale of being. The King's servant is every other

person's master. And he that feels that he is Christ's, may well be,

not proud but conscious, of the dignity of belonging to such a Lord.

The monarch's livery is a sign of honour. In our old Saxon kingdom the

king's menials were the first nobles. So it is with us. The aristocracy

of humanity are the slaves of Jesus Christ.

And let us be proud of the marks of the branding iron, whether they

come in the shape of sorrows and pains, or otherwise. It is well that

we should have to carry these. It is blessed, and a special mark of the

Master's favour that He should think it worth His while to mark us as

His own, by any sorrow or by any pain. Howsoever hot may be the iron,

and howsoever deeply it may be pressed by His firm, steady, gentle hand

upon the quivering flesh and the shrinking heart, let us be thankful if

He, even by it, impresses on us the manifest tokens of ownership. Oh,

brethren! if we could come to look upon sorrows and losses with this

clear recognition of their source, meaning and purpose, they change

their nature, the paradox is fulfilled that we do 'gather grapes of

thorns and figs of thistles.' 'I bear in my body,' with a solemn

triumph and patient hope, 'the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

IV. And now, lastly, the immunity from any disturbance which men can

bring, which these marks, and the servitude they express, secure.

'From henceforth let no man trouble me.' Paul claims that his apostolic

authority, having been established by the fact of his sufferings for

Christ, should give him a sacredness in their eyes; that henceforth

there should be no rebellion against his teaching and his word. We may

expand the thought to apply more to ourselves, and say that, in the

measure in which we belong to Christ, and hear the marks of His

possession of us, in that measure are we free from the disturbance of

earthly influences and of human voices; and from all the other sources

of care and trouble, of perturbation and annoyance, which harass and

vex other men's spirits. 'Ye are bought with a price,' says Paul

elsewhere. 'Be not the servants of men.' Christ is your Master; do not

let men trouble you. Take your orders from Him; let men rave as they

like. Be content to be approved by Him; let men think of you as they

please. The Master's smile is life, the Master's frown is death to the

slave; what matters it what other people may say? 'He that judgeth me

is the Lord.' So keep yourselves above the cackle of 'public opinion';

do not let your creed be crammed down your throats even by a consensus

of however venerable and grave human teachers. Take your directions

from your Master, and pay no heed to other voices if they would

command. Live to please Him, and do not care what other people think.

You are Christ's servant; 'let no man trouble' you.

And so it should be about all the distractions and petty annoyances

that disturb human life and harass our hearts. A very little breath of

wind will ruffle all the surface of a shallow pond, though it would

sweep across the deep sea and produce no effect. Deepen your natures by

close union with Christ, and absolute submission to Him, and there will

be a great calm in them, and cares and sorrows, and all the external

sources of anxiety, far away, down there beneath your feet, will 'show

scarce so gross as beetles,' whilst you stand upon the high cliff and

look down upon them all. 'From henceforth no man shall trouble me.' 'I

bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

My brother! Whose marks do you bear? There are only two masters. If an

eye that could see things as they are, were to go through this

congregation, whose initials would it discern in your faces? There are

some of us, I have no doubt, who in a very horrid sense bear in our

bodies the marks of the idol that we worship. Men who have ruined their

health by dissipation and animal sensualism--are there any of them here

this morning? Are there none of us whose faces, whose trembling hands,

whose diseased frames, are the tokens that they belong to the flesh and

the world and the devil? Whose do you bear?

Oh! when one looks at all the faces that pass one upon the street--this

all drawn with avarice and earthly-mindedness; that all bloated with

self-indulgence and loose living--when one sees the mean faces, the

passionate faces, the cruel faces, the vindictive faces, the lustful

faces, the worldly faces, one sees how many of us bear in our bodies

the marks of another lord. They have no rest day nor night who worship

the beast; and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

I pray you, yield yourselves to your true Lord, so on earth you may

bear the beginnings of the likeness that stamps you His, and hereafter,

as one of His happy slaves, shall do priestly service at His throne and

see His face, and His name shall be in your foreheads.

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PHILIPPIANS

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LOVING GREETINGS

'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in

Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, 4. Always in every

supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with

joy, 5. For your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first

day until now; 6. Being confident of this very thing that He which

began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ:

7. Even as it is right for me to be thus minded on behalf of you all,

because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as, both in my bonds and in

the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with

me of grace. 8. For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the

tender mercies of Christ Jesus.'--Phil. i. 1-8 (R.V.).

The bond between Paul and the church at Philippi was peculiarly close.

It had been founded by himself, as is narrated at unusual length in the

book of Acts. It was the first church established in Europe. Ten years

had elapsed since then, possibly more. Paul is now a prisoner in Rome,

not suffering the extremest rigour of imprisonment, but still a

prisoner in his own hired house, accessible to his friends and able to

do work for God, but still in the custody of soldiers, chained and

waiting till the tardy steps of Roman law should come up to him, or

perhaps till the caprice of Nero should deign to hear his cause. In

that imprisonment we have his letters to the Philippians, Ephesians,

Colossians, and Philemon, which latter three are closely connected in

time, the two former in subject, and the two latter in destination.

This letter stands apart from those to the great Asiatic churches.

Its tone and general cast are unlike those of most of his letters. It

contains no doctrinal discussions and no rebukes of evil, but is an

outpouring of happy love and confidence. Like all Paul's epistles it

begins with salutations, and like most of them with prayer, but from

the very beginning is a long gush of love. These early verses seem to

me very beautiful if we regard them either as a revelation of the

personal character of the Apostle, or as a picture of the relation

between teacher and taught in its most blessed and undisturbed form, or

as a lovely ideal of friendship and love in any relation, hallowed and

solemnised by Christian feeling.

Verses one and two contain the apostolic greeting. In it we note the

senders. Timothy is associated with Paul, according to his custom in

all his letters even when he goes on immediately to speak in the

singular. He ever sought to hide his own supremacy and to bring his

friends into prominence. He was a great, lowly soul, who had no pride

in the dignity of his position but felt the weight of its

responsibility and would fain have had it shared. He calls Timothy and

himself the slaves of Christ. He regarded it as his highest honour to

be Christ's born servant, bound to absolute submission to the

all-worthy Lord who had died to win him. It is to be noted that there

is no reference here to apostolic authority, and the contrast is very

remarkable in this respect with the Epistle to the Galatians, where

with scornful emphasis he asserts it as bestowed 'not from men, neither

through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.' In this

designation of himself, we have already the first trace of the intimate

and loving relationship in which Paul stood to the Philippians. There

was no need for him to assert what was not denied, and he did not wish

to deal with them officially, but rather personally. There is a similar

omission in Philemon and a pathetic substitution there of the 'prisoner

of Jesus Christ' for the 'slave of Christ Jesus.'

The persons addressed are 'all the saints in Christ Jesus.' As he had

not called himself an apostle, so he does not call them a church. He

will not lose in an abstraction the personal bond which unites them.

They are saints, which is not primarily a designation of moral purity,

but of consecration to God, from whom indeed purity flows. The

primitive meaning of the word is separation; the secondary meaning is

holiness, and the connection between these two meanings contains a

whole ethical philosophy. They are saints in Christ Jesus; union with

Him is the condition both of consecration and of purity.

The Philippian community had an organisation primitive but sufficient.

We do not enter on the discussion of its two offices further than to

note that the bishops are evidently identical with the elders, in the

account in Acts xx. of Paul's parting with the Ephesian Christians,

where the same persons are designated by both titles, as is also the

case in Titus i. 5 and 7; the one name (elder) coming from the Hebrew

and designating the office on the side of dignity, the other (bishop)

being of Greek origin and representing it in terms of function. We note

that there were several elders then in the Philippian church, and that

their place in the salutation negatives the idea of hierarchical

supremacy.

The benediction or prayer for grace and peace is couched in the form

which it assumes in all Paul's letters. It blends Eastern and Western

forms of greeting. 'Grace' being the Greek and 'Peace' the Hebrew form

of salutation. So Christ fuses and fulfils the world's desires. The

grace which He gives is the self-imparting love of God, the peace which

He gives is its consequence, and the salutation is an unmistakable

evidence of Paul's belief in Christ's divinity.

This salutation is followed by a great burst of thankful love, for the

full apprehension of which we must look briefly at the details of these

verses. We have first Paul's thankfulness in all his remembrance of the

Philippians, then he further defines the times of his thankfulness as

'always in every supplication of mind on behalf of you all making my

supplication with joy.' His gratitude for them is expressed in all his

prayers which are all thank-offerings. He never thinks of them nor

prays for them without thanking God for them. Then comes the reason for

his gratitude--their fellowship in furtherance of the gospel, from the

first day when Lydia constrained him to come into her house, until this

moment when now at the last their care of him had flourished again. The

Revised Version's rendering 'fellowship in furtherance of' instead of

'fellowship in' conveys the great lesson which the other rendering

obscures--that the true fellowship is not in enjoyment but in service,

and refers not so much to a common participation in the blessedness as

in the toils and trials of Christian work. This is apparent in an

immediately following verse where the Philippians' fellowship with

Christ is again spoken of as consisting in sharing both in His bonds

and in the double work of defending the gospel from gainsayers and in

positively proclaiming it. Very beautifully in this connection does he

designate that work and toil as 'my grace.'

The fellowship which thus is the basis of his thanksgiving leads on to

a confidence which he cherishes for them and which helps to make his

prayers joyful thanksgivings. And such confidence becomes him because

he has them in his heart, and 'love hopeth all things' and delights to

believe in and anticipate all good concerning its object. He has them

in his heart because they faithfully share with him his honourable,

blessed burdens. But that is not all, it is 'in the tender mercies' of

Christ that he loved them. His love is the love of Christ in him; his

being is so united to Jesus that his heart beats with the same emotion

as throbs in Christ's, and all that is merely natural and of self in

his love is changed into a solemn participation in the great love which

Christ has to them. This, then, being the general exposition of the

words, let us now dwell for a little while on the broad principles

suggested by them.

I. Participation in the work of Christ is the noblest basis for love

and friendship.

Paul had tremendous courage and yet hungered for sympathy. He had no

outlets for his love but his fellow Christians. There had, no doubt,

been a wrenching of the ties of kindred when he became a Christian, and

his love, dammed back and restrained, had to pour itself on his

brethren.

The Church is a workshop, not a dormitory, and every Christian man and

woman is bound to help in the common cause. These Philippians help Paul

by sympathy and gifts, indeed, but by their own direct work as well,

and things are not right with us unless leaders can say, 'Ye all are

partakers of my grace.' There are other real and sweet bonds of love

and friendship, but the most real and sweetest is to be found in our

common relation to Jesus Christ and in our co-operation in the work

which is ours because it is His and we are His.

II. Thankful, glad prayer flows from such co-operation.

The prisoner in his bonds in the alien city had the remembrance of his

friends coming into his chamber like fresh, cool air, or fragrance from

far-off gardens. A thrill of gladness was in his soul as often as he

thought on them. It is blessed if in our experience teacher and taught

are knit together thus; without some such bond of union no good will be

done. The relation of pastor and people is so delicate and spiritual,

the purpose of it so different from that of mere teaching, the laws of

it so informal and elastic, the whole power of it, therefore, so

dependent on sympathy and mutual kindliness that, unless there be

something like the bond which united Paul and the Philippians, there

will be no prosperity or blessing. The thinnest film of cloud prevents

deposition of dew. If all men in pulpits could say what Paul said of

the Philippians, and all men in pews could deserve to have it said of

them, the world would feel the power of a quickened Church.

III. Confidence is born of love and common service.

Paul delights to think that God will go on because God has already

begun a good work in them, and Paul delights to think of their

perfection because he loves them. 'God is not a man that He should lie,

or the son of man that He should repent.' His past is the guarantee for

His future; what He begins He finishes.

IV. Our love is hallowed and greatened in the love of Christ.

Paul lived, yet not he, but Christ lived in him. It is but one

illustration of the principle of his being that Christ who was the life

of his life, is the heart of his love. He longed after his Philippian

friends in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. This and this only is

the true consecration of love when we live and love in the Lord; when

we will as Christ does, think as He does, love as He does, when the

mind that was in Christ Jesus was in us. It is needful to guard against

the intrusion of mere human affection and regard into our sacred

relations in the Church; it is needful to guard against it in our own

personal love and friendship. Let us see that we ourselves know and

believe the love wherewith Christ hath loved us, and then let us see

that that love dwells in us informing and hallowing our hearts, making

them tender with His great tenderness, and turning all the water of our

earthly affections into the new wine of His kingdom. Let the law for

our hearts, as well as for our minds and wills, be 'I live, yet not I

but Christ liveth in me.'

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A COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER

'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in

knowledge and all discernment; 10. So that ye may approve the things

that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the

day of Christ; 11. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which

are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.'--Phil. i.

9-11 (R.V.).

What a blessed friendship is that of which the natural language is

prayer! We have many ways, thank God, of showing our love and of

helping one another, but the best way is by praying for one another.

All that is selfish and low is purged out of our hearts in the act,

suspicions and doubts fade away when we pray for those whom we love.

Many an alienation would have melted like morning mists if it had been

prayed about, added tenderness and delicacy come to our friendships so

like the bloom on ripening grapes. We may test our loves by this simple

criterion--Can we pray about them? If not, should we have them? Are

they blessings to us or to others?

This prayer, like all those in Paul's epistles, is wonderfully full.

His deep affection for, and joy in, the Philippian church breathes in

every word of it. Even his jealous watchfulness saw nothing in them to

desire but progress in what they possessed. Such a desire is the

highest that love can frame. We can wish nothing better for one another

than growth in the love of God. Paul's estimate of the highest good of

those who were dearest to him was that they should be more and more

completely filled with the love of God and with its fruits of holiness

and purity, and what was his supreme desire for the Philippians is the

highest purpose of the gospel for us all, and should be the aim of our

effort and longing, dominating all others as some sovereign mountain

peak towers above the valleys. Looking then at this prayer as

containing an outline of true progress in the Christian life, we may

note:

I. The growth in keenness of conscience founded on growth in love.

Paul does not merely desire that their love may abound, but that it may

become more and more 'rich in knowledge and all discernment.' The

former is perhaps accurate knowledge, and the latter the application of

it. 'Discernment' literally means 'sense,' and here, of course, when

employed about spiritual and moral things it means the power of

apprehending good and bad as such. It is, I suppose, substantially

equivalent to conscience, the moral tact or touch of the soul by which,

in a manner analogous to bodily sense, it ascertains the moral

character of things. This growth of love in the power of spiritual and

moral discernment is desired in order to its exercise in 'proving

things that differ.' It is a process of discrimination and testing that

is meant, which is, I think, fairly represented by the more modern

expression which I have used--keenness of conscience.

I need spend little time in remarking on the absolute need of such a

process of discrimination. We are surrounded by temptations to evil,

and live in a world where maxims and principles not in accordance with

the gospel abound. Our own natures are but partially sanctified. The

shows of things must be tested. Apparent good must be proved. The

Christian life is not merely to unfold itself in peace and order, but

through conflict. We are not merely to follow impulses, or to live as

angels do, who are above sin, or as animals do who are beneath it. When

false coin is current it is folly to accept any without a test. All

around us there is glamour, and so within us there is need for careful

watchfulness and quick discrimination.

This keenness of conscience follows on the growth of love. Nothing

makes a man more sensitive to evil than a hearty love to God. Such a

heart is keener to discern what is contrary to its love than any

ethical maxims can make it. A man who lives in love will be delivered

from the blinding influence of his own evil tastes, and a heart

steadfast in love will not be swayed by lower temptations. Communion

with God will, from its very familiarity with Him, instinctively

discern the evil of evil, as a man coming out of pure air is conscious

of vitiated atmosphere which those who dwell in it do not perceive. It

used to be said that Venice glass would shiver into fragments if poison

were poured into the cup. As evil spirits were supposed to be cast out

by the presence of an innocent child or a pure virgin, so the ugly

shapes that sometimes tempt us by assuming fair disguises will be shown

in their native hideousness when confronted with a heart filled with

the love of God.

Such keenness of judgment is capable of indefinite increase. Our

consciences should become more and more sensitive: we should always be

advancing in our discovery of our own evils, and be more conscious of

our sins, the fewer we have of them. Twilight in a chamber may reveal

some foul things, and the growing light will disclose more. 'Secret

faults' will cease to be secret when our love abounds more and more in

knowledge, and in all discernment.

II. The purity and completeness of character flowing from this keenness

of conscience.

The Apostle desires that the knowledge which he asks for his Philippian

friends may pass over into character, and he describes the sort of men

which he desires them to be in two clauses, 'sincere and void of

offence' being the one, 'filled with the fruits of righteousness' being

the other. The former is perhaps predominantly negative, the latter

positive. That which is sincere is so because when held up to the light

it shows no flaws, and that which is without offence is so because the

stones in the path have been cleared away by the power of

discrimination, so that there is no stumbling. The life which discerns

keenly will bring forth the fruit which consists of righteousness, and

that fruit is to fill the whole nature so that no part shall be without

it.

Nothing lower than this is the lofty standard towards which each

Christian life is to aim, and to which it can indefinitely approximate.

It is not enough to aim at the negative virtue of sincerity so that the

most searching scrutiny of the web of our lives shall detect no flaws

in the weaving, and no threads dropped or broken. There must also be

the actual presence of positive righteousness filling life in all its

parts. That lofty standard is pressed upon us by a solemn motive, 'unto

the day of Christ.' We are ever to keep before us the thought that in

that coming day all our works will be made manifest, and that all of

them should be done, so that when we have to give account of them we

shall not be ashamed.

The Apostle takes it for granted here that if the Philippian Christians

know what is right and what is wrong, they will immediately choose and

do the right. Is he forgetting the great gulf between knowledge and

practice? Not so, but he is strong in the faith that love needs only to

know in order to do. The love which abounds more and more in knowledge

and in all discernment will be the soul of obedience, and will delight

in fulfilling the law which it has delighted in beholding. Other

knowledge has no tendency to lead to practice, but this knowledge which

is the fruit of love has for its fruit righteousness.

III. The great Name in which this completeness is secured.

The Apostle's prayer dwells not only on the way by which a Christian

life may increase itself, but in its close reaches the yet deeper

thought that all that growth comes 'through Jesus Christ.' He is the

Giver of it all, so that we are not so much called to a painful toil as

to a glad reception. Our love fills us with the fruits of

righteousness, because it takes all these from His hands. It is from

His gift that conscience derives its sensitiveness. It is by His

inspiration that conscience becomes strong enough to determine action,

and that even our dull hearts are quickened into a glow of desiring to

have in our lives, the law of the spirit of life, that was in Christ

Jesus, and to make our own all that we see in Him of 'things that are

lovely and of good report.'

The prayer closes with a reference to the highest end of all our

perfecting--the glory and praise of God; the former referring rather to

the transcendent majesty of God in itself, and the latter to the

exaltation of it by men. The highest glory of God comes from the

gradual increase in redeemed men's likeness to Him. They are 'the

secretaries of His praise,' and some portion of that great honour and

responsibility lies on each of us. If all Christian men were what they

all might be and should be, swift and sure in their condemnation of

evil and loyal fidelity to conscience, and if their lives were richly

hung with ripened clusters of the fruits of righteousness, the glory of

God would be more resplendent in the world, and new tongues would break

into praise of Him who had made men so like Himself.

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A PRISONER'S TRIUMPH

'Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened

unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; 13. So

that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole pr�torian

guard, and to all the rest; 14. And that most of the brethren in the

Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to

speak the word of God without fear. 15. Some indeed preach Christ even

of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16. The one do it of

love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel: 17. But the

other proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely, thinking to raise up

affliction for me in my bonds. 18. What then? only that in every way,

whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I

rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. 19. For I know that this shall turn to

my salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of

Jesus Christ. 20. According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in

nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always,

so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by

death.'--Phil. i. 12-20 (R.V.)

Paul's writings are full of autobiography, that is partly owing to

temperament, partly to the profound interpenetration of his whole

nature with his religion. His theology was but the generalisation of

his experience. He has felt and verified all that he has to say. But

the personal experiences of this sunny letter to his favourite church

have a character all their own. In that atmosphere of untroubled love

and sympathy a shyer heart than Paul's would have opened: his does so

in tenderness, gladness, and trust. We have here the unveiling of his

inmost self in response to what he knew would be an eager desire for

news of his welfare. This whole section appears to me to be a wonderful

revelation of his prison thoughts, an example of what we may call the

ennobling power of a passionate enthusiasm for Christ. Remember that he

is a prisoner, shut out from his life's work, waiting to be tried

before Nero, whose reign had probably, by this time, passed from its

delusive morning of dewy promise to its lurid noon. The present and the

future were dark for him, and yet in spite of them all comes forth this

burst of undaunted courage and noble gladness. We simply follow the

course of the words as they lie, and we find in them,

I. An absorbing purpose which bends all circumstances to its service

and values them only as instruments.

The things which happened unto me; that is Paul's minimising euphemism

for the grim realities of imprisonment, or perhaps for some recent

ominous turns in his circumstances. To him they are not worth dwelling

on further, nor is their personal incidence worth taking into account;

the only thing which is important is to say how these things have

affected his life's work. It is enough for him, and he believes that it

will be enough even for his loving friends at Philippi to know that,

instead of their being as they might have feared, and as he sometimes

when he was faithless expected, hindrances to his work, they have

turned out rather to 'the furtherance of the gospel.' Whether he has

been comfortable or not is a matter of very small importance, the main

thing is that Christ's work has been helped, and then he goes on to

tell two ways in which his imprisonment had conduced to this end.

'My bonds became manifest in Christ.' It has been clearly shown why I

was a prisoner; all the Pr�torian guard had learned what Paul was there

for. We know from Acts that he was 'suffered to abide by himself with

the soldier that kept him.' He has no word to say of the torture of

compulsory association, night and day, with the rude legionaries, or of

the horrors of such a presence in his sweetest, sacredest moments of

communion with his Lord. These are all swallowed up in the thought as

they were in the fact, that each new guard as he came to sit there

beside Paul was a new hearer, and that by this time he must have told

the story of Christ and His love to nearly the whole corps. That is a

grand and wonderful picture of passionate earnestness and absorbed

concentration in one pursuit. Something of the same sort is in all

pursuits, the condition of success and the sure result of real

interest. We have all to be specialists if we would succeed in any

calling. The river that spreads wide flows slow, and if it is to have a

scour in its current it must be kept between high banks. We have to

bring ourselves to a point and to see that the point is red-hot if we

mean to bore with it. If our limitations are simply enforced by

circumstances, they may be maiming, but if they come of clear insight

and free choice of worthy ends, they are noble. The artist, the

scholar, the craftsman, all need to take for their motto 'This one

thing I do.' I suppose that a man would not be able to make a good

button unless he confined himself to button-making. We see round us

abundant examples of men who, for material aims and almost

instinctively, use all circumstances for one end and appraise them

according to their relations to that, and they are quoted as

successful, and held up to young souls as patterns to be imitated. Yes!

But what about the man who does the same in regard to Christ and His

work? Is he thought of as an example to be imitated or as a warning to

be avoided? Is not the very same concentration when applied to

Christian work and living thought to be fanatical, which is welcomed

with universal applause when it is directed to lower pursuits? The

contrast of our eager absorption in worldly things and of the ease with

which any fluttering butterfly can draw us away from the path which

leads us to God, ought to bring a blush to all cheeks and penitence to

all hearts. There was no more obligation on Paul to look at the

circumstances of his life thus than there is on every Christian to do

so. We do not desire that all should be apostles, but the Apostle's

temper and way of looking at 'the things which happened unto' him

should be our way of looking at the things which happen unto us. We

shall estimate them rightly, and as God estimates them, only when we

estimate them according to their power to serve our souls and to

further Christ's kingdom.

II. The magnetism or contagion of enthusiasm.

The second way by which Paul's circumstances furthered the gospel was

'that most of the brethren, being confident through my bonds, are more

abundantly bold to speak the word of God.' His constancy and courage

stirred them up. Moved by good-will and love, they were heartened to

preach because they saw in him one 'appointed by God for the defence of

the gospel.' A soul all on flame has power to kindle others. There is

an old story of a Scottish martyr whose constancy at the stake touched

so many hearts that 'a merry gentleman' said to Cardinal Beaton, 'If ye

burn any more you should burn them in low cellars, for the reek (smoke)

of Mr. Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon.'

It is not only in the case of martyrs that enthusiasm is contagious.

However highly we may estimate the impersonal forces that operate for

'the furtherance of the gospel' we cannot but see that in all ages,

from the time of Paul down to to-day, the main agents for the spread of

the gospel have been individual souls all aflame with the love of God

in Christ Jesus and filled with the life of His Spirit. The history of

the Church has largely consisted in the biographies of its saints, and

every great revival of religion has been the flame kindled round a

flaming heart. Paul was impelled by his own love; the brethren in Rome

were in a lower state as only reflecting his, and it ought to be the

prerogative of every Christian to be a centre and source of kindling

influence rather than a mere recipient of it. It is a question which

may well be asked by each of us about ourselves--would anybody find

quickening impulses to divine life and Christian service coming from

us, or do we simply serve to keep others' coldness in countenance? It

was said of old of Jesus Christ, 'He shall baptize you in the Holy

Ghost and in fire,' and that promise remains effective to-day, however

little one looking on the characters of the mass of so-called

Christians would believe it. They seem rather to have been plunged into

ice-cold water than into fire, and their coldness is as contagious as

Paul's radiant enthusiasm was. Let us try, for our parts, to radiate

out the warmth of the love of God, that it may kindle in others the

flame which it has lighted in ourselves, and not be like icebergs

floating southwards and bringing down the temperature of even the very

temperate seas in which we find ourselves.

III. The wide tolerance of such enthusiasm.

It is stigmatised as 'narrow,' which to-day is the sin of sins, but it

is broad with the true breadth. Such enthusiasm lifts a man high enough

to see over many hedges and to be tolerant even of intolerance, and of

the indifference which tolerates everything but earnestness. Paul here

deals with a class amongst the Roman Christians who were 'preaching of

envy and strife,' with the malicious calculation that so they would

annoy him and 'add affliction' to his bonds. It is generally supposed

that these were Judaising Christians against whom Paul fulminates in

all his letters, but I confess that, notwithstanding the arguments of

authoritative commentators, I cannot believe that they are the same set

of men preaching the same doctrines which in other places he treats as

destructive of the whole gospel. The change of tone is so great as to

require the supposition of a change of subjects, and the Judaisers with

whom the Apostle waged a neverending warfare, never did evangelistic

work amongst the heathen as these men seem to have done, but confined

themselves to trying to pervert converts already made. It was not their

message but their spirit that was faulty. With whatever purpose of

annoyance they were animated, they did 'preach Christ,' and Paul

superbly brushes aside all that was antagonistic to him personally, in

his triumphant recognition that the one thing needful was spoken, even

from unworthy motives and with a malicious purpose. The situation here

revealed, strange though it appears with our ignorance of the facts, is

but too like much of what meets us still. Do we not know denominational

rivalries which infuse a bitter taint of envy and strife into much

evangelistic earnestness, and is the spectacle of a man preaching

Christ with a taint of sidelong personal motives quite unknown to this

day? We may press the question still more closely home and ask

ourselves if we are entirely free from the influence of such a spirit.

No man who knows himself and has learned how subtly lower motives blend

themselves with the highest will be in haste to answer these questions

with an unconditional 'No,' and no man who looks on the sad spectacle

of competing Christian communities and knows anything of the methods of

competition that are in force, will venture to deny that there are

still those who preach Christ of envy and strife.

It comes, then, to be a testing question for each of us, have we

learned from Paul this lesson of tolerance, which is not the result of

cold indifference, but the outcome of fiery enthusiasm and of a clear

recognition of the one thing needful? Granted that there is preaching

from unworthy motives and modes of work which offend our tastes and

prejudices, and that there are types of evangelistic earnestness which

have errors mixed up with them, are we inclined to say 'Nevertheless

Christ is proclaimed, and therein I rejoice, Yea, and will rejoice'?

Much chaff may be blended with the seeds sown; the chaff will lie inert

and the seed will grow. Such tolerance is the very opposite of the

carelessness which comes from languid indifference. The one does not

mind what a man preaches because it has no belief in any of the things

preached, and to it one thing is as good as another, and none are of

any real consequence. The other proceeds from a passionate belief that

the one thing which sinful men need to hear is the great message that

Christ has lived and died for them, and therefore, it puts all else on

one side and cares nothing for jangling notes that may come in, if only

above them the music of His name sounds out clear and full.

IV. The calm fronting of life and death as equally magnifying Christ.

The Apostle is sure that all the experiences of his prison will turn to

his ultimate salvation, because he is sure that his dear friends in

Philippi will pray for him, and that through their prayers he will

receive a 'supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,' which shall be enough

to secure his steadfastness. His expectation is not that he will escape

from prison or from martyrdom, both of which stand only too clearly

before him, but that whatever may be waiting for him in the future,

'all boldness' will be granted him, so that whether he lives he will

live to the Lord, or whether he dies, he will die to the Lord. He had

so completely accepted it as his life's purpose to magnify Jesus, that

the extremest possible changes of condition came to be insignificant to

him. He had what we may have, the true an�sthetic which will give us a

'solemn scorn of ills' and make even the last and greatest change from

life to death of little account. If we magnify Christ in our lives with

the same passionate earnestness and concentrated absorption as Paul

had, our lives like some train on well-laid rails will enter upon the

bridge across the valley with scarce a jolt. With whatever

differences--and the differences are to us tremendous--the same purpose

will be pursued in life and in death, and they who, living, live to the

praise of Christ, dying will magnify Him as their last act in the body

which they leave. What was it that made possible such a passion of

enthusiasm for a man whom Paul had never seen in the flesh? What

changed the gloomy fuliginous fanaticism of the Pharisee, at whose feet

were laid the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen, into this radiant

light, all aflame with a divine splendour? The only answer is in Paul's

own words, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' That answer is as

true for each of us as it was for him. Does it produce in us anything

like the effects which it produced in him?

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A STRAIT BETWIXT TWO

'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22. But if I live in the

flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot

not. 23. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart,

and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24. Nevertheless to abide

in the flesh is more needful for you. 25. And having this confidence, I

know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance

and joy of faith.'--Phil. i. 21-25.

A preacher may well shrink from such a text. Its elevation of feeling

and music of expression make all sermons on it sound feeble and harsh,

like some poor shepherd's pipe after an organ. But, though this be

true, it may not be useless to attempt, at least, to point out the

course of thought in these grand words. They flow like a great river,

which springs at first with a strong jet from some deep cave, then is

torn and chafed among dividing rocks, and after a troubled middle

course, moves at last with stately and equable current to the sea. The

Apostle's thoughts and feelings have here, as it were, a threefold bent

in their flow. First, we have the clear, unhesitating statement of the

comparative advantages of life and death to a Christian man, when

thought of as affecting himself alone. The one is Christ, the other

gain. But we neither live nor die to ourselves; and no man has a right

to think of life or death only from the point of view of his own

advantage. So the problem is not so simple as it looked. Life here is

the condition of fruitful labour here. There are his brethren and his

work to think of. These bring him to a stand, and check the rising

wish. He knows not which state to prefer. The stream is dammed back

between rocks, and it chafes and foams and seems to lose its way among

them. Then comes a third bend in the flow of thought and feeling, and

he gladly apprehends it as his present duty to remain at his work. If

his own joy is thereby less, his brethren's will be more. If he is not

to depart and be with Christ, he will remain and be with Christ's

friends, which is, in some sort, being with Him too. If he may not have

the gain of death, he will have the fruit of work in life.

Let us try to fill up, somewhat, this meagre outline of the warm stream

that pours through these great words.

I. The simplicity of the comparison between life and death to a

Christian thinking of himself alone.

'To me' is plainly emphatic. It means more than 'in my judgment' or

even 'in my case.' It is equal to 'To me personally, if I stood alone,

and had no one to consider but myself.' 'To live' refers mainly here to

outward practical life of service, and 'to die' should, perhaps, rather

be 'to be dead,' referring, not to the act of dissolution, but to the

state after; not to the entrance chamber, but to the palace to which it

admits.

So we have here grandly set forth the simplicity and unity of the

Christian life. While the words probably refer mainly to outward life,

they presuppose an inward, of which that outward is the expression. In

every possible phase of the word 'life,' Christ is the life of the

Christian. To live is Christ, for He is the mystical source from whom

all ours flows. 'With Thee is the fountain of life,' and all life, both

of body and spirit, is from Him, by Him, and in Him. 'To live is

Christ,' for He is the aim and object, as well as the Lord, of it all,

and no other is worth calling life, but that which is for Him by

willing consecration, as well as from Him by constant derivation. 'To

live is Christ,' for He is the model of all our life, and the one

all-sufficient law for us is to follow Him.

Life is to be as Christ, for Christ, by, in, and from Christ. So shall

there be strength, peace, and freedom in our days. The unity brought

into life thereby will issue in calm blessedness, contrasted wondrously

with the divided hearts and aims which fritter our days into fragments,

and make our lives heaps of broken links instead of chains.

Surely this is the charm which brings rest into the most troubled

history, and nobleness into the lowliest duties. There is nothing so

grand as the unity breathed into our else distracted days by the

all-pervading reference to and presence of Christ. Without that, we are

like the mariners of the old world, who crept timidly from headland to

headland, making each their aim for a while, and leaving each

inevitably behind, never losing sight of shore, nor ever knowing the

wonders of the deep and all the majesty of mid-ocean, nor ever touching

the happy shores beyond, which they reach who carry in their hearts a

compass that ever points to the unseen pole.

Then comes the other great thought, that where life is simply Christ,

death will be simply gain.

Paul, no doubt, shrank from the act of death, as we all do. It was not

the narrow passage which attracted him, but the broad land beyond.

Every other aspect of that was swallowed up in one great thought, which

will occupy us more at length presently. But that word 'gain' suggests

that to Paul's confident faith death was but an increase and

progression in all that was good here. To him it was no loss to lose

flesh and sense and all the fleeting joys with which they link us. To

him death was no destruction of his being, and not even an interruption

of its continuity. Everything that was of any real advantage to him was

to be his after as before. The change was clear gain. Everything good

was to be just as it had been, only better. Nothing was to be dropped

but what it was progress to lose, and whatever was kept was to be

heightened.

How strongly does that view express the two thoughts of the continuity

and intensifying of the Christian life beyond the grave! And what a

contrast does that simple, sublime confidence present to many another

thought of death! To how many men its blackness seems to be the sudden

swallowing up of the light of their very being! To how many more does

it seem to put an end to all their occupations, and to shear their

lives in twain, as remorselessly as the fall of the guillotine severs

the head from the body. How are the light butterfly wings of the

trivialities in which many men and women spend their days to carry them

across the awful gulf? What are the people to do on the other side

whose lives have all been given to purposes and tasks that stop on this

side? Are there shops and mills, or warehouses and drawing-rooms, or

studies and lecture-halls, over there? Will the lives which have not

struck their roots down through all the surface soil to the rock, bear

transplanting? Alas! for the thousands landed in that new country, as

unfit for it by the tenor of their past occupations, as some pale

artisan, with delicate fingers and feeble muscles, set down as a

colonist to clear the forest!

This Paul had a work here which he could carry on hereafter. There

would be no reversal of view, no change in the fundamental character of

his occupations. True, the special forms of work which he had pursued

here would be left behind, but the principle underlying them would

continue. It matters very little to the servant whether he is out in

the cold and wet 'ploughing and tending cattle,' or whether he is

waiting on his master at table. It is service all the same, only it is

warmer and lighter in the house than in the field, and it is promotion

to be made an indoor servant.

So the direction of the life, and the source of the life, and the

fundamentals of the life continue unchanged. Everything is as it was,

only in the superlative degree. To other men the narrow plain on which

their low-lying lives are placed is rimmed by the jagged, forbidding

white peaks. It is cold and dreary on these icy summits where no

creature can live. Perhaps there is land on the other side; who knows?

The pale barrier separates all here from all there; we know not what

may be on the other side. Only we feel that the journey is long and

chill, that the ice and the barren stone appal, and that we never can

carry our household goods, our tools, or our wealth with us up to the

black jaws of the pass.

But for this man the Alps were tunnelled. There was no interruption in

his progress. He would go, he believed, without 'break of gauge,' and

would pass through the darkness, scarcely knowing when it came, and

certainly unchecked for even a moment, right on to the other side where

he would come out, as travellers to Italy do, to fairer plains and

bluer skies, to richer harvests and a warmer sun. No jolt, no pause, no

momentary suspension of consciousness, no reversal, nor even

interruption in his activity, did Paul expect death to bring him, but

only continuance and increase of all that was essential to his life.

He has calmness in his confidence. There is nothing hysterical or

overwrought or morbid in these brief words, so peaceful in their trust,

so moderate and restrained in their rapture. Are our anticipations of

the future moulded on such a pattern? Do we think of it as quietly as

this man did? Are we as tranquilly sure about it? Is there as little

mist of uncertainty about the clearly defined image to our eye as there

was to his? Is our confidence so profound that these brief

monosyllables are enough to state it? Above all, do we know that to die

will be gain, because we can honestly say that to live is Christ? If

so, our hope is valid, and will not yield when we lean heavily upon it

for support in the ford over the black stream. If our hope is built on

anything besides, it will snap then like a rotten pole, and leave us to

stumble helpless among the slippery stones and the icy torrent.

II. The second movement of thought here, which troubles and complicates

this simple decision, as to what is the best for Paul himself, is the

hesitation springing from the wish to help his brethren.

As we said, no man has a right to forget others in settling the

question whether he would live or die. We see the Apostle here brought

to a stand by two conflicting currents of feelings. For himself he

would gladly go, for his friends' sake he is drawn to the opposite

choice. He has 'fallen into a place where two seas meet,' and for a

minute or two his will is buffeted from side to side by the 'violence

of the waves.' The obscurity of his language, arising from its broken

construction, corresponds to the struggle of his feelings. As the

Revised Version has it, 'If to live in the flesh--if this is the fruit

of my work, then what I shall choose, I wot not.' By which fragmentary

sentence, rightly representing as it does the roughness of the Greek,

we understand him to mean that if living on in this life is the

condition of his gaining fruit from his toil, then he has to check the

rising wish, and is hindered from decisive preference either way. Both

motives act upon him, one drawing him deathward, the other holding him

firmly here. He is in a dilemma, pinned in, as it were, between the two

opposing pressures. On the one hand he has the desire (not 'a desire,'

as the English Bible has it, as if it were but one among many) turned

towards departing to be with Christ; but on the other, he knows that

his remaining here is for the present all but indispensable for the

immature faith of the churches which he has founded. So he stands in

doubt for a moment, and the picture of his hesitation may well be

studied by us.

Such a reason for wishing to die in conflict with such a reason for

wishing to live, is as noble as it is rare, and, thank God, as imitable

as it is noble.

Notice the aspect which death wore to his faith. He speaks of it as

'departing,' a metaphor which does not, like many of the flattering

appellations which men give that last enemy, reveal a quaking dread

which cannot bear to look him in his ashen, pale face. Paul calls him

gentle names, because he fears him not at all. To him all the

dreadfulness, the mystery, the pain and the solitude have melted away,

and death has become a mere change of place. The word literally means

to unloose, and is employed to express pulling up the tent-pegs of a

shifting encampment, or drawing up the anchor of a ship. In either case

the image is simply that of removal. It is but striking the earthly

house of this tent; it is but one more day's march, of which we have

had many already, though this is over Jordan. It is but the last day's

journey, and to-morrow there will be no packing up in the morning and

resuming our weary tramp, but we shall be at home, and go no more out.

So has the awful thing at the end dwindled, and the brighter and

greater the land behind it shines, the smaller does it appear.

The Apostle thinks little of dying because he thinks so much of what

comes after. Who is afraid of a brief journey if a meeting with dear

friends long lost is at the end of it? The narrow avenue seems short,

and its roughness and darkness are nothing, because Jesus Christ stands

with outstretched arms at the other end, beckoning us to Himself, as

mothers teach their children to walk. Whosoever is sure that he will be

with Christ can afford to smile at death, and call it but a shifting of

place. And whosoever feels the desire to be with Christ will not shrink

from the means by which that desire is fulfilled, with the agony of

revulsion that it excites in many an imagination. It will always be

solemn, and its physical accompaniments of pain and struggle will

always be more or less of a terror, and the parting, even for a time,

from our dear ones, will always be loss, but nevertheless if we see

Christ across the gulf, and know that one struggle more and we shall

clasp Him with 'inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over measure

for ever,' we shall not dread the leap.

One thought about the future should fill our minds, as it did Paul's,

that it is to be with Christ. How different that nobly simple

expectation, resolving all bliss into the one element, is from the

morbid curiosity as to details, which vulgarises and weakens so much of

even devout anticipation of the future. To us as to him Heaven should

be Christ, and Christ should be Heaven. All the rest is but accident.

Golden harps and crowns, and hidden manna and white robes and thrones,

and all the other representations, are but symbols of the blessedness

of union with Him, or consequences of it. Immortal life and growth in

perfection, both of mind and heart, and the cessation of all that

disturbs, and our investiture with glory and honour, flung around our

poor natures like a royal robe over a naked body, are all but the

many-sided brightnesses that pour out from Him, and bathe in their

rainbowed light those who are with Him.

To be with Christ is all we need. For the loving heart to be near Him

is enough.

'I shall clasp thee again, O soul of my soul,

And with God be the rest.'

Let us not fritter away our imaginations and our hopes on the

subordinate and non-essential accompaniments, but concentrate all their

energy on the one central thought. Let us not lose this gracious image

in a maze of symbols, that, though precious, are secondary. Let us not

inquire, with curiosity that will find no answer, about the unrevealed

wonders and staggering mysteries of that transcendent thought, life

everlasting. Let us not acquire the habit of thinking of the future as

the perfecting of our humanity, without connecting all our speculations

with Him, whose presence will be all of heaven to us all. But let us

keep His serene figure ever clear before our imaginations in all the

blaze of the light, and try to feed our hopes and stay our hearts on

this aspect of heavenly blessedness as the all-embracing one, that all,

each for himself, shall be for ever conscious of Christ's loving

presence, and of the closest union with Him, a union in comparison with

which the dearest and sacredest blendings of heart with heart and life

with life are cold and distant. For the clearness of our hope the fewer

the details the better: for the willingness with which we turn from

life and face the inevitable end, it is very important that we should

have that one thought disengaged from all others. The one full moon,

which dims all the stars, draws the tides after it. These lesser lights

may gem the darkness, and dart down white shafts of brilliance in

quivering reflections on the waves, but they have no power to move

their mass. It is Christ and Christ only who draws us across the gulf

to be with Him, and reduces death to a mere shifting of our encampment.

This is a noble and worthy reason for wishing to die; not because Paul

is disappointed and sick of life, not because he is weighed down with

sorrow, or pain, or loss, or toil, but because he would like to be with

his Master. He is no morbid sentimentalist, he is cherishing no

unwholesome longing, he is not weary of work, he indulges in no

hysterical raptures of desire. What an eloquent simplicity is in that

quiet 'very far better!' It goes straight to one's heart, and says more

than paragraphs of falsetto yearnings. There is nothing in such a wish

to die, based on such a reason, that the most manly and wholesome piety

need be ashamed of. It is a pattern for us all.

The attraction of life contends with the attraction of heaven in these

verses. That is a conflict which many good men know something of, but

which does not take the shape with many of us which it assumed with

Paul. Drawn, as he is, by the supreme desire of close union with his

Master, for the sake of which he is ready to depart, he is tugged back

even more strongly by the thought that, if he stays here, he can go on

working and gaining results from his labour. It does not follow that he

did not expect service if he were with Christ. We may be very sure that

Paul's heaven was no idle heaven, but one of happy activity and larger

service. But he will not be able to help these dear friends at Philippi

and elsewhere who need him, as he knows. So love to them drags at his

skirts, and ties him here.

One can scarcely miss the remarkable contrast between Paul's 'To abide

in the flesh is more needful for you,' and the saying of Paul's Master

to people who assuredly needed His presence more than Philippi needed

Paul's, 'It is expedient for you that I go away.' This is not the place

to work out the profound significance of the contrast, and the

questions which it raises as to whether Christ expected His work to be

finished and His helpfulness ended by His death, as Paul did by his. It

must suffice to have suggested the comparison.

Returning to our text, such a reason for wishing to die, held in check

and overcome by such a reason for wishing to live, is great and noble.

There are few of us who would not own to the mightier attraction of

life; but how few of us who feel that, for ourselves personally, if we

were free to think only of ourselves, we should be glad to go, because

we should be closer to Christ, but that we hesitate for the sake of

others whom we think we can help! Many of us cling to life with a

desperate clutch, like some poor wretch pushed over a precipice and

trying to dig his nails into the rock as he falls. Some of us cling to

it because we dread what is beyond, and our longing to live is the

measure of our dread to die. But Paul did not look forward to a thick

darkness of judgment, or to nothingness. He saw in the darkness a great

light, the light in the windows of his Father's house, and yet he

turned willingly away to his toil in the field, and was more than

content to drudge on as long as he could do anything by his work.

Blessed are they who share his desire to depart, and his victorious

willingness to stay here and labour! They shall find that such a life

in the flesh, too, is being with Christ.

III. Thus the stream of thought passes the rapids and flows on smoothly

to its final phase of peaceful acquiescence.

That is expressed very beautifully in the closing verse, 'Having this

confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for

your furtherance and joy in faith.' Self is so entirely overcome that

he puts away his own desire to enter into their joy, and rejoices with

them. He cannot yet have for himself the blessedness which his spirit

seeks. Well, be it so; he will stop here and find a blessedness in

seeing them growing in confidence and knowledge of Christ and in the

gladness that comes from it. He gives up the hope of that higher

companionship with Jesus which drew him so mightily. Well, be it so; he

will have companionship with his brethren, and 'abiding with you all'

may haply find, even before the day of final account, that to 'visit'

Christ's little ones is to visit Christ. Therefore he fuses his

opposing wishes into one. He is no more in a strait betwixt two, or

unwitting what he shall choose. He chooses nothing, but accepts the

appointment of a higher wisdom. There is rest for him, as for us, in

ceasing from our own wishes, and laying our wills silent and passive at

His feet.

The true attitude for us in which to face the unknown future, with its

dim possibilities, and especially the supreme alternative of life or

death, is neither desire nor reluctance, nor a hesitation compounded of

both, but trustful acquiescence. Such a temper is far from

indifference, and as far from agitation. In all things, and most of all

in regard to these matters, it is best to hold desire in equilibrium

till God shall speak. Torture not yourself with hopes or fears. They

make us their slaves. Put your hand in God's hand, and let Him guide

you as He will. Wishes are bad steersmen. We are only at peace when

desires and dreads are, if not extinct, at all events held tightly in.

Rest, and wisdom, and strength come with acquiescence. Let us say with

Richard Baxter, in his simple, noble words:

'Lord, it belongs not to my care

Whether I die or live;

To love and serve Thee is my share,

And that Thy grace must give.'

We may learn, too, that we may be quite sure that we shall be left here

as long as we are needed. Paul knew that his stay was needful, so he

could say, 'I know that I shall abide with you.' We do not, but we may

be sure that if our stay is needful we shall abide. We are always

tempted to think ourselves indispensable, but, thank God, nobody is

necessary. There are no irreparable losses, hard as it is to believe

it. We look at our work, at our families, our business, our

congregations, our subjects of study, and we say to ourselves, 'What

will become of them when I am gone? Everything would fall to pieces if

I were withdrawn.' Do not be afraid. Depend on it, you will be left

here as long as you are wanted. There are no incomplete lives and no

premature removals. To the eye of faith the broken column in our

cemeteries is a sentimental falsehood. No Christian life is broken

short off so, but rises in a symmetrical shaft, and its capital is

garlanded with amaranthine flowers in heaven. In one sense all our

lives are incomplete, for they and their issues are above, out of our

sight here. In another none are, for we are 'immortal till our work is

done.'

The true attitude, then, for us is patient service till He withdraws us

from the field. We do not count him a diligent servant who is always

wearying for the hour of leaving off to strike. Be it ours to labour

where He puts us, patiently waiting till 'death's mild curfew' sets us

free from the long day's work, and sends us home.

Brethren! there are but two theories of life; two corresponding aspects

of death. The one says, 'To me to live is Christ, and to die gain'; the

other, 'To me to live is self, and to die is loss and despair.' One or

other must be your choice. Which?

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CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ:

that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your

affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving

together for the faith of the gospel; 28. And in nothing terrified by

your adversaries.'--Phil. i. 27, 28.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that Philippi was the chief city of

that part of Macedonia, and a 'colony.' Now, the connection between a

Roman colony and Rome was a great deal closer than that between an

English colony and England. It was, in fact, a bit of Rome on foreign

soil.

The colonists and their children were Roman citizens. Their names were

enrolled on the lists of Roman tribes. They were governed not by the

provincial authorities, but by their own magistrates, and the law to

which they owed obedience was not that of the locality, but the law of

Rome.

No doubt some of the Philippian Christians possessed these privileges.

They knew what it was to live in a community to which they were less

closely bound than to the great city beyond the sea. They were members

of a mighty polity, though they had never seen its temples nor trod its

streets. They lived in Philippi, but they belonged to Rome. Hence there

is a peculiar significance in the first words of our text. The

rendering, 'conversation,' was inadequate even when it was made. It has

become more so now. The word then meant 'conduct.' It now means little

more than words. But though the phrase may express loosely the

Apostle's general idea, it loses entirely the striking metaphor under

which it is couched. The Revised Version gives the literal rendering in

its margin--'Behave as citizens'--though it adopts in its text a

rendering which disregards the figure in the word, and contents itself

with the less picturesque and vivid phrase--'let your manner of life be

worthy.' But there seems no reason for leaving out the metaphor; it

entirely fits in with the purpose of the Apostle and with the context.

The meaning is, Play the citizen in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Paul

does not, of course, mean, Discharge your civic duties as Christian

men, though some Christian Englishmen need that reminder; but the city

of which these Philippians were citizens was the heavenly Jerusalem,

the metropolis, the mother city of us all. He would kindle in them the

consciousness of belonging to another order of things than that around

them. He would stimulate their loyalty to obedience to the city's laws.

As the outlying colonies of Rome had sometimes entrusted to them the

task of keeping the frontiers and extending the power of the imperial

city, so he stirs them up to aggressive warfare; and as in all their

conflicts the little colony felt that the Empire was at its back, and

therefore looked undaunted on shoals of barbarian foes, so he would

have his friends at Philippi animated by lofty courage, and ever

confident of final victory.

Such seems to be a general outline of these eager exhortations to the

citizens of heaven in this outlying colony of earth. Let us think of

them briefly in order now.

I. Keep fresh the sense of belonging to the mother city.

Paul was not only writing to Philippi, but from Rome, where he might

see how, even in degenerate days, the consciousness of being a Roman

gave dignity to a man, and how the idea became almost a religion. He

would kindle a similar feeling in Christians.

We do belong to another polity or order of things than that with which

we are connected by the bonds of flesh and sense. Our true affinities

are with the mother city. True, we are here on earth, but far beyond

the blue waters is another community, of which we are really members,

and sometimes in calm weather we can see, if we climb to a height above

the smoke of the valley where we dwell, the faint outline of the

mountains of that other land, lying bathed in sunlight and dreamlike on

the opal waves.

Therefore it is a great part of Christian discipline to keep a vivid

consciousness that there is such an unseen order of things at present

in existence. We speak popularly of 'the future life,' and are apt to

forget that it is also the present life to an innumerable company. In

fact, this film of an earthly life floats in that greater sphere which

is all around it, above, beneath, touching it at every point.

It is, as Peter says, 'ready to be unveiled.' Yes, behind the thin

curtain, through which stray beams of the brightness sometimes shoot,

that other order stands, close to us, parted from us by a most slender

division, only a woven veil, no great gulf or iron barrier. And before

long His hand will draw it back, rattling with its rings as it is put

aside, and there will blaze out what has always been, though we saw it

not. It is so close, so real, so bright, so solemn, that it is worth

while to try to feel its nearness; and we are so purblind, and such

foolish slaves of mere sense, shaping our lives on the legal maxim that

things which are non-apparent must be treated as non-existent, that it

needs a constant effort not to lose the feeling altogether.

There is a present connection between all Christian men and that

heavenly City. It not merely exists, but we belong to it in the measure

in which we are Christians. All these figurative expressions about our

citizenship being in heaven and the like, rest on the simple fact that

the life of Christian men on earth and in heaven is fundamentally the

same. The principles which guide, the motives which sway, the tastes

and desires, affections and impulses, the objects and aims, are

substantially one. A Christian man's true affinities are with the

things not seen, and with the persons there, however his surface

relationship knit him to the earth. In the degree in which he is a

Christian, he is a stranger here and a native of the heavens. That

great City is, like some of the capitals of Europe, built on a broad

river, with the mass of the metropolis on the one bank, but a

wide-spreading suburb on the other. As the Trastevere is to Rome, as

Southwark to London, so is earth to heaven, the bit of the city on the

other side the bridge. As Philippi was to Rome, so is earth to heaven,

the colony on the outskirts of the empire, ringed round by barbarians,

and separated by sounding seas, but keeping open its communications,

and one in citizenship.

Be it our care, then, to keep the sense of that city beyond the river

vivid and constant. Amid the shows and shams of earth look ever onward

to the realities 'the things which are,' while all else only seems to

be. The things which are seen are but smoke wreaths, floating for a

moment across space, and melting into nothingness while we look. We do

not belong to them or to the order of things to which they belong.

There is no kindred between us and them. Our true relationships are

elsewhere. In this present visible world all other creatures find their

sufficient and homelike abode. 'Foxes have holes, and birds their

roosting-places'; but man alone has not where to lay his head, nor can

he find in all the width of the created universe a place in which and

with which he can be satisfied. Our true habitat is elsewhere. So let

us set our thoughts and affections on things above. The descendants of

the original settlers in our colonies talk still of coming to England

as going 'home,' though they were born in Australia, and have lived

there all their lives. In like manner we Christian people should keep

vigorous in our minds the thought that our true home is there where we

have never been, and that here we are foreigners and wanderers.

Nor need that feeling of detachment from the present sadden our

spirits, or weaken our interest in the things around us. To recognise

our separation from the order of things in which we 'move,' because we

belong to that majestic unseen order in which we really 'have our

being,' makes life great and not small. It clothes the present with

dignity beyond what is possible to it if it be not looked at in the

light of its connection with 'the regions beyond.' From that connection

life derives all its meaning. Surely nothing can be conceived more

unmeaning, more wearisome in its monotony, more tragic in its joy, more

purposeless in its efforts, than man's life, if the life of sense and

time be all. Truly it is 'like a tale told by an idiot, full of sound

and fury, signifying nothing.' 'The white radiance of eternity,'

streaming through it from above, gives all its beauty to the 'dome of

many-coloured glass' which men call life. They who feel most their

connection with the city which hath foundations should be best able to

wring the last drop of pure sweetness out of all earthly joys, to

understand the meaning of all events, and to be interested most keenly,

because most intelligently and most nobly, in the homeliest and

smallest of the tasks and concerns of the present.

So, in all things, act as citizens of the great Mother of heroes and

saints beyond the sea. Ever feel that you belong to another order, and

let the thought, 'Here we have no continuing city,' be to you not

merely the bitter lesson taught by the transiency of earthly joys and

treasures and loves, but the happy result of 'seeking for the city

which hath the foundations.'

II. Another exhortation which our text gives is, Live by the laws of

the city.

The Philippian colonists were governed by the code of Rome. Whatever

might be the law of the province of Macedonia, they owed no obedience

to it. So Christian men are not to be governed by the maxims and rules

of conduct which prevail in the province, but to be governed from the

capital. We ought to get from on-lookers the same character that was

given to the Jews, that we are 'a people whose laws are different from

all people that be on earth,' and we ought to reckon such a character

our highest praise. Paul would have these Philippian Christians act

'worthy of the gospel.' That is our law.

The great good news of God manifest in the flesh, and of our salvation

through Christ Jesus, is not merely to be believed, but to be obeyed.

The gospel is not merely a message of deliverance, it is also a rule of

conduct. It is not merely theology, it is also ethics. Like some of the

ancient municipal charters, the grant of privileges and proclamation of

freedom is also the sovereign code which imposes duties and shapes

life. A gospel of laziness and mere exemption from hell was not Paul's

gospel. A gospel of doctrines, to be investigated, spun into a system

of theology, and accepted by the understanding, and there an end, was

not Paul's gospel. He believed that the great facts which he proclaimed

concerning the self-revelation of God in Christ would unfold into a

sovereign law of life for every true believer, and so his one

all-sufficient precept and standard of conduct are in these simple

words, 'worthy of the gospel.'

That law is all-sufficient. In the truths which constituted Paul's

gospel, that is to say, in the truths of the life, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ, lies all that men need for conduct and

character. In Him we have the 'realised ideal,' the flawless example,

and instead of a thousand precepts, for us all duty is resolved into

one--be like Christ. In Him we have the mighty motive, powerful enough

to overcome all forces that would draw us away, and like some strong

spring to keep us in closest contact with right and goodness. Instead

of a confusing variety of appeals to manifold motives of interest and

conscience, and one knows not what beside, we have the one all-powerful

appeal, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments,' and that draws all the

agitations and fluctuations of the soul after it, as the rounded

fulness of the moon does the heaped waters in the tidal wave that

girdles the world. In Him we have all the helps that weakness needs,

for He Himself will come and dwell with us and in us, and be our

righteousness and our strength.

Live 'worthy of the gospel,' then. How grand the unity and simplicity

thus breathed into our duties and through our lives! All duties are

capable of reduction to this one, and though we shall still need

detailed instruction and specific precepts, we shall be set free from

the pedantry of a small scrupulous casuistry, which fetters men's limbs

with microscopic bands, and shall joyfully learn how much mightier and

happier is the life which is shaped by one fruitful principle, than

that which is hampered by a thousand regulations.

Nor is such an all-comprehensive precept a mere toothless generality.

Let a man try honestly to shape his life by it; and he will find soon

enough how close it grips him, and how wide it stretches, and how deep

it goes. The greatest principles of the gospel are to be fitted to the

smallest duties. Indeed that combination--great principles and small

duties--is the secret of all noble and calm life, and nowhere should it

be so beautifully exemplified as in the life of a Christian man. The

tiny round of the dew-drop is shaped by the same laws that mould the

giant sphere of the largest planet. You cannot make a map of the

poorest grass-field without celestial observations. The star is not too

high nor too brilliant to move before us and guide simple men's feet

along their pilgrimage. 'Worthy of the gospel' is a most practical and

stringent law.

And it is an exclusive commandment too, shutting out obedience to other

codes, however common and fashionable they may be. We are governed from

home, and we give no submission to provincial authorities. Never mind

what people say about you, nor what may be the maxims and ways of men

around you. These are no guides for you. Public opinion (which only

means for most of us the hasty judgments of the half-dozen people who

happen to be nearest us), use and wont, the customs of our set, the

notions of the world about duty, with all these we have nothing to do.

The censures or the praise of men need not move us. We report to

headquarters, and subordinates' estimate need be nothing to us. Let us

then say, 'With me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of

men's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.' When we may be

misunderstood or harshly dealt with, let us lift our eyes to the lofty

seat where the Emperor sits, and remove ourselves from men's sentences

by our 'appeal unto C�sar'; and, in all varieties of circumstances and

duty, let us take the Gospel which is the record of Christ's life,

death, and character, for our only law, and labour that, whatever

others may think of us, we 'may be well pleasing to Him.'

III. Further, our text bids the colonists fight for the advance of the

dominions of the City.

Like the armed colonists whom Russia and other empires had on their

frontier, who received their bits of land on condition of holding the

border against the enemy, and pushing it forward a league or two when

possible, Christian men are set down in their places to be 'wardens of

the marches,' citizen soldiers who hold their homesteads on a military

tenure, and are to 'strive together for the faith of the gospel.'

There is no space here and now to go into details of the exposition of

this part of our text. Enough to say in brief that we are here exhorted

to 'stand fast'; that is, as it were, the defensive side of our

warfare, maintaining our ground and repelling all assaults; that this

successful resistance is to be 'in one spirit,' inasmuch as all

resistance depends on our poor feeble spirits being ingrafted and

rooted in God's Spirit, in vital union with whom we may be knit

together into a unity which shall oppose a granite breakwater to the

onrushing tide of opposition; that in addition to the unmoved

resistance which will not yield an inch of the sacred soil to the

enemy, we are to carry the war onwards, and, not content with holding

our own, are with one mind to strive together for the faith of the

gospel. There is to be discipline, then, and compact organisation, like

that of the legions whom Paul, from his prison among the Pr�torian

guards, had often seen shining in steel, moving like a machine, grim,

irresistible. The cause for which we are to fight is the faith of the

gospel, an expression which almost seems to justify the opinion that

'the faith' here means, as it does in later usage, the sum and

substance of that which is believed. But even here the word may have

its usual meaning of the subjective act of trust in the gospel, and the

thought may be that we are unitedly to fight for its growing power in

our own hearts and in the hearts of others. In any case, the idea is

plainly here that Christian men are set down in the world, like the

frontier guard, to push the conquests of the empire, and to win more

ground for their King.

Such work is ever needed, never more needed than now. In this day when

a wave of unbelief seems passing over society, when material comfort

and worldly prosperity are so dazzlingly attractive to so many, the

solemn duty is laid upon us with even more than usual emphasis, and we

are called upon to feel more than ever the oneness of all true

Christians, and to close up our ranks for the fight. All this can only

be done after we have obeyed the other injunctions of this text. The

degree in which we feel that we belong to another order of things than

this around us, and the degree in which we live by the Imperial laws,

will determine the degree in which we can fight with vigour for the

growth of the dominion of the City. Be it ours to cherish the vivid

consciousness that we are here dwelling not in the cities of the

Canaanites, but, like the father of the faithful, in tents pitched at

their gates, nomads in the midst of a civic life to which we do not

belong, in order that we may breathe a hallowing influence through it,

and win hearts to the love of Him whom to imitate is perfection, whom

to serve is freedom.

IV. The last exhortation to the colonists is, Be sure of victory.

'In nothing terrified by your adversaries,' says Paul. He uses a very

vivid, and some people might think, a very vulgar metaphor here. The

word rendered terrified properly refers to a horse shying or plunging

at some object. It is generally things half seen and mistaken for

something more dreadful than themselves that make horses shy; and it is

usually a half-look at adversaries, and a mistaken estimate of their

strength, that make Christians afraid. Go up to your fears and speak to

them, and as ghosts are said to do, they will generally fade away. So

we may go into the battle, as the rash French minister said he did into

the Franco-German war, 'with a light heart,' and that for good reasons.

We have no reason to fear for ourselves. We have no reason to fear for

the ark of God. We have no reason to fear for the growth of

Christianity in the world. Many good men in this time seem to be

getting half-ashamed of the gospel, and some preachers are preaching it

in words which sound like an apology rather than a creed. Do not let us

allow the enemy to overpower our imaginations in that fashion. Do not

let us fight as if we expected to be beaten, always casting our eyes

over our shoulders, even while we are advancing, to make sure of our

retreat, but let us trust our gospel, and trust our King, and let us

take to heart the old admonition, 'Lift up thy voice with strength;

lift it up, be not afraid.'

Such courage is a prophecy of victory. Such courage is based upon a

sure hope. 'Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for

the Lord Jesus as Saviour.' The little outlying colony in this far-off

edge of the empire is ringed about by wide-stretching hosts of dusky

barbarians. Far as the eye can reach their myriads cover the land, and

the watchers from the ramparts might well be dismayed if they had only

their own resources to depend on. But they know that the Emperor in his

progress will come to this sorely beset outpost, and their eyes are

fixed on the pass in the hills where they expect to see the waving

banners and the gleaming spears. Soon, like our countrymen in Lucknow,

they will hear the music and the shouts that tell that He is at hand.

Then when He comes, He will raise the siege and scatter all the enemies

as the chaff of the threshing-floor, and the colonists who held the

post will go with Him to the land which they have never seen, but which

is their home, and will, with the Victor, sweep in triumph 'through the

gates into the city.'

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A PLEA FOR UNITY

'If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of

love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and

compassions, 2. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having

the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; 3. Doing nothing

through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each

counting other better than himself; 4. Not looking each of you to his

own things, but each of you also to the things of others.'--Phil. ii.

1-4 (R.V.).

There was much in the state of the Philippian church which filled

Paul's heart with thankfulness, and nothing which drew forth his

censures, but these verses, with their extraordinary energy of

pleading, seem to hint that there was some defect in the unity of heart

and mind of members of the community. It did not amount to discord, but

the concord was not as full as it might have been. There is another

hint pointing in the same direction in the appeal to Paul's true

yoke-fellow, in chapter iv., to help two good women who, though they

had laboured much in the gospel, had not managed to keep 'of the same

mind in the Lord,' and there is perhaps a still further indication that

Paul's sensitive heart was conscious of the beginnings of strife in the

air, in the remarkable emphasis with which, at the very outset of the

letter, he over and over again pours out his confidence and affection

on them 'all,' as if aware of some incipient rifts in their

brotherhood. There are always forces at work which tend to part the

most closely knit unities even when these are consecrated by Christian

faith. Where there are no dogmatical grounds of discord, nor any open

alienation, there may still be the beginnings of separation, and a

chill breeze may be felt even when the sun is shining with summer

warmth. Wasps are attracted by the ripest fruit.

The words of our text present no special difficulty, and bring before

us a well-worn subject, but it has at least this element of interest,

that it grips very tightly the deepest things in Christian life, and

that none of us can truly say that we do not need to listen to Paul's

pleading voice. We may notice the general division of his thoughts in

these words, in that he puts first the heart-touching motives for

listening to his appeal, next describes with the exuberance of

earnestness the fair ideal of unity to which he exhorts, and finally

touches on the hindrances to its realisation, and the victorious powers

which will overcome these.

I. The motives and bonds of Christian unity.

It is not a pedantic dissection (and vivisection) of the Apostle's

earnest words, if we point out that they fall into four clauses, of

which the first and third ('any comfort in Christ, any fellowship of

the Spirit') urge the objective facts of Christian revelation, and the

second and fourth ('any consolation of love, any tender mercies and

compassions') put emphasis on the subjective emotions of Christian

experience. We may lay the warmth of all of these on our own hearts,

and shall find that these hearts will be drawn into the blessedness of

Christian unity in the precise measure in which they are affected by

them.

As to the first of them, it may be suggested that here, as elsewhere in

the New Testament, the true idea of the word rendered 'comfort' is

rather 'exhortation.' The Apostle is probably not so much pointing to

the consolations for trouble which come from Jesus, as to the stimulus

to unity which flows from Him. It would rather weaken the force of

Paul's appeal, if the two former grounds of it were so nearly identical

as they are, if the one is based upon 'comfort' and the other on

'consolation.' The Apostle is true to his dominant belief, that in

Jesus Christ there lies, and from Him flows, the sovereign exhortation

that rouses men to 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.'

In Him we shall find in the measure in which we are in Him, the most

persuasive of all exhortations to unity, and the most omnipotent of all

powers to enforce it. Shall we not be glad to be in the flock of the

Good Shepherd, and to preserve the oneness which He gave His life to

establish? Can we live in Him, and not share His love for His sheep?

Surely those who have felt the benediction of His breath on their

foreheads when He prayed 'that they may all be one; even as Thou,

Father, art in Me and I in Thee,' cannot but do what is in them to

fulfil that prayer, and to bring a little nearer the realisation of

their Lord's purpose in it, 'that the world may believe that Thou didst

send Me.' Surely if we lay to heart, and enter into sympathy with, the

whole life and death of Jesus Christ, we shall not fail to feel the

dynamic power fusing us together, nor fail to catch the exhortation to

unity which comes from the lips that said, 'I am the vine, ye are the

branches.'

The Apostle next bases his appeal for unity on the experiences of the

Philippian Christians, and on their memories of the comfort which they

have tasted in the exercise of mutual love. Our hearts find it hard to

answer the question whether they are more blessed when their love

passes out from them in a warm stream to others, or when the love of

others pours into them. To love and to be loved equally elevate

courage, and brace the weakest for calm endurance and high deeds. The

man who loves and knows that he is loved will be a hero. It must always

seem strange and inexplicable that a heart which has known the

enlargement and joy of love given and received, should ever fall so far

beneath itself as to be narrowed and troubled by nourishing feelings of

separation and alienation from those whom it might have gathered into

its embrace, and thereby communicated, and in communicating acquired,

courage and strength. We have all known the comfort of love; should it

not impel us to live in 'the unity of the spirit and the bond of

peace'? Men around us are meant to be our helpers, and to be helped by

us, and the one way to secure both is to walk in love, as Christ also

hath loved us.

But Paul has still further heart-melting motives to urge. He turns the

Philippians' thoughts to their fellowship in the Spirit. All believers

have been made to drink into one spirit, and in that common

participation in the same supernatural life they partake of a oneness,

which renders any clefts or divisions unnatural, and contradictory of

the deepest truths of their experience. The branch can no more shiver

itself off from the tree, or keep the life sap enclosed within itself,

than one possessor of the common gift of the Spirit can separate

himself from the others who share it. We are one in Him; let us be one

in heart and mind. The final appeal is connected with the preceding,

inasmuch as it lays emphasis on the emotions which flow from the one

life common to all believers. That participation in the Spirit

naturally leads in each participant to 'tender mercies and compassions'

directed to all sharers in it. The very mark of truly possessing the

Spirit's life is a nature full of tenderness and swift to pity, and

they who have experienced the heaven on earth of such emotions should

need no other motive than the memory of its blessedness, to send them

out among their brethren, and even into a hostile world, as the

apostles of love, the bearers of tender mercies, and the messengers of

pity.

II. The fair ideal which would complete the Apostle's joy.

We may gather from the rich abundance of motives which the Apostle

suggests before he comes to present his exhortation, that he suspected

the existence of some tendencies in the opposite direction in Philippi,

and possibly the same conclusion may be drawn from the exuberance of

the exhortation itself, and from its preceding the dehortation which

follows. He does not scold, he scarcely even rebukes, but he begins by

trying to melt away any light frost that had crept over the warmth of

the Philippians' love; and having made that preparation, he sets before

them with a fulness which would be tautological but for the earnestness

that throbs in it, the ideal of unity, and presses it upon them still

more meltingly, by telling them that their realisation of it will be

the completion of his joy. The main injunction is 'that ye be of the

same mind,' and that is followed by three clauses which are all but

exactly synonymous with it, 'having the same love, being of one accord,

of one mind.' The resemblance of the latter clause to the main

exhortation is still more complete, if we read with Revised Version

(margin) 'of the same mind,' but in any case the exhortations are all

practically the same. The unity which Paul would fain see, is far

deeper and more vital than mere unanimity of opinion, or identity of

polity, or co-operation in practice. The clauses which expand it guard

us against the mistake of thinking that intellectual or practical

oneness is all that is meant by Christian unity. They are 'of the same

mind,' who have the same wishes, aims, outlooks, the same hopes and

fears, and who are one in the depths of their being. They have 'the

same love,' all similarly loving and being loved, the same emotion

filling each heart. They are united in soul, or 'with accordant souls'

having, and knowing that they have them, akin, allied to one another,

moving to a common end, and aware of their oneness. The unity which

Christian people have hitherto reached is at its best but a small are

of the great circle which the Apostle drew, and none of us can read

these fervid words without shame. His joy is not yet fulfilled.

That exhortation to be 'of the same mind,' not only points to a deep

and vital unity, but suggests that the ground of the unity is to be

found without us, in the common direction of our 'minds,' which means

far more than popular phraseology means by it, to an external object.

It is having our hearts directed to Christ that makes us one. He is the

bond and centre of unity. We have just said that the object is

external, but that has to be taken with a modification, for the true

basis of unity is the common possession of 'Christ in us.' It is when

we have this mind in us 'which was also in Christ Jesus,' that we have

'the same mind' one with another.

The very keynote of the letter is joy, as may be seen by a glance over

it. He joys and rejoices with them all, but his cup is not quite full.

One more precious drop is needed to make it run over. Probably the

coldness which he had heard of between Euodias and Syntyche had

troubled him, and if he could be sure of the Philippians' mutual love

he would rejoice in his prison. We cannot tell whether that loving and

careful heart is still aware of the fortunes of the Church, but we know

of a more loving and careful heart which is, and we cannot but believe

that the alienations and discords of His professed followers bring some

shadow over the joy of Christ. Do we not hear His voice again asking,

'what was it that you disputed among yourselves by the way?' and must

we not, like the disciples, 'hold our peace' when that question is

asked? May we not hear a voice sweeter in its cadence, and more melting

in its tenderness than Paul's, saying to us 'Fulfil ye My joy that ye

be of the same mind.'

III. The hindrances and helps to being of the same mind.

The original has no verb in front of 'nothing' in verse 3, and it seems

better to supply the one which has been so frequently used in the

preceding exhortation than 'doing,' which carries us too abruptly into

the outer region of action. Paul indicates two main hindrances to being

of the same mind, namely, faction and vainglory on the one hand, and

self-absorption on the other, and opposed to each the tone of mind

which is its best conqueror. Faction and vainglory are best defeated by

humility and unselfishness. As to the former, the love of making or

heading little cliques in religion or politics or society, has oftenest

its roots in nothing loftier than vanity or pride. Many a man who poses

as guided by staunch adherence to conviction is really impelled only by

a wish to make himself notorious as a leader, and loves to talk of

'those with whom I act.' There is a strong admixture of a too lofty

estimate of self in most of the disagreements of Christian people. They

expect more deference than they get, or their judgment is not taken as

law, or their place is not so high as they think is their due, or in a

hundred different ways self-love is wounded, and self-esteem is

inflamed. All this is true in reference to the smaller communities of

congregations, and with the necessary modifications it is quite as true

in reference to the larger aggregations which we call churches or

denominations. If all in their work that is directly due to faction and

vainglory were struck out there would be great gaps in their

activities, and many a flourishing scheme would fall dead.

The cure for all these evils is lowliness of mind. That is a Christian

word. Used by Greek thinkers, it meant abjectness; and it is one

conspicuous instance of the change effected in morals by Christian

teaching that it has become the name of a virtue. We are to dwell not

on our gifts but on our imperfections, and if we judge ourselves with

constant reference to the standard in Christ's life, we shall need

little more to bring us to our knees in true lowliness of mind. The man

who has been forgiven so many talents will not be in a hurry to take

his brother by the throat and leave the marks of his fingers for

tenpence.

Christian unity is further broken by selfishness. To be absorbed in

self is of course to have the heart shut to others. Our own interests,

inclinations, possessions, when they assert themselves in our lives,

build up impassable barriers between us and our fellows. To live to

self is the real root of every sin as it is of all loveless life. The

Apostle uses careful language: he admits the necessity for attention to

our 'own things,' and only requires that we should look 'also' on the

things of others. His cure for the hindrances to Christian unity is

very complete, very practical, and very simple. Each counting other

better than himself, and each 'looking also to the things of others'

seem very homely and pedestrian virtues, but homely as they are we

shall find that they grip us tight, if we honestly try to practise them

in our daily lives, and we shall find also that the ladder which has

its foot on earth has its top in the heavens, and that the practice of

humility and unselfishness leads straight to having 'the mind which was

also in Christ Jesus.'

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THE DESCENT OF THE WORD

'Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: 6. Who, being in

the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God,

7. But emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the

likeness of men; 8. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled

Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the

cross.'--Phil. ii. 5-8 (R.V.).

The purpose of the Apostle in this great passage must ever be kept

clearly in view. Our Lord's example is set forth as the pattern of that

unselfish disregard of one's own things, and devotion to the things of

others, which has just been urged on the Philippians, and the mind

which was in Him is presented as the model on which they are to fashion

their minds. This purpose in some measure explains some of the

peculiarities of the language here, and may help to guide us through

some of the intricacies and doubtful points in the interpretation of

the words. It explains why Christ's death is looked at in them only in

its bearing upon Himself, as an act of obedience and of condescension,

and why even that death in which Jesus stands most inimitable and

unique is presented as capable of being imitated by us. The general

drift of these verses is clear, but there are few Scripture passages

which have evoked more difference of opinion as to the precise meaning

of nearly every phrase. To enter on the subtle discussions involved in

the adequate exposition of the words would far exceed our limits, and

we must perforce content ourselves with a slight treatment of them, and

aim chiefly at bringing out their practical side.

The broad truth which stands sun-clear amid all diverse interpretations

is--that the Incarnation, Life, and Death are the great examples of

living humility and self-sacrifice. To be born was His supreme act of

condescension. It was love which made Him assume the vesture of human

flesh. To die was the climax of His voluntary obedience, and of His

devotion to us.

I. The height from which Jesus descended.

The whole strange conception of birth as being the voluntary act of the

Person born, and as being the most stupendous instance of condescension

in the world's history, necessarily reposes on the clear conviction

that He had a prior existence so lofty that it was an all but infinite

descent to become man. Hence Paul begins with the most emphatic

assertion that he who bore the name of Jesus lived a divine life before

He was born. He uses a very strong word which is given in the margin of

the Revised Version, and might well have been in its text. 'Being

originally' as the word accurately means, carries our thoughts back not

only to a state which preceded Bethlehem and the cradle, but to that

same timeless eternity from which the prologue of the Gospel of John

partially draws the veil when it says, 'In the beginning was the Word,'

and to which Jesus Himself more obscurely pointed when He said, 'Before

Abraham was I am.'

Equally emphatic in another direction is Paul's next expression, 'In

the form of God,' for 'form' means much more than 'shape.' I would

point out the careful selection in this passage of three words to

express three ideas which are often by hasty thought regarded as

identical. We read of 'the form of God' (verse 6), 'the likeness of

men' (verse 7), and 'in fashion as a man.' Careful investigation of

these two words 'form' and 'fashion' has established a broad

distinction between them, the former being more fixed, the latter

referring to that which is accidental and outward, which may be

fleeting and unsubstantial. The possession of the form involves

participation in the essence also. Here it implies no corporeal idea as

if God had a material form, but it implies also much more than a mere

apparent resemblance. He who is in the form of God possesses the

essential divine attributes. Only God can be 'in the form of God': man

is made in the likeness of God, but man is not 'in the form of God.'

Light is thrown on this lofty phrase by its antithesis with the

succeeding expression in the next verse, 'the form of a servant,' and

as that is immediately explained to refer to Christ's assumption of

human nature, there is no room for candid doubt that 'being originally

in the form of God' is a deliberately asserted claim of the divinity of

Christ in His pre-existent state.

As we have already pointed out, Paul soars here to the same lofty

height to which the prologue of John's Gospel rises, and he echoes our

Lord's own words about 'the glory which I had with Thee before the

foundation of the world.' Our thoughts are carried back before

creatures were, and we become dimly aware of an eternal distinction in

the divine nature which only perfects its eternal oneness. Such an

eternal participation in the divine nature before all creation and

before time is the necessary pre-supposition of the worth of Christ's

life as the pattern of humility and self-sacrifice. That

pre-supposition gives all its meaning, its pathos, and its power, to

His gentleness, and love, and death. The facts are different in their

significance, and different in their power to bless and gladden, to

purge and sway the soul, according as we contemplate them with or

without the background of His pre-existent divinity. The view which

regards Him as simply a man, like all the rest of us, beginning to be

when He was born, takes away from His example its mightiest

constraining force. Only when we with all our hearts believe 'that the

Word became flesh,' do we discern the overwhelming depths of

condescension manifested in the Birth. If it was not the incarnation of

God, it has no claim on the hearts of men.

II. The wondrous act of descent.

The stages in that long descent are marked out with a precision and

definiteness which would be intolerable presumption, if Paul were

speaking only his own thoughts, or telling what he had seen with his

own eyes. They begin with what was in the mind of the eternal Word

before He began His descent, and whilst yet He is 'in the form of God.'

He stands on the lofty level before the descent begins, and in spirit

makes the surrender, which, stage by stage, is afterwards to be wrought

out in act. Before any of these acts there must have been the

disposition of mind and will which Paul describes as 'counting it not a

thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God.' He did not regard

the being equal to God as a prey or treasure to be clutched and

retained at all hazards. That sweeps our thoughts into the dim regions

far beyond Calvary or Bethlehem, and is a more overwhelming

manifestation of love than are the acts of lowly gentleness and patient

endurance which followed in time. It included and transcended them all.

It was the supreme example of not 'looking on one's own things.' And

what made Him so count? What but infinite love. To rescue men, and win

them to Himself and goodness, and finally to lift them to the place

from which He came down for them, seemed to Him to be worth the

temporary surrender of that glory and majesty. We can but bow and adore

the perfect love. We look more deeply into the depths of Deity than

unaided eyes could ever penetrate, and what we see is the movement in

that abyss of Godhead of purest surrender which, by beholding, we are

to assimilate.

Then comes the wonder of wonders, 'He emptied Himself.' We cannot enter

here on the questions which gather round that phrase, and which give it

a factitious importance in regard to present controversies. All that we

would point out now is that while the Apostle distinctly treats the

Incarnation as being a laying aside of what made the Word to be equal

with God, he says nothing, on which an exact determination can be

based, of the degree or particulars in which the divine nature of our

Lord was limited by His humanity. The fact he asserts, and that is all.

The scene in the Upper Chamber was but a feeble picture of what had

already been done behind the veil. Unless He had laid aside His

garments of divine glory and majesty, He would have had no human flesh

from which to strip the robes. Unless He had willed to take the 'form

of a servant,' He would not have had a body to gird with the slave's

towel. The Incarnation, which made all His acts of lowly love possible,

was a greater act of lowly love than those which flowed from it.

Looking at it from earth, men say, 'Jesus was born.' Looking at it from

heaven, Angels say, 'He emptied Himself.'

But how did He empty Himself? By taking the form of a slave, that is to

God. And how did He take the form of a slave? By 'becoming in the

likeness of men.' Here we are specially to note the remarkable language

implying that what is true of none other in all the generations of men

is true of Him. That just as 'emptying Himself' was His own act, also

the taking the form of a slave by His being born was His own act, and

was more truly described as a 'becoming.' We note, too, the strong

contrast between that most remarkable word and the 'being originally'

which is used to express the mystery of divine pre-existence.

Whilst His becoming in the likeness of men stands in strong contrast

with 'being originally' and energetically expresses the voluntariness

of our Lord's birth, the 'likeness of men' does not cast any doubt on

the reality of His manhood, but points to the fact that 'though

certainly perfect man, He was by reason of the divine nature present in

Him not simply and merely man.'

Here then the beginning of Christ's manhood is spoken of in terms which

are only explicable, if it was a second form of being, preceded by a

pre-existent form, and was assumed by His own act. The language, too,

demands that that humanity should have been true essential manhood. It

was in 'the form' of man and possessed of all essential attributes. It

was in 'the likeness' of man possessed of all external characteristics,

and yet was something more. It summed up human nature, and was its

representative.

III. The obedience which attended the descent.

It was not merely an act of humiliation and condescension to become

man, but all His life was one long act of lowliness. Just as He

'emptied Himself' in the act of becoming in the 'likeness of men,' so

He 'humbled Himself,' and all along the course of His earthly life He

chose constant lowliness and to be 'despised and rejected of men.' It

was the result moment by moment of His own will that to the eyes of men

He presented 'no form nor comeliness,' and that will was moment by

moment steadied in its unmoved humility, because He perpetually looked

'not on His own things, but on the things of others.' The guise He

presented to the eyes of men was 'the fashion of a man.' That word

corresponds exactly to Paul's carefully selected term, and makes

emphatic both its superficial and its transitory character.

The lifelong humbling of Himself was further manifested in His becoming

'obedient.' That obedience was, of course, to God. And here we cannot

but pause to ask the question, How comes it that to the man Jesus

obedience to God was an act of humiliation? Surely there is but one

explanation of such a statement. For all men but this one to be God's

slaves is their highest honour, and to speak of obedience as

humiliation is a sheer absurdity.

Not only was the life of Jesus so perfect an example of unbroken

obedience that He could safely front His adversaries with the question,

'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' and with the claim to 'do always

the things that pleased Him,' but the obedience to the Father was

perfected in His death. Consider the extraordinary fact that a man's

death is the crowning instance of his humility, and ask yourselves the

question, Who then is this who chose to be born, and stooped in the act

of dying? His death was obedience to God, because by it He carried out

the Father's will for the salvation of the world, His death is the

greatest instance of unselfish self-sacrifice, and the loftiest example

of looking on the 'things of others' that the world has ever seen. It

dwindles in significance, in pathos, and in power to move us to

imitation unless we clearly see the divine glory of the eternal Lord as

the background of the gentle lowliness of the Man of Sorrows, and the

Cross. No theory of Christ's life and death but that He was born for

us, and died for us, either explains the facts and the apostolic

language concerning them, or leaves them invested with their full power

to melt our hearts and mould our lives. There is a possibility of

imitating Him in the most transcendent of His acts. The mind may be in

us which was in Christ Jesus. That it may, His death must first be the

ground of our hope, and then we must make it the pattern of our lives,

and draw from it the power to shape them after His blessed Example.

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THE ASCENT OF JESUS

'Wherefore also God highly exalted Him and gave unto Him the name which

is above every name; 10. That in the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the

earth; 11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is

Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'--Phil. ii. 9-11 (R.V.).

'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted,' said Jesus. He is Himself

the great example of that law. The Apostle here goes on to complete his

picture of the Lord Jesus as our pattern. In previous verses we had the

solemn steps of His descent, and the lifelong humility and obedience of

the incarnate Son, the man Christ Jesus. Here we have the wondrous

ascent which reverses all the former process. Our text describes the

reflex motion by which Jesus is borne back to the same level as that

from which the descent began.

We have

I. The act of exaltation which forms the contrast and the parallel to

the descent.

'God highly exalted Him.' The Apostle coins an emphatic word which

doubly expresses elevation, and in its grammatical form shows that it

indicates a historical fact. That elevation was a thing once

accomplished on this green earth; that is to say it came to pass in the

fact of our Lord's ascension when from some fold of the Mount of Olives

He was borne upwards and, with blessing hands, was received into the

Shechinah cloud, the glory of which hid Him from the upward-gazing

eyes.

It is plain that the 'Him' of whom this tremendous assertion is made,

must be the same as the 'He' of whom the previous verses spoke, that

is, the Incarnate Jesus. It is the manhood which is exalted. His

humiliation consisted in His becoming man, but His exaltation does not

consist in His laying aside His humanity. It is not a transient but an

eternal union into which in the Incarnation it entered with divinity.

Henceforward we have to think of Him in all the glory of His heavenly

state as man, and as truly and completely in the 'likeness of men' as

when He walked with bleeding feet on the flinty road of earthly life.

He now bears for ever the 'form of God' and 'the fashion of a man.'

Here I would pause for a moment to point out that the calm tone of this

reference to the ascension indicates that it was part of the recognised

Christian beliefs, and implies that it had been familiar long before

the date of this Epistle, which itself dates from not more than at the

most thirty years from the death of Christ. Surely that lapse of time

is far too narrow to allow of such a belief having sprung up, and been

universally accepted about a dead man, who all the while was lying in a

nameless grave.

The descent is presented as His act, but decorum and truth required

that the exaltation should be God's act. 'He humbled Himself,' but 'God

exalted Him.' True, He sometimes represented Himself as the Agent of

His own Resurrection and Ascension, and established a complete parallel

between His descent and His ascent, as when He said, 'I came out from

the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and

go unto the Father.' He was no less obedient to the Father's will when

He ascended up on high, than He was when He came down to earth, and

whilst, from one point of view, His Resurrection and Ascension were as

truly His own acts as were His birth and His death, from another, He

had to pray, 'And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self

with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.' The Titans

presumptuously scaled the heavens, according to the old legend, but the

Incarnate Lord returned to 'His own calm home, His habitation from

eternity,' was exalted thither by God, in token to the universe that

the Father approved the Son's descent, and that the work which the Son

had done was indeed, as He declared it to be, 'finished.' By exalting

Him, the Father not merely reinstated the divine Word in its eternal

union with God, but received into the cloud of glory the manhood which

the Word had assumed.

II. The glory of the name of Jesus.

What is the name 'which is above every name'? It is the name Jesus. It

is to be noted that Paul scarcely ever uses that simple appellative.

There are, roughly speaking, about two hundred instances in which he

names our Lord in his Epistles, and there are only four places, besides

this, in which he uses this as his own, and two in which he, as it

were, puts it into the mouth of an enemy. Probably then, some special

reason led to its occurrence here, and it is not difficult, I think, to

see what that reason is. The simple personal name was given indeed with

reference to His work, but had been borne by many a Jewish child before

Mary called her child Jesus, and the fact that it is this common name

which is exalted above every name, brings out still more strongly the

thought already dwelt upon, that what is thus exalted is the manhood of

our Lord. The name which expressed His true humanity, which showed His

full identification with us, which was written over His Cross, which

perhaps shaped the taunt 'He saved others, Himself He cannot

save,'--that name God has lifted high above all names of council and

valour, of wisdom and might, of authority and rule. It is shrined in

the hearts of millions who render to it perfect trust, unconditional

obedience, absolute loyalty. Its growing power, and the warmth of

personal love which it evokes, in centuries and lands so far removed

from the theatre of His life, is a unique thing in the world's history.

It reigns in heaven.

But Paul is not content with simply asserting the sovereign glory of

the name of Jesus. He goes on to set it forth as being what no other

name borne by man can be, the ground and object of worship, when he

declares, that 'in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' The words

are quoted from the second Isaiah, and occur in one of the most solemn

and majestic utterances of the monotheism of the Old Testament. And

Paul takes these words, undeterred by the declaration which precede

them, 'I Am am God and there is none else,' applies them to Jesus, to

the manhood of our Lord. Bowing the knee is of course prayer, and in

these great words the issue of the work of Jesus is unmistakably set

forth, as not only being that He has declared God to men, who through

Him are drawn to worship the Father, but that their emotions of love,

reverence, worship, are turned to Him, though as the Apostle is careful

immediately to note, they are not thereby intercepted from, but

directed to, the glory of God the Father. In the eternities before His

descent, there was equality with God, and when He returns, it is to the

Father, who in Him has become the object of adoration, and round whose

throne gather with bended knees all those who in Jesus see the Father.

The Apostle still further dwells on the glory of the name as that of

the acknowledged Lord. And here we have with significant variation in

strong contrast to the previous name of Jesus, the full title 'Jesus

Christ Lord.' That is almost as unusual in its completeness as the

other in its simplicity, and it comes in here with tremendous energy,

reminding us of the great act to which we owe our redemption, and of

all the prophecies and hopes which, from of old, had gathered round the

persistent hope of the coming Messiah, while the name of Lord proclaims

His absolute dominion. The knee is bowed in reverence, the tongue is

vocal in confession. That confession is incomplete if either of these

three names is falteringly uttered, and still more so, if either of

them is wanting. The Jesus whom Christians confess is not merely the

man who was born in Bethlehem and known among men as 'Jesus the

carpenter.' In these modern days, His manhood has been so emphasised as

to obscure His Messiahship and to obliterate His dominion, and alas!

there are many who exalt Him by the name that Mary gave Him, who turn

away from the name of Jesus as 'Hebrew old clothes,' and from the name

of Lord as antiquated superstition. But in all the lowliness and

gentleness of Jesus there were not wanting lofty claims to be the

Christ of whom prophets and righteous men of old spake, and whose

coming many a generation desired to see and died without the sight, and

still loftier and more absolute claims to be invested with 'all power

in heaven and earth,' and to sit down with the Father on His throne. It

is dangerous work to venture to toss aside two of these three names,

and to hope that if we pronounce the third of them, Jesus, with

appreciation, it will not matter if we do not name Him either Christ or

Lord.

If it is true that the manhood of Jesus is thus exalted, how wondrous

must be the kindred between the human and the divine, that it should be

capable of this, that it should dwell in the everlasting burnings of

the Divine Glory and not be consumed! How blessed for us the belief

that our Brother wields all the forces of the universe, that the human

love which Jesus had when He bent over the sick and comforted the

sorrowful, is at the centre. Jesus is Lord, the Lord is Jesus!

The Psalmist was moved to a rapture of thanksgiving when he thought of

man as 'made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and

honour,' but when we think of the Man Jesus 'sitting at the right hand

of God,' the Psalmist's words seem pale and poor, and we can repeat

them with a deeper meaning and a fuller emphasis, 'Thou madest Him to

have dominion over the works of Thy hands, Thou hast put all things

under His feet.'

III. The universal glory of the name.

By the three classes into which the Apostle divides creation, 'things

in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth,' he simply

intends to declare, that Jesus is the object of all worship, and the

words are not to be pressed as containing dogmatic assertions as to the

different classes mentioned. But guided by other words of Scripture, we

may permissibly think that the 'things in heaven' tell us that the

angels who do not need His mediation learn more of God by His work and

bow before His throne. We cannot be wrong in believing that the glory

of His work stretches far beyond the limits of humanity, and that His

kingdom numbers other subjects than those who draw human breath. Other

lips than ours say with a great voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that hath

been slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honour

and glory and blessing.'

The things on earth are of course men, and the words encourage us to

dim hopes about which we cannot dogmatise of a time when all the

wayward self-seeking and self-tormenting children of men shall have

learned to know and love their best friend, and 'there shall be one

flock and one shepherd.'

'Things under the earth' seems to point to the old thought of 'Sheol'

or 'Hades' or a separate state of the dead. The words certainly suggest

that those who have gone from us are not unconscious nor cut off from

the true life, but are capable of adoration and confession. We cannot

but remember the old belief that Jesus in His death 'descended into

Hell,' and some of us will not forget Fra Angelico's picture of the

open doorway with a demon crushed beneath the fallen portal, and the

crowd of eager faces and outstretched hands swarming up the dark

passage, to welcome the entering Christ. Whatever we may think of that

ancient representation, we may at least be sure that, wherever they

are, the dead in Christ praise and reverence and love.

IV. The glory of the Father in the glory of the name of Jesus.

Knees bent and tongues confessing the absolute dominion of Jesus Christ

could only be offence and sin if He were not one with the Father. But

the experience of all the thousands since Paul wrote, whose hearts have

been drawn in reverent and worshipping trust to the Son, has verified

the assertion, that to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord diverts no

worship from God, but swells and deepens the ocean of praise that

breaks round the throne. If it is true, and only if it is true, that in

the life and death of Jesus all previous revelations of the Father's

heart are surpassed, if it is true and only if it is true, as He

Himself said, that 'I and the Father are one,' can Paul's words here be

anything but an incredible paradox. But unless these great words close

and crown the Apostle's glowing vision, it is maimed and imperfect, and

Jesus interposes between loving hearts and God. One could almost

venture to believe that at the back of Paul's mind, when he wrote these

words, was some remembrance of the great prayer, 'I glorified Thee on

the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.'

When the Son is glorified we glorify the Father, and the words of our

text may well be remembered and laid to heart by any who will not

recognise the deity of the Son, because it seems to them to dishonour

the Father. Their honour is inseparable and their glory one.

There is a sense in which Jesus is our example even in His ascent and

exaltation, just as He was in His descent and humiliation. The mind

which was in Him is for us the pattern for earthly life, though the

deeds in which that mind was expressed, and especially His 'obedience

to the death of the Cross,' are so far beyond any self-sacrifice of

ours, and are inimitable, unique, and needing no repetition while the

world lasts. And as we can imitate His unexampled sacrifice, so we may

share His divine glory, and, resting on His own faithful word, may

follow the calm motion of His Ascension, assured that where He is there

we shall be also, and that the manhood which is exalted in Him is the

prophecy that all who love Him will share His glory. The question for

us all is, have we in us 'the mind that was in Christ'? and the other

question is, what is that name to us? Can we say, 'Thy mighty name

salvation is'? If in our deepest hearts we grasp that name, and with

unfaltering lips can say that 'there is none other name under heaven

given amongst men whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus,' then

we shall know that

'To us with Thy dear name are given,

Pardon, and holiness, and heaven.'

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WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13. For it is God

which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good

pleasure.'--Phil. ii. 12, 13.

'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder!' Here are,

joined together, in the compass of one practical exhortation, the

truths which, put asunder, have been the war-cries and shibboleths of

contending sects ever since. Faith in a finished salvation, and yet

work; God working all in me, and yet I able and bound to work likewise;

God upholding and sustaining His child to the very end; 'perfecting

that which concerns him,' making his salvation certain and sure, and

yet the Christian working 'with fear and trembling,' lest he should be

a castaway and come short of the grace of God;--who does not recognise

in these phrases the mottoes that have been written on the opposing

banners in many a fierce theological battle, waged with much harm to

both sides, and ending in no clear victory for either? Yet here they

are blended in the words of one who was no less profound a thinker than

any that have come after, and who had the gift of a divine inspiration

to boot.

Not less remarkable than the fusion here of apparent antagonisms, the

harmonising of apparent opposites, is the intensely practical character

of the purpose for which they are adduced at all. Paul has no idea of

giving his disciples a lesson in abstract theology, or laying for them

a foundation of a philosophy of free will and divine sovereignty; he is

not merely communicating to these Philippians truths for their creed,

but precepts for their deeds. The Bible knows nothing of an unpractical

theology, but, on the other hand, the Bible knows still less of an

untheological morality. It digs deep, bottoming the simplest right

action upon right thinking, and going down to the mountain bases on

which the very pillars of the universe rest, in order to lay there,

firm and [INS: immovable :INS] , the courses of the temple of a holy

life. Just as little as Scripture gives countenance to the error that

makes religion theology rather than life, just so little does it give

countenance to the far more contemptible and shallower error common in

our day, which says, Religion is not theology, but life; and means,

'Therefore, it does not matter what theology you have, you can work a

good life out with any creed!' The Bible never teaches unpractical

speculations, and the Bible never gives precepts which do not rest on

the profoundest truths. Would God, brethren, that we all had souls as

wide as would take in the whole of the many-sided scriptural

representation of the truths of the Gospel, and so avoid the narrowness

of petty, partial views of God's infinite counsel; and that we had as

close, direct, and as free communication between head, and heart, and

hand, as the Scripture has between precept and practice!

But in reference more especially to my text. Keeping in view these two

points I have already suggested, namely,--that it is the reconciling of

apparent opposites, and that it is intensely practical, I find in it

these three thoughts;--First, a Christian has his whole salvation

accomplished for him, and yet he is to work it out. Secondly, a

Christian has everything done in him by God, and yet he is to work.

Lastly, a Christian has his salvation certainly secured, and yet he is

to fear and tremble.

I. In the first place, A Christian man has his whole salvation already

accomplished for him in Christ, and yet he is to work it out.

There are two points absolutely necessary to be kept in view in order

to a right understanding of the words before us, for the want of

noticing which it has become the occasion of terrible mistakes. These

are--the persons to whom it is addressed, and the force of the

scriptural expression 'salvation.' As to the first, this exhortation

has been misapplied by being addressed to those who have no claim to be

Christians, and by having such teaching deduced from it as, You do your

part, and God will do His; You work, and God will certainly help you;

You co-operate in the great work of your salvation, and you will get

grace and pardon through Jesus Christ. Now let us remember the very

simple thing, but very important to the right understanding of these

words, that none but Christian people have anything to do with them. To

all others, to all who are not already resting on the finished

salvation of Jesus Christ, this injunction is utterly inapplicable. It

is addressed to the 'beloved, who have always obeyed'; to the 'saints

in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi.' The whole Epistle is

addressed, and this injunction with the rest, to Christian men. That is

the first thing to be remembered. If there be any of you, who have

thought that these words of Paul's to those who had believed on Christ

contained a rule of action for you, though you have not rested your

souls on Him, and exhorted you to try to win salvation by your own

doings, let me remind you of what Christ said when the Jews came to Him

in a similar spirit and asked Him, 'What shall we do that we may work

the works of God?' His answer to them was, and His answer to you, my

brother, is, 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe in Him

whom He hath sent.' That is the first lesson: Not work, but faith;

unless there be faith, no work. Unless you are a Christian, the passage

has nothing to do with you.

But now, if this injunction be addressed to those who are looking for

their salvation only to the perfect work of Christ, how can they be

exhorted to work it out themselves? Is not the oft-recurring burden of

Paul's teaching 'not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but

by His mercy He saved us'? How does this text harmonise with these

constantly repeated assertions that Christ has done all for us, and

that we have nothing to do, and can do nothing? To answer this

question, we have to remember that that scriptural expression,

'salvation,' is used with considerable width and complexity of

signification. It sometimes means the whole of the process, from the

beginning to the end, by which we are delivered from sin in all its

aspects, and are set safe and stable at the right hand of God. It

sometimes means one or other of three different parts of that

process--either deliverance from the guilt, punishment, condemnation of

sin; or secondly, the gradual process of deliverance from its power in

our own hearts; or thirdly, the completion of that process by the final

and perfect deliverance from sin and sorrow, from death and the body,

from earth and all its weariness and troubles, which is achieved when

we are landed on the other side of the river. Salvation, in one aspect,

is a thing past to the Christian; in another, it is a thing present; in

a third, it is a thing future. But all these three are one; all are

elements of the one deliverance--the one mighty and perfect act which

includes them all.

These three all come equally from Christ Himself. These three all

depend equally on His work and His power. These three are all given to

a Christian man in the first act of faith. But the attitude in which he

stands in reference to that accomplished salvation which means

deliverance from sin as a penalty and a curse, and that in which he

stands to the continuing and progressive salvation which means

deliverance from the power of evil in his own heart, are somewhat

different. In regard to the one, he has only to take the finished

blessing. He has to exercise faith and faith alone. He has nothing to

do, nothing to add, in order to fit himself for it, but simply to

receive the gift of God, and to believe on Him whom He hath sent. But

then, though that reception involves what shall come after it, and

though every one who has and holds the first thing, the pardon of his

transgression, has and holds thereby and therein his growing

sanctifying and his final glory, yet the salvation which means our

being delivered from the evil that is in our hearts, and having our

souls made like unto Christ, is one which--free gift though it be--is

not ours on the sole condition of an initial act of faith, but is ours

on the condition of continuous faithful reception and daily effort, not

in our own strength, but in God's strength, to become like Him, and to

make our own that which God has given us, and which Christ is

continually bestowing upon us.

The two things, then, are not inconsistent--an accomplished salvation,

a full, free, perfect redemption, with which a man has nothing to do at

all, but to take it;--and, on the other hand, the injunction to them

who have received this divine gift: 'Work out your own salvation.'

Work, as well as believe, and in the daily practice of faithful

obedience, in the daily subjugation of your own spirits to His divine

power, in the daily crucifixion of your flesh with its affections and

lusts, in the daily straining after loftier heights of godliness and

purer atmospheres of devotion and love--make more thoroughly your own

that which you possess. Work into the substance of your souls that

which you have. Apprehend that for which you are apprehended of Christ.

'Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure'; and

remember that not a past act of faith, but a present and continuous

life of loving, faithful work in Christ, which is His and yet yours, is

the 'holding fast the beginning of your confidence firm unto the end.'

II. In the second place, God works all in us, and yet we have to work.

There can be no mistake about the good faith and firm emphasis--as of a

man who knows his own mind, and knows that his word is true--with which

the Apostle holds up here the two sides of what I venture to call the

one truth; 'Work out your own salvation--for God works in you.' Command

implies power. Command and power involve duty. The freedom of the

Christian's action, the responsibility of the believer for his

Christian growth in grace, the committal to the Christian man's own

hands of the means of sanctifying, lie in that injunction, 'Work out

your own salvation.' Is there any faltering, any paring down or

cautious guarding of the words, in order that they may not seem to

clash with the other side of the truth? No: Paul does not say, 'Work it

out; yet it is God that worketh in you'; not 'Work it out although it

is God that worketh in you'; not 'Work it out, but then it must always

be remembered and taken as a caution that it is God that worketh in

you!' He blends the two things together in an altogether different

connection, and sees--strangely to some people, no contradiction, nor

limitation, nor puzzle, but a ground of encouragement to cheerful

obedience. Do you work, 'for it is God that worketh in you both to will

and to do of His good pleasure.' And does the Apostle limit the divine

operation? Notice how his words seem picked out on purpose to express

most emphatically its all-pervading energy. Look how his words seem

picked out on purpose to express with the utmost possible emphasis that

all which a good man is, and does, is its fruit. It is God that worketh

in you. That expresses more than bringing outward means to bear upon

heart and will. It speaks of an inward, real, and efficacious operation

of the Indwelling Spirit of all energy on the spirit in which He

dwells. 'Worketh in you to will'; this expresses more than the

presentation of motives from without, it points to a direct action on

the will, by which impulses are originated within. God puts in you the

first faint motions of a better will. 'Worketh in you, doing as well as

willing'; this points to all practical obedience, to all external acts

as flowing from His grace in us, no less than all inward good thoughts

and holy desires.

It is not that God gives men the power, and then leaves them to make

the use of it. It is not that the desire and purpose come forth from

Him, and that then we are left to ourselves to be faithful or

unfaithful stewards in carrying it out. The whole process, from the

first sowing of the seed until its last blossoming and fruiting, in the

shape of an accomplished act, of which God shall bless the

springing--it is all God's together! There is a thorough-going,

absolute attribution of every power, every action, all the thoughts

words, and deeds of a Christian soul, to God. No words could be

selected which would more thoroughly cut away the ground from every

half-and-half system which attempts to deal them out in two portions,

part God's and part mine. With all emphasis Paul attributes all to God.

And none the less strongly does he teach, by the implication contained

in his earnest injunction, that human responsibility, that human

control over the human will, and that reality of human agency which are

often thought to be annihilated by these broad views of God as

originating all good in the soul and life. The Apostle thought that

this doctrine did not absorb all our individuality in one great divine

Cause which made men mere tools and puppets. He did not believe that

the inference from it was, 'Therefore do you sit still, and feel

yourselves the cyphers that you are.' His practical conclusion is the

very opposite. It is--God does all, therefore do you work. His belief

in the power of God's grace was the foundation of the most intense

conviction of the reality and indispensableness of his own power, and

was the motive which stimulated him to vigorous action. Work, for God

works in you.

Each of these truths rests firmly on its own appropriate evidence. My

own consciousness tells me that I am free, that I have power, that I am

therefore responsible and exposed to punishment for neglect of duty. I

know what I mean when I speak of the will of God, because I myself am

conscious of a will. The power of God is an object of intelligent

thought to me, because I myself am conscious of power. And on the other

hand, that belief in a God which is one of the deep and universal

beliefs of men contains in it, when it comes to be thought about, the

belief in Him as the source of all power, as the great cause of all. If

I believe in a God at all, I must believe that He whom I so call,

worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. These two

convictions are both given to us in the primitive beliefs which belong

to us all. The one rests on consciousness, and underlies all our moral

judgments. The other rests on an original belief, which belongs to man

as such. These two mighty pillars on which all morality and all

religion repose have their foundations down deep in our nature, and

tower up beyond our sight. They seem to stand opposite to each other,

but it is only as the strong piers of some tall arch are opposed.

Beneath they repose on one foundation, above they join together in the

completing keystone and bear the whole steady structure.

Wise and good men have toiled to harmonise them, in vain. The task

transcends the limits of human faculties, as exercised here, at all

events. Perhaps the time may come when we shall be lifted high enough

to see the binding arch, but here on earth we can only behold the

shafts on either side. The history of controversy on the matter surely

proves abundantly what a hopeless task they undertake who attempt to

reconcile these truths. The attempt has usually consisted in speaking

the one loudly and the other in a whisper, and then the opposite side

has thundered what had been whispered, and has whispered very softly

what had been shouted very loudly. One party lays hold of the one pole

of the ark, and the other lays hold of that on the other side. The

fancied reconciliation consists in paring down one half of the

full-orbed truth to nothing, or in admitting it in words while every

principle of the reconciler's system demands its denial. Each

antagonist is strong in his assertions, and weak in his denials,

victorious when he establishes his half of the whole, easily defeated

when he tries to overthrow his opponent's.

This apparent incompatibility is no reason for rejecting truths each

commended to our acceptance on its own proper grounds. It may be a

reason for not attempting to dogmatise about them. It may be a warning

to us that we are on ground where our limited understandings have no

firm footing, but it is no ground for suspecting the evidence which

certifies the truths. The Bible admits and enforces them both. It never

tones down the emphasis of its statement of the one for fear of

clashing against the other, but points to us the true path for thought,

in a firm grasp of both, in the abandonment of all attempts to

reconcile them, and for practical conduct, in the peaceful trust in God

who hath wrought all our works in us, and in strenuous working out of

our own salvation. Let us, as we look back on that battlefield where

much wiser men than we have fought in vain, doing little but raising up

'a little dust that is lightly laid again,' and building trophies that

are soon struck down, learn the lesson it teaches, and be contented to

say, The short cord of my plummet does not quite go down to the bottom

of the bottomless, and I do not profess either to understand God or to

understand man, both of which I should want to do before I understood

the mystery of their conjoint action. Enough for me to believe that,

'If any force we have, it is to ill,

And all the power is God's, to do and eke to will.'

Enough for me to know that I have solemn duties laid upon me, a life's

task to be done, my deliverance from mine own evil to work out, and

that I shall only accomplish that work when I can say with the Apostle,

'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

God is all, but thou canst work! My brother, take this belief, that God

worketh all in you, for the ground of your confidence, and feel that

unless He do all, you can do nothing. Take this conviction, that thou

canst work, for the spur and stimulus of thy life, and think, These

desires in my soul come from a far deeper source than the little

cistern of my own individual life. They are God's gift. Let me cherish

them with the awful carefulness which their origin requires, lest I

should seem to have received the grace of God in vain. These two

streams of truth are like the rain-shower that falls upon the watershed

of a country. The one half flows down the one side of the everlasting

hills, and the other down the other. Falling into rivers that water

different continents, they at length find the sea, separated by the

distance of half the globe. But the sea into which they fall is one, in

every creek and channel. And so, the truth into which these two

apparent opposites converge, is 'the depth of the wisdom and the

knowledge of God,' whose ways are past finding out--the Author of all

goodness, who, if we have any holy thought, has given it us; if we have

any true desire, has implanted it; has given us the strength to do the

right and to live in His fear; and who yet, doing all the willing and

the doing, says to us, 'Because I do everything, therefore let not thy

will be paralysed, or thy hand palsied; but because I do everything,

therefore will thou according to My will, and do thou according to My

commandments!'

III. Lastly: The Christian has his salvation secured, and yet he is to

fear and tremble.

'Fear and trembling.' 'But,' you may say, 'perfect love casts out

fear.' So it does. The fear which has torment it casts out. But there

is another fear in which there is no torment, brethren; a fear and

trembling which is but another shape of confidence and calm hope!

Scripture does tell us that the believing man's salvation is certain.

Scripture tells us it is certain since he believes. And your faith can

be worth nothing unless it have, bedded deep in it, that trembling

distrust of your own power which is the pre-requisite and the companion

of all thankful and faithful reception of God's infinite mercy. Your

horizon ought to be full of fear, if your gaze be limited to yourself;

but oh! above our earthly horizon with its fogs, God's infinite blue

stretches untroubled by the mist and cloud which are earth-born. I, as

working, have need to tremble and to fear, but I, as wrought upon, have

a right to confidence and hope, a hope that is full of immortality, and

an assurance which is the pledge of its own fulfilment. The worker is

nothing, the Worker in him is all. Fear and trembling, when the

thoughts turn to mine own sins and weaknesses, hope and confidence when

they turn to the happier vision of God! 'Not I'--there is the tremulous

self-distrust; 'the grace of God in me'--there is the calm assurance of

victory. Forasmuch, then, as God worketh all things, be you diligent,

faithful, prayerful, confident. Forasmuch as Christ has perfected the

work for you, do you 'go on unto perfection.' Let all fear and

trembling be yours, as a man; let all confidence and calm trust be

yours as a child of God. Turn your confidence and your fears alike into

prayer. 'Perfect, O Lord, that which concerneth me; forsake not the

work of Thine own hands!'--and the prayer will evoke the merciful

answer, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee God is faithful, who

hath called you unto the Gospel of His Son; and will keep you unto His

everlasting kingdom of glory.'

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COPIES OF JESUS

'Do all things without murmurings and disputings; 15. That ye may be

blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of

a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in

the world, 16. Holding forth the word of life.'--Phil. ii. 14-16

(R.V.).

We are told by some superfine modern moralists, that to regard one's

own salvation as the great work of our lives is a kind of selfishness,

and no doubt there may be a colour of truth in the charge. At least the

meaning of the injunction to work out our own salvation may have been

sometimes so misunderstood, and there have been types of Christian

character, such as the ascetic and monastic, which have made the

representation plausible. I do not think that there is much danger of

anybody so misunderstanding the precept now. But it is worthy of notice

that there stand here side by side two paragraphs, in the former of

which the effort to work out one's own salvation is urged in the

strongest terms, and in the other of which the regard for others is

predominant. We shall see that the connection between these two is not

accidental, but that one great reason for working out our salvation is

here set forth as being the good we may thereby do to others.

I. We note the one great duty of cheerful yielding to God's will.

It is clear, I think, that the precept to do 'all things without

murmurings and disputings' stands in the closest connection with what

goes before. It is, in fact, the explanation of how salvation is to be

wrought out. It presents the human side which corresponds to the divine

activity, which has just been so earnestly insisted on. God works in us

'willing and doing,' let us on our parts do with ready submission all

the things which He so inspires to will and to do.

The 'murmurings' are not against men but against God. The 'disputings'

are not wrangling with others but the division of mind in one's

self-questionings, hesitations, and the like. So the one are more

moral, the other more intellectual, and together they represent the

ways in which Christian men may resist the action on their spirits of

God's Spirit, 'willing,' or the action of God's providence on their

circumstances, 'doing.' Have we never known what it was to have some

course manifestly prescribed to us as right, from which we have shrunk

with reluctance of will? If some course has all at once struck us as

wrong which we had been long accustomed to do without hesitation, has

there been no 'murmuring' before we yielded? A voice has said to us,

'Give up such and such a habit,' or 'such and such a pursuit is

becoming too engrossing': do we not all know what it is not only to

feel obedience an effort, but even to cherish reluctance, and to let it

stifle the voice?

There are often 'disputings' which do not get the length of

'murmurings.' The old word which tried to weaken the plain imperative

of the first command by the subtle suggestion, 'Yea, hath God said?'

still is whispered into our ears. We know what it is to answer God's

commands with a 'But, Lord.' A reluctant will is clever to drape itself

with more or less honest excuses, and the only safety is in cheerful

obedience and glad submission. The will of God ought not only to

receive obedience, but prompt obedience, and such instantaneous and

whole-souled submission is indispensable if we are to 'work out our own

salvation,' and to present an attitude of true, receptive

correspondence to that of God, who 'works in us both to will and to do

of His own good pleasure.' Our surrender of ourselves into the hands of

God, in respect both to inward and outward things, should be complete.

As has been profoundly said, that surrender consists 'in a continual

forsaking and losing all self in the will of God, willing only what God

from eternity has willed, forgetting what is past, giving up the time

present to God, and leaving to His providence that which is to come,

making ourselves content in the actual moment seeing it brings along

with it the eternal order of God concerning us' (Madame Guyon).

II. The conscious aim in all our activity.

What God works in us for is that for which we too are to yield

ourselves to His working, 'without murmurings and disputings,' and to

co-operate with glad submission and cheerful obedience. We are to have

as our distinct aim the building up of a character 'blameless and

harmless, children of God without rebuke.' The blamelessness is

probably in reference to men's judgment rather than to God's, and the

difficulty of coming untarnished from contact with the actions and

criticisms of a crooked and perverse generation is emphasised by the

very fact that such blamelessness is the first requirement for

Christian conduct. It was a feather in Daniel's cap that the president

and princes were foiled in their attempt to pick holes in his conduct,

and had to confess that they would not 'find any occasion against him,

except we find it concerning the laws of his God.' God is working in us

in order that our lives should be such that malice is dumb in their

presence. Are we co-operating with Him? We are bound to satisfy the

world's requirements of Christian character. They are sharp critics and

sometimes unreasonable, but on the whole it would not be a bad rule for

Christian people, 'Do what irreligious men expect you to do.' The worst

man knows more than the best man practises, and his conscience is quick

to decide the course for other people. Our weaknesses and compromises,

and love of the world, might receive a salutary rebuke if we would try

to meet the expectations which 'the man in the street' forms of us.

'Harmless' is more correctly pure, all of a piece, homogeneous and

entire. It expresses what the Christian life should be in itself,

whilst the former designation describes it more as it appears. The

piece of cloth is to be so evenly and carefully woven that if held up

against the light it will show no flaws nor knots. Many a professing

Christian life has a veneer of godliness nailed thinly over a solid

bulk of selfishness. There are many goods in the market finely dressed

so as to hide that the warp is cotton and only the weft silk. No

Christian man who has memory and self-knowledge can for a moment claim

to have reached the height of his ideal; the best of us, at the best,

are like Nebuchadnezzar's image, whose feet were iron and clay, but we

ought to strain after it and to remember that a stain shows most on the

whitest robe. What made David's sin glaring and memorable was its

contradiction of his habitual nobler self. One spot more matters little

on a robe already covered with many. The world is fully warranted in

pointing gleefully or contemptuously at Christians' inconsistencies,

and we have no right to find fault with their most pointed sarcasms, or

their severest judgments. It is those 'that bear the vessels of the

Lord' whose burden imposes on them the duty 'be ye clean,' and makes

any uncleanness more foul in them than in any other.

The Apostle sets forth the place and function of Christians in the

world, by bringing together in the sharpest contrast the 'children of

God' and a 'crooked and perverse generation.' He is thinking of the old

description in Deuteronomy, where the ancient Israel is charged with

forgetting 'Thy Father that hath bought thee,' and as showing by their

corruption that they are a 'perverse and crooked generation.' The

ancient Israel had been the Son of God, and yet had corrupted itself;

the Christian Israel are 'sons of God' set among a world all deformed,

twisted, perverted. 'Perverse' is a stronger word than 'crooked,' which

latter may be a metaphor for moral obliquity, like our own right and

wrong, or perhaps points to personal deformity. Be that as it may, the

position which the Apostle takes is plain enough. He regards the two

classes as broadly separated in antagonism in the very roots of their

being. Because the 'sons of God' are set in the midst of that 'crooked

and perverse generation' constant watchfulness is needed lest they

should conform, constant resort to their Father lest they should lose

the sense of sonship, and constant effort that they may witness of Him.

III. The solemn reason for this aim.

That is drawn from a consideration of the office and function of

Christian men. Their position in the midst of a 'crooked and perverse

generation' devolves on them a duty in relation to that generation.

They are to 'appear as lights in the world.' The relation between them

and it is not merely one of contrast, but on their parts one of witness

and example. The metaphor of light needs no explanation. We need only

note that the word, 'are seen' or 'appear,' is indicative, a statement

of fact, not imperative, a command. As the stars lighten the darkness

with their myriad lucid points, so in the divine ideal Christian men

are to be as twinkling lights in the abyss of darkness. Their light

rays forth without effort, being an involuntary efflux. Possibly the

old paradox of the Psalmist was in the Apostle's mind, which speaks of

the eloquent silence, in which 'there is no speech nor language, and

their voice is not heard,' but yet 'their line has gone out through all

the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.'

Christian men appear as lights by 'holding forth the word of life.' In

themselves they have no brightness but that which comes from raying out

the light that is in them. The word of life must live, giving life in

us, if we are ever to be seen as 'lights in the world.' As surely as

the electric light dies out of a lamp when the current is switched off,

so surely shall we be light only when we are 'in the Lord.' There are

many so-called Christians in this day who stand tragically unaware that

their 'lamps are gone out.' When the sun rises and smites the mountain

tops they burn, when its light falls on Memnon's stony lips they

breathe out music, 'Arise, shine, for thy light has come.'

Undoubtedly one way of 'holding forth the word of life' must be to

speak the word, but silent living 'blameless and harmless' and leaving

the secret of the life very much to tell itself is perhaps the best way

for most Christian people to bear witness. Such a witness is constant,

diffused wherever the witness-bearer is seen, and free from the

difficulties that beset speech, and especially from the assumption of

superiority which often gives offence. It was the sight of 'your good

deeds' to which Jesus pointed as the strongest reason for men's

'glorifying your Father.' If we lived such lives there would be less

need for preachers. 'If any will not hear the word they may without the

word be won.' And reasonably so, for Christianity is a life and cannot

be all told in words, and the Gospel is the proclamation of freedom

from sin, and is best preached and proved by showing that we are free.

The Gospel was lived as well as spoken. Christ's life was Christ's

mightiest preaching.

'The word was flesh and wrought

With human hands the creed of creeds.'

If we keep near to Him we too shall witness, and if our faces shine

like Moses' as he came down from the mountain, or like Stephen's in the

council chamber, men will 'take knowledge of us that we have been with

Jesus.'

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A WILLING SACRIFICE

'That I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not

run in vain neither labour in vain. 17. Yea, and if I am offered upon

the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you

all. 18. And in the same manner do ye also joy, and rejoice with

me.'--Phil. ii. 16-18 (R.V.).

We come here to another of the passages in which the Apostle pours out

all his heart to his beloved Church. Perhaps there never was a

Christian teacher (always excepting Christ) who spoke more about

himself than Paul. His own experience was always at hand for

illustration. His preaching was but the generalisation of his life. He

had felt it all first, before he threw it into the form of doctrine. It

is very hard to keep such a style from becoming egotism.

This paragraph is remarkable, especially if we consider that this is

introduced as a motive to their faithfulness, that thereby they will

contribute to his joy at the last great testing. There must have been a

very deep love between Paul and the Philippians to make such words as

these true and appropriate. They open the very depths of his heart in a

way from which a less noble and fervid nature would have shrunk, and

express his absolute consecration in his work, and his eager desire for

their spiritual good, with such force as would have been exaggeration

in most men.

We have here a wonderful picture of the relation between him and the

church at Philippi which may well stand as a pattern for us all. I do

not mean to parallel our relations with that between him and them, but

it is sufficiently analogous to make these words very weighty and

solemn for us.

I. The Philippians' faithfulness Paul's glory in the day of Christ.

The Apostle strikes a solemn note, which was always sounding through

his life, when he points to that great Day of Christ as the time when

his work was to be tested. The thought of that gave earnestness to all

his service, and in conjunction with the joyful thought that, however

his work might be marred by failures and flaws, he himself was

'accepted in the beloved,' was the impulse which carried him on through

a life than which none of Christ's servants have dared, and done, and

suffered more for Him. Paul believed that, according to the results of

that test, his position would in some sort be determined. Of course he

does not here contradict the foundation principle of his whole Gospel,

that salvation is not the result of our own works, or virtues, but is

the free unmerited gift of Christ's grace. But while that is true, it

is none the less true, that the degree in which believers receive that

gift depends on their Christian character, both in their life on earth

and in the day of Christ. One element in that character is faithful

work for Jesus. Faithful work indeed is not necessarily successful

work, and many who are welcomed by Jesus, the judge, will have the

memory of many disappointments and few harvested grains. It was not a

reaper, 'bringing his sheaves with him,' who stayed himself against the

experience of failure, by the assurance, 'Though Israel be not gathered

yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.' If our want of

success, and others' lapse, and apostasy or coldness has not been

occasioned by any fault of ours, there will be no diminution of our

reward. But we can so seldom be sure of that, and even then there will

be an absence of what might have added to gladness.

We need not do more than note that the text plainly implies, that at

that testing time men's knowledge of all that they did, and the results

of it, will be complete. Marvellous as it seems to us, with our

fragmentary memories, and the great tracts of our lives through which

we have passed mechanically, and which seem to have left no trace on

the mirror of our consciousness, we still, all of us, have experiences

which make that all-recovering memory credible. Some passing

association, a look, a touch, an odour, a sun-set sky, a chord of music

will bring before us some trivial long-forgotten incident or emotion,

as the chance thrust of a boat-hook will draw to the surface by its

hair, a long-drowned corpse. If we are, as assuredly we are, writing

with invisible ink our whole life's history on the pages of our own

minds, and if we shall have to read them all over again one day, is it

not tragic that most of us scribble the pages so hastily and

carelessly, and forget that, 'what I have written I have written,' and

what I have written I must read.

But there is another way of looking at Paul's words as being an

indication of his warm love for the Philippians. Even among the

glories, he would feel his heart filled with new gladness when he found

them there. The hunger for the good of others which cannot bear to

think even of heaven without their presence has been a master note of

all true Christian teachers, and without it there will be little of the

toil, of which Paul speaks in the context, 'running and labouring.' He

that would win men's hearts for any great cause must give his heart to

them.

That Paul should have felt warranted in using such a motive with the

Philippians tells how surely he reckoned on their true and deep love.

He believes that they care enough for him to feel the power as a motive

with them, that their faithfulness will make Paul more blessed amidst

the blessings of heaven. Oh! if such love knit together all Christian

teachers and their hearers in this time, and if the 'Day of Christ'

burned before them, as it did before him, and if the vision stirred to

such running and labouring as his, teachers and taught would oftener

have to say, 'We are your rejoicing, even as ye are also ours in the

Day of our Lord Jesus.' The voice of the man who is in the true

'Apostolic Succession' will dare to make the appeal, knowing that it

will call forth an abundant answer, 'Look to yourselves that we lose

not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full

reward.'

II. Paul's death an aid to the Philippians' faith.

The general meaning of the Apostle's words is, 'If I have not only to

run and labour, but to die in the discharge of my Apostolic Mission, I

joy and rejoice, and I bid you rejoice with me.' We need only note that

the Apostle here casts his language into the forms consecrated for

sacrifice. He will not speak of death by its own ugly and threadbare

name, but thinks of himself as a devoted victim, and of his death as

making the sacrifice complete. In the figure there is a solemn scorn of

death, and at the same time a joyful recognition that it is the means

of bringing him more nearly to God, with whom he would fain be. It is

interesting, as showing the persistence of these thoughts in the

Apostle's mind, that the word rendered in our text 'offered,' which

fully means 'poured out as a drink offering,' occurs again in the same

connection in the great words of the swan song in ii. Timothy, 'I am

already being offered, and the time of my departure is come.' Death

looked to him, when he looked it in the eyes, and the block was close

by him, as it had done when he spoke of it to his Philippian friends.

It is to be noted, in order to bring out more vividly the force of the

figure, that Paul here speaks of the libation being poured 'on' the

sacrifice, as was the practice in heathen ritual. The sacrifice is the

victim, 'service' is the technical word for priestly ministration, and

the general meaning is, 'If my blood is poured out as a drink offering

on the sacrifice ministered by you, which is your faith, I joy with you

all.' This man had no fear of death, and no shrinking from 'leaving the

warm precincts of the cheerful day.' He was equally ready to live or to

die as might best serve the name of Jesus, for to him 'to live was

Christ,' and therefore to him it could be nothing but 'gain' to die.

Here he seems to be treating his death as a possibility, but as a

possibility only, for almost immediately afterwards he says, that he

'trusts in the Lord that I myself will come shortly.' It is interesting

to notice the contrast between his mood of mind here and that in the

previous chapter (i. 25) where the 'desire to depart and to be with

Christ' is deliberately suppressed, because his continuous life is

regarded as essential for the Philippians' 'progress and joy in faith.'

Here he discerns that perhaps his death would do more for their faith

than would his life, and being ready for either alternative he welcomes

the possibility. May we not see in the calm heart, which is at leisure

to think of death in such a fashion, a pattern for us all? Remember how

near and real his danger was. Nero was not in the habit of letting a

man, whose head had been in the mouth of the lion, take it out unhurt.

Paul is no eloquent writer or poet playing with the idea of death, and

trying to say pretty things about it, but a man who did not know when

the blow would come, but did know that it would come before long.

We may point here to the two great thoughts in Paul's words, and notice

the priesthood and sacrifice of life, and the sacrifice and libation of

death. The Philippians offered as their sacrifice their faith, and all

the works which flow therefrom. Is that our idea of life? Is it our

idea of faith? We have no gifts to bring, we come empty-handed unless

we carry in our hands the offering of our faith, which includes the

surrender of our will, and the giving away of our hearts, and is

essentially laying hold of Christ's sacrifice. When we come empty,

needy, sinful, but cleaving wholly to that perfect sacrifice of the

Great Priest, we too become priests and our poor gift is accepted.

But another possibility than that of a life of running and labour

presented itself to Paul, and it is a revelation of the tranquillity of

his heart in the midst of impending danger, all the more pathetic

because it is entirely unconscious, that he should be free to cast his

anticipations into that calm metaphor of being, 'offered upon the

sacrifice and service of your faith.' His heart beats no faster, nor

does the faintest shadow of reluctance cross his will, when he thinks

of his death. All the repulsive accompaniments of a Roman execution

fade away from his imagination. These are but negligible accidents; the

substantial reality which obscures them all is that his blood will be

poured out as a libation, and that by it his brethren's faith will be

strengthened. To this man death had finally and completely ceased to be

a terror, and had become what it should be to all Christians, a

voluntary surrender to God, an offering to Him, an act of worship, of

trust, and of thankful praise. Seneca, in his death, poured out a

libation to Jupiter the Liberator, and if we could only know beforehand

what death delivers us from, and admits us to, we should not be so

prone to call it 'the last enemy.' What Paul's death was for himself in

the process of his perfecting called forth, and warranted, the 'joy'

with which he anticipated it. It did no more for him than it will do

for each of us, and if our vision were as clear, and our faith as firm

as his, we should be more ready than, alas! we too often are, to catch

up the exulting note with which he hails the possibility of its coming.

But it is not the personal bearing only of his death that gives him

joy. He thinks of it mainly as contributing to the furtherance of the

faith of others. For that end he was spending the effort and toil of an

effortful and toilsome life, and was equally ready to meet a violent

and shameful death. He knew that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed

of the Church,' and rejoiced, and called upon his brethren also to 'joy

and rejoice' with him in his shedding of his martyr's blood.

The Philippians might well have thought, as we all are tempted to

think, that the withdrawal of those round whom our hearts desperately

cling, and who seem to us to bring love and trust nearer to us, can

only be loss, but surely the example in our text may well speak to our

hearts of the way in which we should look at death for ourselves, and

for our dearest. Their very withdrawal may send us nearer to Christ.

The holy memories which linger in the sky, like the radiance of a

sunken sun, may clothe familiar truths with unfamiliar power and

loveliness. The thought of where the departed have gone may lift our

thoughts wistfully thither with a new feeling of home. The path that

they have trodden may become less strange to us, and the victory that

they have won may prophesy that we too shall be 'more than conquerors

through Him that loveth us.' So the mirror broken may turn us to the

sun, and the passing of the dearest that can die may draw us to the

Dearer who lives.

Paul, living, rejoiced in the prospect of death. We may be sure that he

rejoiced in it no less dead than living. And we may permissibly think

of this text as suggesting how

'The saints on earth and all the dead

But one communion make,'

and are to be united in one joy. They rejoice for their own sakes, but

their joy is not self-absorbed, and so putting them farther away from

us. They look back upon earth, the runnings and labourings of the

unforgotten life here; and are glad to bear in their hearts the

indubitable token that they have 'not run in vain neither laboured in

vain.' But surely the depth of their own repose will not make them

indifferent to those who are still in the midst of struggle and toil,

nor the fulness of their own felicity make them forget those whom they

loved of old, and love now with the perfect love of Heaven. It is hard

for us to rise to complete sympathy with these serenely blessed

spirits, but yet we too should rejoice. Not indeed to the exclusion of

sorrow, nor to the neglect of the great purpose to be effected in us by

the withdrawal, as by the presence of dear ones, the furtherance of our

faith, but having made sure that that purpose has been effected in us,

we should then give solemn thanksgivings if it has. It is sad and

strange to think of how opposite are the feelings about their

departure, of those who have gone and of those who are left. Would it

not be better that we should try to share theirs and so bring about a

true union? We may be sure that their deepest desire is that we should.

If some lips that we shall never hear any more, till we come where they

are, could speak, would not they bring to us as their message from

Heaven, Do 'ye also joy and rejoice with me'?

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PAUL AND TIMOTHY

'But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I

also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20. For I have no

man like-minded, who will care truly for your state. 21. For they all

seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. 22. But ye know the

proof of him, that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me

in furtherance of the gospel. 23. Him therefore I hope to send

forthwith, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me: 24. But I

trust in the Lord that I myself also shall come shortly.'--Phil. ii.

19-24 (R.V.).

Like all great men Paul had a wonderful power of attaching followers to

himself. The mass of the planet draws in small aerolites which catch

fire as they pass through its atmosphere. There is no more beautiful

page in the history of the early Church than the story of Paul and his

companions. They gathered round him with such devotion, and followed

him with such love. They were not small men. Luke and Aquila were among

them, and they would have been prominent in most companies, but gladly

took a place second to Paul. He impressed his own personality and his

type of teaching on his followers as Luther did on his, and as many

another great teacher has done.

Among all these Timothy seems to have held a special place. Paul first

found him on his second journey either at Derbe or Lystra. His mother,

Eunice, was already a believer, his father a Greek. Timothy seems to

have been converted on Paul's first visit, for on his second he was

already a disciple well reported of, and Paul more than once calls him

his 'son in the faith.' He seems to have come in to take John Mark's

place as the Apostle's 'minister,' and from that time to have been

usually Paul's trusted attendant. We hear of him as with the Apostle on

his first visit to Philippi, and to have gone with him to Thessalonica

and Beroea, but then to have been parted until Corinth. Thence Paul

went quickly up to Jerusalem and back to Antioch, from which he set out

again to visit the churches, and made a special stay in Ephesus. While

there he planned a visit to Macedonia and Achaia, in preparation for

one to Jerusalem, and finally to Rome. So he sent Timothy and Erastus

on ahead to Macedonia, which would of course include Philippi. After

that visit to Macedonia and Greece Paul returned to Philippi, from

which he sailed with Timothy in his company. He was probably with him

all the way to Rome, and we find him mentioned as sharer in the

imprisonment both here and in Colossians.

The references made to him point to a very sweet, good, pure and

gracious character without much strength, needing to be stayed and

stiffened by the stronger character, but full of sympathy, unselfish

disregard of self, and consecrated love to Christ. He had been

surrounded with a hallowed atmosphere from his youth, and 'from a child

had known the holy Scriptures,' and 'prophecies' like fluttering doves

had gone before on him. He had 'often infirmities' and 'tears.' He

needed to be roused to 'stir up the gift that was in him,' and braced

up 'not to be ashamed,' but to fight against the disabling 'spirit of

fear,' and to be 'strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.'

The bond between these two was evidently very close, and the Apostle

felt something of a paternal interest in the very weakness of character

which was in such contrast to his own strength, and which obviously

dreaded the discouragement which was likely to be produced by his own

martyrdom. This favourite companion he will now send to his favourite

church. The verses of our text express that intention, and give us a

glimpse into the Apostle's thoughts and feelings in his imprisonment.

I. The prisoner's longing and hope.

The first point which strikes us in this self-revelation of Paul's is

his conscious uncertainty as to his future. In the previous chapter

(ver. 25) he is confident that he will live. In the verses immediately

preceding our text he faces the possibility of death. Here he

recognises the uncertainty but still 'trusts' that he will be

liberated, but yet he does not know 'how it may go with' him. We think

of him in his lodging sometimes hoping and sometimes doubting. He had a

tyrant's caprice to depend on, and knew how a moment's whim might end

all. Surely his way of bearing that suspense was very noteworthy and

noble. It is difficult to keep a calm heart, and still more difficult

to keep on steadily at work, when any moment might bring the victor's

axe. Suspense almost enforces idleness, but Paul crowded these moments

of his prison time with letters, and Ephesians, Philippians,

Colossians, and Philemon are the fruits for which we are indebted to a

period which would have been to many men a reason for throwing aside

all work.

How calmly too he speaks of the uncertain issue! Surely never was the

possibility of death more quietly spoken of than in 'so soon as I shall

see how it will go with me.' That means--'as soon as my fate is

decided, be it what it may, I will send Timothy to tell you.' What a

calm pulse he must have had! There is no attitudinising here, all is

perfectly simple and natural. Can we look, do we habitually look, into

the uncertain future with such a temper--accepting all that may be in

its grey mists, and feeling that our task is to fill the present with

strenuous loving service, leaving tomorrow with all its alternatives,

even that tremendous one of life and death, to Him who will shape it to

a perfect end?

We note, further, the purpose of Paul's love. It is beautiful to see

how he yearns over these Philippians and feels that his joy will be

increased when he hears from them. He is sure, as he believes, to hear

good, and news which will be a comfort. Among the souls whom he bore on

his heart were many in the Macedonian city, and a word from them would

be like 'cold water to a thirsty soul.'

What a noble suppression of self; how deep and strong the tie that

bound him to them must have been! Is there not a lesson here for all

Christian workers, for all teachers, preachers, parents, that no good

is to be done without loving sympathy? Unless our hearts go out to

people we shall never reach their hearts. We may talk to them for ever,

but unless we have this loving sympathy we might as well be silent. It

is possible to pelt people with the Gospel, and to produce the effect

of flinging stones at them. Much Christian work comes to nothing mainly

for that reason.

And how deep a love does he show in his depriving himself of Timothy

for their sakes, and in his reason for sending him! Those reasons would

have been for most of us the strongest reason for keeping him. It is

not everybody who will denude himself of the help of one who serves him

'as a child serveth a father,' and will part with the only like-minded

friend he has, because his loving eye will clearly see the state of

others.

Paul's expression of his purpose to send Timothy is very much more than

a piece of emotional piety. He 'hopes in the Lord' to accomplish his

design, and that hope so rooted and conditioned is but one instance of

the all-comprehending law of his life, that, to him, to 'live is

Christ.' His whole being was so interpenetrated with Christ's that all

his thoughts and feelings were 'in the Lord Jesus.' So should our

purposes be. Our hopes should be derived from union with Him. They

should not be the play of our own fancy or imagination. They should be

held in submission to him, and ever with the limitation, 'Not as I

will, but as Thou wilt.' We should be trusting to Him to fulfil them.

If thus we hope, our hopes may lead us nearer to Jesus instead of

tempting us away from Him by delusive brightnesses. There is a

religious use of hope not only when it is directed to heavenly

certainties, and 'enters within the veil,' but even when occupied about

earthly things. Spenser twice paints for us the figure of Hope, one has

always something of dread in her blue eyes, the other, and the other

only, leans on the anchor, and 'maketh not ashamed'; and her name is

'Hope in the Lord.'

II. The prisoner solitary among self-seeking men.

With wonderful self-surrender the Apostle thinks of his lack of

like-minded companions as being a reason for depriving himself of the

only like-minded one who was left with him. He felt that Timothy's

sympathetic soul would truly care for the Philippians' condition, and

would minister to it lovingly. He could rely that Timothy would have no

selfish by-ends to serve, but would seek the things of Jesus Christ. We

know too little of the circumstances of Paul's imprisonment to know how

he came to be thus lonely. In the other Epistles of the Captivity we

have mention of a considerable group of friends, many of whom would

certainly have been included in a list of the 'like-minded.' We hear,

for example, of Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, John Mark, Epaphras,

and Luke. What had become of them all we do not know. They were

evidently away on Christian service, somewhere or other, or some of

them perhaps had not yet arrived. At all events for some reason Paul

was for the time left alone but for Timothy. Not that there were no

Christian men in Rome, but of those who could have been sent on such an

errand there were none in whom love to Christ and care for His cause

and flock were strong enough to mark them as fit for it.

So then we have to take account of Paul's loneliness in addition to his

other sorrows, and we may well mark how calmly and uncomplainingly he

bears it. We are perpetually hearing complaints of isolation and the

difficulty of finding sympathy, or 'people who understand me.' That is

often the complaint of a morbid nature, or of one which has never given

itself the trouble of trying to 'understand' others, or of showing the

sympathy for which it says that it thirsts. And many of these

complaining spirits might take a lesson from the lonely Apostle. There

never was a man, except Paul's Master and ours, who cared more for

human sympathy, had his own heart fuller of it, and received less of it

from others than Paul. But he had discovered what it would be

blessedness for us all to lay to heart, that a man who has Christ for

his companion can do without others, and that a heart in which there

whispers, 'Lo, I am with you always,' can never be utterly solitary.

May we not take the further lesson that the sympathy which we should

chiefly desire is sympathy and fellow-service in Christian work? Paul

did not want like-minded people in order that he might have the luxury

of enjoying their sympathy, but what he wanted was allies in his work

for Christ. It was sympathy in his care for the Philippians that he

sought for in his messenger. And that is the noblest form of

like-mindedness that we can desire--some one to hold the ropes for us.

Note, too, that Paul does not weakly complain because he had no

helpers. Good and earnest men are very apt to say much about the

half-hearted way in which their brethren take up some cause in which

they are eagerly interested, and sometimes to abandon it altogether for

that reason. May not such faint hearts learn a lesson from him who had

'no man like-minded,' and yet never dreamt of whimpering because of it,

or of flinging down his tools because of the indolence of his

fellow-workers?

There is another point to be observed in the Apostle's words here. He

felt that their attitude to Christ determined his affinities with men.

He could have no deep and true fellowship with others, whatever their

name to live, who were daily 'seeking their own,' and at the same time

leaving unsought 'the things of Jesus Christ.' They who are not alike

in their deepest aims can have no real kindred. Must we not say that

hosts of so-called Christian people do not seem to feel, if one can

judge by the company they affect, that the deepest bond uniting men is

that which binds them to Jesus Christ? I would press the question, Do

we feel that nothing draws us so close to men as common love to Jesus,

and that if we are not alike on that cardinal point there is a deep

gulf of separation beneath a deceptive surface of union, an

unfathomable gorge marked by a quaking film of earth?

It is a solemn estimate of some professing Christians which the Apostle

gives here, if he is including the members of the Roman Church in his

judgment that they are not 'like-minded' with him, and are 'seeking

their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.' We may rather hope that he

is speaking of others around him, and that for some reason unknown to

us he was at the time secluded from the Roman Christians. He brings out

with unflinching precision the choice which determines a life. There is

always that terrible 'either--or.' To live for Christ is the

antagonist, and only antagonist of life for self. To live for self is

death. To live for Jesus is the only life. There are two centres,

heliocentric and geocentric as the scientists say. We can choose round

which we shall draw our orbit, and everything depends on the choice

which we make. To seek 'the things of Jesus Christ' is sure to lead to,

and is the only basis of, care for men. Religion is the parent of

compassion, and if we are looking for a man who will care truly for the

state of others, we must do as Paul did, look for him among those who

'seek the things of Jesus Christ.'

III. The prisoner's joy in loving co-operation.

The Apostle's eulogium on Timothy points to his long and intimate

association with Paul and to the Philippians' knowledge of him as well

as to the Apostle's clinging to him. There is a piece of delicate

beauty in the words which we may pause for a moment to point out. Paul

writes as 'a child serveth a father,' and the natural sequence would

have been 'so he served me,' but he remembers that the service was not

to him, Paul, but to another, and so he changes the words and says he

'served with me in furtherance of the Gospel.' We are both servants

alike--Christ's servants for the Gospel.

Paul's joy in Timothy's loving co-operation was so deep because Paul's

whole heart was set on 'the furtherance of the Gospel.' Help towards

that end was help indeed. We may measure the ardour and intensity of

Paul's devotion to his apostolic work by the warmth of gratitude which

he shows to his helper. They who contribute to our reaching our chief

desire win our warmest love, and the catalogue of our helpers follows

the order of the list of our aims. Timothy brought to Paul no

assistance to procure any of the common objects of human desires.

Wealth, reputation, success in any of the pursuits which attract most

men might have been held out to the Apostle and not been thought worth

stooping to take, nor would the offerer have been thanked, but any

proffered service that had the smallest bearing on that great work to

which Paul's life was given, and which his conscience told him there

would be a curse on himself if he did not fulfil, was welcomed as a

priceless gift. Do we arrange the lists of our helpers on the same

fashion, and count that they serve us best who help us to serve Christ?

It should be as much the purpose of every Christian life as it was that

of Paul to spread the salvation and glory of the 'name that is above

every name.' If we lived as continually under the influence of that

truth as he did, we should construe the circumstances of our lives,

whether helpful or hindering, very differently, and we could shake the

world.

Christian unity is very good and infinitely to be desired, but the true

field on which it should display itself is that of united work for the

common Lord. The men who have marched side by side through a campaign

are knit together as nothing else would bind them. Even two horses

drawing one carriage will have ways and feelings and a common

understanding, which they would never have attained in any other way.

There is nothing like common work for clearing away mists. Much

so-called Christian sympathy and like-mindedness are something like the

penal cranks that used to be in jails, which generated immense power on

this side of the wall but ground out nothing on the other.

Let us not forget that in the field of Christian service there is room

for all manner of workers, and that they are associated, however

different their work. Paul often calls Timothy his 'fellow-labourer,'

and once gives him the eulogium, 'he worketh the work of the Lord as I

also do.' Think of the difference between the two men in age,

endowment, and sphere! Apparently Timothy at first had very subordinate

work taking John Mark's place, and is described as being one of those

who 'ministered' to Paul. It is the cup of cold water over again. All

work done for the same Lord, and with the same motive is the same; 'he

that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a

prophet's reward.' When Paul associates Timothy with himself he is

copying from afar off his Lord, who lets us think of even our poor

deeds as done by those whom He does not disdain to call His

fellow-workers. It would be worth living for if, at the last, He should

acknowledge us, and say even of us, 'he hath served with Me in the

Gospel.'

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PAUL AND EPAPHRODITUS

'But I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and

fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my

need. 26. Since he longed after you all, and was sore troubled, because

ye had heard that he was sick. 27. For indeed he was sick nigh unto

death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also,

that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28. I have sent him therefore

the more diligently, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and

that I may be the less sorrowful. 29. Receive him therefore in the Lord

with all joy; and hold such in honour: 30. Because for the work of

Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which

was lacking in your service toward me.'--Phil. ii. 25-30 (R.V.).

Epaphroditus is one of the less known of Paul's friends. All our

information about him is contained in this context, and in a brief

reference in Chapter iv. His was a singular fate--to cross Paul's path,

and for one short period of his life to be known to all the world, and

for all the rest before and after to be utterly unknown. The ship sails

across the track of the moonlight, and then vanishes ghost-like into

darkness. Of all the inhabitants of Philippi at that time we know the

names of but three, Euodias, Syntiche, and Epaphroditus, and we owe

them all to Paul. The context gives us an interesting miniature of the

last, and pathetic glimpses into the private life of the Apostle in his

imprisonment, and it is worth our while to try to bring our historic

imagination to bear on Epaphroditus, and to make him a living man.

The first fact about him is, that he was one of the Philippian

Christians, and sent by them to Rome, with some pecuniary or material

help, such as comforts for Paul's prison-house, food, clothing, or

money. There was no reliable way of getting these to Paul but to take

them, and so Epaphroditus faced the long journey across Greece to

Brindisi and Rome, and when arrived there threw himself with ardour

into serving Paul. The Apostle's heartfelt eulogium upon him shows two

phases of his work. He was in the first place Paul's helper in the

Gospel, and his faithfulness there is set forth in a glowing climax,

'My brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier.' He was in the second

place the minister to Paul's needs. There would be many ways of serving

the captive, looking after his comfort, doing his errands, procuring

daily necessaries, managing affairs, perhaps writing his letters,

easing his chain, chafing his aching wrists, and ministering in a

thousand ways which we cannot and need not specify. At all events he

gladly undertook even servile work for love of Paul.

He had an illness which was probably the consequence of his toil.

Perhaps over-exertion in travel, or perhaps his Macedonian constitution

could not bear the enervating air of Rome, or perhaps Paul's prison was

unhealthy. At any rate he worked till he made himself ill. The news

reached Philippi in some round-about way, and, as it appears, the news

of his illness only, not of his recovery. The difficulty of

communication would sufficiently account for the partial intelligence.

Then the report found its way back to Rome, and Epaphroditus got

home-sick and was restless, uneasy, 'sore troubled,' as the Apostle

says, because they had heard he had been sick. In his low, nervous

state, barely convalescent, the thought of home and of his brethren's

anxiety about him was too much for him. It is a pathetic little picture

of the Macedonian stranger in the great city--pallid looks, recent

illness, and pining for home and a breath of pure mountain air, and for

the friends he had left. So Paul with rare abnegation sent him away at

once, though Timothy was to follow shortly, and accompanied him with

this outpouring of love and praise in his long homeward journey. Let us

hope he got safe back to his friends, and as Paul bade them, they

received him in the Lord with all joy, the echoes of which we almost

hear as he passes out of our knowledge.

In the remainder of this sermon we shall simply deal with the two

figures which the text sets before us, and we may look first at the

glimpses of Paul's character which we get here.

We may note the generous heartiness of his praise in his associating

Epaphroditus with himself as on full terms of equality, as worker and

soldier, and the warm generosity of the recognition of all that he had

done for the Apostle's comfort. Paul's first burst of gratitude and

praise does not exhaust all that he has to say about Epaphroditus. He

comes back to the theme in the last words of the context, where he says

that the Philippian messenger had 'hazarded' his life, or, as we might

put it with equal accuracy and more force, had 'gambled' his life, or

'staked it on the die' for Paul's sake. No wonder that men were eager

to risk their lives for a leader who lavished such praise and such love

upon them. A man who never opens his lips but to censure or criticise,

who fastens on faults as wasps do on blemished fruit, will never be

surrounded by loyal love. Faithful service is most surely bought by

hearty praise. A caressing hand on a horse's neck is better than a

whip.

We may further note the intensity of Paul's sympathy. He speaks of

Epaphroditus' recovery as a mercy to himself 'lest he should have the

sorrow of imprisonment increased by the sorrow of his friend's death.'

That attitude of mind stands in striking contrast to the heroism which

said, 'To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain,' but the two are

perfectly consistent, and it was a great soul which had room for them

both.

We must not leave unnoticed the beautiful self-abnegation which sends

off Epaphroditus as soon as he was well enough to travel, as a gift of

the Apostle's love, in order to repay them for what they had done for

him. He says nothing of his own loss or of how much more lonely he

would be when the brother whom he had praised so warmly had left him

alone. But he suns himself in the thought of the Philippians' joy, and

in the hope that some reflection of it will travel across the seas to

him, and make him, if not wholly glad, at any rate 'the less

sorrowful.'

We have also to notice Paul's delicate recognition of all friendly

help. He says that Epaphroditus risked his life to 'supply that which

was lacking in your service toward me.' That implies that all which the

Philippians' ministration lacked was their personal presence, and that

Epaphroditus, in supplying that, made his work in a real sense theirs.

All the loving thoughts, and all the material expressions of them which

Epaphroditus brought to Paul were fragrant with the perfume of the

Philippians' love, 'an odour of a sweet smell, acceptable' to Paul as

to Paul's Lord.

We briefly note some general lessons which may be suggested by the

picture of Epaphroditus as he stands by the side of Paul.

The first one suggested is the very familiar one of the great uniting

principle which a common faith in Christ brought into action. Think of

the profound clefts of separation between the Macedonian and the Jew,

the antipathies of race, the differences of language, the

dissimilarities of manner, and then think of what an unheard-of new

thing it must have been that a Macedonian should 'serve' a Jew! We but

feebly echo Paul's rapture when he thought that there was 'neither

Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, but all were one in Christ Jesus,'

and for all our talk about the unity of humanity and the like, we

permit the old gulfs of separation to gape as deeply as ever.

Dreadnoughts are a peculiar expression of the brotherhood of men after

nineteen centuries of so-called Christianity.

The terms in which the work of Epaphroditus is spoken of by Paul are

very significant. He has no hesitation in describing the work done for

himself as 'the work of Christ,' nor in using, as the name for it, the

word ('service'), which properly refers to the service rendered by

priestly hands. Work done for Paul was done for Jesus, and that, not

because of any special apostolic closeness of relation of Paul to

Jesus, but because, like all other Christians, he was one with his

Lord. 'The cup of cold water' given 'in the name of a disciple' is

grateful to the lips of the Master. We have no reason to suppose that

Epaphroditus took part with Paul in his more properly apostolic work,

and the fact that the purely material help, and pecuniary service which

most probably comprised all his 'ministering,' is honoured by Paul with

these lofty designations, carries with it large lessons as to the

sanctity of common life. All deeds done from the same motive are the

same, however different they may be in regard to the material on which

they are wrought. If our hearts are set to 'hallow all we find,' the

most secular duties will be acts of worship. It is possible for us in

the ordering of our own lives to fulfil the great prophecy with which

Zechariah crowned his vision of the Future, 'In that day shall there be

on the bells of the horses Holiness unto the Lord'; and the 'pots in

the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.'

May we not further draw from Paul's words here a lesson as to the

honour due to Christian workers? It was his brethren who were exhorted

to receive their own messenger back again 'in the Lord with all joy,

and to hold him in honour.' Possibly there were in Philippi some sharp

tongues and envious spirits, who needed the exhortation. Whether there

were so or no, the exhortation itself traces lightly but surely the

lines on which Christians should render, and their fellow-Christians

can rightly receive, even praise from men. If Epaphroditus were

'received in the Lord,' there would be no foolish and hurtful adulation

of him, nor prostration before him, but he would be recognised as but

the instrument through which the true Helper worked, and not he, but

the Grace of Christ in him would finally receive the praise. There are

very many Christian workers who never get their due of recognition and

welcome from their brethren, and there are many who get far more of

both than belongs to them, and both they and the crowds who bring them

adulation would be freed from dangers, which can scarcely be

over-stated, if the spirit of Paul's warm-hearted praise of

Epaphroditus were kept in view.

Epaphroditus but passes across the illuminated disc of the lantern for

a moment, and we have scarcely time to catch a glimpse of his face

before it is lost to us. He and all his brethren are gone, but his name

lives for ever, and Paul's praise of him and of his work outshines all

else remembered of the city, where conquerors once reigned, and outside

whose walls was fought a battle that decided for a time the fate of the

world.

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PREPARING TO END

'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to

you, to me indeed is not irksome, but for you it is safe. 2. Beware of

the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision: 3. For

we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in

Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.'--Phil. iii. 1-3

(R.V.).

The first words of the text show that Paul was beginning to think of

winding up his letter, and the preceding context also suggests that.

The personal references to Timothy and Epaphroditus would be in their

appropriate place near the close, and the exhortation with which our

text begins is also most fitting there, for it is really the key-note

of the letter. How then does he come to desert his purpose? The answer

is to be found in his next advice, the warning against the Judaising

teachers who were his great antagonists all his life. A reference to

them always roused him, and here the vehement exhortation to mark them

well and avoid them opens the flood-gates. Forgetting all about his

purpose to come to an end, he pours out his soul in the long and

precious passage which follows. Not till the next chapter does he get

back to his theme in the reiterated exhortation (iv. 4), 'Rejoice in

the Lord alway; again I will say, rejoice.' This outburst is very

remarkable, for its vehemence is so unlike the tone of the rest of the

letter. That is calm, joyous, bright, but this is stormy and

impassioned, full of flashing and scathing words, the sudden

thunder-storm breaks in on a mellow, autumn day, but it hurtles past

and the sun shines out again, and the air is clearer.

Another question suggested is the reference of the second half of verse

1. What are 'the same things' to write which is 'safe' for the

Philippians? Are they the injunctions preceding to 'rejoice in the

Lord,' or that following, the warning against the Judaisers? The former

explanation may be recommended by the fact that 'Rejoice' is in a sense

the key-note of the Epistle, but on the other hand, the things where

repetition would be 'safe' would most probably be warnings against some

evil that threatened the Philippians' Christian standing.

There is no attempt at unity in the words before us, and I shall not

try to force them into apparent oneness, but follow the Apostle's

thoughts as they lie. We note--

I. The crowning injunction as to the duty of Christian gladness.

A very slight glance over the Epistle will show how continually the

note of gladness is struck in it. Whatever in Paul's circumstances was

'at enmity with joy' could not darken his sunny outlook. This bird

could sing in a darkened cage. If we brought together the expressions

of his joy in this letter, they would yield us some precious lessons as

to what were the sources of his, and what may be the sources of ours.

There runs through all the instances in the Epistle the implication

which comes out most emphatically in his earnest exhortation, 'Rejoice

in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.' The true source of true

joy lies in our union with Jesus. To be in Him is the condition of

every good, and, just as in the former verses 'trust in the Lord' is

set forth, so the joy which comes from trust is traced to the same

source. The joy that is worthy, real, permanent, and the ally of lofty

endeavour and noble thoughts has its root in union with Jesus, is

realised in communion with Him, has Him for its reason or motive, and

Him for its safeguard or measure. As the passages in question in this

Epistle show, such joy does not shut out but hallows other sources of

satisfaction. In our weakness creatural love and kindness but too often

draw us away from our joy in Him. But with Paul the sources which we

too often find antagonistic were harmoniously blended, and flowed side

by side in the same channel, so that he could express them both in the

one utterance, 'I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at the last

your care of me hath flourished again.'

We do not sufficiently realise the Christian duty of Christian joy,

some of us even take mortified countenances and voices in a minor key

as marks of grace, and there is but little in any of us of 'the joy in

the Lord' which a saint of the Old Testament had learned was our

'strength.' There is plenty of gladness amongst professing Christians,

but a good many of them would resent the question, is your gladness 'in

the Lord'? No doubt any deep experience in the Christian life makes us

aware of much in ourselves that saddens, and may depress, and our joy

in Him must always be shaded by penitent sorrow for ourselves. But that

necessary element of sadness in the Christian life is not the cause why

so many Christian lives have little of the buoyancy and hope and

spontaneity which should mark them. The reason rather lies in the lack

of true union with Christ, and habitual keeping of ourselves 'in the

love of God.'

II. Paul's apology for reiteration.

He is going to give once more old and well-worn precepts which are

often very tedious to the hearer, and not much less so to the speaker.

He can only say that to him the repetition of familiar injunctions is

not 'irksome,' and that to them it is 'safe.' The diseased craving for

'originality' in the present day tempts us all, hearers and speakers

alike, and we ever need to be reminded that the staple of Christian

teaching must be old truths reiterated, and that it is not time to stop

proclaiming them until all men have begun to practise them. But a

speaker must try to make the thousandth repetition of a truth fresh to

himself, and not a wearisome form, or a dead commonplace, by freshening

it to his own mind and by living on it in his own practice, and the

hearers must remember that it is only the completeness of their

obedience that antiquates the commandment. The most threadbare

commonplace becomes a novelty when occasions for its application arise

in our own lives, just as a prescription may lie long unnoticed in a

drawer, but when a fever attacks its possessor it will be quickly drawn

out and worth its weight in gold.

III. Paul's warning against teachers of a ceremonial religion.

It scarcely seems congruous with the tone of the rest of this letter

that the preachers whom Paul so scathingly points out here had obtained

any firm footing in the Philippian Church, but no doubt there, as

everywhere, they had dogged Paul's footsteps, and had tried as they

always did to mar his work. They had not missionary fervour or

Christian energy enough to initiate efforts amongst the Gentiles so as

to make them proselytes, but when Paul and his companions had made them

Christians, they did their best, or their worst, to insist that they

could not be truly Christians, unless they submitted to the outward

sign of being Jews. Paul points a scathing finger at them when he bids

the Philippians 'beware,' and he permits himself a bitter retort when

he lays hold of the Jewish contemptuous word for Gentiles which

stigmatised them as 'dogs,' that is profane and unclean, and hurls it

back at the givers. But he is not indulging in mere bitter retorts when

he brings against these teachers the definite charge that they are

'evil workers.' People who believed that an outward observance was the

condition of salvation would naturally be less careful to insist upon

holy living. A religion of ceremonies is not a religion of morality.

Then the Apostle lets himself go in a contemptuous play of words, and

refuses to recognise that these sticklers for circumcision had

themselves been circumcised. 'I will not call them the circumcision,

they have not been circumcised, they have only been gashed and

mutilated, it has been a mere fleshly maiming.' His reason for denying

the name to them is his profound belief that it belonged to true

Christians. His contemptuous reference puts in a word, the principle

which he definitely states in another place, 'He is not a Jew who is

one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the

flesh.'

The Apostle here is not only telling us who are the truly circumcised,

but at the same time he is telling us what makes a Christian, and he

states three points in which, as I take it, he begins at the end and

works backwards to the beginning. 'We are the circumcision who worship

in the Spirit of God'--that is the final result--'and glory in Christ

Jesus'--'and have no confidence in the flesh'--that is the

starting-point. The beginning of all true Christianity is distrust of

self. What does Paul mean by 'flesh'? Body? Certainly not. Animal

nature, or the passions rooted in it? Not only these, as may be seen by

noting the catalogue which follows of the things in the flesh, in which

he might have trusted. What are these? 'Circumcised the eighth day, of

the tribe of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the

Hebrews'--these belong to ritual and race; 'as touching the law a

Pharisee'--that belongs to ecclesiastical standing; 'concerning zeal

persecuting the church'--that has nothing to do with the animal nature:

'touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless'--that

concerns the moral nature. All these come under the category of the

'flesh,' which, therefore, plainly includes all that belongs to

humanity apart from God. Paul's old-fashioned language translated into

modern English just comes to this--it is vain to trust in external

connection with the sacred community of the Church, or in participation

in any of its ordinances and rites. To Paul, Christian rites and Jewish

rites were equally rites and equally insufficient as bases of

confidence. Do not let us fancy that dependence on these is peculiar to

certain forms of Christian belief. It is a very subtle all-pervasive

tendency, and there is no need to lift up Nonconformist hands in holy

horror at the corruptions of Romanism and the like. Their origin is not

solely priestly ambition, but also the desires of the so-called laity.

Demand creates a supply, and if there were not people to think, 'Now it

shall be well with me because I have a Levite for my priest,' there

would be no Levites to meet their wishes.

Notice that Paul includes amongst the things belonging to the flesh

this 'touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless.' Many

of us can say the same. We do our duties so far as we know them, and

are respectable law-abiding people, but if we are trusting to that, we

are of the 'flesh.' Have we estimated what God is, and what the real

worth of our conduct is? Have we looked not at our actions but at our

motives, and seen them as they are seen from above or from the inside?

How many 'blameless' lives are like the scenes in a theatre, effective

and picturesque, when seen with the artificial glory of the footlights?

But go behind the scenes and what do we find? Dirty canvas and cobwebs.

If we know ourselves we know that a life may have a fair outside, and

yet not be a thing to trust to.

The beginning of our Christianity is the consciousness that we are

'naked and poor, and blind, and in need of all things.' Men come to

Jesus Christ by many ways, thank God, and I care little by what road

they come so long as they get there, nor do I insist upon any

stereotyped order of religious experience. But of this I am very sure:

that unless we abandon confidence in ourselves, because we have seen

ourselves in the light of God's law, we have not learned all that we

need nor laid hold of all that Christ gives. Let us measure ourselves

in the light of God, and we shall learn that we have to take our places

beside Job, when the vision of God silenced his protestations of

innocence. 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now

mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and

ashes.'

That self-distrust should pass into glorying in Christ Jesus. If a man

has learned his emptiness he will look about for something to fill it.

Unless I know myself to be under condemnation because of my sin, and

fevered, disturbed, and made wretched, by its inward consequences which

forbid repose, the sweetest words of Gospel invitation will pass by me

like wind whistling through an archway. But if once I have been driven

from self-confidence, then like music from heaven will come the word,

'Trust in Jesus.' The seed dropped into the ground puts out a

downward-going shoot, which is the root, and an upward-growing one,

which is the stalk. The downward-going shoot is 'no confidence in the

flesh,' the upward-going is 'glorying in Christ Jesus.'

But that word suggests the blessed experience of triumph in the

possession of the Person known and felt to be all, and to give all that

life needs. A true Christian should ever be triumphant in a felt

experience, in a Name proved to be sufficient, in a power which infuses

strength into his weakness, and enables him to do the will of God. It

is for want of utter self-distrust and absolute faith in Christ that

'glorying' in Him is so far beyond the ordinary mood of the average

Christian. You say, 'I hope, sometimes I doubt, sometimes I fear,

sometimes I tremblingly trust.' Is that the kind of experience that

these words shadow? Why do we continue amidst the mist when we might

rise into the clear blue above the obscuring pall? Only because we are

still in some measure clinging to self, and still in some measure

distrusting our Lord. If our faith were firm and full our 'glorying'

would be constant. Do not be contented with the prevailing sombre type

of Christian life which is always endeavouring, and always foiled,

which is often doubting and often indifferent, but seek to live in the

sunshine, and expatiate in the light, and 'rejoice in the Lord always.'

'Glorying' not only describes an attitude of mind, but an activity of

life. Many things to-day tempt Christian people to speak of their

religion and of their Lord in an apologetic tone, in the face of strong

and educated unbelief; but if we have within us, as we all may have,

and ought to have, the triumphant assurance of His sufficiency,

nearness, and power, it will not be with bated breath that we shall

speak of our Master, or apologise for our Christianity, but we shall

obey the commandment, 'Lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be

not afraid.' Ring out the name and be proud that you can ring it out,

as the Name of your Lord, and your Saviour, and your all-sufficient

Friend. Whatever other people say, you have the experience, if you are

a Christian, which more than answers all that they can say.

We have said that the final result set forth here by Paul is, 'We

worship by the Spirit of God.' The expression translated worship is the

technical word for rendering priestly service. Just as Paul has

asserted that uncircumcised Christians, not circumcised Jews, are the

true circumcision, so he asserts that they are the true priests, and

that these officials in the outward temple at Jerusalem have forfeited

the title, and that it has passed over to the despised followers of the

despised Nazarene. If we have 'no confidence in the flesh,' and are

'glorying in Christ Jesus,' we are all priests of the most high God.

'Worship in the Spirit' is our function and privilege. The externals of

ceremonial worship dwindle into insignificance. They may be means of

helping, or they may be means of hindering, the 'worship in the

Spirit,' which I venture to think all experience shows is the more

likely to be pure and real, the less it invokes the aid of flesh and

sense. To make the senses the ladder for the soul by which to climb to

God is quite as likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder as up

it. Aesthetic aids to worship are crutches which keep a lame soul lame

all its days.

Such worship is the obligation as well as the prerogative of the

Christian. We have no right to say that we have truly forsaken

confidence in ourselves, and are truly 'glorying' in Christ Jesus,

unless our daily life is communion with God, and all your work

'worshipping by the Spirit of God.' Such communion and worship are

possible for those, and for those only, who have 'no confidence in the

flesh' and who 'glory in Christ Jesus.'

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THE LOSS OF ALL

'Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other

man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised

the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a

Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal,

persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the

law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I

counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss

for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I

suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung.'--Phil.

iii. 4-8 (R.V.).

We have already noted that in the previous verses the Apostle is

beginning to prepare for closing his letter, but is carried away into

the long digression of which our text forms the beginning. The last

words of the former verse open a thought of which his mind is always

full. It is as when an excavator strikes his pickaxe unwittingly into a

hidden reservoir and the blow is followed by a rush of water, which

carries away workmen and tools. Paul has struck into the very deepest

thoughts which he has of the Gospel and out they pour. That one

antithesis, 'the loss of all, the gain of Christ,' carried in it to him

the whole truth of the Christian message. We may well ask ourselves

what are the subjects which lie so near our hearts, and so fill our

thoughts, that a chance word sets us off on them, and we cannot help

talking of them when once we begin.

The text exemplifies another characteristic of Paul's, his constant

habit of quoting his own experience as illustrating the truth. His

theology is the generalisation of his own experience, and yet that

continual autobiographical reference is not egotism, for the light in

which he delights to present himself is as the recipient of the great

grace of God in pardoning sinners. It is a result of the complete

saturation of himself with the Gospel. It was to him no mere body of

principles or thoughts, it was the very food and life of his life. And

so this characteristic reveals not only his natural fervour of

character, but the profound and penetrating hold which the Gospel had

on his whole being.

In our text he presents his own experience as the type to which ours

must on the whole be conformed. He had gone through an earthquake which

had shattered the very foundations of his life. He had come to despise

all that he had counted most precious, and to clasp as the only true

treasures all that he had despised. With him the revolution had turned

his whole life upside down. Though the change cannot be so subversive

and violent with us, the forsaking of self-confidence must be as real,

and the clinging to Jesus must be as close, if our Christianity is to

be fervid and dominant in our lives.

I. The treasures that were discovered to be worthless.

We have already had occasion in the previous sermon to refer to Paul's

catalogue of 'things that were gain' to him, but we must consider it a

little more closely here. We may repeat that it is important for

understanding Paul's point of view to note that by 'flesh' he means the

whole self considered as independent of God. The antithesis to it is

'spirit,' that is humanity regenerated and vitalised by Divine

influence. 'Flesh,' then, is humanity not so vitalised. That is to say,

it is 'self,' including both body and emotions, affections, thoughts,

and will.

As to the points enumerated, they are those which made the ideal to a

Jew, including purity of race, punctilious orthodoxy, flaming zeal,

pugnacious antagonism, and blameless morality. With reference to race,

the Jewish pride was in 'circumcision on the eighth day,' which was the

exclusive privilege of one of pure blood. Proselytes might be

circumcised in later life, but one of the 'stock of Israel' only on the

'eighth day.' Saul of Tarsus had in earlier days been proud of his

tribal genealogy, which had apparently been carefully preserved in the

Gentile home, and had shared ancestral pride in belonging to the once

royal tribe, and perhaps in thinking that the blood of the king after

whom he was named flowed in his veins. He was a 'Hebrew of the

Hebrews,' which does not mean, as it is usually taken to do, intensely,

superlatively Hebrew, but simply is equivalent to 'myself a Hebrew, and

come from pure Hebrew ancestors on both sides.' Possibly also the

phrase may have reference to purity of language and customs as well as

blood. These four items make the first group. Paul still remembers the

time when, in the blindness which he shared with his race, he believed

that these wholly irrelevant points had to do with a man's acceptance

before God. He had once agreed with the Judaisers that 'circumcision'

admitted Gentiles into the Jewish community, and so gave them a right

to participate in the blessings of the Covenant.

Then follow the items of his more properly religious character, which

seem in their three clauses to make a climax. 'As touching the law a

Pharisee,' he was of the 'straitest sect,' the champions and

representatives of the law. 'As touching zeal persecuting the Church,'

it was not only in Judaism that the mark of zeal for a cause has been

harassing its opponents. We can almost hear a tone of sad irony as Paul

recalls that past, remembering how eagerly he had taken charge of the

clothes trusted to his care by the witnesses who stoned Stephen, and

how he had 'breathed threatening and slaughter' against the disciples.

'As touching the righteousness which is in the law found blameless,' he

is evidently speaking of the obedience of outward actions and of

blamelessness in the judgment of men.

So we get a living picture of Paul and of his confidence before he was

a Christian. All these grounds for pride and self-satisfaction were

like triple armour round the heart of the young Pharisee, who rode out

of Jerusalem on the road to Damascus. How little he thought that they

would all have been pierced and have dropped from him before he got

there! The grounds of his confidence are antiquated in form, but in

substance are modern. At bottom the things in which Paul's 'flesh'

trusted are exactly the same as those in which many of us trust. Even

his pride of race continues to influence some of us. We have got the

length of separating between our nationality and our acceptance with

God, but we have still a kind of feeling that 'God's Englishmen,' as

Milton called them, have a place of their own, which is, if not a

ground of confidence before God, at any rate a ground for carrying

ourselves with very considerable complacency before men. It is not

unheard of that people should rely, if not on 'circumcision on the

eighth day,' on an outward rite which seems to connect them with a

visible Church. Strict orthodoxy takes the place among us which

Pharisaism held in Paul's mind before he was a Christian, and it is

easier to prove our zeal by pugnacity against heretics, than by fervour

of devotion. The modern analogue of Paul's, 'touching the righteousness

which is in the law blameless,' is 'I have done my best, I have lived a

decent life. My religion is to do good to other people.' All such talk,

which used to be a vague sentiment or excuse, is now put forward in

definite theoretical substitution for the Christian Truth, and finds

numerous teachers and acceptors. But how short a way all such grounds

of confidence go to satisfy a soul that has once seen the vision that

blazed in on Paul's mind on the road to Damascus!

II. The discovery of their worthlessness.

'These have I counted loss for Christ.' There is a possibility of

exaggeration in interpreting Paul's words. The things that were 'gain'

to him were in themselves better than their opposites. It is better to

to be 'blameless' than to have a life all stained with foulness and

reeking with sins. But these 'gains' were 'losses,' disadvantages, in

so far as they led him to build upon them, and trust in them as solid

wealth. The earthquake that shattered his life had two shocks: the

first turned upside down his estimate of the value of his gains, the

second robbed him of them. He first saw them to be worthless, and then,

so far as others' judgment went, he was stripped of them. Actively he

'counted them loss,' passively he 'suffered the loss of all things.'

His estimate came, and was followed by the practical outcome of his

brethren's excommunication.

What changed his estimate? In our text he answers the question in two

forms: first he gives the simple, all-sufficient monosyllabic reason

for his whole life--'for Christ,' and then he enlarges that motive into

'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.' The former

carries us back straight to the vision which revolutionised Paul's

life, and made him abjure all which he had trusted, and adore what he

had abhorred. The latter dwells a little more upon the subjective

process which followed on the vision, but the two are substantially the

same, and we need only note the solemn fulness of the name of 'Jesus

Christ,' and the intense motion of submission and of personal

appropriation contained in the designation, 'my Lord.' It was not when

he found his way blinded into Damascus that he had learned that

knowledge, or could apprehend its 'excellency.' The words are enriched

and enlarged by later experiences. The sacrifice of his earlier 'gains'

had been made before the 'excellency of the knowledge' had been

discerned. It was no mere intellectual perception which could be

imparted in words, or by eyesight, but here as always Paul by

'knowledge' means experience which comes from possession and

acquaintance, and which therefore gleams ever before us as we move, and

is capable of endless increase, in the measure in which we are true to

the estimate of 'gains' and 'losses' to which our initial vision of Him

has led us. At first we may not know that that knowledge excels all

others, but as we grow in acquaintance with Jesus, and in experience of

Him, we shall be sure that it transcends all others, because He does

and we possess Him.

The revolutionising motive may be conceived of in two ways. We have to

abandon the lower 'gains' in order to gain Christ, or to abandon these

because we have gained Him. Both are true. The discernment of Christ as

the one ground of confidence is ever followed by the casting away of

all others. Self-distrust is a part of faith. When we feel our feet

upon the rock, the crumbling sands on which we stood are left to be

broken up by the sea. They who have seen the Apollo Belvedere will set

little store by plaster of Paris casts. In all our lives there come

times when the glimpse of some loftier ideal shows up our ordinary as

hollow and poor and low. And when once Christ is seen, as Scripture

shows Him, our former self appears poor and crumbles away.

We are not to suppose that the act of renunciation must be completed

before a second act of possession is begun. That is the error of many

ascetic books. The two go together, and abandonment in order to win

merges into abandonment because we have won. The strongest power to

make renunciation possible is 'the expulsive power of a new affection.'

When the heart is filled with love to Christ there is no sense of

'loss,' but only of 'exceeding gain,' in casting away all things for

Him.

III. The continuous repetition of the discovery.

Paul compares his present self with his former Christian self, and with

a vehement 'Yea, verily,' affirms his former judgment, and reiterates

it in still more emphatic terms. It is often easy to depreciate the

treasures which we possess. They sometimes grow in value as they slip

from our hands. It is not usual for a man who has 'suffered the loss of

all things' to follow their disappearance by counting them 'but dung.'

The constant repetition through the whole Christian course of the

depreciatory estimate of grounds of confidence is plainly necessary.

There are subtle temptations to the opposite course. It is hard to keep

perfectly clear of all building on our own blamelessness or on our

connection with the Christian Church, and we have need ever to renew

the estimate which was once so epoch-making, and which 'cast down all

our imaginations and high things.' If we do not carefully watch

ourselves, the whispering tempter that was silenced will recover his

breath again, and be once more ready to drop into our ears his

poisonous suggestions. We have to take pains and 'give earnest heed' to

the initial, revolutionary estimate, and to see that it is worked out

habitually in our daily lives. It is a good exchange when we count 'all

but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.'

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THE GAIN OF CHRIST

'That I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a

righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which

is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by

faith.'--Phil. iii. 8, 9 (R.V.).

It is not everybody who can say what is his aim in life. Many of us

have never thought enough about it to have one beyond keeping alive. We

lose life in seeking for the means of living. Many of us have such a

multitude of aims, each in its turn drawing us, that no one of them is

predominant and rules the crowd. There is no strong hand at the tiller,

and so the ship washes about in the trough of the waves.

It is not everybody who dares to say what is his aim in life. We are

ashamed to acknowledge even to ourselves what we are not at all ashamed

to do. Paul knew his aim, and was not afraid to speak it. It was high

and noble, and was passionately and persistently pursued. He tells us

it here, and we can see his soul kindling as he speaks. We may note how

there is here the same double reference as we found in the previous

verses, gaining Christ corresponding to the previous loss for Christ,

and the later words of our text being an expansion of the 'excellency

of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.' No man will ever succeed in any

life's purpose, unless like Paul he is enthusiastic about it. If his

aim does not rouse his fervour when he speaks of it, he will never

accomplish it. We may just remark that Paul does not suppose his aim to

be wholly unattained, even although he does not count himself to 'have

apprehended.' He knows that he has gained Christ, and is 'found in

Him,' but he knows also that there stretch before him the possibilities

of infinite increase.

I. His life's aim was to have the closest possession of, and

incorporation in, Christ.

His two expressions, 'that I may gain Christ and be found in Him,' are

substantially identical in meaning, though they put the same truth from

different sides, and with some variety of metaphor. We may deal with

them separately.

The 'gain' is of course the opposite of the 'loss.' His balance-sheet

has on one side 'all things lost,' on the other 'Christ gained,' and

that is profitable trading. But we have to go deeper than such a

metaphor, and to give full scope to the Scriptural truth, that Christ

really imparts Himself to the believing soul. There is a real

communication of His own life to us, and thereby we live, as He Himself

declared, 'He that hath the Son hath life.' The true deep sense in

which we possess Christ is not to be weakened down, as it, alas! so

often is in our shallow Christianity, which is but the echo of a

shallow experience, and a feeble hold of that possession of the Son to

which Jesus called us, as the condition of our possession of life.

Christ is thus Himself possessed by all our faculties, each after its

kind; head and heart, passions and desires, hopes and longings, may

each have Him abiding in them, guiding them with His strong and gentle

hand, animating them into nobler life, restraining and controlling,

gradually transforming and ultimately conforming them to His own

likeness. Till that Divine Indweller enters in, the shrine is empty,

and unclean things lurk in its hidden corners. To be a man full summed

in all his powers, each of us must 'gain Christ.'

The other expression in the text, 'be found in Him,' presents the same

truth from the completing point of view. We gain Christ in us when we

are 'found in Him.' We are to be incorporated as members are in the

body, or imbedded as a stone in the foundation, or to go back to the

sweetest words, which are the source of all these representations,

included as 'a branch in the vine.' We are to be in Him for safety and

shelter, as fugitives take refuge in a strong tower when an enemy

swarms over the land.

'And lo! from sin and grief and shame,

I hide me, Jesus, in Thy name.'

We are to be in Him that the life sap may freely flow through us. We

are to be in Him that the Divine Love may fall on us, and that in Jesus

we may receive our portion of all which is His heritage.

This mutual possession and indwelling is possible if Jesus be the Son

of God, but the language is absurd in any other interpretation of His

person. It is clearly in its very nature capable of indefinite

increase, and as containing in itself the supply of all which we need

for life and blessedness, is fitted to be what nothing else can pretend

to be, without wrecking the lives that are unwise enough to pursue

it--the sovereign aim of a human life. In following it, and only in

following it, the highest wisdom says Amen to the aspiration of the

lowliest faith. 'This one thing I do.'

II. Paul's life's aim was righteousness to be received.

He goes on to present some of the consequences which follow on his

gaining Christ and being 'found in Him,' and before all others he names

as his aim the possession of 'righteousness.' We must remember that

Paul believed that righteousness in the sense of 'justification' had

been his from the moment when Ananias came to where he was sitting in

darkness, and bid him be baptized and wash away his sins. The word here

must be taken in its full sense of moral perfectness; even if we

included only this in our thoughts of his life's aim, how high above

most men would he tower! But his statement carries him still higher

above, and farther away from, the common ideas of moral perfection, and

what he means by righteousness is widely separated from the world's

conception, not only in regard to its elements, but still more in

regard to its source.

It is possible to lose oneself in a dreamy mysticism which has had much

to say of 'gaining Christ and being found in Him,' and has had too

little to say about 'having righteousness,' and so has turned out to be

an ally of indifference and sometimes of unrighteousness. Buddhism and

some forms of mystical Christianity have fallen into a pit of

immorality from which Paul's sane combination here would have saved

them. There is no danger in the most mystical interpretation of the

former statement of his aim, when it is as closely connected as it is

here with the second form in which he states it. I have just said that

Paul differed from men who were seeking for righteousness, not only

because his conceptions of what constituted it were not the same as

theirs, though he in this very letter endorses the Greek ideals of

'virtue and praise,' but also and more emphatically because he looked

for it as a gift, and not as the result of his own efforts. To him the

only righteousness which availed was one which was not 'my own,' but

had its source in, and was imparted by, God. The world thought of

righteousness as the general designation under which were summed up a

man's specific acts of conformity to law, the sum total reached by the

addition of many specific instances of conformity to a standard of

duty. Paul had learned to think of it as preceding and producing the

specific acts. The world therefore said, and says, Do the deeds and win

the character; Paul says, Receive the character and do the deeds. The

result of the one conception of righteousness is in the average man

spasmodic efforts after isolated achievements, with long periods

between in which effort subsides into torpor. The result in Paul's case

was what we know: a continuous effort to keep his mind and heart open

for the influx of the power which, entering into him, would make him

able to do the specific acts which constitute righteousness. The one

road is a weary path, hard to tread, and, as a matter of fact, not

often trodden. To pile up a righteousness by the accumulation of

individual righteous acts is an endeavour less hopeful than that of the

coral polypes slowly building up their reef out of the depths of the

Pacific, till it rises above the waves. He who assumes to be righteous

on the strength of a succession of righteous acts, not only needs a

profounder idea of what makes his acts righteous, but should also make

a catalogue of his unrighteous ones and call himself wicked. The other

course is the final deliverance of a man from dependence upon his own

struggles, and substitutes for the dreary alternations of effort and

torpor, and for the imperfect harvest of imperfectly righteous acts,

the attitude of receiving, which supersedes painful strife and weary

endeavour. To seek after a righteousness which is 'my own,' is to seek

what we shall never find, and what, if found, would crumble beneath us.

To seek the righteousness which is from God, is to seek what He is

waiting to bestow, and what the blessed receivers blessedly know is

more than they dreamed of.

But Paul looked for this great gift as a gift in Christ. It was when he

was 'found in Him' that it became his, and he was found 'blameless.'

That gift of an imparted life, which has a bias towards all goodness,

and the natural operation of which is to incline all our faculties

towards conformity with the will of God, is bestowed when we 'win

Christ.' Possessing Him, we possess it. It is not only 'imputed,' as

our fathers delighted to say, but it is 'imparted.' And because it is

the gift of God in Christ, it was in Paul's view received by faith. He

expresses that conviction in a double form in our text. It is 'through

faith' as the channel by which it passes into our happy hands. It is

'by faith,' or, more accurately, 'upon faith,' as the foundation on

which it rests, or the condition on which it depends. Our trust in

Christ does bring His life to us to sanctify us, and the plain English

of all this blessed teaching is--if we wish to be better let us trust

Christ and get Him into the depths of our lives, and righteousness will

be ours. That transforming Presence laid up in 'the hidden man of the

heart,' will be like some pungent scent in a wardrobe which keeps away

moths, and gives out a fragrance that perfumes all that hangs near it.

But all which we have been saying is not to be understood as if there

was no effort to be made, in order to receive, and to live manifesting,

the 'righteousness which is of God.' There must be the constant

abandonment of self, and the constant utilising of the grace given. The

righteousness is bestowed whenever faith is exercised. The hand is

never stretched out and the gift not lodged in it. But it is a life's

aim to possess the 'righteousness which is of God by faith,' because

that gift is capable of indefinite increase, and will reward the most

strenuous efforts of a believing soul as long as life continues.

III. Paul's life's aim stretches beyond this life.

Shall we be chargeable with crowding too much meaning into his words,

if we fix on his remarkable expression, 'be found in Him,' as

containing a clear reference to that great day of final judgment? We

recall other instances of the use of the same expression in connections

which unmistakably point to that time. Such as 'being clothed we shall

not be found naked,' or 'the proof of your faith . . . might be found

unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ,' or

'found of Him in peace without spot, blameless.' In the light of these

and similar passages, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that

this 'being found' does include a reference to the Apostle's place

after death, though it is not confined to that. He thinks of the

searching eye of the Judge taking keen account, piercing through all

disguises, and wistfully as well as penetratingly scrutinising

characters, till it finds that for which it seeks. They who are 'found

in Him' in that day, are there and thus for ever. There is no further

fear of falling out of union with Him, or of being, by either gradual

and unconscious stages, or by sudden and overmastering assaults,

carried out of the sacred enclosure of the City of Refuge in which they

dwell henceforth for ever. A dangerous presumptuousness has sometimes

led to the over-confident assertion, 'Once in Christ always in Christ.'

But Paul teaches us that that security of permanent dwelling in Him is

to be for ever in this life the aim of our efforts, rather than an

accomplished fact. So long as we are here, the possibility of falling

away cannot be shut out, and there must always rise before us the

question, Am I in Christ? Hence there is need for continual

watchfulness, self-control, and self-distrust, and the life's aim has

to be perpetual, not only because it is capable of indefinite

expansion, but because our weakness is capable of deserting it. It is

only when at the last we are found by Him, in Him, that we are there

for ever, with all dangers of departure from Him at an end. In that

City of Refuge, and there only, 'the gates shall not be shut at all,'

not solely because no enemies shall attempt to come in, but also

because no citizens shall desire to go out.

We should ever have before us that hour, and our life's aim should ever

definitely include the final scrutiny in which many a hidden thing will

come to light, many a long-lost thing be found, and each man's ultimate

place in relation to Jesus Christ will be freed from uncertainties,

ambiguities, hypocrisies, and disguises, and made plain to all

beholders. In that great day of 'finding,' some of us will have to ask

with sinking hearts, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' and others

will break forth into the glad acclaim, 'I have found Him,' or rather

'been found of Him.'

So we have before us the one reasonable aim for a man to have Christ,

to be found in Him, to have His righteousness. It is reasonable, it is

great enough to absorb all our energies, and to reward them. It will

last a lifetime, and run on undisturbed beyond life. Following it, all

other aims will fall into their places. Is this my aim?

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SAVING KNOWLEDGE

'That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the

fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death; if by

any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.'--Phil.

iii. 10-11 (R.V.).

We have seen how the Apostle was prepared to close his letter at the

beginning of this chapter, and how that intention was swept away by the

rush of new thoughts. His fervid faith caught fire when he turned to

think of what he had lost, and how infinitely more he had gained in

Christ. His wealth is so great that it cannot be crowded into the

narrow space of one brief sentence, and after all the glowing words

which precede our text, he feels that he has not yet adequately set

forth either his present possessions or his ultimate aims. So here he

continues the theme which might have seemed most fully dealt with in

the great thoughts that occupied us in the former sermon, but which

still wait to be completed here. They are most closely connected with

the former, and the unity of the sentence is but a parallel to the

oneness of the idea. The elements of our present text constitute a part

of the Apostle's aim in life, and may be dealt with as such.

I. Paul's life's aim was the knowledge of Christ.

That sounds an anti-climax after 'Gain' and 'Be in Him.' These phrases

seem to express a much more intimate relation than this, but we must

note that it is no mere theoretical or intellectual knowledge which is

intended. Such knowledge would need no surrender or suffering 'the loss

of all things.' We can only buy the knowledge of Christ at such a rate,

but we can buy knowledge about Him very much cheaper. Such knowledge

would not be worth the price; it lies on the surface of the soul, and

does nothing. Many a man amongst us has it, and it is of no use to him.

If Paul had undergone all that he had undergone and sacrificed all that

he had given up, and for his reward had only gained accurate knowledge

about Christ, he had certainly wasted his life and made a bad bargain.

But as always, so here, to know means knowledge based upon experience.

Did Christ mean that a correct creed was eternal life when He said,

'This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ

whom Thou has sent?' Did Paul mean the dry light of the understanding

when he prayed that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ which

passeth knowledge, in order to be filled with all the fulness of God?

Clearly we have to go much deeper down than that superficial

interpretation in order to reach the reality of the New Testament

conception of knowledge. It is co-extensive with life, and is built

upon inward experience. In a word, it is one aspect of winning Jesus.

It is consciousness contemplating its riches, counting its gains. As a

man knows the bliss of parental or wedded love only by having it, or as

he knows the taste of wine only by drinking it, or the glory of music

only by hearing it, and the brightness of the day only by seeing it, so

we know Christ only by winning Him. There must first be the perception

and possession by sense or emotion, and then the reflection on the

possession by understanding. This applies to all religious truth. It

must be possessed ere it be fully known. Like the new name written upon

the Apocalyptic stone, 'No one knoweth but he that receiveth it.'

The knowledge which was Paul's life's aim was knowledge of a Person:

the object determines the nature of the knowledge. The mental act of

knowing a proposition or a science or even of knowing about a person by

hearing of him is different from that of knowing people when we have

lived beside them. We need not be afraid of attaching too familiar a

meaning to this word of our text, if we say that it implies personal

acquaintance with the Christ whom we know. Of course we come to know

Him in the first instance through the medium of statements about Him,

and we cannot too strongly insist, in these days of destructive

criticism, on the absolute necessity of accepting the Gospel statements

as to the life of Jesus as the only possible method of knowing Him. But

then, beyond that acceptance of the record must come the application

and appropriation of it, and the transmutation of a historical fact

into a personal experience. We may take an illustration from any of the

Scriptural truths about Jesus:--For instance, Scripture declares Him to

be our Redeemer. One man believes Him to be so, welcomes Him into his

life as such, and finds Him to be such. Another man believes Him to be

so, but never puts His redeeming power to the proof. Is the knowledge

of these two rightly called by the same name? That which comes after

experience is surely not rightly designated by the same title as that

which has no vivification nor verification of such a sort to build on,

and is the mere product of the understanding. There is nothing which

the great mass of so-called Christians need more than to have forced

into their thoughts the difference between these two kinds of knowledge

of Christ. There are thousands of them who, if asked, are ready to

profess that they know Jesus, but to whom He has never been anything

more than a partially understood article of an uncared for creed, and

has never been in living contact with their needs, nor known for their

strength in weakness, their comforter in sorrow, 'their life in death,'

their all in all.

To deepen that experimental knowledge of Jesus is a worthy aim for the

whole life, and is a process that may go on indefinitely through it

all. To know Him more and more is to have more of heaven in us. To be

penetrating ever deeper into His fulness, and finding every day new

depths to penetrate is to have a fountain of freshness in our dusty

days that will never fail or run dry. There is only one inexhaustible

person, and that is Jesus Christ. We have all fulness in our Lord: we

have already received all when we received Him. Are we advancing in the

experience that is the parent of knowing Him? Do new discoveries meet

us every day as if we were explorers in a virgin land? To have this for

our aim is enough for satisfaction, for blessedness, and for growth. To

know Him is a liberal education.

II. That knowledge involves knowing the power of His Resurrection.

The power of His Resurrection is an expression which covers a wide

ground. There are several distinct and well-marked powers ascribed to

it in Paul's writings. It has a demonstrative force in reference to our

Lord's person and work. For He is by it 'declared to be the Son of God

with power.' That rising again from the dead, taken in conjunction with

the fact that He dieth no more, but is ascended up on high, and in

conjunction with His own words concerning Himself and His Resurrection,

sets Him forth before the world as the Son of God, and is the solemn

divine approval and acceptance of His work.

It has a revealing power in regard to the condition of humanity in

death. It is the one fact which establishes immortality, and which not

only establishes it, but casts some light on the manner of it. The

possibility of personal life after, and therefore, in death, the

unbroken continuity of being, the possibility of a resurrection, and a

glorifying of this corporeal frame, with all the far-reaching

consequences of these truths in the triumph they give over death, in

the support and substance they afford to the else-shadowy idea of

immortality, in the lofty place which they assign to the bodily frame,

and the conception which they give of man's perfection as consisting of

body, soul, and spirit--these thoughts have flashed light into all the

darkness of the grave, have narrowed to a mere strip of coast-line the

boundaries of the kingdom of death, have proclaimed love as the victor

in her contest with that shrouded horror. The basis of them all is

Christ's Resurrection; its power in this respect is the power to

illuminate, to console, to certify, to wrench the sceptre from the

hands of death, and to put it in the pierced hands of the Living One

that was dead, and is Lord both of the dead and the living.

Further, the Resurrection is treated by Paul as having a power for our

justification, in so far as the risen Lord bestows upon us by His risen

life the blessings of His righteousness. Paul also represents the

Resurrection of Christ as having the power of quickening our Spiritual

life. I need not spend time in quoting the many passages where His

rising from the dead, and His life after the Resurrection, are treated

as the type and pattern of our lives: and are not only regarded as

pattern, but are also regarded as the power by which that new life of

ours is brought about. It has the power of raising us from the death of

sin, and bringing us into a new life of the Spirit. And finally, the

Resurrection of Christ is regarded as having the power of raising His

servants from the grave to the full possession of His own glorious

life, and so it is the power of our final victory over death.

Now I do not know that we are entitled to exclude any of these powers

from view. The broad words of the text include them all, but perhaps

the two last are mainly meant, and of these chiefly the former.

The risen life of Christ quickens and raises us, and that not merely as

a pattern, but as a power. It is only if we are in Him that there is so

real a unity of life between Him and us that there enters into us some

breath of His own life.

That risen life of the Saviour which we share if we have Him, enters

into our nature as leaven into the three measures of meal; transforming

and quickening it, gives new directions, tastes, motives, impulses, and

power. It bids and inclines us to seek the things that are above, and

its great exhortation to the hearts in which it dwells, to fix

themselves there, and to forsake the things that are on the earth, is

based upon the fact that they have died, and 'their life is hid with

Christ in God.' Without that leaven the life that we live is a death,

because it is lived in the 'lusts of the flesh,' doing the desires of

the flesh and of the mind. There is no real union with Jesus Christ, of

which the direct issue is not a living experience of the power of His

Resurrection in bringing us to the likeness of itself in regard to our

freedom from the bondage to sin, and to our presenting ourselves unto

God as alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of

righteousness unto God. It is a solemn thought which we all need to

press upon our consciences, that the only infallible sign that we have

been in any measure quickened together with Christ and raised up with

Him is that we have ceased to live in the lusts of our flesh, doing the

desires of the flesh and of the mind. The risen life of Jesus may

indefinitely increase, and will do so in the measure in which we

honestly make it our life's aim to know Him and the power of His

Resurrection.

III. The experience of the power of Christ's Resurrection is

inseparable from the fellowship of His sufferings.

We must not suppose that Paul's solemn and awful words here trench in

the smallest degree on the solitary unapproachableness of Christ's

death. He would have answered, as in fact he does answer, the appeal of

the prophetic sufferer, 'Behold and see if there be any sorrow like

unto my sorrow' with the strongest negative. No other human lips have

ever tasted, or can ever taste, a cup of such bitterness as He drained

for us all, and no other human lips have ever been so exquisitely

sensitive to the bitterness which they have drunk. The identification

of Himself with a sinful world, the depth and closeness of His

community of feeling with all sorrow, the consciousness of the glory

which He had left, and the perpetual sense of the hostility into which

He had come, set Christ's sufferings by themselves as surely as the

effects that flow from them declare that they need no repetition, and

cannot be degraded by any parallel whilst the world lasts.

But yet His Death, like His Resurrection, is set forth in Scripture as

being a type and power of ours. We have to die to the world by the

power of the Cross. If we truly trust in His sacrifice there will

operate upon us motives which separate and detach us from our old

selves and the old world. A fundamental, ethical, and spiritual change

is effected on us through faith. We were dead in sin, we are dead to

sin. We have to blend the two thoughts of the Christian life as being a

daily dying and a continual resurrection in order to get the whole

truth of the double aspect of it.

It may be a question whether the Apostle is here referring to outward

or inward and ethical sorrows, but perhaps we should not do justice to

the thought unless we extend it to cover both of these. Certainly if

his theology was but the generalising of his experience, he had ample

material in his daily life for knowing the fellowship of Christ's

sufferings. One of his most frequently recurring and most cherished

thoughts is, that to suffer for Christ is to suffer with Christ, and in

it he found and teaches us to find strength to endure, and patience to

outlast any sorrows that may swoop upon us like birds of prey because

we are Christians. Happy shall we be if Christ's sufferings are ours,

because it is our union with Him and our likeness to Him, not to

ourselves, our sins, or our worldliness, that is their occasion. There

is an old legend that Peter was crucified head downwards, because he

felt himself unworthy to be as his Master. We may well feel that

nothing which we can ever bear for Him is worthy to be compared with

what He has borne for us, and be the more overwhelmed with the

greatness of the condescension, and the humility of the love which

reckon our light affliction, which is but for a moment, along with the

heavy weight which He bore, and the blessed issue of which outlasts

time and enriches eternity.

But there is another sense in which it is a worthy aim of our lives

that our sufferings may be felt to be fellowship with His. That is a

blessed sorrow which brings us closer to our Lord. That is a wholesome

sorrow of which the issue is an intenser faith in Him, a fuller

experience of His sufficiency. The storm blows us well when it blows us

to His breast, and sorrow enriches us, whatever it may take away, which

gives us fuller and more assured possession of Jesus.

But when we are living in fellowship with Jesus, that union works in

two directions, and while on the one hand we may then humbly venture to

feel that our sufferings for Him are sufferings with Him, we may

thankfully feel, too, that in all our affliction He is afflicted. If

His sufferings are ours we may be sure that ours are His. And how

different they all become when we are certain of His sympathy! It is

possible that we may have a kind of common consciousness with our Lord,

if our whole hearts and wills are kept in close touch with Him, so that

in our experience there may be a repetition in a higher form of that

strange experience alleged to be familiar in hypnotism, where the

bitter in one mouth is tasted in another.

So, what we ought to make our aim is that in our lives our growing

knowledge of Christ should lead to the two results, so inexorably

intertwined, of daily death and daily resurrection, and that we may be

kept faithful to Him so that our outward sufferings may be caused by

our union with Him, and not by our own faithlessness, and may be

discerned by us to be fellowship with His. Then we shall also feel that

He bears ours with us, and sorrow itself will be calmed and beautified

into a silent bliss, as the chill peaks when the morning strikes them

glow with tender pink, and seem soft and warm, though they are grim

rock and ice-cold snow. Then some faint echo of His history 'who was

acquainted with grief' may be audible in our outward lives and we, too,

may have our Gethsemane and our Calvary. It may not be presumption in

us to say 'We are able' when He asks 'Can ye drink of the cup that I

drink of'? nor terror to hear Him prophesy 'Ye shall indeed drink of

the cup that I drink of,' for we shall remember 'joint-heirs in Christ,

if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified

together.'

IV. The end attained.

The Christian life as here manifested is even in its highest forms

manifestly incomplete. It is a reflected light, and like the reflected

light in the heavens, advances by imperceptible degrees to fill the

whole silver round. It may be 'e'en in its imperfections beautiful,'

but it assuredly has 'a ragged edge.' The hypothetical form of the last

words of our text does not so much imply a doubt of the possibility of

attaining the result as the recognition of the indispensable condition

of effort on the part of him who attains it. That effort forthcoming,

the attainment is certain.

The Revised Version makes a slight correction which involves a great

matter, in reading 'the resurrection from the dead.' It is necessary to

insist on this change in rendering, not because it implies that only

saints are raised, but because Paul is thinking of that first

resurrection of which the New Testament habitually speaks. 'The dead in

Christ shall rise first' as he himself declared in his earliest

epistle, and the seer in the Apocalypse shed a benediction on 'him that

hath part in the first resurrection.' Our knowledge of that solemn

future is so fragmentary that we cannot venture to draw dogmatic

inferences from the little that has been declared to us, but we cannot

forget the distinct words of Jesus in which He not only plainly

declares a universal resurrection, but as plainly proclaims that it

falls into two parts, one a 'resurrection of life,' and one a

'resurrection of judgment.' The former may well be the final aim of a

Christian life: the latter is a fate which one would think no sane man

would deliberately provoke. Each carries in its name its dominant

characteristic, the one full of attractiveness, the other partially

unveiling depths of shame and punitive retributions which might appal

the stoutest heart.

This resurrection of life is the last result of the power of Christ's

Resurrection received into and working on the human spirit. It is plain

enough that if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead

dwell in us there is no term to its operations until our mortal bodies

also are quickened by His Spirit that dwelleth in us. The ethical and

spiritual resurrection in the present life finds its completion in the

bodily resurrection in the future. It cannot be that the transformation

wrought in a human life shall be complete until it has flowed outwards

into and permeated the whole of manhood, body, soul, and spirit. The

three measures of meal have each to be influenced before 'the whole is

leavened.' If we duly consider the elements necessary to a perfect

realisation of the divine ideal of humanity, we shall discern that

redemption must have a gospel to bring to the body as well as to the

spirit. Whatever has been devastated by sin must be healed by Jesus. It

is not necessary to suppose that the body which dies is the body which

rises again, rather the Apostle's far-reaching series of antitheses

between that which is sown and that which is raised leads us to think

that the natural body, which has passed through corruption, and the

particles of which have been gathered into many different combinations,

does not become the spiritual body. The person who dies is the person

who lives through death, and who assumes the body of the resurrection,

and it is the person, not the elements which make up the personality,

who is spoken of as risen from the dead. The vesture may be different,

but the wearer is the same.

So that resurrection from the dead is the end of a supernatural life

begun here and destined to culminate hereafter. It is the last step in

the manifestation of our being in Christ, and so is being prepared for

here by every step in advance in gaining Jesus. It should ever be

before every Christian soul that participation in Christ hereafter is

conditioned by its progress in likeness to Him here. The Resurrection

from the dead is not a gift which can be bestowed apart from a man's

moral state. If he dies having had no knowledge by experience of the

power of Christ's Resurrection, there is nothing in the fact of death

to give him that knowledge, and it is impossible to bring 'any means'

to bear on him by which he will attain unto the 'resurrection from the

dead.' If God could give that gift irrespective of a man's relations to

Jesus, He would give it to all. Let us ask ourselves, then, is it not

worth making the dominant aim of our lives the same as that of Paul's?

How stands our account then? Are we not wise traders presenting a good

balance-sheet when we show entered on the one side the loss of all

things, and on the other the gaining of Christ, and the attaining the

resurrection from the dead, the perfect transformation of body, soul,

and spirit, into the perfect likeness of the perfect Lord? Does the

other balance-sheet show the man as equally solvent who enters on one

side the gain of a world, and on the other a Christless life, to be

followed by a resurrection in which is no joy, no advance, no life, but

which is a resurrection of judgment? May we all be found in Him, and

attain to the resurrection from the dead!

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LAID HOLD OF AND LAYING HOLD

'I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I was

apprehended of Christ Jesus.'--Phil. iii. 12.

'I was laid hold of by Jesus Christ.' That is how Paul thinks of what

we call his conversion. He would never have 'turned' unless a hand had

been laid upon him. A strong loving grasp had gripped him in the midst

of his career of persecution, and all that he had done was to yield to

the grip, and not to wriggle out of it. The strong expression suggests,

as it seems to me, the suddenness of the incident. Possibly impressions

may have been working underground, ever since the martyrdom of Stephen,

which were undermining his convictions, and the very insanity of his

zeal may have been due to an uneasy consciousness that the ground was

yielding beneath his feet. That may have been so, but, whether it were

so or not, the crisis came like a bolt out of the blue, and he was

checked in full career, as if a voice had spoken to the sea in its

wildest storm, and frozen its waves into immobility.

There is suggested in the word, too, distinctly, our Lord's personal

action in the matter. No doubt, the fact of His supernatural appearance

gives emphasis to the phrase here. But every Christian man and woman

has been, as truly as ever Paul was, laid hold of by the personal

action of Jesus Christ. He is present in His Word, and, by multitudes

of inward impulses and outward providences, He is putting out a gentle

and a firm hand, and laying it upon the shoulders of all of us. Have we

yielded? Have we resisted, when we were laid hold of? Did we try to get

away? Did we plant our feet and say, 'I will not be drawn,' or did we

simply neglect the pressure? If we have yielded, my text tells us what

we have to do next. For that hand is laid upon a man for a purpose, and

that purpose is not secured by the hand being laid upon him, unless he,

in his turn, will put out a hand and grasp. Our activity is needed;

that activity will not be put forth without very distinct effort, and

that effort has to be life-long, because our grasp at the best is

incomplete. So then, we have here, first of all, to consider--

I. What Christ has laid His grip on us for.

Now, the immediate result of that grasp, when it is yielded to, is the

sense of the removal of guilt, forgiveness of sins, acceptance with

God. But these, the immediate results, are by no means the whole

results, although a great many of us live as if we thought that the

only thing that Christianity is meant to do to us is that it bars the

gates of some future hell, and brings to us the message of forgiveness.

We cannot think too nobly or too loftily of that gift of forgiveness,

the initial gift that is laid in every Christian man's hands, but we

may think too exclusively of it, and a great many of us do think of it

as if it were all that was to be given. A painter has to clear away the

old paint off a door, or a wall, before he lays on the new. The initial

gift that comes from being laid hold of by Jesus Christ is the burning

off of the old coat of paint. But that is only the preliminary to the

laying on of the new. A man away in the backwoods will spend a couple

of years after he has got his bit of land in felling and burning the

trees, and rooting out and destroying the weeds. But is that what he

got the clearing for? That is only a preliminary to sowing the seed. My

friend! If Jesus Christ has laid hold of you, and you have let Him keep

hold of you, it is not only that you may be forgiven, not only that you

may sun yourself in the light of God's countenance, and feel that a new

blessed relation is set up between you and Him, but there are great

purposes lying at the back of that, of which all that is only the

preliminary and the preparation.

Conversion. Yes; but what is the good of turning a man round unless he

goes in the direction in which his face is turned? And so here the

Apostle having for years lived in the light of that great thought, that

God was reconciled in Jesus Christ, and that he was God's friend,

discerns far beyond that, in dim perspective, towering high above the

land in the front, the snowy sunlit summits of a great range to which

he has yet to climb, and says, 'I press on to lay hold of that for

which I was laid hold of by Jesus Christ.'

And what was that? On the road to Damascus Paul was only told one

thing, that Christ had grasped him and drawn him to Himself in order

that He might make him a chosen vessel to bear the Word far hence

amongst the Gentiles. The bearing of His conversion upon Paul himself

was never mentioned. The bearing of His conversion on the world was the

only subject that Jesus spoke of at first. But here Paul has nothing to

say about his world-wide mission. He does not think of himself as being

called to be an Apostle, but as being summoned to be a Christian. And

so, forgetting for the time all the glorious and yet burdensome

obligations which were laid upon him, and the discharge of which was

the very life of his life, he thinks only of what affects his own

character, the perfecting of which he regards as being the one thing

for which he was 'laid hold of by Christ Jesus.' The purpose is

twofold. No Christian man is made a Christian only in order that he may

secure his own salvation; there is the world to think of. No Christian

man is made a Christian only in order that he may be Christ's

instrument for carrying the Word to other people; there is himself to

think of. And these two phases of the purpose for which Jesus Christ

lays hold upon us are very hard to unite in practice, giving to each

its due place and prominence, and they are often separated, to the

detriment of both the one that is attended to, and the one that is

neglected. The monastic life has not produced the noblest Christians;

and there are pitfalls lying in the path of every man who, like me, has

for his profession to preach the Gospel, which, if they are fallen

into, the inward life is utterly wrecked.

The two sides of Christ's purpose have, in our practice, to be held

together, but for the present I only wish to say a word or two about

that which, as I have indicated, is but one hemisphere of the completed

orb, and that is our personal culture and growth in the divine life.

What did Christ lay hold of me for? Paul answers the question very

strikingly and beautifully in a previous verse. Here is his conception

of the purpose, 'that I may know Him, and the power of His

resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made

conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain unto the

resurrection of the dead.' That is what you were forgiven for; that is

what you have 'passed from death unto life' for; that is what you have

come into the sweet fellowship of God, and can think of Him as your

Friend and Helper for.

Let us take the clauses seriatim, and say a word about each of them.

'That I may know Him.' Ah! there is a great deal more in Jesus Christ

than a man sees when he first sees Him through his tears and his fears,

and apprehends Him as the Saviour of his soul, and the sacrifice on

whom the burden and the guilt of his sins were laid. We must begin

there, as I believe. But woe to us if we stop there. There is far more

in Christ than that; although all that is in Him is included in that,

yet you have to dig deep before you find all that is included in it.

You have to live with Him day by day, and year by year, and to learn to

know Him as we learn to know husbands and wives, by continual

intercourse, by continual experience of a sweet and unfailing love, by

many a sacred hour of interchange of affection and reception of gifts

and counsels. It is only thus that we learn to know what Jesus Christ

is. When He lays hold of us, He comes like the angel that came to Peter

in the prison in the dark and awoke him out of his sleep and said

'Rise! and follow me.' It is only when we get out into the street, and

have been with Him for awhile, and the daylight begins to stream in,

that we see clearly the face of our Deliverer, and know Him for all

that He is. This knowledge is not the sort of knowledge that you can

get by thinking, or out of a book. It is the knowledge of experience.

It is the knowledge of love, it is the knowledge of union, and it is in

order that we may know Christ that He lays his hand upon us.

'The power of His Resurrection.' Now, by that I understand a similar

knowledge, by experience, of the risen life of Jesus Christ flowing

into us, and filling our hearts and minds with its own power. The risen

life of Jesus is the nourishment and strengthening and blessing and

life of a Christian. Our daily experience ought to be that there comes,

wavelet by wavelet, that silent, gentle, and yet omnipotent influx into

our empty hearts, the very life of Christ Himself.

I know that this generation says that that is mysticism. I do not know

whether it is mysticism or not. I am sure it is truth; and I do not

understand Christianity at all, unless there is that kind of mysticism,

perfectly wholesome and good, in it. You will never know Jesus Christ

until you know Him as pouring into your hearts the power of an endless

life, His own life. Christ for us by all means,--Christ's death the

basis of our hope, but Christ in us, and Christ's life as the true gift

to His Church. Have you got that? Do you know the power of His

Resurrection?

'The fellowship of His sufferings.' Has Paul made a mistake, and

deserted the chronological order? Why does he put the 'fellowship of

the sufferings' after the 'power of the Resurrection'? For this plain

reason, that if we get Christ's life into our hearts, in the measure in

which we get it we shall bear a similar relation to the world which He

bore to it, and in our measure will 'fill up that which is behind in

the sufferings of Christ,' and will understand how true it is that 'if

they hate Me they will hate you also.' Brethren, the test of us who

have the life of Christ in our hearts is that we shall, in some

measure, suffer with Him, because 'as He is, so are we, in this world,'

and because we must in that case look upon the world, its sins and its

sorrows, with something of the sad gaze with which He looked across the

valley to the Temple sparkling in the morning light, and wept over it.

So if we know the power of His Resurrection we shall know the

fellowship of His sufferings.

And then Paul goes on, in his definition of the purpose for which

Christ lays hold upon men, apparently to say the same thing over again,

only in the opposite order, 'that I may be conformable to His death, if

by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.' Both of

these clauses, I think, refer to the future, to the actual dying of the

body, and the actual future resurrection of the same. And the thought

is this, that if here, through our earthly lives, we have been

recipients of the risen life of Jesus Christ, and so have stood to the

world in our degree as He stood to it, then when the moment of death

comes to us, we shall, in so far, have our departure shaped after His

as that we shall be able to say, 'Into Thy hands I commit my spirit,'

and die willingly, and at last shall be partakers of that blessed

Resurrection unto life eternal which closes the vista of our earthly

history. Stephen's death was conformed to Christ's in outward fashion,

in so far as it echoed the Master's prayer, 'Father forgive them, for

they know not what they do,' and in so far as it echoed the Master's

last words, with the significant alteration that, whilst Jesus

commended His spirit to the Father, the first martyr commended his to

Jesus Christ.

These, then, are the purposes for which Christ laid His hand upon us,

that we might know Him, the power of His Resurrection, the fellowship

of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death yet by attaining

the resurrection of the dead.

II. Notice, again, our laying hold because we have been laid hold of.

Christ's laying hold of me, blessed and powerful as it is, does not of

itself secure that I shall reach the end which He had in view in His

arresting of me. What more is wanted? My effort. 'I follow after if I

may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended.' Now, notice, in

the one case, the Apostle speaks of himself, not as passive, but

certainly not as active. 'I was laid hold of.' What did he do? As I

have said, he simply yielded to the grasp. But 'I may lay hold of'

conveys the idea of personal effort; and so these two expressions, 'I

was apprehended,' and 'I apprehend,' suggest this consideration, that,

for the initial blessings of the Christian life, forgiveness,

acceptance, the sense of God's favour, and of reconciliation with him,

nothing is needed but the simple faith that yields itself altogether to

the grasp of Christ's hand, but that for my possessing what Christ

means that I should possess when He lays His hand on me, there is

needed not only faith but effort. I have to put out my hand and tighten

my fingers round the thing, if I would make it my own, and keep it.

So--faith, to begin with, and work based on faith, to go on with. It is

because a man is sure that Jesus Christ has laid His hand upon him, and

meant something when He did it, that he fights on with all his might to

realise Christ's purpose, and to get and keep the thing which Christ

meant him to have. There is stimulus in the thought, I was laid hold of

by Him for a purpose. There is all the difference between striving,

however eagerly, however nobly, however strenuously, however

constantly, after self-improvement, by one's own effort only, and

striving after it because one knows that he is therein fulfilling the

purpose for which Jesus Christ drew him to Himself.

And if that be so, then the nature of the thing to be laid hold of

determines what we are to do to lay hold of it. And since to know

Christ, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His

sufferings, is the aim and end of our conversion, the way to secure it

must be keeping in continual touch with Jesus by meditating upon Him,

by holding many a moment of still, sacred, sweet communion with Him, by

carefully avoiding whatever might come between us and our knowledge of

Him, and the influx of His life into us, and by yielding ourselves, day

by day, to the continual influence of His divine grace upon us and by

the discipline which shall make our inward natures more and more

capable of receiving more and more of that dear Lord. These being the

things to do, in regard to the inward life, there must be effort too,

in regard to the outward; for we must, if we are to lay hold of that

for which we are laid hold of by Jesus Christ, bring all the outward

life under the dominion of this inward impulse, and when the flood

pours into our hearts we must, by many a sluice and trench, guide it

into every corner of the field, that all may be irrigated. The first

thing they do when they are going to sow rice in an Eastern field is to

flood it, and then they cast in the seed, and it germinates. Flood your

lives with Christ, and then sow the seed and you will get a crop.

III. Lastly, the text suggests the incompleteness of our grasp.

'I follow that,' says Paul, 'if that I may apprehend.' This letter was

written far on in his career, in the time of his imprisonment in Rome,

which all but ended his ministerial activity; and was many years after

that day on the road to Damascus. And yet, matured Christian and

exercised Apostle as he was, with all that past behind him, he says, 'I

follow after, that I may apprehend.' Ah, brother, our experience must

be incomplete, for we have an infinite aim set before us, and there is

no end to the possibilities of plunging deeper and deeper and deeper

into the knowledge of Christ, and having larger and larger and larger

draughts of the fulness of His life. We have only been like

goldseekers, who have contented themselves as yet with washing the

precious grains out of the gravel of the river. There are great reefs

filled with the ore that we have not touched. Thank God for the

necessary incompleteness of our 'apprehending.' It is the very salt of

life. To have realised our aims, to have fulfilled our ideals, to have

sucked dry the cluster of the grapes is the death of aspiration, of

hope, of blessedness; and to have the distance beckoning, and all

experience 'an arch, wherethro' gleams the untravelled world to which

we move,' is the secret of perpetual youth and energy.

Because incomplete, our experience should be progressive; and that is a

truth that needs hammering into Christian people to-day. About how many

of us can it be said that our light 'shineth more and more unto the

noonday.' Alas! about an enormous number of us it must be said, 'When

for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you.'

All our churches have many grown babies, and cases of arrested

development--people that ought to be living on strong meat, and are

unable to masticate or digest it, and by their own fault have still

need of the milk of infancy. There is an old fable about a strange

animal that fastened itself to the keel of sailing ships, and by some

uncanny power was able to arrest them in mid-ocean, though the winds

were filling all their sails. There is a remora, as they called it, of

that sort adhering to a great many Christian people, and keeping them

fixed on one spot, instead of 'following after, if that they may

apprehend.'

Dear friends--and especially you younger Christians--Christ has laid

hold of you. Well and good! that is the beginning. He has laid hold of

you for an end. That end will not be reached without your effort, and

that effort must be perpetual. It is a life-long task. Ay! and even up

yonder the apprehending will be incomplete. Like those mathematical

lines that ever approximate to a point which they never reach, we shall

through Eternity be, as it were, rising, in ascending and ever-closer

drawing spirals, to that great Throne, and to Him that sits upon it. So

that, striking out the humble 'may' from our text, the rest of it

describes the progressive blessedness of the endless life in the

heavens, as truly as it does the progressive duty of the Christian life

here, and the glorified flock that follows the Lamb in the heavenly

pastures may each say: I follow after in order to apprehend that 'for

which,' long ago and down amidst the dim shadows of earth, 'I was

apprehended of Christ Jesus.'

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THE RACE AND THE GOAL

'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and

reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the

mark for the prize.'--Phil. iii. 13, 14.

This buoyant energy and onward looking are marvellous in 'Paul the

aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.' Forgetfulness of the

past and eager anticipation for the future are, we sometimes think, the

child's prerogatives. They may be ignoble and puerile, or they may be

worthy and great. All depends on the future to which we look. If it be

the creation of our fancies, we are babies for trusting it. If it be,

as Paul's was, the revelation of God's purposes, we cannot do a wiser

thing than look.

The Apostle here is letting us see the secret of his own life, and

telling us what made him the sort of Christian that he was. He counsels

wise obliviousness, wise anticipation, strenuous concentration, and

these are the things that contribute to success in any field of life.

Christianity is the perfection of common sense. Men become mature

Christians by no other means than those by which they become good

artisans, ripe scholars, or the like. But the misery is that, though

people know well enough that they cannot be good carpenters, or

doctors, or fiddlers without certain habits and practices, they seem to

fancy that they can be good Christians without them.

So the words of my text may suggest appropriate thoughts on this first

Sunday of a new year. Let us listen, then, to Paul telling us how he

came to be the sort of Christian man he was.

I. First, then, I would say, make God's aim your aim.

Paul distinguishes here between the 'mark' and the 'prize.' He aims at

the one for the sake of the other. The one is the object of effort; the

other is the sure result of successful effort. If I may so say, the

crown hangs on the winning post; and he who touches the goal clutches

the garland.

Then, mark that he regards the aim towards which he strains as being

the aim which Christ had in view in his conversion. For he says in the

preceding context, 'I labour if that I may lay hold of that for which

also I have been laid hold of by Jesus Christ.' In the words that

follow the text he speaks of the prize as being the result and purpose

of the high calling of God 'in Christ Jesus.' So then he took God's

purpose in calling, and Christ's purpose in redeeming him, as being his

great object in life. God's aims and Paul's were identical.

What, then, is the aim of God in all that He has done for us? The

production in us of God-like and God-pleasing character. For this suns

rise and set; for this seasons and times come and go; for this sorrows

and joys are experienced; for this hopes and fears and loves are

kindled. For this all the discipline of life is set in motion. For this

we were created; for this we have been redeemed. For this Jesus Christ

lived and suffered and died. For this God's Spirit is poured out upon

the world. All else is scaffolding; this is the building which it

contemplates, and when the building is reared the scaffolding may be

cleared away. God means to make us like Himself, and so pleasing to

Himself, and has no other end in all the varieties of His gifts and

bestowments but only this, the production of character.

Such is the aim that we should set before us. The acceptance of that

aim as ours will give nobleness and blessedness to our lives as nothing

else will. How different all our estimates of the meaning and true

nature of events would be, if we kept clearly before us that their

intention was not merely to make us blessed and glad, or to make us

sorrowful, but that, through the blessedness, through the sorrow,

through the gift, through the withdrawal, through all the variety of

dealings, the intention was one and the same, to mould us to the

likeness of our Lord and Saviour! There would be fewer mysteries in our

lives, we should seldomer have to stand in astonishment, in vain

regret, in miserable and weakening looking back upon vanished gifts,

and saying to ourselves, 'Why has this darkness stooped upon my path?'

if we looked beyond the darkness and the light to that for which both

were sent. Some plants require frost to bring out their savour, and men

need sorrow to test and to produce their highest qualities. There would

be fewer knots in the thread of our lives, and fewer mysteries in our

experience, if we made God's aim ours, and strove through all

variations of condition to realise it.

How different all our estimate of nearer objects and aims would be, if

once we clearly recognised what we are here for! The prostitution of

powers to obviously unworthy aims and ends is the saddest thing in

humanity. It is like elephants being set to pick up pins; it is like

the lightning being harnessed to carry all the gossip and filth of one

capital of the world to the prurient readers in another. Men take these

great powers which God has given them, and use them to make money, to

cultivate their intellects, to secure the gratification of earthly

desires, to make a home for themselves here amidst the illusions of

time; and all the while the great aim which ought to stand out clear

and supreme is forgotten by them.

There is nothing that needs more careful examination by us than our

accepted schemes of life for ourselves; the roots of our errors mostly

lie in these things that we take to be axioms, and that we never

examine into. Let us begin this new year by an honest dealing with

ourselves, asking ourselves this question, 'What am I living for?' And

if the answer, first of all, be, as, of course, it will be, the

accomplishment of the nearer and necessary aims, such as the conduct of

our business, the cultivating of our understandings, the love and peace

of our homes, then let us press the investigation a little further, and

say, What then? Suppose I make a fortune, what then? Suppose I get the

position I am striving for, what then? Suppose I cultivate my

understanding and win the knowledge that I am nobly striving after,

what then? Let us not cease to ask the question until we can say, 'Thy

aim, O Lord, is my aim, and I press toward the mark,' the only mark

which will make life noble, elastic, stable, and blessed, that I 'may

be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, but that which

is of God by faith.' For this we have all been made, guided, redeemed.

If we carry this treasure out of life we shall carry all that is worth

carrying. If we fail in this we fail altogether, whatever be our

so-called success. There is one mark, one only, and every arrow that

does not hit that target is wasted and spent in vain.

II. Secondly, let me say, concentrate all effort on this one aim.

'This one thing I do,' says the Apostle, 'I press toward the mark.'

That aim is the one which God has in view in all circumstances and

arrangements. Therefore, obviously, it is one which may be pursued in

all of these, and may be sought whatsoever we are doing. All

occupations of life except only sin are consistent with this highest

aim. It needs not that we should seek any remote or cloistered form of

life, nor sheer off any legitimate and common interests and

occupations, but in them all we may be seeking for the one thing, the

moulding of our characters into the shapes that are pleasing to Him.

'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I

may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life';

wheresoever the outward days of my life may be passed. Whatsoever we

are doing in business, in shop, at a study table, in the kitchen, in

the nursery, by the road, in the house, we may still have the supreme

aim in view, that from all occupations there may come growth in

character and in likeness to Jesus Christ.

Only, to keep this supreme aim clear there will require far more

frequent and resolute effort of what the old mystics used to call

'recollection' than we are accustomed to put forth. It is hard, amidst

the din of business, and whilst yielding to other lower, legitimate

impulses and motives, to set this supreme one high above them all. But

it is possible if only we will do two things: keep ourselves close to

God, and be prepared to surrender much, laying our own wills, our own

fancies, purposes, eager hopes and plans in His hands, and asking Him

to help us, that we may never lose sight of the harbour light because

of any tossing waves that rise between us and it, nor may ever be so

swallowed up in ends, which are only means after all, as to lose sight

of the only end which is an end in itself. But for the attainment of

this aim in any measure, the concentration of all our powers upon it is

absolutely needful. If you want to bore a hole you take a sharp point;

you can do nothing with a blunt one. Every flight of wild ducks in the

sky will tell you the form that is most likely to secure the maximum of

motion with the minimum of effort. The wedge is that which pierces

through all the loosely-compacted textures against which it is pressed.

The Roman strategy forced the way of the legion through the

loose-ordered ranks of barbarian foes by arraying it in that wedge-like

form. So we, if we are to advance, must gather ourselves together and

put a point upon our lives by compaction and concentration of effort

and energy on the one purpose. The conquering word is, 'This one thing

I do.' The difference between the amateur and the artist is that the

one pursues an art at intervals by spurts, as a parergon--a thing that

is done in the intervals of other occupations--and that the other makes

it his life's business. There are a great many amateur Christians

amongst us, who pursue the Christian life by spurts and starts. If you

want to be a Christian after God's pattern--and unless you are you are

scarcely a Christian at all--you have to make it your business, to give

the same attention, the same concentration, the same unwavering energy

to it which you do to your trade. The man of one book, the man of one

idea, the man of one aim is the formidable and the successful man.

People will call you a fanatic; never mind. Better be a fanatic and get

what you aim at, which is the highest thing, than be so broad that,

like a stream spreading itself out over miles of mud, there is no scour

in it anywhere, no current, and therefore stagnation and death. Gather

yourselves together, and amidst all the side issues and nearer aims

keep this in view as the aim to which all are to be subservient--that,

'whether I eat or drink, or whatsoever I do, I may do all to the glory

of God.' Let sorrow and joy, and trade and profession, and study and

business, and house and wife and children, and all home joys, be the

means by which you may become like the Master who has died for this

end, that we may become partakers of His holiness.

III. Pursue this end with a wise forgetfulness.

'Forgetting the things that are behind.' The art of forgetting has much

to do with the blessedness and power of every life. Of course, when the

Apostle says 'Forgetting the things that are behind,' he is thinking of

the runner, who has no time to cast his eye over his shoulder to mark

the steps already trod. He does not mean, of course, either, to tell us

that we are so to cultivate obliviousness as to let God's mercies to us

'lie forgotten in unthankfulness, or without praises die.' Nor does he

mean to tell us that we are to deny ourselves the solace of remembering

the mercies which may, perhaps, have gone from us. Memory may be like

the calm radiance that fills the western sky from a sun that has set,

sad and yet sweet, melancholy and lovely. But he means that we should

so forget as, by the oblivion, to strengthen our concentration.

So I would say, let us remember, and yet forget, our past failures and

faults. Let us remember them in order that the remembrance may

cultivate in us a wise chastening of our self-confidence. Let us

remember where we were foiled, in order that we may be the more careful

of that place hereafter. If we know that upon any road we fell into

ambushes, 'not once nor twice,' like the old king of Israel, we should

guard ourselves against passing by that road again. He who has not

learned, by the memory of his past failures, humility and wise

government of his life, and wise avoidance of places where he is weak,

is an incurable fool.

But let us forget our failures in so far as these might paralyse our

hopes, or make us fancy that future success is impossible where past

failures frown. Ebenezer was a field of defeat before it rang with the

hymns of victory. And there is no place in your past life where you

have been shamefully baffled and beaten, but there, and in that, you

may yet be victorious. Never let the past limit your hopes of the

possibilities and your confidence in the certainties and victories of

the future. And if ever you are tempted to say to yourselves, 'I have

tried it so often, and so often failed, that it is no use trying it any

more. I am beaten and I throw up the sponge,' remember Paul's wise

exhortation, and 'forgetting the things that are behind . . . press

toward the mark.'

In like manner I would say, remember and yet forget past successes and

achievements. Remember them for thankfulness, remember them for hope,

remember them for counsel and instruction, but forget them when they

tend, as all that we accomplish does tend, to make us fancy that little

more remains to be done; and forget them when they tend, as all that we

accomplish ever does tend, to make us think that such and such things

are our line, and of other virtues and graces and achievements of

culture and of character, that these are not our line, and not to be

won by us.

'Our line!' Astronomers take a thin thread from a spider's web and

stretch it across their object glasses to measure stellar magnitudes.

Just as is the spider's line in comparison with the whole shining

surface of the sun across which it is stretched, so is what we have

already attained to the boundless might and glory of that to which we

may come. Nothing short of the full measure of the likeness of Jesus

Christ is the measure of our possibilities.

There is a mannerism in Christian life, as there is in everything else,

which is to be avoided if we would grow into perfection. There was a

great artist in the last century who never could paint a picture

without sticking a brown tree in the foreground. We have all got our

'brown trees,' which we think we can do well, and these limit our

ambition to secure other gifts which God is ready to bestow upon us. So

'forget the things that are behind.' Cultivate a wise obliviousness of

past sorrows, past joys, past failures, past gifts, past achievements,

in so far as these might limit the audacity of our hopes and the energy

of our efforts.

IV. So, lastly, pursue the aim with a wise, eager reaching forward.

The Apostle employs a very graphic word here, which is only very

partially expressed by that 'reaching forth.' It contains a condensed

picture which it is scarcely possible to put into any one expression.

'Reaching out over' is the full though clumsy rendering of the word,

and it gives us the picture of the runner with his whole body thrown

forward, his hand extended, and his eye reaching even further than his

hand, in eager anticipation of the mark and the prize. So we are to

live, with continual reaching out of confidence, clear recognition, and

eager desire to make our own the unattained.

What is that which gives an element of nobleness to the lives of great

idealists, whether they be poets, artists, students, thinkers, or what

not? Only this, that they see the unattained burning ever so clearly

before them that all the attained seems as nothing in their eyes. And

so life is saved from commonplace, is happily stung into fresh effort,

is redeemed from flagging, monotony, and weariness.

The measure of our attainments may be fairly estimated by the extent to

which the unattained is clear in our sight. A man down in the valley

sees the nearer shoulder of the hill, and he thinks it the top. The man

up on the shoulder sees all the heights that lie beyond rising above

him. Endeavour is better than success. It is more to see the Alpine

heights unscaled than it is to have risen so far as we have done. They

who thus have a boundless future before them have an endless source of

inspiration, of energy, of buoyancy granted to them.

No man has such an absolutely boundless vision of the future which may

be his as we have, if we are Christian people, as we ought to be. We

only can thus look forward. For all others a blank wall stretches at

the end of life, against which hopes, when they strike, fall back

stunned and dead. But for us the wall may be overleaped, and, living by

the energy of a boundless hope, we, and only we, can lay ourselves down

to die, and say then, 'Reaching forth unto the things that are before.'

So, dear friends, make God's aim your aim; concentrate your life's

efforts upon it; pursue it with a wise forgetfulness; pursue it with an

eager confidence of anticipation that shall not be put to shame.

Remember that God reaches His aim for you by giving to you Jesus

Christ, and that you can only reach it by accepting the Christ who is

given and being found in Him. Then the years will take away nothing

from us which it is not gain to lose. They will neither weaken our

energy nor flatten our hopes, nor dim our confidence, and, at the last

we shall reach the mark, and, as we touch it, we shall find dropping on

our surprised and humble heads the crown of life which they receive who

have so run, not as uncertainly, but doing this one thing, pressing

towards the mark for the prize.

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THE SOUL'S PERFECTION

'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in

anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto

you.'--Phil. iii. 15.

'As many as be perfect'; and how many may they be? Surely a very short

bede-roll would contain their names; or would there be any other but

the Name which is above every name upon it? Part of the answer to such

a question may be found in observing that the New Testament very

frequently uses the word to express not so much the idea of moral

completeness as that of physical maturity. For instance, when Paul says

that he would have his converts to be 'men in understanding,' and when

the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of 'them that are of full age,' the

same word is used as this 'perfect' in our text. Clearly in such cases

it means 'full grown,' as in contrast with 'babes,' and expresses not

absolute completeness, but what we may term a relative perfection, a

certain maturity of character and advanced stage of Christian

attainment, far removed from the infantile epoch of the Christian life.

Another contribution to the answer may be found in observing that in

this very context these 'perfect' people are exhorted to cultivate the

sense of not having 'already attained,' and to be constantly reaching

forth to unattained heights, so that a sense of imperfection and a

continual effort after higher life are parts of Paul's 'perfect man.'

And it is to be still further noticed that on the same testimony

'perfect' people may probably be 'otherwise minded'; by which we

understand not divergently minded from one another, but 'otherwise'

than the true norm or law of life would prescribe, and so may stand in

need of the hope that God will by degrees bring them into conformity

with His will, and show them 'this,' namely, their divergence from His

Pattern for them.

It is worth our while to look at these large thoughts thus involved in

the words before us.

I. Then there are people whom without exaggeration the judgment of

truth calls perfect.

The language of the New Testament has no scruple in calling men

'saints' who had many sins, and none in calling men perfect who had

many imperfections; and it does so, not because it has any fantastic

theory about religious emotions being the measure of moral purity, but

partly for the reasons already referred to, and partly because it

wisely considers the main thing about a character to be not the degree

to which it has attained completeness in its ideal, but what that ideal

is. The distance a man has got on his journey is of less consequence

than the direction in which his face is turned. The arrow may fall

short, but to what mark was it shot? In all regions of life a wise

classification of men arranges them according to their aims rather than

their achievements. The visionary who attempts something high and

accomplishes scarcely anything of it, is often a far nobler man, and

his poor, broken, foiled, resultless life far more perfect than his who

aims at marks on the low levels and hits them full. Such lives as

these, full of yearning and aspiration, though it be for the most part

vain, are

'Like the young moon with a ragged edge

E'en in its imperfection beautiful.'

If then it be wise to rank men and their pursuits according to their

aims rather than their accomplishments, is there one class of aims so

absolutely corresponding to man's nature and relations that to take

them for one's own, and to reach some measure of approximation to them,

may fairly be called the perfection of human nature? Is there one way

of living concerning which we may say that whosoever adopts it has, in

so far as he does adopt it, discerned and attained the purpose of his

being? The literal force of the word in our text gives pertinence to

that question, for it distinctly means 'having reached the end.' And if

that be taken as the meaning, there need be no doubt about the answer.

Grand old words have taught us long ago 'Man's chief end is to glorify

God and to enjoy Him for ever.' Yes, he who lives for God has taken

that for his aim which all his nature and all his relations prescribe,

he is doing what he was made and meant to do; and however incomplete

may be its attainments, the lowest form of a God-fearing, God-obeying

life is higher and more nearly 'perfect' than the fairest career or

character against which, as a blight on all its beauty, the damning

accusation may be brought, 'The God in whose hand thy breath is, and

whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.'

People sneer at 'saints' and point at their failings. They remind us of

the foul stains in David's career, for instance, and mock as they ask,

'Is this your man after God's own heart?' Yes, he is; not because

religion has a morality of its own different from that of the world

(except as being higher), nor because 'saints' make up for adultery and

murder by making or singing psalms, but because the main set and

current of the life was evidently towards God and goodness, and these

hideous sins were glaring contradictions, eddies and backwaters, as it

were, wept over with bitter self-abasement and conquered by strenuous

effort. Better a life of Godward aspiration and straining after purity,

even if broken by such a fall, so recovered, than one of habitual

earthward grubbing, undisturbed by gross sin.

And another reason warrants the application of the word to men whose

present is full of incompleteness, namely, the fact that such men have

in them the germ of a life which has no natural end but absolute

completeness. The small seed may grow very slowly in the climate and

soil which it finds here, and be only a poor little bit of ragged

green, very shabby and inconspicuous by the side of the native flowers

of earth flaunting around it, but it has a divine germinant virtue

within, and waits but being carried to its own clime and 'planted in

the house of the Lord' above, to 'flourish in the courts of our God,'

when these others with their glorious beauty have faded away and are

flung out to rot.

II. We have set forth here very distinctly two of the characteristics

of this perfection.

The Apostle in our text exhorts the perfect to be 'thus minded.' How is

that? Evidently the word points back to the previous clauses, in which

he has been describing his own temper and feeling in the Christian

race. He sets that before the Philippians as their pattern, or rather

invites them to fellowship with him in the estimate of themselves and

in their efforts after higher attainments. 'Be thus minded' means,

Think as I do of yourselves, and do as I do in your daily life.

How did he think of himself? He tells us in the sentence before, 'Not

as though I were already perfect. I count not myself to have

apprehended.' So then a leading characteristic of this true Christian

perfection is a constant consciousness of imperfection. In all fields

of effort, whether intellectual, moral, or mechanical, as faculty

grows, consciousness of insufficiency grows with it. The farther we get

up the hill, the more we see how far it is to the horizon. The more we

know, the more we know our ignorance. The better we can do, the more we

discern how much we cannot do. Only people who never have done and

never will do anything, or else raw apprentices with the mercifully

granted self-confidence of youth, which gets beaten out of most of us

soon enough, think that they can do everything.

In morals and in Christian life the same thing is true. The measure of

our perfection will be the consciousness of our imperfection--a

paradox, but a great truth. It is plain enough that it will be so.

Conscience becomes more sensitive as we get nearer right. The worse a

man is the less it speaks to him, and the less he hears it. When it

ought to thunder it whispers; when we need it most it is least active.

The thick skin of a savage will not be disturbed by lying on sharp

stones, while a crumpled rose-leaf robs the Sybarite of his sleep. So

the practice of evil hardens the cuticle of conscience, and the

practice of goodness restores tenderness and sensibility; and many a

man laden with crime knows less of its tingling than some fair soul

that looks almost spotless to all eyes but its own. One little stain of

rust will be conspicuous on a brightly polished blade, but if it be all

dirty and dull, a dozen more or fewer will make little difference. As

men grow better they become like that glycerine barometer recently

introduced, on which a fall or a rise that would have been invisible

with mercury to record it takes up inches, and is glaringly

conspicuous. Good people sometimes wonder, and sometimes are made

doubtful and sad about themselves, by this abiding and even increased

consciousness of sin. There is no need to be so. The higher the

temperature the more chilling would it be to pass into an ice-house,

and the more our lives are brought into fellowship with the perfect

life, the more shall we feel our own shortcomings. Let us be thankful

if our consciences speak to us more loudly than they used to do. It is

a sign of growing holiness, as the tingling in a frost-bitten limb is

of returning life. Let us seek to cultivate and increase the sense of

our own imperfection, and be sure that the diminution of a

consciousness of sin means not diminished power of sin, but lessened

horror of it, lessened perception of right, lessened love of goodness,

and is an omen of death, not a symptom of life. Painter, scholar,

craftsman all know that the condition of advance is the recognition of

an ideal not attained. Whoever has not before him a standard to which

he has not reached will grow no more. If we see no faults in our work

we shall never do any better. The condition of all Christian, as of all

other progress, is to be drawn by that fair vision before us, and to be

stung into renewed effort to reach it, by the consciousness of present

imperfection.

Another characteristic to which these perfect men are exhorted is a

constant striving after a further advance. How vigorously, almost

vehemently, that temper is put in the context--'I follow after'; 'I

press toward the mark'; and that picturesque 'reaching forth,' or, as

the Revised Version gives it, 'stretching forward.' The full force of

the latter word cannot be given in any one English equivalent, but may

be clumsily hinted by some such phrase as 'stretching oneself out

over,' as a runner might do with body thrown forward and arms extended

in front, and eagerness in every strained muscle, and eye outrunning

foot, and hope clutching the goal already. So yearning forward, and

setting all the current of his being, both faculty and desire, to the

yet unreached mark, the Christian man is to live. His glances are not

to be bent backwards, but forwards. He is not to be a 'praiser of the

past,' but a herald and expectant of a nobler future. He is the child

of the day and of the morning, forgetting the things which are behind,

and ever yearning towards the things which are before, and drawing them

to himself. To look back is to be stiffened into a living death; only

with faces set forward are we safe and well.

This buoyant energy of hope and effort is to be the result of the

consciousness of imperfection of which we have spoken. Strange to many

of us, in some moods, that a thing so bright should spring up from a

thing so dark, and that the more we feel our own shortcomings, the more

hopeful should we be of a future unlike the past, and the more earnest

in our effort to make that future the present! There is a type of

Christian experience not uncommon among devout people, in which the

consciousness of imperfection paralyses effort instead of quickening

it; men lament their evil, their slow progress and so on, and remain

the same year after year. They are stirred to no effort. There is no

straining onwards. They almost seem to lose the faith that they can

ever be any better. How different this from the grand, wholesome

completeness of Paul's view here, which embraces both elements, and

even draws the undying brightness of his forward-looking confidence

from the very darkness of his sense of present imperfection!

So should it be with us, 'as many as be perfect.' Before us stretch

indefinite possibilities of approximating to the unattainable fulness

of the divine life. We may grow in knowledge and in holiness through

endless ages and grades of advance. In a most blessed sense we may have

that for our highest joy which in another meaning is a punishment of

unfaithfulness and indocility, that we shall be 'ever learning, and

never coming to the full knowledge of the truth.' No limit can be put

to what we may receive of God, nor to the closeness, the fulness of our

communion with Him, nor to the beauty of holiness which may pass from

Him into our poor characters, and irradiate our homely faces. Then,

brethren, let us cherish a noble discontent with all that we at present

are. Let our spirits stretch out all their powers to the better things

beyond, as the plants grown in darkness will send out pale shoots that

feel blindly towards the light, or the seed sown on the top of a rock

will grope down the bare stone for the earth by which it must be fed.

Let the sense of our own weakness ever lead to a buoyant confidence in

what we, even we, may become if we will only take the grace we have. To

this touchstone let us bring all claims to higher holiness--they who

are perfect are most conscious of imperfection, and most eager in their

efforts after a further progress in the knowledge, love, and likeness

of God in Christ.

III. We have here also distinctly brought out the co-existence with

these characteristics of their opposites.

'If in anything ye are otherwise minded,' says Paul. I have already

suggested that this expression evidently refers not to difference of

opinion among themselves, but to a divergence of character from the

pattern of feeling and life which he has been proposing to them. If in

any respects ye are unconscious of your imperfections, if there be any

'witch's mark' of insensibility in some spot of your conscience to some

plain transgressions of law, if in any of you there be some complacent

illusion of your own stainlessness, if to any of you the bright vision

before you seem faint and unsubstantial, God will show you what you do

not see. Plainly then he considers that there will be found among these

perfect men states of feeling and estimates of themselves opposed to

those which he has been exhorting them to cherish. Plainly he supposes

that a good man may pass for a time under the dominion of impulses and

theories which are of another kind from those that rule his life.

He does not expect the complete and uninterrupted dominion of these

higher powers. He recognises the plain facts that the true self, the

central life of the soul, the higher nature, 'the new man,' abides in a

self which is but gradually renewed, and that there is a long distance,

so to speak, from the centre to the circumference. That higher life is

planted, but its germination is a work of time. The leaven does not

leaven the whole mass in a moment, but creeps on from particle to

particle. 'Make the tree good' and in due time its fruit will be good.

But the conditions of our human life are conflict, and these peaceful

images of growth and unimpeded natural development, 'first the blade,

then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' are not meant to

tell all the truth. Interruptions from external circumstances,

struggles of flesh with spirit, and of imagination and heart and will

against the better life implanted in the spirit, are the lot of all,

even the most advanced here, and however a man may be perfect, there

will always be the possibility that in something he may be 'otherwise

minded.'

Such an admission does not make such interruptions less blameworthy

when they occur. The doctrine of averages does not do away with the

voluntary character of each single act. The same number of letters are

yearly posted without addresses. Does anybody dream of not scolding the

errand boy who posted them, or the servant who did not address them,

because he knows that? We are quite sure that we could have resisted

each time that we fell. That piece of sharp practice in business, or

that burst of bad temper in the household which we were last guilty

of--could we have helped it or not? Conscience must answer that

question, which does not depend at all on the law of averages. Guilt is

not taken away by asserting that sin cleaves to men, 'perfect men.'

But the feelings with which we should regard sin and contradictions of

men's truest selves in ourselves and others should be so far altered by

such thoughts that we should be very slow to pronounce that a man

cannot be a Christian because he has done so and so. Are there any sins

which are clearly incompatible with a Christian character? All sins are

inconsistent with it, but that is a very different matter. The uniform

direction of a man's life being godless, selfish, devoted to the

objects and pursuits of time and sense, is incompatible with his being

a Christian--but, thank God, no single act, however dark, is so, if it

be in contradiction to the main tendency impressed upon the character

and conduct. It is not for us to say that any single deed shows a man

cannot be Christ's, nor to fling ourselves down in despair saying, 'If

I were a Christian, I could not have done that.' Let us remember that

'all unrighteousness is sin,' and the least sin is in flagrant

opposition to our Christian profession; but let us also remember, and

that not to blunt our consciences or weaken our efforts, that Paul

thought it possible for perfect men to be 'otherwise minded' from their

deepest selves and their highest pattern.

IV. The crowning hope that lies in these words is the certainty of a

gradual but complete attainment of all the Christian aspirations after

God and goodness.

The ground of that confidence lies in no natural tendencies in us, in

no effort of ours, but solely in that great name which is the anchor of

all our confidence, the name of God. Why is Paul certain that 'God will

reveal even this unto you'? Because He is God. The Apostle has learned

the infinite depth of meaning that lies in that name. He has learned

that God is not in the way of leaving off His work before He has done

His work, and that none can say of Him, that 'He began to build, and

was not able to finish.' The assurances of an unchangeable purpose in

redemption, and of inexhaustible resources to effect it; of a love that

can never fade, and of a grace that can never be exhausted--are all

treasured for us in that mighty name. And such confidence is confirmed

by the manifest tendency of the principles and motives brought to bear

on us in Christianity to lead on to a condition of absolute perfection,

as well as by the experience which we may have, if we will, of the

sanctifying and renewing power of His Spirit in our Spirit.

By the discipline of daily life, by the ministry of sorrow and joy, by

merciful chastisements dogging our steps when we stray, by duties and

cares, by the teaching of His word coming even closer to our hearts and

quickening our consciences to discern evil where we had seen none, as

well as kindling in us desires after higher and rarer goodness, by the

reward of enlarged perceptions of duty and greater love towards it,

with which He recompenses lowly obedience to the duty as yet seen, by

the secret influences of His Spirit of Power and of Love and of a sound

Mind breathed into our waiting spirits, by the touch of His own

sustaining hand and glance of His own guiding eye, He will reveal to

the lowly soul all that is yet wanting in its knowledge, and

communicate all that is lacking in character.

So for us, the true temper is confidence in His power and will, an

earnest waiting on Him, a brave forward yearning hope blended with a

lowly consciousness of imperfection, which is a spur not a clog, and

vigorous increasing efforts to bring into life and character the

fulness and beauty of God. Presumption should be as far from us as

despair--the one because we have not already attained, the other

because 'God will reveal even this unto us.' Only let us keep in mind

the caution which the Apostle, knowing the possible abuses which might

gather round His teaching, has here attached to it,

'Nevertheless'--though all which I have been saying is true, it is only

on this understanding--'Whereto we have already attained, by the same

let us walk.' God will perfect that which concerneth you if--and only

if--you go on as you have begun, if you make your creed a life, if you

show what you are. If so, then all the rest is a question of time. A

has been said, and Z will come in its proper place. Begin with humble

trust in Christ, and a process is commenced which has no natural end

short of that great hope with which this chapter closes, that the

change which begins in the deepest recesses of our being, and struggles

slowly and with many interruptions, into partial visibility in our

character, shall one day triumphantly irradiate our whole nature out to

the very finger-tips, and 'even the body of our humiliation shall be

fashioned like unto the body of Christ's glory, according to the

working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

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THE RULE OF THE ROAD

'Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the

same rule.'--Phil. iii. 16.

Paul has just been laying down a great principle--viz. that if the main

direction of a life be right, God will reveal to a man the points in

which he is wrong. But that principle is untrue and dangerous, unless

carefully guarded. It may lead to a lazy tolerance of evil, and to

drawing such inferences as, 'Well! it does not much matter about

strenuous effort, if we are right at bottom it will all come right

by-and-by,' and so it may become a pillow for indolence and a clog on

effort. This possible abuse of a great truth seems to strike the

Apostle, and so he enters here, with this 'Nevertheless,' a caveat

against that twist of his meaning. It is as if he said, 'Now mind!

while all that is perfectly true, it is true on conditions; and if they

be not attended to, it is not true.' God will reveal to a man the

things in which he is wrong if, and only if, he steadfastly continues

in the course which he knows and sees to be right. Present attainments,

then, are in some sense a standard of duty, and if we honestly and

conscientiously observe that standard we shall get light as we journey.

In this exhortation of the Apostle's there are many exhortations

wrapped up; and in trying to draw them out I venture to adhere to the

form of exhortation for the sake of impressiveness and point.

I. First, then, I would say the Apostle means, 'Live up to your faith

and your convictions.'

It may be a question whether 'that to which we have already attained'

means the amount of knowledge which we have won or the amount of

practical righteousness which we have made our own. But I think that,

instead of sharply dividing between these two, we shall follow more in

the course of the Apostle's thought if we unite them together, and

remember that the Bible does not make the distinct separation which we

sometimes incline to make between knowledge on the one side and

practice on the other, but regards the man as a living unity. And thus,

both aspects of our attainments come into consideration here.

So, then, there are two main thoughts--first, live out your creed, and

second, live up to your convictions.

Live out your creed. Men are meant to live, not by impulse, by

accident, by inclination, but by principle. We are not intended to live

by rule, but we are intended to live by law. And unless we know why we

do as well as what we do, and give a rational account of our conduct,

we fall beneath the height on which God intends us to walk. Impulse is

all very well, but impulse is blind and needs a guide. The imitation of

those around us, or the acceptance of the apparent necessities of

circumstances, are, to some extent, inevitable and right. But to be

driven merely by the force of externals is to surrender the highest

prerogative of manhood. The highest part of human nature is the reason

guided by conscience, and a man's conscience is only then rightly

illuminated when it is illuminated by his creed, which is founded on

the acceptance of the revelation that God has made of Himself.

And whilst we are clearly meant to be guided by the intelligent

appropriation of God's truth, that truth is evidently all meant for

guidance. We are not told anything in the Bible in order that we may

know as an ultimate object, but we are told it all in order that,

knowing, we may be, and, being, we may do, according to His will.

Just think of the intensely practical tendency of all the greatest

truths of Christianity. The Cross is the law of life. The revelation

that was made there was made, not merely that we might cling to it as a

refuge from our sins, but that we might accept it as the rule of our

conduct. All our duties to mankind are summed up in the word 'Love one

another as I have loved you.' We say that we believe in the divinity of

Christ; we say that we believe in the great incarnation and sacrificial

death and eternal priesthood of the loving Son of God. We say that we

believe in a judgment to come and a future life. Well, then, do these

truths produce any effect upon my life? have they shaped me in any

measure into conformity with their great principles? Does there issue

from them constraining power which grasps me and moulds me as a

sculptor would a bit of clay in his hands? Am I subject to the Gospel's

authority, and is the word in which God has revealed Himself to me the

word which dominates and impels all my life? 'Whereunto we have already

attained, by the same let us walk.'

But we shall not do that without a distinct effort. For it is a great

deal easier to live from hand to mouth than to live by principle. It is

a great deal easier to accept what seems forced upon us by

circumstances than to exercise control over the circumstances, and make

them bend to God's holy will. It is a great deal easier to take counsel

of inclination, and to put the reins in the hands of impulses,

passions, desires, tastes, or even habits, than it is, at each fresh

moment, to seek for fresh impulses from a fresh illumination from the

ancient and yet ever fresh truth. The old kings of France used to be

kept with all royal state in the palace, but they were not allowed to

do anything. And there was a rough, unworshipped man that stood by

their side, and who was the real ruler of the realm. That is what a

great many professing Christians do with their creeds. They instal them

in some inner chamber that they very seldom visit, and leave them

there, in dignified idleness, and the real working ruler of their lives

is found elsewhere. Let us see to it, brethren, that all our thoughts

are incarnated in our deeds, and that all our deeds are brought into

immediate connection with the great principles of God's word. Live by

that law, and we live at liberty.

And, then, remember that this translating of creed into conduct is the

only condition of growing illumination. When we act upon a belief, the

belief grows. That is the source of a great deal of stupid obstinacy in

this world, because men have been so long accustomed to go upon certain

principles that it seems incredible to them but that these principles

should be true. But that, too, is at the bottom of a great deal of

intelligent and noble firmness of adherence to the true. A man who has

tested a principle because he has lived upon it has confidence in it

that nobody else can have.

Projectors may have beautiful specifications with attractive pictures

of their new inventions; they look very well upon paper, but we must

see them working before we are sure of their worth. And so, here is

this great body of Divine truth, which assumes to be sufficient for

guidance, for conduct, for comfort, for life. Live upon it, and thereby

your grasp of it and your confidence in it will be immensely increased.

And no man has a right to say 'I have rejected Christianity as untrue,'

unless he has put it to the test by living upon it; and if he has, he

will never say it. A Swiss traveller goes into a shop and buys a

brand-new alpenstock. Does he lean upon it with as much confidence as

another man does, who has one with the names of all the mountains that

it has helped him up branded on it from top to bottom? Take this staff

and lean on it. Live your creed, and you will believe your creed as you

never will until you do. Obedience takes a man up to an elevation from

which he sees further into the deep harmonies of truth. In all regions

of life the principle holds good: 'To him that hath shall be given.'

And it holds eminently in reference to our grasp of Christian

principles. Use them and they grow; neglect them and they perish.

Sometimes a man dies in a workhouse who has a store of guineas and

notes wrapped up in rags somewhere about him; and so they have been of

no use to him. If you want your capital to increase, trade with it. As

the Lord said when He gave the servants their talents: 'Trade with them

till I come.' The creed that is utilised is the creed that grows. And

that is why so many of you Christian people have so little real

intellectual grasp of the principles of Christianity, because you have

not lived upon them, nor tried to do it.

And, in like manner, another side of this thought is, be true to your

convictions. There is no such barrier to a larger and wholesomer view

of our duty as the neglect of anything that plainly is our duty. It

stands there, an impassable cliff between us and all progress. Let us

live and be what we know we ought to be, and we shall know better what

we ought to be at the next moment.

II. Secondly, let me put the Apostle's meaning in another exhortation,

Go on as you have begun.

'Whereunto we have already attained, by the same let us walk.' The

various points to which the men have reached are all points in one

straight line; and the injunction of my text is 'Keep the road.' There

are a great many temptations to stray from it. There are nice smooth

grassy bits by the side of it where it is a great deal easier walking.

There are attractive things just a footstep or two out of the

path--such a little deviation that it can easily be recovered. And so,

like children gathering daisies in the field, we stray away from the

path; and, like men on a moor, we then look round for it, and it is

gone. The angle of divergence may be the acutest possible; the

deviation when we begin may be scarcely visible, but if you draw a line

at the sharpest angle and the least deviation from a straight line, and

carry it out far enough, there will be space between it and the line

from which it started ample to hold a universe. Then, let us take care

of small deviations from the plain straight path, and give no heed to

the seductions that lie on either side, but 'whereunto we have already

attained, by the same let us walk.'

There are temptations, too, to slacken our speed. The river runs far

more slowly in its latter course than when it came babbling and leaping

down the hillside. And sometimes a Christian life seems as if it crept

rather than ran, like those sluggish streams in the Fen country, which

move so slowly that you cannot tell which way the water is flowing. Are

not there all round us, are there not amongst ourselves instances of

checked growth, of arrested development? There are people listening to

me now, calling themselves--and I do not say that they have not a right

to do so--Christians, who have not grown a bit for years, but stand at

the very same point of attainment, both in knowledge and in purity and

Christlikeness, as they were many, many days ago. I beseech you, listen

to this exhortation of my text, 'Whereunto we have already attained, by

the same let us walk,' and continue patient and persistent in the

course that is set before us.

III. The Apostle's injunction may be cast into this form, Be

yourselves.

The representation which underlies my text, and precedes it in the

context, is that of the Christian community as a great body of

travellers all upon one road, all with their faces turned in one

direction, but at very different points on the path. The difference of

position necessarily involves a difference in outlook. They see their

duties, and they see the Word of God, in some respects diversely. And

the Apostle's exhortation is: 'Let each man follow his own insight, and

whereunto he has attained, by that, and not by his brother's

attainment, by that let him walk.' From the very fact of the diversity

of advancement there follows the plain duty for each of us to use our

own eyesight, and of independent faithfulness to our own measure of

light, as the guide which we are bound to follow.

There is a dreadful want, in the ordinary Christian life, of any

appearance of first-hand communication with Jesus Christ, and daring to

be myself, and to act on the insight into His will which Christ has

given me.

Conventional Godliness, Christian people cut after one pattern, a

little narrow round of certain statutory duties and obligations, a

parrot-like repetition of certain words, a mechanical copying of

certain methods of life, an oppressive sameness, mark so much of modern

religion. What a freshening up there would come into all Christian

communities if every man lived by his own perception of truth and duty!

If a musician in an orchestra is listening to his neighbour's note and

time, he will lose many an indication from the conductor that would

have kept him far more right, if he had attended to it. And if, instead

of taking our beliefs and our conduct from one another, or from the

average of Christian men round us, we went straight to Jesus Christ and

said to Him, 'What wouldst Thou have me to do?' there would be a

different aspect over Christendom from what there is to-day. The fact

of individual responsibility, according to the measure of our

individual light, and faithful following of that, wheresoever it may

lead us, are the grand and stirring principles that come from these

words. 'Whereunto we have already attained,' by that--and by no other

man's attainment or rule--let us walk.

But do not let us forget that that same faithful independence and

independent faithfulness because Christ speaks to us, and we will not

let any other voice blend with His, are quite consistent with, and,

indeed, demand, the frank recognition of our brother's equal right. If

we more often thought of all the great body of Christian people as an

army, united in its diversity, its line of march stretching for

leagues, and some in the van, and some in the main body, and some in

the rear, but all one, we should be more tolerant of divergences, more

charitable in our judgment of the laggards, more patient in waiting for

them to come up with us, and more wise and considerate in moderating

our pace sometimes to meet theirs. All who love Jesus Christ are on the

same road and bound for the same home. Let us be contented that they

shall be at different stages on the path, seeing that we know that they

will all reach the Temple above.

IV. Lastly, cherish the consciousness of imperfection and the

confidence of success.

'Whereunto we have attained' implies that that is only a partial

possession of a far greater whole. The road is not finished at the

stage where we stand. And, on the other hand, 'by the same let us

walk,' implies that beyond the present point the road runs on equally

patent and pervious to our feet. These two convictions, of my own

imperfection and of the certainty of my reaching the great perfectness

beyond, are indispensable to all Christian progress. As soon as a man

begins to think that he has realised his ideal, Good-bye! to all

advance. The artist, the student, the man of business, all must have

gleaming before them an unattained object, if they are ever to be

stirred to energy and to run with patience the race that is set before

them.

The more distinctly that a man is conscious of his own imperfection in

the Christian life, the more he will be stung and stirred into

earnestness and energy of effort, if only, side by side with the

consciousness of imperfection, there springs triumphant the confidence

of success. That will give strength to the feeble knees; that will lift

a man buoyant over difficulties; that will fire desire; that will

stimulate and solidify effort; that will make the long, monotonous

stretches of the road easy, the rough places plain, the crooked things

straight. Over all reluctant, repellent duties it will bear us, in all

weariness it will re-invigorate us. We are saved by hope, and the more

brightly there burns before us, not as a tremulous hope, but as a

future certainty, the thought, 'I shall be like Him, for I shall see

Him as He is,' the more shall I set my face to the loved goal and my

feet to the dusty road, and 'press toward the mark for the prize of the

high calling of God.' Christian progress comes out of the clash and

collision of these two things, like that of flint and steel--the

consciousness of imperfection and the confidence of success. And they

who thus are driven by the one and drawn by the other, in all their

consciousness of failure are yet blessed, and are crowned at last with

that which they believed before it came.

'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house'--the prize won is heaven.

But 'blessed are they in whose hearts are the ways'--the prize desired

and strained after is heaven upon earth. We may all live a life of

continual advancement, each step leading upwards, for the road always

climbs, to purer air, grander scenery, and a wider view. And yonder,

progress will still be the law, for they who here have followed the

Lamb, and sought to make Him their pattern and Commander, will there

'follow Him whithersoever He goeth.' If here we walk according to that

'whereunto we have attained,' there He shall say, 'They will walk with

Me in white, for they are worthy.'

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WARNINGS AND HOPES

'Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them which so walk

even as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I told you

often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the

cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose God is the belly, and

whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our

citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the

Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation,

that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the

working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto

Himself.'--Phil. iii. 17-21 (R.V.).

There is a remarkable contrast in tone between the sad warnings which

begin this section and the glowing hopes with which it closes, and that

contrast is made the more striking when we notice that the Apostle

binds the gloom of the one and the radiance of the other by 'For,'

which makes the latter the cause of the former.

The exhortation in which the Apostle begins by proposing himself as an

example sounds strange on any lips, and, most of all, on his, but we

have to note that the points in which he sets himself up as a pattern

are obviously those on which he touched in the preceding outpouring of

his heart, and which he has already commended to the Philippians in

pleading with them to be 'thus minded.' What he desires them to copy is

his self-distrust, his willingness to sacrifice all things to win

Christ, his clear sense of his own shortcomings, and his eager

straining towards as yet unreached perfection. His humility is not

disproved by such words, but what is remarkable in them is the clear

consciousness of the main direction and set of his life. We may well

hesitate to take them for ours, but every Christian man and woman ought

to be able to say this much. If we cannot in some degree declare that

we are so walking, we have need to look to our foundations. Such words

are really in sharp contrast to those in which Jesus is held forth as

an example. Notice, too, how quickly he passes to associate others with

him, and to merge the 'Me' into 'Us.' We need not ask who his

companions were, since Timothy is associated with him at the beginning

of the letter.

The exhortation is enforced by pointing to others who had gone far

astray, and of whom he had warned the Philippians often, possibly by

letter. Who these unworthy disciples were remains obscure. They were

clearly not the Judaisers branded in verse 2, who were teachers seeking

to draw away the Philippians, while these others seem to have been

'enemies of the Cross of Christ,' not by open hostility nor by

theoretical errors, but by practical worldliness, and that in these

ways; they make sense their God, they are proud of what is really their

disgrace, namely, they are shaking off the restraints of morality; and,

most black though it may seem least so, they 'mind earthly things' on

which thought, feeling, and interest are concentrated. Let us lay to

heart the lesson that such direction of the current of a life to the

things of earth makes men 'enemies of the Cross of Christ,' whatever

their professions, and will surely make their end perdition, whatever

their apparent prosperity. Paul's life seemed loss and was gain; these

men's lives seemed gain and was loss.

From this dark picture charged with gloom, and in one corner showing

white waves breaking far out against an inky sky, and a vessel with

torn sails driving on the rocks, the Apostle turns with relief to the

brighter words in which he sets forth the true affinities and hopes of

a Christian. They all stand or fall with the belief in the Resurrection

of Christ and His present life in His glorified corporeal manhood.

I. Our true metropolis.

The Revised Version puts in the margin as an alternative rendering for

'citizenship' commonwealth, and there appears to be a renewed allusion

here to the fact already noted that Philippi was a 'colony,' and that

its inhabitants were Roman citizens. Paul uses a very emphatic word for

'is' here which it is difficult to reproduce in English, but which

suggests essential reality.

The reason why that heavenly citizenship is ours in no mere play of the

imagination but in most solid substance, is because He is there for

whom we look. Where Christ is, is our Mother-country, our Fatherland,

according to His own promise, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' His

being there draws our thoughts and sets our affections on Heaven.

II. The colonists looking for the King.

The Emperors sometimes made a tour of the provinces. Paul here thinks

of Christians as waiting for their Emperor to come across the seas to

this outlying corner of His dominions. The whole grand name is given

here, all the royal titles to express solemnity and dignity, and the

character in which we look for Him is that of Saviour. We still need

salvation, and though in one sense it is past, in another it will not

be ours until He comes the second time without sin unto salvation. The

eagerness of the waiting which should characterise the expectant

citizens is wonderfully described by the Apostle's expression for it,

which literally means to look away out--with emphasis on both

prepositions--like a sentry on the walls of a besieged city whose eyes

are ever fixed on the pass amongst the hills through which the

relieving forces are to come.

It may be said that Paul is here expressing an expectation which was

disappointed. No doubt the early Church looked for the speedy return of

our Lord and were mistaken. We are distinctly told that in that point

there was no revelation of the future, and no doubt they, like the

prophets of old, 'searched what manner of time the spirit of Christ

which was in them did signify.' In this very letter Paul speaks of

death as very probable for himself, so that he had precisely the same

double attitude which has been the Church's ever since, in that he

looked for Christ's coming as possible in his own time, and yet

anticipated the other alternative. It is difficult, no doubt, to

cherish the vivid anticipation of any future event, and not to have any

certainty as to its date. But if we are sure that a given event will

come sometime and do not know when it may come, surely the wise man is

he who thinks to himself it may come any time, and not he who treats it

as if it would come at no time. The two possible alternatives which

Paul had before him have in common the same certainty as to the fact

and uncertainty as to the date, and Paul had them both before his mind

with the same vivid anticipation.

The practical effect of this hope of the returning Lord on our 'walk'

will be all to bring it nearer Paul's. It will not suffer us to make

sense our God, nor to fix our affections on things above; it will

stimulate all energies in pressing towards the goal, and will turn away

our eyes from the trivialities and transiencies that press upon us,

away out toward the distance where 'far off His coming shone.'

III. The Christian sharing in Christ's glory.

The same precise distinction between 'fashion' and 'form,' which we

have had occasion to notice in Chapter ii., recurs here. The 'fashion'

of the body of our humiliation is external and transient; the 'form' of

the body of His glory to which we are to be assimilated consists of

essential characteristics or properties, and may be regarded as being

almost synonymous with 'Nature.' Observing the distinction which the

Apostle draws by the use of these two words, and remembering their

force in the former instance of their occurrence, we shall not fail to

give force to the representation that in the Resurrection the fleeting

fashion of the bodily frame will be altered, and the glorified bodies

of the saints made participant of the essential qualities of His.

We further note that there is no trace of false asceticism or of

gnostic contempt for the body in its designation as 'of our

humiliation.' Its weaknesses, its limitations, its necessities, its

corruption and its death, sufficiently manifest our lowliness, while,

on the other hand, the body in which Christ's glory is manifested, and

which is the instrument for His glory, is presented in fullest contrast

to it.

The great truth of Christ's continual glorified manhood is the first

which we draw from these words. The story of our Lord's Resurrection

suggests indeed that He brought the same body from the tomb as loving

hands had laid there. The invitation to Thomas to thrust his hands into

the prints of the nails, the similar invitation to the assembled

disciples, and His partaking of food in their presence, seemed to

forbid the idea of His rising changed. Nor can we suppose that the body

of His glory would be congruous with His presence on earth. But we have

to think of His ascension as gradual, and of Himself as 'changed by

still degrees' as He ascended, and so as returned to where the 'glory

which He had with the Father before the world was,' as the Shechinah

cloud received Him out of the sight of the gazers below. If this be the

true reading of His last moments on earth, He united in His own

experience both the ways of leaving it which His followers

experience--the way of sleep which is death, and the way of 'being

changed.'

But at whatever point the change came, He now wears, and for ever will

wear, the body of a man. That is the dominant fact on which is built

the Christian belief in a future life, and which gives to that belief

all its solidity and force, and separates it from vague dreams of

immortality which are but a wish tremblingly turned into a hope, or a

dread shudderingly turned into an expectation. The man Christ Jesus is

the pattern and realised ideal of human life on earth, the revelation

of the divine life through a human life, and in His glorified humanity

is no less the pattern and realised ideal of what human nature may

become. The present state of the departed is incomplete in that they

have not a body by which they can act on, and be acted on by, an

external universe. We cannot indeed suppose them lapped in age-long

unconsciousness, and it may be that the 'dead in Christ' are through

Him brought into some knowledge of externals, but for the full-summed

perfection of their being, the souls under the altar have to wait for

the resurrection of the body. If resurrection is needful for completion

of manhood, then completed manhood must necessarily be set in a

locality, and the glorified manhood of Jesus must also now be in a

place. To think thus of it and of Him is not to vulgarise the Christian

conception of Heaven, but to give it a definiteness and force which it

sorely lacks in popular thinking. Nor is the continual manhood of our

Lord less precious in its influence in helping our familiar approach to

Him. It tells us that He is still and for ever the same as when on

earth, glad to welcome all who came and to help and heal all who need

Him. It is one of ourselves who 'sitteth at the right hand of God.' His

manhood brings Him memories which bind Him to us sorrowing and

struggling, and His glory clothes Him with power to meet all our needs,

to stanch all our wounds, to satisfy all our desires.

Our text leads us to think of the wondrous transformation into Christ's

likeness. We know not what are the differences between the body of our

humiliation and the body of His glory, but we must not be led away by

the word Resurrection to fall into the mistake of supposing that in

death we 'sow that body which shall be.' Paul's great chapter in I.

Corinthians should have destroyed that error for ever, and it is a

singular instance of the persistency of the most unsupported mistakes

that there are still thousands of people who in spite of all that they

know of what befalls our mortal bodies, and of how their parts pass

into other forms, still hold by that crude idea. We have no material by

which to construct any, even the vaguest, outline of that body that

shall be. We can only run out the contrasts as suggested by Paul in 1st

Corinthians, and let the dazzling greatness of the positive thought

which he gives in the text lift our expectations. Weakness will become

power, corruption incorruption, liability to death immortality,

dishonour glory, and the frame which belonged and corresponded to 'that

which was natural,' shall be transformed into a body which is the organ

of that which is spiritual. These things tell us little, but they may

be all fused into the great light of likeness to the body of His glory;

and though that tells us even less, it feeds hope more and satisfies

our hearts even whilst it does not feed our curiosity. We may well be

contented to acknowledge that 'it doth not yet appear what we shall

be,' when we can go on to say, 'We know that when He shall appear we

shall be like Him.' It is enough for the disciple that he be as his

Master.

But we must not forget that the Apostle regards even this overwhelming

change as but part of a mightier process, even the universal subjection

of all things unto Christ Himself. The Emperor reduces the whole world

to subjection, and the glorifying of the body as the climax of the

universal subjugation represents it as the end of the process of

assimilation begun in this mortal life. There is no possibility of a

resurrection unto life unless that life has been begun before death.

That ultimate glorious body is needed to bring men into correspondence

with the external universe. As is the locality so is the body. Flesh

and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. This whole series of

thoughts makes our glorious resurrection the result not of death, but

of Christ's living power on His people. It is only in the measure in

which He lives in us and we in Him, and are partaking by daily

participation in the power of His Resurrection, that we shall be made

subjects of the working whereby He is able even to subject all things

unto Himself, and finally be conformed to the body of His glory.

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EXPOSITIONS OF

HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

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PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, FIRST

AND SECOND THESSALONIANS

AND FIRST TIMOTHY

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A TENDER EXHORTATION

'Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and

crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.'--Phil. iv. 1.

The words I have chosen set forth very simply and beautifully the bond

which knit Paul and these Philippian Christians together, and the chief

desire which his Apostolic love had for them. I venture to apply them

to ourselves, and I speak now especially to the members of my own

church and congregation.

I. Let us note, then, first, the personal bond which gives force to the

teacher's words.

That Church at Philippi was, if Paul had any favourites amongst his

children, his favourite child. The circumstances of its formation may

have had something to do with that. It was planted by himself; it was

the first Church in Europe; perhaps the Philippian gaoler and Lydia

were amongst the 'beloved' and 'longed for' ones who were 'his joy and

crown.' But be that as it may, all through the letter we can feel the

throbbing of a very loving heart, and the tenderness of a strong man,

which is the most tender of all things.

Note how he addresses them. There is no assumption of Apostolic

authority, but he puts himself on their level, and speaks to them as

brethren. Then he lets his heart out, and tells them how they lived in

his love, and how, of course, when he was parted from them, he had

desired to be with them. And then he touches a deeper and a sacreder

chord when he contemplates the results of the relation between them, if

he on his side, and they on theirs, were faithful to it. It says much

for the teacher, and for the taught, if he can truly say 'My joy,'--'I

have no greater joy than to know that my children walk in the truth.'

And not only were they his joy, but they who, by their faithfulness,

have become his joy, will on that one day in the far future, be his

'crown.' That metaphor carries on the thoughts to the great Judgment

Day, and introduces a solemn element, which is as truly present, dear

friends, in our relation to one another, little of an Apostle as I am,

as it was in the relation between Paul and the Philippians. They who

'turn many to righteousness shine as the brightness of the firmament,'

because those whom they have turned, 'shine as lights in the world.'

And at that last august and awful tribunal, where you will have to give

an account for your listening, as I for my speaking, the crown of

victory laid on the locks of a faithful teacher is the characters of

those whom he has taught. 'Who is my joy and hope, and crown of

rejoicing?' Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his

coming?

Now, notice, further, how such mutual affection is needed to give force

to the teacher's exhortation. Preaching from unloved lips never does

any good. It irritates, or leaves untouched. Affection melts and opens

the heart to the entrance of the word. And preaching from unloving lips

does very little good either. So speaking, I condemn myself. There are

men who handle God's great, throbbing message of love so coldly as that

they ice even the Gospel. There are men who have a strange gift of

taking all the sap and the fervour out of the word that they proclaim,

making the very grapes of Eshcol into dried raisins. And I feel for

myself that my ministry may well have failed in this respect. For who

is there that can modulate his voice so as to reproduce the music of

that great message, or who can soften and open his heart so as that it

shall be a worthy vehicle of the infinite love of God?

But, dear brethren, though conscious of many failures in this respect,

I yet thank God that here, at the end of nearly forty years of a

ministry, I can look you in the face and believe that your look

responds to mine, and that I can take these words as the feathers for

my arrow, as that which will make words otherwise weak go further, and

may help to write the precepts upon hearts, and to bring them to bear

in practice--'My beloved and longed for'; 'my joy and my crown.'

Such feelings do not need to be always spoken. There is very little

chance of us Northerners erring on the side of letting our hearts speak

too fully and frequently. Perhaps we should be all the better if we

were a little less reticent, but at any rate you and I can surely trust

each other after so many years, and now and then, as to-day, let our

hearts speak.

II. Secondly, notice the all-sufficient precept which such love gives.

'So stand fast in the Lord.'

That is a very favourite figure of Paul's, as those of you who have any

reasonable degree of familiarity with his letters will know. Here it

carries with it, as it generally does, the idea of resistance against

antagonistic force. But the main thought of it is that of continuous

steadfastness in our union with Jesus Christ. It applies, of course, to

the intellect, but not mainly, and certainly not exclusively to

intellectual adherence to the truths spoken in the Gospel. It covers

the whole ground of the whole man; will, conscience, heart, practical

effort, as well as understanding. And it is really Paul's version, with

a characteristic dash of pugnacity in it, of our Lord's yet deeper and

calmer words, 'Abide in Me and I in you.' It is the same exhortation as

Barnabas gave to the infantile church at Antioch, when, to these men

just rescued from heathenism and profoundly ignorant of much which we

suppose it absolutely necessary that Christians should know, he had

only one thing to say, exhorting them all, that 'with purpose of heart

they should cleave to the Lord.'

Steadfast continuance of personal union with Jesus Christ, extending

through all the faculties of our nature, and into every corner of our

lives, is the kernel of this great exhortation. And he who fulfils it

has little left unfulfilled. Of course, as I said, there is a very

strong suggestion that such 'standing' is by no means an easy thing, or

accomplished without much antagonism; and it may help us if, just for a

moment, we run over the various forms of resistance which they have to

overcome who stand fast. Nothing stands where it is without effort.

That is true in the moral world, although in the physical world the law

of motion is that nothing moves without force being applied to it.

What are the things that would shake our steadfastness, and sweep us

away? Well, there are, first, the tiny, continuously acting, and

therefore all but omnipotent forces of daily life--duties, occupations,

distractions of various kinds--which tend to move us imperceptibly

away, as by the slow sliding of a glacier, from the hope of the Gospel.

There is nothing so strong as a gentle pressure, equably and

unintermittently applied. It is far mightier than thrusts and

hammerings and sudden assaults. I stood some time ago looking at the

Sphinx. The hard stone--so hard that it turns the edge of a sculptor's

chisel--has been worn away, and the solemn features all but

obliterated. What by? The continual attrition of multitudinous grains

of sand from the desert. The little things that are always at work upon

us are the things that have most power to sweep us away from our

steadfastness in Jesus Christ.

Then there are, besides, the sudden assaults of strong temptations, of

sense and flesh, or of a more subtle and refined character. If a man is

standing loosely, in some careless d�gag� attitude, and a sudden impact

comes upon him, over he goes. The boat upon a mountain-locked lake

encounters a sudden gust when opposite the opening of a glen, and

unless there be a very strong hand and a watchful eye at the helm, is

sure to be upset. Upon us there come, in addition to that silent

continuity of imperceptible but most real pressure, sudden gusts of

temptation which are sure to throw us over, unless we are well and

always on our guard against them.

In addition to all these, there are ups and downs of our own nature,

the fluctuations which are sure to occur in any human heart, when faith

seems to ebb and falter, and love to die down almost into cold ashes.

But, dear brethren, whilst we shall always be liable to these

fluctuations of feeling, it is possible for us to have, deep down below

these, a central core of our personality, in which unchanging

continuity may abide. The depths of the ocean know nothing of the tides

on the surface that are due to the mutable moon. We can have in our

inmost hearts steadfastness, immovableness, even though the surface may

be ruffled. Make your spirits like one of those great cathedrals whose

thick walls keep out the noises of the world, and in whose still

equability there is neither excessive heat nor excessive cold, but an

approximately uniform temperature, at midsummer and at midwinter.

'Stand fast in the Lord.'

Now, my text not only gives an exhortation, but, in the very act of

giving it, suggests how it is to be fulfilled. For that phrase 'in the

Lord' not only indicates where we are to stand, but also how. That is

to say--it is only in proportion as we keep ourselves in union with

Christ, in heart and mind, and will, and work, that we shall stand

steadfast. The lightest substances may be made stable, if they are

glued on to something stable. You can mortice a bit of thin stone into

the living rock, and then it will stand 'four-square to every wind that

blows.' So it is only on condition of our keeping ourselves in Jesus

Christ, that we are able to keep ourselves steadfast, and to present a

front of resistance that does not yield one foot, either to

imperceptible continuous pressure, to sudden assaults, or to the

fluctuations of our own changeful dispositions and tempers. The ground

on which a man stands has a great deal to do with the firmness of his

footing. You cannot stand fast upon a bed of slime, or upon a sand-bank

which is being undermined by the tides. And if we, changeful creatures,

are to be steadfast in any region, our surest way of being so is to

knit ourselves to Him 'who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for

ever,' and from whose immortality will flow some copy and reflection of

itself into our else changeful natures.

Still further, in regard to this commandment, I would pray you to

notice that very eloquent little word which stands at the beginning of

it. 'So stand fast in the Lord.' 'So.' How? That throws us back to what

the Apostle has been saying in the previous context. And what has he

been saying there? The keynote of the previous chapter is progress--'I

follow after; I press toward the mark, forgetting the things that are

behind, and reaching forth to the things that are before.' To these

exhortations to progress he appends this remarkable exhortation:

'So'--that is, by progress--'stand fast in the Lord,' which being

turned into other words is just this--if you stand still, you will not

stand fast. There can be no steadfastness without advancement. If a man

is not going forward, he is going backward. The only way to ensure

stability is 'pressing toward the mark.' Why, a child's top only stands

straight up as long as it is revolving. If a man on a bicycle stops, he

tumbles. And so, in the depths of a Christian life, as in all science,

and all walks of human activity, the condition of steadfastness is

advance. Therefore, dear brethren, let no man deceive himself with the

notion that he can keep at the same point of religious experience and

of Christian character. You are either more of a Christian, or less of

one, than you were at a past time. 'So, stand fast,' and remember that

to stand still is not to stand fast.

Now, whilst all these things that I have been trying to say have

reference to Christian people at all stages of their spiritual history,

they have a very especial reference to those in the earlier part of

Christian life.

And I want to say to those who have only just begun to run the

Christian life, very lovingly and very earnestly, that this is a text

for them. For, alas! there is nothing more frequent than that, after

the first dawnings of a Christian life in a heart, there should come a

period of overclouding; or that, as John Bunyan has taught us, when

Christian has gone through the wicket-gate, he should fall very soon

into the Slough of Despond. One looks round, and sees how many

professing Christians there are who, perhaps, were nearer Jesus Christ

on the day of their conversion than they have ever been since, and how

many cases of arrested development there are amongst professing and

real Christians; so that when for the 'time they ought to be teachers,

they have need' to be taught again; and when, after the number of years

that have passed, they ought to be full-grown men, they are but babes

yet. And so I say to you, dear young friends, stand fast. Do not let

the world attract you again. Keep near to Jesus. 'Hold fast that thou

hast; let no man take thy crown.'

III. Lastly, we have here a great motive which encourages obedience to

this command.

People generally pass over that 'Therefore' which begins my text, but

it is full of significance and of importance. It links the precept

which we have been considering with the immediately preceding hope

which the Apostle has so triumphantly proclaimed, when he says that 'we

look for the Saviour from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall

change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto

the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even

to subdue all things to Himself.'

So there rises before us that twofold great hope; that the Master

Himself is coming to the succour of His servants, and that when He

comes, He will perfect the incomplete work which has been begun in them

by their faith and steadfastness, and will change their whole humanity

so that it shall become participant of, and conformed to, the glory of

His own triumphant manhood.

That hope is presented by the Apostle as having its natural sequel in

the 'steadfastness' of my text, and that 'steadfastness' is regarded by

the Apostle as drawing its most animating motives from the

contemplation of that great hope. Blessed be God! The effort of the

Christian life is not one which is extorted by fear, or by the cold

sense of duty. There are no taskmasters with whips to stand over the

heart that responds to Christ and to His love. But hope and joy, as

well as love, are the animating motives which make sacrifices easy,

soften the yoke that is laid upon our shoulders, and turn labour into

joy and delight.

So, dear brethren, we have to set before us this great hope, that Jesus

Christ is coming, and that, therefore, our labour on ourselves is sure

not to be in vain. Work that is done hopelessly is not done long, and

there is no heart in it whilst it is being done. But if we know that

Christ will appear, 'and that when He who is our life shall appear, we

also shall appear with Him in glory,' then we may go to work in keeping

ourselves steadfast in Him, with cheery hearts, and with full assurance

that what we have been doing will have a great result.

You have read, no doubt, about some little force in North-West India,

hemmed in by enemies. They may well hold out resolutely and hopefully

when they know that three relieving armies are converging upon their

stronghold. And we, too, know that our Emperor is coming to raise the

siege. We may well stand fast with such a prospect. We may well work at

our own sanctifying when we know that our Lord Himself--like some

master-sculptor who comes to his pupil's imperfectly blocked-out work,

and takes his chisel in his hand, and with a touch or two completes

it--will come and finish what we, by His grace, imperfectly began. 'So

stand fast in the Lord,' because you have hope that the Lord is about

to come, and that when He comes you will be like Him.

One last word. That steadfastness is the condition without which we

have no right to entertain that hope.

If we keep ourselves near Christ, and if by keeping ourselves near Him,

we are becoming day by day liker Him, then we may have calm confidence

that He will perfect that which concerns us. But I, for my part, can

find nothing, either in Scripture or in the analogy of God's moral

dealings with us in the world, to warrant the holding out of the

expectation to a man that, if he has kept himself apart from Jesus

Christ and his quickening and cleansing power all his life long, Jesus

Christ will take him in hand after he dies, and change him into His

likeness. Don't you risk it! Begin by 'standing fast in the Lord.' He

will do the rest then, not else. The cloth must be dipped into the

dyer's vat, and lie there, if it is to be tinged with the colour. The

sensitive plate must be patiently kept in position for many hours, if

invisible stars are to photograph themselves upon it. The vase must be

held with a steady hand beneath the fountain, if it is to be filled.

Keep yourselves in Jesus Christ. Then here you will begin to be changed

into the same image, and when He comes He will come as your Saviour,

and complete your uncompleted work, and make you altogether like

Himself.

'Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and

crown, so stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved.'

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NAMES IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

'Other my fellow-labourers whose names are in the book of life.'--Phil.

iv. 3.

Paul was as gentle as he was strong. Winsome courtesy and delicate

considerateness lay in his character, in beautiful union with fiery

impetuosity and undaunted tenacity of conviction. We have here a

remarkable instance of his quick apprehension of the possible effects

of his words, and of his nervous anxiety not to wound even unreasonable

susceptibilities.

He had had occasion to mention three of his fellow-workers, and he

wishes to associate with them others whom he does not purpose to name.

Lest any of these should be offended by the omission, he soothes them

with this graceful, half-apologetic reminder that their names are

inscribed on a better page than his. It is as if he had said, 'Do not

mind though I do not mention you individually. You can well afford to

be anonymous in my letter since your names are inscribed in the Book of

Life.'

There is a consolation for obscure good people, who need not expect to

live except in two or three loving hearts; and whose names will only be

preserved on mouldering tombstones that will convey no idea to the

reader. We may well dispense with other commemoration if we have this.

Now, this figure of the Book of Life appears in Scripture at intervals,

almost from the beginning to the very end. The first instance of its

occurrence is in that self-sacrificing, intercessory prayer of Moses,

when he expressed his willingness to be 'blotted out of Thy book' as an

atonement for the sin of Israel. Its last appearance is when the

Apocalyptic Seer is told that none enter into the City of God come down

from Heaven 'save those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of

Life.' Of course in plain English the expression is just equivalent to

being a real disciple of Jesus Christ. But then it presents that

general notion under a metaphor which, in its various aspects, has a

very distinct and stringent bearing upon our duties as well as upon our

blessings and our hopes. I, therefore, wish to work out, as well as I

can, the various thoughts suggested by this emblem.

I. The first of them is Citizenship.

The figure is, of course, originally drawn from the registers of the

tribes of Israel. In that use, though not without a glance at some

higher meaning, it appears in the Old Testament, where we read of

'those who are written among them living in Jerusalem'; or 'are written

in the writing of the house of Israel.' The suggestion of being

inscribed on the burgess-rolls of a city is the first idea connected

with the word. In the New Testament, for instance, we find in the great

passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews the two notions of the city and

the census brought into immediate connection, where the writer says,

'Ye are come unto the city of the living God . . . and to the church of

the first-born whose names are written in heaven.' In this very letter

we have, only a verse or two before my text, the same idea of

citizenship cropping up. 'Our citizenship is in Heaven, from whence

also we look for the Saviour.' That, no doubt, helped to suggest to the

Apostle the words of my text. And there is another verse in the same

letter where the same idea comes out. 'Only act the citizen as becometh

the Gospel of Christ.' Now, you will remember, possibly, that Philippi

was, as the Acts of the Apostles tells us, a Roman colony. And the

reference is exquisitely close-fitting to the circumstances of the

people of that city. For a Roman colony was a bit of Rome in another

land, and the citizens of Philippi had their names inscribed on the

registers of the tribes of Rome. The writer himself was another

illustration of the same thing, of living in a community to which he

did not belong and of belonging to a community in which he did not

live. For Paul was a native of Tarsus; and Paul, the native of the

Asiatic Tarsus, was a Roman.

So, then, the first thought that comes out of this great metaphor is

that all of us, if we are Christian people, belong to another polity,

another order of things than that in which our outward lives are spent.

And the plain, practical conclusion that comes from it is, cultivate

the sense of belonging to another order. Just as it swelled the heart

of a Macedonian Philippian with pride, when he thought that he did not

belong to the semi-barbarous people round about him, but that his name

was written in the books that lay in the Capitol of Rome, so should we

cultivate that sense of belonging to another order. It will make our

work here none the worse, but it will fill our lives with the sense of

nobler affinities, and point our efforts to grander work than any that

belongs to 'the things that are seen and temporal.' Just as the little

groups of Englishmen in treaty-ports own no allegiance to the laws of

the country in which they live, but are governed by English statutes,

so we have to take our orders from headquarters to which we have to

report. Men in our colonies get their instructions from Downing Street.

The officials there, appointed by the Home Government, think more of

what they will say about them at Westminster than of what they say

about them at Melbourne. So we are citizens of another country, and

have to obey the laws of our own kingdom, and not those of the soil on

which we dwell. Never mind about the opinions of men, the babblements

of the people in the land you live in. To us, the main thing is that we

be acceptable, well-pleasing unto Him. Are you solitary? Cultivate the

sense of, in your solitude, being a member of a great community that

stretches through all the ages, and binds into one the inhabitants of

eternity and of time.

Remember that this citizenship in the heavens is the highest honour

that can be conferred upon a man. The patricians of Venice used to have

their names inscribed upon what was called the 'golden book' that was

kept in the Doge's Palace. If our names are written in the book of gold

in the heavens, then we have higher dignities than any that belong to

the fleeting chronicles of this passing, vain world. So we can accept

with equanimity evil report or good report, and can acquiesce in a

wholesome obscurity, and be careless though our names appear on no

human records, and fill no trumpet of fame blown by earthly cheeks.

Intellectual power, wealth, gratified ambition, and all the other

things that men set before them, are small indeed compared with the

honour, with the blessedness, with the repose and satisfaction that

attend the conscious possession of citizenship in the heavens. Let us

lay to heart the great words of the Master which put a cooling hand on

all the feverish ambitions of earth. 'In this rejoice, not that the

spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are

written in heaven.'

II. Then the second idea suggested by these words is the possession of

the life which is life indeed.

The 'Book of Life,' it is called in the New Testament. Its designation

in the Old might as well be translated 'the book of living' as 'the

book of life.' It is a register of the men who are truly alive.

Now, that is but an imaginative way of putting the commonplace of the

New Testament, that anything which is worth calling life comes to us,

not by creation or physical generation, but by being born again through

faith in Jesus Christ, and by receiving into our else dead spirits the

life which He bestows upon all them that trust Him.

In the New Testament 'life' is far more than 'being'; far more than

physical existence; removed by a whole world from these lower

conceptions, and finding its complete explanation only in the fact that

the soul which is knit to God by conscious surrender, love, aspiration,

and obedience, is the only soul that really lives. All else is

death--death! He 'that liveth in pleasure is dead while he liveth.' The

ghastly imagination of one of our poets, of the dead man standing on

the deck pulling at the ropes by the side of the living, is true in a

very deep sense. In spite of all the feverish activities, the manifold

vitalities of practical and intellectual life in the world, the

deepest, truest, life of every man who is parted from God by alienation

of will, by indifference, and neglect of love, lies sheeted and

sepulchred in the depths of his own heart. Brethren, there is no life

worth calling life, none to which that august name can without

degradation be applied, except the complete life of body, soul, and

spirit, in lowly obedience to God in Christ. The deepest meaning of the

work of the Saviour is that He comes into a dead world, and breathes

into the bones--very many and very dry--the breath of His own life.

Christ has died for us; Christ will live in us if we will; and, unless

He does, we are twice dead.

Do not put away that thought as if it were a mere pulpit metaphor. It

is a metaphor, but yet in the metaphor there lies this deepest truth,

which concerns us all, that only he is truly himself, and lives the

highest, best, and noblest life that is possible for him, who is united

to Jesus Christ, and drawing from Christ his own life. 'He that hath

the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son hath not life.' Either my

name and yours are written in the Book of Life, or they are written in

the register of a cemetery. We have to make our choice which.

III. Another idea suggested by this emblem is experience of divine

individualising knowledge and care.

In the Old Testament the book is called 'Thy book,' in the New it is

called 'the Lamb's book.' That is of a piece with the whole relation of

the New to the Old, and of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word and

Manifestor of God, to the Jehovah revealed in former ages. For,

unconditionally, and without thought of irreverence or idolatry, the

New Testament lifts over and confers upon Jesus Christ the attributes

which the Old jealously preserved as belonging only to Jehovah. And

thus Christ the Manifestor of God, and the Mediator to us of all divine

powers and blessings, takes the Book and makes the entries in it. Each

man of us, as in your ledgers, has a page to himself. His account is

opened, and is not confused with other entries. There is

individualising love and care, and as the basis of both,

individualising knowledge. My name, the expression of my individual

being, stands there. Christ does not deal with me as one of a crowd,

nor fling out blessings broadcast, that I may grasp them in the midst

of a multitude, if I choose to put out a hand, but He deals with each

of us singly, as if there were not any beings in the world but He and

I, our two selves, all alone.

It is hard to realise the essentially individualising and isolating

character of our relation to Jesus Christ. But we shall never come to

the heart of the blessedness and the power of His Gospel unless we

translate all 'us'-es and 'every ones' and 'worlds' in Scripture into

'I' and 'me,' and can say not only He gives Himself to be 'the

propitiation for the sins of the whole world,' but 'He loved me and

gave Himself for me.' The same individualising love which is manifested

in that mighty universal Atonement, if we rightly understand it, is

manifested in all His dealings with us. One by one we come under His

notice; the Shepherd tells His sheep singly as they pass out through

the gate or into the fold. He knows them all by name. 'I have called

thee by thy name; thou art Mine.'

Lift up your eyes and behold who made all these; the countless host of

the nightly stars. What are nebul� to our eyes are blazing suns to His.

'He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by name by the

greatness of His power, for that He is strong in might not one

faileth.' So we may nestle in the protection of His hand, sure of a

separate place in His knowledge and His heart.

Deliverance and security are the results of that individualising care.

In one of the Old Testament instances of the use of this metaphor, we

read that in the great day of calamity and sorrow 'Thy people shall be

delivered, even every one that is written in Thy Book.' So we need not

dread anything if our names are there. The sleepless King will read the

Book, and will never forget, nor forget to help and succour His poor

servants.

But there are two other variations of this thought in the Old Testament

even more tenderly suggestive of that individualising care and strong

sufficient love than the emblem of my text. We read that when, in the

exercise of his official functions, the high priest passed into the

Tabernacle he wore, upon his breast, near the seat of personality, and

the home of love--the names of the tribes graven, and that the same

names were written on his shoulders, as if guiding the exercise of his

power. So we may think of ourselves as lying near the beatings of His

heart, and as individually the objects of the work of His almighty arm.

Nor is this all. For there is yet another, and still tenderer,

application of the figure, when we read of the Divine voice as saying

to Israel, 'I have graven thee on the palms of My hands.' The name of

each who loves and trusts and serves is written there; printed deep in

the flesh of the Sovereign Christ. We bear in our bodies the marks, the

stigmata that tell whose slaves we are--'the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

And He bears in His body the marks that tell who His servants are.

IV. Lastly, there is suggested by this text the idea of future entrance

into the land of the living.

The metaphor occurs three times in the final book of Scripture, the

book which deals with the future and with the last things. And it

occurs in all these instances in very remarkable connection. First we

read, in the highly imaginative picture of the final judgment, that

when the thrones are set two books are opened, one the Book of Life,

the other the book in which are written the deeds of men, and that by

these two books men are judged. There is a judgment by conduct. There

is also a judgment by the Book of Life. That is to say, the question at

last comes to be, 'Is this man's name written in that book?' Is he a

citizen of the kingdom, and therefore capable of entering into it? Has

he the life from Christ in his heart? Or, in other words, the question

is, first, has the man who stands at the bar faith in Jesus Christ;

and, second, has he proved that his faith is genuine and real by the

course of his earthly conduct? These are the books from which the

judgment is made.

Further, we read, in that blessed vision which stands at the far-off

end of all the knowledge of the future which is given to humanity, the

vision of the City of God 'that came down from heaven as a bride

adorned for her husband,' that only they enter in there who are

'written in the Lamb's Book of Life.' Only citizens are capable of

entrance into the city. Aliens are necessarily shut out. The Lord, when

He writeth up His people, shall count that this man was born there,

though he never trod its streets while on earth, and, therefore, can

enter into his native home.

Further, in one of the letters to the seven churches our Lord gives as

a promise to him that overcometh, 'I will not blot his name out of the

Book of Life, but I will confess his name.'

What need we care what other people may think about us, or whether the

'hollow wraith of dying fame' that comes like a nimbus round some men

may fade wholly or no, so long as we may be sure of acknowledgment and

praise from Him from whom acknowledgment and praise are precious

indeed.

I have but one or two more words to add. Remember that Paul had no

hesitation in taking upon himself to declare that the names of these

anonymous saints in Philippi were written in the Book of Life. What

business had he to do that? Had he looked over the pages, and marked

the entries? He had simply the right of estimating their state by their

conduct. He saw their works; he knew that these works were the fruit of

their faith; and he knew that, therefore, their faith had united them

to Jesus Christ. So, Christian men and women, two things: show your

faith by your works, and make it impossible for anybody that looks at

you to doubt what King you serve, and to what city you belong. Again,

do not ask, 'Is my name there?' Ask, 'Have I faith, and does my faith

work the works that belong to the Kingdom of Heaven?'

Remember that names can be blotted out of the book. The metaphor has

often been pressed into the service of a doctrine of unconditional and

irreversible predestination. But rightly looked at, it points in the

opposite direction. Remember Moses's agonised cry, 'Blot me out of Thy

book'; and the Divine answer, 'Him that sinneth against Me, his name

will I blot out of My book.' And remember that it is only to 'him that

overcometh' that the promise is made, 'I will not blot him out.' We are

made partakers of Christ if we 'hold fast the beginning of our

confidence firm unto the end.'

Remember that it depends upon ourselves whether our names are there or

not. John Bunyan describes the armed man who came up to the table,

where the man with the book and the inkhorn was seated, and said: 'Set

down my name.' And you and I may do that. If we cast ourselves on Jesus

Christ and yield our wills to be guided by Him, and give our lives for

His service, then He will write our names in His book. If we trust Him

we shall be citizens of the City of God; shall be filled with the life

of Christ; shall be objects of an individualising love and care; shall

be accepted in that Day; and shall enter in through the gates into the

city. 'They that forsake me shall be written on the earth'; and there

wiped out as are the children's scribbles on the sand when the ocean

come up. They that trust in Jesus Christ shall have their names written

in the Book of Life; graven on the High Priest's breastplate, and

inscribed on His mighty hand and His faithful heart.

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REJOICE EVERMORE

'Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice!'--Phil. iv. 4.

It has been well said that this whole epistle may be summed up in two

short sentences: 'I rejoice'; 'Rejoice ye!' The word and the thing crop

up in every chapter, like some hidden brook, ever and anon sparkling

out into the sunshine from beneath the shadows. This continual refrain

of gladness is all the more remarkable if we remember the Apostle's

circumstances. The letter shows him to us as a prisoner, dependent on

Christian charity for a living, having no man like-minded to cheer his

solitude; uncertain as to 'how it shall be with me,' and obliged to

contemplate the possibility of being 'offered,' or poured out as a

libation, 'on the sacrifice and service of your faith.' Yet out of all

the darkness his clear notes ring jubilant; and this sunny epistle

comes from the pen of a prisoner who did not know but that to-morrow he

might be a martyr.

The exhortation of my text, with its urgent reiteration, picks up again

a dropped thread which the Apostle had first introduced in the

commencement of the previous chapter. He had there evidently been

intending to close his letter, for he says: 'Finally, my brethren,

rejoice in the Lord'; but he is drawn away into that precious personal

digression which we could so ill spare, in which he speaks of his

continual aspiration and effort towards things not yet attained. And

now he comes back again, picks up the thread once more, and addresses

himself to his parting counsels. The reiteration in the text becomes

the more impressive if we remember that it is a repetition of a former

injunction. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway'; and then he seems to hear one

of his Philippian readers saying: 'Why! you told us that once before!'

'Yes,' he says, 'and you shall hear it once again; so important is my

commandment that it shall be repeated a third time. So I again say,

"rejoice!"' Christian gladness is an important element in Christian

duty; and the difficulty and necessity of it are indicated by the

urgent repetition of the injunction.

I. So, then, the first thought that suggests itself to me from these

words is this, that close union with Jesus Christ is the foundation of

real gladness.

Pray note that 'the Lord' here, as is usually the case in Paul's

Epistles, means, not the Divine Father, but Jesus Christ. And then

observe, again, that the phrase 'Rejoice in the Lord' has a deeper

meaning than we sometimes attach to it. We are accustomed to speak of

rejoicing in a thing or a person, which, or who, is thereby represented

as being the occasion or the object of our gladness. And though that is

true, in reference to our Lord, it is not the whole sweep and depth of

the Apostle's meaning here. He is employing that phrase, 'in the Lord,'

in the profound and comprehensive sense in which it generally appears

in his letters, and especially in those almost contemporaneous with

this Epistle to the Philippians. I need only refer you, in passing,

without quoting passages, to the continual use of that phrase in the

nearly contemporaneous letter to the Ephesians, in which you will find

that 'in Christ Jesus' is the signature stamped upon all the gifts of

God, and upon all the possible blessings of the Christian life. 'In

Him' we have the inheritance; in Him we obtain redemption through His

blood, even the forgiveness of sins; in Him we are 'blessed with all

spiritual blessings.' And the deepest description of the essential

characteristic of a Christian life is, to Paul, that it is a life in

Christ.

It is this close union which the Apostle here indicates as being the

foundation and the source of all that gladness which he desires to see

spreading its light over the Christian life. 'Rejoice in the

Lord'--being in Him be glad.

Now that great thought has two aspects, one deep and mysterious, one

very plain and practical. As to the former, I need not spend much time

upon it. We believe, I suppose, in the superhuman character and nature

of Jesus Christ. We believe in His divinity. We can therefore believe

reasonably in the possibility of a union between Him and us,

transcending all the forms of human association, and being really like

that which the creature holds to its Creator in regard to its physical

being. 'In him we live, and move, and have our being' is the very

foundation truth in regard to the constitution of the universe. 'In Him

we live, and move, and have our being' is the very foundation truth in

regard to the relation of the Christian soul to Jesus Christ. All

earthly unions are but poor adumbrations from afar of that deep,

transcendent, mysterious, but most real union, by which the Christian

soul is in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, the member in the

body, the planet in its atmosphere, and by which Christ is in the

Christian soul as the life sap is in every twig, as the mysterious

vital power is in every member. Thus abiding in Him, in a manner which

admits of no parallel nor of any doubt, we may, and we shall, be glad.

But then, passing from the mysterious, we come to the plain. To be 'in

Christ' which is commended to us here as the basis of all true

blessedness, means that the whole of our nature shall be occupied with,

and fastened upon, Him; thought turning to Him, the tendrils of the

heart clinging and creeping around Him, the will submitting itself in

glad obedience to His beloved and supreme commandments, the

aspirations, and desires feeling out after Him as the sufficient and

eternal good, and all the current of our being setting towards Him in

earnestness of desire, and resting in Him in tranquillity of

possession. Thus 'in Christ' we may all be.

And, says Paul, in the great words of my text, such a union, reciprocal

and close, is the secret of all blessedness. If thus we are wedded to

that Lord, and His life is in us and ours enclosed in Him, then there

is such correspondence between our necessities and our supplies as that

there is no room for aching emptiness; no gnawing of unsatisfied

longings, but the blessedness that comes from having found that which

we seek, and in the finding being stimulated to a still closer,

happier, and not restless search after fuller possession. The man that

knows where to get anything and everything that he needs, and to whom

desires are but the prophets of instantaneous fruition; surely that man

has in his possession the talismanic secret of perpetual gladness. They

who thus dwell in Christ by faith, love, obedience, imitation,

aspiration, and enjoyment, are like men housed in some strong fortress,

who can look out over all the fields alive with enemies, and feel that

they are safe. They who thus dwell in Christ gain command over

themselves; and because they can bridle passions, and subdue hot and

impossible desires, and keep themselves well in hand, have stanched one

chief source of unrest and sadness, and have opened one pure and

sparkling fountain of unfailing gladness. To rule myself because Christ

rules me is no small part of the secret of blessedness. And they who

thus dwell in Christ have the purest joy, the joy of

self-forgetfulness. He that is absorbed in a great cause; he whose

pitiful, personal individuality has passed out of his sight; he who is

swallowed up by devotion to another, by aspiration after 'something

afar from the sphere of our sorrow,' has found the secret of gladness.

And the man who thus can say, 'I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in

me,' this is the man who will ever rejoice. The world may not call such

a temper gladness. It is as unlike the sputtering, flaring,

foul-smelling joys which it prizes--like those filthy but bright

'Lucigens' that they do night work by in great factories--it is as

unlike the joy of the world as these are to the calm, pure moonlight

which they insult. The one is of heaven, and the other is the foul

product of earth, and smokes to extinction swiftly.

II. So, secondly, notice that this joy is capable of being continuous.

'Rejoice in the Lord always,' says Paul. That is a hard nut to crack. I

can fancy a man saying, 'What is the use of giving me such exhortations

as this? My gladness is largely a matter of temperament, and I cannot

rule my moods. My gladness is largely a matter of circumstances, and I

do not determine these. How vain it is to tell me, when my heart is

bleeding, or beating like a sledge-hammer, to be glad!' Yes!

Temperament has a great deal to do with joy; and circumstances have a

great deal to do with it; but is not the mission of the Gospel to make

us masters of temperament, and independent of circumstances? Is not the

possibility of living a life that has no dependence upon externals, and

that may persist permanently through all varieties of mood, the very

gift that Christ Himself has come to bestow upon us--bringing us into

communion with Himself, and so making us lords of our own inward nature

and of externals: so that 'though the fig-tree shall not blossom, and

there be no fruit in the vine,' yet we may 'rejoice in the Lord, and be

glad in the God of our salvation.' If a ship has plenty of water in its

casks or tanks in its hold, it does not matter whether it is sailing

through fresh water or salt. And if you and I have that union with

Jesus Christ of which my text speaks, then we shall be, not wholly, but

with indefinite increase of approximation towards the ideal,

independent of circumstances and masters of our temperaments. And so it

is possible, if not absolutely to reach this fair achievement of an

unbroken continuity of gladness, at least to bring the lucent points so

close to one another as that the intervals of darkness between shall be

scarcely visible, and the whole will seem to form one continuous ring

of light.

Brother, if you and I can keep near Jesus Christ always--and I suppose

we can do that in sorrow as in joy--He will take care that our keeping

near Him will not want its reward in that blessed continuity of felt

repose which is very near the sunniness of gladness. For, if we in the

Lord sorrow, we may, then, simultaneously, in the Lord rejoice. The two

things may go together, if in the one mood and the other we are in

union with Him. The bitterness of the bitterest calamity is taken away

from it when it does not separate us from Jesus Christ. And just as the

mother is specially tender with her sick child, and just as we have

often found that the sympathy of friends comes to us, when need and

grief are upon us, in a fashion that would have been incredible

beforehand, so it is surely true that Jesus Christ can, and does,

soften His tone, and select the tokens of His presence with especial

tenderness for a wounded heart; so as that sorrow in the Lord passes

into joy in the Lord. And if that be so, then the pillar which was

cloud in the sunshine brightens into fire as night falls on the desert.

But it is not only that this divine gladness is consistent with the

sorrow that is often necessary for us, but also that the continuity of

such gladness is secured, because in Christ there are open for us

sources of blessedness in what is else a dry and thirsty land. If you

would take this epistle at your leisure, and run over it in order to

note the various occasions of joy which the Apostle expresses for

himself, and commends to his brethren, you would see how beautifully

they reveal to us the power of communion with Jesus Christ, to find

honey in the rock, good in everything, and a reason for thankful

gladness in all events.

I have not time, at this stage of my sermon, to do more than just

glance at these. We find, for instance, that a very large portion of

the joy which he declares fills his own heart, and which he commends to

these Philippians, arises from the recognition of good in others. He

speaks to them of being his 'joy and crown.' He tells them that in his

sorrows and imprisonment, their 'fellowship in the Gospel, from the

first day until now,' had brought a whiff of gladness into the close

air of the prison cell. He begs them to be Christlike in order that

they may 'fulfil his joy'; and he may lose himself in others'

blessings, and therein find gladness. A large portion of his joy came

from very common things. A large portion of the joy that he commends to

them he contemplates as coming to them from small matters. They were to

be glad because Timothy came with a message from the Apostle. He is

glad because he hears of their well-being, and receives a little

contribution from them for his daily necessities. A large portion of

his gladness came from the spread of Christ's kingdom. 'Christ is

preached,' says he, with a flash of triumph, 'and I therein do rejoice;

yea, and will rejoice.' And, most beautiful of all, no small portion of

his gladness came from the prospect of martyrdom. 'If I be offered upon

the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you

all; and do ye joy and rejoice with me.'

Now, put all these things together and they just come to this, that a

heart in union with Jesus Christ can find streams in the desert, joys

blossoming as the rose, in places that to the un-Christlike eye are

wilderness and solitary, and out of common things it can bring the

purest gladness and draw a tribute and revenue of blessedness even from

the prospect of God-sent sorrows. Dear brethren, if you and I have not

learned the secret of modest and unselfish delights, we shall vainly

seek for joy in the vulgar excitements and coarse titillations of

appetites and desires which the world offers. 'Calm pleasures there

abide' in Christ. The northern lights are weird and bright, but they

belong to midwinter, and they come from electric disturbances, and

portend rough weather afterwards. Sunshine is silent, steadfast, pure.

Better to walk in that light than to be led astray by fantastic and

perishable splendours. 'Rejoice in the Lord always.'

III. Lastly, such gladness is an important part of Christian duty.

As I have said, the urgency of the command indicates both its

importance and its difficulty. It is important that professing

Christians should be glad Christians (with the joy that is drawn from

Jesus Christ, of course, I mean), because they thereby become walking

advertisements and living witnesses for Him. A gloomy, melancholy,

professing Christian is a poor recommendation of his faith. If you want

to 'adorn the doctrine of Christ' you will do it a great deal more by a

bright face, that speaks of a calm heart, calm because filled with

Christ, than by many more ambitious efforts. This gladness is important

because, without it, there will be little good work done, and little

progress made. It is important, surely, for ourselves, for it can be no

small matter that we should be able to have travelling with us all

through the desert that mystical rock which follows with its streams of

water, and ever provides for us the joys that we need. In every aspect,

whether as regards men who take their notions of Christ and of

Christianity, a great deal more from the concrete examples of both in

human lives than from books and sermons, or from the Bible itself--or

as regards the work which we have to do, or as regards our own inward

life, it is all-important that we should have that close union with

Jesus Christ which cannot but result in pure and holy gladness.

But the difficulty, as well as the importance, of the obligation, are

expressed by the stringent repetition of the commandment, 'And again I

say, Rejoice.' When objections arise, when difficulties present

themselves, I repeat the commandment again, in the teeth of them all;

and I know what I mean when I am saying it. Thus, thought Paul, we need

to make a definite effort to keep ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ,

or else gladness, and a great deal besides, will fade away from our

grasp.

And there are two things that you have to do if you would obey the

commandment. The one is the direct effort at fostering and making

continuous your fellowship with Jesus Christ, through your life; and

the other is looking out for the bright bits in your life, and making

sure that you do not sullenly and foolishly, perhaps with vain regrets

after vanished blessings, or perhaps with vain murmurings about

unattained good, obscure to your sight the mercies that you have, and

so cheat yourselves of the occasions for thankfulness and joy. There

are people who, if there be ever such a little bit of a fleecy film of

cloud low down on their horizon, can see nothing of the sparkling blue

arch above them for looking at that, and who behave as if the whole sky

was one roof of doleful grey. Do not you do that! There is always

enough to be thankful for. Lay hold of Christ, and be sure that you

open your eyes to His gifts.

Surely, dear friends, if there be offered to us, as there is, a

gladness which is perfect in the two points in which all other gladness

fails, it is wise for us to take it. The commonplace which all men

believe, and most men neglect, is that nothing short of an infinite

Person can fill a finite soul. And if we look for our joys anywhere but

to Jesus Christ, there will always be some bit of our nature which,

like the sulky elder brother in the parable, will scowl at the music

and dancing, and refuse to come in. All earthly joys are transient as

well as partial. Is it not better that we should have gladness that

will last as long as we do, that we can hold in our dying hands, like a

flower clasped in some cold palm laid in the coffin, that we shall find

again when we have crossed the bar, that will grow and brighten and

broaden for evermore? My joy shall remain . . . full.

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HOW TO OBEY AN IMPOSSIBLE INJUNCTION

'Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication,

with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.'--Phil.

iv. 6.

It is easy for prosperous people, who have nothing to trouble them, to

give good advices to suffering hearts; and these are generally as

futile as they are easy. But who was he who here said to the Church at

Philippi, 'Be careful for nothing?' A prisoner in a Roman prison; and

when Rome fixed its claws it did not usually let go without drawing

blood. He was expecting his trial, which might, so far as he knew, very

probably end in death. Everything in the future was entirely dark and

uncertain. It was this man, with all the pressure of personal sorrows

weighing upon him, who, in the very crisis of his life, turned to his

brethren in Philippi, who had far fewer causes of anxiety than he had,

and cheerfully bade them 'be careful for nothing, but in everything by

prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make their requests known

unto God.' Had not that bird learned to sing when his cage was

darkened? And do you not think that advice of that sort, coming not

from some one perched up on a safe hillock to the strugglers in the

field below, but from a man in the thick of the fight, would be like a

trumpet-call to them who heard it?

Now, here are two things. There is an apparently perfectly impossible

advice, and there is the only course that will make it possible.

I. An apparently impossible advice.

'Be careful for nothing.' I do not need to remind you--for I suppose

that we all know it--that that word 'careful,' in a great many places

in the New Testament, does not mean what, by the slow progress of

change in the significance of words, it has come to mean to-day; but it

means what it should still mean, 'full of care,' and 'care' meant, not

prudent provision, forethought, the occupation of a man's common-sense

with his duty and his work and his circumstances, but it meant the

thing which of all others unfits a man most for such prudent provision,

and that is, the nervous irritation of a gnawing anxiety which, as the

word in the original means, tears the heart apart and makes a man quite

incapable of doing the wise thing, or seeing the wise thing to do, in

the circumstances. We all know that; so that I do not need to dwell

upon it. 'Careful' here means neither more nor less than 'anxious.'

But I may just remind you how harm has been done, and good has been

lost and missed, by people reading that modern meaning into the word.

It is the same word which Christ employed in the exhortation 'Take no

thought for to-morrow.' It is a great pity that Christian people

sometimes get it into their heads that Christ prohibited what

common-sense demands, and what everybody practises. 'Taking thought for

the morrow' is not only our duty, but it is one of the distinctions

which make us 'much better than' the fowls of the air, that have no

barns in which to store against a day of need. But when our Lord said,

'Take no thought for the morrow,' he did not mean 'Do not lay

yourselves out to provide for common necessities and duties,' but 'Do

not fling yourselves into a fever of anxiety, nor be too anxious to

anticipate the "fashion of uncertain evils."'

But even with that explanation, is it not like an unreachable ideal

that Paul puts forward here? 'Be anxious about nothing'--how can a man

who has to face the possibilities that we all have to face, and who

knows himself to be as weak to deal with them as we all are: how can he

help being anxious? There is no more complete waste of breath than

those sage and reverend advices which people give us, not to do the

things, nor to feel the emotions, which our position make absolutely

inevitable and almost involuntary. Here, for instance, is a man

surrounded by all manner of calamity and misfortune; and some

well-meaning but foolish friend comes to him, and, without giving him a

single reason for the advice, says, 'Cheer up! my friend.' Why should

he cheer up? What is there in his circumstances to induce him to fall

into any other mood? Or some unquestionable peril is staring him full

in the face, coming nearer and nearer to him, and some well-meaning,

loose-tongued friend, says to him, 'Do not be afraid!'--but he ought to

be afraid. That is about all that worldly wisdom and morality have to

say to us, when we are in trouble and anxiety. 'Shut your eyes very

hard, and make believe very much, and you will not fear.' An impossible

exhortation! Just as well bid a ship in the Bay of Biscay not to rise

and fall upon the wave, but to keep an even keel. Just as well tell the

willows in the river-bed that they are not to bend when the wind blows,

as come to me, and say to me, 'Be careful about nothing.' Unless you

have a great deal more than that to say, I must be, and I ought to be,

anxious, about a great many things. Instead of anxiety being folly, it

will be wisdom; and the folly will consist in not opening our eyes to

facts, and in not feeling emotions that are appropriate to the facts

which force themselves against our eyeballs. Threadbare maxims, stale,

musty old commonplaces of unavailing consolation and impotent

encouragement say to us, 'Do not be anxious.' We try to stiffen our

nerves and muscles in order to bear the blow; or some of us, more

basely still, get into a habit of feather-headed levity, making no

forecasts, nor seeing even what is plainest before our eyes. But all

that is of no use when once the hot pincers of real trouble, impending

or arrived, lay hold of our hearts. Then of all idle expenditures of

breath in the world there is none to the wrung heart more idle and more

painful than the one that says, Be anxious about nothing.

II. So we turn to the only course that makes the apparent impossibility

possible.

Paul goes on to direct to the mode of feeling and action which will

give exemption from the else inevitable gnawing of anxious forethought.

He introduces his positive counsel with an eloquent 'But,' which

implies that what follows is the sure preservative against the temper

which he deprecates; 'But in everything by prayer and supplication,

with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.'

There are, then, these alternatives. If you do not like to take the

one, you are sure to have to take the other. There is only one way out

of the wood, and it is this which Paul expands in these last words of

my text. If a man does not pray about everything, he will be worried

about most things. If he does pray about everything, he will not be

troubled beyond what is good for him, about anything. So there are

these alternatives; and we have to make up our minds which of the two

we are going to take. The heart is never empty. If not full of God, it

will be full of the world, and of worldly care. Luther says somewhere

that a man's heart is like a couple of millstones; if you don't put

something between them to grind, they will grind each other. It is

because God is not in our hearts that the two stones rub the surface

off one another. So the victorious antagonist of anxiety is trust, and

the only way to turn gnawing care out of my heart and life is to usher

God into it, and to keep him resolutely in it.

'In everything.' If a thing is great enough to threaten to make me

anxious, it is great enough for me to talk to God about. If He and I

are on a friendly footing, the instinct of friendship will make me

speak. If so, how irrelevant and superficial seem to be discussions

whether we ought to pray about worldly things, or confine our prayers

entirely to spiritual and religious matters. Why! if God and I are on

terms of friendship and intimacy of communication, there will be no

question as to what I am to talk about to Him; I shall not be able to

keep silent as to anything that interests me. And we are not right with

God unless we have come to the point that entire openness of speech

marks our communications with Him, and that, as naturally as men, when

they come home from business, like to tell their wives and children

what has happened to them since they left home in the morning, so

naturally we talk to our Friend about everything that concerns us. 'In

everything let your requests be made known unto God.' That is the wise

course, because a multitude of little pimples may be quite as painful

and dangerous as a large ulcer. A cloud of gnats may put as much poison

into a man with their many stings as will a snake with its one bite.

And if we are not to get help from God by telling Him about little

things, there will be very little of our lives that we shall tell Him

about at all. For life is a mountain made up of minute flakes. The

years are only a collection of seconds. Every man's life is an

aggregate of trifles. 'In everything make your requests known.'

'By prayer'--that does not mean, as a superficial experience of

religion is apt to suppose it to mean, actual petition that follows.

For a great many of us, the only notion that we have of prayer is

asking God to give us something that we want. But there is a far higher

region of communion than that, in which the soul seeks and finds, and

sits and gazes, and aspiring possesses, and possessing aspires. Where

there is no spoken petition for anything affecting outward life, there

may be the prayer of contemplation such as the burning seraphs before

the Throne do ever glow with. The prayer of silent submission, in which

the will bows itself before God; the prayer of quiet trust, in which we

do not so much seek as cleave; the prayer of still fruition--these, in

Paul's conception of the true order, precede 'supplication.' And if we

have such union with God, by realising His presence, by aspiration

after Himself, by trusting Him and submission to Him, then we have the

victorious antagonist of all our anxieties, and the 'cares that infest

the day shall fold their tents' and 'silently steal away.' For if a man

has that union with God which is effected by such prayer as I have been

speaking about, it gives him a fixed point on which to rest amidst all

perturbations. It is like bringing a light into a chamber when thunder

is growling outside, which prevents the flashing of the lightning from

being seen.

Years ago an ingenious inventor tried to build a vessel in such a

fashion as that the saloon for passengers should remain upon one level,

howsoever the hull might be tossed by waves. It was a failure, if I

remember rightly. But if we are thus joined to God, He will do for our

inmost hearts what the inventor tried to do with the chamber within his

ship. The hull may be buffeted, but the inmost chamber where the true

self sits will be kept level and unmoved. Brethren! prayer in the

highest sense, by which I mean the exercise of aspiration, trust,

submission--prayer will fight against and overcome all anxieties.

'By prayer and supplication.' Actual petition for the supply of present

wants is meant by 'supplication.' To ask for that supply will very

often be to get it. To tell God what I think I need goes a long way

always to bringing me the gift that I do need. If I have an anxiety

which I am ashamed to speak to Him, that silence is a sign that I ought

not to have it; and if I have a desire that I do not feel I can put

into a prayer, that feeling is a warning to me not to cherish such a

desire.

There are many vague and oppressive anxieties that come and cast a

shadow over our hearts, that if we could once define, and put into

plain words, we should find that we vaguely fancied them a great deal

larger than they were, and that the shadow they flung was immensely

longer than the thing that flung it. Put your anxieties into definite

speech. It will reduce their proportions to your own apprehension very

often. Speaking them, even to a man who may be able to do little to

help, eases them wonderfully. Put them into definite speech to God; and

there are very few of them that will survive.

'By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.' That thanksgiving is

always in place. If one only considers what he has from God, and

realises that whatever he has he has received from the hands of divine

love, thanksgiving is appropriate in any circumstances. Do you remember

when Paul was in gaol at the very city to which this letter went, with

his back bloody with the rod, and his feet fast in the stocks, how then

he and Silas 'prayed and sang praises to God.' Therefore the obedient

earthquake came and set them loose. Perhaps it was some reminiscence of

that night which moved him to say to the Church that knew the story--of

which perhaps the gaoler was still a member--'By prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known unto God.'

One aching nerve can monopolise our attention and make us unconscious

of the health of all the rest of the body. So, a single sorrow or loss

obscures many mercies. We are like men who live in a narrow alley in

some city, with great buildings on either side, towering high above

their heads, and only a strip of sky visible. If we see up in that

strip a cloud, we complain and behave as if the whole heavens, right

away round the three hundred and sixty degrees of the horizon, were

black with tempest. But we see only a little strip, and there is a

great deal of blue in the sky; however, there may be a cloud in the

patch that we see above our heads, from the alley where we live.

Everything, rightly understood, that God sends to men is a cause of

thanksgiving; therefore, 'in everything by prayer and supplication,

with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.'

'Casting all your anxieties upon him,' says Peter, 'for He'--not is

anxious; that dark cloud does not rise much above the earth--but, 'He

careth for you.' And that loving guardianship and tender care is the

one shield, armed with which we can smile at the poisoned darts of

anxiety which would else fester in our hearts and, perhaps, kill. 'Be

careful for nothing'--an impossibility unless 'in everything' we make

'our requests known unto God.'

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THE WARRIOR PEACE

'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your

hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'--Phil. iv. 7.

The great Mosque of Constantinople was once a Christian church,

dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. Over its western portal may still be

read, graven on a brazen plate, the words, 'Come unto Me, all ye that

labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' For four hundred

years noisy crowds have fought, and sorrowed, and fretted, beneath the

dim inscription in an unknown tongue; and no eye has looked at it, nor

any heart responded. It is but too sad a symbol of the reception which

Christ's offers meet amongst men, and--blessed be His name!--its

prominence there, though unread and unbelieved, is a symbol of the

patient forbearance with which rejected blessings are once and again

pressed upon us, and He stretches out His hand though no man regards,

and calls though none do hear. My text is Christ's offer of peace. The

world offers excitement, Christ promises repose.

I. Mark, then, first, this peace of God.

What is it? What are its elements? Whence does it come? It is of God,

as being its Source, or Origin, or Author, or Giver, but it belongs to

Him in a yet deeper sense, for Himself is Peace. And in some humble but

yet real fashion our restless and anxious hearts may partake in the

divine tranquillity, and with a calm repose, kindred with that rest

from which it is derived, may enter into His rest.

If that be too high a flight, at all events the peace that may be ours

was Christ's, in the perfect and unbroken tranquillity of His perfect

Manhood. What, then, are its elements? The peace of God must, first of

all, be peace with God. Conscious friendship with Him is indispensable

to all true tranquillity. Where that is absent there may be the

ignoring of the disturbed relationship; but there will be no peace of

heart. The indispensable requisite is 'a conscience like a sea at

rest.' Unless we have made sure work of our relationship with God, and

know that He and we are friends, there is no real repose possible for

us. In the whirl of excitement we may forget, and for a time turn away

from, the realities of our relation to Him, and so get such gladness as

is possible to a life not rooted in conscious friendship with Him. But

such lives will be like some of those sunny islands in the Eastern

Pacific, extinct volcanoes, where nature smiles and all things are

prodigal and life is easy and luxuriant; but some day the clouds

gather, and the earth shakes, and fire pours forth, and the sea boils,

and every living thing dies, and darkness and desolation come. You are

living, brother, upon a volcano's side, unless the roots of your being

are fixed in a God who is your friend.

Again, the peace of God is peace within ourselves. The unrest of human

life comes largely from our being torn asunder by contending impulses.

Conscience pulls this way, passion that. Desire says, 'Do this';

reason, judgment, prudence say, 'It is at your peril if you do!' One

desire fights against another, and so the man is rent asunder. There

must be the harmonising of all the Being if there is to be real rest of

spirit. No longer must it be like the chaos ere the creative word was

spoken, where, in gloom, contending elements strove.

Again, men have not peace, because in most of them everything is

topmost that ought to be undermost, and everything undermost that ought

to be uppermost. 'Beggars are on horseback' (and we know where they

ride), 'and princes walking.' The more regal part of the man's nature

is suppressed, and trodden under foot; and the servile parts, which

ought to be under firm restraint, and guided by a wise hand, are too

often supreme, and wild work comes of that. When you put the captain

and the officers, and everybody on board that knows anything about

navigation, into irons, and fasten down the hatches on them, and let

the crew and the cabin boys take the helm and direct the ship, it is

not likely that the voyage will end anywhere but on the rocks.

Multitudes are living lives of unrestfulness, simply because they have

set the lowest parts of their nature upon the throne, and subordinated

the highest to these.

Our unrest comes from yet another source. We have not peace, because we

have not found and grasped the true objects for any of our faculties.

God is the only possession that brings quiet. The heart hungers until

it feeds upon Him. The mind is satisfied with no truth until behind

truth it finds a Person who is true. The will is enslaved and wretched

until in God it recognises legitimate and absolute authority, which it

is blessing to obey. Love puts out its yearnings, like the filaments

that gossamer spiders send out into the air, seeking in vain for

something to fasten upon, until it touches God, and clings there. There

is no rest for a man until he rests in God. The reason why this world

is so full of excitement is because it is so empty of peace, and the

reason why it is so empty of peace is because it is so void of God. The

peace of God brings peace with Him, and peace within. It unites our

hearts to fear His name, and draws all the else turbulent and

confusedly flowing impulses of the great deep of the spirit after

itself, in a tidal wave, as the moon draws the waters of the gathered

ocean. The peace of God is peace with Him, and peace within.

I need not, I suppose, do more than say one word about that descriptive

clause in my text, It 'passeth understanding.' The understanding is not

the faculty by which men lay hold of the peace of God any more than you

can see a picture with your ears or hear music with your eyes. To

everything its own organ; you cannot weigh truth in a tradesman's

scales or measure thought with a yard-stick. Love is not the instrument

for apprehending Euclid, nor the brain the instrument for grasping

these divine and spiritual gifts. The peace of God transcends the

understanding, as well as belongs to another order of things than that

about which the understanding is concerned. You must experience it to

know it; you must have it in order that you may feel its sweetness. It

eludes the grasp of the wisest, though it yields itself to the patient

and loving heart.

II. So notice, in the next place, what the peace of God does.

It 'shall keep your hearts and minds.' The Apostle here blends

together, in a very remarkable manner, the conceptions of peace and of

war, for he employs a purely military word to express the office of

this Divine peace. That word, 'shall keep,' is the same as is

translated in another of his letters kept with a garrison--and, though,

perhaps, it might be going too far to insist that the military idea is

prominent in his mind, it will certainly not be unsafe to recognise its

presence.

So, then, this Divine peace takes upon itself warlike functions, and

garrisons the heart and mind. What does he mean by 'the heart and

mind'? Not, as the English reader might suppose, two different

faculties, the emotional and the intellectual--which is what we usually

roughly mean by our distinction between heart and mind--but, as is

always the case in the Bible, the 'heart' means the whole inner man,

whether considered as thinking, willing, purposing, or doing any other

inward act; and the word rendered 'mind' does not mean another part of

human nature, but the whole products of the operations of the heart.

The Revised Version renders it by 'thoughts,' and that is correct if it

be given a wide enough application, so as to include emotions,

affections, purposes, as well as 'thoughts' in the narrower sense. The

whole inner man, in all the extent of its manifold operations, that

indwelling peace of God will garrison and guard.

So note, however profound and real that Divine peace is, it is to be

enjoyed in the midst of warfare. Quiet is not quiescence. God's peace

is not torpor. The man that has it has still to wage continual

conflict, and day by day to brace himself anew for the fight. The

highest energy of action is the result of the deepest calm of heart;

just as the motion of this solid, and, as we feel it to be, immovable

world, is far more rapid through the abysses of space, and on its own

axis, than any of the motions of the things on its surface. So the

quiet heart, 'which moveth altogether if it move at all,' rests whilst

it moves, and moves the more swiftly because of its unbroken repose.

That peace of God, which is peace militant, is unbroken amidst all

conflicts. The wise old Greeks chose for the protectress of Athens the

goddess of Wisdom, and whilst they consecrated to her the olive branch,

which is the symbol of peace, they set her image on the Parthenon,

helmed and spear-bearing, to defend the peace, which she brought to

earth. So this heavenly Virgin, whom the Apostle personifies here, is

the 'winged sentry, all skilful in the wars,' who enters into our

hearts and fights for us to keep us in unbroken peace.

It is possible day by day to go out to toil and care and anxiety and

change and suffering and conflict, and yet to bear within our hearts

the unalterable rest of God. Deep in the bosom of the ocean, beneath

the region where winds howl and billows break, there is calm, but the

calm is not stagnation. Each drop from these fathomless abysses may be

raised to the surface by the power of the sunbeams, expanded there by

their heat, and sent on some beneficent message across the world. So,

deep in our hearts, beneath the storm, beneath the raving winds and the

curling waves, there may be a central repose, as unlike stagnation as

it is unlike tumult; and the peace of God may, as a warrior, keep our

hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What is the plain English of that metaphor? Just this, that a man who

has that peace as his conscious possession is lifted above the

temptations that otherwise would drag him away. The full cup, filled

with precious wine, has no room in it for the poison that otherwise

might be poured in. As Jesus Christ has taught us, there is such a

thing as cleansing a heart in some measure, and yet because it is

'empty,' though it is 'swept and garnished,' the demons come back

again. The best way to be made strong to resist temptation, is to be

lifted above feeling it to be a temptation, by reason of the sweetness

of the peace possessed. Oh! if our hearts were filled, as they might be

filled, with that divine repose, do you think that the vulgar,

coarse-tasting baits which make our mouths water now would have any

power over us? Will a man who bears in his hands jewels of priceless

value, and knows them to be such, find much temptation when some

imitation stone, made of coloured glass and a tinfoil backing, is

presented to him? Will the world draw us away if we are rooted and

grounded in the peace of God? Geologists tell us that climates are

changed and creatures are killed by the slow variation of level in the

earth. If you and I can only heave our lives up high enough, the foul

things that live down below will find the air too pure and keen for

them, and will die and disappear; and all the vermin that stung and

nestled down in the flats will be gone when we get up to the heights.

The peace of God will keep our hearts and thoughts.

III. Now, lastly, notice how we get the peace of God.

My text is an exuberant promise, but it is knit on to something before,

by that 'and' at the beginning of the verse. It is a promise, as all

God's promises are, on conditions. And here are the conditions. 'Be

careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with

thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' That defines

the conditions in part; and the last words of the text itself complete

the definition. 'In Christ Jesus' describes, not so much where we are

to be kept, as a condition under which we shall be kept. How, then, can

I get this peace into my turbulent, changeful life?

I answer, first, trust is peace. It is always so; even when it is

misplaced we are at rest. The condition of repose for the human heart

is that we shall be 'in Christ,' who has said, 'In the world ye shall

have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace.' And how may I be 'in

Him'? Simply by trusting myself to Him. That brings peace with God.

The sinless Son of God has died on the Cross, a sacrifice for the sins

of the whole world, for yours and for mine. Let us trust to that, and

we shall have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And 'in

Him' we have, by trust, inward peace, for He, through our faith,

controls our whole natures, and Faith leads the lion in a silken leash,

like Spenser's Una. Trust in Christ brings peace amid outward sorrows

and conflicts. When the pilot comes on board the captain does not leave

the bridge, but stands by the pilot's side. His responsibility is past,

but his duties are not over. And when Christ comes into my heart, my

effort, my judgment, are not made unnecessary, or put on one side. Let

Him take the command, and stand beside Him, and carry out His orders,

and you will find rest to your souls.

Again, submission is peace. What makes our troubles is not outward

circumstances, howsoever afflictive they may be, but the resistance of

our spirits to the circumstances. And where a man's will bends and

says, 'Not mine but Thine be done,' there is calm. Submission is like

the lotion that is applied to mosquito bites--it takes away the

irritation, though the puncture be left. Submission is peace, both as

resignation and as obedience.

Communion is peace. You will get no quiet until you live with God.

Until He is at your side you will always be moved.

So, dear friend, fix this in your minds: a life without Christ is a

life without peace. Without Him you may have excitement, pleasure,

gratified passions, success, accomplished hopes, but peace never! You

never have had it, have you? If you live without Him, you may forget

that you have not Him, and you can plunge into the world, and so lose

the consciousness of the aching void, but it is there all the same. You

never will have peace until you go to Him. There is only one way to get

it. The Christless heart is like the troubled sea that cannot rest.

There is no peace for it. But in Him you can get it for the asking.

'The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him.' For our sakes He

died on the Cross, so making peace. Trust Him as your only hope,

Saviour and friend, and the God of peace will 'fill you with all joy

and peace in believing.' Then bow your wills to Him in acceptance of

His providence, and in obedience to His commands, and so, 'your peace

shall be as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea.'

Then keep your hearts in union and communion with Him, and so His

presence will keep you in perfect peace whilst conflicts last, and,

with Him at your side, you will pass through the valley of the shadow

of death undisturbed, and come to the true Salem, the city of peace,

where they beat their swords into ploughshares, and learn and fear war

no more.

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THINK ON THESE THINGS

' . . . Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,

whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever

things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be

any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'--Phil.

iv. 8.

I am half afraid that some of you may think, as I have at times

thought, that I am too old to preach to the young. You would probably

listen with more attention to one less remote from you in years, and

may be disposed to discount my advices as quite natural for an old man

to give, and quite unnatural for a young man to take. But, dear

friends, the message which I have to bring to you is meant for all

ages, and for all sorts of people. And, if I may venture a personal

word, I proved it, when I stood where you stand, and it is fresher and

mightier to me to-day than it ever was.

You are in the plastic period of your lives, with the world before you,

and the mightier world within to mould as you will; and you can be

almost anything you like, I do not mean in regard to externals, or

intellectual capacities, for these are only partially in our control,

but in regard to the far more important and real things--viz. elevation

and purity of heart and mind. You are in the period of life to which

fair dreams of the future are natural. It is, as the prophet tells us,

for 'the young man' to 'see visions,' and to ennoble his life

thereafter by turning them into realities. Generous and noble ideas

ought to belong to youth. But you are also in the period when there is

a keen joy in mere living, and when some desires, which get weaker as

years go on, are very strong, and may mar youthful purity. So, taking

all these into account, I have thought that I could not do better than

press home upon you the counsels of this magnificent text, however

inadequately my time may permit of my dealing with them; for there are

dozens of sermons in it, if one could expand it worthily.

But my purpose is distinctly practical, and so I wish just to cast what

I have to say to you into the answer to three questions, the three

questions that may be asked about everything. What? Why? How?

I. What, then, is the counsel here?

'Think on these things.' To begin with, that advice implies that we

can, and, therefore, that we should, exercise a very rigid control over

that part of our lives which a great many of us never think of

controlling at all. There are hosts of people whose thoughts are just

hooked on to one another by the slightest links of accidental

connection, and who scarcely ever have put a strong hand upon them, or

coerced them into order, or decided what they are going to let come

into their minds, and what to keep out. Circumstances, the necessities

of our daily occupations, the duties that we owe to one another, all

these make certain streams of thought very necessary, and to some of us

very absorbing. And for the rest--well! 'He that hath no rule over his

own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls'; anybody can go

in, and anybody can come out. I am sure that amongst young men and

women there are multitudes who have never realised how responsible they

are for the flow of the waves of that great river that is always coming

from the depths of their being, and have never asked whether the

current is bringing down sand or gold. Exercise control, as becomes

you, over the run and drift of your thoughts. I said that many of us

had minds like cities broken down. Put a guard at the gate, as they do

in some Continental countries, and let in no vagrant that cannot show

his passport, and a clear bill of health. Now, that is a lesson that

some of you very much want.

But, further, notice that company of fair guests that you may welcome

into the hospitalities of your heart and mind. 'Think on these

things'--and what are they? It would be absurd of me to try to exhaust

the great catalogue which the Apostle gives here, but let me say a word

or two about it.

'Whatsoever things are true . . . think on these things.' Let your

minds be exercised, breathed, braced, lifted, filled by bringing them

into contact with truth, especially with the highest of all truths, the

truths affecting God and your relations to Him. Why should you, like so

many of us, be living amidst the small things of daily life, the

trifles that are here, and never coming into vital contact with the

greatest things of all, the truths about God and Christ, and what you

have to do with them, and what they have to do with you? 'Whatsoever

things are true . . . think on these things.'

'Whatsoever things are honest,' or, as the word more properly and nobly

means, 'Whatsoever things are reverent, or venerable'--let grave,

serious, solemn thought be familiar to your minds, not frivolities, not

mean things. There is an old story in Roman history about the

barbarians breaking into the Capitol, and their fury being awed into

silence, and struck into immobility, as they saw, round and round in

the hall, the august Senators, each in his seat. Let your minds be like

that, with reverent thoughts clustering on every side; and when wild

passions, and animal desires, and low, mean contemplations dare to

cross the threshold, they will be awed into silence and stillness.

'Whatsoever things are august . . . think on these things.'

'Whatsoever things are just'--let the great, solemn thought of duty,

obligation, what I ought to be and do, be very familiar to your

consideration and meditation. 'Whatsoever things are just . . . think

on these things.'

'Whatsoever things are pure'--let white-robed angels haunt the place.

Let there be in you a shuddering recoil from all the opposite; and

entertain angels not unawares. 'Whatsoever things are pure . . . think

on these things.'

Now, these characteristics of thoughts which I have already touched

upon all belong to a lofty region, but the Apostle is not contented

with speaking austere things. He goes now into a region tinged with

emotion, and he says, '[INS: whatsoever :INS] things are lovely'; for

goodness is beautiful, and, in effect, is the only beautiful.

'Whatsoever things are lovely . . . think on these things.' And

'whatsoever things are of good report'--all the things that men speak

well of, and speak good in the very naming of, let thoughts of them be

in your minds.

And then he gathers all up into two words. 'If there be any

virtue'--which covers the ground of the first four, that he has already

spoken about--viz. true, venerable, just, pure; and 'if there be any

praise'--which resumes and sums up the two last: 'lovely and of good

report,' 'think on these things.'

Now, if my purpose allowed it, one would like to point out here how the

Apostle accepts the non-Christian notions of the people in whose tongue

he was speaking; and here, for the only time in his letters, uses the

great Pagan word 'virtue,' which was a spell amongst the Greeks, and

says, 'I accept the world's notion of what is virtuous and

praiseworthy, and I bid you take it to your hearts.'

Dear brethren, Christianity covers all the ground that the noblest

morality has ever attempted to mark out and possess, and it covers a

great deal more. 'If there be any virtue, as you Greeks are fond of

talking about, and if there be any praise, if there is anything in men

which commends noble actions, think on these things.'

Now, you will not obey this commandment unless you obey also the

negative side of it. That is to say, you will not think on these fair

forms, and bring them into your hearts, unless you turn away, by

resolute effort, from their opposites. There are some, and I am afraid

that in a congregation as large as this there must be some

representatives of the class, who seem to turn this apostolic precept

right round about, and whatsoever things are illusory and vain,

whatsoever things are mean, and frivolous, and contemptible, whatsoever

things are unjust, and whatsoever things are impure, and whatsoever

things are ugly, and whatsoever things are branded with a stigma by all

men they think on these things. Like the flies that are attracted to a

piece of putrid meat, there are young men who are drawn by all the

lustful, the lewd, the impure thoughts; and there are young women who

are too idle and uncultivated to have any pleasure in anything higher

than gossip and trivial fiction. 'Whatsoever things are noble and

lovely, think on these things,' and get rid of all the others.

There are plenty of occasions round about you to force the opposite

upon your notice; and, unless you shut your door fast, and double-lock

it, they will be sure to come in:--Popular literature, the scrappy

trivialities that are put into some periodicals, what they call

'realistic fiction'; modern Art, which has come to be largely the

servant of sense; the Stage, which has come--and more is the pity! for

there are enormous possibilities of good in it--to be largely a

minister of corruption, or if not of corruption at least of

frivolity--all these things are appealing to you. And some of you young

men, away from the restraints of home, and in a city, where you think

nobody could see you sowing your wild oats, have got entangled with

them. I beseech you, cast out all this filth, and all this meanness and

pettiness from your habitual thinkings, and let the august and the

lovely and the pure and the true come in instead. You have the cup in

your hand, you can either press into it clusters of ripe grapes, and

make mellow wine, or you can squeeze into it wormwood and gall and

hemlock and poison-berries; and, as you brew, you have to drink. You

have the canvas, and you are to cover it with the figures that you like

best. You can either do as Fra Angelico did, who painted the white

walls of every cell in his quiet convent with Madonnas and angels and

risen Christs, or you can do like some of those low-toned Dutch

painters, who never can get above a brass pan and a carrot, and ugly

boors and women, and fill the canvas with vulgarities and deformities.

Choose which you will have to keep you company.

II. Now, let me ask you to think for a moment why this counsel is

pressed upon you.

Let me put the reasons very briefly. They are, first, because thought

moulds action. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.' One looks

round the world, and all these solid-seeming realities of institutions,

buildings, governments, inventions and machines, steamships and

electric telegrams, laws and governments, palaces and fortresses, they

are all but embodied thoughts. There was a thought at the back of each

of them which took shape. So, in another sense than the one in which

the saying was originally meant, but yet an august and solemn sense,

'the word is made flesh,' and our thoughts became visible, and stand

round us, a ghastly company. Sooner or later what has been the drift

and trend of a man's life comes out, flashes out sometimes, and

dribbles out at other times, into visibility in his actions; and, just

as the thunder follows on the swift passage of the lightning, so my

acts are neither more nor less than the reverberation and after-clap of

my thoughts.

So if you are entertaining in your hearts and minds this august company

of which my text speaks, your lives will be fair and beautiful. For

what does the Apostle immediately go on to add to our text? 'These

things do'--as you certainly will if you think about them, and as you

certainly will not unless you do.

Again, thought and work make character. We come into the world with

certain dispositions and bias. But that is not character, it is only

the raw material of character. It is all plastic, like the lava when it

comes out of the volcano. But it hardens, and whatever else my thought

may do, and whatever effects may follow upon any of my actions, the

recoil of them on myself is the most important effect to me. And there

is not a thought that comes into, and is entertained by a man, or

rolled as a sweet morsel under his tongue, but contributes its own

little but appreciable something to the making of the man's character.

I wonder if there is anybody in this chapel now who has been so long

accustomed to entertain these angels of whom my text speaks as that to

entertain their opposites would be an impossibility. I hope there is. I

wonder if there is anybody in this chapel to-night who has been so long

accustomed to live amidst the thoughts that are small and trivial and

frivolous, if not amongst those that are impure and abominable, as that

to entertain their opposites seems almost an impossibility. I am afraid

there are some. I remember hearing about a Maori woman who had come to

live in one of the cities in New Zealand, in a respectable station, and

after a year or two of it she left husband and children, and

civilisation, and hurried back to her tribe, flung off the European

garb, and donned the blanket, and was happy crouching over the embers

on the clay hearth. Some of you have become so accustomed to the low,

the wicked, the lustful, the impure, the frivolous, the contemptible,

that you cannot, or, at any rate, have lost all disposition to rise to

the lofty, the pure, and the true.

Once more; as thought makes deeds, and thought and deeds make

character, so character makes destiny, here and hereafter. If you have

these blessed thoughts in your hearts and minds, as your continual

companions and your habitual guests, then, my friend, you will have a

light within that will burn all independent of externals; and whether

the world smiles or frowns on you, you will have the true wealth in

yourselves; 'a better and enduring substance.' You will have peace, you

will be lords of the world, and having nothing yet may have all. No

harm can come to the man who has laid up in his youth, as the best

treasure of old age, this possession of these thoughts enjoined in my

text.

And character makes destiny hereafter. What is a man whose whole life

has been one long thought about money-making, or about other objects of

earthly ambition, or about the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the

eye, and the pride of life, to do in heaven? What would one of those

fishes in the sunless caverns of America, which, by long living in the

dark, have lost their eyes, do, if it were brought out into the

sunshine? A man will go to his own place, the place for which he is

fitted, the place for which he has fitted himself by his daily life,

and especially by the trend and the direction of his thoughts.

So do not be led away by talk about 'seeing both sides,' about 'seeing

life,' about 'knowing what is going on.' 'I would have you simple

concerning evil, and wise concerning good.' Do not be led away by talk

about having your fling, and sowing your wild oats. You may make an

indelible stain on your conscience, which even forgiveness will not

wipe out; and you may sow your wild oats, but what will the harvest be?

'Whatsoever a man soweth that'--that--'shall he also reap.' Would you

like all your low thoughts, all your foul thoughts, to return and sit

down beside you, and say, 'We have come to keep you company for ever'?

'If there be any virtue . . . think on these things.'

III. Now, lastly, how is this precept best obeyed?

I have been speaking to some extent about that, and saying that there

must be real, honest, continuous effort to keep out the opposite, as

well as to bring in the 'things that are lovely and of good report.'

But there is one more word that I must say in answer to the question

how this precept can be observed, and it is just this. All these

things, true, venerable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, are

not things only; they are embodied in a Person. For whatever things are

fair meet in Jesus Christ, and He, in His living self, is the sum of

all virtue and of all praise. So that if we link ourselves to Him by

faith and love, and take Him into our hearts and minds, and abide in

Him, we have them all gathered together into that One. Thinking on

these things is not merely a meditating upon abstractions, but it is

clutching and living in and with and by the living, loving Lord and

Saviour of us all. If Christ is in my thoughts, all good things are

there.

If you trust Him, and make him your Companion, He will help you, He

will give you His own life, and in it will give you tastes and desires

which will make all these fair thoughts congenial to you, and will

deliver you from the else hopeless bondage of subjection to their very

opposites.

Brethren, our souls cleave to the dust, and all our efforts will be

foiled, partially or entirely, to obey this precept, unless we remember

that it was spoken to people who had previously obeyed a previous

commandment, and had taken Christ for their Saviour. We gravitate

earthwards, alas! after all our efforts, but if we will put ourselves

in His hands, then He will be as a Magnet drawing us upwards, or rather

He will give us wings of love and contemplation by which we can soar

above that dim spot that men call Earth, and walk in the heavenly

places. The way by which this commandment can be obeyed is by obeying

the other precept of the same Apostle, 'Set your minds on things which

are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.'

I beseech you, take Christ and enthrone Him in the very sanctuary of

your minds. Then you will have all these venerable, pure, blessed

thoughts as the very atmosphere in which you move. 'Think on these

things . . . these things do! . . . and the God of Peace shall be with

you.'

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HOW TO SAY 'THANK YOU'

'But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived

your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked

opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned,

in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be

abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things

have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to

abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth

me. Howbeit ye did well, that ye had fellowship with my

affliction.'--Phil. iv. 10-14 (R.V.).

It is very difficult to give money without hurting the recipient. It is

as difficult to receive it without embarrassment and sense of

inferiority. Paul here shows us how he could handle a delicate subject

with a feminine fineness of instinct and a noble self-respect joined

with warmest gratitude. He carries the weight of obligation, is profuse

in his thanks, and yet never crosses the thin line which separates the

expression of gratitude from self-abasing exaggeration, nor that other

which distinguishes self-respect in the receiver of benefits from proud

unwillingness to be obliged to anybody. Few words are more difficult to

say rightly than 'Thank you.' Some people speak them reluctantly and

some too fluently: some givers are too exacting in the acknowledgments

they expect, and do not so much give as barter so much help for so much

recognition of superiority.

The Philippians had sent to Paul some money help by Epaphroditus as we

heard before in Chapter ii., and this gift he now acknowledges in a

paragraph full of autobiographical interest which may be taken as a

very model of the money relations between teachers and taught in the

church. It is besides an exquisite illustration of the fineness and

delicacy of Paul's nature, and it includes large spiritual lessons.

The stream of the Apostle's thoughts takes three turns here. There is

first the exuberant and delicate expression of his thanks, then, as

fearing that they might misunderstand his joy in their affection as if

it were only selfish gladness that his wants had been met, he gives

utterance to his triumphant and yet humble consciousness of his

Christ-given independence in, and of, all circumstances, and then

feeling in a moment that such words, if they stood alone, might sound

ungrateful, he again returns to thanks, but not for their gift so much

as for the sympathy expressed in it. We may follow these movements of

feeling now.

I. The exuberant expression of thanks, 'I rejoice in the Lord greatly.'

There is an instance of his following his own twice-given precept,

'Rejoice in the Lord always.' The Philippians' care of him was the

source of the joy, and yet it was joy in the Lord. So we learn the

perfect consistency of that joy in Christ with the full enjoyment of

all other sources of joy, and especially of the joy that arises from

Christian love and friendship. Union with Christ heightens and purifies

all earthly relations. Nobody should be so tender and so sweet in these

as a Christian. His faith should be like the sunshine blazing out over

the meadows making them greener. It should, and does in the measure of

its power, destroy selfishness and guard us against the evils which sap

love and the anxieties which torment it, against the dread that it may

end, and our hopeless desolation when it does. There is a false ascetic

idea of Christian devotion as if it were a regard to Christ which made

our hearts cold to others, which is clean against Paul's experience

here. His joy went out in fuller stream towards the Philippians because

it was 'joy in the Lord.'

We may just note in passing the tender metaphor by which the

Philippians' renewed thought of him is likened to a tree's putting

forth its buds in a gracious springtide, and may link with it the

pretty fancy of an old commentator whom some people call prosaic and

puritanical (Bengel), that the stormy winter had hindered

communication, and that Epaphroditus and the gifts came with the

opening spring.

Paul's inborn delicacy and quick considerateness comes beautifully

forward in his addition, to remove any suspicion of his thinking that

his friends in Philippi had been negligent or cold. Therefore he adds

that he knew that they had always had the will. What had hindered them

we do not know. Perhaps they had no one to send. Perhaps they had not

heard that such help would be welcome, but whatever frost had kept the

tree from budding, he knew that the sap was in it all the same.

We may note that trait of true friendship, confidence in a love that

did not express itself. Many of us are too exacting in always wanting

manifestations of our friend's affection. What cries out for these is

not love so much as self-importance which has not had the attention

which it thinks its due. How often there have been breaches of intimacy

which have no better reason than 'He didn't come to see me often

enough'; 'He hasn't written to me for ever so long'; 'He does not pay

me the attention I expect.' It is a poor love which is always needing

to be assured of another's. It is better to err in believing that there

is a store of goodwill in our friends' hearts to us which only needs

occasion to be unfolded. One often hears people say that they were

quite surprised at the proofs of affection which came to them when they

were in trouble. They would have been happier and more nearly right if

they had believed in them when there was no need to show them.

II. Consciousness of Christ-given independence and of 'content' is

scarcely Paul's whole idea here, though that, no doubt, is included. We

have no word which exactly expresses the meaning. 'Self-sufficient' is

a translation, but then it has acquired a bad meaning as connoting a

false estimate of one's own worth and wisdom. What Paul means is that

whatever be his condition he has in himself enough to meet it. He does

not depend on circumstances, and he does not depend on other people for

strength to face them. Many words are not needed to insist that only

the man of whom these things are true is worth calling a man at all. It

is a miserable thing to be hanging on externals and so to be always

exposed to the possibility of having to say, 'They have taken away my

Gods.' It is as wretched to be hanging on people. 'The good man shall

be satisfied for himself.' The fortress that has a deep well in the

yard and plenty of provisions within, is the only one that can hold

out.

This independence teaches the true use of all changing circumstances.

The consequence of 'learning' therewith to be content is further stated

by the Apostle in terms which perhaps bear some reference to the

mysteries of Greek religion, since the word rendered 'I have learned

the secret' means I have been initiated. He can bear either of the two

extremes of human experience, and can keep a calm and untroubled mind

whichever of them he has to front. He has the same equable spirit when

abased and when abounding. He is like a compensation pendulum which

corrects expansions and contractions and keeps time anywhere. I

remember hearing of a captain in an Arctic expedition who had been

recalled from the Tropics and sent straight away to the North Pole.

Sometimes God gives His children a similar experience.

It is possible for us not only to bear with equal minds both extremes,

but to get the good out of both. It is a hard lesson and takes much

conning, to learn to bear sorrow or suffering or want. They have great

lessons to teach us all, and a character that has not been schooled by

one of these dwellers in the dark is imperfect as celery is not in

season till frost has touched it. But it is not less difficult to learn

how to bear prosperity and abundance, though we think it a pleasanter

lesson. To carry a full cup without spilling is proverbially difficult,

and one sees instances enough of men who were far better men when they

were poor than they have ever been since they were rich, to give a

terrible significance to the assertion that it is still more difficult

to live a Christian life in prosperity than in sorrow. But while both

threaten, both may minister to our growth. Sorrow will drive, and joy

will draw, us nearer to God. If we are not tempted by abundance to

plunge our desires into it, nor tempted by sorrow to think ourselves

hopelessly harmed by it, both will knit us more closely to our true and

changeless good. The [INS: centrifugal :INS] and centripetal forces

both keep the earth in its orbit.

It is only when we are independent of circumstances that we are able to

get the full good of them. When there is a strong hand at the helm, the

wind, though it be almost blowing directly against us, helps us

forward, but otherwise the ship drifts and washes about in the trough.

We all need the exhortation to be their master, for we can do without

them and they serve us.

Paul here lets us catch a glimpse of the inmost secret of his power

without which all exhortations to independence are but waste words. He

is conscious of a living power flowing through him and making him fit

for anything, and he is not afraid that any one who studies him will

accuse him of exaggeration even when he makes the tremendous claim 'I

can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.' That great word is

even more emphatic in the original, not only because, as the Revised

Version shows, it literally is in and not through, and so suggests

again his familiar thought of a vital union with Jesus, but also

because he uses a compound word which literally means 'strengthening

within,' so then the power communicated is breathed into the man, and

in the most literal sense he is 'strong in the Lord and in the power of

His might.' This inward impartation of strength is the true and only

condition of that self-sufficingness which Paul has just been claiming.

Stoicism breaks down because it tries to make men apart from God

sufficient for themselves, which no man is. To stand alone without Him

is to be weak. Circumstances will always be too strong for me, and sins

will be too strong. A Godless life has a weakness at the heart of its

loneliness, but Christ and I are always in the majority, and in the

face of all foes, be they ever so many and strong, we can confidently

say, 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.' The

old experience will prove true in our lives, and though 'they compass

us about like bees,' the worst that they can do is only to buzz angrily

round our heads, and their end is in the name of the Lord to be

destroyed. In ourselves we are weak, but if we are 'rooted, grounded,

built' on Jesus, we partake of the security of the rock of ages to

which we are united, and cannot be swept away by the storm, so long as

it stands unmoved. I have seen a thin hair-stemmed flower growing on

the edge of a cataract and resisting the force of its plunge, and of

the wind that always lives in its depths, because its roots are in a

cleft of the cliff. The secret of strength for all men is to hold fast

by the 'strong Son of God,' and they only are sufficient in whatsoever

state they are, to whom this loving and quickening voice has spoken the

charter 'My grace is sufficient for thee.'

III. The renewed thanks for the loving sympathy expressed in the gift.

We have here again an eager anxiety not to be misunderstood as

undervaluing the Philippians' gift. How beautifully the sublimity of

the previous words lies side by side with the lowliness and gentleness

of these.

We note here the combination of that grand independence with loving

thankfulness for brotherly help. The self-sufficingness of Stoicism is

essentially inhuman and isolating. It is contrary to God's plan and to

the fellowship which is meant to knit men together. So we have always

to take heed to blend with it a loving welcome to sympathy, and not to

fancy that human help and human kindness is useless. We should be able

to do without it, but that need not make it the less sweet when it

comes. We may be carrying water for the march, but shall not the less

prize a brook by the way. Our firm souls should be like the rocking

stones in Cornwall, poised so truly that tempests cannot shake them,

and yet vibrating at the touch of a little child's soft hand. That

lofty independence needs to be humanised by grateful acceptance of the

refreshment of human sympathy even though we can do without it.

Paul shows us here what is the true thing in a brother's help for which

to be thankful. The reason why he was glad of their help was because it

spoke to his heart and told him that they were making themselves

sharers with him in his troubles. As he tells us in the beginning of

the letter, their fellowship in his labours had been from the beginning

a joy to him. It was not so much their material help as their true

sympathy that he valued. The high level to which he lifts what was

possibly a very modest contribution, if measured by money standards,

carries with it a great lesson for all receivers and for all givers of

such gifts, teaching the one that they are purely selfish if they are

glad of what they get, and bidding the other remember that they may

give so as to hurt by a gift more than by a blow, that they may give

infinitely more by loving sympathy than by much gold, and that a �5

note does not discharge all their obligations. We have to give after

His pattern who does not toss us our alms from a height, but Himself

comes to bestow them, and whose gift, though it be the unspeakable gift

of eternal life, is less than the love it speaks, in that He Himself

has in wondrous manner become partaker of our weakness. The pattern of

all sympathy, the giver of all our possessions, is God. Let us hold to

Him in faith and love, and all earthly love will be sweeter and

sympathy more precious. Our own hearts will be refined and purified to

a delicacy of consideration and a tenderness beyond their own. Our

souls will be made lords of all circumstances and strengthened

according to our need. He will say to us 'My grace is sufficient for

thee,' and we, as we feel His strength being made perfect in our

weakness, shall be able to say with humble confidence, 'I can do all

things in Christ who strengtheneth me within.'

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GIFTS GIVEN, SEED SOWN

'And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of

the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship

with me in the matter of giving and receiving, but ye only; for even in

Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. Not that I seek for

the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account. But

I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from

Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odour of a sweet smell,

a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall fulfil

every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ

Jesus.'--Phil. iv. 15-19 (R.V.).

Paul loved the Philippians too well and was too sure of their love to

be conscious of any embarrassment in expressing his thanks for money

help. His thanks are profuse and long drawn out. Our present text still

strikes the note of grateful acknowledgment. It gives us a little

glimpse into earlier instances of their liberality, and beautifully

suggests that as they had done to him so God would do to them, and that

their liberality was in a fashion a prophecy, because it was in some

measure an imitation, of God's liberality. He had just said 'I am full,

having received the things which were sent from you,' and now he says,

'My God shall fill full all your needs.' The use of the same word in

these two connections is a piece of what one would call the very

ingenuity of graceful courtesy, if it were not something far deeper,

even the utterance of a loving and self-forgetting heart.

I. We may note here Paul's money relations with the churches.

We know that he habitually lived by his own labour. He could call to

witness the assembled elders at Ephesus, when he declared that 'these

hands ministered unto my necessities,' and could propose himself as an

illustration of the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to

give than to receive.' He firmly holds the right of Christian teachers

to be supported by the churches, and vehemently insists upon it in the

First Epistle to the Corinthians. But he waives the right in his own

case, and passionately insists that it were better for him rather to

die than that any man should make his glorying void. He will not use to

the full his right in the Gospel 'that he may make a Gospel without

charge,' but when needed he gladly accepted money gifts, as he did from

the Philippians. In our text he points back to an earlier instance of

this. The history of that instance we may briefly recall. After his

indignities and imprisonment in Philippi he went straight to

Thessalonica, stayed there a short time till a riot drove him to take

refuge in Berea, whence again he had to flee, and guided by brethren

reached Athens. There he was left alone, and his guides went back to

Macedonia to send on Silas and Timothy. From Athens he went to Corinth,

and there was rejoined by them. According to our text, 'in the

beginning of the Gospel,' that is, of course, its beginning in

Philippi, they relieved him twice in Thessalonica, and if the words in

our text which date the Philippians' gift may be read 'when I had

departed from Macedonia,' we should have here another reference to the

same incident mentioned in 2 Corinthians, chap. xi. 8-9, where he

speaks of being in want there, and having 'the measure of my want'

supplied by the brethren who came from Macedonia. The coincidence of

these two incidental references hid away, as it were, confirms the

historical truthfulness of both Epistles. And if we take into view the

circumstances in which he was placed in Thessalonica and at the

beginning of his stay in Corinth, his needing and receiving such aid is

amply accounted for. Once again, after a long interval, when he was a

prisoner in Rome, and probably unable to work for his maintenance,

their care of him flourished again.

In the present circumstances of our churches, it seems necessary that

the right which Paul so strongly asserted should, for the most part,

not be waived, but the only true way of giving and receiving as between

minister and people is when it is a matter not of payment but a gift.

When it is an expression of sympathy and affection on both sides, the

relationship is pleasant and may be blessed. When it comes to be a

business transaction, and is to be measured by the rules applicable to

such, it goes far to destroy some of the sweetest bonds, and to

endanger a preacher's best influence.

II. The lofty view here taken of such service.

It is 'the fruit that increaseth to your account.' Fruit, which as it

were is put to their credit in the account-book of heaven, but it is

called by Paul by a sacreder name as being an odour of a sweet smell, a

sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God, in which metaphor all the

sacred ideas of yielding up precious things to God and of the sacred

fire that consumed the offering or brought to bear on the prosaic

material gift.

The principle which the Apostle here lays down in reference to a money

gift has, of course, a much wider application, and is as true about all

Christian acts. We need not be staggered at the emphasis with which

Paul states the truths of their acceptableness and rewardableness, but

in order fully to understand the ground of his assurance we must

remember that in his view the root of all such fruit increasing to our

account, and of everything which can claim to be an odour of a sweet

smell well pleasing to God, is love to Christ, and the renewal of our

nature by the spirit of God dwelling in us. In us there dwells no good

thing. It is only as we abide in Him and His words abide in us that we

bear much fruit. Separate from Him we can do nothing. If our works are

ever to smell sweet to God, they must be done for Christ, and in a very

profound and real sense, done by Him.

The essential character of all work which has the right to be called

good, and which is acceptable to God, is sacrifice. The one exhortation

which takes the place and more than fills the place of all other

commandments, and is enforced by the motive which takes the place, and

more than takes the place of all other motives, is, 'I beseech you by

the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice.' It is

works which in the intention of the doer are offered to Him, and in

which therefore there is a surrender of our own wills, or tastes, or

inclinations, or passions, or possessions, that yield to Him an odour

of a sweet smell. The old condition which touched the chivalrous heart

of David has to be repeated by us in regard to any work which we can

ever hope to make well pleasing to God; 'I will not offer burnt

offerings unto the Lord my God which cost me nothing.'

There is a spurious humility which treats all the works of good men as

filthy rags, but such a false depreciation is contradicted by Christ's

'Well done, good and faithful servant.' It is true that all our deeds

are stained and imperfect, but if they are offered on the altar which

He provides, it will sanctify the giver and the gift. He is the great

Aaron who makes atonement for the iniquity of our holy things. And

whilst we are stricken silent with thankfulness for the wonderful mercy

of His gracious allowance, we may humbly hope that His 'Well done' will

be spoken of us, and may labour, not without a foretaste that we do not

labour in vain, that 'whether present or absent we may be well pleasing

to Him.'

The fruit is here supposed to be growing, that is, of course, in

another life. We need not insist that the service and sacrifice and

work of earth, if the motive be right, tell in a man's condition after

death. It is not all the same how Christian men live; some gain ten

talents, some five, and some two, and the difference between them is

not always as the parable represents it, a difference in the original

endowment. An entrance may be given into the eternal kingdom, and yet

it may not be an abundant entrance.

III. The gift that supplies the givers.

Paul has nothing to bestow, but he serves a great God who will see to

it that no man is the poorer by helping His servants. The king's honour

is concerned in not letting a poor man suffer by lodging and feeding

his retainers. The words here suggest to us the source from which our

need may be filled full, as an empty vessel might be charged to the

brim with some precious liquid, the measure or limit of the fulness,

and the channel by which we receive it.

Paul was so sure that the Philippians' needs would all be satisfied,

because he knew that his own had been; he is generalising from his own

case, and that, I think, is at all events part of the reason why he

says with much emphasis, 'My God. As He has done to me He will do to

you,' but even without the 'my,' the great name contains in itself a

promise and its seal. 'God will supply just because He is God'; that is

what His name means--infinite fulness and infinite

self-communicativeness and delight in giving. But is not so absolutely

unlimited a promise as this convicted of complete unreality when

contrasted with the facts of any life, even of the most truly Christian

or the most outwardly happy? Its contradiction of the grim facts of

experience is not to be slurred over by restricting it to religious

needs only. The promise needs the eye of Faith to interpret the facts

of experience, and to let nothing darken the clear vision that if any

seeming need is left by God unfilled, it is not an indispensable need.

If we do not get what we want we may be quite sure that we do not need

it. The axiom of Christian faith is that whatever we do not obtain we

do not require. Very desirable things may still not be necessary. Let

us limit our notions of necessity by the facts of God's giving, and

then we, too, shall have learned, in whatsoever state we are, therein

to be content. When the Apostle says that God shall fill all our need

full up to the brim, was he contemplating only such necessities as God

could supply through outward gifts? Surely not. God Himself is the

filler and the only filler of a human heart, and it is by this

impartation of Himself and by nothing else that He bestows upon us the

supply of our needs.

Unless we have been initiated into this deepest and yet simplest secret

of life, it will be full of gnawing pain and unfulfilled longings.

Unless we have learned that our needs are like the cracks in the

parched ground, cups to hold the rain from heaven, doors by which God

Himself can come to us, we shall dwell for ever in a dry and thirsty

land. God Himself is the only satisfier of the soul. 'Whom have I in

heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that'--if I am not a

fool--'I desire side by side with Thee?'

But Paul here sets forth in very bold words the measure or limits of

the divine supply of our need. It is 'according to His riches in

glory.' Then, all of God belongs to me, and the whole wealth of His

aggregated perfections is available for stopping the crannies of my

heart and filling its emptiness. My emptiness corresponds with His

fulness as some concavity does with the convexity that fits into it,

and the whole that He is waits to fill and to satisfy me. There is no

limit really to what a man may have of God except the limitless limit

of the infinite divine nature, but on the other hand this great promise

is not fulfilled all at once, and whilst the actual limit is the

boundlessness of God, there is a working limit, so to speak, a variable

one, but a very real one. The whole riches of God's glory are available

for us, but only so much of the boundless store as we desire and are at

present capable of taking in will belong to us now. What is the use of

owning half a continent if the owner lives on an acre of it and grows

what he wants there, and has never seen the broad lands that yet belong

to him? Nothing hinders a man from indefinitely increased possession of

a growing measure of God, except his own arbitrarily narrowed measure

of desire and capacity. Therefore it becomes a solemn question for each

of us, Am I day by day becoming more and more fit to possess more of

God, and enjoy more of the God whom I possess? In Him we have each 'a

potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.' Do we growingly

realise that boundless possibility?

The channel by which that boundless supply is to reach us is distinctly

set forth here. All these riches are stored up 'in Christ Jesus.' A

deep lake may be hidden away in the bosom of the hills that would pour

blessing and fertility over a barren land if it could find a channel

down into the plains, but unless there be a river flowing out of it,

its land-locked waters might as well be dried up. When Paul says

'riches in glory,' he puts them up high above our reach, but when he

adds 'in Christ Jesus,' he brings them all down amongst us. In Him is

'infinite riches in a narrow room.' If we are in Him then we are beside

our treasure, and have only to put out our hands and take the wealth

that is lying there. All that we need is 'in Christ,' and if we are in

Christ it is all close at our sides.

Then the question comes to be, 'Am I thus near my wealth, and can I get

at it whenever I want it, as I want it, and as much as I want of it?'

We can if we will. The path is easy to define, though our slothfulness

find it hard to tread. That man is in Christ who dwells with Him by

faith, whose heart is by love plunged in His love, who daily seeks to

hold communion with Him amid the distractions of life, and who in

practical submission obeys His will. If thus we trust, if thus we love,

if thus we hold fast to Him, and if thus we link Him with all our

activities in the world, need will cease to grow, and will only be an

occasion for God's gift. 'Delight thyself in the Lord,' and then the

heart's desires being set upon Him, 'He will give thee the desire of

thy heart.'

Paul says to us 'My God shall supply all your need.' Let us answer,

'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.'

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FAREWELL WORDS

'Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever, Amen.

Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me

salute you. All the saints salute you, especially they that are of

C�sar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your

spirit.'--Phil. iv. 20-23 (R.V.).

These closing words fall into three unconnected parts, a doxology,

greetings, and a benediction. As in all his letters, the Apostle

follows the natural instinct of making his last words loving words.

Even when he had to administer a bitter draught, the last drops in the

cup were sweetened, and to the Philippians whom he loved so well, and

in whose loyal love he confided so utterly, his parting was tender as

an embrace. Taking together the three elements of this farewell, they

present to us a soul filled with desire for the glory of God and with

loving yearning for all His brethren. We shall best deal with them by

simply taking them in order.

I. The Doxology.

It is possibly evoked by the immediately preceding thought of God's

infinite supply of all human need 'according to his riches in glory';

but the glory which is so richly stored in Christ, and is the full

storehouse from which our emptiness is to be filled, is not the same as

the glory here ascribed to Him. The former is the sum of His divine

perfections, the light of His own infinite being: the latter is the

praise rendered to Him when we know Him for what He is, and exalt Him

in our thankful thoughts and adoration. As this doxology is the last

word of this whole letter, we may say that it gathers into one all that

precedes it. Our ascription of glory to God is the highest object of

all His self-manifestation, and should be the end of all our

contemplations of Him and of His acts. The faith that God does 'all for

His glory' may be and often has been so interpreted as to make his

character repellent and hideous, but in reality it is another way of

saying that God is love. He desires that all men should be gladdened

and elevated by knowing Him as He is. His glory is to give. That to

which He has committed the charge of interpreting Him to our dim eyes

and disordered natures is not the attributes of sovereign power, or

creative wisdom, or administrative providence, or any other elements

which men lay hold of in their conceptions of deity. When men make gods

they make them in their own image: when God reveals God, the emphasis

is put on an altogether different aspect of His nature. It is His

self-communicating and paternal love revealed to the heart of a son

which will kindle the highest aspiration of praise, and that fatherhood

is not found in the fact that God has made us, but in the higher fact

that He has redeemed us and has sent the spirit of His Son into our

hearts. The doxology of our text is a distinctively Christian doxology

which Paul conceives can only be uttered by lips which have learned to

say 'Abba, Father,' 'and have received the adoption of sons' through

the eternal Son.

Mark, too, that this glad ascription of glory to God is conceived of as

sounded forth for ever and ever, or literally through 'ages and ages,

as long as successive epochs shall unfold.' It is not as if the

revelation of the divine character were in the past, and the light of

it continued to touch stony lips to music, but it fills in continuous

forthcoming every age, and in every age men receive the fulness of God,

and in every age redeemed hearts bring back their tribute of praise and

love to Him.

II. The Greetings.

The Apostle's habit of closing all his letters with kindly messages is,

of course, more than a habit. It is the natural instinct to which all

true hearts have a hundred times yielded. It is remarkable that in this

letter there are no individual greetings, but that instead of such

there is the emphatic greeting to every saint in Christ Jesus. He will

not single out any where all are so near His heart, and He will have no

jealousies to be fed by His selection of more favoured persons. It may

be too, that the omission of individual messages is partly occasioned

by some incipient tendencies to alienation and faction of which we see

some traces in His earnest exhortations to stand fast in one spirit,

and to be of the same mind, having the same love, and being of one

accord, as well as in his exhortation to two Philippian women to be of

the same mind in the Lord. The all-embracing word at parting singularly

links the end of the letter with its beginning, where we find a

remarkable sequence of similar allusions to 'all' the Philippian

Christians. He has them all in His heart; they are all partakers with

Him of grace; He longs after them all.

The designation by which Paul describes the recipients of his greeting

carries in it a summons as well as a promise. They are saints, and they

are so as being 'in Christ.' That name is often used as a clumsy

sarcasm, but it goes to the very root of Christian character. The

central idea contained in it is that of consecration to God, and that

which is often taken to be its whole meaning is but a secondary one, a

result of that consecration. The true basis of all real purity of

conduct lies in devotion of heart and life to God, and for want of

discerning the connection of these two elements the world's ethics fail

in theory and in practice. A 'saint' is not a faultless monster, and

the persistence of failures and inconsistencies, whilst affording only

too sad an occasion for penitence and struggle, afford no occasion for

a man's shrinking from taking to himself the humble claim to be a

saint. Both the elements of consecration to God and of real and

progressive, though never complete perfection of personal character,

are realised only in Christ; in and only in fellowship with Him whose

life was unbroken fellowship with the Father, and whose will was

completely accordant with the Father's, do we rise to the height of

belonging to God. And only in Him who could challenge a world to

convict Him of sin shall we make even a beginning of personal

righteousness. If we are in Christ we should be saints to-day however

imperfect our holiness, and shall be 'as the angels of God' in the day

that is coming--nay, rather as the Lord of the Angels, 'not having spot

or blemish or any such thing.'

The New Testament has other names for believers, each of which

expresses some great truth in regard to them; for example, the earliest

name by which they knew themselves was the simple one of 'brethren,'

which spoke of their common relation to a Father and pledged them to

the sweetness and blessedness of a family. The sarcastic wits of

Antioch called them Christians as seeing nothing in them other than

what they had many a time seen in the adherents of some founder of a

school or a party. They called themselves disciples or believers,

revealing by both names their humble attitude and their Lord's

authority, and by the latter disclosing to seeing eyes the central bond

which bound them to Him. But the name of Saint declares something more

than these in that it speaks of their relation to God, the fulfilment

of the Old Testament ideal, and carries in it a prophecy of personal

character.

The sharers in Paul's salutation call for some notice. We do not know

who 'the brethren that are with me' were. We might have supposed from

Paul's pathetic words that he had no man like-minded with him, that the

faithful band whom we find named in the other epistles of the captivity

were dispersed. But though there were none 'like-minded who will care

truly for your state,' there were some recognised as brethren who were

closely associated with him, and who, though they had no such warm

interest in the Philippians as he had, still had a real affection for

them, drawn no doubt from him. Distinct from these was the whole body

of the Roman Christians, from the mention of whom we may gather that

his imprisonment did not prevent his intercourse with them. Again,

distinct from these, though a part of them, were the saints of C�sar's

household. He had apparently special opportunities for intercourse with

them, and probably his imprisonment brought him through the pr�torian

guards into association with them, as C�sar's household included all

the servants and retainers of Nero.

May we not see in this union of members of the most alien races a

striking illustration of the new bond which the Gospel had woven among

men? There was a Jew standing in the midst between Macedonian Greeks

and proud Roman citizens, including members of that usually most

heartless and arrogant of all classes, the lackeys of a profligate

court, and they are all clasping one another's hands in true brotherly

love. Society was falling to pieces. We know the tragic spectacle that

the empire presented then. Amidst universal decay of all that held men

together, here was a new uniting principle; everywhere else dissolution

was at work; here was again crystallising. A flower was opening its

petals though it grew on a dunghill. What was it that drew slaves and

patricians, the Pharisee of Tarsus, rude Lycaonians, the 'barbarous'

people of Melita, the Areopagite of Athens, the citizens of Rome into

one loving family? How came Lydia and her slave girl, Onesimus and his

master, the pr�torian guard and his prisoner, the courtier in Nero's

golden house and the jailer at Philippi into one great fellowship of

love? They were all one in Christ Jesus.

And what lessons the saints in C�sar's household may teach us! Think of

the abyss of lust and murder there, of the Emperor by turns a buffoon,

a sensualist, and a murderer. A strange place to find saints in that

sty of filth! Let no man say that it is impossible for a pure life to

be lived in any circumstances, or try to bribe his conscience by

insisting on the difficulties of his environment. It may be our duty to

stand at our post however foul may be our surroundings and however

uncongenial our company, and if we are sure that He has set us there,

we may be sure that He is with us there, and that there we can live the

life and witness to His name.

III. The Parting Benediction.

The form of the benediction seems to be more correctly given in the

Revised Version, which reads 'with your spirit' instead of 'with you

all.' That form reappears in Galatians and in Philemon. What Paul

especially desires of his favourite church is that they may possess

'the grace.' Grace is love exercising itself to inferiors, and to those

who deserve something sadder and darker. The gifts of that one grace

are manifold. They comprise all blessings that man can need or receive.

This angel comes with her hands and her lap full of good. Her name is

shorthand for all that God can bestow or man can ask or think.

And it needs all the names by which Christ is known among men to

describe the encyclop�diacal Person who can bestow the encyclop�diacal

gift. Here we have them all gathered, as it were, into one great

diadem, set on His head where once the crown of thorns was twined. He

is Lord, the name which implies at least absolute authority, and is

most probably the New Testament translation of the Old Testament name

of Jehovah. He is our Lord as supreme over us, and wonderful as it is,

as belonging to us. He holds the keys of the storehouse of grace. The

river of the water of life flows where He turns it on. He is Jesus--the

personal name which He bore in the days of His flesh, and by which men

who knew Him only as one of themselves called Him. It is the token of

His brotherhood and the guarantee of the sympathy which will ever

bestow 'grace for grace.' He is the Christ, the Messiah, the name which

points back to the Old Testament ideas and declares His office,

realising all the rapturous anticipations of prophets, and the longings

of psalmists, and more than fulfilling them all by giving Himself to

men.

That great gift is to be the companion of every spirit which looks to

that Jesus in the reality of His humanity, in the greatness of His

office, in the loftiness of His divinity, and finds in each of His

names an anchor for its faith and an authoritative claim for its

obedience.

Such a wish as this benediction is the truest expression of human

friendship; it is the highest desire any of us can form for ourselves

or for those dearest to us. Do we keep it clear before us in our

intercourse with them so that the end of that intercourse will

naturally be such a prayer?

Our human love has its limitations. We can but wish for others the

grace which Christ can give, but neither our wishes nor His giving can

make the grace ours unless for ourselves we take the great gift that is

freely given to us of God. It is no accident that all his letters close

thus. This benediction is the last word of God's revelation to man, the

brightness in the clear west, the last strain of the great oratorio.

The last word or last book of Scripture is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus

Christ be with you all.' Let us take up the solemn Amen in our lips and

in our hearts.

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COLOSSIANS

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SAINTS, BELIEVERS, BRETHREN

' . . . The saints and faithful brethren in Christ.'--Col. i. 2.

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,' says the Acts

of the Apostles. It was a name given by outsiders, and like most of the

instances where a sect, or school, or party is labelled with the name

of its founder, it was given in scorn. It hit and yet missed its mark.

The early believers were Christians, that is, Christ's men, but they

were not merely a group of followers of a man, like many other groups

of whom the Empire at that time was full. So they never used that name

themselves. It occurs twice only in Scripture, once when King Agrippa

was immensely amused at the audacity of Paul in thinking that he would

easily make 'a Christian' of him; and once when Peter speaks of

'suffering as a Christian,' where he is evidently quoting, as it were,

the indictment on which the early believers were tried and punished.

What did they call themselves then?

I have chosen this text not for the purpose of speaking about it only,

but because it gathers together in brief compass the three principal

designations by which the early believers knew themselves.

'Saints'--that tells their relation to God, as well as their character,

for it means 'consecrated,' set apart for Him, and therefore pure;

'faithful'--that means 'full of faith' and is substantially equivalent

to the usual 'believers,' which defines their relation to Jesus Christ

as the Revealer of God; 'brethren'--that defines their relation and

sentiment towards their fellows. These terms go a great deal deeper

than the nickname which the wits of Antioch invented. The members of

the Church were not content with the vague 'Christian,' but they called

themselves 'saints,' 'believers,' 'brethren.' One designation does not

appear here, which we must take into account for completeness: the

earliest of all--disciples. Now, I purpose to bring together these four

names, by which the early believers thought and spoke of themselves, in

order to point the lessons as to our position and our duty, which are

wrapped up in them. And I may just say that, perhaps, it is no sign of

advance that the Church, as years rolled on, accepted the world's name

for itself, and that people found it easier to call themselves

'Christians'--which did not mean very much--than to call themselves

'saints' or 'believers.'

Now then, to begin with,

I. They were 'Disciples' first of all.

The facts as to the use of that name are very plain, and as instructive

as they are plain. It is a standing designation in the Gospels, both in

the mouths of friends and of outsiders; it is sometimes, though very

sparingly, employed by Jesus Christ Himself. It persists on through the

book of the Acts of the Apostles, and then it stops dead, and we never

hear it again.

Now its existence at first, and its entire abandonment afterwards, both

seem to me to carry very valuable lessons. Let me try to work them out.

Of course, 'disciple' or 'scholar' has for its correlative--as the

logicians call it--'teacher.' And so we find that as the original

adherents of Jesus called themselves 'disciples,' they addressed Him as

'Master,' which is the equivalent of 'Rabbi.' That at once suggests the

thought that to themselves, and to the people who saw the origination

of the little Christian community, the Lord and His handful of

followers seemed just to be like John and his disciples, the Pharisees

and their disciples, and many another Rabbi and his knot of admiring

adherents. Therefore whilst the name was in one view fitting, it was

conspicuously inadequate, and as time went on, and the Church became

more conscious of the uniqueness of the bond that knit it to Jesus

Christ, it instinctively dropped the name 'disciple,' and substituted

others more intimate and worthy.

But yet it remains permanently true, that Christ's followers are

Christ's scholars, and that He is their Rabbi and Teacher. Only the

peculiarity, the absolute uniqueness, of His attitude and action as a

Teacher lies in two things: one, that His main subject was Himself, as

He said, 'I am the Truth,' and consequently His characteristic demand

from His scholars was not, as with other teachers, 'Accept this, that,

or the other doctrine which I propound,' but 'Believe in Me'; and the

other, that He seldom if ever argues, or draws conclusions from

previous premises, that He never speaks as if He Himself had learnt and

fought His way to what He is saying, or betrays uncertainty,

limitation, or growth in His opinions, and that for all confirmation of

His declarations, He appeals only to the light within and to His own

authority: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you.' No wonder that the common

people were astonished at His teaching, and felt that here was an

authority in which the wearisome citations of what Rabbi So-and-So had

said, altogether lacked.

That teaching abides still, and, as I believe, opens out into, and is

our source of, all that we know--in distinction and contrast from,

'imagine,' 'hope,' 'fear'--of God, and of ourselves, and of the future.

It casts the clearest light on morals for the individual and on

politics for the community. Whatever men may say about Christianity

being effete, it will not be effete till the world has learnt and

absorbed the teaching of Jesus Christ; and we are a good long way from

that yet!

If He is thus the Teacher, the perpetual Teacher, and the only Teacher,

of mankind in regard to all these high things about God and man and the

relation between them, about life and death and the world, and about

the practice and conduct of the individual and of the community, then

we, if we are His disciples, build houses on the rock, in the degree in

which we not only hear but do the things that He commands. For this

Teacher is no theoretical handler of abstract propositions, but the

authoritative imposer of the law of life, and all His words have a

direct bearing upon conduct. Therefore it is vain for us to say: 'Lord,

Lord, Thou hast taught in our streets and we have accepted Thy

teaching.' He looks down upon us from the Throne, as He looked upon the

disciples in that upper room, and He says to each of us: 'If ye know

these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

But the complete disappearance of the name as the development of the

Church advanced, brings with it another lesson, and that is, that

precious and great as are the gifts which Jesus Christ bestows as a

Teacher, and unique as His act and attitude in that respect are, the

name either of teacher or of disciple fails altogether to penetrate to

the essence of the relation which knits us together. It is not enough

for our needs that we shall be taught. The worst man in the world knows

a far nobler morality than the best man practises. And if it were true,

as some people superficially say is the case, that evil-doing is the

result of ignorance, there would be far less evil-doing in the world

than, alas! there is. It is not for the want of knowing, that we go

wrong, as our consciences tell us; but it is for want of something that

can conquer the evil tendencies within, and lift off the burden of a

sinful past which weighs on us. As in the carboniferous strata what was

pliant vegetation has become heavy mineral, our evil deeds lie heavy on

our souls. What we need is not to be told what we ought to be, but to

be enabled to be it. Electricity can light the road, and it can drive

the car along it; and that is what we want, a dynamic as well as an

illuminant, something that will make us able to do and to be what

conscience has told us we ought to be and do.

Teacher? Yes. But if only teacher, then He is nothing more than one of

a multitude who in all generations have vainly witnessed to sinful men

of the better path. There is no reformation for the individual, and

little hope for humanity, in a Christ whom you degrade to the level of

a Rabbi, or in a Church which has not pressed nearer to Him than to

feel itself His disciples.

There was a man who came to Jesus by night, and was in the dark about

the Jesus to whom he came, and he said, 'We know that Thou art a

Teacher come from God.' But Jesus did not accept the witness, though a

young teacher fighting for recognition might have been glad to get it

from an authoritative member of the Sanhedrim. But He answered, 'Except

a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' If we need to

be born again before we see it, it is not teachers of it that will

serve our turn, but One who takes us by the hand, and translates us out

of the tyranny of the darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's

love. So much, then, for the first of these names and lessons.

Now turn to the second--

II. The Disciples must be Believers.

That name begins to appear almost immediately after Pentecost, and

continues throughout. It comes in two forms, one which is in my text,

'the faithful,' meaning thereby not the reliable, but the people that

are full of faith; the other, meaning the same thing, they who believe,

the 'believers.' The Church found that 'disciple' was not enough. It

went deeper; and, with a true instinct, laid hold of the unique bond

which knits men to their Lord and Saviour. That name indicates that

Jesus Christ appears to the man who has faith in a new character. He is

not any longer the Teacher who is to be listened to, but He is the

Object of trust. And that implies the recognition, first, of His

Divinity, which alone is strong enough to bear up the weight of

millions of souls leaning hard upon it; and, second, of what He has

done and not merely of what He has said. We accept the Teacher's word;

we trust the Saviour's Cross. And in the measure in which men learned

that the centre of the work of the Rabbi Jesus was the death of the

Incarnate Son of God, their docility was sublimed into faith.

That faith is the real bond that knits men to Jesus Christ. We are

united to Him, and become recipient of the gifts that He has to bestow,

by no sacraments, by no externals, by no reverential admiration of His

supreme wisdom and perfect beauty of character, not by assuming the

attitude of the disciple, but by flinging our whole selves upon Him,

because He is our Saviour. That unites us to Jesus Christ; nothing else

does. Faith is the opening of the heart, by which all His power can be

poured into us. It is the grasping of His hand, by which, even though

the cold waters be above our knees and be rising to our hearts, we are

lifted above them and they are made a solid pavement for our feet.

Faith is the door opened by ourselves, and through which will come all

the Glory that dwelt between the cherubim, and will fill the secret

place in our hearts. To be the disciple of a Rabbi is something; to be

the 'faithful' dependent on the Saviour is to be His indeed.

And then there is to be remembered, further, that this bond, which is

the only vital link between a man and Christ, is therefore the basis of

all virtue, of all nobility, of all beauty of conduct, and that

'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' are its natural

efflorescence and fruit. And so that leads us to the third point--

III. The believing Disciple is a 'Saint.'

That name does not appear in the Gospels, but it begins to show in the

Acts of the Apostles, and it becomes extremely common throughout the

Epistles of Paul. He had no hesitation in calling the very imperfect

disciples in Corinth by this great name. He was going to rebuke them

for some very great offences, not only against Christian elevation of

conduct, but against common pagan morality; but he began by calling

them 'saints.'

What is a saint? First and foremost, a man who has given himself to

God, and is consecrated thereby. Whoever has cast himself on Christ,

and has taken Christ for his, therein and in the same degree as he is

exercising faith, has thus yielded himself to God. If your faith has

not led you to such a consecration of will and heart and self, you had

better look out and see whether it is faith at all. But then, because

faith involves the consecration of a man to God, and consecration

necessarily implies purity, since nothing can be laid on God's altar

which is not sanctified thereby, the name of saint comes to imply

purity of character. Sanctity is the Christian word which means the

very flower and fragrant aroma of what the world calls virtue.

But sanctity is not emotion, A man may luxuriate in devout feeling, and

sing and praise and pray, and be very far from being a saint; and there

is a great deal of the emotional Christianity of this day which has a

strange affinity for the opposite of saintship. Sanctity is not

aloofness. 'There were saints in C�sar's household'--a very unlikely

place; they were flowers on a dunghill, and perhaps their blossoms were

all the brighter because of what they grew on, and which they could

transmute from corruption into beauty. So sanctity is no blue ribbon of

the Christian profession, to be given to a few select (and mostly

ascetic) specimens of consecration, but it is the designation of each

of us, if we are disciples who are more than disciples, that is,

'believers.' And thus, brethren, we have to see to it that, in our own

cases, our faith leads to surrender, and our self-surrender to purity

of life and conduct. Faith, if real, brings sanctity; sanctity, if

real, is progressive. Sanctity, though imperfect, may be real.

IV. The believing Saints are 'Brethren.'

That is the name that predominates over all others in the latter

portions of the New Testament, and it is very natural that it should do

so. It reposes upon and implies the three preceding. Its rapid adoption

and universal use express touchingly the wonder of the early Church at

its own unity. The then world was rent asunder by deep clefts of

misunderstanding, alienation, animosity, racial divisions of Jew and

Greek, Parthian, Scythian; by sexual divisions which flung men and

women, who ought to have been linked hand in hand, and united heart to

heart, to opposite sides of a great gulf; by divisions of culture which

made wise men look down on the unlearned, and the unlearned hate the

wise men; by clefts of social position, and mainly that diabolical one

of slave and free. All these divisive and disintegrating forces were in

active operation. The only thing except Christianity, which produced

even a semblance of union, was the iron ring of the Roman power which

compressed them all into one indeed, but crushed the life out of them

in the process. Into that disintegrating world, full of mutual

repulsion, came One who drew men to Himself and said, 'One is your

Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' And to their own

astonishment, male and female, Greek and Jew, bond and free,

philosopher and fool, found themselves sitting at the same table as

members of one family; and they looked in each other's eyes and said,

'Brother!' There had never been anything like it in the world. The name

is a memorial of the unifying power of the Christian faith.

And it is a reminder to us of our own shortcomings. Of course, in the

early days, the little band were driven together, as sheep that stray

over a pasture in the sunshine will huddle into a corner in a storm, or

when the wolves are threatening. There are many reasons to-day which

make less criminal the alienation from one another of Christian

communities and Christian individuals. I am not going to dwell on the

evident signs in this day, for which God be thanked, that Christian men

are beginning, more than they once did, to realise their unity in Jesus

Christ, and to be content to think less of the things that separate

than of the far greater things that unite. But I would lay upon your

hearts, as individual parts of that great whole, this, that whatever

may be the differences in culture, outlook, social position, or the

like, between two Christian men, they each, the rich man and the poor,

the educated man and the unlettered one, the master and the servant,

ought to feel that deep down in their true selves they are nearer one

another than they are to the men who, differing from them in regard to

their faith in Jesus Christ, are like them in all these superficial

respects. Regulate your conduct by that thought.

That name, too, speaks to us of the source from which Christian

brotherhood has come. We are brethren of each other because we have one

Father, even God, and the Fatherhood which makes us brethren is not

that which communicates the common life of humanity, but that which

imparts the new life of sonship through Jesus Christ. So the name

points to the only way by which the world's dream of a universal

brotherhood can ever be fulfilled. If there is to be fraternity there

must be fatherhood, and the life which, possessed by each, makes a

family of all, is the life which He gives, who is 'the first-born among

many brethren,' and who, to them who believe on Him, gives power to

become the sons of God, and the brethren of all the other sons and

daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

So, dear friends, take these names, ponder their significance and the

duties they impose. Let us make sure that they are true of us. Do not

be content with the vague, often unmeaning name of Christian, but fill

it with meaning by being a believer on Christ, a saint devoted to God,

and a brother of all who, 'by like precious faith,' have become Sons of

God.

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THE GOSPEL-HOPE

'The hope of the Gospel.'--Col. i. 5.

'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them,' says the old

proverb. And yet it seems as if that were scarcely true in regard to

that strange faculty called Hope. It may well be a question whether on

the whole it has given us more pleasure than pain. How seldom it has

been a true prophet! How perpetually its pictures have been too highly

coloured! It has cast illusions over the future, colouring the far-off

hills with glorious purple which, reached, are barren rocks and cold

snow. It has held out prizes never won. It has made us toil and

struggle and aspire and fed us on empty husks. Either we have not got

what we expected or have found it to be less good than it appeared from

afar.

If we think of all the lies that hope has told us, of all the vain

expenditure of effort to which it has tempted us, of the little that

any of us have of what we began by thinking we should surely attain,

hope seems a questionable good, and yet how obstinate it is, living on

after all disappointments and drawing the oldest amongst us onwards.

Surely somewhere there must be a reason for this great and in some

respects awful faculty, a vindication of its existence in an adequate

object for its grasp.

The New Testament has much to say about hope. Christianity lays hold of

it and professes to supply it with its true nourishment and support.

Let us look at the characteristics of Christian hope, or, as our text

calls it, the hope of the Gospel, that is, the hope which the Gospel

creates and feeds in our souls.

I. What does it hope for?

The weakness of our earthly hopes is that they are fixed on things

which are contingent and are inadequate to make us blessed. Even when

tinted with the rainbow hues, which it lends them, they are poor and

small. How much more so when seen in the plain colourless light of

common day. In contrast with these the objects of the Christian hope

are certain and sufficient for all blessedness. In the most general

terms they may be stated as 'That blessed hope, even the appearing of

the Great God and our Saviour.' That is the specific Christian hope,

precise and definite, a real historical event, filling the future with

a certain steadfast light. Much is lost in the daily experience of all

believers by the failure to set that great and precise hope in its true

place of prominence. It is often discredited by millenarian dreams, but

altogether apart from these it has solidity and substance enough to

bear the whole weight of a world rested upon it.

That appearance of God brings with it the fulfilment of our highest

hopes in the 'grace that is to be brought to us at His appearing.' All

our blessedness of every kind is to be the result of the manifestation

of God in His unobscured glory. The mirrors that are set round the

fountain of light flash into hitherto undreamed-of brightness. It is

but a variation in terms when we describe the blessedness which is to

be the result of God's appearing as being the Hope of Salvation in its

fullest sense, or, in still other words, as being the Hope of Eternal

Life. Nothing short of the great word of the Apostle John, that when He

shall appear we shall be like Him, exhausts the greatness of the hope

which the humblest and weakest Christian is not only allowed but

commanded to cherish. And that great future is certainly capable of,

and in Scripture receives, a still more detailed specification. We

hear, for example, of the hope of Resurrection, and it is most natural

that the bodily redemption which Paul calls the adoption of the body

should first emerge into distinct consciousness as the principal object

of hope in the earliest Christian experience, and that the mighty

working whereby Jesus is able to subdue all things unto Himself, should

first of all be discerned to operate in changing the body of our

humiliation into the body of His glory.

But equally natural was it that no merely corporeal transformation

should suffice to meet the deep longings of Christian souls which had

learned to entertain the wondrous thought of likeness to God as the

certain result of the vision of Him, and so believers 'wait for the

hope of righteousness by faith.' The moral likeness to God, the

perfecting of our nature into His image, will not always be the issue

of struggle and restraint, but in its highest form will follow on

sight, even as here and now it is to be won by faith, and is more

surely attained by waiting than by effort.

The highest form which the object of our hope takes is, the Hope of the

Glory of God. This goes furthest; there is nothing beyond this. The

eyes that have been wearied by looking at many fading gleams and seen

them die away, may look undazzled into the central brightness, and we

may be sure that even we shall walk there like the men in the furnace,

unconsumed, purging our sight at the fountain of radiance, and being

ourselves glorious with the image of God. This is the crown of glory

which He has promised to them that love Him. Nothing less than this is

what our hope has to entertain, and that not as a possibility, but as a

certainty. The language of Christian hope is not perhaps this may be,

but verily it shall be. To embrace its transcendent certainties with a

tremulous faith broken by much unbelief, is sin.

II. The grounds on which the hope of the Gospel rests.

The grounds of our earthly hopes are for the most part possibilities,

or, at the best, probabilities turned by our wishes into certainties.

We moor our ships to floating islands which we resolve to think

continents. So our earthly hopes vary indefinitely in firmness and

substance. They are sometimes but wishes turned confident, and can

never rise higher than their source, or be more certain than it is. At

the best they are building on sand. At the surest there is an element

of risk in them. One singer indeed may take for his theme 'The

pleasures of Hope,' but another answers by singing of 'The fallacies of

Hope.' Earth-born hopes carry no anchor and have always a latent dread

looking out of their blue eyes.

But it is possible for us to dig down to and build on rock, to have a

future as certain as our past, to escape in our anticipations from the

region of the Contingent, and this we assuredly do when we take the

hope of the Gospel for ours, and listen to Paul proclaiming to us

'Christ which is our Hope,' or 'Christ in you the Hope of glory.' If

our faith grasps Jesus Christ risen from the dead and for us entered

into the heavenly state as our forerunner, our hope will see in Him the

pattern and the pledge of our manhood, and will begin to experience

even here and now the first real though faint accomplishments of

itself. The Gospel sets forth the facts concerning Christ which fully

warrant and imperatively require our regarding Him as the perfect

realised ideal of manhood as God meant it to be, and as bearing in

Himself the power to make all men even as He is. He has entered into

the fellowship of our humiliation and become bone of our bone and flesh

of our flesh that we might become life of His Life and spirit of His

Spirit. As certain as it is that 'we have borne the image of the

earthy,' so certain is it that 'we shall also bear the image of the

heavenly.'

What cruel waste of a divine faculty it is, then, of which we are all

guilty when we allow our hopes to be frittered away and dissipated on

uncertain and transient goods which they may never secure, and which,

even if secured, would be ludicrously or rather tragically insufficient

to make us blessed, instead of withdrawing them from all these and

fixing them on Him who alone is able to satisfy our hungry souls in all

their faculties for ever!

The hope of the Gospel is firm enough to rest our all upon because in

it, by 'two immutable things in which it is impossible that God should

lie,' His counsel and His oath, He has given strong encouragement to

them who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.

Well may the hope for which God's own eternal character is the

guarantee be called 'sure and steadfast.' The hope of the Gospel rests

at last on the Being and Heart of God. It is that which God 'who cannot

lie hath promised before the world was' is working towards whilst the

world lasts, and will accomplish when the world is no more. He has made

known His purpose and has pledged all the energies and tendernesses of

His Being to its realisation. Surely on this rock-foundation we may

rest secure. The hopes that grow on other soils creep along the

surface. The hope of the Gospel strikes its roots deep into the heart

of God.

III. What the hope of the Gospel is and does for us.

We cannot do better than to lay hold of some of the New Testament

descriptions of it. We recall first that great designation 'A good hope

through grace.' This hope is no illusion; it does not come from fumes

of fancy or the play of imagination. The wish is not father to the

thought. We do not make bricks without straw nor spin ropes of sand on

the shore of the great waste sea that waits to swallow us up. The cup

of Tantalus has had its leaks stopped; the sieve carries the treasure

unspilled. The rock can be rolled to the hill-top. All the

disappointments, fallacies, and torments of hope pass away. It never

makes ashamed. We have a solid certainty as solid as memory. The hope

which is through grace is the full assurance of hope, and that full

assurance is just what every other hope lacks. In that region and in

that region only we can either say I hope or I know.

Another designation is 'A lively hope.' It is no poor pale ghost

brightening and fading, fading and brightening, through which one can

see the stars shine, and of little power in practical life, but strong

and vigorous and not the least active amongst the many forces that make

up the sum of our lives.

It is most significantly designated as 'The blessed hope.' All others

quickly pass into sorrows. This alone gives lasting joys, for this

alone is blessed whilst it is only anticipation, and still more blessed

when its blossoms ripen into full fruition. In all earthly hopes there

is an element of unrest, but the hope of the Gospel is so remote, so

certain, and so satisfying, that it works stillness, and they who most

firmly grasp it 'do with patience wait for it.' Earthly hopes have

little moral effect and often loosen the sinews of the soul, and are

distinctly unfavourable to all strenuous effort. But 'every man that

hath this hope in Jesus purifieth himself even as He is pure,' and the

Apostle, whose keen insight most surely discerns the character-building

value of the fundamental facts of Christian experience, was not wrong

when he bid us find in the hope of the Gospel deeply rooted within us

the driving force of the most strenuous efforts after purity like His

whom it is our deepest desire and humble hope to become like.

Let us remember the double account which Scripture gives of the

discipline by which the hope of the Gospel is won for our very own. On

the one hand, we have 'joy and peace in believing, that we may abound

in hope.' Our faith breeds hope because it grasps the divine facts

concerning Jesus from which hope springs. And faith further breeds hope

because it kindles joy and peace, which are the foretastes and earnests

of the future blessedness. On the other hand, the very opposite

experiences work to the same end, for 'tribulation worketh patience,

and patience experience, and experience hope.' Sorrow rightly borne

tests for us the power of the Gospel and the reality of our faith, and

so gives us a firmer grip of hope and of Him on whom in the last result

it all depends. Out of this collision of flint and steel the spark

springs. The water churned into foam and tortured in the cataract has

the fair bow bending above it.

But this discipline will not achieve its result, therefore comes the

exhortation to us all, 'Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and

hope to the end.' The hope of the Gospel is the one thing that we need.

Without it all else is futile and frail. God alone is worthy to have

the whole weight and burden of a creature's hope fixed on Him, and it

is an everlasting truth that they who are 'without God in the world'

also 'have no hope.' Saints of old held fast by an assurance, which

they must often have felt left many questions still to be asked, and

because they were sure that they were continually with Him, were also

sure of His guidance through life and of His afterwards receiving them

to glory. But for us the twilight has broadened into day, and we shall

be wise if, knowing our defencelessness, and forsaking all the lies and

illusions of this vain present, we flee for refuge to lay hold on the

hope set before us in the Gospel.

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'ALL POWER'

'Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto

all patience and longsuffering with joy.'--Col. i. 11 (R.V.).

There is a wonderful rush and fervour in the prayers of Paul. No parts

of his letters are so lofty, so impassioned, so full of his soul, as

when he rises from speaking of God to men to speaking to God for men.

We have him here setting forth his loving desires for the Colossian

Christians in a prayer of remarkable fulness and sweep. Broadly taken,

it is for their perfecting in religious and moral excellence, and it is

very instructive to note the idea of what a good man is which is put

forth here.

The main petition is for wisdom and spiritual understanding applied

chiefly, as is to be carefully noted, to the knowledge of God's will.

The thought is that what it most imports us to know is the Will of God,

a knowledge not of merely speculative points in the mysteries of the

divine nature, but of that Will which it concerns us to know because it

is our life to do it. The next element in Paul's desires, as set forth

in the ideal here, is a worthy walk, a practical life, or course of

conduct which is worthy of Jesus Christ, and in every respect pleases

Him. The highest purpose of knowledge is a good life. The surest

foundation for a good life is a full and clear knowledge of the Will of

God.

Then follow a series of clauses which seem to expand the idea of the

worthy walk and to be co-ordinate or perhaps slightly causal, and to

express the continuous condition of the soul which is walking worthily.

Let us endeavour to gather from these words some hints as to what it is

God's purpose that we should become.

I. The many-sided strength which may be ours.

The form of the word 'strengthened' here would be more fully

represented by 'being strengthened,' and suggests an unintermitted

process of bestowal and reception of God's might rendered necessary by

our continuous human weakness, and by the tear and wear of life. As in

the physical life there must be constant renewal because there is

constant waste, and as every bodily action involves destruction of

tissue so that living is a continual dying, so is it in the mental and

still more in the spiritual life. Just as there must be a perpetual

oxygenation of blood in the lungs, so there must be an uninterrupted

renewal of spiritual strength for the highest life. It is demanded by

the conditions of our human weakness. It is no less rendered necessary

by the nature of the divine strength imparted, which is ever

communicating itself, and like the ocean cannot but pour so much of its

fulness as can be received into every creek and crack on its shore.

The Apostle not merely emphasises the continuousness of this

communicated strength, but its many-sided variety, by designating it

'all power.' In this whole context that word 'all' seems to have a

charm for him. We read in this prayer of 'all spiritual wisdom,' of

'walking worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing,' of 'fruit in every

good work,' and now of 'all power,' and lastly of 'all patience and

longsuffering.' These are not instances of being obsessed with a word,

but each of them has its own appropriate force, and here the

comprehensive completeness of the strength available for our many-sided

weakness is marvellously revealed. There is 'infinite riches in a

narrow room.' All power means every kind of power, be it bodily or

mental, for all variety of circumstances, and, Protean, to take the

shape of all exigencies. Most of us are strong only at points, and weak

in others. In all human experience there is a vulnerable spot on the

heel. The most glorious image, though it has a head of gold, ends in

feet, 'part of iron and part of clay.'

And if this ideal of many-sided power stands in contrast with the

limitations of human strength, how does it rebuke and condemn the very

partial manifestations of a very narrow and one-sided power which we

who profess to have received it set forth! We have access to a source

which can fill our whole nature, can flower into all gracious forms,

can cope with all our exigencies, and make us all-round men, complete

in Jesus Christ, and, having this, what do we make of it, what do we

show for it? Does not God say to us, 'Ye are not straitened in me, ye

are straitened in yourselves; I beseech you be ye enlarged.'

The conditions on our part requisite for possessing 'all might' are

plain enough. The earlier portion of the prayer plainly points to them.

The knowledge of God's Will and the 'walk worthy of the Lord' are the

means whereby the power which is ever eager to make its dwelling in us,

can reach its end. If we keep the channel unchoked, no doubt 'the river

of the water of life which proceedeth from the throne of God and the

Lamb' will rejoice to fill it to the brim with its flashing waters. If

we do not wrench away ourselves from contact with Him, He will

'strengthen us with all might.' If we keep near Him we may have calm

confidence that power will be ours that shall equal our need and

outstrip our desires.

II. The measure of the strength.

It is 'according to the power of His glory.' The Authorised Version but

poorly represents the fulness of the Apostle's thought, which is more

adequately and accurately expressed in the Revised Version. 'His glory'

is the flashing brightness of the divine self-manifestation, and in

that Light resides the strength which is the standard or measure of the

gift to us. The tremendous force of the sunbeam which still falls so

gently on a sleeper's face as not to disturb the closed eyes is but a

parable of the strength which characterises the divine glory. And

wonderful and condemnatory as the thought is, that power is the

unlimited limit of the possibilities of our possession. His gifts are

proportioned to His resources. While He is rich, can I be poor? The

only real limit to His bestowal is His own fulness. Of course, at each

moment, our capacity of receiving is for the time being the practical

limit of our possession, but that capacity varies indefinitely, and may

be, and should be, indefinitely and continuously increasing. It is an

elastic boundary, and hence we may go on making our own as much as we

will, and progressively more and more, of God's strength. He gives it

all, but there is a tragical difference between the full cup put into

our hands and the few drops carried to our lips. The key of the

treasure-chamber is in our possession, and on each of us His gracious

face smiles the permission which His gracious lips utter in words, 'Be

it unto thee even as thou wilt.' If we are conscious of defect, if our

weakness is beaten by the assaults of temptation, or crushed by sorrows

that ride it down in a fierce attack, the fault is our own. We have, if

we choose to make it our own and to use it as ours, more than enough to

make us 'more than conquerors' over all sins and all sorrows.

But when we contrast what we have by God's gift and what we have in our

personal experience and use in our daily life, the contrast may well

bring shame, even though the contrast brings to us hope to lighten the

shame. The average experience of present-day Christians reminds one of

the great tanks that may be seen in India, that have been suffered to

go to ruin, and so an elaborate system of irrigation comes to nothing,

and the great river that should have been drawn off into them runs past

them, all but unused. Repair them and keep the sluices open, and all

will blossom again.

III. The great purpose of this strength.

'Patience and longsuffering with joyfulness' seems at first but a poor

result of such a force, but it comes from a heart that was under no

illusions as to the facts of human life, and it finds a response in us

all. It may be difficult to discriminate 'patience' from

'longsuffering,' but the general notion here is that one of the highest

uses for which divine strength is given to us, is to make us able to

meet the antagonism of evil without its shaking our souls. He who

patiently endures without despondency or the desire to 'recompense evil

for evil,' and to whom by faith even 'the night is light about him,' is

far on the way to perfection. God is always near us, but never nearer

than when our hearts are heavy and our way rough and dark. Our sorrows

make rents through which His strength flows. We can see more of heaven

when the leaves are off the trees. It is a law of the Divine dealings

that His strength is 'made perfect in weakness.' God leads us in to a

darkened room to show us His wonders.

That strength is to be manifested by us in 'patience and

longsuffering,' both of which are to have blended with them a real

though apparently antagonistic joy. True and profound grief is not

opposed to such patience, but the excess of it, the hopeless and

hysterical outbursts certainly are. We are all like the figures in some

old Greek temples which stand upright with their burdens on their

heads. God's strength is given that we may bear ours calmly, and

upright like these fair forms that hold up the heavy architecture as if

it were a feather, or like women with water-jars on their heads, which

only make their carriage more graceful and their step more firm.

How different the patience which God gives by His own imparted

strength, from the sullen submission or hysterical abandonment to

sorrow, or the angry rebellion characterising Godless grief! Many of us

think that we can get on very well in prosperity and fine weather

without Him. We had better ask ourselves what we are going to do when

the storm comes, which comes to all some time or other.

The word here rendered 'patience' is more properly 'perseverance.' It

is not merely a passive but an active virtue. We do not receive that

great gift of divine strength to bear only, but also to work, and such

work is one of the best ways of bearing and one of the best helps to

doing so. So in our sorrows and trials let us feel that God's strength

is not all given us to be expended in our own consolation, but also to

be used in our plain duties. These remain as imperative though our

hearts are beating like hammers, and there is no more unwise and

cowardly surrender to trouble than to fling away our tools and fold our

hands idly on our laps.

But Paul lays a harder duty on us even in promising a great gift to us,

when he puts before us an ideal of joy mingling with patience and

longsuffering. The command would be an impossible one if there were not

the assurance that we should be 'strengthened with all might.' We

plainly need an infusion of diviner strength than our own, if that

strange marriage of joy and sorrow should take place, and they should

at once occupy our hearts. Yet if His strength be ours we shall be

strong to submit and acquiesce, strong to look deep enough to see His

will as the foundation of all and as ever busy for our good, strong to

hope, strong to discern the love at work, strong to trust the Father

even when He chastens. And all this will make it possible to have the

paradox practically realised in our own experience, 'As sorrowful yet

always rejoicing.' One has seen potassium burning underwater. Our joy

may burn under waves of sorrow. Let us bring our weakness to Jesus

Christ and grasp Him as did the sinking Peter. He will breathe His own

grace into us, and speak to our feeble and perchance sorrowful hearts,

as He had done long before Paul's words to the Colossians, 'My grace is

sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

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THANKFUL FOR INHERITANCE

'Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the

inheritance of the saints in light.'--Col. i. 12 (R.V.)

It is interesting to notice how much the thought of inheritance seems

to have been filling the Apostle's mind during his writing of Ephesians

and Colossians. Its recurrence is one of the points of contact between

them. For example, in Ephesians, we read, 'In whom also were made a

heritage' (i. 11); 'An earnest of our inheritance' (i. 14); 'His

inheritance in the saints' (i. 18); 'Inheritance in the Kingdom of

Christ' (v. 5). We notice too that in the address to the Elders of the

Church at Ephesus, we read of 'the inheritance among all them that are

sanctified' (Acts 20-32).

In the text the climax of the Apostle's prayer is presented as

thankfulness, the perpetual recognition of the Divine hand in all that

befalls us, the perpetual confidence that all which befalls us is good,

and the perpetual gushing out towards Him of love and praise. The

highest diligence, the most strenuous fruit-bearing, and the most

submissive patience and longsuffering would be incomplete without the

consecration of a grateful heart, and the noblest beauty of a Christian

character would lack its rarest lustre. This crown of Christian

perfectness the Apostle regards as being called into action mainly by

the contemplation of that great act and continuous work of God's

Fatherly love by which he makes us fit for our portion of the

inheritance which the same love has prepared for us. That inheritance

is the great cause for Christian thankfulness; the more immediate cause

is His preparation of us for it. So we have three points here to

consider; the inheritance; God's Fatherly preparation of His children

for it; the continual temper of thankfulness which these should evoke.

I. The Inheritance.

The frequent recurrence of this idea in the Old Testament supplies Paul

with a thought which he uses to set forth the most characteristic

blessings of the New. The promised land belonged to Israel, and each

member of each tribe had his own little holding in the tribal

territory. Christians have in common the higher spiritual blessings

which Christ brings, and Himself is, and each individual has his own

portion of, the general good.

We must begin by dismissing from our minds the common idea, which a

shallow experience tends to find confirmed by the associations

ordinarily attached to the word 'inheritance,' that it is entered upon

by death. No doubt, that great change does effect an unspeakable change

in our fitness for, and consequently in our possession of, the gifts

which we receive from Christ's pierced hands, and, as the Apostle has

told us, the highest of these possessed on earth is but the 'earnest of

the inheritance'; but we must ever bear in mind that the distinction

between a Christian life on earth and one in heaven is by no means so

sharply drawn in Scripture as it generally is by us, and that death has

by no means so great importance as we faithlessly attribute to it. The

life here and hereafter is like a road which passes the frontiers of

two kingdoms divided by a bridged river, but runs on in the same

direction on both sides of the stream. The flood had to be forded until

Jesus bridged it. The elements of the future and the present are the

same, as the apostolic metaphor of the 'earnest of the inheritance'

teaches us. The handful of soil which constitutes the 'arles' is part

of the broad acres made over by it.

We should be saved from many unworthy conceptions of the future life,

if we held more steadfastly to the great truth that God Himself is the

portion of the inheritance. The human spirit is too great and too

exacting to be satisfied with anything less than Him, and the

possession of Him opens out into every blessedness, and includes all

the minor joys and privileges that can gladden and enrich the soul. We

degrade the future if we think of it only, or even chiefly, as a state

in which faculties are enlarged, and sorrows and sins are for ever

ended. Neither such negatives as 'no night there,' 'neither sorrow nor

crime,' 'no more pain,' nor such metaphors as 'white robes' and 'golden

crowns' and 'seats on thrones' are enough. We are 'heirs of God,' and

only as we possess Him, and know that we are His, and He is ours, are

we 'rich to all intents of bliss.' That inheritance is here set forth

as being 'in light' and as belonging to saints. Light is the element

and atmosphere of God. He is in light. He is the fountain of all light.

He is light; perfect in wisdom, perfect in purity. The sun has its

spots, but in Him is no darkness at all. Moons wax and wane, shadows of

eclipse fall, stars have their time to set, but 'He is the Father of

lights with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by

turning.' All that light is focussed in Jesus the Light of the world.

That Light fills the earth, but here it shineth in darkness that

obstructs its rays. But there must be a place and a time where the

manifestation of God corresponds with the reality of God, where His

beams pour out and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof, nothing

which they do not bless, nothing which does not flash them back

rejoicing. There is a land whereof the Lord God is the Light. In it is

the inheritance of the 'saints,' and in its light live the nations of

the saved, and have God for their companion. All darkness of ignorance,

of sorrow, and of sin will fade away as the night flees and ceases to

be, before the rising sun.

The phrase 'to be partakers' is accurately rendered 'for the portion,'

and carries a distinct allusion to the partition of the promised land

to Israel by which each man had his lot or share in the common

inheritance. So the one word inheritance brings with it blessed

thoughts of a common possession of a happy society in which no man's

gain is another's loss, and all envyings, rivalries, and jealousies

have ceased to be, and the other word, 'the portion,' suggests the

individual possession by each of his own vision and experience. Each

man's 'portion' is capable of growth; each has as much of God as he can

hold. The measure of his desire is the measure of his capacity. There

are infinite differences in the 'portions' of the saints on earth, and

heaven is robbed of one of its chief charms unless we recognise that

there are infinite differences among the saints there. For both states

the charter by which the portion is held is 'Be it unto thee even as

thou wilt,' and in both the law holds 'To him that hath shall be

given.'

II. The Fatherly preparation for the Inheritance.

It is obvious from all which we have been saying that without holiness

no man shall see the Lord. The inheritance being what it is, the

possession, the enjoyment of communion with a Holy God, it is

absolutely incapable of being entered upon by any who are unholy. That

is true about both the partial possession of the earnest of it here and

of its fulness hereafter. In the present life all tolerated sin bars us

out from enjoying God, and in the future nothing can enter that

defileth nor whatsoever worketh or maketh a lie. There are many people

who think that they would like 'to go to heaven,' but who would find it

difficult to answer such questions as these: Do you like to think of

God? Do you find any joy in holy thoughts? What do you feel about

prayer? Does the name of Christ make your heart leap? Is righteousness

your passion? If you have to answer these questions with a silence

which is the saddest negative, what do you think you would do in

heaven? I remember that the Greenlanders told the Moravian missionaries

who were trying to move them by conventional pictures of its delights,

that the heaven which these pious souls had painted would not do for

them, for there were no seals there. There are thousands of us who, if

we spoke the truth, would say the same thing, with the necessary

variations arising from our environment. There is not a spinning-mill

in it all. How would some of us like that? There is not a ledger, nor a

theatre, no novels, no amusements. Would it not be intolerable ennui to

be put down in such an order of things? You would be like the

Israelites, loathing 'this light bread' and hungering for the

strong-smelling and savoury-tasting leeks and garlic, even if in order

to taste them you had to be slaves again.

Heaven would be no heaven to you if you could go there and be thus

minded. But you could not. God Himself cannot carry men thither but by

fitting them for it. It is not a place so much as a state, and the

mighty hand that works on one side of the thick curtain preparing the

inheritance in light for the saints, is equally busy on this side

making the saints meet for the inheritance.

I do not wish to enter here on grammatical niceties, but I must point

out that the form of the word which the Apostle employs to express it

points to an act in the past which still runs on.

The Revised Version's rendering, 'made us meet,' is preferable to the

Authorised Version's, because of its omission of the 'hath' which

relegates the whole process of preparation to the past. And it is of

importance to recognise that the difference between these two

representations of the divine preparation is not a piece of pedantry,

for that preparation has indeed its beginnings in the past of every

Christian soul, but is continuous throughout its whole earthly

experience. There is the great act of forgiveness and justifying which

is cotemporaneous with the earliest and most imperfect faith, and there

is the being born again, the implanting of a new life which is the life

of Christ Himself, and has no spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing. That

new life is infantile, but it is there, the real man, and it will grow

and conquer. Take an extreme case and suppose a man who has just

received forgiveness for his past and the endowment of a new nature.

Though he were to die at that moment he would still in the basis of his

being and real self be meet for the inheritance. He who truly trusts in

Jesus is passed from death unto life, though the habits of sins which

are forgiven still cling to him, and his new life has not yet exercised

a controlling power or begun to build up character. So Christians ought

not to think that, because they are conscious of much unholiness, they

are not ready for the inheritance. The wild brigand through whose

glazing eyeballs faith looked out to his fellow-sufferer on the central

cross was adjudged meet to be with him in Paradise, and if all his

deeds of violence and wild outrages on the laws of God and man did not

make him unmeet, who amongst us need write bitter things against

himself? The preparation is further effected through all the future

earthly life. The only true way to regard everything that befalls us

here is to see in it the Fatherly discipline preparing us for a fuller

possession of a richer inheritance. Gains and losses, joys and sorrows,

and all the endless variety of experiences through which we all have to

pass, are an unintelligible mystery unless we apply to them this

solution, 'He for our profit that we might be partakers of His

holiness.' It is not a blind Fate or a still blinder Chance that

hurtles sorrows and changes at us, but a loving Father; and we do not

grasp the meaning of our lives unless we feel, even about their darkest

moments, that the end of them all is to make us more capable of

possessing more of Himself.

III. The thankfulness which these thoughts should evoke.

Thankfulness ought to be a sweet duty. It is a joy to cherish

gratitude. Generous hearts do not need to be told to be thankful, and

they who are only thankful to order are not thankful at all. In nothing

is the ordinary experience of the ordinary Christian more defective,

and significant of the deficiencies of their faith, than in the

tepidness and interruptedness of their gratitude. The blessings

bestowed are continuous and unspeakable. The thanks returned are

grudging and scanty. The river that flows from God is 'full of water'

and pours out unceasingly, and all that we return is a tiny trickle,

often choked and sometimes lost in the sands.

Our thankfulness ought to be constant. The fire on the altar should

never be quenched. The odour of the sweet-smelling incense should ever

ascend. Why is it that we have so little of this grace which the

Apostle in our text regards as the precious stone that binds all

Christian graces together, the sparkling crest of the wave of a

Christian life? Mainly because we have so little of the habit of

regarding all things as God's Fatherly discipline and meditating on

that for which they are making us meet. We need a far more habitual

contemplation of our inheritance, of our experience as lovingly given

by God to fit us for it and of the darkest hours which would otherwise

try our faith and silence our praise as necessary parts of that

preparation. If this be our habitual attitude of mind, and these be

ever present to us, our song will be always of His mercy and our whole

lives a thank-offering.

The text is a prophecy describing the inheritance in its perfect form.

Earthly life must be ended before it is fully understood. Down in the

valleys we praised God, but tears and mysteries sometimes saddened our

songs; but now on the summit surveying all behind, and knowing by a

blessed eternity of experience to what it has led, even an inheritance

incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, we shall praise

Him with a new song for ever.

Thankfulness is the one element of worship common to earth and heaven,

to angels and to us. Whilst they sing, 'Bless the Lord all ye His

hosts,' redeemed men have still better reason to join in the chorus and

answer, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.'

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CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR

'I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me

mightily.'--Col. i. 29.

I have chosen this text principally because it brings together the two

subjects which are naturally before us to-day. All 'Western

Christendom,' as it is called, is to-day commemorating the Pentecostal

gift. My text speaks about that power that 'worketh in us mightily.'

True, the Apostle is speaking in reference to the fiery energy and

persistent toil which characterised him in proclaiming Christ, that he

might present men perfect before Him. But the same energy which he

expended on his apostolic office he expended on his individual

personality. And he would not have discharged the one unless he had

first laboured on the other. And although in a letter contemporary with

this one from which my text is taken he speaks of himself as no longer

young, but 'such an one as Paul the aged, and likewise, also a prisoner

of Jesus Christ,' the young spirit was in him, and the continual

pressing forward to unattained heights. And that is the spirit, not

only of a section of the Church divided from the rest by youth and by

special effort, but of the whole Church if it is worth calling a

Church, and unless it is thus instinct, it is a mere dead organisation.

So I hope that what few things I have to say may apply to, and be felt

to be suitable by all of us, whether we are nominally Christian

Endeavourers or not. If we are Christian people, we are such. If we are

not endeavouring, shall I venture to say we are not Christians? At any

rate, we are very poor ones.

Now here, then, are two plain things, a great universal Christian duty

and a sufficient universal Christian endowment. 'I work striving'; that

is the description of every true Christian. 'I work striving, according

to His working, who worketh in me mightily': there is the great gift

which makes the work and the striving possible. Let me briefly deal,

then, with these two.

I. The solemn universal Christian obligation.

Now the two words which the Apostle employs here are both of them very

emphatic. 'His words were half battles,' was said about Luther. It may

be as truly said about Paul. And that word 'work' which he employs,

means, not work with one hand, or with a delicate forefinger, but it

means toil up to the verge of weariness. The notion of fatigue is

almost, I might say, uppermost in the word as it is used in the New

Testament. Some people like to 'labour' so as never to turn a hair, or

bring a sweat-drop on to their foreheads. That is not Christian

Endeavour. Work that does not 'take it out of you' is not worth doing.

The other word 'striving' brings up the picture of the arena with the

combatants' strain of muscle, their set teeth, their quick, short

breathing, their deadly struggle. That is Paul's notion of Endeavour.

Now 'Endeavour,' like a great many other words, has a baser and a

nobler side to it. Some people, when they say, 'I will endeavour,' mean

that they are going to try in a half-hearted way, with no prospect of

succeeding. That is not Christian Endeavour. The meaning of the

word--for the expression in my text might just as well be rendered

'endeavouring' as 'striving'--is that of a buoyant confident effort of

all the concentrated powers, with the certainty of success. That is the

endeavour that we have to cultivate as Christian men. And there is only

one field of human effort in which that absolute confidence that it

shall not be in vain is anything but presumptuous arrogance; namely, in

the effort after making ourselves what God means us to be, what Jesus

Christ longs for us to be, what the Spirit of God is given to us in

order that we should be. 'We shall not fail,' ought to be the word of

every man and woman when they set themselves to the great task of

working out, in their own characters and personalities, the Divine

intention which is made a Divine possibility by the sacrifice of Jesus

Christ and the gift of the Divine Spirit.

So then what we come to is just this, dear brethren, if we are

Christians at all, we have to make a business of our religion; to go

about it as if we meant work. Ah! what a contrast there is between the

languid way in which Christian men pursue what the Bible designates

their 'calling' and that in which men with far paltrier aims pursue

theirs! And what a still sadder contrast there is between the way in

which we Christians go about our daily business, and the way in which

we go about our Christian life! Why, a man will take more pains to

learn some ornamental art, or some game, than he will ever take to make

himself a better Christian. The one is work. What is the other? To a

very large extent dawdling and make-believe.

You remember the old story,--it may raise a smile, but there should be

a deep thought below the smile,--of the little child that said as to

his father that 'he was a Christian, but he had not been working much

at it lately.' Do not laugh. It is a great deal too true of--I will not

venture to say what percentage of--the professing Christians of this

day. Work at your religion. That is the great lesson of my text.

Endeavour with confidence of success. The Book of Proverbs says: 'He

that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster,'

and that is true. A man that does 'the work of the Lord negligently' is

scarcely to be credited with doing it at all. Dear friends, young or

old, if you name the name of Christ, be in earnest, and make earnest

work of your Christian character.

And now may I venture two or three very plain exhortations? First, I

would say--if you mean to make your Christian life a piece of genuine

work and striving, the first thing that you have to do is to endeavour

in the direction of keeping its aim very clear before you. There are

many ways in which we may state the goal of the Christian life, but let

us put it now into the all-comprehensive form of likeness to Jesus

Christ, by entire conformity to His Example and full interpretation of

His life. I do not say 'Heaven'; I say 'Christ.'

That is our aim, the loftiest idea of development that any human spirit

can grasp, and rising high above a great many others which are noble

but incomplete. The Christian ideal is the greatest in the universe.

There is no other system of thought that paints man as he is, so

darkly; there is none that paints man as he is meant to be, in such

radiant colours. The blacks upon the palette of Christianity are

blacker, and the whites are whiter, and the golden is more radiant,

than any other painter has ever mixed. And so just because the aim

which lies before the least and lowest of us, possessing the most

imperfect and rudimentary Christianity, is so transcendent and lofty,

it is hard to keep it clear before our eyes, especially when all the

shabby little necessities of daily life come in to clutter up the

foreground, and hide the great distance. Men may live up at Darjeeling

there on the heights for weeks, and never see the Himalayas towering

opposite. The lower hills are clear; the peaks are wreathed in cloud.

So the little aims, the nearer purposes, stand out distinct and

obtrusive, and force themselves, as it were, upon our eyeballs, and the

solemn white Throne of the Eternal away across the marshy levels, is

often hid, and it needs an effort for us to keep it clear before us.

One of the main reasons for much that is unsatisfactory in the

spiritual condition of the average Christian of this day is precisely

that he has not burning ever before him there, the great aim to which

he ought to be tending. So he gets loose and diffused, and vague and

uncertain. That is what Paul tells you when he proposes himself as an

example: 'So run I, not as uncertainly,' The man who knows where he is

running makes a bee-line for the goal. If he is not sure of his

destination, of course he zigzags. 'So fight I, not as one that beateth

the air'--if I see my antagonist I can hit him. If I do not see him

clearly I strike like a swordsman in the dark, at random, and my sword

comes back unstained. If you want to make the harbour, keep the harbour

lights always [INS: clear :INS] before you, or you will go yawing

about, and washing here and there, in the trough of the wave, [INS: and

:INS] the tempest will be your master. If you do not [INS: know :INS]

where you are going you will have to say, like the [INS: men :INS] in

the old story in the Old Book, 'Thy servant went no whither.' If you

are going to endeavour, endeavour first to keep the goal clear before

you.

And endeavour next to keep up communion with Jesus Christ, which is the

secret of all peaceful and of all noble living. And endeavour next

after concentration. And what does that mean? It means that you have to

detach yourself from hindrances. It means that you have to prosecute

the Christian aim all through the common things of Christian life. If

it were not possible to be pursuing the great aim of likeness to Jesus

Christ, in the veriest secularities of the most insignificant and

trivial occupations, then it would be no use talking about that being

our aim. If we are not making ourselves more like Jesus Christ by the

way in which we handle our books, or our pen, or our loom, or our

scalpel, or our kitchen utensils, then there is little chance of our

ever making ourselves like Jesus Christ. For it is these trifles that

make life, and to concentrate ourselves on the pursuit of the Christian

aim is, in other words, to carry that Christian aim into every

triviality of our daily lives.

There are three Scripture passages which set forth various aspects of

the aim that we have before us, and from each of these aspects deduce

the one same lesson. The Apostle says 'giving all diligence, add to

your faith virtue,' etc., 'for if ye do these things ye shall never

fail.' He also exhorts: 'Give diligence to make your calling and

election sure.' And finally he says: 'Be diligent, that ye may be found

of Him in peace, without spot, blameless.' There are three aspects of

the Christian course, and the Christian aim, the addition to our faith

of all the clustering graces and virtues and powers that can be hung

upon it, like jewels on the neck of a queen; the making our calling and

election sure, and the being found at last tranquil, spotless,

stainless, and being found so by Him. These great aims are incumbent on

all Christians, they require diligence, and ennoble the diligence which

they require.

So, brethren, we have all to be Endeavourers if we are Christians, and

that to the very end of our lives. For our path is the only path on

which men tread that has for its goal an object so far off that it

never can be attained, so near that it can ever be approached. This

infinite goal of the Christian Endeavour means inspiration for youth,

and freshness for old age, and that man is happy who can say: 'Not as

though I had already attained' at the end of a long life, and can say

it, not because he has failed, but because in a measure he has

succeeded. Other courses of life are like the voyages of the old

mariners which were confined within the narrow limits of the

Mediterranean, and steered from headland to headland. But the Christian

passes through the jaws of the straits, and comes out on a boundless

sunlit ocean where, though he sees no land ahead, he knows there is a

peaceful shore, beyond the western waves. 'I work striving.'

Now one word as to the other thought that is here, and that is

II. The all-sufficient Christian gift.

'According to His working, which worketh in me mightily.' I need not

discuss whether 'His' in my text refers to God or to Christ. The thing

meant is the operation upon the Christian spirit, of that Divine Spirit

whose descent the Church to-day commemorates. At this stage of my

sermon I can only remind you in a word, first of all, that the Apostle

here is arrogating to himself no special or peculiar gift, is not

egotistically setting forth something which he possessed and other

Christian people did not--that power which, 'working in him mightily,'

worked in all his brethren as well. It was his conviction and his

teaching--would that it were more operatively and vitally the

conviction of all professing Christians to-day, and would that it were

more conspicuously, and in due proportion to the rest of Christian

truth, the teaching of all Christian teachers to-day!--that that Divine

power is in the very act of faith received and implanted in every

believing soul. 'Know ye not,' the Apostle could say to his hearers,

'that ye have the Spirit of God, except ye be reprobates.' I doubt

whether the affirmative response would spring to the lips of all

professing or real Christians to-day as swiftly as it would have done

then. And I cannot help feeling, and feeling with increasing gravity of

pressure as the days go on, that the thing that our churches, and we as

individuals, perhaps need most to-day, is the replacing of that great

truth--I do not call it a 'doctrine,' that is cold, it is

experience--in its proper place. They who believe on Him do receive a

new life, a supernatural communication of the new Spirit, to be the

very power that rules in their lives.

It is an inward gift. It is not like the help that men can render us,

given from without and apprehended and incorporated with ourselves

through the medium of the understanding or of the heart. There is an

old story in the history of Israel about a young king that was bid by

the prophet to bend his bow against the enemies of Israel, as a symbol;

and the old prophet put his withered, skinny brown hand on the young

man's fleshy one, and then said to him, 'Shoot.' But this Divine Spirit

comes to strengthen us in a more intimate and blessed fashion than

that, for it glides into our hearts and dwells in our spirits, and our

work, as my text says, is His working. This 'working within' is stated

in the original of my text most emphatically, for it is literally 'the

inworking which inworketh in me mightily.'

So, dear brethren, the first direct aim of all our endeavour ought to

be to receive and to keep and to increase our gift of that Divine

Spirit. The work and the striving of which my text speaks would be

sheer slavery unless we had that help. It would be impossible of

accomplishment unless we had it.

'If any power we have, it is to ill,

And all the power is Thine, to do and eke to will.'

Let us, then, begin our endeavour, not by working, but by receiving. Is

not that the very meaning of the doctrine that we are always talking

about, that men are saved, not by works but by faith? Does not that

mean that the first step is reception, and the first requisite is

receptiveness, and that then, and after that, second and not first,

come working and striving? To keep our hearts open by desire, to keep

them open by purity, are the essentials. The dove will not come into a

fouled nest. It is said that they forsake polluted places. But also we

have to use the power which is inwrought. Use is the way to increase

all gifts, from the muscle in your arm to the Christian life in your

spirit. Use it, and it grows. Neglect it, and it vanishes, and like the

old Jewish heroes, a man may go forth to exercise himself as of old

time, and know not that the Spirit of God hath departed from him. Dear

friends, do not bind yourselves to the slavery of Endeavour, until you

come into the liberty and wealth of receiving. He gives first, and then

says to you, 'Now go to work, and keep that good thing which is

committed unto thee.'

There is but one thought more in this last part of my text, which I

must not leave untouched, and that is that this sufficient and

universal gift is not only the means by which the great universal duty

can be discharged, but it ought to be the measure in which it is

discharged. 'I work according to the working in me.' That is, all the

force that came into Paul by that Divine Spirit, came out of Paul in

his Christian conduct, and the gift was not only the source, but also

the measure, of this man's Christian Endeavour. Is that true about us?

They say that the steam-engine is a most wasteful application of power,

that a great deal of the energy which is generated goes without ever

doing any work. They tell us that one of the great difficulties in the

way of economic application of electricity is the loss which comes

through using accumulators. Is not that like a great many of us? So

much power poured into us; so little coming out from us and translated

into actual work! Such a 'rushing mighty wind,' and the air about us so

heavy and stagnant and corrupt! Such a blaze of fire, and we so cold!

Such a cataract of the river of the water of life, and our lips parched

and our crops seared and worthless! Ah, brethren! when we look at

ourselves, and when we think of the condition of so many of the

churches to which we belong, the old rebuke of the prophet comes back

to us in this generation, 'Thou that art named the House of Israel, is

the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' We have an

all-sufficient power. May our working and striving be according to it,

and may we work mightily, being 'strong in the Lord, and in the power

of His might!'

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CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

'As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted

and builded up in Him.'--Col. ii. 6, 7 (R.V.).

It is characteristic of Paul that he should here use three figures

incongruous with each other to express the same idea, the figures of

walking, being rooted, and built up. They, however, have in common that

they all suggest an initial act by which we are brought into connection

with Christ, and a subsequent process flowing from and following on it.

Receiving Christ, being rooted in Him, being founded on Him, stand for

the first; walking in Him, growing up from the root in Him, being built

up on Him as foundation, stand for the second. Fully expressed then,

the text would run, 'As ye have received Christ, so walk in Him; as ye

have been rooted in Him, so grow up in Him; as ye have been founded on

Him, so be builded up.' These three clauses present the one idea in

slightly different forms. The first expresses Christian progress as the

manifestation before the world of an inward possession, the exhibition

in the outward life of a treasure hid in the heart. The second

expresses the same progress as the development by its own vital energy

of the life of Christ in the soul. The third expresses the progress as

the addition, by conscious efforts, of portion after portion to the

character, which is manifestly incomplete until the headstone crowns

the structure. We may then take the passage before us as exhibiting the

principles of Christian progress.

I. The origin of all, or how Christian progress begins.

These three figures, receiving, rooted, founded, all express a great

deal more than merely accepting certain truths about Him. The

acceptance of truths is the means by which we come to what is more than

any belief of truths. We possess Christ when we believe with a true

faith in Him. We are rooted in Him. His life flows into us. We draw

nourishment from that soil. We are built on Him, and in our compact

union find a real support to a life which is otherwise baseless and

blown about like thistledown by every breath. The union which all these

metaphors presupposes is a vital connection; the possession which is

the first step in the Christian life is a real possession.

There is no progress without that initial step. Our own experience

tells us but too plainly and loudly that we need the impartation of a

new life, and to be set on a new foundation, if we are ever to be

anything else than failures and blots.

There is sure to be progress if the initial step has been taken. If

Christ has been received, the life possessed will certainly manifest

itself. It will go on to perfection. The union effected will work on

through the whole character and nature. It is the beginning of all; it

is only the beginning.

II. The manner of Christian progress or in what it consists.

It consists in a more complete possession of Him, in a more constant

approximation to Him, and a more entire appropriation of Him. Christian

progress is not a growing up from Christ as starting-point, but into

Christ as goal. All is contained in the first act by which He is first

received; the remainder is but the working out of that. All our growth

in knowledge and wisdom consists in our knowing what we have when we

receive Christ. We grow in proportion as we learn to see in Him the

centre of all truth, as the Revealer of God, as the Teacher of man, as

the Interpreter of nature, as the meaning and end of history, as the

Lord of life and death. Morals, politics, and philosophy flow from Him.

His lips and His life and death proclaim all truth, human and divine.

As in wisdom so in character, all progress consists in coming closer to

Jesus and receiving more and more of His many-sided grace. He is the

pattern of all excellence, the living ideal of whatsoever things are

pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good

report, virtue incarnate, praise embodied. He is the power by which we

become gradually and growingly moulded into His likeness. Every part of

our nature finds its best stimulus in Jesus for individuals and for

societies. Christ and growth into Him is progress, and the only way by

which men can be presented perfect, is that they shall be presented

'perfect in Christ,' whereunto every man must labour who would that his

labour should not be in vain. That progress must follow the threefold

direction in the text. There must first be the progressive

manifestation in act and life of the Christ already possessed, 'As ye

received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.' There must also be the

completer growth in the soul of the new life already received. As the

leaf grows green and broad, so a Christlike character must grow not

altogether by effort. And there must be a continual being builded up in

Him by constant additions to the fabric of graces set on that

foundation.

III. The means, or how it is accomplished.

The first words of our text tell us that 'Ye have received Christ Jesus

as Lord,' and all depends on keeping the channels of communication open

so that the reception may be continuous and progressive. We must live

near and ever nearer to the Lord, and seek that our communion with Him

may be strengthened. On the other hand, it is not only by the

spontaneous development of the implanted life, but by conscious and

continuous efforts which sometimes involve vigorous repression of the

old self that progress is realised. The two metaphors of our text have

to be united in our experience. Neither the effortless growth of the

tree nor the toilsome work of the builder suffice to represent the

whole truth. The two sides of deep and still communion, and of

strenuous effort based on that communion, must be found in the

experience of every Christian who has received Christ, and is advancing

through the imperfect manifestations of earth to the perfect union

with, and perfect assimilation to, the Lord.

To all men who are ready to despair of themselves, here is the way to

realise the grandest hopes. Nothing is too great to be attained by one

who, having received Christ Jesus as Lord, walks in Him, rooted and

builded up in Him, 'a holy temple to the Lord.'

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RISEN WITH CHRIST

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above,

where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2. Set your affection on

things above, not on things on the earth. 3. For ye are dead, and your

life is hid with Christ in God. 4. When Christ, who is our life, shall

appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. 5. Mortify

therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication,

uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and

covetousness, which is idolatry: 6. For which things' sake the wrath of

God cometh on the children of disobedience. 7. In the which ye also

walked sometime, when ye lived in them. 8. But now ye also put off all

these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of

your mouth. 9. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the

old man with his deeds; 10. And have put on the new man, which is

renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: 11. Where

there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision,

Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 12.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of

mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13.

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a

quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14. And

above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of

perfectness. 15. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the

which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.'--Col. iii.

1-15.

The resurrection is regarded in Scripture in three aspects--as a fact

establishing our Lord's Messiahship, as a prophecy of our rising from

the dead, and as a symbol of the Christian life even now. The last is

the aspect under which Paul deals with it here.

I. Verses 1-4 set forth the wonderful but most real union of the

believer with the risen Christ. We have said that the Lord's

resurrection is regarded as a symbol, but that is an incomplete

representation of the truth here taught, for Paul believed that the

Christian is so joined to Jesus as that he has, not in symbol only, but

in truth, risen with him. Mark the emphasis and depth of the

expressions setting forth the believer's unity with his Lord: 'Ye were

raised together with Christ'; 'Ye died, and your life is hid with

Christ.' And these wonderful statements do not go to the bottom of the

fact, for Paul goes beyond even them, and does not scruple to say that

Christ 'is our life.'

The ground of these great declarations is found in the fact that faith

joins us in most real and close union to Jesus Christ, so that in His

death we die to sin and the world, and that, even while we live the

bodily life of men here, we have in us another life, derived from

Jesus. Unless our Christianity has grasped that great truth, it has not

risen to the height of New Testament teaching and Christian privilege.

We cannot make too much of 'Christ our sacrifice,' but some of us make

too little of 'Christ our life,' and thereby fail to understand in all

its fulness that other truth on which they fasten so exclusively. Union

with Christ in the possession of His life in us, and the consequent

rooting of our lives in Him, is a truth which much of the evangelical

Christianity of this day needs to see more clearly.

The life is 'hid,' as being united with Jesus, and consequently

withdrawn from the world, which neither comprehends nor sustains it. A

Christian man is bound to manifest to the utmost of his power what is

the motive and aim of his life; but the devout life is, like the divine

life, a mystery, unrevealed after all revelation.

The practical conclusion from this blessed union with Jesus is that we

are, as Christians, bound to be true in our conduct to the facts of our

spiritual life, and to turn away from the world, which is now not our

home, and set our mind (not only our 'affections') on things above.

Surely the Christ, 'seated on the right hand of God,' will be as a

magnet to draw our conscious being upwards to Himself. Surely union

with Him in His death will lead us to die to the world which is alien

to us, and to live in aspiration, thought, desire, love, and obedience

with Him in His calm abode, whence He rules and blesses the souls whom,

through their faith, He has made to live the new life of heaven on

earth.

II. The first consequence of the risen life is negative, the death or

'putting off' of the old nature, the life which belongs to and is ruled

by earth. Verses 5-9 solemnly lay on the Christian the obligation to

put this to death. The 'therefore' in verse 5 teaches a great lesson,

for it implies that the union with Jesus by faith must precede all

self-denial which is true to the spirit of the Gospel. Asceticism of

any sort which is not built on the evangelical foundation is thereby

condemned, whether it is practised by Buddhist, or monk, or Protestant.

First be partaker of the new life, and then put off the old man with

his deeds. The withered fronds of last year are pushed off the fern by

the new ones as they uncurl. That doctrine of life in Christ is set

down as mystical; but it is mysticism of the wholesome sort, which is

intensely practical, and comes down to the level of the lowest

duties,--for observe what homely virtues are enjoined, and how the

things prohibited are no fantastic classifications of vices, but the

things which all the world owns to be ugly and wrong.

We cannot here enlarge on Paul's grim catalogue, but only point out

that it is in two parts, the former (verses 5, 6) being principally

sins of impurity and unregulated passion, to which is added

'covetousness,' as the other great vice to which the old nature is

exposed. Lust and greed between them are the occasions of most of the

sins of men. Stop these fountains, and the streams of evil would shrink

to very small trickles. These twin vices attract the lightning of God's

wrath, which 'cometh' on their perpetrators, not only in some final

future judgment, but here and now. If we were not blind, we should see

that thundercloud steadily drawing nearer, and ready to launch its

terrors on impure and greedy men. They have set it in motion, and they

are right in the path of the avalanche which they have loosened.

The possessors of the risen life are exhorted to put off these things,

not only because of the coming wrath, but because continuance in them

is inconsistent with their present standing and life (v. 7). They do

not now 'live in them,' but in the heavenly places with the risen Lord,

therefore to walk in them is a contradiction. Our conduct should

correspond to our real affinities, and the surface of our lives should

be true to their depths and roots.

The second class of vices are those which mar our intercourse with our

fellows,--the more passionate anger and wrath and the more cold-blooded

and deadly malice, with the many sins of speech.

III. In verse 9 Paul appends the great reason for all the preceding

injunctions; namely, the fact, already enlarged on in verses 1-4, of

the Christian's death and new life by union with Jesus. He need only

have stated the one-half of the fact here, but he never can touch one

member of the antithesis without catching fire, as it were, and so he

goes on to dwell on the new life in Christ, and thus to prepare for the

transition to the exhortation to 'put on' its characteristic

excellences. We note how true to fact, though apparently illogical, his

representation is. He bases the command to put off the old man on the

fact that Christians have put it off. They are to be what they are, to

work out in daily acts what they did in its full ideal completeness

when by faith they died to self and were made alive in and to Christ. A

strong motive for a continuous Christian life is the recollection of

the initial Christian act.

But Paul's fervent spirit blazes up as he thinks of that new nature

which union with Jesus has brought, and he turns aside from his

exhortations to gaze on that great sight. He condenses volumes into a

sentence. That new man is not only new, but is perpetually being

renewed with a renovation penetrating more and more deeply, and

extending more and more widely, in the Christian's nature. It is

continually advancing in knowledge, and tending towards perfect

knowledge of Christ. It is being fashioned, by a better creation than

that of Adam, into a more perfect likeness of God than our first father

bore in his sinless freshness. The possession of it gathers all

Christians into a unity in which all distinctions of nationality,

religious privilege, culture, or social condition, are lost. Paul the

Pharisee and the Colossian brethren, Onesimus the slave and Philemon

his master, are one in Jesus. The new life is one in all its

recipients, and makes them one. The phenomena of the lowest forms of

life are almost repeated in the highest, and, just as in a coral reef

the myriads of workers are not individuals so much as parts of one

living whole, 'so also is Christ.' The union is the closest possible

without destruction of our individuality.

IV. The final, positive consequence of the risen life follows in verses

12-15. Again the Apostle reminds Christians of what they are, as the

great motive for putting on the new man. The contemplation of

privileges may tend to proud isolation and neglect of duty to our

fellows, but the true effect of knowing that we are 'God's elect, holy

and beloved,' is to soften our hearts, and to lead us to walk among men

as mirrors and embodiments of God's mercy to us. The only virtues

touched on here are the various manifestations of love, such as quick

susceptibility to others' sorrows; readiness to help by act as well as

to pity in word; lowliness in estimating one's own claims, which will

lead to bearing evils without resentment or recompensing the like; and

patient forgiveness, after the pattern and measure of the forgiveness

we have received. All these graces, which would make earth an Eden, and

our hearts temples, and our lives calm, are outcomes of love, and must

never be divorced from it. Paul uses a striking image to express this

thought of their dependence on it. He likens them to the various

articles of dress, and bids us hold them all in place with love as a

girdle, which keeps together all the various graces that make up

'perfectness.'

Thus living in love, we shall be free from the tumult of spirit which

ever attends a selfish life; for nothing is more certain to stuff a

man's pillow with thorns, and to wreck his tranquillity, than to live

in hate and suspicion, or self-absorbed. 'The peace of Christ' is ours

in the measure in which we live the risen life and put on the new man,

and that peace in our hearts will rule, that is, will sit there as

umpire; for it will instinctively draw itself into itself, as it were,

like the leaves of a sensitive plant, at the approach of evil, and, if

we will give heed to its warnings, and have nothing to do with what

disturbs it, we shall be saved from falling into many a sin. That peace

gathers all the possessors of the new life into blessed harmony. It is

peace with God, with ourselves, and with all our brethren; and the fact

that all Christians are, by their common life, members of the one body,

lays on them all the obligation to keep the unity in the bond of peace.

And for all these great blessings, especially for that union with Jesus

which gives us a share in his risen life, thankfulness should ever fill

our hearts and make all our days and deeds the sacrifice of praise unto

him continually.

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RISEN WITH CHRIST

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above,

where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on

things above, not on things on the earth.'--Col. iii. 1, 2.

There are three aspects in which the New Testament treats the

Resurrection, and these three seem to have successively come into the

consciousness of the Church. First, as is natural, it was considered

mainly in its bearing on the person and work of our Lord. We may point

for illustration to the way in which the Resurrection is treated in the

earliest of the apostolic discourses, as recorded in the Acts of the

Apostles. Then it came, with further reflection and experience, to be

discerned that it had a bearing on the hope of the immortality of man.

And last of all, as the Christian life deepened, it came to be

discerned that the Resurrection was the pattern of the life of the

Christian disciples. It was regarded first as a witness, then as a

prophecy, then as a symbol. Three fragments of Scripture express these

three phases: for the first, 'Declared to be the Son of God with power

by the Resurrection from the dead'; for the second, 'Now is Christ

risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept';

for the third, 'God hath raised us up together with Him, and made us

sit together in the heavenly places.' I have considered incidentally

the two former aspects in the course of previous sermons; I wish to

turn at present to that final third one.

One more observation I must make by way of introduction, and that is,

that the way in which the Apostle here glides from 'being risen with

Christ' to where 'Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,'

confirms what I have pointed out in former discourses, that the

Ascension of Jesus Christ is always considered in Scripture as being

nothing more than the necessary outcome and issue of the process which

began in the Resurrection. They are not separate facts, but they are

two ends of one process. And so with these thoughts, that Resurrection

develops into Ascension, and that in both Jesus Christ is the pattern

for His followers, let us turn to the words before us.

Then we have here

I. The Christian life considered as a risen life.

Now, we are all familiar with the great evangelical point of view from

which the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are usually

contemplated. To many of us Christ's sacrifice is nothing more or less

than the means by which the world is reconciled to God, and Christ's

Resurrection nothing more than the seal which was set by Divinity upon

that work. 'Crucified for our offences, and raised again for our

justification,' as Paul has it--that is the point of view from which

most evangelical or orthodox Christian people are contented to regard

the solemn fact of the Death and the radiant fact of the Resurrection.

You cannot be too emphatic about these truths, but you may be too

exclusive in your contemplation of them. You do well when you say that

they are the Gospel; you do not well when you say, as some of you do,

that they are the whole Gospel. For there is another stream of teaching

in the New Testament, of which my text is an example, and a multitude

of other passages that I cannot refer to now are equally conspicuous

instances, in which that death and that Resurrection are regarded, not

so much in respect to the power which they exercise in the

reconciliation of the world to God, as in their aspect as the type of

all noble and true Christian life. You remember how, when our Lord

Himself touched upon the fruitful issues of His death, and said:

'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone;

but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit,' He at once went on to say

that a man that loved his life would lose it; and that a man that lost

his life would find it, and proceeded to point, even then, and in that

connection, to His Cross as our pattern, declaring: 'If any man serve

Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

'Made like Him, like Him we rise;

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.'

So, then, a risen life is the type of all noble life, and before there

can be a risen life there must have been a death. True, we may say that

the spiritual facts in a man's experience, which are represented by

these two great symbols of a death and a rising, are but like the

segment of a circle which, seen from the one side is convex and from

the other is concave. But however loosely we may feel that the

metaphors represent the facts, this is plain, that unless a man dies to

flesh, to self-will, to the world, he never will live a life that is

worth calling life. The condition of all nobleness and all growth

upwards is that we shall die daily, and live a life that has sprung

victorious from the death of self. All lofty ethics teach that; and

Christianity teaches it, with redoubled emphasis, because it says to

us, that the Cross and the Resurrection are not merely imaginative

emblems of the noble and the Christian life, but are a great deal more

than that. For, brethren, do not forget--if you do, you will be

hopelessly at sea as to large tracts of blessed Christian truth--that

by faith in Jesus Christ we are brought into such a true deep union

with Him as that, in no mere metaphorical or analogous sense, but in

most blessed reality, there comes into the believing heart a spark of

the life that is Christ's own, so that with Him we do live, and from

Him we do live a life cognate with His, who, having risen from the

dead, dieth no more, and over whom death hath no dominion. So it is not

a metaphor only, but a spiritual truth, when we speak of being risen

with Christ, seeing that our faith, in the measure of its genuineness,

its depth and its operative power upon our characters, will be the gate

through which there shall pass into our deadness the life that truly

is, the life that has nought to do with death or sin. And this unity

with Jesus, brought about by faith, brings about that the depths of the

Christian life are hid with Christ in God, and that we, risen with Him,

do even now sit 'at the right hand in heavenly places,' whilst our

feet, dusty and sometimes blood-stained, are journeying along the paths

of life. This is the great teaching of my text, and of a multitude of

other places; and this is the teaching which modern Christianity, in

its exclusive, or all but exclusive, contemplation of the Cross as the

sacrifice for sin, has far too much forgotten. 'Ye are risen with

Christ.'

Let me remind you that this veritable death and rising again, which

marks the Christian life, is set forth before us in the initial rite of

the Christian Church. Some of you do not agree with me in my view,

either of what is the mode or of who are the subjects of that

ordinance, but if you know anything about the question, you know that

everybody that has a right to give a judgment agrees with us Baptists

in saying--although they may not think that it carries anything

obligatory upon the practice of to-day--that the primitive Church

baptized by immersion. Now, the meaning of baptism is to symbolise

these two inseparable moments, dying to sin, to self, to the world, to

the old past, and rising again to newness of life. Our sacramentarian

friends say that, in my text, it was in baptism that these Colossian

Christians rose again with Christ. I, for my part, do not believe that,

but that baptism was the speaking sign of what lies at the gate of a

true Christian life I have no manner of doubt.

So the first thought of our text is not only taught us in words, but it

stands manifest in the ritual of the Church as it was from the

beginning. We die, and we rise again, through faith and by union

through faith, with Christ 'that died, yea, rather that is risen again,

who is even at the right hand of God.'

Let me turn, secondly, to

II. The consequent aims of the Christian life.

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.'

'To seek' implies the direction of the external life toward certain

objects. It is not to seek as if perhaps we might not find; it is not

even to seek in the sense of searching for, but it is to seek in the

sense of aiming at. And now do you not think that if we had burning in

our hearts, and conscious to our experiences, the sense of union with

Jesus Christ the risen Saviour, that would shape the direction and

dictate the aims of our earthly life? As surely as the elevation of the

rocket tube determines the flight of the projectile that comes from it,

so surely would the inward consciousness, if it were vivid as it ought

to be in all Christian people, of that risen life throbbing within the

heart, shape all the external conduct. It would give us wings and make

us soar. It would make us buoyant, and lift us above the creeping aims

that constitute the objects of life for so many men.

But you say, 'Things above: that is an indefinite phrase. What do you

mean by it?' I will tell you what the Bible means by it. It means Jesus

Christ. All the nebulous splendours of that firmament are gathered

together into one blazing sun. It is a vague direction to tell a man to

shoot up, into an empty heaven. It is not a vague direction to tell him

to seek the 'things above'; for they are all gathered into a person.

'Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,'--that is the

meaning of 'things above,' which are to be the continual aim of the man

who is conscious of a risen life. And of course they will be, for if we

feel, as we ought to feel habitually, though with varying clearness,

that we do carry within us a spark, if I might use that phrase, of the

very life of Jesus Christ, so surely as fire will spring upwards, so

surely as water will rise to the height of its source, so surely will

our outward lives be directed towards Him, who is the life of our

inward lives, and the goal therefore of our outward actions?

Jesus Christ is the summing up of 'the things that are above';

therefore there stands out clear this one great truth, that the only

aim for a Christian soul, consistent with the facts of its Christian

life, is to be like Christ, to be with Christ, to please Christ.

Now, how does that aim--'whether present or absent we labour that we

may be well pleasing to Him'--how does that aim bear upon the multitude

of inferior and nearer aims which men pursue, and which Christians have

to pursue along with other men? How does it bear upon them?--Why

thus--as the culminating peak of a mountain-chain bears on the lower

hills that for miles and miles buttress it, and hold it up, and aspire

towards it, and find their perfection in its calm summit that touches

the skies. The more we have in view, as our aim in life, Christ who is

'at the right hand of God,' and assimilation, communion with Him,

approbation from Him, the more will all immediate aims be ennobled and

delivered from the evils that else cleave to them. They are more when

they are second than when they are first. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of

God,' and all your other aims--as students, as thinkers, as scientists,

as men of business, as parents, as lovers, or anything else--will be

greatened by being subordinated to the conscious aim of pleasing Him.

That aim should persist, like a strain of melody, one long,

holden-down, diapason note, through all our lives. Perfume can be

diffused into the air, and dislodge no atom of that which it makes

fragrant. This supreme aim can be pursued through, and by means of, all

nearer ones, and is inconsistent with nothing but sin. 'Seek the things

that are above.'

Lastly, we have here--

III. The discipline which is needed to secure the right direction of

the life.

The Apostle does not content himself with pointing out the aims. He

adds practical advice as to how these aims can be made dominant in our

individual cases, when he says, 'Set your affections on things above.'

Now, many of you will know that 'affections' is not the full sense of

the word that is here employed, and that the Revised Version gives a

more adequate rendering when it says, 'Set your minds on the things

that are above.' A man cannot do with his love according to his will.

He cannot say: 'Resolved, that I love So-and-So'; and then set himself

to do it. But though you cannot act on the emotions directly by the

will, you can act directly on your understandings, on your thoughts,

and your thoughts will act on your affections. If a man wants to love

Jesus Christ he must think about Him. That is plain English. It is vain

for a man to try to coerce his wandering affections by any other course

than by concentrating his thoughts. Set your minds on the things that

are above, and that will consolidate and direct the emotions; and the

thoughts and the emotions together will shape the outward efforts.

Seeking the things that are above will come, and will only come, when

mind and heart and inward life are occupied with Him. There is no other

way by which the externals can be made right than by setting a watch on

the door of our hearts and minds, and this inward discipline must be

put in force before there will be any continuity or sureness in the

outward aim. We want, for that direction of the life of which I have

been speaking, a clear perception and a concentrated purpose, and we

shall not get either of these unless we fall back, by thought and

meditation, upon the truths which will provide them both.

Brethren, there is another aspect of the connection between these two

parts of our text, which I can only touch. Not only is the setting of

our thoughts on the things above, the way by which we can make these

the aim of our lives. They are not only aims to be reached at some

future stage of our progress, but they are possessions to be enjoyed at

the present. We may have a present Christ and a present Heaven. The

Christian life is not all aspiration; it is fruition as well. We have

to seek, but even whilst we seek, we should be conscious that we

possess what we are seeking, even whilst we seek it. Do you know

anything of that double experience of having the things that are above,

here and now, as well as reaching out towards them?

I am afraid that the Christian life of this generation suffers at a

thousand points, because it is more concerned with the ordering of the

outward life, and the manifold activities which this busy generation

has struck out for itself, than it is with the quiet setting of the

mind, in silent sunken depths of contemplation, on the things that are

above. Oh, if we would think more about them we should aim more at

them; and if we were sure that we possessed them to-day we should be

more eager for a larger possession to-morrow.

Dear brethren, we may all have the risen life for ours, if we will knit

ourselves, in humble dependence and utter self-surrender, to the Christ

who died for us that we might be dead to sin, and rose again that we

might rise to righteousness. And if we have Him, in any deep and real

sense, as the life of our lives, then we shall be blessed, amid all the

divergent and sometimes conflicting nearer aims, which we have to

pursue, by seeing clear above them that to which they all may tend, the

one aim which corresponds to a man's nature, which meets his condition,

which satisfies his needs, which can always be attained if it is

followed, and which, when secured, never disappoints. God help us all

to say, 'This one thing I do, and all else I count but dung, that I may

know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His

sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I

may attain unto the Resurrection from the dead!'

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WITHOUT AND WITHIN

'Them that are without.'--Col. iv. 5.

That is, of course, an expression for the non-Christian world; the

outsiders who are beyond the pale of the Church. There was a very broad

line of distinction between it and the surrounding world in the early

Christian days, and the handful of Christians in a heathen country felt

a great gulf between them and the society in which they lived. That

distinction varies in form, and varies somewhat in apparent magnitude

according as Christianity has been rooted in a country for a longer or

a shorter time, but it remains, and is as real to-day as it ever was,

and there is neither wisdom nor kindness in ignoring the distinction.

The phrase of our text may sound harsh, and might be used, as it was by

the Jews, from whom it was borrowed, in a very narrow and bitter

spirit. Close corporations of any sort are apt to generate, not only a

wholesome esprit de corps, but a hostile contempt for outsiders, and

Christianity has too often been misrepresented by its professors, who

have looked down upon those that are without with supercilious and

unchristian self-complacency.

There is nothing of that sort in the words themselves; the very

opposite is in them. They sound to me like the expression of a man

conscious of the security and comfort and blessedness of the home where

he sat, and with his heart yearning for all the houseless wanderers

that were abiding the pelting of the pitiless storm out in the darkness

there. The spirit and attitude of Christianity to such is one of

yearning pity and urgent entreaty to come in and share in the

blessings. There is deep pathos in the words, as well as solemn

earnestness, and in such a spirit I wish to dwell upon them now for a

short time.

I. I begin with the question: Who are they that are outside? And what

is it of which they are outside?

As I have already remarked, the phrase was apparently borrowed from

Judaism, where it meant, 'outside the Jewish congregation,' and its

primary application, as used here, is no doubt to those who are outside

the Christian Church. But do not let us suppose that that explanation

gets to the bottom of the meaning of the words. It may stand as a

partial answer, but only as partial. The evil tendency which attends

all externalising of truth in the concrete form of institutions works

in full force on the Church, and ever tempts us to substitute outward

connection with the institution for real possession of the truth of

which the institution is the outgrowth. Therefore I urge upon you very

emphatically--and all the more earnestly because of the superstitious

overestimate of outward connection with the outward institution of the

Church which is eagerly proclaimed all around us to-day--that

connection with any organised body of believing men is not 'being

within,' and that isolation from all these is not necessarily 'being

without.' Many a man who is within the organisation is not 'in the

truth,' and, blessed be God, a man may be outside all churches, and yet

be one of God's hidden ones, and may dwell safe and instructed in the

very innermost shrine of the secret place of the Most High. We hear

from priestly lips, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, that there is 'no

safety outside the Church.' The saying is true when rightly understood.

If by the Church be meant the whole company of those who are trusting

to Jesus Christ, of course there is no safety outside, because to trust

in Jesus is the one condition of safety, and unless we belong to those

who so trust we shall not possess the blessing. So understood, the

phrase may pass, and is only objectionable as a round-about and easily

misunderstood way of saying what is much better expressed by 'Whosoever

shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

But that is not the meaning of the phrase in the mouths of those who

use it most frequently. To them the Church is a visible corporation,

and not only so, but as one of the many organisations into which

believers are moulded, it is distinguished from the others by certain

offices and rites, bishops, priests, and sacraments, through whom and

which certain grace is supposed to flow, no drop of which can reach a

community otherwise shaped and officered!

Nor is it only Roman Catholics and Anglicans who are in danger of

externalising personal Christianity into a connection with a church.

The tendency has its roots deep in human nature, and may be found

flourishing quite as rankly in the least sacerdotal of the 'sects' as

in the Vatican itself. There is very special need at present for those

who understand that Christianity is an immensely deeper thing than

connection with any organised body of Christians, to speak out the

truth that is in them, and to protest against the vulgar and fleshly

notion which is forcing itself into prominence in this day when

societies of all sorts are gaining such undue power, and religion, like

much else, is being smothered under forms, as was the maiden in the old

story, under the weight of her ornaments. External relationships and

rites cannot determine spiritual conditions. It does not follow because

you have passed through certain forms, and stand in visible connection

with any visible community, that you are therefore within the pale and

safe. Churches are appointed by Christ. Men who believe and love

naturally draw together. The life of Christ is in them. Many spiritual

blessings are received through believing association with His people.

Illumination and stimulus, succour and sympathy pass from one to

another, each in turn experiencing the blessedness of receiving, and

the greater blessedness of giving. No wise man who has learned of

Christ will undervalue the blessings which come through union with the

outward body which is a consequence of union with the unseen Head. But

men may be in the Church and out of Christ. Not connection with it, but

connection with Him, brings us 'within.' 'Those that are without' may

be either in or out of the pale of any church.

We may put the answer to this question in another form, and going

deeper than the idea of being within a visible church, we may say,

'those that are without' are they who are outside the Kingdom of

Christ.

The Kingdom of Christ is not a visible external community. The Kingdom

of Christ, or of God, or of Heaven, is found wherever human wills obey

the Law of Christ, which is the will of God, the decrees of Heaven; as

Christ himself put it, in profound words--profound in all their

simplicity--when He said, 'Not every man that saith unto Me Lord! Lord!

shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of

My Father, which is in Heaven.' 'Them that are without' are they whose

wills are not bent in loving obedience to the Lord of their spirit.

But we must go deeper than that. In the Church? Yes! In the Kingdom?

Yes! But I venture to take another Scripture phrase as being the one

satisfactory fundamental answer to the question: What is it that these

people are outside of? and I say Christ, Christ. If you will take your

New Testament as your guide, you will find that the one question upon

which all is suspended is the, Am I, or Am I not, in Jesus Christ? Am I

in Him, or Am I outside of Him? And the answer to that question is the

answer to this other: Who are they that are without?

They that are outside are not the 'non-Christian world' who are not

church members; they that are inside are not the 'Christian world' who

make an outward profession of being in the Kingdom. It is not going

down to the foundation to explain the antithesis so; but 'those that

are within' are those who have simple trust upon Jesus Christ as the

sole and all-sufficient Saviour of their sinful spirits and the life of

their life, and having entered into that great love, have plunged

themselves, as it were, into the very heart of Jesus; have found in Him

righteousness and peace, forgiveness and love, joy and salvation. Are

you in Christ because you love Him and trust your soul to Him? If not,

if not, you are amongst those 'that are without,' though you be ever so

much joined to the visible Church of the living God.

And then there is one more remark that I must drop in here before I go

on, namely, that whilst I thankfully admit, and joyfully preach, that

the most imperfect, rudimentary faith knits a man to Jesus Christ, even

if in this life it may be found covered over with a great deal that is

contradictory and inconsistent; on the other hand there are some people

who stand like the angel in the Apocalypse, with one foot on the solid

land and one upon the restless sea, half in and half out, undecided,

halting--that is, 'limping'--between two opinions. Some people of that

sort are listening to me now, who have been like that for years. Now I

want them to remember this plain piece of common-sense--half in is

altogether out! So that is my answer to the first question: Who are

they that are outside, and what is it that they are outside of?

I cannot carry round these principles and lay them upon the conscience

of each hearer, but I pray you to listen to your own inmost voice

speaking, and I am mistaken if many will not hear it saying: 'Thou art

the man!' Do not stop your ears to that voice!

II. Notice next the force of this phrase as implying the woeful

condition of those without.

I have said that it is full of pathos. It is the language of a man

whose heart yearns as, in the midst of his own security, he thinks of

the houseless wanderers in the dark and the storm. He thinks pityingly

of what they lose, and of that to which they are exposed.

There are two or three ways in which I may illustrate that condition,

but perhaps the most graphic and impressive may be just to recall for a

moment three or four of the Scripture metaphors that fit into this

representation: 'Those that are without'; and thus to gain some

different pictures of what the inside and the outside means in these

varying figures.

First, then, there is a figure drawn from the Old Testament which is

often applied, and correctly applied, to this subject--Noah's Ark.

Think of that safe abode floating across the waters, whilst all without

it was a dreary waste. Without were death and despair, but those that

were within sat warm and dry and safe and fed and living. The men that

were without, high as they might climb upon rocks and hills, strong as

they might be--when the dreary rainstorm wept itself dry, 'they were

all dead corpses.' To be in was life, to be out was death.

That is the first metaphor. Take another. That singular institution of

the old Mosaic system, in which the man who inadvertently, and

therefore without any guilt or crime of his own, had been the cause of

death to his brother, had provided for him, half on one side Jordan and

half on the other, and dotted over the land, so that it should not be

too far to run to one of them, Cities of Refuge. And when the wild

vendetta of those days stirred up the next of kin to pursue at his

heels, if he could get inside the nearest of these he was secure. They

that were within could stand at the city gates and look out upon the

plain, and see the pursuer with his hate glaring from his eyes, and

almost feel his hot breath on their cheeks, and know that though but a

yard from him, his arm durst not touch them. To be inside was to be

safe, to be outside was certain bloody death.

That is the second figure; take a third; one which our Lord Himself has

given us. Here is the picture--a palace, a table abundantly spread,

lights and music, delight and banqueting, gladness and fulness, society

and sustenance. The guests sit close and all partake. To be within

means food, shelter, warmth, festivity, society; to be without, like

Lear on the moor, is to stand the pelting of the storm, weary,

stumbling in the dark, starving, solitary, and sad. Within is

brightness and good cheer; without is darkness, hunger, death.

That is the third figure. Take a fourth, another of our Master's.

Picture a little rude, stone-built enclosure with the rough walls piled

high, and a narrow aperture at one point, big enough for one creature

to pass through at a time. Within, huddled together, are the innocent

sheep; without, the lion and the bear. Above, the vault of night with

all its stars, and watching all, the shepherd, with unslumbering eye.

In the fold is rest for the weary limbs that have been plodding through

valleys of the shadow of death, and dusty ways; peace for the panting

hearts that are trembling at every danger, real and imaginary. Inside

the fold is tranquillity, repose for the wearied frame, safety, and the

companionship of the Shepherd; and without, ravening foes and a dreary

wilderness, and flinty paths and sparse herbage and muddy pools. Inside

is life; without is death. That is the fourth figure.

In the Ark no Deluge can touch; in the City of Refuge no avenger can

smite; in the banqueting-hall no thirst nor hunger but can be

satisfied; in the fold no enemy can come and no terror can live.

Brethren! are you amongst 'them that are without,' or are you within?

III. Lastly--why is anybody outside? Why? It is no one's fault but

their own. It is not God's. He can appeal with clean hands and ask us

to judge what more could have been done for His vineyard that He has

not done for it. The great parable which represents Him as sending out

His summons to the feast in His palace puts the wonderful words in the

mouth of the master of the house, after his call by his servants had

been refused. 'Go out into the highways and hedges,' beneath which the

beggars squat, 'and compel them to come in, that my house may be full.'

'Nature abhors a vacuum,' the old natural philosophers used to say. So

does grace; so does God's love. It hates to have His house empty and

His provisions unconsumed. And so He has done all that He could do to

bring you and me inside. He has sent His Son, He beckons us, He draws

us by countless mercies day by day. He appeals to our hearts, and would

have us gathered into the fold. And if we are outside it is not because

He has neglected to do anything which He can do in order to bring us

in.

But why is it that any of us resist such drawing, and make the wretched

choice of perishing without, rather than find safety within? The

deepest reason is an alienated heart, a rebellious will. But the reason

for alienation and rebellion lie among the inscrutable mysteries of our

awful being. All sin is irrational. The fact is plain, the temptations

are obvious; excuses there are in plenty, but reasons there are none.

Still we may touch for a moment on some of the causes which operate

with many hearers of God's merciful call to enter in, and keep them

without.

Many remain outside because they do not really believe in the danger.

No doubt there was a great deal of brilliant sarcasm launched at Noah

for his folly in thinking that there was anything coming that needed an

ark. It seemed, no doubt, food for much laughter, and altogether

impossible to think of gravely, that this flood which he talked about

should ever come. So they had their laughter out as they saw him

working away at his ludicrous task 'until the day when the flood came

and swept them all away,' and the laughter ended in gurgling sobs of

despair.

If a manslayer does not believe that the next of kin is on his track,

he will not flee to the City of Refuge. If the sheep has no fear of

wolves, it will choose to be outside the fold among the succulent

herbage. Did you ever see how, in a Welsh slate-quarry, before a blast,

a horn is blown, and at its sound all along the face of the quarry the

miners run to their shelters, where they stay until the explosion is

over? What do you suppose would become of one of them who stood there

after the horn had blown, and said: 'Nonsense! There is nothing coming!

I will take my chance where I am!' Very likely a bit of slate would end

him before he had finished his speech. At any rate, do not you, dear

friend, trifle with the warning that says: 'Flee for refuge to Christ

and shelter yourself in Him.'

There are some people, too, who stop outside because they do not much

care for the entertainment that they will get within. It does not

strike them as being very desirable. They have no appetite for it. We

preachers seek to draw hearts to Jesus by many motives--and among

others by setting forth the blessings which he bestows. But if a man

does not care about pardon, does not fear judgment, does not want to be

good, has no taste for righteousness, is not attracted by the pure and

calm pleasures which Christ offers, the invitation falls flat upon his

ear. Wisdom cries aloud and invites the sons of men to her feast, but

the fare she provides is not coarse and high spiced enough, and her

table is left unfilled, while the crowd runs to the strong-flavoured

meats and foaming drinks which her rival, Folly, offers. Many of us

say, like the Israelites 'Our souls loathe this light bread,' this

manna, white and sweet, and Heaven-descended, and angels' food though

it be, and we hanker after the reeking garlic and leeks and onions of

Egypt.

Some of us again, would like well enough to be inside, if that would

keep us from dangers which we believe to be real, but we do not like

the doorway. You may see in some remote parts of the country strange,

half-subterranean structures which are supposed to have been the houses

of a vanished race. They have a long, narrow, low passage, through

which a man has to creep with his face very near the ground. He has to

go low and take to his knees to get through; and at the end the passage

opens out into ampler, loftier space, where the dwellers could sit safe

from wild weather and wilder beasts and wildest men. That is like the

way into the fortress home which we have in Jesus Christ. We must stoop

very low to enter there. And some of us do not like that. We do not

like to fall on our knees and say, I am a sinful man, O Lord. We do not

like to bow ourselves in penitence. And the passage is narrow as well

as low. It is broad enough for you, but not for what some of you would

fain carry in on your back. The pack which you bear, of earthly

vanities and loves, and sinful habits, will be brushed off your

shoulders in that narrow entrance, like the hay off a cart in a country

lane bordered by high hedges. And some of us do not like that. So,

because the way is narrow, and we have to stoop, our pride kicks at the

idea of having to confess ourselves sinners, and of having to owe all

our hope and salvation to God's undeserved mercy, therefore we stay

outside. And because the way is narrow, and we have to put off some of

our treasures, our earthward-looking desires shrink from laying these

aside, and therefore we stop outside. There was room in the boat for

the last man who stood on the deck, but he could not make up his mind

to leave a bag of gold. There was no room for that. Therefore he would

not leap, and went down with the ship.

The door is open. The Master calls. The feast is spread. Dangers

threaten. The flood comes. The avenger of blood makes haste. 'Why

standest thou without?' Enter in, before the door is shut. And if you

ask, How shall I pass within?--the answer is plain: 'They could not

enter in because of unbelief. We which have believed do enter into

rest.'

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I. THESSALONIANS

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FAITH, LOVE, HOPE, AND THEIR FRUITS

'Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.'--1

Thess. i. 3.

This Epistle, as I suppose we all know, is Paul's first letter. He had

been hunted out of Thessalonica by the mob, made the best of his way to

Athens, stayed there for a very short time, then betook himself to

Corinth, and at some point of his somewhat protracted residence there,

this letter was written. So that we have in it his first attempt, so

far as we know, to preach the Gospel by the pen. It is interesting to

notice how, whatever changes and developments there may have been in

him thereafter, all the substantial elements of his latest faith beam

out in this earliest letter, and how even in regard to trifles we see

the germs of much that came afterwards. This same triad, you remember,

'faith, hope, charity,' recurs in the First Epistle to the Corinthians,

though with a very significant difference in the order, which I shall

have to dwell upon presently.

The letter is interesting on another account. Remembering that it was

only a very short time since these Thessalonians had turned from idols

to serve the living God, there is something very beautiful in the

overflowing generosity of commendation, which never goes beyond

veracity, with which he salutes them. Their Christian character, like

seeds sown in some favoured tropical land, had sprung up swiftly; yet

not with the dangerous kind of swiftness which presages decay of the

growth. It was only a few days since they had been grovelling before

idols, but now he can speak of 'your work of faith, and labour of love,

and patience of hope' . . . and declare that the Gospel 'sounded out'

from them--the word which he employs is that which is technically used

for the blast of a trumpet--'so that we need not to speak anything.'

Rapid growth is possible for us all, and is not always superficial.

I desire now to consider that pair of triads--the three

foundation-stones, and the three views of the fair building that is

reared upon them.

I. The three foundation-stones.

That is a natural metaphor to use, but it is not quite correct, for

these three--faith, love, hope--are not to be conceived of as lying

side by side. Rather than three foundations we have three courses of

the building here; the lowest one, faith; the next one, love; and the

top one, hope. The order in 1 Corinthians is different, 'faith, hope,

charity,' and the alteration in the sequence is suggested by the

difference of purpose. The Apostle intended in 1 Corinthians to dwell

at some length thereafter on 'charity,' or 'love.' So he puts it last

to make the link of connection with what he is going to say. But here

he is dealing with the order of production, the natural order in which

these three evolve themselves. And his thought is that they are like

the shoots that successive springs bring upon the bough of a tree,

where each year has its own growth, and the summit of last year's

becomes the basis of next. Thus we have, first, faith; then, shooting

from that, love; and then, sustained by both, hope. Now let us look at

that order.

It is a well-worn commonplace, which you may think it not needful for

me to dwell upon here, that in the Christian theory, both of salvation

and of morals, the basis of everything is trust. And that is no

arbitrary theological arrangement, but it is the only means by which

the life that is the basis both of salvation and of righteousness can

be implanted in men. There is no other way by which Jesus Christ can

come into our hearts than by what the New Testament calls 'trust,'

which we have turned into the hard, theological concept which too often

glides over people's minds without leaving any dint at all--'faith.'

Distrust is united with trust. There is no trust without, complementary

to it, self-distrust. Just as the sprouting seed sends one little

radicle downwards, and that becomes the root, and at the same time

sends up another one, white till it reaches the light, and it becomes

the stem, so the underside of faith is self-distrust, and you must

empty yourselves before you can open your hearts to be filled by Jesus.

That being so, this self-distrustful trust is the beginning of

everything. That is the alpha of the whole alphabet, however glorious

and manifold may be the words into which its letters are afterwards

combined. Faith is the hand that grasps. It is the means of

communication, it is the channel through which the grace which is the

life, or, rather, I should say, the life which is the grace, comes to

us. It is the open door by which the angel of God comes in with his

gifts. It is like the petals of the flowers, opening when the sunshine

kisses them, and, by opening, laying bare the depths of their calyxes

to be illuminated and coloured, and made to grow by the sunshine which

itself has opened them, and without the presence of which, within the

cup, there would have been neither life nor beauty. So faith is the

basis of everything; the first shoot from which all the others ascend.

Brethren, have you that initial grace? I leave the question with you.

If you have not that, you have nothing else.

Then again, out of faith rises love. No man can love God unless he

believes that God loves him. I, for my part, am old-fashioned and

narrow enough not to believe that there is any deep, soul-cleansing or

soul-satisfying love of God which is not the answer to the love that

died on the Cross. But you must believe that, and more than believe it;

you must have trusted and cast yourselves on it, in the utter

abandonment of self-distrust and Christ-confidence, before there will

well up in your heart the answering love to God. First faith, then

love. My love is the reverberation of the primeval voice, the echo of

God's. The angle at which the light falls on the mirror is the same as

the angle at which it is reflected from it. And though my love at its

highest is low, at its strongest is weak: yet, like the echo that is

faint and far, feeble though it be, it is pitched on the same key, and

is the prolongation of the same note as the mother-sound. So my love

answers God's love, and it will never answer it unless faith has

brought me within the auditorium, the circle wherein the voice that

proclaims 'I love thee, my child,' can be heard.

Now, we do not need to ask ourselves whether Paul is here speaking of

love to God or love to man. He is speaking of both, because the New

Testament deals with the latter as being a part of the former, and sure

to accompany it. But there is one lesson that I wish to draw. If it be

true that love in us is thus the result of faith in the love of God,

let us learn how we grow in love. You cannot say, 'Now I will make an

effort to love.' The circulation of the blood, the pulsations of the

heart, are not within the power of the will. But you can say, 'Now I

will make an effort to trust.' For faith is in the power of the will,

and when the Master said, 'Ye will not come unto me,' He taught us that

unbelief is not a mere intellectual deficiency or perversity, but that

it is the result, in the majority of cases--I might almost say in

all-of an alienated will. Therefore, if you wish to love, do not try to

work yourself into a hysteria of affection, but take into your hearts

and minds the Christian facts, and mainly the fact of the Cross, which

will set free the frozen and imprisoned fountains of your affections,

and cause them to flow out abundantly in sweet water. First faith, then

love; and get at love through faith. That is a piece of practical

wisdom that it will do us all good to keep in mind.

Then the third of the three, the topmost shoot, is hope. Hope is faith

directed to the future. So it is clear enough that, unless I have that

trust of which I have been speaking, I have none of the hope which the

Apostle regards as flowing from it. But love has to do with hope quite

as much, though in a different way, as faith has to do with it. For in

the direct proportion in which we are taking into our hearts Christ and

His truth, and letting our hearts go out in love towards Him and

communion with Him, will the glories beyond brighten and consolidate

and magnify themselves in our eyes. The hope of the Christian man is

but the inference from his present faith, and the joy and sweetness of

his present love. For surely when we rise to the heights which are

possible to us all, and on which I suppose most Christian people have

been sometimes, though for far too brief seasons; when we rise to the

heights of communion with God, anything seems more possible to us than

that death, or anything that lies in the future, should have power over

a tie so sweet, so strong, so independent of externals, and so

all-sufficing in its sweetness. Thus we shall be sure that God is our

portion for ever, in the precise degree in which, by faith and love, we

feel that 'He is the strength of our hearts,' to-day and now. So, then,

we have the three foundation-stones.

And now a word or two, in the second place, about

II. The fair building which rises on them.

I have already half apologised for using the metaphor of a foundation

and a building. I must repeat the confession that the symbol is an

inadequate one. For the Apostle does not conceive of the work and

labour and patience which are respectively allocated to these three

graces as being superimposed upon them, as it were, by effort, so much

as he thinks of them as growing out of them by their inherent nature.

The work is 'the work of faith,' that which characterises faith, that

which issues from it, that which is its garment, visible to the world,

and the token of its reality and its presence. Faith works. It is the

foundation of all true work; even in the lowest sense of the word we

might almost say that. But in the Christian scheme it is eminently the

underlying requisite for all work which God does not consider as busy

idleness. I might here make a general remark, which, however, I need

not dwell upon, that we have here the broad thought which Christian

people in all generations need to have drummed into their heads over

and over again, and that is that inward experiences and emotions, and

states of mind and heart, however good and precious, are so mainly as

being the necessary foundations of conduct. What is the good of praying

and feeling comfortable within, and having 'a blessed assurance,' a

'happy experience,' 'sweet communion,' and so on? What is the good of

it all, if these things do not make us 'live soberly, righteously, and

godly in this present world'? What is the good of the sails of a

windmill going whirling round, if the machinery has been thrown out of

gear, and the great stones which it ought to actuate are not revolving?

What is the good of the screw of a steamer revolving, when she pitches,

clean above the waves? It does nothing then to drive the vessel

onwards, but will only damage the machinery. And Christian emotions and

experiences which do not drive conduct are of as little use, often as

perilous, and as injurious. If you want to keep your 'faith, love,

hope,' sound and beneficial, set them to work. And do not be too sure

that you have them, if they do not crave for work, whether you set them

to it or not.

'Your work of faith.' There is the whole of the thorny subject of the

relation of faith and works packed into a nutshell. It is exactly what

James said and it is exactly what a better than James said. When the

Jews came to Him with their externalism, and thought that God was to be

pleased by a whole rabble of separate good actions, and so said, 'What

shall we do that we might work the works of God?' Jesus said, 'Never

mind about works. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom

He hath sent,' and out of that will come all the rest. That is the

mother-tincture; everything will flow from that. So Paul says, 'Your

work of faith.'

Does your faith work? Perhaps I should ask other people rather than

you. Do men see that your faith works; that its output is different

from the output of men who are not possessors of a 'like precious

faith'? Ask yourselves the question, and God help you to answer it.

Love labours. Labour is more than work, for it includes the notion of

toil, fatigue, difficulty, persistence, antagonism. Ah! the work of

faith will never be done unless it is the toil of love. You remember

how Milton talks about the immortal garland that is to be run for, 'not

without dust and sweat.' The Christian life is not a leisurely

promenade. The limit of our duty is not ease of work. There must be

toil. And love is the only principle that will carry us through the

fatigues, and the difficulties, and the oppositions which rise against

us from ourselves and from without. Love delights to have a hard task

set it by the beloved, and the harder the task the more poignant the

satisfaction. Loss is gain when it brings us nearer the beloved. And

whether our love be love to God, or its consequence, love to man, it is

the only foundation on which toil for either God or man will ever

permanently be rested. Do not believe in philanthropy which has not a

bottom of faith, and do not believe in work for Christ which does not

involve in toil. And be sure that you will do neither, unless you have

both these things: the faith and the love.

And then comes the last. Faith works, love toils, hope is patient. Is

that all that 'hope' is? Not if you take the word in the narrow meaning

which it has in modern English; but that was not what Paul meant. He

meant something a great deal more than passive endurance, great as that

is. It is something to be able to say, in the pelting of a pitiless

storm, 'Pour on! I will endure.' But it is a great deal more to be

able, in spite of all, not to bate one jot of heart or hope, but 'still

bear up and steer right onward'; and that is involved in the true

meaning of the word inadequately rendered 'patience' in the New

Testament. For it is no passive virtue only, but it is a virtue which,

in the face of the storm, holds its course; brave persistence, active

perseverance, as well as meek endurance and submission.

'Hope' helps us both to bear and to do. They tell us nowadays that it

is selfish for a Christian man to animate himself, either for endurance

or for activity, by the contemplation of those great glories that lie

yonder. If that is selfishness, God grant we may all become a great

deal more selfish than we are! No man labours in the Christian life, or

submits to Christian difficulty, for the sake of going to heaven. At

least, if he does, he has got on the wrong tack altogether. But if the

motive for both endurance and activity be faith and love, then hope has

a perfect right to come in as a subsidiary motive, and to give strength

to the faith and rapture to the love. We cannot afford to throw away

that hope, as so many of us do--not perhaps, intellectually, though I

am afraid there is a very considerable dimming of the clearness, and a

narrowing of the place in our thoughts, of the hope of a future

blessedness, in the average Christian of this day--but practically we

are all apt to lose sight of the recompense of the reward. And if we

do, the faith and love, and the work and toil, and the patience will

suffer. Faith will relax its grasp, love will cool down its fervour;

and there will come a film over Hope's blue eye, and she will not see

the land that is very far off. So, dear brethren, remember the

sequence, 'faith, love, hope,' and remember the issues, 'work, toil,

patience.'

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GOD'S TRUMPET

'From you sounded out the word of God.'--1 Thess. i. 8.

This is Paul's first letter. It was written very shortly after his

first preaching of the Gospel in the great commercial city of

Thessalonica. But though the period since the formation of the

Thessalonian Church was so brief, their conversion had already become a

matter of common notoriety; and the consistency of their lives, and the

marvellous change that had taken place upon them, made them conspicuous

in the midst of the corrupt heathen community in which they dwelt. And

so says Paul, in the text, by reason of their work of faith and labour

of love and patience of hope, they had become ensamples to all that

believe, and loud proclaimers and witnesses of the Gospel which had

produced this change.

The Apostle employs a word never used anywhere else in the New

Testament to describe the conspicuous and widespread nature of this

testimony of theirs. He says, 'The word of the Lord sounded out' from

them. That phrase is one most naturally employed to describe the blast

of a trumpet. So clear and ringing, so loud, penetrating, melodious,

rousing, and full was their proclamation, by the silent eloquence of

their lives, of the Gospel which impelled and enabled them to lead such

lives. A grand ideal of a community of believers! If our churches

to-day were nearer its realisation there would be less unbelief, and

more attraction of wandering prodigals to the Father's house. Would

that this saying were true of every body of professing believers! Would

that from each there sounded out one clear accordant witness to Christ,

in the purity and unworldliness of their Christlike lives!

I. This metaphor suggests the great purpose of the Church.

It is God's trumpet, His means of making His voice heard through all

the uproar of the world. As the captain upon the deck in the gale will

use his speaking-trumpet, so God's voice needs your voice. The Gospel

needs to be passed through human lips in order that it may reach deaf

ears. The purpose for which we have been apprehended of Christ is not

merely our own personal salvation, whether we understand that in a

narrow and more outward, or in a broader and more spiritual sense. No

man is an end in himself, but every man, though he be partially and

temporarily an end, is also a means. And just as, according to the

other metaphor, the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, each particle of

the dead dough, as soon as it is leavened and vitalised, becoming the

medium for transmitting the strange, transforming, and living influence

to the particle beyond, so all of us, if we are Christian people, have

received that grace into our hearts, for our own sakes indeed, but also

that through us might be manifested to the darkened eyes beyond, and

through us might drop persuasively on the dull, cold ears that are

further away from the Divine Voice, the great message of God's mercy.

The Church is God's trumpet, and the purpose that He has in view in

setting it in the world is to make all men know the fellowship of the

mystery, and that through it there may ring out, as by some artificial

means a poor human voice will be flung to a greater distance than it

would otherwise reach, the gentle entreaties, and the glorious

proclamation, and the solemn threatenings of the Word, the Incarnate as

well as the written Word, of God.

Of course all this is true, not only about communities, but it is true

of a community, just because it is true of each individual member of

it. The Church is worse than as 'sounding brass,' it is as silent brass

and an untinkling cymbal, unless the individuals that belong to it

recognise God's meaning in making them His children, and do their best

to fulfil it. 'Ye are my witnesses,' saith the Lord. You are put into

the witness-box; see that you speak out when you are there.

II. Another point that this figure may suggest is, the sort of sound

that should come from the trumpet.

A trumpet note is, first of all, clear. There should be no hesitation

in our witness; nothing uncertain in the sound that we give. There are

plenty of so-called Christian people whose lives, if they bear any

witness for the Master at all, are like the notes that some bungling

learner will bring out of a musical instrument: hesitating, uncertain,

so that you do not know exactly what note he wants to produce. How many

of us, calling ourselves Christian people, testify on both sides;

sometimes bearing witness for Christ; and alas! alas! oftener bearing

witness against Him. Will the trumpet, the instrument of clear,

ringing, unmistakable sounds, be the emblem of your Christian

testimony? Would not some poor scrannel-pipe, ill-blown, be nearer the

mark? The note should be clear.

The note should be penetrating. There is no instrument, I suppose, that

carries further than the ringing clarion that is often heard on the

field of battle, above all the strife; and this little church at

Thessalonica, a mere handful of people, just converted, in the very

centre of a strong, compact, organised, self-confident, supercilious

heathenism, insisted upon being heard, and got itself made audible,

simply by the purity and the consistency of the lives of its members.

So that Paul, a few weeks, or at most a few months, after the formation

of the church, could say, 'From you sounded out the word of the Lord,

not only in Macedonia and Achaia,' your own province and the one next

door to it, 'but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread

abroad.' No man knows how far his influence will go. No man can tell

how far his example may penetrate. Thessalonica was a great commercial

city. So is Manchester. Hosts of people of all sorts came into it as

they come here. There were many different circles which would be

intersected by the lives of this Christian church, and wherever its

units went they carried along with them the conviction that they had

turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from

heaven.

And so, dear brethren, if our witness is to be worth anything it must

have this penetrating quality. There is a difference in sounds as there

is a difference in instruments. Some of them carry further than others.

A clear voice will fling words to a distance that a thick, mumbling one

never can attain. One note will travel much further than another. Do

you see to it that your notes are of the penetrating sort.

And then, again, the note should be a musical one. There is nothing to

be done for God by harshness; nothing to be done by discords and

gangling; nothing to be done by scolding and rebuke. The ordered

sequence of melodious sound will travel a great deal further than

unmusical, plain speech. You can hear a song at a distance at which a

saying would be inaudible. Which thing is an allegory, and this is its

lesson,--Music goes further than discord; and the witness that a

Christian man bears will travel in direct proportion as it is

harmonious, and gracious and gentle and beautiful.

And then, again, the note should be rousing. You do not play on a

trumpet when you want to send people to sleep; dulcimers and the like

are the things for that purpose. The trumpet means strung-up intensity,

means a call to arms, or to rejoicing; means at any rate, vigour, and

is intended to rouse. Let your witness have, for its utmost

signification, 'Awake! thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and

Christ shall give thee light.'

III. Then, still further, take another thought that may be suggested

from this metaphor, the silence of the loudest note.

If you look at the context, you will see that all the ways in which the

word of the Lord is represented as sounding out from the Thessalonian

Church were deeds, not words. The context supplies a number of them.

Such as the following are specified in it: their work; their toil,

which is more than work; their patience; their assurance; their

reception of the word, in much affliction with joy in the Holy Ghost;

their faith to Godward; their turning to God from idols, to serve and

to wait.

That is all. So far as the context goes there might not have been a man

amongst them who ever opened his mouth for Jesus Christ. We know not,

of course, how far they were a congregation of silent witnesses, but

this we know, that what Paul meant when he said, 'The whole world is

ringing with the voice of the word of God sounding from you,' was not

their going up and down the world shouting about their Christianity,

but their quiet living like Jesus Christ. That is a louder voice than

any other.

Ah! dear friends! it is with God's Church as it is with God's heavens;

the 'stars in Christ's right hand' sparkle in the same fashion as the

stars that He has set in the firmament. Of them we read: 'There is

neither voice nor language, their speech is not heard'; and yet, as man

stands with bared head and hushed heart beneath the violet abysses of

the heavens, 'their line' (or chord, the metaphor being that of a

stringed instrument) 'is gone out through all the earth, and their

words to the end of the world.' Silent as they shine, they declare the

glory of God, and proclaim His handiwork. And so you may speak of Him

without speaking, and though you have no gift of tongues the night may

be filled with music, and your lives be eloquent of Christ.

I do not mean to say that Christian men and women are at liberty to

lock their lips from verbal proclamation of the Saviour they have

found, but I do mean to say that if there was less talk and more

living, the witness of God's Church would be louder and not lower; 'and

men would take knowledge of us, that we had been with Jesus'; and of

Jesus, that He had made us like Himself.

IV. And so, lastly, let me draw one other thought from this metaphor,

which I hope you will not think fanciful playing with a figure; and

that is the breath that makes the music.

If the Church is the trumpet, who blows it? God! It is by His Divine

Spirit dwelling within us, and breathing through us, that the harsh

discords of our natural lives become changed into melody of praise and

the music of witness for Him. Keep near Christ, live in communion with

God, let Him breathe through you, and when His Spirit passes through

your spirits their silence will become harmonious speech; and from you

'will sound out the word of the Lord.'

In a tropical country, when the sun goes behind a cloud, all the insect

life that was cheerily chirping is hushed. In the Christian life, when

the Son of Righteousness is obscured by the clouds born of our own

carelessness and sin, all the music in our spirit ceases, and no more

can we witness for Him. A scentless substance lying in a drawer, with a

bit of musk, will become perfumed by contact, and will bring the

fragrance wherever it is carried. Live near God, and let Him speak to

you and in you; and then He will speak through you. And if He be the

breath of your spiritual lives, and the soul of your souls, then, and

only then, will your lives be music, the music witness, and the witness

conviction. And only then will there be fulfilled what I pray there may

be more and more fulfilled in us as a Christian community, this great

word of our text, 'from you sounded out,' clear, rousing, penetrating,

melodious, 'the word of the Lord,' so that we, with our poor preaching,

need not to speak anything.

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WALKING WORTHILY

'Walk worthy of God.'--1 Thess. ii. 12.

Here we have the whole law of Christian conduct in a nutshell. There

may be many detailed commandments, but they can all be deduced from

this one. We are lifted up above the region of petty prescriptions, and

breathe a bracing mountain air. Instead of regulations, very many and

very dry, we have a principle which needs thought and sympathy in order

to apply it, and is to be carried out by the free action of our own

judgments.

Now it is to be noticed that there are a good many other passages in

the New Testament in which, in similar fashion, the whole sum of

Christian conduct is reduced to a 'walking worthy' of some certain

thing or other, and I have thought that it might aid in appreciating

the many-sidedness and all-sufficiency of the great principles into

which Christianity crystallises the law of our life, if we just gather

these together and set them before you consecutively.

They are these: we are told in our text to 'walk worthy of God.' Then

again, we are enjoined, in other places, to 'walk worthy of the Lord,'

who is Christ. Or again, 'of the Gospel of Christ.' Or again, 'of the

calling wherewith we were called.' Or again, of the name of 'saints.'

And if you put all these together, you will get many sides of one

thought, the rule of Christian life as gathered into a single

expression--correspondence with, and conformity to, a certain standard.

I. And first of all, we have this passage of my text, and the other one

to which I have referred, 'Walking worthy of the Lord,' by whom we are

to understand Christ. We may put these together and say that the whole

sum of Christian duty lies in conformity to the character of a Divine

Person with whom we have loving relations.

The Old Testament says: 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'

The New Testament says: 'Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love.' So

then, whatever of flashing brightness and infinite profundity in that

divine nature is far beyond our apprehension and grasp, there are in

that divine nature elements--and those the best and divinest in

it--which it is perfectly within the power of every man to copy.

Is there anything in God that is more Godlike than righteousness and

love? And is there any difference in essence between a man's

righteousness and God's;--between a man's love and God's? The same

gases make combustion in the sun and on the earth, and the spectroscope

tells you that it is so. The same radiant brightness that flames

burning in the love, and flashes white in the purity of God, even that

may be reproduced in man.

Love is one thing, all the universe over. Other elements of the bond

that unites us to God are rather correspondent in us to what we find in

Him. Our concavity, so to speak, answers to His convexity; our

hollowness to His fulness; our emptiness to His all-sufficiency. So our

faith, for instance, lays hold upon His faithfulness, and our obedience

grasps, and bows before, His commanding will. But the love with which I

lay hold of Him is like the love with which He lays hold on me; and

righteousness and purity, howsoever different may be their

accompaniments in an Infinite and uncreated Nature from what they have

in our limited and bounded and progressive being, in essence are one.

So, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'; 'Walk in the light as He is in the

light,' is the law available for all conduct; and the highest divine

perfections, if I may speak of pre-eminence among them, are the

imitable ones, whereby He becomes our Example and our Pattern.

Let no man say that such an injunction is vague or hopeless. You must

have a perfect ideal if you are to live at all by an ideal. There

cannot be any flaws in your pattern if the pattern is to be of any use.

You aim at the stars, and if you do not hit them you may progressively

approach them. We need absolute perfection to strain after, and one

day--blessed be His name--we shall attain it. Try to walk worthy of God

and you will find out how tight that precept grips, and how close it

fits.

The love and the righteousness which are to become the law of our

lives, are revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Whatever may sound

impracticable in the injunction to imitate God assumes a more homely

and possible shape when it becomes an injunction to follow Jesus. And

just as that form of the precept tends to make the law of conformity to

the divine nature more blessed and less hopelessly above us, so it

makes the law of conformity to the ideal of goodness less cold and

unsympathetic. It makes all the difference to our joyfulness and

freedom whether we are trying to obey a law of duty, seen only too

clearly to be binding, but also above our reach, or whether we have the

law in a living Person whom we have learned to love. In the one case

there stands upon a pedestal above us a cold perfection, white,

complete, marble; in the other case there stands beside us a living law

in pattern, a Brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; whose

hand we can grasp; whose heart we can trust, and of whose help we can

be sure. To say to me: 'Follow the ideal of perfect righteousness,' is

to relegate me to a dreary, endless struggling; to say to me, 'Follow

your Brother, and be like your Father,' is to bring warmth and hope and

liberty into all my effort. The word that says, 'Walk worthy of God,'

is a royal law, the perfect law of perfect freedom.

Again, when we say, 'Walk worthy of God,' we mean two things--one, 'Do

after His example,' and the other, 'Render back to Him what He deserves

for what He has done to you.' And so this law bids us measure, by the

side of that great love that died on the Cross for us all, our poor

imperfect returns of gratitude and of service. He has lavished all His

treasure on you; what have you brought him back? He has given you the

whole wealth of His tender pity, of His forgiving mercy, of His

infinite goodness. Do you adequately repay such lavish love? Has He not

'sown much and reaped little' in all our hearts? Has He not poured out

the fulness of His affection, and have we not answered Him with a few

grudging drops squeezed from our hearts? Oh! brethren! 'Walk worthy of

the Lord,' and neither dishonour Him by your conduct as professing

children of His, nor affront Him by the wretched refuse and remnants of

your devotion and service that you bring back to Him in response to His

love to you.

II. Now a word about the next form of this all-embracing precept. The

whole law of our Christian life may be gathered up in another

correspondence, 'Walk worthy of the Gospel' (Phil. i. 27), in a manner

conformed to that great message of God's love to us.

That covers substantially the same ground as we have already been going

over, but it presents the same ideas in a different light. It presents

the Gospel as a rule of conduct. Now people have always been apt to

think of it more as a message of deliverance than as a practical guide,

as we all need to make an effort to prevent our natural indolence and

selfishness from making us forget that the Gospel is quite as much a

rule of conduct as a message of pardon.

It is both by the same act. In the very facts on which our redemption

depends lies the law of our lives.

What was Paul's Gospel? According to Paul's own definition of it, it

was this: 'How that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the

Scriptures.' And the message that I desire now to bring to all you

professing Christians is this: Do not always be looking at Christ's

Cross only as your means of acceptance. Do not only be thinking of

Christ's Passion as that which has barred for you the gates of

punishment, and has opened for you the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It has done all that; but if you are going to stop there you have only

got hold of a very maimed and imperfect edition of the Gospel. The

Cross is your pattern, as well as the anchor of your hope and the

ground of your salvation, if it is anything at all to you. And it is

not the ground of your salvation and the anchor of your hope unless it

is your pattern. It is the one in exactly the same degree in which it

is the other.

So all self-pleasing, all harsh insistence on your own claims, all

neglect of suffering and sorrow and sin around you, comes under the

lash of this condemnation: 'They are not worthy of the Gospel.' And all

unforgivingness of spirit and of temper in individuals and in nations,

in public and in private matters, that, too, is in flagrant

contradiction to the principles that are taught on the Cross to which

you say you look for your salvation. Have you got forgiveness, and are

you going out from the presence-chamber of the King to take your

brother by the throat for the beggarly coppers that he owes you, and

say: 'Pay me what thou owest!' when the Master has forgiven you all

that great mountain of indebtedness which you owe Him? Oh, my brother!

if Christian men and women would only learn to take away the scales

from their eyes and souls; not looking at Christ's Cross with less

absolute trustfulness, as that by which all their salvation comes, but

also learning to look at it as closely and habitually as yielding the

pattern to which their lives should be conformed, and would let the

heart-melting thankfulness which it evokes when gazed at as the ground

of our hope prove itself true by its leading them to an effort at

imitating that great love, and so walking worthy of the Gospel, how

their lives would be transformed! It is far easier to fetter your life

with yards of red-tape prescriptions--do this, do not do that--far

easier to out-pharisee the Pharisees in punctilious scrupulosities,

than it is honestly, and for one hour, to take the Cross of Christ as

the pattern of your lives, and to shape yourselves by that.

One looks round upon a lethargic, a luxurious, a self-indulgent, a

self-seeking, a world-besotted professing Church, and asks: 'Are these

the people on whose hearts a cross is stamped?' Do these men--or rather

let us say, do we live as becometh the Gospel which proclaims the

divinity of self-sacrifice, and that the law of a perfect human life is

perfect self-forgetfulness, even as the secret of the divine nature is

perfect love? 'Walk worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'

III. Then again, there is another form of this same general

prescription which suggests to us a kindred and yet somewhat different

standard. We are also bidden to bring our lives into conformity to, and

correspondence with, or, as the Bible has it, 'to walk worthy of the

calling wherewith we are called' (Eph. iv. 1).

God summons or invites us, and summons us to what? The words which

follow our text answer, 'Who calleth you into His own kingdom and

glory.' All you Christian people have been invited, and if you are

Christians you have accepted the invitation; and all you men and women,

whether you are Christians or not, have been and are being invited and

summoned into a state and a world (for the reference is to the future

life), in which God's will is supreme, and all wills are moulded into

conformity with that, and into a state and a world in which all

shall--because they submit to His will--partake of His glory, the

fulness of His uncreated light.

That being the aim of the summons, that being the destiny that is held

out before us all, ought not that destiny and the prospect of what we

may be in the future, to fling some beams of guiding brightness on to

the present?

Men that are called to high functions prepare themselves therefor. If

you knew that you were going away to Australia in six months, would you

not be beginning to get your outfit ready? You Christian men profess to

believe that you have been called to a condition in which you will

absolutely obey God's will, and be the loyal subjects of His kingdom,

and in which you will partake of God's glory. Well then, obey His will

here, and let some scattered sparklets of that uncreated light that is

one day going to flood your soul lie upon your face to-day. Do not go

and cut your lives into two halves, one of them all contradictory to

that which you expect in the other, but bring a harmony between the

present, in all its weakness and sinfulness, and that great hope and

certain destiny that blazes on the horizon of your hope, as the joyful

state to which you have been invited. 'Walk worthy of the calling to

which you are called.'

And again, that same thought of the destiny should feed our hope, and

make us live under its continual inspiration. A walk worthy of such a

calling and such a caller should know no despondency, nor any weary,

heartless lingering, as with tired feet on a hard road. Brave good

cheer, undimmed energy, a noble contempt of obstacles, a confidence in

our final attainment of that purity and glory which is not depressed by

consciousness of present failure--these are plainly the characteristics

which ought to mark the advance of the men in whose ears such a summons

from such lips rings as their marching orders.

And a walk worthy of our calling will turn away from earthly things. If

you believe that God has summoned you to His kingdom and glory, surely,

surely, that should deaden in your heart the love and the care for the

trifles that lie by the wayside. Surely, surely, if that great voice is

inviting, and that merciful hand is beckoning you into the light, and

showing you what you may possess there, it is not walking according to

that summons if you go with your eyes fixed upon the trifles at your

feet, and your whole heart absorbed in this present fleeting world.

Unworldliness, in its best and purest fashion--by which I mean not only

a contempt for material wealth and all that it brings, but the sitting

loose by everything that is beneath the stars--unworldliness is the

only walk that is 'worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called.'

And if you hear that voice ringing like a trumpet call, or a

commander's shout on the battlefield, into your ears, ever to stimulate

you, to rebuke your lagging indifference; if you are ever conscious in

your inmost hearts of the summons to His kingdom and glory, then, no

doubt, by a walk worthy of it, you will make your calling sure; and

there shall 'an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly into the

everlasting kingdom.'

IV. And the last of the phases of this prescription which I have to

deal with is this. The whole Christian duty is further crystallised

into the one command, to walk in a manner conformed to, and

corresponding with, the character which is impressed upon us.

In the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans (verse 2), we read

about a very small matter, that it is to be done 'worthily of the

saints.' It is only about the receiving of a good woman who was

travelling from Corinth to Rome, and extending hospitality to her in

such a manner as became professing Christians; but the very minuteness

of the details to which the great principle is applied points a lesson.

The biggest principle is not too big to be brought down to the

narrowest details, and that is the beauty of principles as

distinguished from regulations. Regulations try to be minute, and,

however minute you make them, some case always starts up that is not

exactly provided for in them, and so the regulations come to nothing. A

principle does not try to be minute, but it casts its net wide and it

gathers various cases into its meshes. Like the fabled tent in the old

legend that could contract so as to have room for but one man, or

expand wide enough to hold an army, so this great principle of

Christian conduct can be brought down to giving 'Phoebe our sister, who

is a servant of the church at Cenchrea,' good food and a comfortable

lodging, and any other little kindnesses, when she comes to Rome. And

the same principle may be widened out to embrace and direct us in the

largest tasks and most difficult circumstances.

'Worthily of saints'--the name is an omen, and carries in it rules of

conduct. The root idea of 'saint' is 'one separated to God,' and the

secondary idea which flows from that is 'one who is pure.'

All Christians are 'saints.' They are consecrated and set apart for

God's service, and in the degree in which they are conscious of and

live out that consecration, they are pure.

So their name, or rather the great fact which their name implies,

should be ever before them, a stimulus and a law. We are bound to

remember that we are consecrated, separated as God's possession, and

that therefore purity is indispensable. The continual consciousness of

this relation and its resulting obligations would make us recoil from

impurity as instinctively as the sensitive plant shuts up its little

green fingers when anything touches it; or as the wearer of a white

robe will draw it up high above the mud on a filthy pavement. Walk

'worthily of saints' is another way of saying, Be true to your own best

selves. Work up to the highest ideal of your character. That is far

more wholesome than to be always looking at our faults and failures,

which depress and tempt us to think that the actual is the measure of

the possible, and the past or present of the future. There is no fear

of self-conceit or of a mistaken estimate of ourselves. The more

clearly we keep our best and deepest self before our consciousness, the

more shall we learn a rigid judgment of the miserable contradictions to

it in our daily outward life, and even in our thoughts and desires. It

is a wholesome exhortation, when it follows these others of which we

have been speaking (and not else), which bids Christians remember that

they are saints and live up to their name.

A Christian's inward and deepest self is better than his outward life.

We have all convictions in our inmost hearts which we do not work out,

and beliefs that do not influence us as we know they ought to do, and

sometimes wish that they did. By our own fault our lives but

imperfectly show their real inmost principle. Friction always wastes

power before motion is produced.

So then, we may well gather together all our duties in this final form

of the all-comprehensive law, and say to ourselves, 'Walk worthily of

saints.' Be true to your name, to your best selves, to your deepest

selves. Be true to your separation for God's service, and to the purity

which comes from it. Be true to the life which God has implanted in

you. That life may be very feeble and covered by a great deal of

rubbish, but it is divine. Let it work, let it out. Do not disgrace

your name.

These are the phases of the law of Christian conduct. They reach far,

they fit close, they penetrate deeper than the needle points of minute

regulations. If you will live in a manner corresponding to the

character, and worthy of the love of God, as revealed in Christ, and in

conformity with the principles that are enthroned upon His Cross, and

in obedience to the destiny held forth in your high calling, and in

faithfulness to the name that He Himself has impressed upon you, then

your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the painful and

punctilious pharisaical obedience to outward commands, and all things

lovely and of good report will spring to life in your hearts and bear

fruit in your lives.

One last word--all these exhortations go on the understanding that you

are a Christian, that you have taken Christ for your Saviour, and are

resting upon Him, and recognising in Him the revelation of God, and in

His Cross the foundation of your hope; that you have listened to, and

yielded to, the divine summons, and that you have a right to be called

a saint. Is that presumption true about you, my friend? If it is not,

Christianity thinks that it is of no use wasting time talking to you

about conduct.

It has another word to speak to you first, and after you have heard and

accepted it, there will be time enough to talk to you about rules for

living. The first message which Christ sends to you by my lips is,

Trust your sinful selves to Him as your only all-sufficient Saviour.

When you have accepted Him, and are leaning on Him with all your weight

of sin and suffering, and loving Him with your ransomed heart, then,

and not till then, will you be in a position to hear His law for your

life, and to obey it. Then, and not till then, will you appreciate the

divine simplicity and breadth of the great command to walk worthy of

God, and the divine tenderness and power of the motive which enforces

it, and prints it on yielding and obedient hearts, even the dying love

and Cross of His Son. Then, and not till then, will you know how the

voice from heaven that calls you to His kingdom stirs the heart like

the sound of a trumpet, and how the name which you bear is a perpetual

spur to heroic service and priestly purity. Till then, the word which

we would plead with you to listen to and accept is that great answer of

our Lord's to those who came to Him for a rule of conduct, instead of

for the gift of life: 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe

on Him whom He hath sent.'

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SMALL DUTIES AND THE GREAT HOPE

'But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for

ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10. And indeed ye

do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we

beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; 11. And that ye

study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your

own hands, as we commanded you; 12. That ye may walk honestly toward

them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. 13. But I

would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are

asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14. For

if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which

sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. 15. For this we say unto you by

the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the

coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16. For

the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice

of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ

shall rise first; 17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be

caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the

air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18. Wherefore comfort one

another with these words.'--1 Thess. iv. 9-18.

'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I

write unto you. 2. For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the

Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.'--1 Thess. v. 1-2.

This letter was written immediately on the arrival of Silas and Timothy

in Corinth (1 Thess. iii. 6, 'even now'), and is all flushed with the

gladness of relieved anxiety, and throbs with love. It gains in

pathetic interest when we remember that, while writing it, the Apostle

was in the thick of his conflict with the Corinthian synagogue. The

thought of his Thessalonian converts came to him like a waft of pure,

cool air to a heated brow.

The apparent want of connection in the counsels of the two last

chapters is probably accounted for by supposing that he takes up, as

they occurred to him, the points reported by the two messengers. But we

may note that the plain, prosaic duties enjoined in verses 7-12 lead on

to the lofty revelations of the rest of the context without any sense

of a gap, just because to Paul the greatest truths had a bearing on the

smallest duties, and the vision of future glory was meant to shape the

homely details of present work.

I. We need to make an effort to realise the startling novelty of 'love

of the brethren' when this letter was written. The ancient world was

honeycombed with rents and schisms, scarcely masked by political union.

In the midst of a world of selfishness this new faith started up, and

by some magic knit warring nationalities and hostile classes and wide

diversities of culture and position into a strange whole, transcending

all limits of race and language. The conception of brotherhood was new,

and the realisation of it in Christian love was still more astonishing.

The world wondered; but to the Christians the new affection was, we

might almost say, instinctive, so naturally and spontaneously did it

fill their hearts.

Paul's graceful way of enjoining it here is no mere pretty compliment.

The Thessalonians did not need to be bidden to love the brethren, for

such love was a part of their new life, and breathed into their hearts

by God Himself. They were drawn together by common relation to Jesus,

and driven together by common alienation from the world. Occasions of

divergence had not yet risen. The world had not yet taken on a varnish

of Christianity. The new bond was still strong in its newness. So,

short as had been the time since Paul landed at Neapolis, the golden

chain of love bound all the Macedonian Christians together, and all

that Paul had to exhort was the strengthening of its links and their

tightening.

That fair picture faded soon, but it still remains true that the deeper

our love to Jesus, the warmer will be our love to all His lovers. The

morning glow may not come back to the prosaic noonday, but love to the

brethren remains as an indispensable token of the Christian life. Let

us try ourselves thereby.

II. What have exhortations to steady work to do with exhortations to

increasing love? Not much, apparently; but may not the link be, 'Do not

suppose that your Christianity is to show itself only in emotions,

however sweet; the plain humdrum tasks of a working man's life are

quite as noble a field as the exalted heights of brotherly love.' A

loving heart is good, but a pair of diligent hands are as good. The

juxtaposition of these two commands preaches a lesson which we need

quite as much as the Thessalonians did. Possibly, too, as we see more

fully in the second Epistle, the new truths, which had cut them from

their old anchorage, had set some of them afloat on a sea of unquiet

expectation. So much of their old selves had been swept away, that it

would be hard for some to settle down to the old routine. That is a

common enough experience in all 'revivals,' and at Thessalonica it was

intensified by speculations about Christ's coming.

The 'quiet' which Paul would have us cultivate is not only external,

but the inward tranquillity of a spirit calm because fixed on God and

filled with love. The secret place of the Most High is ever still, and,

if we dwell there, our hearts will not be disturbed by any tumults

without. To 'do our own business' is quite a different thing from

selfish 'looking on our own things,' for a great part of our business

is to care for others, and nothing dries up sympathy and practical help

more surely than a gossiping temper, which is perpetually buzzing about

other people's concerns, and knows everybody's circumstances and duties

better than its own. This restless generation, whose mental food is so

largely the newspaper, with its floods of small-talk about people, be

they politicians, ministers, or murderers, sorely needs these precepts.

We are all so busy that we have no time for quiet meditation, and so

much occupied with trivialities about others that we are strangers to

ourselves. Therefore religious life is low in many hearts.

The dignity of manual labour was a new doctrine to preach to Greeks,

but Paul lays stress on it repeatedly in his letters to Thessalonica.

Apparently most of the converts there were of the labouring class, and

some of them needed the lesson of Paul's example as well as his

precept. A Christian workman wielding chisel or trowel for Christ's

sake will impress 'them that are without.' Dignity depends, not on the

nature, but on the motive, of our work. 'A servant with this clause

makes drudgery divine.' It is permissible to take the opinion of those

who are not Christians into account, and to try to show them what good

workmen Christ can turn out. It is right, too, to cultivate a spirit of

independence, and to prefer a little earned to abundance given as a

gift or alms. Perhaps some of the Thessalonians were trying to turn

brotherly love to profit, and to live on their richer brethren. Such

people infest the Church at all times.

III. With what ease, like a soaring song-bird, the letter rises to the

lofty height of the next verses, and how the note becomes more musical,

and the style richer, more sonorous and majestic, with the changed

subject! From the workshop to the descending Lord and the voice of the

trumpet and the rising saints, what a leap, and yet how easily it is

made! Happy we if we keep the future glory and the present duty thus

side by side, and pass without jar from the one to the other!

The special point which Paul has in view must be kept well in mind.

Some of the Thessalonians seem to have been troubled, not by questions

about the Resurrection, as the Corinthians afterwards were, but by a

curious difficulty, namely, whether the dead saints would not be worse

off at Christ's coming than the living, and to that one point Paul

addresses himself. These verses are not a general revelation of the

course of events at that coming, or of the final condition of the

glorified saints, but an answer to the question, What is the relation

between the two halves of the Church, the dead and the living, in

regard to their participation in Christ's glory when He comes again?

The question is answered negatively in verse 15, positively in verses

16 and 17.

But, before considering them, note some other precious lessons taught

here. That sweet and consoling designation for the dead, 'them who

sleep in Jesus,' is Christ's gift to sorrowing hearts. No doubt, the

idea is found in pagan thinkers, but always with the sad addition, 'an

eternal sleep.' Men called death by that name in despair. The Christian

calls it so because he knows that sleep implies continuous existence,

repose, consciousness, and awaking. The sleepers are not dead, they

will be roused to refreshed activity one day.

We note how emphatically verse 14 brings out the thought that Jesus

died, since He suffered all the bitterness of death, not only in

physical torments, but in that awful sense of separation from God which

is the true death in death, and that, because He did, the ugly thing

wears a softened aspect to believers, and is but sleep. He died that we

might never know what the worst sting of death is.

We note further that, in order to bring out the truth of the gracious

change which has passed on death physical for His servants, the

remarkable expression is used, in verse 14, 'fallen asleep through

Jesus'; His mediatorial work being the reason for their death becoming

sleep. Similarly, it is only in verse 16 that the bare word 'dead' is

used about them, and there it is needed for emphasis and clearness.

When we are thinking of Resurrection we can afford to look death in the

face.

We note that Paul here claims to be giving a new revelation made to him

directly by Christ. 'By (or, "in") the word of the Lord' cannot mean

less than that. The question arises, in regard to verse 15, whether

Paul expected that the advent would come in his lifetime. It need not

startle any if he were proved to have cherished such a mistaken

expectation; for Christ Himself taught the disciples that the time of

His second coming was a truth reserved, and not included in His gifts

to them. But two things may be noted. First, that in the second

Epistle, written very soon after this, Paul sets himself to damp down

the expectation of the nearness of the advent, and points to a long

course of historical development of incipient tendencies which must

precede it; and, second, that his language here does not compel the

conclusion that he expected to be alive at the second coming. For he is

distinguishing between the two classes of the living and the dead, and

he naturally puts himself in the class to which, at that time, he and

his hearers belonged, without thereby necessarily deciding, or even

thinking about, the question whether he and they would or would not

belong to that class at the actual time of the advent.

The revelation here reveals much, and leaves much unrevealed. It is

perfectly clear on the main point. Negatively, it declares that the

sleeping saints lose nothing, and are not anticipated or hindered in

any blessedness by the living. Positively, it declares that they

precede the living, inasmuch as they 'rise first'; that is, before the

living saints, who do not sleep, but are changed (1 Cor. xv. 51), are

thus transfigured. Then the two great companies shall unitedly rise to

meet the descending Lord; and their unity in Him, and, therefore, their

fellowship with one another, shall be eternal.

That great hope helps us to bridge the dark gorge of present

separation. It leaves unanswered a host of questions which our lonely

hearts would fain have cleared up; but it is enough for hope to hold

by, and for sorrow to be changed into submission and anticipation. As

to the many obscurities that still cling to the future, the meaning and

the nature of the accompaniments, the shout, the trumpet, and the like,

the way of harmonising the thought that the departed saints attend the

descending Lord, with whom they dwell now, with the declaration here

that they rise from the earth to meet Him, the question whether these

who are thus caught up from earth to meet the Lord in the air come back

again with Him to earth,--all these points of curious speculation we

may leave. We know enough for comfort, for assurance of the perfect

reunion of the saints who sleep in Jesus and of the living, and of the

perfect blessedness of both wings of the great army. We may be content

with what is clearly revealed, and be sure that, if what is unrevealed

would have been helpful to us, He would have told us. We are to use the

revelation for comfort and for stimulus, and we are to remember that

'times and seasons' are not told us, nor would the knowledge of them

profit us.

Paul took for granted that the Thessalonians remembered the Lord's

word, which he had, no doubt, told them, that He would come 'as a thief

in the night.' So he discourages a profitless curiosity, and exhorts to

a continual vigilance. When He comes, it will be suddenly, and will

wake some who live from a sinful sleep with a shock of terror, and the

dead from a sweet sleep in Him with a rush of gladness, as in body and

spirit they are filled with His life, and raised to share in His

triumph.

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SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS

' . . . Them also which sleep in Jesus . . .'--1 Thess. iv. 14.

That expression is not unusual, in various forms, in the Apostle's

writings. It suggests a very tender and wonderful thought of closeness

and union between our Lord and the living dead, so close as that He is,

as it were, the atmosphere in which they move, or the house in which

they dwell. But, tender and wonderful as the thought is, it is not

exactly the Apostle's idea here. For, accurately rendered--and accuracy

in regard to Scripture language is not pedantry--the words run, 'Them

which sleep through Jesus.'

Now, that is a strange phrase, and, I suppose, its strangeness is the

reason why our translators have softened it down to the more familiar

and obvious 'in Jesus.' We can understand living through Christ, on

being sacred through Christ, but what can sleeping through Christ mean?

I shall hope to answer the question presently, but, in the meantime, I

only wish to point out what the Apostle does say, and to plead for

letting him say it, strange though it sounds. For the strange and the

difficult phrases of Scripture are like the hard quartz reefs in which

gold is, and if we slur them over we are likely to loose the treasure.

Let us try if we can find what the gold here may be.

Now, there are only two thoughts that I wish to dwell upon as suggested

by these words. One is the softened aspect of death, and of the state

of the Christian dead; and the other is the ground or cause of that

softened aspect.

I. First, then, the softened aspect of death, and of the state of the

Christian dead.

It is to Jesus primarily that the New Testament writers owe their use

of this gracious emblem of sleep. For, as you remember, the word was

twice upon our Lord's lips; once when, over the twelve-years-old maid

from whom life had barely ebbed away, He said, 'She is not dead, but

sleepeth'; and once when in regard of the man Lazarus, from whom life

had removed further, He said, 'Our friend sleepeth, but I go that I may

awake him out of sleep.' But Jesus was not the originator of the

expression. You find it in the Old Testament, where the prophet Daniel,

speaking of the end of the days and the bodily Resurrection, designates

those who share in it as 'them that sleep in the dust of the earth.'

And the Old Testament was not the sole origin of the phrase. For it is

too natural, too much in accordance with the visibilities of death, not

to have suggested itself to many hearts, and been shrined in many

languages. Many an inscription of Greek and Roman date speaks of death

under this figure; but almost always it is with the added, deepened

note of despair, that it is a sleep which knows no waking, but lasts

through eternal night.

Now, the Christian thought associated with this emblem is the precise

opposite of the pagan one. The pagan heart shrank from naming the ugly

thing because it was so ugly. So dark and deep a dread coiled round the

man, as he contemplated it, that he sought to drape the dreadfulness in

some kind of thin, transparent veil, and to put the buffer of a word

between him and its hideousness. But the Christian's motive for the use

of the word is the precise opposite. He uses the gentler expression

because the thing has become gentler.

It is profoundly significant that throughout the whole of the New

Testament the plain, naked word 'death' is usually applied, not to the

physical fact which we ordinarily designate by the name, but to the

grim thing of which that physical fact is only the emblem and the

parable, viz., the true death which lies in the separation of the soul

from God; whilst predominately the New Testament usage calls the

physical fact by some other gentler form of expression, because, as I

say, the gentleness has enfolded the thing to be designated.

For instance, you find one class of representations which speak of

death as being a departing and a being with Christ; or which call it,

as one of the apostles does, an 'exodus,' where it is softened down to

be merely a change of environment, a change of locality. Then another

class of representations speak of it as 'putting off this my

tabernacle,' or, the dissolution of the 'earthly house'--where there is

a broad, firm line of demarcation drawn between the inhabitant and the

habitation, and the thing is softened down to be a mere change of

dwelling. Again, another class of expressions speak of it as being an

'offering,' where the main idea is that of a voluntary surrender, a

sacrifice or libation of myself, and my life poured out upon the altar

of God. But sweetest, deepest, most appealing to all our hearts, is

that emblem of my text, 'them that sleep.' It is used, if I count

rightly, some fourteen times in the New Testament, and it carries with

it large and plain lessons, on which I touch but for a moment. What,

then, does this metaphor say to us?

Well, it speaks first of rest. That is not altogether an attractive

conception to some of us. If it be taken exclusively it is by no means

wholesome. I suppose that the young, and the strong, and the eager, and

the ambitious, and the prosperous rather shrink from the notion of

their activities being stiffened into slumber. But, dear friends, there

are some of us like tired children in a fair, who would fain have done

with the weariness, who have made experience of the distractions and

bewildering changes, whose backs are stiffened with toil, whose hearts

are heavy with loss. And to all of us, in some moods, the prospect of

shuffling off this weary coil of responsibilities and duties and tasks

and sorrows, and of passing into indisturbance and repose, appeals. I

believe, for my part, that, after all, the deepest longing of

men--though they search for it through toil and effort--is for repose.

As the poet has taught us, 'there is no joy but calm.' Every heart is

weary enough, and heavy laden, and labouring enough, to feel the

sweetness of a promise of rest:--

'Sleep, full of rest from head to foot,

Lie still, dry dust, secure of change.'

Yes! but the rest of which our emblem speaks is, as I believe, only

applicable to the bodily frame. The word 'sleep' is a transcript of

what sense enlightened by faith sees in that still form, with the

folded hands and the quiet face and the closed eyes. But let us

remember that this repose, deep and blessed as it is, is not, as some

would say, the repose of unconsciousness. I do not believe, and I would

have you not believe, that this emblem refers to the vigorous,

spiritual life, or that the passage from out of the toil and moil of

earth into the calm of the darkness beyond has any power in limiting or

suspending the vital force of the man.

Why, the very metaphor itself tells us that the sleeper is not

unconscious. He is parted from the outer world, he is unaware of

externals. When Stephen knelt below the old wall, and was surrounded by

howling fanatics that slew him, one moment he was gashed with stones

and tortured, and the next 'he fell on sleep.' They might howl, and the

stones fly as they would, and he was all unaware of it. Like Jonah

sleeping in the hold, what mattered the roaring of the storm to him?

But separation from externals does not mean suspense of life or of

consciousness, and the slumberer often dreams, and is aware of himself

persistently throughout his slumber. Nay! some of his faculties are set

at liberty to work more energetically, because his connection with the

outer world is for the time suspended.

And so I say that what on the hither side is sleep, on the further side

is awaking, and that the complex whole of the condition of the sainted

dead may be described with equal truth by either metaphor; 'they sleep

in Jesus'; or, 'when I awake I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness.'

Scripture, as it seems to me, distinctly carries this limitation of the

emblem. For what does it mean when the Apostle says that to depart and

to be with Christ is far better? Surely he who thus spoke conceived

that these two things were contemporaneous, the departing and the being

with Him. And surely he who thus spoke could not have conceived that a

millennium-long parenthesis of slumberous unconsciousness was to

intervene between the moment of his decease and the moment of his

fellowship with Jesus. How could a man prefer that dormant state to the

state here, of working for and living with the Lord? Surely, being with

Him must mean that we know where we are, and who is our companion.

And what does that text mean: 'Ye are come unto the spirits of just men

made perfect,' unless it means that of these two classes of persons who

are thus regarded as brought into living fellowship, each is aware of

the other? Does perfecting of the spirit mean the smiting of the spirit

into unconsciousness? Surely not, and surely in view of such words as

these, we must recognise the fact that, however limited and imperfect

may be the present connection of the disembodied dead, who sleep in

Christ, with external things, they know themselves, they know their

home and their companion, and they know the blessedness in which they

are lapped.

But another thought which is suggested by this emblem is, as I have

already said, most certainly the idea of awaking. The pagans said, as

indeed one of their poets has it, 'Suns can sink and return, but for

us, when our brief light sinks, there is but one perpetual night of

slumber.' The Christian idea of death is, that it is transitory as a

sleep in the morning, and sure to end. As St. Augustine says somewhere,

'Wherefore are they called sleepers, but because in the day of the Lord

they will be reawakened?'

And so these are the thoughts, very imperfectly spoken, I know, which

spring like flowers from this gracious metaphor 'them that sleep'--rest

and awaking; rest and consciousness.

II. Note the ground of this softened aspect.

They 'sleep through Him.' It is by reason of Christ and His work, and

by reason of that alone, that death's darkness is made beautiful, and

death's grimness is softened down to this. Now, in order to grasp the

full meaning of such words as these of the Apostle, we must draw a

broad distinction between the physical fact of the ending of corporeal

life and the mental condition which is associated with it by us. What

we call death, if I may so say, is a complex thing--a bodily phenomenon

plus conscience, the sense of sin, the certainty of retribution in the

dim beyond. And you have to take these elements apart. The former

remains, but if the others are removed, the whole has changed its

character and is become another thing, and a very little thing.

The mere physical fact is a trifle. Look at it as you see it in the

animals; look at it as you see it in men when they actually come to it.

In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is painless and easy, and men

sink into slumber. Strange, is it not, that so small a reality should

have power to cast over human life so immense and obscuring a shadow!

Why? Because, as the Apostle says, 'the sting of death is sin,' and if

you can take the sting out of it, then there is very little to fear,

and it comes down to be an insignificant and transient element in our

experience.

Now, the death of Jesus Christ takes away, if I may so say, the nimbus

of apprehension and dread arising from conscience and sin, and the

forecast of retribution. There is nothing left for us to face except

the physical fact, and any rough soldier, with a coarse, red coat upon

him, will face that for eighteenpence a day, and think himself well

paid. Jesus Christ has abolished death, leaving the mere shell, but

taking all the substance out of it. It has become a different thing to

men, because in that death of His He has exhausted the bitterness, and

has made it possible that we should pass into the shadow, and not fear

either conscience or sin or judgment.

In this connection I cannot but notice with what a profound meaning the

Apostle, in this very verse, uses the bare, naked word in reference to

Him, and the softened one in reference to us. 'If we believe that Jesus

Christ died and rose again, even so them also which sleep.' Ah! yes! He

died indeed, bearing all that terror with which men's consciences have

invested death. He died indeed, bearing on Himself the sins of the

world. He died that no man henceforward need ever die in that same

fashion. His death makes our deaths sleep, and His Resurrection makes

our sleep calmly certain of a waking.

So, dear 'brethren, I would not have you ignorant concerning them which

are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope.' And

I would have you to remember that, whilst Christ by His work has made

it possible that the terror may pass away, and death may be softened

and minimised into slumber, it will not be so with you--unless you are

joined to Him, and by trust in the power of His death and the

overflowing might of His Resurrection, have made sure that what He has

passed through, you will pass through, and where He is, and what He is,

you will be also.

Two men die by one railway accident, sitting side by side upon one

seat, smashed in one collision. But though the outward fact is the same

about each, the reality of their deaths is infinitely different. The

one falls asleep through Jesus, in Jesus; the other dies indeed, and

the death of his body is only a feeble shadow of the death of his

spirit. Do you knit yourself to the Life, which is Christ, and then 'he

that believeth on Me shall never die.'

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THE WORK AND ARMOUR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY

'Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of

faith and love; and for a helmet the hope of salvation.'--1 Thess. v.

8.

This letter to the Thessalonians is the oldest book of the New

Testament. It was probably written within something like twenty years

of the Crucifixion; long, therefore, before any of the Gospels were in

existence. It is, therefore, exceedingly interesting and instructive to

notice how this whole context is saturated with allusions to our Lord's

teaching, as it is preserved in these Gospels; and how it takes for

granted that the Thessalonian Christians were familiar with the very

words.

For instance: 'Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so

cometh as a thief in the night' (ver. 2). How did these people in

Thessalonica know that? They had been Christians for a year or so only;

they had been taught by Paul for a few weeks only, or a month or two at

the most. How did they know it? Because they had been told what the

Master had said: 'If the goodman of the house had known at what hour

the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have

suffered his house to be broken up.'

And there are other allusions in the context almost as obvious: 'The

children of the light.' Who said that? Christ, in His words: 'The

children of this world are wiser than the children of light.' 'They

that sleep, sleep in the night, and if they be drunken, are drunken in

the night.' Where does that metaphor come from? 'Take heed lest at any

time ye be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares

of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.' 'Watch, lest

coming suddenly He find you sleeping!'

So you see all the context reposes upon, and presupposes the very

words, which you find in our present existing Gospels, as the words of

the Lord Jesus. And this is all but contemporaneous, and quite

independent, evidence of the existence in the Church, from the

beginning, of a traditional teaching which is now preserved for us in

that fourfold record of His life.

Take that remark for what it is worth; and now turn to the text itself

with which I have to deal in this sermon. The whole of the context may

be said to be a little dissertation upon the moral and religious uses

of the doctrine of our Lord's second coming. In my text these are

summed up in one central injunction which has preceding it a motive

that enforces it, and following it a method that ensures it. 'Let us be

sober'; that is the centre thought; and it is buttressed upon either

side by a motive and a means. 'Let us who are of the day,' or 'since we

are of the day,--be sober.' And let us be it by 'putting on the

breastplate and helmet of faith, love, and hope.' These, then, are the

three points which we have to consider.

I. First, this central injunction, into which all the moral teaching

drawn from the second coming of Christ is gathered--'Let us be sober.'

Now, I do not suppose we are altogether to omit any reference to the

literal meaning of this word. The context seems to show that, by its

reference to night as the season for drunken orgies. Temperance is

moderation in regard not only to the evil and swinish sin of

drunkenness, which is so manifestly contrary to all Christian integrity

and nobility of character, but in regard to the far more subtle

temptation of another form of sensual indulgence--gluttony. The

Christian Church needed to be warned of that, and if these people in

Thessalonica needed the warning I am quite sure that we need it. There

is not a nation on earth which needs it more than Englishmen. I am no

ascetic, I do not want to glorify any outward observance, but any

doctor in England will tell you that the average Englishman eats and

drinks a great deal more than is good for him. It is melancholy to

think how many professing Christians have the edge and keenness of

their intellectual and spiritual life blunted by the luxurious and

senseless table-abundance in which they habitually indulge. I am quite

sure that water from the spring and barley-bread would be a great deal

better for their souls, and for their bodies too, in the case of many

people who call themselves Christians. Suffer a word of exhortation,

and do not let it be neglected because it is brief and general. Sparta,

after all, is the best place for a man to live in, next to Jerusalem.

But, passing from that, let us turn to the higher subject with which

the Apostle is here evidently mainly concerned. What is the meaning of

the exhortation 'Be sober'? Well, first let me tell you what I think is

not the meaning of it. It does not mean an unemotional absence of

fervour in your Christian character.

There is a kind of religious teachers who are always preaching down

enthusiasm, and preaching up what they call a 'sober standard of

feeling' in matters of religion. By which, in nine cases out of ten,

they mean precisely such a tepid condition as is described in much less

polite language, when the voice from heaven says, 'Because thou art

neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of My mouth.' That is the

real meaning of the 'sobriety' that some people are always desiring you

to cultivate. I should have thought that the last piece of furniture

which any Christian Church in the twentieth century needed was a

refrigerator! A poker and a pair of bellows would be very much more

needful for them. For, dear brethren, the truths that you and I profess

to believe are of such a nature, so tremendous either in their

joyfulness and beauty, or in their solemnity and awfulness, that one

would think that if they once got into a man's head and heart, nothing

but the most fervid and continuous glow of a radiant enthusiasm would

correspond to their majesty and overwhelming importance. I venture to

say that the only consistent Christian is the enthusiastic Christian;

and that the only man who will ever do anything in this world for God

or man worth doing is the man who is not sober, according to that

cold-blooded definition which I have been speaking about, but who is

all ablaze with an enkindled earnestness that knows no diminution and

no cessation.

Paul, the very man that is exhorting here to sobriety, was the very

type of an enthusiast all his life. So Festus thought him mad, and even

in the Church at Corinth there were some to whom in his fervour, he

seemed to be 'beside himself' (2 Cor. v. 13).

Oh! for more of that insanity! You may make up your minds to this; that

any men or women that are in thorough earnest, either about

Christianity or about any other great, noble, lofty, self-forgetting

purpose, will have to be content to have the old Pentecostal charge

flung at them:--'These men are full of new wine!' Well for the Church,

and well for the men who deserve the taunt; for it means that they have

learned something of the emotion that corresponds to such magnificent

and awful verities as Christian faith converses with.

I did not intend to say so much about that; I turn now for a moment to

the consideration of what this exhortation really means. It means, as I

take it, mainly this: the prime Christian duty of self-restraint in the

use and the love of all earthly treasures and pleasures.

I need not do more than remind you how, in the very make of a man's

soul, it is clear that unless there be exercised rigid self-control he

will go all to pieces. The make of human nature, if I may say so, shows

that it is not meant for a democracy but a monarchy.

Here are within us many passions, tastes, desires, most of them rooted

in the flesh, which are as blind as hunger and thirst are. If a man is

hungry, the bread will satisfy him all the same whether he steals it or

not; and it will not necessarily be distasteful even if it be poisoned.

And there are other blind impulses and appetites in our nature which

ask nothing except this:--'Give me my appropriate gratification, though

all the laws of God and man be broken in order to get it!'

And so there has to be something like an eye given to these blind

beasts, and something like a directing hand laid upon these instinctive

impulses. The true temple of the human spirit must be built in stages,

the broad base laid in these animal instincts; above them, and

controlling them, the directing and restraining will; above it the

understanding which enlightens it and them; and supreme over all the

conscience with nothing between it and heaven. Where that is not the

order of the inner man you get wild work. You have set 'beggars on

horseback,' and we all know where they go! The man who lets passion and

inclination guide is like a steam-boat with all the furnaces banked up,

with the engines going full speed, and nobody at the wheel. It will

drive on to the rocks, or wherever the bow happens to point, no matter

though death and destruction lie beyond the next turn of the screw.

That is what you will come to unless you live in the habitual exercise

of rigid self-control.

And that self-control is to be exercised mainly, or at least as one

very important form of it, in regard to our use and estimate of the

pleasures of this present life. Yes! it is not only from the study of a

man's make that the necessity for a very rigid self-government appears,

but the observation of the conditions and circumstances in which he is

placed points the same lesson. All round about him are hands reaching

out to him drugged cups. The world with all its fading sweet comes

tempting him, and the old fable fulfils itself--Whoever takes that

Circe's cup and puts it to his lips and quaffs deep, turns into a

swine, and sits there imprisoned at the feet of the sorceress for

evermore!

There is only one thing that will deliver you from that fate, my

brother. 'Be sober,' and in regard to the world and all that it offers

to us--all joy, possession, gratification--'set a knife to thy throat

if thou be a man given to appetite.' There is no noble life possible on

any other terms--not to say there is no Christian life possible on any

other terms--but suppression and mortification of the desires of the

flesh and of the spirit. You cannot look upwards and downwards at the

same moment. Your heart is only a tiny room after all, and if you cram

it full of the world, you relegate your Master to the stable outside.

'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' 'Be sober,' says Paul, then, and

cultivate the habit of rigid self-control in regard to this present.

Oh! what a melancholy, solemn thought it is that hundreds of professing

Christians in England, like vultures after a full meal, have so gorged

themselves with the garbage of this present life that they cannot fly,

and have to be content with moving along the ground, heavy and languid.

Christian men and women, are you keeping yourselves in spiritual health

by a very sparing use of the dainties and delights of earth? Answer the

question to your own souls and to your Judge.

II. And now let me turn to the other thoughts that lie here. There is,

secondly, a motive which backs up and buttresses this exhortation. 'Let

us who are of the day'--or as the Revised Version has it a little more

emphatically and correctly, 'Let us, since we are of the day, be

sober.' 'The day'; what day? The temptation is to answer the question

by saying--'of course the specific day which was spoken about in the

beginning of the section, "the day of the Lord," that coming judgment

by the coming Christ.' But I think that although, perhaps, there may be

some allusion here to that specific day, still, if you will look at the

verses which immediately precede my text, you will see that in them the

Apostle has passed from the thought of 'the day of the Lord' to that of

day in general. That is obvious, I think, from the contrast he draws

between the 'day' and the 'night,' the darkness and the light. If so,

then, when he says 'the children of the day' he does not so much

mean--though that is quite true--that we are, as it were, akin to that

day of judgment, and may therefore look forward to it without fear, and

in quiet confidence, lifting up our heads because our redemption draws

nigh; but rather he means that Christians are the children of that

which expresses knowledge, and joy, and activity. Of these things the

day is the emblem, in every language and in every poetry. The day is

the time when men see and hear, the symbol of gladness and cheer all

the world over.

And so, says Paul, you Christian men and women belong to a joyous

realm, a realm of light and knowledge, a realm of purity and

righteousness. You are children of the light; a glad condition which

involves many glad and noble issues. Children of the light should be

brave, children of the light should not be afraid of the light,

children of the light should be cheerful, children of the light should

be buoyant, children of the light should be transparent, children of

the light should be hopeful, children of the light should be pure, and

children of the light should walk in this darkened world, bearing their

radiance with them; and making things, else unseen, visible to many a

dim eye.

But while these emblems of cheerfulness, hope, purity, and illumination

are gathered together in that grand name--'Ye are the children of the

day,' there is one direction especially in which the Apostle thinks

that that consideration ought to tell, and that is the direction of

self-restraint. 'Noblesse oblige!'--the aristocracy are bound to do

nothing low or dishonourable. The children of the light are not to

stain their hands with anything foul. Chambering and wantonness,

slumber and drunkenness, the indulgence in the appetites of the

flesh,--all that may be fitting for the night, it is clean incongruous

with the day.

Well, if you want that turned into pedestrian prose--which is no more

clear, but a little less emotional--it is just this: You Christian men

and women belong--if you are Christians--to another state of things

from that which is lying round about you; and, therefore, you ought to

live in rigid abstinence from these things that are round about you.

That is plain enough surely, nor do I suppose that I need to dwell on

that thought at any length. We belong to another order of things, says

Paul; we carry a day with us in the midst of the night. What follows

from that? Do not let us pursue the wandering lights and treacherous

will-o'-the-wisps that lure men into bottomless bogs where they are

lost. If we have light in our dwellings whilst Egypt lies in darkness,

let it teach us to eat our meat with our loins girded, and our staves

in our hands, not without bitter herbs, and ready to go forth into the

wilderness. You do not belong to the world in which you live, if you

are Christian men and women; you are only camped here. Your purposes,

thoughts, hopes, aspirations, treasures, desires, delights, go up

higher. And so, if you are children of the day, be self-restrained in

your dealings with the darkness.

III. And, last of all, my text points out for us a method by which this

great precept may be fulfilled:--'Putting on the breastplate of faith

and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation.'

That, of course, is the first rough draft occurring in Paul's earliest

Epistle, of an image which recurs at intervals, and in more or less

expanded form in other of his letters, and is so splendidly worked out

in detail in the grand picture of the Christian armour in the Epistle

to the Ephesians.

I need not do more than just remind you of the difference between that

finished picture and this outline sketch. Here we have only defensive

and not offensive armour, here the Christian graces are somewhat

differently allocated to the different parts of the armour. Here we

have only the great triad of Christian graces, so familiar on our

lips--faith, hope, charity. Here we have faith and love in the closest

possible juxtaposition, and hope somewhat more apart. The breastplate,

like some of the ancient hauberks, made of steel and gold, is framed

and forged out of faith and love blended together, and faith and love

are more closely identified in fact than faith and hope, or than love

and hope. For faith and love have the same object--and are all but

contemporaneous. Wherever a man lays hold of Jesus Christ by faith,

there cannot but spring up in his heart love to Christ; and there is no

love without faith. So that we may almost say that faith and love are

but the two throws of the shuttle, the one in the one direction and the

other in the other; whereas hope comes somewhat later in a somewhat

remoter connection with faith, and has a somewhat different object from

these other two. Therefore it is here slightly separated from its

sister graces. Faith, love, hope--these three form the defensive armour

that guard the soul; and these three make self-control possible. Like a

diver in his dress, who is let down to the bottom of the wild,

far-weltering ocean, a man whose heart is girt by faith and charity,

and whose head is covered with the helmet of hope, may be dropped down

into the wildest sea of temptation and of worldliness, and yet will

walk dry and unharmed through the midst of its depths, and breathe air

that comes from a world above the restless surges.

And in like manner the cultivation of faith, charity, and hope is the

best means for securing the exercise of sober self-control.

It is an easy thing to say to a man, 'Govern yourself!' It is a very

hard thing with the powers that any man has at his disposal to do it.

As somebody said about an army joining the rebels, 'It's a bad job when

the extinguisher catches fire!' And that is exactly the condition of

things in regard to our power of self-government. The powers that

should control are largely gone over to the enemy, and become traitors.

'Who shall keep the very keepers?' is the old question, and here is the

answer:--You cannot execute the gymnastic feat of 'erecting yourself

above yourself' any more than a man can take himself by his own coat

collar and lift himself up from the ground with his own arms. But you

can cultivate faith, hope, and charity, and these three, well

cultivated and brought to bear upon your daily life, will do the

governing for you. Faith will bring you into communication with all the

power of God. Love will lead you into a region where all the

temptations round you will be touched as by an Ithuriel spear, and will

show their foulness. And hope will turn away your eyes from looking at

the tempting splendours around, and fix them upon the glories that are

above.

And so the reins will come into your hands in an altogether new manner,

and you will be able to be king over your own nature in a fashion that

you did not dream of before, if only you will trust in Christ, and love

Him, and fix your desires on the things above.

Then you will be able to govern yourself when you let Christ govern

you. The glories that are to be done away, that gleam round you like

foul, flaring tallow-candles, will lose all their fascination and

brightness, by reason of the glory that excelleth, the pure starlike

splendour of the white inextinguishable lights of heaven.

And when by faith, charity, and hope you have drunk of the new wine of

the kingdom, the drugged and opiate cup which a sorceress world

presents, jewelled though it be, will lose its charms, and it will not

be hard to turn from it and dash it to the ground.

God help you, brother, to be 'sober,' for unless you are 'you cannot

see the kingdom of God!'

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WAKING AND SLEEPING

'Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we

should live together with Him.'--1 Thess. v. 10.

In these words the Apostle concludes a section of this, his earliest

letter, in which he has been dealing with the aspect of death in

reference to the Christian. There are two very significant usages of

language in the context which serve to elucidate the meaning of the

words of our text, and to which I refer for a moment by way of

introduction.

The one is that throughout this portion of his letter the Apostle

emphatically reserves the word 'died' for Jesus Christ, and applies to

Christ's followers only the word 'sleep.' Christ's death makes the

deaths of those who trust Him a quiet slumber. The other is that the

antithesis of waking and sleep is employed in two different directions

in this section, being first used to express, by the one term, simply

physical life, and by the other, physical death; and secondly, to

designate respectively the moral attitude of Christian watchfulness and

that of worldly apathy to things unseen and drowsy engrossment with the

present.

So in the words immediately preceding my text, we read, 'let us not

sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober.' The use of the

antithesis in our text is chiefly the former, but there cannot be

discharged from one of the expressions, 'wake,' the ideas which have

just been associated with it, especially as the word which is

translated 'wake' is the same as that just translated in the sixth

verse, 'let us watch.' So that here there is meant by it, not merely

the condition of life but that of Christian life--sober-minded

vigilance and wide-awakeness to the realities of being. With this

explanation of the meanings of the words before us, we may now proceed

to consider them a little more minutely.

I. Note the death which is the foundation of life.

Recalling what I have said as to the precision and carefulness with

which the Apostle varies his expressions in this context; speaking of

Christ's death only by that grim name, and of the death of His servants

as being merely a slumber, we have for the first thought suggested in

reference to Christ's death, that it exhausted all the bitterness of

death. Physically, the sufferings of our Lord were not greater, they

were even less, than that of many a man. His voluntary acceptance of

them was peculiar to Himself. But His death stands alone in this, that

on His head was concentrated the whole awfulness of the thing. So far

as the mere external facts go, there is nothing special about it. But I

know not how the shrinking of Jesus Christ from the Cross can be

explained without impugning His character, unless we see in His death

something far more terrible than is the common lot of men. To me

Gethsemane is altogether mysterious, and that scene beneath the olives

shatters to pieces the perfectness of His character, unless we

recognise that there it was the burden of the world's sin, beneath

which, though His will never faltered, His human power tottered. Except

we understand that, it seems to me that many who derived from Jesus

Christ all their courage, bore their martyrdom better than He did; and

that the servant has many a time been greater than his Lord. But if we

take the Scripture point of view, and say, 'The Lord has made to meet

upon Him the iniquity of us all,' then we can understand the agony

beneath the olives, and the cry from the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken

Me?'

Further, I would notice that this death is by the Apostle set forth as

being the main factor in man's redemption. This is the first of Paul's

letters, dating long before the others with which we are familiar.

Whatever may have been the spiritual development of St. Paul in certain

directions after his conversion--and I do not for a moment deny that

there was such--it is very important to notice that the fundamentals of

his Christology and doctrine of salvation were the same from the

beginning to the end, and that in this, his first utterance, he lays

down, as emphatically and clearly as ever afterwards he did, the great

truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the Cross, thereby

secured man's redemption. Here he isolates the death from the rest of

the history of Christ, and concentrates the whole light of his thought

upon the Cross, and says, There! that is the power by which men have

been redeemed. I beseech you to ask yourselves whether these

representations of Christian truth adhere to the perspective of

Scripture, which do not in like manner set forth in the foreground of

the whole the atoning death of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then note, further, that this death, the fountain of life, is a death

for us. Now I know, of course, that the language here does not

necessarily involve the idea of one dying instead of, but only of one

dying on behalf of, another. But then I come to this question, In what

conceivable sense, except the sense of bearing the world's sins, and,

therefore, mine, is the death of Jesus Christ of advantage to me? Take

the Scripture narratives. He died by the condemnation of the Jewish

courts as a blasphemer; by the condemnation of the supercilious Roman

court--cowardly in the midst of its superciliousness--as a possible

rebel, though the sentencer did not believe in the reality of the

charges. I want to know what good that is to me? He died, say some

people, as the victim of a clearer insight and a more loving heart than

the men around Him could understand. What advantage is that to me?

Oh, brethren! there is no meaning in the words 'He died for us' unless

we understand that the benefit of His death lies in the fact that it

was the sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and

that, therefore, He died for us.

But then remember, too, that in this expression is set forth, not only

the objective fact of Christ's death for us, but much in reference to

the subjective emotions and purposes of Him who died. Paul was writing

to these Thessalonians, of whom none, I suppose, except possibly a few

Jews who might be amongst them, had ever seen Jesus Christ in the

flesh, or known anything about Him. And yet he says to them, 'Away

across the ocean there, Jesus Christ died for you men, not one of whom

had ever appealed to His heart through His eyes.'

The principle involved is capable of the widest possible expansion.

When Christ went to the Cross there was in His heart, in His purposes,

in His desires, a separate place for every soul of man whom He

embraced, not with the dim vision of some philanthropist, who looks

upon the masses of unborn generations as possibly beneficially affected

by some of his far-reaching plans, but with the individualising and

separating knowledge of a divine eye, and the love of a divine heart.

Jesus Christ bore the sins of the world because He bore in His

sympathies and His purposes the sins of each single soul. Yours and

mine and all our fellows' were there. Guilt and fear and loneliness,

and all the other evils that beset men because they have departed from

the living God, are floated away

'By the water and the blood

From Thy wounded side which flowed';

and as the context teaches us, it is because He died for us that He is

our Lord, and because He died for every man that He is every man's

Master and King.

II. Note, secondly, the transformation of our lives and deaths affected

thereby.

You may remember that, in my introductory remarks, I pointed out the

double application of that antithesis of waking or sleeping in the

context as referring in one case to the fact of physical life or death,

and in the other to the fact of moral engrossment with the slumbering

influences of the present, or of Christian vigilance. I carry some

allusion to both of these ideas in the remarks that I have to make.

Through Jesus Christ life may be quickened into watchfulness. It is not

enough to take waking as meaning living, for you may turn the metaphor

round and say about a great many men that living means dreamy sleeping.

Paul speaks in the preceding verses of 'others' than Christians as

being asleep, and their lives as one long debauch and slumber in the

night. Whilst, in contrast with physical death, physical life may be

called 'waking'; the condition of thousands of men, in regard to all

the higher faculties, activities, and realities of being, is that of

somnambulists--they are walking indeed, but they are walking in their

sleep. Just as a man fast asleep knows nothing of the realities round

him; just as he is swallowed up in his own dreams, so many walk in a

vain show. Their highest faculties are dormant; the only real things do

not touch them, and their eyes are closed to these. They live in a

region of illusions which will pass away at cock-crowing, and leave

them desolate. For some of us here living is only a distempered sleep,

troubled by dreams which, whether they be pleasant or bitter, equally

lack roots in the permanent realities to which we shall wake some day.

But if we hold by Jesus Christ, who died for us, and let His love

constrain us, His Cross quicken us, and the might of His great

sacrifice touch us, and the blood of sprinkling be applied to our

eyeballs as an eye-salve, that we may see, we shall wake from our

opiate sleep--though it may be as deep as if the sky rained soporifics

upon us--and be conscious of the things that are, and have our dormant

faculties roused, and be quickened into intense vigilance against our

enemies, and brace ourselves for our tasks, and be ever looking forward

to that joyful hope, to that coming which shall bring the fulness of

waking and of life. So, you professing Christians, do you take the

lessons of this text? A sleeping Christian is on the high road to cease

to be a Christian at all. If there be one thing more comprehensively

imperative upon us than another, it is this, that, belonging, as we do

by our very profession, to the day, and being the children of the

light, we shall neither sleep nor be drunken, but be sober, watching as

they who expect their Lord. You walk amidst realities that will hide

themselves unless you gaze for them; therefore, watch. You walk amidst

enemies that will steal subtly upon you, like some gliding serpent

through the grass, or some painted savage in the forest; therefore,

watch. You expect a Lord to come from heaven with a relieving army that

is to raise the siege and free the hard-beset garrison from its fears

and its toilsome work; therefore, watch. 'They that sleep, sleep in the

night.' They who are Christ's should be like the living creatures in

the Revelation, all eyes round about, and every eye gazing on things

unseen and looking for the Master when He comes.

On the other hand, the death of Christ will soften our deaths into

slumber. The Apostle will not call what the senses call death, by that

dread name, which was warranted when applied to the facts of Christ's

death. The physical fact remaining the same, all that is included under

the complex whole called death which makes its terrors, goes, for a man

who keeps fast hold of Christ who died and lives. For what makes the

sting of death? Two or three things. It is like some poisonous insect's

sting, it is a complex weapon. One side of it is the fear of

retribution. Another side of it is the shrinking from loneliness.

Another side of it is the dread of the dim darkness of an unknown

future. And all these are taken clean away. Is it guilt, dread of

retribution? 'Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me.' Is it loneliness? In

the valley of darkness 'I will be with thee. My rod and My staff will

comfort thee.' Is it a shrinking from the dim unknown and all the

familiar habitudes and occupations of the warm corner where we have

lived? 'Jesus Christ has brought immortality to light by the Gospel.'

We do not, according to the sad words of one of the victims of modern

advanced thought, pass by the common road into the great darkness, but

by the Christ-made living Way into the everlasting light. And so it is

a misnomer to apply the same term to the physical fact plus the

accompaniment of dread and shrinking and fear of retribution and

solitude and darkness, and to the physical fact invested with the

direct and bright opposites of all these.

Sleep is rest; sleep is consciousness; sleep is the prophecy of waking.

We know not what the condition of those who sleep in Jesus may be, but

we know that the child on its mother's breast, and conscious somehow,

in its slumber, of the warm place where its head rests, is full of

repose. And they that sleep in Jesus will be so. Then, whether we wake

or sleep does not seem to matter so very much.

III. The united life of all who live with Christ.

Christ's gift to men is the gift of life in all senses of that word,

from the lowest to the highest. That life, as our text tells us, is

altogether unaffected by death. We cannot see round the sharp angle

where the valley turns, but we know that the path runs straight on

through the gorge up to the throat of the pass--and so on to the

'shining table-lands whereof our God Himself is Sun and Moon.' There

are some rivers that run through stagnant lakes, keeping the tinge of

their waters, and holding together the body of their stream undiverted

from its course, and issuing undiminished and untarnished from the

lower end of the lake. And so the stream of our lives may run through

the Dead Sea, and come out below none the worse for the black waters

through which it has forced its way. The life that Christ gives is

unaffected by death. Our creed is a risen Saviour, and the corollary of

that creed is, that death touches the circumference, but never gets

near the man. It is hard to believe, in the face of the foolish senses;

it is hard to believe, in the face of aching sorrow. It is hard to-day

to believe, in the face of passionate and ingenious denial, but it is

true all the same. Death is sleep, and sleep is life.

And so, further, my text tells us that this life is life with Christ.

We know not details, we need not know them. Here we have the presence

of Jesus Christ, if we love Him, as really as when He walked the earth.

Ay! more really, for Jesus Christ is nearer to us who, having not seen

Him, love Him, and somewhat know His divinity and His sacrifice, than

He was to the men who companied with Him all the time that He went in

and out amongst them, whilst they were ignorant of who dwelt with them,

and entertained the Lord of angels and men unawares. He is with us, and

it is the power and the privilege and the joy of our lives to realise

His presence. That Lord who, whilst He was on earth, was the Son of Man

which is in heaven, now that He is in heaven in His corporeal humanity

is the Son of God who dwells with us. And as He dwells with us, if we

love Him and trust Him, so, but in fashion incapable of being revealed

to us, now does He dwell with those of whose condition this is the only

and all-sufficing positive knowledge which we have, that they are

'absent from the body; present with the Lord.'

Further, that united life is a social life. The whole force of my text

is often missed by English readers, who run into one idea the two words

'together with.' But if you would put a comma after 'together,' you

would understand better what Paul meant. He refers to two forms of

union. Whether we wake or sleep we shall live all aggregated together,

and all aggregated 'together' because each is 'with Him.' That is to

say, union with Jesus Christ makes all who partake of that union,

whether they belong to the one side of the river or the other, into a

mighty whole. They are together because they are with the Lord.

Suppose a great city, and a stream flowing through its centre. The

palace and all pertaining to the court are on one side of the water;

there is an outlying suburb on the other, of meaner houses, inhabited

by poor and humble people. But yet it is one city. 'Ye are come unto

the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, and to the spirits

of just men made perfect.' We are knit together by one life, one love,

one thought; and the more we fix our hearts on the things which those

above live among and by, the more truly are we knit to them. As a

quaint old English writer says, 'They are gone but into another pew in

the same church.'

We are one in Him, and so there will be a perfecting of union in

reunion; and the inference so craved for by our hearts seems to be

warranted to our understandings, that that society above, which is the

perfection of society, shall not be lacking in the elements of mutual

recognition and companionship, without which we cannot conceive of

society at all. 'And so we shall ever be with the Lord.'

Dear friends, I beseech you to trust your sinful souls to that dear

Lord who bore you in His heart and mind when He bore His cross to

Calvary and completed the work of your redemption. If you will accept

Him as your sacrifice and Saviour, when He cried 'It is finished,'

united to Him your lives will be quickened into intense activity and

joyful vigilance and expectation, and death will be smoothed into a

quiet falling asleep. 'The shadow feared of man,' that strikes

threateningly across every path, will change as we approach it, if our

hearts are anchored on Him who died for us, into the Angel of Light to

whom God has given charge concerning us to bear up our feet upon His

hands, and land us in the presence of the Lord and in the perfect

society of those who love Him. And so shall we live together, and all

together, with Him.

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EDIFICATION

'Edify one another.'--1 Thess. v. 11.

I do not intend to preach about that clause only, but I take it as

containing, in the simplest form, one of the Apostle's favourite

metaphors which runs through all his letters, and the significance of

which, I think, is very little grasped by ordinary readers.

'Edify one another.' All metaphorical words tend to lose their light

and colour, and the figure to get faint, in popular understanding. We

all know that 'edifice' means a building; we do not all realise that

'edify' means to build up. And it is a great misfortune that our

Authorised Version, in accordance with the somewhat doubtful principle

on which its translators proceeded, varies the rendering of the one

Greek word so as to hide the frequent recurrence of it in the apostolic

teaching. The metaphor that underlies it is the notion of building up a

structure. The Christian idea of the structure to be built up is that

it is a temple. I wish in this sermon to try to bring out some of the

manifold lessons and truths that lie in this great figure, as applied

to the Christian life.

Now, glancing over the various uses of the phrase in the New Testament,

I find that the figure of 'building,' as the great duty of the

Christian life, is set forth under three aspects; self-edification,

united edification, and divine edification. And I purpose to look at

these in order.

I. First, self-edification.

According to the ideal of the Christian life that runs through the New

Testament, each Christian man is a dwelling-place of God's, and his

work is to build himself up into a temple worthy of the divine

indwelling. Now, I suppose that the metaphor is such a natural and

simple one that we do not need to look for any Scriptural basis of it.

But if we did, I should be disposed to find it in the solemn antithesis

with which the Sermon on the Mount is closed, where there are the two

houses pictured, the one built upon the rock and standing firm, and the

other built upon the sand. But that is perhaps unnecessary.

We are all builders; building up--what? Character, ourselves. But what

sort of a thing is it that we are building? Some of us pigsties, in

which gross, swinish lusts wallow in filth; some of us shops; some of

us laboratories, studies, museums; some of us amorphous structures that

cannot be described. But the Christian man is to be building himself up

into a temple of God. The aim which should ever burn clear before us,

and preside over even our smallest actions, is that which lies in this

misused old word, 'edify' yourselves.

The first thing about a structure is the foundation. And Paul was

narrow enough to believe that the one foundation upon which a human

spirit could be built up into a hallowed character is Jesus Christ. He

is the basis of all our certitude. He is the anchor for all our hopes.

To Him should be referred all our actions; for Him and by Him our lives

should be lived. On Him should rest, solid and inexpugnable, standing

four-square to all the winds that blow, the fabric of our characters.

Jesus Christ is the pattern, the motive which impels, and the power

which enables, me to rear myself into a habitation of God through the

Spirit. Whilst I gladly acknowledge that very lovely structures may be

reared upon another foundation than Him, I would beseech you all to lay

this on your hearts and consciences, that for the loftiest, serenest

beauty of character there is but one basis upon which it can be rested.

'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is

Jesus Christ.'

Then there is another aspect of this same metaphor, not in Paul's

writings but in another part of the New Testament, where we read: 'Ye,

beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.' So that, in a

subordinate sense, a man's faith is the basis upon which he can build

such a structure of character; or, to put it into other words--in

regard to the man himself, the first requisite to the rearing of such a

fabric as God will dwell in is that he, by his own personal act of

faith, should have allied himself to Jesus Christ, who is the

foundation; and should be in a position to draw from Him all the power,

and to feel raying out from Him all the impulses, and lovingly to

discern in Him all the characteristics, which make Him a pattern for

all men in their building.

The first course of stone that we lay is Faith; and that course is, as

it were, mortised into the foundation, the living Rock. He that builds

on Christ cannot build but by faith. The two representations are

complementary to one another, the one, which represents Jesus Christ as

the foundation, stating the ultimate fact, and the other, which

represents faith as the foundation, stating the condition on which we

come into vital contact with Christ Himself.

Then, further, in this great thought of the Christian life being

substantially a building up of oneself on Jesus is implied the need for

continuous labour. You cannot build up a house in half an hour. You

cannot do it, as the old fable told us that Orpheus did, by music, or

by wishing. There must be dogged, hard, continuous, life-long effort if

there is to be this building up. No man becomes a saint per saltum. No

man makes a character at a flash. The stones are actions; the mortar is

that mystical, awful thing, habit; and deeds cemented together by

custom rise into that stately dwelling-place in which God abides. So,

there is to be a life-long work in character, gradually rearing it into

His likeness.

The metaphor also carries with it the idea of orderly progression.

There are a number of other New Testament emblems which set forth this

notion of the true Christian ideal as being continual growth. For

instance, 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the

ear,' represents it as resembling vegetable growth, while elsewhere it

is likened to the growth of the human body. Both of these are beautiful

images, in that they suggest that such progressive advancement is the

natural consequence of life; and is in one aspect effortless and

instinctive.

But then you have to supplement that emblem with others, and there

comes in sharp contrast to it the metaphor which represents the

Christian progress as being warfare. There the element of resistance is

emphasised, and the thought is brought out that progress is to be made

in spite of strong antagonisms, partly to be found in external

circumstances, and partly to be found in our own treacherous selves.

The growth of the corn or of the body does not cover the whole facts of

the case, but there must be warfare in order to growth.

There is also the other metaphor by which this Christian progress,

which is indispensable to the Christian life, and is to be carried on,

whatever may oppose it, is regarded as a race. There the idea of the

great, attractive, but far-off future reward comes into view, as well

as the strained muscles and the screwed-up energy with which the runner

presses towards the mark. But we have not only to fling the result

forward into the future, and to think of the Christian life as all

tending towards an end, which end is not realised here; but we have to

think of it, in accordance with this metaphor of my text, as being

continuously progressive, so as that, though unfinished, the building

is there; and much is done, though all is not accomplished, and the

courses rise slowly, surely, partially realising the divine Architect's

ideal, long before the headstone is brought out with shoutings and

tumult of acclaim. A continuous progress and approximation towards the

perfect ideal of the temple completed, consecrated, and inhabited by

God, lies in this metaphor.

Is that you, Christian man and woman? Is the notion of progress a part

of your working belief? Are you growing, fighting, running, building up

yourselves more and more in your holy faith? Alas! I cannot but believe

that the very notion of progress has died out from a great many

professing Christians.

There is one more idea in this metaphor of self-edification, viz., that

our characters should be being modelled by us on a definite plan, and

into a harmonious whole. I wonder how many of us in this chapel this

morning have ever spent a quiet hour in trying to set clearly before

ourselves what we want to make of ourselves, and how we mean to go

about it. Most of us live by haphazard very largely, even in regard to

outward things, and still more entirely in regard to our characters.

Most of us have not consciously before us, as you put a pattern-line

before a child learning to write, any ideal of ourselves to which we

are really seeking to approximate. Have you? And could you put it into

words? And are you making any kind of intelligent and habitual effort

to get at it? I am afraid a great many of us, if we were honest, would

have to say, No! If a man goes to work as his own architect, and has a

very hazy idea of what it is that he means to build, he will not build

anything worth the trouble. If your way of building up yourselves is,

as Aaron said his way of making the calf was, putting all into the

fire, and letting chance settle what comes out, nothing will come out

better than a calf. Brother! if you are going to build, have a plan,

and let the plan be the likeness of Jesus Christ. And then, with

continuous work, and the exercise of continuous faith, which knits you

to the foundation, 'build up yourselves for an habitation of God.'

II. We have to consider united edification.

There are two streams of representation about this matter in the

Pauline Epistles, the one with which I have already been dealing, which

does not so often appear, and the other which is the habitual form of

the representation, according to which the Christian community, as a

whole, is a temple, and building up is a work to be done reciprocally

and in common. We have that representation with special frequency and

detail in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where perhaps we may not be

fanciful in supposing that the great prominence given to it, and to the

idea of the Church as the temple of God, may have been in some degree

due to the existence, in that city, of one of the seven wonders of the

world, the Temple of Diana of the Ephesians.

But, be that as it may, what I want to point out is that united

building is inseparable from the individual building up of which I have

been speaking.

Now, it is often very hard for good, conscientious people to determine

how much of their efforts ought to be given to the perfecting of their

own characters in any department, and how much ought to be given to

trying to benefit and help other people. I wish you to notice that one

of the most powerful ways of building up myself is to do my very best

to build up others. Some, like men in my position, for instance, and

others whose office requires them to spend a great deal of time and

energy in the service of their fellows, are tempted to devote

themselves too much to building up character in other people, and to

neglect their own. It is a temptation that we need to fight against,

and which can only be overcome by much solitary meditation. Some of us,

on the other hand, may be tempted, for the sake of our own perfecting,

intellectual cultivation, or improvement in other ways, to minimise the

extent to which we are responsible for helping and blessing other

people. But let us remember that the two things cannot be separated;

and that there is nothing that will make a man more like Christ, which

is the end of all our building, than casting himself into the service

of his fellows with self-oblivion.

Peter said, 'Master! let us make here three tabernacles.' Ay! But there

was a demoniac boy down below, and the disciples could not cast out the

demon. The Apostle did not know what he said when he preferred building

up himself, by communion with God and His glorified servants, to

hurrying down into the valley, where there were devils to fight and

broken hearts to heal. Build up yourselves, by all means; if you do you

will have to build up your brethren. 'The edifying of the body of

Christ' is a plain duty which no Christian man can neglect without

leaving a tremendous gap in the structure which he ought to rear.

The building resulting from united edification is represented in

Scripture, not as the agglomeration of a number of little shrines, the

individuals, but as one great temple. That temple grows in two

respects, both of which carry with them imperative duties to us

Christian people. It grows by the addition of new stones. And so every

Christian is bound to seek to gather into the fold those that are

wandering far away, and to lay some stone upon that sure foundation. It

grows, also, by the closer approximation of all the members one to

another, and the individual increase of each in Christlike

characteristics. And we are bound to help one another therein, and to

labour earnestly for the advancement of our brethren, and for the unity

of God's Church. Apart from such efforts our individual edifying of

ourselves will become isolated, the results one-sided, and we ourselves

shall lose much of what is essential to the rearing in ourselves of a

holy character. 'What God hath joined together let not man put

asunder.' Neither seek to build up yourselves apart from the community,

nor seek to build up the community apart from yourselves.

III. Lastly, the Apostle, in his writings, sets forth another aspect of

this general thought, viz., divine edification.

When he spoke to the elders of the church of Ephesus he said that

Christ was able 'to build them up.' When he wrote to the Corinthians he

said, 'Ye are God's building.' To the Ephesians he wrote, 'Ye are built

for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' And so high above all our

individual and all our united effort he carries up our thoughts to the

divine Master-builder, by whose work alone a Paul, when he lays the

foundation, and an Apollos, when he builds thereupon, are of any use at

all.

Thus, dear brethren, we have to base all our efforts on this deeper

truth, that it is God who builds us into a temple meet for Himself, and

then comes to dwell in the temple that He has built.

So let us keep our hearts and minds expectant of, and open for, that

Spirit's influences. Let us be sure that we are using all the power

that God does give us. His work does not supersede mine. My work is to

avail myself of His. The two thoughts are not contradictory. They

correspond to, and fill out, each other, though warring schools of

one-eyed theologians and teachers have set them in antagonism. 'Work

out . . . for it is God that worketh in.' That is the true

reconciliation. 'Ye are God's building; build up yourselves in your

most holy faith.'

If God is the builder, then boundless, indomitable hope should be ours.

No man can look at his own character, after all his efforts to mend it,

without being smitten by a sense of despair, if he has only his own

resources to fall back upon. Our experience is like that of the monkish

builders, according to many an old legend, who found every morning that

yesterday's work had been pulled down in the darkness by demon hands.

There is no man whose character is anything more than a torso, an

incomplete attempt to build up the structure that was in his mind--like

the ruins of half-finished palaces and temples which travellers came

across sometimes in lands now desolate, reared by a forgotten race who

were swept away by some unknown calamity, and have left the stones

half-lifted to their courses, half-hewed in their quarries, and the

building gaunt and incomplete. But men will never have to say about any

of God's architecture, He 'began to build and was not able to finish.'

As the old prophecy has it, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the

house, His hands shall also finish it.' Therefore, we are entitled to

cherish endless hope and quiet confidence that we, even we, shall be

reared up into an habitation of God through the Spirit.

What are you building? 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a

stone.' Let every man take heed what and how and that he buildeth

thereon.

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CONTINUAL PRAYER AND ITS EFFECTS

'Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.'--1

Thess. v. 16-18.

The peculiarity and the stringency of these three precepts is the

unbroken continuity which they require. To rejoice, to pray, to give

thanks, are easy when circumstances favour, as a taper burns steadily

in a windless night; but to do these things always is as difficult as

for the taper's flame to keep upright when all the winds are eddying

round it. 'Evermore'--'without ceasing'--'in everything'--these

qualifying words give the injunctions of this text their grip and

urgency. The Apostle meets the objections which he anticipates would

spring to the lips of the Thessalonians, to the effect that he was

requiring impossibilities, by adding that, hard and impracticable as

they might think such a constant attitude of mind and heart, 'This is

the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' So, then, a Christian

life may be lived continuously on the high level; and more than that,

it is our duty to try to live ours thus.

We need not fight with other Christian people about whether absolute

obedience to these precepts is possible. It will be soon enough for us

to discuss whether a completely unbroken uniformity of Christian

experience is attainable in this life, when we have come a good deal

nearer to the attainable than we have yet reached. Let us mend our

breaches of continuity a good deal more, and then we may begin to

discuss the question whether an absolute absence of any cessation of

the continuity is consistent with the conditions of Christian life

here.

Now it seems to me that these three exhortations hold together in a

very striking way, and that Paul knew what he was about when he put in

the middle, like the strong central pole that holds up a tent, that

exhortation, 'Pray without ceasing.' For it is the primary precept, and

on its being obeyed the possibility of the fulfilment of the other two

depends. If we pray without ceasing, we shall rejoice evermore and in

everything give thanks. So, then, the duty of continual prayer, and the

promise, as well as the precept, that its results are to be continual

joy and continual thanksgiving, are suggested by these words.

I. The duty of continual prayer.

Roman Catholics, with their fatal habit of turning the spiritual into

material, think that they obey that commandment when they set a priest

or a nun on the steps of the altar to repeat Ave Marias day and night.

That is a way of praying without ceasing which we can all see to be

mechanical and unworthy. But have we ever realised what this

commandment necessarily reveals to us, as to what real prayer is? For

if we are told to do a thing uninterruptedly, it must be something that

can run unbroken through all the varieties of our legitimate duties and

necessary occupations and absorptions with the things seen and

temporal. Is that your notion of prayer? Or do you fancy that it simply

means dropping down on your knees, and asking God to give you some

things that you very much want? Petition is an element in prayer, and

that it shall be crystallised into words is necessary sometimes; but

there are prayers that never get themselves uttered, and I suppose that

the deepest and truest communion with God is voiceless and wordless.

'Things which it was not possible for a man to utter,' was Paul's

description of what he saw and felt, when he was most completely

absorbed in, and saturated with, the divine glory. The more we

understand what prayer is, the less we shall feel that it depends upon

utterance. For the essence of it is to have heart and mind filled with

the consciousness of God's presence, and to have the habit of referring

everything to Him, in the moment when we are doing it, or when it meets

us. That, as I take it, is prayer. The old mystics had a phrase,

quaint, and in some sense unfortunate, but very striking, when they

spoke about 'the practice of the presence of God.' God is here always,

you will say; yes, He is, and to open the shutters, and to let the

light always in, into every corner of my heart, and every detail of my

life--that is what Paul means by 'Praying without ceasing.' Petitions?

Yes; but something higher than petitions--the consciousness of being in

touch with the Father, feeling that He is all round us. It was said

about one mystical thinker that he was a 'God-intoxicated man.' It is

an ugly word, but it expresses a very deep thing; but let us rather say

a God-filled man. He who is such 'prays always.'

But how may we maintain that state of continual devotion, even amidst

the various and necessary occupations of our daily lives? As I said, we

need not trouble ourselves about the possibility of complete attainment

of that ideal. We know that we can each of us pray a great deal more

than we do, and if there are regions in our lives into which we feel

that God will not come, habits that we have dropped into which we feel

to be a film between us and Him, the sooner we get rid of them the

better. But into all our daily duties, dear friends, however absorbing,

however secular, however small, however irritating they may be, however

monotonous, into all our daily duties it is possible to bring Him.

'A servant with this clause

Makes drudgery divine,

Who sweeps a room, as by Thy laws,

Makes that and the calling fine.'

But if that is our aim, our conscious aim, our honest aim, we shall

recognise that a help to it is words of prayer. I do not believe in

silent adoration, if there is nothing but silent; and I do not believe

in a man going through life with the conscious presence of God with

him, unless, often, in the midst of the stress of daily life, he shoots

little arrows of two-worded prayers up into the heavens, 'Lord! be with

me.' 'Lord! help me.' 'Lord! stand by me now'; and the like. 'They

cried unto God in the battle,' when some people would have thought they

would have been better occupied in trying to keep their heads with

their swords. It was not a time for very elaborate supplications when

the foemen's arrows were whizzing round them, but 'they cried unto the

Lord, and He was entreated of them.' 'Pray without ceasing.'

Further, if we honestly try to obey this precept we shall more and more

find out, the more earnestly we do so, that set seasons of prayer are

indispensable to realising it. I said that I do not believe in silent

adoration unless it sometimes finds its tongue, nor do I believe in a

diffused worship that does not flow from seasons of prayer. There must

be, away up amongst the hills, a dam cast across the valley that the

water may be gathered behind it, if the great city is to be supplied

with the pure fluid. What would become of Manchester if it were not for

the reservoirs at Woodhead away among the hills? Your pipes would be

empty. And that is what will become of you Christian professors in

regard to your habitual consciousness of God's presence, if you do not

take care to have your hours of devotion sacred, never to be interfered

with, be they long or short, as may have to be determined by family

circumstances, domestic duties, daily avocations, and a thousand other

causes. But, unless we pray at set seasons, there is little likelihood

of our praying without ceasing.

II. The duty of continual rejoicing.

If we begin with the central duty of continual prayer, then these other

two which, as it were, flow from it on either side, will be possible to

us; and of these two the Apostle sets first, 'Rejoice evermore.' This

precept was given to the Thessalonians, in Paul's first letter, when

things were comparatively bright with him, and he was young and

buoyant; and in one of his later letters, when he was a prisoner, and

things were anything but rosy coloured, he struck the same note again,

and in spite of his 'bonds in Christ' bade the Philippians 'Rejoice in

the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.' Indeed, that whole

prison-letter might be called the Epistle of Joy, so suffused with

sunshine of Christian gladness is it. Now, no doubt, joy is largely a

matter of temperament. Some of us are constitutionally more buoyant and

cheerful than others. And it is also very largely a matter of

circumstances.

I admit all that, and yet I come back to Paul's command: 'Rejoice

evermore.' For if we are Christian people, and have cultivated what I

have called 'the practice of the presence of God' in our lives, then

that will change the look of things, and events that otherwise would be

'at enmity with joy' will cease to have a hostile influence over it.

There are two sources from which a man's gladness may come, the one his

circumstances of a pleasant and gladdening character; the other his

communion with God. It is like some river that is composed of two

affluents, one of which rises away up in the mountains, and is fed by

the eternal snows; the other springs on the plain somewhere, and is but

the drainage of the surface-water, and when hot weather comes, and

drought is over all the land, the one affluent is dry, and only a chaos

of ghastly white stones litters the bed where the flashing water used

to be. What then? Is the stream gone because one of its affluents is

dried up, and has perished or been lost in the sands? The gushing

fountains away up among the peaks near the stars are bubbling up all

the same, and the heat that dried the surface stream has only loosened

the treasures of the snows, and poured them more abundantly into the

other's bed. So 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; and if earth grows dark,

lift your eyes to the sky, that is light. To one walking in the woods

at nightfall 'all the paths are dim,' but the strip of heaven above the

trees is the brighter for the green gloom around. The organist's one

hand may be keeping up one sustained note, while the other is wandering

over the keys; and one part of a man's nature may be steadfastly

rejoicing in the Lord, whilst the other is feeling the weight of

sorrows that come from earth. The paradox of the Christian life may be

realised as a blessed experience of every one of us: a surface

troubled, a central calm; an ocean tossed with storm, and yet the crest

of every wave flashing in the sunshine. 'Rejoice in the Lord always,

and again I say, Rejoice.'

III. Lastly, the duty of continual thankfulness.

That, too, is possible only on condition of continual communion with

God. As I said in reference to joy, so I say in reference to

thankfulness; the look of things in this world depends very largely on

the colour of the spectacles through which you behold them.

'There's nothing either good or bad

But thinking makes it so.'

And if a man in communion with God looks at the events of his life as

he might put on a pair of coloured glasses to look at a landscape, it

will be tinted with a glory and a glow as he looks. The obligation to

gratitude, often neglected by us, is singularly, earnestly, and

frequently enjoined in the New Testament. I am afraid that the average

Christian man does not recognise its importance as an element in his

Christian experience. As directed to the past it means that we do not

forget, but that, as we look back, we see the meaning of these old

days, and their possible blessings, and the loving purposes which sent

them, a great deal more clearly than we did whilst we were passing

through them. The mountains that, when you are close to them, are

barren rock and cold snow, glow in the distance with royal purples. And

so if we, from our standing point in God, will look back on our lives,

losses will disclose themselves as gains, sorrows as harbingers of joy,

conflict as a means of peace, the crooked things will be straight, and

the rough places plain; and we may for every thing in the past give

thanks, if only we 'pray without ceasing.' The exhortation as applied

to the present means that we bow our wills, that we believe that all

things are working together for our good, and that, like Job in his

best moments, we shall say, 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away:

blessed be the Name of the Lord.' Ah, that is hard. It is possible, but

it is only possible if we 'pray without ceasing,' and dwell beside God

all the days of our lives, and all the hours of every day. Then, and

only then, shall we be able to thank Him for all the way by which He

hath led us these many years in the wilderness, that has been

brightened by the pillar of cloud by day, and the fire by night.

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PAUL'S EARLIEST TEACHING

'I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy

brethren,'--1 Thess. v. 27.

If the books of the New Testament were arranged according to the dates

of their composition, this epistle would stand first. It was written

somewhere about twenty years after the Crucifixion, and long before any

of the existing Gospels. It is, therefore, of peculiar interest, as

being the most venerable extant Christian document, and as being a

witness to Christian truth quite independent of the Gospel narratives.

The little community at Thessalonica had been gathered together as the

result of a very brief period of ministration by Paul. He had spoken

for three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue, and had drawn together

a Christian society, mostly consisting of heathens, though with a

sprinkling of Jews amongst them. Driven from the city by a riot, he had

left it for Athens, with many anxious thoughts, of course, as to

whether the infant community would be able to stand alone after so few

weeks of his presence and instruction. Therefore he sent back one of

his travelling companions, Timothy by name, to watch over the young

plant for a little while. When Timothy returned with the intelligence

of their steadfastness, it was good news indeed, and with a sense of

relieved anxiety, he sits down to write this letter, which, all

through, throbs with thankfulness, and reveals the strain which the

news had taken off his spirit.

There are no such definite doctrinal statements in it as in the most of

Paul's longer letters; it is simply an outburst of confidence and love

and tenderness, and a series of practical instructions. It has been

called the least doctrinal of the Pauline Epistles. And in one sense,

and under certain limitations, that is perfectly true. But the very

fact that it is so makes its indications and hints and allusions the

more significant; and if this letter, not written for the purpose of

enforcing any special doctrinal truth, be so saturated as it is with

the facts and principles of the Gospel, the stronger is the attestation

which it gives to the importance of these. I have, therefore, thought

it might be worth our while now, and might, perhaps, set threadbare

truth in something of a new light, if we put this--the most ancient

Christian writing extant, which is quite independent of the four

Gospels--into the witness-box, and see what it has to say about the

great truths and principles which we call the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is my simple design, and I gather the phenomena into three or four

divisions for the sake of accuracy and order.

I. First of all, then, let us hear its witness to the divine Christ.

Look how the letter begins. 'Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto

the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the

Lord Jesus Christ.' What is the meaning of that collocation, putting

these two names side by side, unless it means that the Lord Jesus

Christ sits on the Father's throne, and is divine?

Then there is another fact that I would have you notice, and that is

that more than twenty times in this short letter that great name is

applied to Jesus, 'the Lord.' Now mark that that is something more than

a mere title of human authority. It is in reality the New Testament

equivalent of the Old Testament Jehovah, and is the transference to Him

of that incommunicable name.

And then there is another fact which I would have you weigh, viz., that

in this letter direct prayer is offered to our Lord Himself. In one

place we read the petition, 'May our God and Father Himself and our

Lord Jesus direct our way unto you,' where the petition is presented to

both, and where both are supposed to be operative in the answer. And

more than that, the word 'direct,' following upon this plural subject,

is itself a singular verb. Could language more completely express than

that grammatical solecism does, the deep truth of the true and proper

divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? There is nothing in any

part of Scripture more emphatic and more lofty in its unfaltering

proclamation of that fundamental truth of the Gospel than this

altogether undoctrinal Epistle.

The Apostle does not conceive himself to be telling these men, though

they were such raw and recent Christians, anything new when he

presupposes the truth that to Him desires and prayers may go. Thus the

very loftiest apex of revealed religion had been imparted to that

handful of heathens in the few weeks of the Apostle's stay amongst

them. And nowhere upon the inspired pages of the fourth Evangelist, nor

in that great Epistle to the Colossians, which is the very citadel and

central fort of that doctrine in Scripture, is there more emphatically

stated this truth than here, in these incidental allusions.

This witness, at any rate, declares, apart altogether from any other

part of Scripture, that so early in the development of the Church's

history, and to people so recently dragged from idolatry, and having

received but such necessarily partial instruction in revealed truth,

this had not been omitted, that the Christ in whom they trusted was the

Everlasting Son of the Father. And it takes it for granted that, so

deeply was that truth embedded in their new consciousness that an

allusion to it was all that was needed for their understanding and

their faith. That is the first part of the testimony.

II. Now, secondly, let us ask what this witness has to say about the

dying Christ.

There is no doctrinal theology in the Epistle to the Thessalonians,

they tell us. Granted that there is no articulate argumentative setting

forth of great doctrinal truths. But these are implied and involved in

almost every word of it; and are definitely stated thus incidentally in

more places than one. Let us hear the witness about the dying Christ.

First, as to the fact, 'The Jews killed the Lord Jesus.' The historical

fact is here set forth distinctly. And then, beyond the fact, there is

as distinctly, though in the same incidental fashion, set forth the

meaning of that fact--'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to

obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us.'

Here are at least two things--one, the allusion, as to a well-known and

received truth, proclaimed before now to them, that Jesus Christ in His

death had died for them; and the other, that Jesus Christ was the

medium through whom the Father had appointed that men should obtain all

the blessings which are wrapped up in that sovereign word 'salvation.'

I need but mention in this connection another verse, from another part

of the letter, which speaks of Jesus as 'He that delivereth us from the

wrath to come.' Remark that there our Authorised Version fails to give

the whole significance of the words, because it translates delivered,

instead of, as the Revised Version correctly does, delivereth. It is a

continuous deliverance, running all through the life of the Christian

man, and not merely to be realised away yonder at the far end; because

by the mighty providence of God, and by the automatic working of the

consequences of every transgression and disobedience, that 'wrath' is

ever coming, coming, coming towards men, and lighting on them, and a

continual Deliverer, who delivers us by His death, is what the human

heart needs. This witness is distinct that the death of Christ is a

sacrifice, that the death of Christ is man's deliverance from wrath,

that the death of Christ is a present deliverance from the consequences

of transgression.

And was that Paul's peculiar doctrine? Is it conceivable that, in a

letter in which he refers--once, at all events--to the churches in

Judea as their 'brethren,' he was proclaiming any individual or

schismatic reading of the facts of the life of Jesus Christ? I believe

that there has been a great deal too much made of the supposed

divergencies of types of doctrine in the New Testament. There are such

types, within certain limits. Nobody would mistake a word of John's

calm, mystical, contemplative spirit for a word of Paul's fiery,

dialectic spirit. And nobody would mistake either the one or the other

for Peter's impulsive, warm-hearted exhortations. But whilst there are

diversities in the way of apprehending, there are no diversities in the

declaration of what is the central truth to be apprehended. These

varyings of the types of doctrine in the New Testament are one in this,

that all point to the Cross as the world's salvation, and declare that

the death there was the death for all mankind.

Paul comes to it with his reasoning; John comes to it with his adoring

contemplation; Peter comes to it with his mind saturated with Old

Testament allusions. Paul declares that the 'Christ died for us'; John

declares that He is 'the Lamb of God'; Peter declares that 'Christ bare

our sins in His own body on the tree.' But all make one unbroken

phalanx of witness in their proclamation, that the Cross, because it is

a cross of sacrifice, is a cross of reconciliation and peace and hope.

And this is the Gospel that they all proclaim, 'how that Jesus Christ

died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and Paul could venture

to say, 'Whether it were they or I, so we preach, and so ye believed.'

That was the Gospel that took these heathens, wallowing in the mire of

sensuous idolatry, and lifted them up to the elevation and the

blessedness of children of God.

And if you will read this letter, and think that there had been only a

few weeks of acquaintance with the Gospel on the part of its readers,

and then mark how the early and imperfect glimpse of it had transformed

them, you will see where the power lies in the proclamation of the

Gospel. A short time before they had been heathens; and now says Paul,

'From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and

Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad;

so that we need not to speak anything.' We do not need to talk to you

about 'love of the brethren,' for 'yourselves are taught of God to love

one another, and my heart is full of thankfulness when I think of your

work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope.' The men had

been transformed. What transformed them? The message of a divine and

dying Christ, who had offered up Himself without spot unto God, and who

was their peace and their righteousness and their power.

III. Thirdly, notice what this witness has to say about the risen and

ascended Christ. Here is what it has to say: 'Ye turned unto God . . .

to wait for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead.' And

again: 'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout.' The

risen Christ, then, is in the heavens, and Paul assumes that these

people, just brought out of heathenism, have received that truth into

their hearts in the love of it, and know it so thoroughly that he can

take for granted their entire acquiescence in and acceptance of it.

Remember, we have nothing to do with the four Gospels here. Remember,

not a line of them had yet been written. Remember, that we are dealing

here with an entirely independent witness. And then tell us what

importance is to be attached to this evidence of the Resurrection of

Jesus Christ. Twenty years after His death here is this man speaking

about that Resurrection as being not only something that he had to

proclaim, and believed, but as being the recognised and notorious fact

which all the churches accepted, and which underlay all their faith.

I would have you remember that if, twenty years after this event, this

witness was borne, that necessarily carries us back a great deal nearer

to the event than the hour of its utterance, for there is no mark of

its being new testimony at that instant, but every mark of its being

the habitual and continuous witness that had been borne from the

instant of the alleged Resurrection to the present time. It at least

takes us back a good many years nearer the empty sepulchre than the

twenty which mark its date. It at least takes us back to the conversion

of the Apostle Paul; and that necessarily involves, as it seems to me,

that if that man, believing in the Resurrection, went into the Church,

there would have been an end of his association with them, unless he

had found there the same faith. The fact of the matter is, there is not

a place where you can stick a pin in, between the Resurrection of Jesus

Christ and the date of this letter, wide enough to admit of the rise of

the faith in a Resurrection. We are necessarily forced by the very fact

of the existence of the Church to the admission that the belief in the

Resurrection was contemporaneous with the alleged Resurrection itself.

And so we are shut up--in spite of the wriggling of people that do not

accept that great truth--we are shut up to the old alternative, as it

seems to me, that either Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or the

noblest lives that the world has ever seen, and the loftiest system of

morality that has ever been proclaimed, were built upon a lie. And we

are called to believe that at the bidding of a mere unsupported, bare,

dogmatic assertion that miracles are impossible. Believe it who will, I

decline to be coerced into believing a blank, staring psychological

contradiction and impossibility, in order to be saved the necessity of

admitting the existence of the supernatural. I would rather believe in

the supernatural than the ridiculous. And to me it is unspeakably

ridiculous to suppose that anything but the fact of the Resurrection

accounts for the existence of the Church, and for the faith of this

witness that we have before us.

And so, dear friends, we come back to this, the Christianity that

flings away the risen Christ is a mere mass of tatters with nothing in

it to cover a man's nakedness, an illusion with no vitality in it to

quicken, to comfort, to ennoble, to raise, to teach aspiration or hope

or effort. The human heart needs the 'Christ that died, yea, rather,

that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also

maketh intercession for us.' And this independent witness confirms the

Gospel story: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the

first-fruits of them that slept.'

IV. Lastly, let us hear what this witness has to say about the

returning Christ.

That is the characteristic doctrinal subject of the letter. We all know

that wonderful passage of unsurpassed tenderness and majesty, which has

soothed so many hearts and been like a gentle hand laid upon so many

aching spirits, about the returning Jesus 'coming in the clouds,' with

the dear ones that are asleep along with Him, and the reunion of them

that sleep and them that are alive and remain, in one indissoluble

concord and concourse, when we shall ever be with the Lord, and 'clasp

inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever.' The

coming of the Master does not appear here with emphasis on its judicial

aspect. It is rather intended to bring hope to the mourners, and the

certainty that bands broken here may be re-knit in holier fashion

hereafter. But the judicial aspect is not, as it could not be, left

out, and the Apostle further tells us that 'that day cometh as a thief

in the night.' That is a quotation of the Master's own words, which we

find in the Gospels; and so again a confirmation, so far as it goes,

from an independent witness, of the Gospel story. And then he goes on,

in terrible language, to speak of 'sudden destruction, as of travail

upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.'

These, then, are the points of this witness's testimony as to the

returning Lord--a personal coming, a reunion of all believers in Him,

in order to eternal felicity and mutual gladness, and the destruction

that shall fall by His coming upon those who turn away from Him.

What a revelation that would be to men who had known what it was to

grope in the darkness of heathendom, and to have new light upon the

future!

I remember once walking in the long galleries of the Vatican, on the

one side of which there are Christian inscriptions from the catacombs,

and on the other heathen inscriptions from the tombs. One side is all

dreamy and hopeless; one long sigh echoing along the line of white

marbles--'Vale! vale! in aeternum vale!' (Farewell, farewell, for ever

farewell.) On the other side--'In Christo, in pace, in spe.' (In

Christ, in peace, in hope.) That is the witness that we have to lay to

our hearts. And so death becomes a passage, and we let go the dear

hands, believing that we shall clasp them again.

My brother! this witness is to a gospel that is the gospel for

Manchester as well as for Thessalonica. You and I want just the same as

these old heathens there wanted. We, too, need the divine Christ, the

dying Christ, the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, the returning

Christ. And I beseech you to take Him for your Christ, in all the

fulness of His offices, the manifoldness of His power, and the

sweetness of His love, so that of you it may be said, as this Apostle

says about these Thessalonians, 'Ye received it not as the word of man,

but, as it is in truth, as the word of God.'

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II. THESSALONIANS

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CHRIST GLORIFIED IN GLORIFIED MEN

'He shall come to be glorified in His saints; and to be admired in all

them that believe.'--2 Thess. i. 10.

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the Apostle's earliest

letters, both give very great prominence to the thought of the second

coming of our Lord to judgment. In the immediate context we have that

coming described, with circumstances of majesty and of terror. He

'shall be revealed . . . with the angels of His power.' 'Flaming fire'

shall herald His coming; vengeance shall be in His hands, punishment

shall follow His sentence; everlasting destruction shall be the issue

of evil confronted with 'the face of the Lord'--for so the words in the

previous verse rendered 'the presence of the Lord' might more

accurately be translated.

And all these facts and images are, as it were, piled up in one half of

the Apostle's sky, as in thunderous lurid masses; and on the other side

there is the pure blue and the peaceful sunshine. For all this terror

and destruction, and flashing fire, and punitive vengeance come to pass

in the day when 'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be

wondered at in all them that believe.'

There be the two halves--the aspect of that day to those to whom it is

the revelation of a stranger, and the aspect of that day to those to

whom it is the glorifying of Him who is their life.

I. The remarkable words which I have taken for my text suggest to us,

first of all, some thoughts about that striking expression that Christ

is glorified in the men who are glorified in Christ.

If you look on a couple of verses you will find that the Apostle

returns to this thought, and expresses in the clearest fashion the

reciprocal character of that 'glorifying' of which he has been

speaking. 'The name of our Lord Jesus Christ,' says he, 'may be

glorified in you, and ye in Him.'

So, then, glorifying has a double meaning. There is a double process

involved. It means either 'to make glorious' or 'to manifest as being

glorious.' And men are glorified in the former sense in Christ, that

Christ in them may, in the latter sense, be glorified. He makes them

glorious by imparting to them of the lustrous light and flashing beauty

of His own perfect character, in order that that light, received into

their natures, and streaming out at last conspicuously manifest from

their redeemed perfectness, may redound to the praise and the honour,

before a whole universe, of Him who has thus endued their weakness with

His own strength, and transmuted their corruptibility into His own

immortality. We are glorified in Christ in some partial, and, alas!

sinfully fragmentary, manner here; we shall be so perfectly in that

day. And when we are thus glorified in Him, then--wondrous

thought!--even we shall be able to manifest Him as glorious before some

gazing eyes, which without us would have seen Him as less fair. Dim,

and therefore great and blessed thoughts about what men may become are

involved in such words. The highest end, the great purpose of the

Gospel and of all God's dealings with us in Christ Jesus is to make us

like our Lord. As we have borne the image of the earthly we shall also

bear the image of the heavenly. 'We, beholding the glory, are changed

into the glory.'

And that glorifying of men in Christ, which is the goal and highest end

of Christ's Cross and passion and of all God's dealings, is

accomplished only because Christ dwells in the men whom He glorifies.

We read words applying to His relation to His Father which need but to

be transferred to our relation to Him, in order to teach us high and

blessed things about this glorifying. The Father dwelt in Christ,

therefore Christ was glorified by the indwelling divinity, in the sense

that His humanity was made partaker of the divine glory, and thereby He

glorified the divinity that dwelt in Him, in the sense that He

conspicuously displayed it before the world as worthy of all admiration

and love.

And, in like manner, as is the Son with the Father, participant of

mutual and reciprocal glorification, so is the Christian with Christ,

glorified in Him and therefore glorifying Him.

What may be involved therein of perfect moral purity, of enlarged

faculties and powers, of a bodily frame capable of manifesting all the

finest issues of a perfect spirit, it is not for us to say. These

things are great, being hidden; and are hidden because they are great.

But whatever may be the lofty heights of Christlikeness to which we

shall attain, all shall come from the indwelling Lord who fills us with

His own Spirit.

And, then, according to the great teaching here, this glorified

humanity, perfected and separated from all imperfection, and helped

into all symmetrical unfolding of dormant possibilities, shall be the

highest glory of Christ even in that day when He comes in His glory and

sits upon the throne of His glory with His holy angels with Him. One

would have thought that, if the Apostle wanted to speak of the

glorifying of Jesus Christ, he would have pointed to the great white

throne, His majestic divinity, the solemnities of His judicial office;

but he passes by all these, and says, 'Nay! the highest glory of the

Christ lies here, in the men whom He has made to share His own nature.'

The artist is known by his work. You stand in front of some great

picture, or you listen to some great symphony, or you read some great

book, and you say, 'This is the glory of Raphael, Beethoven,

Shakespeare.' Christ points to His saints, and He says, 'Behold My

handiwork! Ye are my witnesses. This is what I can do.'

But the relation between Christ and His saints is far deeper and more

intimate than simply the relation between the artist and his work, for

all the flashing light of moral beauty, of intellectual perfectness

which Christian men can hope to receive in the future is but the light

of the Christ that dwells in them, 'and of whose fulness all they have

received.' Like some poor vapour, in itself white and colourless, which

lies in the eastern sky there, and as the sun rises is flushed up into

a miracle of rosy beauty, because it has caught the light amongst its

flaming threads and vaporous substance, so we, in ourselves pale,

ghostly, colourless as the mountains when the Alpine snow passes off

them, being recipient of an indwelling Christ, shall blush and flame in

beauty. 'Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in my

Father's kingdom.' Or, rather they are not suns shining by their own

light, but moons reflecting the light of Christ, who is their light.

And perchance some eyes, incapable of beholding the sun, may be able to

look undazzled upon the sunshine in the cloud, and some eyes that could

not discern the glory of Christ as it shines in His face as the sun

shineth in its strength, may not be too weak to behold and delight in

the light as it is reflected from the face of His servants. At all

events, He shall come to be glorified in the saints whom He has made

glorious.

II. And now, notice again, out of these full and pregnant words the

other thought, that this transformation of men is the great miracle and

marvel of Christ's power.

'He shall come to be admired'--which word is employed in its old

English signification, 'to be wondered at'--'in all them that believe.'

So fair and lovely is He that He needs but to be recognised for what He

is in order to be glorified. So great and stupendous are His operations

in redeeming love that they need but to be beheld to be the object of

wonder. 'His name shall be called Wonderful,' and wonderfully the

energy of His redeeming and sanctifying grace shall then have wrought

itself out to its legitimate end. There you get the crowning marvel of

marvels, and the highest of miracles. He did wonderful works upon earth

which we rightly call miraculous,--things to be wondered at--but the

highest of all His wonders is the wonder that takes such material as

you and me, and by such a process, and on such conditions, simply

because we trust Him, evolves such marvellous forms of beauty and

perfectness from us. 'He is to be wondered at in all them that

believe.'

Such results from such material! Chemists tell us that the black bit of

coal in your grate and the diamond on your finger are varying forms of

the one substance. What about a power that shall take all the black

coals in the world and transmute them into flashing diamonds, prismatic

with the reflected light that comes from His face, and made gems on His

strong right hand? The universe will wonder at such results from such

material.

And it will wonder, too, at the process by which they were

accomplished, wondering at the depth of His pity revealed all the more

pathetically now from the great white throne which casts such a light

on the Cross of Calvary; wondering at the long, weary path which He who

is now declared to be the Judge humbled Himself to travel in the quest

of these poor sinful souls whom He has redeemed and glorified. The

miracle of miracles is redeeming love; and the high-water mark of

Christ's wonders is touched in this fact, that out of men He makes

saints; and out of saints He makes perfect likenesses of Himself.

III. And now a word about what is not expressed, but is necessarily

implied in this verse, viz., the spectators of this glory.

The Apostle does not tell us what eyes they are before which Christ is

thus to be glorified. He does not summon the spectators to look upon

this wonderful exhibition of divine judgment and divine glory; but we

may dwell for a moment on the thought that to whomsoever in the whole

universe Christ at that great day shall be manifested, to them, whoever

they be, will His glory, in His glorified saints, be a revelation

beyond what they have known before. 'Every eye shall see Him.' And

whatsoever eyes look upon Him, then on His throne, they shall behold

the attendant courtiers and the assessors of His judgment, and see in

them the manifestation of His own lustrous light.

We read that 'unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places

shall be made known' in future days, 'by the Church, the manifold

wisdom of God.' We hear that, after the burst of praise which comes

from redeemed men standing around the throne, every creature in the

earth and in the heavens, and in the sea and all that are therein were

heard saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that

sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'

We need not speculate, it is better not to enter into details, but

this, at least, is clear, that that solemn winding up of the long,

mysterious, sad, blood and tear-stained history of man upon the earth

is to be an object of interest and a higher revelation of God to other

creatures than those that dwell upon the earth; and we may well believe

that for that moment, at all events, the centre of the universe, which

draws the thoughts of all thinking, and the eyes of all seeing,

creatures to it, shall be that valley of judgment wherein sits the Man

Christ and judges men, and round Him the flashing reflectors of His

glory in the person of His saints.

IV. And lastly, look at men's path to this glorifying.

'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be wondered at in

all them that believed'; as that word ought to be rendered. That is to

say, they who on earth were His, consecrated and devoted to Him, and in

some humble measure partaking even here of His reflected beauty and

imparted righteousness--these are they in whom He shall be glorified.

They who 'believed'; poor, trembling, struggling, fainting souls, that

here on earth, in the midst of many doubts and temptations, clasped His

hand; and howsoever tremulously, yet truly put their trust in Him,

these are they in whom He shall 'be wondered at.'

The simple act of faith knits us to the Lord. If we trust Him He comes

into our hearts here, and begins to purify us, and to make us like

Himself; and, if that be so, and we keep hold of Him, we shall finally

share in His glory.

What a hope, what an encouragement, what a stimulus and exhortation to

humble and timorous souls there is in that great word, 'In all them

that believed'! Howsoever imperfect, still they shall be kept by the

power of God unto that final salvation. And when He comes in His glory,

not one shall be wanting that put their trust in Him.

It will take them all, each in his several way reflecting it, to set

forth adequately the glory. As many diamonds round a central light,

which from each facet give off a several ray and a definite colour; so

all that circle round Christ and partaking of His glory, will each

receive it, transmit it, and so manifest it in a different fashion. And

it needs the innumerable company of the redeemed, each a several

perfectness, to set forth all the fulness of the Christ that dwells in

us.

So, dear brethren, beginning with simple faith in Him, partially

receiving the beauty of His transforming spirit, seeking here on earth

by assimilation to the Master in some humble measure to adorn the

doctrine and to glorify the Christ, we may hope that each blackness

will be changed into brightness, our limitations done away with, our

weakness lifted into rejoicing strength; and that we shall be like Him,

seeing Him as He is, and glorified in Him, shall glorify Him before the

universe.

You and I will be there. Choose which of the two halves of that sky

that I was speaking about in my introductory remarks will be your sky;

whether He shall be revealed, and the light of His face be to you like

a sword whose flashing edge means destruction, or whether the light of

His face shall fall upon your heart because you love Him and trust Him,

like the sunshine on the Alpine snow, lifting it to a more lustrous

whiteness, and tingeing it with an ethereal hue of more than earthly

beauty, which no other power but an indwelling Christ can give. He

shall come with 'everlasting destruction from the face'; and 'He shall

come to be glorified in His saints, and to be wondered at in all them

that believed.' Do you choose which of the two shall be your portion in

that day.

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WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

'We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this

calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work

of faith with power; 12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be

glorified in you, and ye in Him.'--2 Thess. i. 11, 12.

In the former letter to the Church of Thessalonica, the Apostle had

dwelt, in ever-memorable words--which sound like a prelude of the trump

of God--on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world, and to

gather His servants into His rest. That great thought seems to have

excited some of the hotter heads in Thessalonica, and to have led to a

general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach or

actual dawn of the day. This letter is intended as a supplement to the

former Epistle, and to damp down the fire which had been kindled. It,

therefore, dwells with emphasis on the necessary preliminaries to the

dawning of that day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the

excited spirits to patience and persistent work, and to calm their

feverish expectations. This purpose colours the whole letter.

Another striking characteristic of it is the frequent gushes of short

prayer for the Thessalonians with which the writer turns aside from the

main current of his thoughts. In its brief compass there are four of

these prayers, which, taken together, present many aspects of the

Christian life, and hold out much for our hopes and much for our

efforts. The prayer which I have read for our text is the first of

these. The others, the consideration of which will follow on subsequent

occasions, are these:--'Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even

our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting

consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and

stablish you in every good word and work.' And, again, 'The Lord direct

your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for

Christ.' And, finally, summing up all, 'The Lord of peace Himself give

you peace always, by all means.' So full, so tender, so directed to the

highest blessings, and to those only, are the wishes of a true

Christian teacher, and of a true Christian friend, for those to whom He

ministers and whom He loves. It is a poor love that cannot express

itself in prayer. It is an earthly love which desires for its objects

anything less than the highest of blessings.

I. Notice, first, here, the divine test for Christian lives: 'We pray

for you, that God would count you worthy of your calling.'

Now, it is to be observed that this 'counting worthy' refers mainly to

a future estimate to be made by God of the completed career and

permanent character brought out of earth into another state by

Christian souls. That is obvious from the whole strain of the letter,

which I have already pointed out as mainly being concerned with the

future coming to judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also, I

think, made probable by the fact that the same expression, 'counting

worthy,' occurs in an earlier verse of this chapter, where the

reference is exclusively to the future judgment.

So, then, we are brought face to face with this thought of an actual,

stringent judgment which God will apply in the future to the lives and

characters of professing Christians. Now, that is a great deal too much

forgotten in our popular Christian teaching and in our average

Christian faith. It is perfectly true that he who trusts in Jesus

Christ will 'not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto

life.' But it is just as true that 'judgment shall begin at the house

of God,' and that, 'the Lord will judge His people.' And therefore, it

becomes us to lay to heart this truth, that we, just because, if we are

Christians, we stand nearest to God, are surest to be searched through

and through by the light that streams from Him, and to have every flaw

and corrupt speck and black spot brought out into startling prominence.

Let no Christian man fancy that he shall escape the righteous judgment

of God. The great doctrine of forgiveness does not mean that He suffers

our sin to remain upon us unjudged, ay! or unavenged. But just as, day

by day, there is an actual estimate in the divine mind, according to

truth, of what we really are, so, at the last, God's servants will be

gathered before His throne. 'They that have made a covenant with Him by

sacrifice' shall be assembled there--as the Psalm has it--'that the

Lord may judge His people.'

Then, if the actual passing of a divine judgment day by day, and a

future solemn act of judgment after we have done with earth, and our

characters are completed, and our careers rounded into a whole, is to

be looked for by Christians, what is the standard by which their

worthiness is to be judged?

'Your calling.' The 'this' of my text in the Authorised Version is a

supplement, and a better supplement is that of the Revised Version,

'your calling.' Now calling does not mean 'avocation' or 'employment,'

as I perhaps need scarcely explain, but the divine fact of our having

been summoned by Him to be His. Consider who calls. God Himself.

Consider how He calls. By the Gospel, by Jesus Christ, or, as another

apostle has it, 'by His own glory and virtue' manifested in the world.

That great voice which is in Jesus Christ, so tender, so searching, so

heart-melting, so vibrating with the invitation of love and the

yearning of a longing heart, summons or calls us. Consider, also, what

this calling is to. 'God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to

holiness,' or, as this letter has it, in another part, 'unto salvation

through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' By all

the subduing and animating and restraining and impelling tones in the

sacrifice and life of Jesus Christ we are summoned to a life of

self-crucifixion, of subjection of the flesh, of aspiration after God,

of holy living according to the pattern that was showed us in Him. We

are summoned here and now to a life of purity and righteousness and

self-sacrifice. But also 'He hath called us to His everlasting kingdom

and glory.' That voice sounds from above now. From the Cross it said to

us, 'I die that ye may live'; from the throne it says to us, 'Live

because I live, and come to live where I live.' The same invitation,

which calls us to a life of righteousness and self-suppression and

purity, also calls us, with the sweet promise that is firm as the

throne of God, to the everlasting felicities of that perfect kingdom in

which, because the obedience is entire, the glory shall be untremulous

and unstained. Therefore, considering who summons, by what He summons,

and to what He calls us, do there not lie in the fact of that divine

call to which we Christians say that we have yielded, the solemnest

motives, the loftiest standard, the most stringent obligations for

life? What sort of a life will that be which is worthy of that voice?

Is yours? Is mine? Are there not the most flagrant examples of

professing Christians, whose lives are in the most outrageous

discordance with the lofty obligations and mighty motives of the

summons which they profess to have obeyed? 'Worthy of the vocation

wherewith ye are called!' Have I made my own the things which I am

invited to possess? Have I yielded to the obligations which are

enwrapped in that invitation? Does my life correspond to the divine

purpose in calling me to be His? Can I say, 'Lord, Thou art mine, and I

am Thine, and here my life witnesses to it, because self is banished

from it, and I am full of God, and the life which I live in the flesh I

live not to myself, but to Him that died for me?'

An absolute correspondence, a complete worthiness or perfect desert, is

impossible for us all, but a worthiness which His merciful judgment who

makes allowance for us all may accept, as not too flagrantly

contradictory of what He meant us to be, is possible even for our poor

attainments and our stained lives. If it were Paul's supreme prayer,

should it not be our supreme aim, that we may be worthy of Him that

hath called us, and 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are

called'?

II. Note, here, the divine help to meet the test.

If it were a matter of our own effort alone, who of us could pretend to

reach to the height of conformity with the great design of the loving

Father in summoning us, or with the mighty powers that are set in

motion by the summons for the purifying of men's lives? But here is the

great characteristic and blessing of God's Gospel, that it not only

summons us to holiness and to heaven, but reaches out a hand to help us

thither. Therein it contrasts with all other voices--and many of them

are noble and pathetic in their insistence and vehemence--which call

men to lofty lives. Whether it be the voice of conscience, or of human

ethics, or of the great ones, the elect of the race, who, in every age,

have been as voices crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of

the Lord'--all these call us, but reach no hand out to draw us. They

are all as voices from the heights and are of God, but they are voices

only; they summon us to noble deeds, and leave us floundering in the

mire.

But we have not a God who tells us to be good, and then watches to see

if we will obey, but we have a God who, with all His summonses, brings

to us the help to keep His commandments. Our God has more than a voice

to enjoin, He has a hand to lift, 'Give what Thou commandest, and

command what Thou wilt,' said Augustine. There is the blessing and

glory of the Gospel, that its summons has in it an impelling power

which makes men able to be what it enjoins them to become. My text,

therefore, follows the prayer 'that God would count you worthy,' which

contemplates God simply as judging men's correspondence with the ideal

revealed in their calling, and is the cry of faith to the giving God,

who works in us, if we will let Him, that which He enjoins on us. There

are two directions of that divine working specified in the text. Paul

asks that God would fulfil 'every desire of goodness and every work of

faith,' as the Revised Version renders the words. Two things, then, we

may hope that God will do for us--He will fulfil every yearning after

righteousness and purity in our hearts, and will perfect the active

energy which faith puts forth in our lives.

Paul says, in effect, first, that God will fulfil every desire that

longs for goodness. He is scarcely deserving of being called good who

does not desire to be better. Aspiration must always be ahead of

performance in a growing life, such as every Christian life ought to

be. To long for any righteousness and beauty of goodness is, in some

imperfect and incipient measure, to possess the good for which we long.

This is the very signature of a Christian life--yearning after

unaccomplished perfection. If you know nothing of that desire that

stings and impels you onwards; if you do not know what it is to say,

'Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this

death?' if you do not know what it is to follow the fair ideal realised

in Jesus Christ with infinite longing, what right have you to call

yourself a Christian? The very essence of the Christian life is

yearning for completeness, and restlessness as long as sin has any

power over us. We live not only by admiration, faith, and love, but we

live by hope; and he who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness

has yet to learn what are the first principles of the Gospel of Christ.

If there be not the desire after goodness, the restlessness and

dissatisfaction with every present good, the brave ambition that says,

'Forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forth unto the things

that are before,' there is nothing in a man to which God's grace can

attach itself. God cannot make you better if you do not wish to be

better. There is no point upon which His hallowing and ennobling grace

can lay hold in your hearts without such desire. 'Open thy mouth wide

and I will fill it.' If, as is too often the case with hosts of

professing Christians, you shut your mouths tight and lock your teeth,

how can God put any food between your lips? There must, first of all,

be the aspiration, and then there will be the satisfaction.

I look out upon my congregation, or, better still, I look into my own

heart, and I say, If I, if you, dear brethren, are not worthy of the

vocation wherewith we are called, we have not because we ask not. If

there be no desire after goodness in our hearts, God cannot make us

good. Our wishes are the mould into which the molten metal from the

great furnace of His love will run. If we bring but a little vessel we

cannot get a large supply. The manna lies round our tents; it is for us

to determine how much we will gather.

And in like manner, says Paul, God will fulfil every work of faith. Our

faith in Jesus Christ will naturally tend to influence our lives, and

to manifest itself as a driving power which will set all the wheels of

conduct in motion. Paul is quite sure that if we trust ourselves to

God, all the beneficent and holy work that flows from such confidence

will by Him be fully perfected.

God's fulfilment is to be done with power. That is to say, He will fit

us to be worthy of our calling, He will answer our desires, He will

give energy to our faith, and complete in number and in quality its

operations in our lives, by reason of His dwelling with us and in us by

that spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind which works all

righteousness in believing hearts, and sheds divine beauty and goodness

over character and life.

III. Lastly, note the divine glory of the worthy.

This fulfilment of every desire of goodness and work of faith is in

order 'that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you

and ye in Him.'

Here, again, as in the first clause of our text, I take, in accordance

with the prevailing tone of this letter, the reference to be mainly,

though perhaps not exclusively, to a future transcendent glorifying of

the name of Christ in perfected saints, and glorifying of perfected

saints in Jesus Christ.

We have, then, set forth, first, as the result of the fulfilling of

Christian men's desires after goodness, and the work of their faith,

the glory that accrues to Christ from perfected saints. They are His

workmanship. You remember the old story of the artist who went into a

fellow-artist's studio and left upon the easel one complete circle,

swept with one master-whirl of the brush. Jesus Christ presents

perfected men to an admiring universe as specimens of what He can do.

His highest work is the redeeming of poor creatures like you and me,

and the making of us perfect in goodness and worthy of our calling. We

are His chefs-d'oeuvre, the master work of the great divine artist.

Think, then, brethren, how, here and now, Christ's reputation is in our

hands. Men judge of Him by us. The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified

in you if you live 'worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,'

and people will think better of the Master if His disciples are

faithful. Depend upon it, if we of this church, for instance, and the

Christian people within these walls now, lived the lives that they

ought to do, and manifested the power of the Gospel as they might,

there would be many who would say, 'They have been with Jesus, and the

Jesus that has made them what they are must be mighty and great.' The

best evidence of the power of the Gospel is your consistent lives.

Think, too, of that strange dignity that in the future, in manners and

in regions all undiscernible by us, Christians, who have been made out

of stones into children of God, will make known 'unto principalities

and powers in heavenly places' the wisdom and the love and the energy

of the redeeming God. Who knows to what regions the commission of the

perfected saints to make Christ known may carry them? Light travels

far, and we cannot tell into what remote corners of the universe this

may penetrate. This only we know, that they who shall be counted worthy

to attain that life and the Resurrection from the dead shall bear the

image of the heavenly, and perhaps to creations yet uncreated, and

still to be evolved through the ages of eternity, it may be their part

to carry the lustre of the light of the glory of God who redeemed and

purified them.

On the other hand, there is glory accruing to perfected saints in

Christ. 'And ye in Him.' There will be a union so close as that nothing

closer is possible, personality being preserved, between Christ and the

saints above, who trust Him and love Him and serve Him there. And that

union will lead to a participation in His glory which shall exalt their

limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into 'the measure of the

stature of the fulness of Christ.' Astronomers tell us that dead, cold

matter falls from all corners of the system into the sun, drawn by its

magic magnetism from farthest space, and, plunging into that great

reservoir of fire, the deadest and coldest matter glows with fervid

heat and dazzling light. So you and I, dead, cold, dull, opaque, heavy

fragments, drawn into mysterious oneness with Christ, the Sun of our

souls, shall be transformed into His own image, and like Him be light

and heat which shall radiate through the universe.

Brethren, meditate on your calling, the fact, its method, its aim, its

obligations, and its powers. Cherish hopes and desires after goodness,

the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate

the life of faith working by love, and let us all live in the light of

that solemn expectation that the Lord will judge His people. Then we

may hope that the voice which summoned us will welcome us, and proclaim

even of us, stained and undeserving as we rightly feel ourselves to be:

'They have not defiled their garments, therefore they shall walk with

Me in white, for they are worthy.'

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EVERLASTING CONSOLATION AND GOOD HOPE

'Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which

hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope

through grace. 17. Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good

word and work.'--2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

This is the second of the four brief prayers which, as I pointed out in

my last sermon, break the current of Paul's teaching in this letter,

and witness to the depth of his affection to his Thessalonian converts.

We do not know the special circumstances under which these then were,

but there are many allusions, both in the first and second epistles,

which seem to indicate that they specially needed the gift of

consolation.

They were a young Church, just delivered from paganism. Like lambs in

the midst of wolves, they stood amongst bitter enemies, their teacher

had left them alone, and their raw convictions needed to be

consolidated and matured in the face of much opposition. No wonder then

that over and over again, in both letters, we have references to the

persecutions and tribulations which they endured, and to the

consolations which would much more abound.

But whatever may have been their specific circumstances, the prayer

which puts special emphasis on comfort is as much needed by each of us

as it could ever have been by any of them. For there are no eyes that

have not wept, or will not weep; no breath that has not been, or will

not be, drawn in sighs; and no hearts that have not bled, or will not

bleed. So, dear friends, the prayer that went up for these long since

comforted brothers, in their forgotten obscure sorrows, is as needful

for each of us--that the God who has given everlasting consolation may

apply the consolations which He has supplied, and 'comfort our hearts

and stablish them in every good word and work.'

The prayer naturally falls, as all true prayer will, into three

sections--the contemplation of Him to whom it is addressed, the

grasping of the great act on which it is based, and the specification

of the desires which it includes. These three thoughts may guide us for

a few moments now.

I. First of all, then, note the divine hearers of the prayer.

The first striking thing about this prayer is its emphatic recognition

of the divinity of Jesus Christ as a truth familiar to these

Thessalonian converts. Note the solemn accumulation of His august

titles, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.' Note, further, that

extraordinary association of His name with the Father's. Note, still

further, the most remarkable order in which these two names

occur--Jesus first, God second. If we were not so familiar with the

words, and with their order, which reappears in Paul's well-known and

frequently-used Benediction, we should be startled to find that Jesus

Christ was put before God in such a solemn address. The association and

the order of mention of the names are equally outrageous, profane, and

inexplicable, except upon one hypothesis, and that is that Jesus Christ

is divine.

The reason for the order may be found partly in the context, which has

just been naming Christ, but still more in the fact that whilst he

writes, the Apostle is realising the mediation of Christ, and that the

order of mention is the order of our approach. The Father comes to us

in the Son; we come to the Father by the Son; and, therefore, it is no

intercepting of our reverence, nor blasphemously lifting the creature

to undue elevation, when in one act the Apostle appeals to 'our Lord

Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father.'

Note, still further, the distinct address to Christ as the Hearer of

Prayer. And, note, last of all, about this matter, the singular

grammatical irregularity in my text, which is something much more than

a mere blunder or slip of the pen. The words which follow, viz.,

'comfort' and 'stablish,' are in the singular, whilst these two mighty

and august names are their nominatives, and would therefore, by all

regularity, require a plural to follow them. That this peculiarity is

no mere accident, but intentional and deliberate, is made probable by

the two instances in our text, and is made certain, as it seems to me,

by the fact that the same anomalous and eloquent construction occurs in

the previous epistle to the same church, where we have in exact

parallelism with our text, 'God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus

Christ,' with the singular verb, 'direct our way unto you.' The

phraseology is the expression, in grammatical form, of the great truth,

'Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doth the Son likewise.'

And from it there gleam out unmistakably the great principles of the

unity of action and the distinction of person between Father and Son,

in the depths of that infinite and mysterious Godhead.

Now all this, which seems to me to be irrefragable, is made the more

remarkable and the stronger as a witness of the truth, from the fact

that it occurs in this perfectly incidental fashion, and without a word

of explanation or apology, as taking for granted that there was a

background of teaching in the Thessalonian Church which had prepared

the way for it, and rendered it intelligible, as well as a background

of conviction which had previously accepted it.

And, remember, these two letters, thus full-toned in their declaration,

and taking for granted the previous acceptance of the great doctrine of

the divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are the earliest

portions of the New Testament, and are often spoken about as being

singularly undogmatic. So they are, and therefore all the more eloquent

and all the more conclusive is such a testimony as this to the sort of

teaching which from the beginning the Apostle addressed to his

converts.

Now is that your notion of Jesus Christ? Do you regard Him as the

sharer in the divine attributes and in the divine throne? It was a

living Christ that Paul was thinking about when he wrote these words,

who could hear him praying in Corinth, and could reach a helping hand

down to these poor men in Thessalonica. It was a divine Christ that

Paul was thinking about when he dared to say, 'Our Lord Jesus Christ,

and God our Father.' And I beseech you to ask yourself the question

whether your faith accepts that great teaching, and whether to you He

is far more than 'the Man Christ Jesus'; and just because He is the

man, is therefore the Son of God. Brethren! either Jesus lies in an

unknown grave, ignorant of all that is going on here, and the notion

that He can help is a delusion and a dream, or else He is the

ever-living because He is the divine Christ, to whom we poor men can

speak with the certainty that He hears us, and who wields the energies

of Deity, and works the same works as the Father, for the help and

blessing of the souls that trust Him.

II. Secondly, note the great fact on which this prayer builds itself.

The form of words in the original, 'loved' and 'given,' all but

necessarily requires us to suppose that their reference is to some one

definite historical act in which the love was manifested, and, as love

always does, found voice in giving. Love is the infinite desire to

bestow, and its language is always a gift. Then, according to the

Apostle's thought, there is some one act in which all the fulness of

the divine love manifests itself; some one act in which all the

treasures which God can bestow upon men are conveyed and handed over to

a world.

The statement that there is such renders almost unnecessary the

question what such an act is. For there can be but one in all the sweep

of the magnificent and beneficent divine deeds, so correspondent to His

love, and so inclusive of all His giving, as that it shall be the

ground of our confidence and the warrant for our prayers. The gift of

Jesus Christ is that in which everlasting consolation and good hope are

bestowed upon men. When our desires are widened out to the widest they

must be based upon the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ; and when we

would think most confidently and most desiringly of the benefits that

we seek, for ourselves or for our fellows, we must turn to the Cross.

My prayer is then acceptable and prevalent when it foots itself on the

past divine act, and looking to the life and death of Jesus Christ, is

widened out to long for, ask for, and in the very longing and asking

for to begin to possess, the fulness of the gifts which then were

brought to men in Him.

'Everlasting consolation and good hope.' I suppose the Apostle's

emphasis is to be placed quite as much on the adjectives as on the

nouns; for there are consolations enough in the world, only none of

them are permanent; and there are hopes enough that amuse and draw men,

but one of them only is 'good.' The gift of Christ, thinks Paul, is the

gift of a comfort which will never fail amidst all the vicissitudes and

accumulated and repeated and prolonged sorrows to which flesh is heir,

and is likewise the gift of a hope which, in its basis and in its

objects, is equally noble and good.

Look at these two things briefly. Paul thinks that in Jesus Christ you

and I, and all the world, if it will have it, has received the gift of

an everlasting comfort. Ah! sorrow is more persistent than consolation.

The bandaged wounds bleed again; the fire damped down for a moment

smoulders, even when damped, and bursts out again. But there is one

source of comfort which, because it comes from an unchangeable Christ,

and because it communicates unfailing gifts of patience and insight,

and because it leads forward to everlasting blessedness and

recompenses, may well be called 'eternal consolation.' Of course,

consolation is not needed when sorrow has ceased; and when the wiping

away of all tears from off all faces, and the plunging of grief into

the nethermost fires, there to be consumed, have come about, there is

no more need for comfort. Yet that which made the comfort while sorrow

lasts, makes the triumph and the rapture when sorrow is dead, and is

everlasting, though its office of consolation determines with earth.

'Good hope through grace.' This is the weakness of all the hopes which

dance like fireflies in the dark before men, and are often like

will-o'-the-wisps in the night tempting men into deep mire, where there

is no standing--that they are uncertain in their basis and inadequate

in their range. The prostitution of the great faculty of hope is one of

the saddest characteristics of our feeble and fallen manhood; for the

bulk of our hopes are doubtful and akin to fears, and are mean and low,

and disproportioned to the possibilities, and therefore the

obligations, of our spirits. But in that Cross which teaches us the

meaning of sorrows, and in that Christ whose presence is light in

darkness, and the very embodied consolation of all hearts, there lie at

once the foundation and the object of a hope which, in consideration

both of object and foundation, stands unique in its excellence and

sufficient in its firmness. 'A good hope'; good because well founded;

and good because grasping worthy objects; eternal consolation

outlasting all sorrows--these things were given once for all, to the

whole world when Jesus Christ came and lived and died. The materials

for a comfort that shall never fail me, and for the foundation and the

object of a hope that shall never be ashamed, are supplied in Jesus

Christ our Lord. And so these gifts, already passed under the great

seal of heaven, and confirmed to us all, if we choose to take them for

ours, are the ground upon which the largest prayers may be rested, and

the most ardent desires may be unblamably cherished, in the full

confidence that no petitions of ours can reach to the greatness of the

divine purpose, and that the widest and otherwise wildest of our hopes

and wishes are sober under-estimates of what God has already given to

us. For if He has given the material, He will apply what He has

supplied. And if He has thus in the past bestowed the possibilities of

comfort and hope upon the world, He will not slack His hand, if we

desire the possibility to be in our hearts turned into the actuality.

God has given, therefore God will give. That in heaven's logic, but it

does not do for men. It presupposes inexhaustible resources,

unchangeable purposes of kindness, patience that is not disgusted and

cannot be turned away by our sin. These things being presupposed it is

true; and the prayer of my text, that God would comfort, can have no

firmer foundation than the confidence of my text, that God has given

'everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.' 'Thou hast

helped us; leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation.'

III. The last thing here is the petitions based upon the contemplation

of the divine hearers of the prayer, and of the gift already bestowed

by God.

May He 'comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and

work.' I have already said all that perhaps is necessary in regard to

the connection between the past gift of everlasting consolation and the

present and future comforting of hearts which is here desired. It seems

to me that the Apostle has in his mind the distinction between the

great work of Christ, in which are supplied for us the materials for

comfort and hope, and the present and continuous work of that Divine

Spirit, by which God dwelling in our hearts in Jesus Christ makes real

for each of us the universal gift of consolation and of hope. God has

bestowed the materials for comfort; God will give the comfort for which

He has supplied the materials. It were a poor thing if all that we

could expect from our loving Father in the heavens were that He should

contribute to us what might make us peaceful and glad and calm in

sorrow, if we chose to use it. Men comfort from without; God steals

into the heart, and there diffuses the aroma of His presence. Christ

comes into the ship before He says, 'Peace! be still!' It is not enough

for our poor troubled heart that there should be calmness and

consolation twining round the Cross if we choose to pluck the fruit. We

need, and therefore we have, an indwelling God who, by that Spirit

which is the Comforter, will make for each of us the everlasting

consolation which He has bestowed upon the world our individual

possession. God's husbandry is not merely broadcast sowing of the seed,

but the planting in each individual heart of the precious germ. And the

God who has given everlasting consolation to a whole world will comfort

thy heart.

Then, again, the comforted heart will be a stable heart. Our fixedness

and stability are not natural immobility, but communicated

steadfastness. There must be, first, the consolation of Christ before

there can be the calmness of a settled heart. We all know how

vacillating, how driven to and fro by gusts of passion and winds of

doctrine and forces of earth our resolutions and spirits are. But

thistledown glued to a firm surface will be firm, and any light thing

lashed to a solid one will be solid; and reeds shaken with the wind may

be turned into brazen pillars that cannot be moved. If we have Christ

in our hearts, He will be our consolation first and our stability next.

Why should it be that we are spasmodic and fluctuating, and the slaves

of ups and downs, like some barometer in stormy weather; now at 'set

fair,' and then away down where 'much rain' is written? There is no

need for it. Get Christ into your heart, and your mercury will always

stand at one height. Why should it be that at one hour the flashing

waters fill the harbour, and that six hours afterwards there is a waste

of ooze and filth? It need not be. Our hearts may be like some

landlocked lake that knows no tide. 'His heart is fixed, trusting in

the Lord.'

The comforted and stable heart will be a fruitful heart. 'In every good

word and work.' Ah! how fragmentary is our goodness, like the broken

torsos of the statues of fair gods dug up in some classic land. There

is no reason why each of us should not appropriate and make our own the

forms of goodness to which we are least naturally inclined, and

cultivate and possess a symmetrical, fully-developed, all-round

goodness, in some humble measure after the pattern of Jesus Christ our

Lord. Practical righteousness, 'in every good word and work,' is the

outcome of all the sacred and secret consolations and blessings that

Jesus Christ imparts. There are many Christian people who are like

those swallow-holes, as they call them, characteristic of limestone

countries, where a great river plunges into a cave and is no more heard

of. You do not get your comforts and your blessing for that, brother,

but in order that all the joy and peace, all the calmness and the

communion, which you realise in the secret place of the Most High, may

be translated into goodness and manifest righteousness in the

market-place and the street. We get our goodness where we get our

consolation, from Jesus Christ and His Cross.

And so, dear friends, all your comforts will die, and your sorrows will

live, unless you have Christ for your own. The former will be like some

application that is put on a poisoned bite, which will soothe it for a

moment, but as soon as the anodyne dries off the skin, the poison will

tingle and burn again, and will be working in the blood, whilst the

remedy only touched the surface of the flesh. All your hopes will be

like a child's castles on the sand, which the next tide will smooth out

and obliterate, unless your hope is fixed on Him. You may have

everlasting consolation, you may have a hope which will enable you to

look serenely on the ills of life, and on the darkness of death, and on

what darkly looms beyond death. You may have a calmed and steadied

heart; you may have an all-round, stable, comprehensive goodness. But

there is only one way to get these blessings, and that is to grasp and

make our own, by simple faith and constant clinging, that great gift,

given once for all in Jesus Christ, the gift of comfort that never

dies, and of hope that never deceives, and then to apply that gift day

by day, through God's good Spirit, to sorrows and trials and duties as

they emerge.

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THE HEART'S HOME AND GUIDE

'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient

waiting for Christ.'--2 Thess. iii. 5.

A word or two of explanation of terms may preface our remarks on this,

the third of the Apostle's prayers for the Thessalonians in this

letter. The first point to be noticed is that by 'the Lord' here is

meant, as usually in the New Testament, Jesus Christ. So that here

again we have the distinct recognition of His divinity, and the direct

address of prayer to Him.

The next thing to notice is that by 'the love of God' is here meant,

not God's to us, but ours to Him; and that the petition, therefore,

respects the emotions and sentiments of the Thessalonians towards the

Father in heaven.

And the last point is that the rendering of the Authorised Version,

'patient waiting for Christ,' is better exchanged for that of the

Revised Version, 'the patience of Christ,' meaning thereby the same

patience as He exhibited in His earthly life, and which He is ready to

bestow upon us.

It is not usual in the New Testament to find Jesus Christ set forth as

the great Example of patient endurance; but still there are one or two

instances in which the same expression is applied to Him. For example,

in two contiguous verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of His

'enduring contradiction of sinners against Himself,' and 'enduring the

Cross, despising the shame,' in both of which cases we have the verb

employed of which the noun is here used. Then in the Apocalypse we have

such expressions as 'the patience of Christ,' of which John says that

he and his brethren whom he is addressing are 'participators,' and,

again, 'thou hast kept the word of my patience.'

So, though unusual, the thought of our text as presented in the amended

version is by no means singular. These things, then, being premised, we

may now look at this petition as a whole.

I. The first thought that it suggests to me is, the home of the heart.

'The Lord direct you into the love of God and the patience of Christ.'

The prayers in this letter with which we have been occupied for some

Sundays present to us Christian perfection under various aspects. But

this we may, perhaps, say is the most comprehensive and condensed of

them all. The Apostle gathers up the whole sum of his desires for his

friends, and presents to us the whole aim of our efforts for ourselves,

in these two things, a steadfast love to God, and a calm endurance of

evil and persistence in duty, unaffected by suffering or by pain. If we

have these two we shall not be far from being what God wishes to see

us.

Now the Apostle's thought here, of 'leading us into' these two seems to

suggest the metaphor of a great home with two chambers in it, of which

the inner was entered from the outer. The first room is 'the love of

God,' and the second is 'the patience of Christ.' It comes to the same

thing whether we speak of the heart as dwelling in love, or of love as

dwelling in the heart. The metaphor varies, the substance of the

thought is the same, and that thought is that the heart should be the

sphere and subject of a steadfast, habitual, all-pleasing love, which

issues in unbroken calmness of endurance and persistence of service, in

the face of evil.

Let us look, then, for a moment at these two points. I need not dwell

upon the bare idea of love to God as being the characteristic of the

Christian attitude towards Him, or remind you of how strange and

unexampled a thing it is that all religion should be reduced to this

one fruitful germ, love to the Father in heaven. But it is more to the

purpose for me to point to the constancy, the unbrokenness, the depth,

which the Apostle here desires should be the characteristics of

Christian love to God. We sometimes cherish such emotion; but, alas,

how rare it is for us to dwell in that calm home all the days of our

lives! We visit that serene sanctuary at intervals, and then for the

rest of our days we are hurried to and fro between contending

affections, and wander homeless amidst inadequate loves. But what Paul

asked, and what should be the conscious aim of the Christian life, is,

that we should 'dwell all our days in the house of the Lord, to behold

the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple.'

Alas, when we think of our own experiences, how fair and far seems that

other, contemplated as a possibility in my text, that our hearts should

'abide in the love of God'!

Let me remind you, too, that steadfastness of habitual love all round

our hearts, as it were, is the source and germ of all perfectness of

life and conduct. 'Love and do as Thou wilt,' is a bold saying, but not

too bold. For the very essence of love is the smelting of the will of

the lover into the will of the beloved. And there is nothing so certain

as that, in regard to all human relations, and in regard to the

relations to God which in many respects follow, and are moulded after

the pattern of, our earthly relations of love, to have the heart fixed

in pure affection is to have the whole life subordinated in glad

obedience. Nothing is so sweet as to do the beloved's will. The germ of

all righteousness, as well as the characteristic spirit of every

righteous deed, lies in love to God. This is the mother tincture which,

variously coloured and with various additions, makes all the different

precious liquids which we can pour as libations on His altar. The one

saving salt of all deeds in reference to Him is that they are the

outcome and expression of a loving heart. He who loves is righteous,

and doeth righteousness. So, 'love is the fulfilling of the law.'

That the heart should be fixed in its abode in love to God is the

secret of all blessedness, as it is the source of all righteousness.

Love is always joy in itself; it is the one deliverance from

self-bondage to which self is the one curse and misery of man. The

emancipation from care and sorrow and unrest lies in that going out of

ourselves which we call by the name of love. There be things

masquerading about the world, and profaning the sacred name of love by

taking it to themselves, which are only selfishness under a disguise.

But true love is the annihilation, and therefore the apotheosis and

glorifying, of self; and in that annihilation lies the secret charm

which brings all blessedness into a life.

But, then, though love in itself be always bliss, yet, by reason of the

imperfections of its objects, it sometimes leads to sorrow. For

limitations and disappointments and inadequacies of all sorts haunt our

earthly loves whilst they last; and we have all to see them fade, or to

fade away from them. The thing you love may change, the thing you love

must die; and therefore love, which in itself is blessedness, hath

often, like the little book that the prophet swallowed, a bitter taste

remaining when the sweetness is gone. But if we set our hearts on God,

we set our hearts on that which knows no variableness, neither the

shadow of turning. There are no inadequate responses, no changes that

we need fear. On that love the scythe of death, which mows down all

other products of the human heart, hath no power; and its stem stands

untouched by the keen edge that levels all the rest of the herbage.

Love God, and thou lovest eternity; and therefore the joy of the love

is eternal as its object. So he who loves God is building upon a rock,

and whosoever has this for his treasure carries his wealth with him

whithersoever he goes. Well may the Apostle gather into one potent

word, and one mighty wish, the whole fulness of his desires for his

friends. And wise shall we be if we make this the chiefest of our aims,

that our hearts may have their home in the love of God.

Still further, there is another chamber in this house of the soul. The

outer room, where the heart inhabits that loves God, leads into another

compartment, 'the patience of Christ.'

Now, I suppose I need not remind many of you that this great New

Testament word 'patience' has a far wider area of meaning than that

which is ordinarily covered by that expression. For patience, as we use

it, is simply a passive virtue. But the thing that is meant by the New

Testament word which is generally so rendered has an active as well as

a passive side. On the passive side it is the calm, unmurmuring,

unreluctant submission of the will to whatsoever evil may come upon us,

either directly from God's hand, or through the ministration and

mediation of men who are His sword. On the active side it is the

steadfast persistence in the path of duty, in spite of all that may

array itself against us. So there are the two halves of the virtue

which is here put before us--unmurmuring submission and bold

continuance in well-doing, whatsoever storms may hurtle in our faces.

Now, in both of these aspects, the life of Jesus Christ is the great

pattern. As for the passive side, need I remind you how, 'as a sheep

before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth'? 'When He was

reviled He reviled not again, but committed Himself unto Him that

judgeth uprightly.' No anger ever flushed His cheek or contracted His

brow. He never repaid scorn with scorn, nor hate with hate. All men's

malice fell upon Him, like sparks upon wet timber, and kindled no

conflagration.

As for the active side, I need not remind you how 'He set His face to

go to Jerusalem'--how the great solemn 'must' which ruled His life bore

Him on, steadfast and without deflection in His course, through all

obstacles. There never was such heroic force as the quiet force of the

meek and gentle Christ, which wasted no strength in displaying or

boasting of itself, but simply, silently, unconquerably, like the

secular motions of the stars, dominated all opposition, and carried

Him, unhasting and unresting, on His path. That life, with all its

surface of weakness, had an iron tenacity of purpose beneath, which may

well stand for our example. Like some pure glacier from an Alpine peak,

it comes silently, slowly down into the valley; and though to the eye

it seems not to move, it presses on with a force sublime in its silence

and gigantic in its gentleness, and buries beneath it the rocks that

stand in its way. The patience of Christ is the very sublimity of

persistence in well-doing. It is our example, and more than our

example--it is His gift to us.

Such passive and active patience is the direct fruit of love to God.

The one chamber opens into the other. For they whose hearts dwell in

the sweet sanctities of the love of God will ever be those who say,

with a calm smile, as they put out their hand to the bitterest draught,

'the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?'

Love, and evil dwindles; love, and duty becomes supreme; and in the

submission of the will, which is the true issue of love, lies the

foundation of indomitable and inexhaustible endurance and perseverance.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this resolve to do the will

of God, in spite of all antagonism and opposition, lies a condition at

once of moral perfection and of blessedness. So, dear friends, if we

would have a home for our hearts, let us pass into that sweet, calm,

inexpugnable fortress provided for us in the love of God and the

patience of Christ.

II. Now notice, secondly, the Guide of the heart to its home.

'The Lord direct you.' I have already explained that we have here a

distinct address to Jesus Christ as divine, and the hearer of prayer.

The Apostle evidently expects a present, personal influence from Christ

to be exerted upon men's hearts. And this is the point to which I

desire to draw your attention in a word or two. We are far too

oblivious of the present influence of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, upon

the hearts of men that trust Him. We have very imperfectly apprehended

our privileges as Christians if our faith do not expect, and if our

experience have not realised, the inward guidance of Christ moment by

moment in our daily lives. I believe that much of the present

feebleness of the Christian life amongst its professors is to be traced

to the fact that their thoughts about Jesus Christ are predominantly

thoughts of what He did nineteen centuries ago, and that the proportion

of faith is not observed in their perspective of His work, and that

they do not sufficiently realise that to-day, here, in you and me, if

we have faith in Him, He is verily and really putting forth His power.

Paul's prayer is but an echo of Christ's promise. The Master said, 'He

shall guide you into all truth.' The servant prays, 'The Lord direct

your hearts into the love of God.' And if we rightly know the whole

blessedness that is ours in the gift of Jesus Christ, we shall

recognise His present guidance as a reality in our lives.

That guidance is given to us mainly by the Divine Spirit laying upon

our hearts the great facts which evoke our answering love to God. 'We

love Him because He first loved us'; and the way by which Jesus directs

our hearts into the love of God is mainly by shedding abroad God's love

to us in our spirits by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.

But, besides that, all these movements in our hearts so often

neglected, so often resisted, by which we are impelled to a holier

life, to a deeper love, to a more unworldly consecration--all these,

rightly understood, are Christ's directions. He leads us, though often

we know not the hand that guides; and every Christian may be sure of

this--and he is sinful if he does not live up to the height of his

privileges--that the ancient promises are more than fulfilled in his

experience, and that he has a present Christ, an indwelling Christ, who

will be his Shepherd, and lead him by green pastures and still waters

sometimes and through valleys of darkness and rough defiles sometimes,

but always with the purpose of bringing him nearer and nearer to the

full possession of the love of God and the patience of Christ.

The vision which shone before the eyes of the father of the forerunner,

was that 'the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to guide our feet

into the way of peace.' It is fulfilled in Jesus who directs our hearts

into love and patience, which are the way of peace.

We are not to look for impressions and impulses distinguishable from

the operations of our own inward man. We are not to fall into the error

of supposing that a conviction of duty or a conception of truth is of

divine origin because it is strong. But the true test of their divine

origin is their correspondence with the written word, the standard of

truth and life. Jesus guides us to a fuller apprehension of the great

facts of the infinite love of God in the Cross. Shedding abroad a

Saviour's love does kindle ours.

III. Lastly, notice the heart's yielding to its guide.

If this was Paul's prayer for his converts, it should be our aim for

ourselves. Christ is ready to direct our hearts, if we will let Him.

All depends on our yielding to that sweet direction, loving as that of

a mother's hand on her child's shoulder.

What is our duty and wisdom in view of these truths? The answer may be

thrown into the shape of one or two brief counsels.

First, desire it. Do you Christian people want to be led to love God

more? Are you ready to love the world less, which you will have to do

if you love God more? Do you wish Christ to lay His hand upon you, and

withdraw you from much, that He may draw you into the sanctities and

sublimities of His own experienced love? I do not think the lives of

some of us look very like as if we should welcome that direction. And

it is a sharp test, and a hard commandment to say to a Christian

professor, 'Desire to be led into the love of God.'

Again, expect it. Do not dismiss all that I have been saying about a

present Christ leading men by their own impulses, which are His

monitions, as fanatical and mystical and far away from daily

experience. Ah! it is not only the boy Samuel whose infancy was an

excuse for his ignorance, who takes God's voice to be only

white-bearded Eli's. There are many of us who, when Christ speaks,

think it is only a human voice. Perhaps His deep and gentle tones are

thrilling through my harsh and feeble voice; and He is now, even by the

poor reed through which He breathes His breath, saying to some of you,

'Come near to Me.' Expect the guidance.

Still your own wills that you may hear His voice. How can you be led if

you never look at the Guide? How can you hear that still small voice

amidst the clattering of spindles, and the roar of wagons, and the

noises in your own heart? Be still, and He will speak.

Follow the guidance, and at once, for delay is fatal. Like a man

walking behind a guide across some morass, set your feet in the print

of the Master's and keep close at His heels, and then you will be safe.

And so, dear friends, if we want to have anchorage for our love, let us

set our love on God, who alone is worthy of it, and who alone of all

its objects will neither fail us nor change. If we would have the

temper which lifts us above the ills of life and enables us to keep our

course unaffected by them all, as the gentle moon moves with the same

silent, equable pace through piled masses of cloud and clear stretches

of sky, we must attain submission through love, and gain unreluctant

endurance and steadfast wills from the example and source of both, the

gentle and strong Christ. If we would have our hearts calm, we must let

Him guide them, sway them, curb their vagrancies, stimulate their

desires, and satisfy the desires which He has stimulated. We must

abandon self, and say, 'Lord, I cannot guide myself. Do Thou direct my

wandering feet.' The prayer will not be in vain. He will guide us with

His eye, and that directing of our hearts will issue in experiences of

love and patience, whose 'very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were

born for immortality.' The Guide and the road foreshadow the goal. The

only natural end to which such a path can lead and such guidance point

is a heaven of perfect love, where patience has done its perfect work,

and is called for no more. The experience of present direction

strengthens the hope of future perfection. So we may take for our own

the triumphant confidence of the Psalmist, and embrace the nearest and

the remotest future in one calm vision of faith that 'Thou wilt guide

me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.'

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THE LORD OF PEACE AND THE PEACE OF THE LORD

'Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. The

Lord be with you all.'--2 Thess. iii. 16.

We have reached here the last of the brief outbursts of prayer which

characterise this letter, and bear witness to the Apostle's affection

for his Thessalonian converts. It is the deepening of the ordinary

Jewish formula of meeting and parting. We find that, in most of his

letters, the Apostle begins with wishing 'grace and peace,' and closes

with an echo of the wish. 'Peace be unto you' was often a form which

meant nothing. But true religion turns conventional insincerities into

real, heartfelt desires. It was often a wish destined to remain

unfulfilled. But loving wishes are potent when they are changed into

petitions.

The relation between the two clauses of my text seems to be that the

second, 'The Lord be with you all,' is not so much a separate,

additional supplication as rather the fuller statement, in the form of

prayer, of the means by which the former supplication is to be

accomplished. 'The Lord of Peace' gives peace by giving His own

presence. This, then, is the supreme desire of the Apostle, that Christ

may be with them all, and in His presence they may find the secret of

tranquillity.

I. The deepest longing of every human soul is for peace.

There are many ways in which the supreme good may be represented, but

perhaps none of them is so lovely, and exercises such universal

fascination of attraction, as that which presents it in the form of

rest. It is an eloquent testimony to the unrest which tortures every

heart that the promise of peace should to all seem so fair. It may be

presented and aimed at in very ignoble and selfish ways. It may be

sought for in cowardly shirking of duty, in sluggish avoidance of

effort, in selfish absorption, apart from all the miseries of mankind.

It may be sought for in the ignoble paths of mere pleasure, amidst the

sanctities of human love, amidst the nobilities of intellectual effort

and pursuit. But all men in their workings are aiming at rest of

spirit, and only in such rest does blessedness lie. 'There is no joy

but calm.' It is better than all the excitements of conflict, and

better than the flush of victory. Best which is not apathy, rest which

is not indolence, rest which is contemporaneous with, and the

consequence of, the full wholesome activity of the whole nature in its

legitimate directions, that is the good that we are all longing for.

The sea is not stagnant, though it be calm. There will be the slow

heave of the calm billow, and the wavelets may sparkle in the sunlight,

though they be still from all the winds that rave. Deep in every human

heart, in yours and mine, brother, is this cry for rest and peace. Let

us see to it that we do not mistranslate the meaning of the longing, or

fancy that it can be found in the ignoble, the selfish, the worldly

ways to which I have referred. We want, most of all, peace in our

inmost hearts.

II. Then the second thing to be suggested here is that the Lord of

Peace Himself is the only giver of peace.

I suppose I may take for granted, on the part at least of the members

of my own congregation, some remembrance of a former discourse upon

another of these petitions, in which I pointed out how, in phraseology

analogous to that of my text, there were the distinct reference to the

divinity of Jesus Christ, the distinct presentation of prayer to Him,

the implication of His present activity upon Christian hearts.

And here again we have the august and majestic 'Himself.' Here again we

have the distinct reference of the title 'Lord' to Jesus. And here

again we have plainly prayer to Him.

But the title by which He is addressed is profoundly significant, 'The

Lord of Peace.' Now we find, in another of Paul's letters, in immediate

conjunction with His teaching, that casting all our care upon God is

the sure way to bring the peace of God into our hearts, the title 'the

God of Peace'; and he employs the same phraseology in another of his

letters, when he prays that the 'God of Peace' would fill the Roman

Christians 'with all joy and peace in believing.'

So, then, here is a title which is all but distinctively divine. 'The

Lord of Peace' is brought into parallelism and equality with 'the God

of Peace'; which were blasphemy unless the underlying implication was

that Jesus Christ Himself was divine.

He is the 'Lord of Peace' because that tranquillity of heart and

spirit, that unruffled calm which we all see from afar, and long to

possess, was verily His, in His manhood, during all the calamities and

changes and activities of His earthly life. I have said that 'peace' is

not apathy, that it is not indifference, that it is not

self-absorption. Look at the life of the 'Lord of Peace.' In Him there

were wholesome human emotions. He sorrowed, He wept, He wondered, He

was angry, He pitied, He loved. And yet all these were perfectly

consistent with the unruffled calm which marked His whole career. So

peace is not stolid indifference, nor is it to be found in the

avoidance of difficult duties, or the cowardly shirking of sacrifices

and pains and struggles; but rather it is 'peace subsisting at the

heart of endless agitation,' of which the great example stands in Him

who was 'the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief,' and who yet, in

it all, was 'the Lord of Peace.'

Why was Christ's manhood so perfectly tranquil? The secret lies here.

It was a manhood in unbroken communion with the Father. And what was

the secret of that unbroken communion with the Father? It lies here, in

the perfect submission of His will. Resignation is peace. The surrender

of self-will is peace. Obedience is peace. Trust is peace, and

fellowship with the divine is peace. So Christ has taught us in His

life--'The Father hath not left Me alone, because I do always the

things that please Him.' And therein He has marked out for us the path

of righteousness and communion, which is ever the path of peace. 'Thou

wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he

trusteth in Thee.' That is the secret of the tranquillity of the

ever-calm Christ.

Being thus the Lord of Peace, inasmuch as it was His own constant and

unbroken possession, He is the sole giver of it to others.

Ah! brethren, our hearts want far more, for their stable restfulness,

than we can find in any hand, or in any heart, except those of Jesus

Christ Himself. For what do we need? We need, in order that we should

know the sweetness of repose, an adequate object for every part of our

nature. If we find something that is good and sweet and satisfying for

some portion of this complex being of ours, all its other hungry

desires are apt to be left unappeased. So we are shuttle-cocked from

one wish to another, and bandied about from one partial satisfaction to

another, and in them all it is but segments of our being that are

satisfied, whilst all the rest of the circumference remains disquieted.

We need that, in one attainable and single object, there shall be at

once that which will subjugate the will, that which will illuminate and

appease the conscience, that which will satisfy the seeking intellect,

and hold forth the promise of endless progress in insight and

knowledge, that which will meet all the desires of our ravenous clamant

nature, and that which will fill every creek and cranny of our empty

hearts as with the flashing brightness of an inflowing tide.

And where shall we find all these, but in one dear heart, and where

shall we discern the one object, whom, possessing, we have enough; and

without whom, possessing all beside, we are mendicants and starving?

Where, but in that dear Lord, who Himself will supply all our needs,

and will minister to us peace, because for will and conscience and

intellect and affections and desires He supplies the pabulum that they

require, and gives more than enough for their satisfaction?

We want, if we are to be at rest, that there shall be some absolute

control over our passions, lusts, desires, which torture us for ever,

as long as they are ungoverned. There is only one hand which will take

the wild beasts of our nature, bind them in the silken leash of His

love, and lead them along, tamed and obedient.

We want, for our peace, that all our relations with circumstances and

men around us shall be rectified. And who is there that can bring about

such harmony between us and our surroundings that calamities shall not

press upon us with their heaviest weight, nor opposing circumstances

kindle angry resistance, but only patient perseverance and thankful

persistence in the path of duty? It is only Christ that can regulate

our relations to the things and the men around us, and make all things

work together to our consciousness for our good.

Further, if we are to be at rest, and possess any true, fundamental,

and stable tranquillity, we want that our relations with God shall

consciously be rectified and made blessed. And I, for my part, do not

believe that any man comes into the full sweetness of an assured

friendship with God, unless he comes to it by the road of faith in that

Saviour in whom God draws near to us with tenderness in His heart, and

blessings dropping from His open Hands. To be at peace with God is the

beginning of all true tranquillity, and that can be secured only by

faith in Jesus Christ.

So, because He brings the reconciliation between man and God, because

He brings the rectification of our relation to circumstances and men,

because He brings the control of desires and passions and inclinations,

and because He satisfies all the capacities of our natures, in Him, and

in Him only, is there peace for us.

III. So note, thirdly, that the peace of the Lord of Peace is perfect.

'Give you peace always,' that points to perpetual, unbroken duration in

time, and through all changing circumstances which might threaten a

less stable and deeply-rooted tranquillity. And then, 'by all means,'

as our Authorised Version has it, or, better, 'in all ways,' as the

Revised Version reads, the reference being, not so much to the various

manners in which the divine peace is to be bestowed, as to the various

aspects which that peace is capable of assuming. Christ's peace, then,

is perpetual and multiform, unbroken, and presenting itself in all the

aspects in which tranquillity is possible for a human spirit.

It is possible, then, thinks Paul, that there shall be in our hearts a

deep tranquillity, over which disasters, calamities, sorrows, losses,

need have no power. There is no necessity why, when my outward life is

troubled, my inward life should be perturbed. There may be light in the

dwellings of Goshen, while darkness lies over all the land of Egypt.

The peace which Christ gives is no exemption from warfare, but is

realised in the midst of warfare. It is no immunity from sorrows, but

is then most felt when the storm of sorrow beating upon us is patiently

accepted. The rainbow steadfastly stands spanning the tortured waters

of the cataract. The fire may burn, like that old Greek fire, beneath

the water. The surface may be agitated, but the centre may be calm. It

is not calamity that breaks our peace, but it is the resistance of our

wills to calamity which troubles us. When we can bow and submit and

say, 'Thy will be done,' 'it seemeth good to Thee, do as Thou wilt,'

then nothing can break the peace of God in our hearts. We seek in the

wrong quarter for peace when we seek it in the disposition of outward

things according to our wills. We seek in the right way when we seek it

in the disposition of our wills according to the will of the Father

manifest in our circumstances. There may be peace always, even whilst

the storms, efforts, and calamities of life are in full operation

around us and on us. That peace may be uninterrupted and uniform,

extended on one high level, as it were through all our lives. It is not

so with us, dear brethren; there are ups and downs which are our own

fault. The peace of God may be permanent, but, in order that it should

be, there must be permanent communion and permanent obedience.

Further, says the Apostle, Christ's peace will not manifest itself in

one form only, but in all the shapes in which peace is possible. There

are many enemies that beset this calmness of spirit; for them all there

is the appropriate armour and defence in the peace of God, I have

already enumerated in part some of the requirements for true and

permanent tranquillity of soul. All these are met in the peace of

Christ. Whatever it is that disturbs men, He has His anodyne that will

soothe. If circumstances threaten, if men array themselves against us,

if our own evil hearts rise up in rebellion, if our passions disturb

us, if our consciences accuse: for all these Christ brings tranquillity

and calm. In every way in which men can be disturbed, and in every way,

therefore, in which peace can be manifest, Christ's gift avails. 'Come

unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you

rest.'

IV. Lastly, 'the Lord of Peace' gives it by giving His own presence.

The Thessalonians, as they listened to Paul's first prayer, might think

to themselves, 'Always, by all means.' That is a large petition! Can it

be fufilled? And so the Apostle adds, 'The Lord be with you all.' You

cannot separate Christ's gifts from Christ. The only way to get

anything that He gives is to get Him. It is His presence that does

everything. If He is with me, the world's annoyances will seem very

small. If I hold His hand I shall not be much troubled. If I can only

nestle close to His side, and come under His cloak, He will shield me

from the cold blast, from whatever side it blows. If my heart is twined

around Him it will partake of the stability and calm of the great heart

on which it rests.

The secret of tranquillity is the presence of Christ. When He is in the

vessel the waves calm themselves. So, Christian men and women, if you

and I are conscious of breaches of our restfulness, interruptions of

our tranquillity by reason of surging, impatient passions, and hot

desires within ourselves, or by reason of the pressure of outward

circumstances, or by reason of our having fallen beneath our

consciences, and done wrong things, let us understand that the breaches

of our peace are not owing to Him, but only to our having let go His

hand. It is our own faults if we are ever troubled; if we kept close to

Him we should not be. It is our own faults if the world ever agitates

us beyond the measure that is compatible with central calm. Sorrow

should not have the power to touch the citadel of our lives. Effort

should not have the power to withdraw us from our trustful repose in

Him. And nothing here would have the power, if we did not let our hand

slip out of His, and break our communion with Him.

So, dear brethren, 'in the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me ye

shall have peace.' Keep inside the fortress and nothing will disturb.

'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide

under the shadow of the Almighty.' The only place where that hungry,

passion-ridden heart of yours, conscious of alienation from God, can

find rest, is close by Jesus Christ. 'The Lord be with us all,' and

then the peace of that Lord shall clothe and fill our hearts in Christ

Jesus.

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I. TIMOTHY

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THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT

'Now, the end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and of a

good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.'--1 Tim. 1. 6.

The Apostle has just said that he left Timothy in Ephesus, in order to

check some tendencies there which were giving anxiety. Certain teachers

had appeared, the effect of whose activity was to create parties, to

foster useless speculations, and to turn the minds of the Ephesian

Christians away from the practical and moral side of Christianity. In

opposition to these, the Apostle here lays down the broad principle

that God has spoken, not in order to make acute theologians, or to

provide materials for controversy, but in order to help us to love. The

whole of these latest letters of the Apostle breathe the mellow wisdom

of old age, which has learned to rate brilliant intellectualism,

agility, incontroversial fence and the like, far lower than homely

goodness. And so, says Paul, 'the end of the commandment is love.'

Now he here states, not only the purpose of the divine revelation, but

gives us a summary, but yet sufficient, outline of the method by which

God works towards that purpose. The commandment is the beginning, love

is the end or aim. And between these two there are inserted three

things, a 'pure heart,' a 'good conscience,' 'faith unfeigned.' Now of

these three the two former are closely connected, and the third is the

cause, or condition, of both of them. It is, therefore, properly named

last as being first in order, and therefore last reached in analysis.

When you track a stream from its mouth to its source, the fountain-head

is the last thing that you come to. And here we have, as in these great

lakes in Central Africa--out of which finally the Nile issues--the

stages of the flow. There are the twin lakes, a 'good conscience' and a

'pure heart.' These come from 'unfeigned faith,' which lies higher up

in the hills of God; and they run down into the love which is the 'end

of the commandment.' The faith lays hold on the commandment, and so the

process is complete. Or, if you begin at the top, instead of at the

bottom, God gives the word; faith grasps the word, and thereby

nourishes a 'pure heart' and a 'good conscience,' and thereby produces

a universal love. So, then, we have three steps to look at here.

I. First of all, what God speaks to us for.

'The end of the commandment is love.'

Now, I take it that the word 'commandment' here means, not this or that

specific precept, but the whole body of Christian revelation,

considered as containing laws for life. And to begin with, and only to

mention, it is something to get that point of view, that all which God

says, be it promise, be it self-manifestation, be it threatening, or be

it anything else, has a preceptive bearing, and is meant to influence

life and conduct. I shall have a word or two more to say about that

presently, but note, just as we go on, how remarkable it is, and how

full of lessons, if we will ponder it, that one name for the Gospel on

the lips of the man who had most to say about the contrast between

Gospel and Law is 'commandment.' Try to feel the stringency of that

aspect of evangelical truth and of Christian revelation.

Then I need not remind you how here the indefinite expression 'love'

must be taken, as I think is generally the case in the New Testament,

when the object on which the love rests is not defined, as including

both of the twin commandments, of which the second, our Master says, is

like unto the first, love to God and love to man. In the Christian idea

these two are one. They are shoots from the one root. The only

difference is that the one climbs and the other grows along the levels

of earth. There is no gulf set in the New Testament teaching, and there

ought to be none in the practice and life of a Christian man, between

the love of God and the love of man. They are two aspects of one thing.

Then, if so, mark how, according to the Apostle's teaching here, in

this one thought of a dual-sided love, one turned upwards, one turned

earthwards, there lies the whole perfection of a human soul. You want

nothing more if you are 'rooted and grounded in love.' That will secure

all goodness, all morality, all religion, everything that is beautiful,

and everything that is noble. And all this is meant to be the result of

God's speech to us.

So, then, two very plain practical principles may be deduced and

enforced from this first thought. First, the purpose of all revelation

and the test of all religion is--character and conduct.

It is all very well to know about God, to have our minds filled with

true thoughts about Him, His nature, and dealings with us. Orthodoxy is

good, but orthodoxy is a means to an end. There should be nothing in a

man's creed which does not act upon his life. Or, if I may put it into

technical words, all a man's credenda should be his agenda; and

whatsoever he believes should come straight into his life to influence

it, and to shape character. Here, then, is the warning against a mere

notional orthodoxy, and against regarding Christian truth as being

intended mainly to illuminate the understanding, or to be a subject of

speculation and discussion. There are people in all generations, and

there are plenty of them to-day, who seem to think that the great

verities of the Gospel are mainly meant to provide material for

controversy--

'As if religion were intended

For nothing else but to be mended';

and that they have done all that can be expected when they have tried

to apprehend the true bearing of this revelation, and to contend

against misinterpretations. This is the curse of religious controversy,

that it blinds men to the practical importance of the truths for which

they are fighting. It is as if one were to take some fertile

wheat-land, and sand it all over, and roll it down, and make it smooth

for a gymnasium, where nothing would grow. So the temper which finds in

Christian truth simply a 'ministration of questions,' as my text says,

mars its purpose, and robs itself of all the power and nourishment that

it might find there.

No less to be guarded against is the other misconception which the

clear grasp of our text would dismiss at once, that the great purpose

for which God speaks to us men, in the revelation of Jesus Christ, is

that we may, as we say, be 'forgiven,' and escape any of the temporal

or eternal consequences of our wrongdoing. That is a purpose, no doubt,

and men will never rise to the apprehension of the loftiest purposes,

nor penetrate to a sympathetic perception of the inmost sweetness of

the Gospel, unless they begin with its redemptive aspect, even in the

narrowest sense of that word. But there are a miserable number of

so-called and of real Christians in this world, and in our churches

to-day, who have little conception that God has spoken to them for

anything else than to deliver them from the fear of death, and from the

incidence on them of future condemnation. He has spoken for this

purpose, but the ultimate end of all is that we may be helped to love

Him, and so to be like Him. The aim of the commandment is love, and if

you ever are tempted to rest in intellectual apprehensions, or to

pervert the truth of God into a mere arena on which you can display

your skill of fence and your intellectual agility, or if ever you are

tempted to think that all is done when the sweet message of forgiveness

is sealed upon a man's heart, remember the solemn and plain words of my

text--the final purpose of all is that we may love God and man.

But then, on the other side, note that no less distinctly is the sole

foundation of this love laid in God's speech. My text, in its elevation

of sentiment and character and conduct above doctrine, falls in with

the prevailing tendencies of this day; but it provides the safeguards

which these tendencies neglect. Notice that this favourite saying of

the most advanced school of broad thinkers, who are always talking

about the decay of dogma, and the unimportance of doctrine as compared

with love, is here uttered by a man who was no sentimentalist, but to

whom the Christian system was a most distinct and definite thing,

bristling all over with the obnoxious doctrines which are by some of us

so summarily dismissed as of no importance. My very text protests

against the modern attempt to wrench away the sentiments and emotions

produced in men, by the reception of Christian truth, from the truth

which it recognises as the only basis on which they can be produced. It

declares that the 'commandment' must come first, before love can

follow; and the rest of the letter, although, as I say, it decisively

places the end of revelation as being the moral and religious

perfecting of men into assimilation with the divine love, no less

decisively demands that for such a perfecting there shall be laid the

foundation of the truth as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

And that is what we want to-day in order to make breadth wholesome, and

if only we will carry with us the two thoughts, the commandment and

love, we shall not go far wrong. But what would you think of a man that

said, 'I do not want any foundations. I want a house to live in'? And

pray how are you going to get your house without the foundations? Or

would he be a wise man who said, 'Oh, never mind about putting grapes

into the vine vat, and producing fermentation; give me the wine!' Yes!

But you must have the fermentation first. The process is not the

result, of course, but there is no result without the process. And

according to New Testament teaching, which, I am bold to say, is

verified by experience, there is no deep, all-swaying, sovereign,

heart-uniting love to God which is not drawn from the acceptance of the

truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

II. And so I come, secondly, to note the purifying which is needed

prior to such love.

Our text, as I said, divides the process into stages; or, if I may go

back to a former illustration, into levels. And on the level

immediately above the love, down into which the waters of the twin

lakes glide, are a pure heart and a good conscience. These are the

requisites for all real and operative love. Now they are closely

connected, as it seems to me, more closely so than with either the

stage which precedes or that which follows. They are, in fact, two twin

thoughts, very closely identified, though not quite identical.

A pure heart is one that has been defecated and cleansed from the

impurities which naturally attach to human affections. A 'good

conscience' is one which is void of offence towards God and man, and

registers the emotions of a pure heart. It is like a sheet of sensitive

paper that, with a broken line, indicates how many hours of sunshine in

the day there have been. We need not discuss the question as to which

of these two great gifts and blessings which sweeten a whole life come

first. In the initial stages of the Christian life I suppose the good

conscience precedes the pure heart. For forgiveness which calms the

conscience and purges it of the perilous stuff which has been injected

into it by our corruptions--forgiveness comes before cleansing, and the

conscience is calm before the heart is purified. But in the later

stages of the Christian life the order seems to be reversed, and there

cannot be in a man a conscience that is good unless there is a heart

that is pure.

But however that may be--and it does not affect the general question

before us--mark how distinctly Paul lays down here the principle that

you will get no real love of God or man out of men whose hearts are

foul, and whose consciences are either torpid or stinging them. I need

not dwell upon that, for it is plain to anybody that will think for a

moment that all sin separates between a man and God; and that from a

heart all seething and bubbling, like the crater of a volcano, with

foul liquids, and giving forth foul odours, there can come no love

worth calling so to God, nor any benevolence worth calling so to man.

Wherever there is sin, unrecognised, unconfessed, unpardoned, there

there is a black barrier built up between a man's heart and the

yearning heart of God on the other side. And until that barrier is

swept away, until the whole nature receives a new set, until it is

delivered from the love of evil, and from its self-centred absorption,

and until conscience has taken into grateful hands, if I might so say,

the greatest of all gifts, the assurance of the divine forgiveness, I,

for one, do not believe that deep, vital, and life-transforming love to

God is possible. I know that it is very unfashionable, I know it is

exceedingly narrow teaching, but it seems to me that it is Scriptural

teaching; and it seems to me that if we will strip it of the

exaggerations with which it has often been surrounded, and recognise

that there may be a kind of instinctive and occasional recognition of a

divine love, there may be a yearning after a clear light, and fuller

knowledge of it, and yet all the while no real love to God, rooted in

and lording over and moulding the life, we shall not find much in the

history of the world, or in the experience of ourselves or of others,

to contradict the affirmation that you need the cleansing of

forgiveness, and the recognition of God's love in Jesus Christ, before

you can get love worth calling so in return to Him in men's hearts.

Brethren, there is much to-day to shame Christian men in the singular

fact which is becoming more obvious daily, of a divorce between human

benevolence and godliness. It is a scandal that there should be so many

men in the world who make no pretensions to any sympathy with your

Christianity, and who set you an example of benevolence,

self-sacrifice, enthusiasm for humanity, as it is called. I believe

that the one basis upon which there can be solidly built benevolence to

men is devotion to God, because of God's great love to us in Jesus

Christ. But I want to stir, if I might not say sting, you and myself

into a recognition of our obligations to mankind, more stringent and

compelling than we have ever felt it, by this phenomenon of modern

life, that a divorce has been proclaimed between philanthropy and

religion. The end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and

of a good conscience.

III. Lastly, notice the condition of such purifying.

To recur to my former illustration, we have to go up country to a still

higher level. What feeds the two reservoirs that feed the love? What

makes the heart pure and the conscience good? Paul answers, 'faith

unfeigned'; not mere intellectual apprehension, not mere superficial or

professed, but deep, genuine, and complete faith which has in it the

element of reliance as well as the element of credence. Belief is not

all that goes to make faith. Trust is not all that goes to make faith.

Belief and trust are indissolubly wedded in the conception of it. Such

a faith, which knows what it lays hold of--for it lays hold upon

definite truth, and lays hold on what it knows, for it trusts in Him

whom the truth reveals--such a faith makes the heart pure and the

conscience good.

And how does it do so? By nothing in itself. There is no power in my

faith to make me one bit better than I am. There is no power in it to

still one accusation of conscience. It is only the condition on which

the one power that purges and that calms enters into my heart and works

there. The power of faith is the power of that which faith admits to

operate in my life. If we open our hearts the fire will come in, and it

will thaw the ice, and melt out the foulness from my heart. It is

important for practice that we should clearly understand that the great

things which the Bible says of faith it says of it only because it is

the channel, the medium, the condition, by and on which the real power,

which is Jesus Christ Himself, acts upon us. It is not the window, but

the sunshine, that floods this building with light. It is not the

opened hand, but the gift laid in it, that enriches the pauper. It is

not the poor leaden pipe, but the water that flows through it, that

fills the cistern, and cleanses it, whilst it fills. It is not your

faith, but the Christ whom your faith brings into your heart and

conscience, that purges the one, and makes the other void of offence

towards God and man.

So, brethren, let us learn the secret of all nobility, of all power, of

all righteousness of character and conduct. Put your foot on the lowest

round of the ladder, and then aspire and climb, and you will reach the

summit. Take the first step, and be true to it after you have taken it,

and the last will surely come. He that can say, 'We have known and

believed the love that God hath to us,' will also be able to say, 'We

love Him because He first loved us.' 'And this commandment have we of

God, that he who loves God loves his brother also.'

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'THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD'

'The glorious gospel of the blessed God.'--1 Tim. i. 11.

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for our

consideration of this text. The first is, that the proper rendering is

that which is given in the Revised Version--'the gospel of the glory,'

not the 'glorious gospel.' The Apostle is not telling us what kind of

thing the Gospel is, but what it is about. He is dealing not with its

quality, but with its contents. It is a Gospel which reveals, has to do

with, is the manifestation of, the glory of God.

Then the other remark is with reference to the meaning of the word

'blessed.' There are two Greek words which are both translated

'blessed' in the New Testament. One of them, the more common, literally

means 'well spoken of,' and points to the action of praise or

benediction; describes what a man is when men speak well of him, or

what God is when men praise and magnify His name. But the other word,

which is used here, and is only applied to God once more in Scripture,

has no reference to the human attribution of blessing and praise to

Him, but describes Him altogether apart from what men say of Him, as

what He is in Himself, the 'blessed,' or, as we might almost say, the

'happy' God. If the word happy seems too trivial, suggesting ideas of

levity, of turbulence, of possible change, then I do not know that we

can find any better word than that which is already employed in my

text, if only we remember that it means the solemn, calm, restful,

perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God.

So much, then, being premised, there are three points that seem to me

to come out of this remarkable expression of my text. First, the

revelation of God in Christ, of which the Gospel is the record, is the

glory of God. Second, that revelation is, in a very profound sense, an

element in the blessedness of God. And, lastly, that revelation is the

good news for men. Let us look at these three points, then, in

succession.

I. Take, first, that striking thought that the revelation of God in

Jesus Christ is the glory of God.

The theme, or contents, or purpose of the whole Gospel, is to set forth

and make manifest to men the glory of God.

Now what do we mean by 'the glory'? I think, perhaps, that question may

be most simply answered by remembering the definite meaning of the word

in the Old Testament. There it designates, usually, that supernatural

and lustrous light which dwelt between the Cherubim, the symbol of the

presence and of the self-manifestation of God. So that we may say, in

brief, that the glory of God is the sum-total of the light that streams

from His self-revelation, considered as being the object of adoration

and praise by a world that gazes upon Him.

And if this be the notion of the glory of God, is it not a startling

contrast which is suggested between the apparent contents and the real

substance of that Gospel? Suppose a man, for instance, who had no

previous knowledge of Christianity, being told that in it he would find

the highest revelation of the glory of God. He comes to the book, and

finds that the very heart of it is not about God, but about a man; that

this revelation of the glory of God is the biography of a man; and more

than that, that the larger portion of that biography is the story of

the humiliations, and the sufferings, and the death of the man. Would

it not strike him as a strange paradox that the history of a man's life

was the shining apex of all revelations of the glory of God? And yet so

it is, and the Apostle, just because to him the Gospel was the story of

the Christ who lived and died, declares that in this story of a human

life, patient, meek, limited, despised, rejected, and at last

crucified, lies, brighter than all other flashings of the divine light,

the very heart of the lustre and palpitating centre and fontal source

of all the radiance with which God has flooded the world. The history

of Jesus Christ is the glory of God. And that involves two or three

considerations on which I dwell briefly.

One of them is this: Christ, then, is the self-revelation of God. If,

when we deal with the story of His life and death, we are dealing

simply with the biography of a man, however pure, lofty, inspired he

may be, then I ask what sort of connection there is between that

biography which the four Gospels gives us, and what my text says is the

substance of the Gospel? What force of logic is there in the Apostle's

words: 'God commendeth His love toward us in that whilst we were yet

sinners Christ died for us,' unless there is some altogether different

connection between the God who commends His love and the Christ who

dies to commend it, than exists between a mere man and God? Brethren!

to deliver my text, and a hundred other passages of Scripture, from the

charge of being extravagant nonsense, and clear, illogical non

sequiturs, you must believe that in that man Christ Jesus 'we behold

His glory--the glory of the only begotten of the Father'; and that when

we look--haply not without some touch of tenderness and awed admiration

in our hearts--upon His gentleness, we have to say, 'the patient God';

when we look upon His tears we have to say, 'the pitying God'; when we

look upon His Cross we have to say, 'the redeeming God'; and gazing

upon the Man, to see in Him the manifest divinity. Oh! listen to that

voice, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' and bow before the

story of the human life as being the revelation of the indwelling God.

And then, still further, my text suggests that this self-revelation of

God in Jesus Christ is the very climax and highest point of all God's

revelations to men. I believe that the loftiest exhibition and

conception of the divine character which is possible to us must be made

to us in the form of a man. I believe that the law of humanity, for

ever, in heaven as on earth, is this, that the Son is the revealer of

God; and that no loftier--yea, at bottom, no other--communication of

the divine nature can be made to man than is made in Jesus Christ.

But be that as it may, let me urge upon you this thought, that in that

wondrous story of the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ the very

high-water mark of divine self-communication has been touched and

reached. All the energies of the divine nature are embodied there. The

'riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God,' are in the

Cross and Passion of our Saviour. 'To declare at this time His

righteousness' Jesus Christ came to die. The Cross is 'the power of God

unto salvation.' Or, to put it into other words, and avail oneself of

an illustration, we know the old story of the queen who, for the love

of an unworthy human heart, dissolved pearls in the cup and gave them

to him to drink. We may say that God comes to us, and for the love of

us, reprobate and unworthy, has melted all the jewels of His nature

into that cup of blessing which He offers to us, saying: 'Drink ye all

of it.' The whole Godhead, so to speak, is smelted down to make that

rushing river of molten love which flows from the Cross of Christ into

the hearts of men. Here is the highest point of God's revelation of

Himself.

And my text implies, still further, that the true living, flashing

centre of the glory of God is the love of God. Christendom is more than

half heathen yet, and it betrays its heathenism not least in its vulgar

conceptions of the divine nature and its glory. The majestic attributes

which separate God from man, and make Him unlike His creatures, are the

ones which people too often fancy belong to the glorious side of His

character. They draw distinctions between 'grace' and 'glory,' and

think that the latter applies mainly to what I might call the physical

and the metaphysical, and less to the moral, attributes of the divine

nature. We adore power, and when it is expanded to infinity we think

that it is the glory of God. But my text delivers us from all such

misconceptions. If we rightly understand it, then we learn this, that

the true heart of the glory is tenderness and love. Of power that weak

man hanging on the Cross is a strange embodiment; but if we learn that

there is something more godlike in God than power, then we can say, as

we look upon Jesus Christ: 'Lo! this is our God. We have waited for

Him, and He will save us.' Not in the wisdom that knows no growth, not

in the knowledge which has no border-land of ignorance ringing it round

about, not in the unwearied might of His arm, not in the exhaustless

energy of His being, not in the unslumbering watchfulness of His

all-seeing eye, not in that awful presence wheresoever creatures are;

not in any or in all of these lies the glory of God, but in His love.

These are the fringes of the brightness; this is the central blaze. The

Gospel is the Gospel of the glory of God, because it is all summed up

in the one word--'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten

Son.'

II. Now, in the next place, the revelation of God in Christ is an

element in the blessedness of God.

We are come here into places where we see but very dimly, and it

becomes us to speak very cautiously. Only as we are led by the divine

teaching may we affirm at all. But it cannot be unwise to accept in

simple literality utterances of Scripture, however they may seem to

strike us as strange. And so I would say--the philosopher's God may be

all-sufficient and unemotional, the Bible's God 'delighteth in mercy,'

rejoiceth in His gifts, and is glad when men accept them. It is

something, surely, amid all the griefs and sorrows of this

sorrow-haunted and devil-hunted world, to rise to this lofty region and

to feel that there is a living personal joy at the heart of the

universe. If we went no further, to me there is infinite beauty and

mighty consolation and strength in that one thought--the happy God. He

is not, as some ways of representing Him figure Him to be, what the

older astronomers thought the sun was, a great cold orb, black and

frigid at the heart, though the source and centre of light and warmth

to the system. But He Himself is joy, or if we dare not venture on that

word, which brings with it earthly associations, and suggests the

possibility of alteration--He is the blessed God. And the Psalmist saw

deeply into the divine nature, who, not contented with hymning His

praise as the possessor of the fountain of life, and the light whereby

we see light, exclaimed in an ecstasy of anticipation, 'Thou makest us

to drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures.'

But there is a great deal more than that here, if not in the word

itself, at least in its connection, which connection seems to suggest

that, howsoever the divine nature must be supposed to be blessed in its

own absolute and boundless perfectness, an element in the blessedness

of God Himself arises from His self-communication through the Gospel to

the world. All love delights in imparting. Why should not God's? On the

lower level of human affection we know that it is so, and on the

highest level we may with all reverence venture to say, The quality of

that mercy . . . 'is twice blest,' and that divine love 'blesseth Him

that gives and them that take.'

He created a universe because He delights in His works, and in having

creatures on whom He can lavish Himself. He 'rests in His love, and

rejoices over us with singing' when we open our hearts to the reception

of His light, and learn to know Him as He has declared Himself in His

Christ. The blessed God is blessed because He is God. But He is blessed

too because He is the loving and, therefore, the giving God.

What a rock-firmness such a thought as this gives to the mercy and the

love that He pours out upon us! If they were evoked by our worthiness

we might well tremble, but when we know, according to the grand words

familiar to many of us, that it is His nature and property to be

merciful, and that He is far gladder in giving than we can be in

receiving, then we may be sure that His mercy endureth for ever, and

that it is the very necessity of His being--and He cannot turn His back

upon Himself--to love, to pity, to succour, and to bless.

III. And so, lastly, the revelation of God in Christ is good news for

us all.

'The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God.' How that word 'Gospel'

has got tarnished and enfeebled by constant use and unreflective use,

so that it slips glibly off my tongue and falls without producing any

effect upon your hearts! It needs to be freshened up by considering

what really it means. It means this: here are we like men shut up in a

beleaguered city, hopeless, helpless, with no power to break out or to

raise the siege; provisions failing, death certain. Some of you older

men and women remember how that was the case in that awful siege of

Paris, in the Franco-German War, and what expedients were adopted in

order to get some communication from without. And here to us, prisoned,

comes, as it did to them, a despatch borne under a dove's wing, and the

message is this:--God is love; and that you may know that He is, He has

sent you His Son who died on the Cross, the sacrifice for a world's

sin. Believe it, and trust it, and all your transgressions will pass

away.

My brother, is not that good news? Is it not the good news that you

need--the news of a Father, of pardon, of hope, of love, of strength,

of purity, of heaven? Does it not meet our fears, our forebodings, our

wants at every point? It comes to you. What do you do with it? Do you

welcome it eagerly, do you clutch it to your hearts, do you say, 'This

is my Gospel'? Oh! let me beseech you, welcome the message; do not turn

away from the word from heaven, which will bring life and blessedness

to all your hearts! Some of you have turned away long enough, some of

you, perhaps, are fighting with the temptation to do so again even now.

Let me press that ancient Gospel upon your acceptance, that Christ the

Son of God has died for you, and lives to bless and help you. Take it

and live! So shall you find that, 'as cold water to a thirsty soul,' so

is this best of all news from the far country.

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THE GOSPEL IN SMALL

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ

Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'--1 Tim. i. 15.

Condensation is a difficult art. There are few things drier and more

unsatisfactory than small books on great subjects, abbreviated

statements of large systems. Error lurks in summaries, and yet here the

whole fulness of God's communication to men is gathered into a

sentence; tiny as a diamond, and flashing like it. My text is the one

precious drop of essence, distilled from gardens full of fragrant

flowers. There is an old legend of a magic tent, which could be

expanded to shelter an army, and contracted to cover a single man. That

great Gospel which fills the Bible and overflows on the shelves of

crowded libraries is here, without harm to its power, folded up into

one saying, which the simplest can understand sufficiently to partake

of the salvation which it offers.

There are five of these 'faithful sayings' in the letters of Paul,

usually called 'the pastoral epistles.' It seems to have been a manner

with him, at that time of his life, to underscore anything which he

felt to be especially important by attaching to it this label. They are

all, with one exception, references to the largest truths of the

Gospel. I turn to this one, the first of them now, for the sake of

gathering some lessons from it.

I. Note, then, first, here the Gospel in a nutshell.

'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Now, every word

there is weighty, and might be, not beaten out, but opened out into

volumes. Mark who it is that comes--the solemn double name of that

great Lord, 'Christ Jesus.' The former tells of His divine appointment

and preparation, inasmuch as the Spirit of the Lord God is upon Him,

anointing Him to proclaim good tidings to the poor, and to open the

prison doors to all the captives, and asserts that it is He to whom

prophets and ritual witnessed, and for whose coming prophets and kings

looked wearily through the ages, and died rejoicing even to see afar

off the glimmer of His day. The name of Jesus tells of the child born

in Bethlehem, who knows the experience of our lives by His own, and not

only bends over our griefs with the pity and omniscience of a God, but

with the experience and sympathy of a man.

'Christ Jesus came.' Then He was before He came. His own will impelled

His feet, and brought Him to earth.

'Christ Jesus came to save.' Then there is disease, for saving is

healing; and there is danger, for saving is making secure.

'Christ Jesus came to save sinners'--the universal condition,

co-extensive with the 'world' into which, and for which, He came. And

so the essence of the Gospel, as it lay in Paul's mind, and had been

verified in his experience, was this--that a divine person had left a

life of glory, and in wonderful fashion had taken upon Himself manhood

in order to deliver men from the universal danger and disease. That is

the Gospel which Paul believed, and which he commends to us as 'a

faithful saying.'

Well, then, if that be so, there are two or three things very important

for us to lay to heart. The first is the universality of sin. That is

the thing in which we are all alike, dear friends. That is the one

thing about which any man is safe in his estimate of another. We differ

profoundly. The members of this congregation, gathered accidentally

together, and perhaps never to be all together again, may be at the

antipodes of culture, of condition, of circumstances, of modes of life;

but, just as really below all the diversities there lies the common

possession of the one human heart, so really and universally below all

diversities there lies the black drop in the heart, and 'we all have

sinned and come short of the glory of God.' It is that truth which I

want to lay on your hearts as the first condition to understanding

anything about the power, the meaning, the blessedness of the Gospel

which we say we believe.

And what does Paul mean by this universal indictment? If you take the

vivid autobiographical sketch in the midst of which it is embedded, you

will understand. He goes on to say, 'of whom I am chief.' It was the

same man that said, without supposing that he was contradicting this

utterance at all, 'touching the righteousness which is in the law' I

was 'blameless.' And yet, 'I am chief.' So all true men who have ever

shown us their heart, in telling their Christian faith, have repeated

Paul's statement; from Augustine in his wonderful Confessions, to John

Bunyan in his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. And then prosaic

men have said, 'What profligates they must have been, or what

exaggerators they are now!' No. Sewer gas of the worst sort has no

smell; and the most poisonous exhalations are only perceptible by their

effects. What made Paul think himself the chief of sinners was not that

he had broken the commandments, for he might have said, and in effect

did say, 'All these have I kept from my youth up,' but that, through

all the respectability and morality of his early life there ran this

streak--an alienation of heart, in the pride of self-confidence, from

God, and an ignorance of his own wretchedness and need. Ah! brethren, I

do not need to exaggerate, nor to talk about 'splendid vices,' in the

untrue language of one of the old saints, but this I seek to press on

you: that the deep, universal sin does not lie in the indulgence of

passions, or the breach of moralities, but it lies here--'thou hast

left Me, the fountain of living water.' That is what I charge on

myself, and on every one of you, and I beseech you to recognise the

existence of this sinfulness beneath all the surface of reputable and

pure lives. Beautiful they may be; God forbid that I should deny it:

beautiful with many a strenuous effort after goodness, and charming in

many respects, but yet vitiated by this, 'The God in whose hand thy

breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.' That

is enough to make a man brush away all the respectabilities and

proprieties and graces, and look at the black reality beneath, and wail

out 'of whom I am chief.'

But, further, Paul's condensed summary of the Gospel implies the fatal

character of this universal sin. 'He comes to save,' says he. Now what

answers to 'save' is either disease or danger. The word is employed in

the original in antithesis to both conditions. To save is to heal and

to make safe. And I need not remind you, I suppose, of how truly the

alienation from God, and the substitution for Him of self or of

creature, is the sickness of the whole man. But the end of sickness

uncured is death. We 'have no healing medicine,' and the 'wound is

incurable' by the skill of any earthly chirurgeon. The notion of

sickness passes, therefore, at once into that of danger: for unhealed

sickness can only end in death. Oh! that my words could have the waking

power that would startle some of my complacent hearers into the

recognition of the bare facts of their lives and character, and of the

position in which they stand on a slippery inclined plane that goes

straight down into darkness!

You do not hear much about the danger of sin from some modern pulpits.

God forbid that it should be the staple of any; but God forbid that it

should be excluded from any! Whilst fear is a low motive,

self-preservation is not a low one; and it is to that that I now

appeal. Brethren, the danger of every sin is, first, its rapid growth;

second, its power of separating from God; third, the certainty of a

future--ay! and present--retribution.

To me, the proof of the fatal effect of sin is what God had to do in

order to stop it. Do you think that it would be a small, superficial

cut which could be stanched by nothing else but the pierced hand of

Jesus Christ? Measure the intensity of danger by the cost of

deliverance, and judge how grave are the wounds for the healing of

which stripes had to be laid on Him. Ah! if you and I had not been in

danger of death, Jesus Christ would not have died. And if it be true

that the Son of God laid aside His glory, and came into the world and

died on the Cross for men, out of the very greatness of the gift, and

the marvellousness of the mercy, there comes solemn teaching as to the

intensity of the misery and the reality and awfulness of the

retribution from which we were delivered by such a death. Sin, the

universal condition, brings with it no slight disease and no small

danger.

Further, we may gather from this condensed summary where the true heart

and essence of the Christian revelation is. You will never understand

it until you are contented to take the point of view which the New

Testament takes, and give all weight and gravity to the fact of man's

transgression and the consequences thereof. We shall never know what

the power and the glory of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is

until we recognise that, first and foremost, it is the mighty means by

which man's ruin is repaired, man's downrush is stopped, sin is

forgiven and capable of being cleansed. Only when we think of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ as being, first and foremost, the redemption of

the world by the great act of incarnation and sacrifice, do we come to

be in a position in any measure to estimate its superlative worth.

And, for my part, I believe that almost all the mistakes and errors and

evaporations of Christianity into a mere dead nothing which have

characterised the various ages of the Church come mainly from this,

that men fail to see how deep and how fatal are the wounds of sin, and

so fail to apprehend the Gospel as being mainly and primarily a system

of redemption. There are many other most beautiful aspects about it,

much else in it, that is lovely and of good report, and fitted to draw

men's hearts and admiration; but all is rooted in this, the life and

death of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice by whom we are forgiven, and in

whom we are healed. And if you strike that out, you have a dead nothing

left--an eviscerated Gospel.

I believe that we all need to be reminded of that to-day, as we always

do, but mainly to-day, when we hear from so many lips estimates,

favourable or unfavourable to Christianity and its mission in the

world, which leave out of sight, or minimise into undue insignificance,

or shove into a backward place, its essential characteristic, that it

is the power of God through Christ, His Son Incarnate, dying and rising

again for the salvation of individual souls from the penalty, the

guilt, the habit, and the love of their sins, and only secondarily is

it a morality, a philosophy, a social lever. I take for mine the quaint

saying of one of the old Puritans, 'When so many brethren are preaching

to the times, it may be allowed one poor brother to preach for

eternity.'

'This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners.'

II. Now, secondly, note the reliableness of this condensed Gospel.

When a man in the middle of some slight plank, thrown across a stream,

tests it with a stamp of his foot, and calls to his comrades, 'It is

quite firm,' there is reason for their venturing upon it too. That is

exactly what Paul is doing here. How does he know that it is 'a

faithful saying'? Because he has proved it in his own experience, and

found that in his case the salvation which Jesus Christ was said to

effect has been effected. Now there are many other grounds of certitude

besides this, but, after all, it is worth men's while to consider how

many millions there have been from the beginning who would be ready to

join chorus with the Apostle here, and to say, 'One thing I know, that

whereas I was blind, now I see.' My experience cannot be your

certitude; but if you and I are suffering from precisely the same

disease, and I have tested a cure, my experiences should have some

weight with you. And so, brethren, I point you to all the thousands who

are ready to say, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and

saved him.' Are there any who give counter-evidence; that say, 'We have

tried it. It is all a sham and imagination. We have asked this Christ

of yours to forgive us, and He has not. We have asked Him to cleanse

us, and He has not. We have tried Him, and He is an impostor, and we

will have no more to do with Him.' There are people, alas! who have

gone back to their wallowing in the mire, but it was not because Christ

had failed in His promises, but because they did not care to have them

fulfilled any more. Jesus Christ does not promise that His salvation

shall work against the will of men who submit themselves to it.

But it is not only because of that consentient chorus of many

voices--the testimony of which wise men will not reject--that the word

is 'a faithful saying.' This is no place or time to enter upon anything

like a condensation of the Christian evidence; but, in lieu of

everything else, I point to one proof. There is no fact in the history

of the world better attested, and the unbelief of which is more

unreasonable, than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if Christ rose

from the dead--and you cannot understand the history of the world

unless He did, nor the existence of the Church either--if Jesus Christ

rose from the dead, it seems to me that almost all the rest follows of

necessity: the influx of the supernatural, the unique character of His

career, the correspondence of the end with the beginning, the broad

seal of the divine confirmation stamped upon His claims to be the Son

of God and the Redeemer of the world. All these things seem to me to

come necessarily from that fact. And I say, given the consentient

witness of nineteen centuries, given the existence of the Church, given

the effects of Christianity in the world, given that upon which they

repose--the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead--the conclusion

is sound, 'This is a faithful saying . . . that He came into the world

to save sinners.'

Men talk, nowadays, very often as if the progress of science and new

views as to the evolution of creatures or of mankind had effected the

certitude of the Gospel. It does not seem to me that they have in the

smallest degree. 'The foundation of God standeth sure,' whatever may

become of some of the superstructures which men have built upon it.

They may very probably be blown away. So much the better if we get the

rock to build upon once more. A great deal is going, but not the

Gospel. Do not let us be afraid, or suppose that it will suffer. Do not

let us dread every new speculation as if it was going to finish

Christianity, but recognise this--that the fact of man's sin and,

blessed be God! the fact of man's redemption stands untouched by them

all; and to-day, as of old, Jesus Christ is, and is firmly manifested

to be, the world's Saviour. Whatsoever refuge may be swept away by any

storms, 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried

corner-stone, a sure foundation: He that believeth shall not be

confounded.'

III. Lastly, notice the consequent wisdom and duty of acceptance.

'Worthy of all acceptation,' says Paul. Yes, of course, if it is

reliable. That word of the Lord which is 'sure, making wise the

simple,' deserves to be received. Now this phrase, 'all acceptation,'

may mean either of two things: it may either mean worthy of being

welcomed by all men, or by the whole of each man.

This Gospel deserves to be welcomed by every man, for it is fitted for

every man, since it deals with the primary human characteristic of

transgression. Brethren! we need different kinds of intellectual

nutriment, according to education and culture. We need different kinds

of treatment, according to condition and circumstance. The morality of

one age is not the morality of another. Much, even of right and wrong,

is local and temporary; but black man and white, savage and civilised,

philosopher and fool, king and clown, all need the same air to breathe,

the same water to drink, the same sun for light and warmth, and all

need the same Christ for redemption from the same sin, for safety from

the same danger, for snatching from the same death. This Gospel is a

Gospel for the world, and for every man in it. Have you taken it for

yours? If it is 'worthy of all acceptation,' it is worthy of your

acceptation. If you have not, you are treating Him and it with

indignity, as if it was a worthless letter left in the post-office for

you, which you knew was there, but which you did not think valuable

enough to take the trouble to go for. The gift lies at your side. It is

less than truth to say that it is 'worthy of being accepted.' Oh! it is

infinitely more than that.

It is, also, 'worthy of all acceptation' in the sense of worthy of

being accepted into all a man's nature, because it will fit it all and

bless it all. Some of us give it a half welcome. We take it into our

heads, and then we put a partition between them and our hearts, and

keep our religion on the other side, so that it does not influence us

at all. It is worthy of being received by the understanding, to which

it will bring truth absolute; of being received by the will, to which

it will bring the freedom of submission; of being received by the

conscience, to which it will bring quickening; of being received by the

affections, to which it will bring pure and perfect love. For hope, it

will bring a certainty to gaze upon; for passions, a curb; for effort,

a spur and a power; for desires, satisfaction; for the whole man,

healing and light.

Brother! take it. And, if you do, begin where it begins, with your

sins; and be contented to be saved as a sinner in danger and sickness,

who can neither defend nor heal yourself. And thus coming, you will

test the rope and find it hold; you will take the medicine and know

that it cures; and, by your own experience, you will be able to say,

'This is a faithful saying, Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinners.'

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THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

'Of whom I am chief.'--1 Tim. i. 15.

The less teachers of religion talk about themselves the better; and yet

there is a kind of personal reference, far removed from egotism and

offensiveness. Few such men have ever spoken more of themselves than

Paul did, and yet none have been truer to his motto: 'We preach not

ourselves, but Christ Jesus.' For the scope of almost all his personal

references is the depreciation of self, and the magnifying of the

wonderful mercy which drew him to Jesus Christ. Whenever he speaks of

his conversion it is with deep emotion and with burning cheeks. Here,

for instance, he adduces himself as the typical example of God's

long-suffering. If he were saved none need despair.

I take it that this saying of the Apostle's, 'Of whom I am chief,'

paradoxical and exaggerated as it seems to many men, is in spirit that

which all who know themselves ought to re-echo; and without which there

is little strength in Christian life.

I. And so I ask you to note, first, what this man thinks of himself.

'Of whom I am chief.' Now, if we set what we know of the character of

Saul of Tarsus before he was a Christian by the side of that of many

who have won a bad supremacy in wickedness, the words seem entirely

strange and exaggerated. But, as I have often had to say, the principle

of the Apostle's estimate is to be found in his belief that, not the

outward manifestation of evil in specific acts of immorality, or

flagrant breaches of commandment, but the inward principle from which

the deeds flowed, is the measure of a man's criminality, and that,

according to the uniform teaching of Scripture, the very root of sin,

and that which is common to all the things that the world's conscience

and ordinary morality designate as wrong, is to be found here, that

self has become the centre, the aim, and the law instead of God. 'This

is the condemnation,' said Paul's Master--not that men have done

so-and-so and so-and-so, but--'that light is come into the world, and

men love darkness.' That is the root of evil. 'When the Comforter is

come,' said Paul's Master, 'He will convince the world of sin.' Because

they have broken the commandments? Because they have been lustful,

ambitious, passionate, murderous, profligate, and so on? No! 'Because

they believe not in Me.'

The common root of all sin is alienation of heart and will from God.

And it is by the root, and not by the black clusters of poisonous

berries that have come from it, that men are to be judged. Here is the

mother-tincture. You may colour it in different ways, and you may

flavour it with different essences, and you will get a whole

pharmacopoeia of poisons out of it. But the mother-poison of them all

is this, that men turn away from the light, which is God; and for you

and me is God in Christ.

So this man, looking back from the to-day of his present devotion and

love to the yesterdays of his hostility, avails himself indeed of the

palliation, 'I did it ignorantly, in unbelief,' but yet is smitten with

the consciousness that whilst as touching the righteousness that is of

the law he was blameless, his attitude to that incarnate love was such

as now, he thinks, stamps him as the worst of men.

Brethren, there is the standard by which we have to try ourselves. If

we get down below the mere surface of acts, and think, not of what we

do, but of what we are, we shall then, at any rate, have in our hands

the means by which we can truly estimate ourselves.

But what have we to say about that word 'chief'? Is not that

exaggeration? Well, yes and no. For every man ought to know the weak

and evil places of his own heart better than he does those of any

besides. And if he does so know them, he will understand that the

ordinary classification of sin, according to the apparent blackness of

the deed, is very superficial and misleading. Obviously, the worst of

acts need not be done by the worst of men, and it does not at all

follow that the man who does the awful deed stands out from his fellows

in the same bad pre-eminence in which his deed stands out from theirs.

Take a concrete case. Go into the slums of Manchester, and take some of

the people there, battered almost out of the semblance of humanity, and

all crusted over and leprous with foul-smelling evils that you and I

never come within a thousand miles of thinking it possible that we

should do. Did you ever think that it is quite possible that the worst

harlot, thief, drunkard, profligate in your back streets may be more

innocent in their profligacy than you are in your respectability; and

that we may even come to this paradox, that the worse the act, as a

rule, the less guilty the doer? It is not such a paradox as it looks,

because, on the one hand, the presence of temptation, and, on the other

hand, the absence of light, make all the difference. And these people,

who could not have been anything else, are innocent in degradation as

compared with you, with all your education and culture, and

opportunities of going straight, and knowledge of Christ and His love.

The little transgressions that you do are far greater than the gross

ones that they do. 'But for the grace of God, there goes John

Bradford,' said the old preacher, when he saw a man going to the

scaffold. And you and I, if we know ourselves, will not think that we

have an instance of exaggeration, but only of the object nearest

seeming the largest, when Paul said 'Of whom I am chief.'

Only go and look for your sin in the way they look for Guy Fawkes at

the House of Commons before the session. Take a dark lantern, and go

down into the cellars. And If you do not find something there that will

take all the conceit out of you, it must be because you are very

short-sighted, or phenomenally self-complacent.

What does it matter though there be vineyards on the slopes of

Vesuvius, and bright houses nestling at its base, and beauty lying all

around like the dream of a god, if, when a man cranes his neck over the

top of the crater, he sees that that cone, so graceful on the outside,

is seething with fire and sulphur? Let us look down into the crater of

our own hearts, and what we see there may well make us feel as Paul did

when he said, 'Of whom I am chief.'

Now, such an estimate is perfectly consistent with a clear recognition

of any good that may be in the character and manifest in life. For the

same Paul who says, 'Of whom I am chief,' says, in the almost

contemporaneous letter sent to the same person, 'I have fought a good

fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith'; and he is the

same man who asserted, 'In nothing am I behind the very chiefest

apostles, though I be nothing.' The true Christian estimate of one's

own evil and sin does not in the least interfere with the recognition

of what God strengthens one to do, or of the progress which, by God's

grace, may have been made in holiness and righteousness. The two things

may lie side by side with perfect harmony, and ought to do so, in every

Christian heart.

But notice one more point. The Apostle does not say 'I was,' but 'I am

chief.' What! A man who could say, in another connection, 'If any man

be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed

away'--the man who could say, in another connection, 'I live, yet not

I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh

I live by the faith of the Son of God'--does he also say, 'I am chief'?

Is he speaking about his present? Are old sins bound round a man's neck

for evermore? If they be, what is the meaning of the Gospel that Jesus

Christ redeems us from our sins? Well, he means this. No lapse of time,

nor any gift of divine pardon, nor any subsequent advancement in

holiness and righteousness, can alter the fact that I, the very same I

that am now rejoicing in God's salvation, am the man that did all these

things; and, in a very profound sense, they remain mine through all

eternity. I may be a forgiven sinner, and a cleansed sinner, and a

sanctified sinner, but I am a sinner--not I was. The imperishable

connection between a man and his past, which may be so tragical, and,

thank God, may be so blessed, even in the case of remembered and

confessed sin, is solemnly hinted at in the words before us. We carry

with us ever the fact of past transgression, and no forgiveness, nor

any future 'perfecting of holiness in the fear' and by the grace 'of

the Lord' can alter that fact. Therefore, let us beware lest we bring

upon our souls any more of the stains which, though they be in a

blessed and sufficient sense blotted out, do yet leave the marks where

they have fallen for ever.

II. Note how this man comes to such an estimate of himself.

He did not think so deeply and penitently of his past at the beginning

of his career, true and deep as his repentance, and valid and genuine

as his conversion were. But as he advanced in the love of Jesus Christ,

his former active hostility became more monstrous to him, and the

higher he rose, the clearer was his vision of the depth from which he

had struggled; for growth in Christian holiness deepens the conviction

of prior imperfection.

If God has forgiven my sin the more need for me to remember it. 'Thou

shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more

because of thy transgressions, when I am pacified towards thee for all

that thou hast done.' If you, my brother, have any real and genuine

hold of God's pardoning mercy, it will bow you down the more completely

on your knees in the recognition of your own sin. The man who, as soon

as the pressure of guilt and danger which is laid upon him seems to him

to be lifted off, springs up like some elastic figure of indiarubber,

and goes on his way in jaunty forgetfulness of his past evil, needs to

ask himself whether he has ever passed from death unto life. Not to

remember the old sin is to be blind. The surest sign that we are

pardoned is the depth of our habitual penitence. Try yourselves, you

Christian people who are so sure of your forgiveness, try yourselves by

that test, and if you find that you are thinking less of your past

evil, be doubtful whether you have ever entered into the genuine

possession of the forgiving mercy of your God.

And then, still further, this penitent retrospect is the direct result

of advancement in Christian characteristics. We are drawn to begin some

study or enterprise by the illusion that there is but a little way to

go. 'Alps upon alps arise' when once we have climbed a short distance

up the hill, and it has become as difficult to go back as to go

forward.

So it is in the Christian life--the sign of growing perfection is the

growing consciousness of imperfection. A spot upon a clean palm is more

conspicuous than a diffuse griminess over all the hand. One stain upon

a white robe spoils it which would not be noticed upon one less

lustrously clean. And so the more we grow towards God in Christ, and

the more we appropriate and make our own His righteousness, the more we

shall be conscious of our deficiencies, and the less we shall be

prepared to assert virtues for ourselves.

Thus it comes to pass that conscience is least sensitive when it is

most needed, and most swift to act when it has least to do. So it comes

to pass, too, that no man's acquittal of himself can be accepted as

sufficient; and that he is a fool in self-knowledge who says, 'I am not

conscious of guilt, therefore I am innocent.' 'I know nothing against

myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the

Lord.' The more you become like Christ the more you will find out your

unlikeness to Him.

III. Lastly, note what this judgment of himself did for this man.

I said in the beginning of my remarks that it seemed to me that without

the reproduction of this estimate of ourselves there would be little

strong Christian life in us. It seems to me that that continual

remembrance which Paul carried with him of what he had been, and of

Christ's marvellous love in drawing him to Himself, was the very spring

of all that was noble and conspicuously Christian in his career. And I

venture to say, in two or three words, what I think you and I will

never have unless we have this lowly self-estimate.

Without it there will be no intensity of cleaving to Jesus Christ. If

you do not know that you are ill, you will not take the medicine. If

you do not believe that the house is on fire, you will not mind the

escape. The life-buoy lies unnoticed on the shelf above the berth as

long as the sea is calm and everything goes well. Unless you have been

down into the depths of your own heart, and seen the evil that is

there, you will not care for the redeeming Christ, nor will you grasp

Him as a man does who knows that there is nothing between him and ruin

except that strong hand. We must be driven to the Saviour as well as

drawn to Him if there is to be any reality or tightness in the clutch

with which we hold Him. And if you do not hold Him with a firm clutch

you do not hold Him at all.

Further, without this lowly estimate there will be no fervour of

grateful love. That is the reason why so much both of orthodox and

heterodox religion amongst us to-day is such a tepid thing as it is. It

is because men have never felt either that they need a Redeemer, or

that Jesus Christ has redeemed them. I believe that there is only one

power that will strike the rock of a human heart, and make the water of

grateful devotion flow out, and that is the belief in Jesus Christ as

the Redeemer of mankind, and as my Saviour. Unless that be your faith,

which it will not be except you have this conviction of my text in its

spirit and essence, there will not be in your hearts the love which

will glow there, an all-transforming power.

And is there anything in the world more obnoxious, more insipid, than

lukewarm religion? If, with marks of quotation, I might use the coarse,

strong expression of John Milton--'It gives a vomit to God Himself.'

'Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my

mouth.'

And without it there will be little pity of, and love for, our fellows.

Unless we feel the common evil, and estimate by the intensity of its

working in ourselves how sad are its ravages in others, our charity to

men will be as tepid as our love to God. Did you ever notice that,

historically, the widest benevolence to men goes along with what some

people call the 'narrowest' theology? People tell us, for instance, to

mark the contrast between the theology which is usually called

evangelical and the wide benevolence usually accompanying it, and ask

how the two things agree. The 'wide' benevolence comes directly from

the 'narrow' theology. He that knows the plague of his own heart, and

how Christ has redeemed him, will go, with the pity of Christ in his

heart, to help to redeem others.

So, dear friends, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive

ourselves.' 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive

us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

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A TEST CASE

'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ

might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should

hereafter believe.'--1 Tim. i. 16.

The smallest of God's creatures, if it were only a gnat dancing in a

sunbeam, has a right to have its well-being considered as an end of

God's dealings. But no creature is so isolated or great as that it has

a right to have its well-being regarded as the sole end of God's

dealings. That is true about all His blessings and gifts; it is

eminently true about His gift of salvation. He saves men because He

loves them individually, and desires to make them blessed; but He also

saves them because He desires that through them others shall be brought

into the living knowledge of His love. It is most especially true about

great religious teachers and guides.

Paul's humility is as manifest as his self-consciousness when he says

in my text, 'This is what I was saved for. Not merely, not even

principally, for the blessings that thereby accrue to myself, but that

in me, as a crucial instance, there should be manifested the whole

fulness of the divine love and saving power.' So he puts his own

experience as giving no kind of honour or glory to himself, but as

simply showing the grace and infinite love of Jesus Christ. Paul

disappears as but a passive recipient; and Christ strides into the

front as the actor in his conversion and apostleship.

So we may take this point of view of my text, and look at the story of

what befell the great Apostle as being in many different ways an

exhibition of the great verities of the Gospel. I desire to signalise,

especially, three points here. We see in it the demonstration of the

life of Christ; an exhibition of the love of the living Christ; and a

marvellous proof of the power of that loving and living Lord.

I. First, then, take the experience of this Apostle as a demonstration

of the exalted life, and continuous energy in the world, of Jesus

Christ.

What was it that turned the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, the

rising hope of the Pharisaic party, the hammer of the heretics, into

one of themselves? The appearance of Jesus Christ. Paul rode out of

Jerusalem believing Him to be dead, and His Resurrection a lie. He

staggered into Damascus, blind but seeing, and knowing that Jesus

Christ lived and reigned. Now if you will let the man tell you himself

what he saw, or thought he saw, you will come to this, that it was a

visible, audible manifestation of a corporeal Christ. For it is

extremely noteworthy that the Apostle ranks the appearance to himself,

on the road to Damascus, as in the same class with the appearances to

the other apostles which he enumerates in the great chapter in the

Epistle to the Corinthians. He draws no distinction, as far as

evidential force goes, between the appearance to Simon and to the five

hundred brethren and to the others, and that which flashed upon him and

made a Christian of him. Other men that were with him saw the light. He

saw the Christ within the blaze. Other men heard a noise; he heard

audible and intelligible words in his own speech. This is his account

of the phenomenon. What do you think of his account?

There are but three possible answers! It was imposture; it was

delusion; it was truth. The theory of imposture is out of court. 'Do

men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?' Such a life as

followed is altogether incongruous with the notion that the man who

lived it was a deceiver. A fanatic he may have been; self-deceived he

may have been; but transparently sincere he undeniably was. It is not

given to impostors to move the world, as Paul did and does.

Was it delusion? Well it is a strange kind of hallucination which has

such physical accompaniments and consequences as those in the

story--not wanting confirmation from witnesses--which has come to us.

'At midday, O king'--in no darkness; in no shut-up chamber, 'at midday,

O king--I heard . . . I saw . . .' 'The men that were with me' partly

shared in the vision. There was a lengthened conversation; two senses

at least were appealed to, vision and hearing, and in both vision and

hearing there were partial participators. Physical consequences that

lasted for three days accompanied the hallucination; and the man 'was

blind, not seeing the sun, and neither did eat nor drink.' There must

be some soil beforehand in which delusions of such a sort can root

themselves. But, if we take the story in the Acts of the Apostles,

there is not the smallest foothold for the fashionable notion, which is

entirely due to men's dislike of the supernatural, that there was any

kind of misgiving in the young Pharisee, springing from the influence

of Stephen's martyrdom, as he went forth breathing out threatenings and

slaughter. The plain fact is that, at one moment he hated Jesus Christ

as a bad man, and believed that the story of the Resurrection was a

gross falsehood; and that at the next moment he knew Him to be living

and reigning, and the Lord of his life and of the world. Hallucinations

do not come thus, like a thunderclap on unprepared minds. Nor is there

anything in the subsequent history of the man that seems to confirm,

but everything that contradicts, the idea that such a revolutionary

change as upset all his mental furniture, and changed the whole current

of his life, and slammed in his face the door that was wide open to

advancement and reputation, came from a delusion.

I think the hallucination theory is out of court, too, and there is

nothing left but the old-fashioned one, that what he said he saw, he

saw, and did not fancy; and that which he said he heard, he heard; and

that it was not a buzzing of a diseased nerve in his own ears, but the

actual speech of the glorified Christ. Very well, then; if that be

true, what then? The old-fashioned belief--Jesus who died on the Cross

is living, Jesus who died on the Cross is glorified, Jesus who died on

the Cross is exalted to the throne of the universe, puts His hand into

the affairs of the world as a power amongst them. Paul's Christology is

but the rationale of the vision that led to Paul's conversion. It was

in part because he 'saw that Just One, and heard the words of His

mouth,' that he declares, 'God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a

name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow.' I do not say that the vision to Paul is a demonstration of

the reality of the Resurrection, but I do say that it is a very strong

confirmatory evidence, which the opponents of that truth will have much

difficulty in legitimately putting aside.

II. Secondly, let me ask you to consider how this man's experience is

an exhibition of the love of the living Lord.

That is the main point on which the Apostle dwells in my text, in which

he says that in him Jesus Christ 'shows forth all long-suffering.' The

whole fulness of His patient, pitying grace was lavished upon him. He

says this because he puts side by side his hostility and Christ's love,

what he had believed of Jesus, and how Jesus had borne with him and

loved him through all, and had drawn him to Himself and received him.

So he established by his own experience this great truth, that the love

of Jesus Christ is never darkened by one single speck of anger, that He

'suffereth long, and is kind'; that He meets hostility with patient

love, hatred with a larger outpouring of His affection, and that His

only answer to men's departures from Him in heart and feeling is more

mightily to seek to draw them to Himself. 'Long-suffering' means, in

its true and proper sense, the patient acceptance, without the smallest

movement of indignation, of unworthy treatment. And just as Christ on

earth 'gave His back to the smiter, and His cheeks to them that pulled

off the hair'; and let the lips of Judas touch His, nor withdrew His

face from 'shame and spitting'; and was never stirred to one impatient

or angry word by any opposition, so now, and to us all, with equal

boundlessness of endurance, He lets men hate Him, and revile Him, and

forget Him, and turn their backs upon Him; and for only answer has,

'Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest.'

Oh, dear brethren, we can weary out all loves except one. By

carelessness, rebelliousness, the opposition of indifference, we can

chill the affection of those to whom we are dearest. 'Can a mother

forget? Yea, she may forget,' but you cannot provoke Jesus Christ to

cease His love. Some of you have been trying it all your days, but you

have not done it yet. There does come a time when 'the wrath of the

Lamb'--which is a very terrible paradox--is kindled, and will fall, I

fear, on some men and women who are listening now. But not yet. You

cannot make Christ angry. 'For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me

Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern'--for

the same long-suffering is extended to us all.

And then, in like manner, I may remind you that out of Paul's

experience, as a cardinal instance and standing example of Christ's

heart and dealings, comes the thought that that long-suffering is

always wooing men to itself, and making efforts to draw them away from

their own evil. In Paul's case there was a miracle. That difference is

of small consequence. As truly as ever Christ spoke to Paul from the

heavens, so truly, and so tenderly, does He speak to every one of us.

He is drawing us all--you that yield and you that do not yield to His

attractions, by the kindliest gifts of His love, by the revelations of

His grace, by the movements of His Spirit, by the providences of our

days, by even my poor lips addressing you now--for, if I be speaking

His truth, it is not I that speak, but He that speaks in me. I beseech

you, dear friends, recognise in this old story of the persecutor turned

apostle nothing exceptional, though there be something miraculous, but

only an exceptional form of manifestation of the normal activity of the

love of Christ towards every soul. He loves, He draws, He welcomes all

that come to Him. His servant, who stood over the blind, penitent

persecutor, and said to him, 'Brother Saul!' was only faintly echoing

the glad reception which the elder Brother of the family gives to this

and to every prodigal who comes back; because He Himself has drawn Him.

If we will only recognise the undying truth for all of us that lies

beneath the individual experience of this apostle, we, too, may share

in the attraction of His love, in the constraining and blessed

influences of that love received, and in the welcome with which He

hails us when we turn. If this man were thus dealt with, no man need

despair.

III. Lastly, we may notice how this experience is a manifestation of

the power of the living, loving Lord.

The first and plainest thing that it teaches us about that power is

that Jesus Christ is able in one moment to revolutionise a life. There

is nothing more striking than the suddenness and completeness of the

change which passed. 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years';

and there come moments in every life into which there is crammed and

condensed a whole world of experience, so as that a man looks back from

this instant to that before, and feels that a gulf, deep as infinity,

separates him from his old self.

Now, it is very unfashionable in these days to talk about conversion at

all. It is even more unfashionable to talk about sudden conversions. I

venture to say that there are types of character and experience which

will never be turned to good, unless they are turned suddenly; while

there are others, no doubt, to whom the course is a gradual one, and

you cannot tell where the dawn broadens into perfect day. But, in the

case of men who have grown up to some degree of maturity of life,

either in sensuous sin or crusted over with selfish worldliness, or in

any other way, by reason of intellectual pursuits, or others have

become forgetful of God and careless of religion--unless such men are

in a moment arrested and wheeled round at once, there is very little

chance of their ever being so at all.

I am sure I am speaking to some now who, unless the truth of Christ

comes into their minds with arresting flash, and unless they are in one

moment, into which an eternity is condensed, changed in their purposes,

will never be changed.

Do not, my friend, listen to the talk that sudden conversion is

impossible or unlikely. It is the only kind of conversion that some of

you are capable of. I remember a man, one of the best Christian men in

a humble station in life that I ever knew--he did not live in

Manchester--he had been a drunkard up to his fortieth or fiftieth year.

One day he was walking across an open field, and a voice, as he

thought, spoke to him and said, naming him, 'If you don't sign the

pledge to-day you will be damned!' He turned on his heel, and walked

straight down the street to the house of a temperance friend, and said,

'I have come to sign the pledge.' He signed it, and from that day to

the day of his death 'adorned the doctrine of Jesus Christ' his

Saviour. If that man had not been suddenly converted he would never

have been converted. So I say that this story of the text is a crucial

instance of Christ's power to lay hold upon a man, and wheel him right

round all in a moment, and send him on a new path. He wants to do that

with all of you to whom He has not already done it. I beseech you, do

not stick your heels into the ground in resistance, nor when He puts

His hand on your shoulder stiffen your back that He may not do what He

desires with you.

May we not see here, too, a demonstration of Christ's power to make a

life nobly and blessedly new, different from all its past, and adorned

with strange and unexpected fruits of beauty and wisdom and holiness?

This man's account of his future, from the moment of that incident on

the Damascus road to the headman's block outside the walls of Rome, is

this: 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature'; 'I live, yet not

I, but Christ liveth in me.' Christ will do that for us all; for

long-suffering was shown on the Apostle for a pattern to them who

should hereafter believe.

So, you Christian people, it is as much your business as it was Paul's,

to be visible rhetoric, manifest demonstrations in your lives of the

truth of the Gospel. Men ought to say about us, 'There must be

something in the religion that has done that for these people.' We

ought to be such that our characters shall induce the thought that the

Christ who has made men like us cannot be a figment. Do you show,

Christian men, that you are grafted upon the true Vine by the abundance

of the fruit that you bring forth? Can you venture to say, as Paul

said, If you want to know what Jesus Christ's love and power are, look

at me? Do not venture adducing yourself as a specimen of His power

unless you have a life like Paul's to look back upon.

For us all the fountain to which Paul had recourse is open. Why do we

draw so little from it? The fire which burned, refining and

illuminating, in him may be kindled in all our hearts. Why are we so

icy? His convictions are of some value, as subsidiary evidence to

Gospel facts; his experience is of still more value as an attestation

and an instance of Gospel blessings. Believe like Paul and you will be

saved like Paul. Jesus Christ will show to you all long-suffering. For

though Paul received it all he did not exhaust it, and the same

long-suffering which was lavished on him is available for each of us.

Only you too must say like him, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly

vision.'

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THE GLORY OF THE KING

'Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be

honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.'--1 Tim. i. 17.

With this burst of irrepressible praise the Apostle ends his reference

to his own conversion as a transcendent, standing instance of the

infinite love and transforming power of God. Similar doxologies

accompany almost all his references to the same fact. This one comes

from the lips of 'Paul the aged,' looking back from almost the close of

a life which owed many sorrows and troubles to that day on the road to

Damascus. His heart fills with thankfulness that overflows into the

great words of my text. He had little to be thankful for, judged

according to the rules of sense; but, though weighed down with care,

having made but a poor thing of the world because of that vision which

he saw that day, and now near martyrdom, he turns with a full heart to

God, and breaks into this song of thanksgiving. There are lives which

bear to be looked back upon. Are ours of that kind?

But my object is mainly to draw your attention to what seems to me a

remarkable feature in this burst of thanksgiving. And perhaps I shall

best impress the thought which it has given to me if I ask you to look,

first, at the character of the God who is glorified by Paul's

salvation; second, at the facts which glorify such a God; and, last, at

the praise which should fill the lives of those who know the facts.

I. First, then, notice the God who is glorified by Paul's salvation.

Now what strikes me as singular about this great doxology is the

characteristics, or, to use a technical word, the attributes, of the

divine nature which the Apostle selects. They are all those which

separate God from man; all those which present Him as arrayed in

majesty, apart from human weaknesses, unapproachable by human sense,

and filling a solitary throne. These are the characteristics which the

Apostle thinks receive added lustre, and are lifted to a loftier height

of 'honour and glory,' by the small fact that he, Paul, was saved from

sins as he journeyed to Damascus.

It would be easy to roll out oratorical platitudes about these specific

characteristics of the divine nature, but that would be as unprofitable

as it would be easy. All that I want to do now is just to note the

force of the epithets; and, if I can, to deepen the impression of the

remarkableness of their selection.

With regard, then, to the first of them, we at once feel that the

designation of 'the King' is unfamiliar to the New Testament. It brings

with it lofty ideas, no doubt; but it is not a name which the writers

of the New Testament, who had been taught in the school of love, and

led by a Son to the knowledge of God, are most fond of using. 'The

King' has melted into 'the Father.' But here Paul selects that more

remote and less tender name for a specific purpose. He is 'the

King'--not 'eternal,' as our Bible renders it, but more correctly 'the

King of the Ages.' The idea intended is not so much that of unending

existence as that He moulds the epochs of the world's history, and

directs the evolution of its progress. It is the thought of an

overruling Providence, with the additional thought that all the moments

are a linked chain, through which He flashes the electric force of His

will. He is 'King of the Ages.'

The other epithets are more appropriately to be connected with the word

'God' which follows than with the word 'King' which precedes. The

Apostle's meaning is this: 'The King of the ages, even the God who is,'

etc. And the epithets thus selected all tend in the same direction.

'Incorruptible.' That at once parts that mystic and majestic Being from

all of which the law is decay. There may be in it some hint of moral

purity, but more probably it is simply what I may call a physical

attribute, that that immortal nature not only does not, but cannot,

pass into any less noble forms. Corruption has no share in His immortal

being.

As to 'invisible,' no word need be said to illustrate that. It too

points solely to the separation of God from all approach by human

sense.

And then the last of the epithets, which, according to the more

accurate reading of the text, should be, not as our Bible has it, 'the

only wise God,' but 'the only God,' lifts Him still further above all

comparison and contact with other beings.

So the whole set forth the remote attributes which make a man feel,

'The gulf between Him and me is so great that thought cannot pass

across it, and I doubt whether love can live half-way across that

flight, or will not rather, like some poor land bird with tiny wings,

drop exhausted, and be drowned in the abyss before it reaches the other

side.' We expect to find a hymn to the infinite love. Instead of that

we get praise, which might be upon the lips of many a thinker of Paul's

day and of ours, who would laugh the idea of revelation, and especially

of a revelation such as Paul believed in, to absolute scorn. And yet he

knew what he was saying when he did not lift up his praise to the God

of tenderness, of pity, of forgiveness, of pardoning love, but to 'the

King of the ages; the incorruptible, invisible, only God'; the God

whose honour and glory were magnified by the revelation of Himself in

Jesus Christ.

II. And so that brings me, in the second place, to ask you to look at

the facts which glorify even such a God.

Paul was primarily thinking of his own individual experience; of what

passed when the voice spoke to him, 'Why persecutest thou Me?' and of

the transforming power which had changed him, the wolf, with teeth red

with the blood of the saints, into a lamb. But, as he is careful to

point out, the personal allusion is lost in his contemplation of his

own history, as being a specimen and test-case for the blessing and

encouragement of all who 'should hereafter believe upon Him unto life

everlasting.' So what we come to is this--that the work of Jesus Christ

is that which paints the lily and gilds the refined gold of the divine

loftinesses and magnificence, and which brings honour and glory even to

that remote and inaccessible majesty. For, in that revelation of God in

Jesus Christ, there is added to all these magnificent and all but

inconceivable attributes and excellences, something that is far diviner

and nobler than themselves.

There be two great conceptions smelted together in the revelation of

God in Jesus Christ, of which neither attains its supremest beauty

except by the juxtaposition of the other. Power is harsh, and scarcely

worthy to be called divine, unless it be linked with love. Love is not

glorious unless it be braced and energised by power. And, says Paul,

these two are brought together in Jesus; and therefore each is

heightened by the other. It is the love of God that lifts His power to

its highest height; it is the revelation of Him as stooping that

teaches us His loftiness. It is because He has come within the grasp of

our humanity in Jesus Christ that we can hymn our highest and noblest

praises to 'the King eternal, the invisible God.'

The sunshine falls upon the snow-clad peaks of the great mountains and

flushes them with a tender pink that makes them nobler and fairer by

far than when they were veiled in clouds. And so all the divine majesty

towers higher when we believe in the divine condescension, and there is

no god that men have ever dreamed of so great as the God who stoops to

sinners and is manifest in the flesh and Cross of the Man of Sorrows.

Take these characteristics of the divine nature as get forth in the

text one by one, and consider how the Revelation in Jesus Christ, and

its power on sinful men, raises our conceptions of them. 'The King of

the ages'--and do we ever penetrate so deeply into the purpose which

has guided His hand, as it moulded and moved the ages, as when we can

say with Paul that His 'good pleasure' is that, 'in the dispensation of

the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in

Christ.' The intention of the epochs as they emerge, the purpose of all

their linked intricacies and apparently diverse movements, is this one

thing, that God in Christ may be manifest to men, a nd that humanity

may be gathered, like sheep round the Shepherd, into the one fold of

the one Lord. For that the world stands; for that the ages roll, and He

who is the King of the epochs hath put into the hands of the Lamb that

was slain the Book that contains all their events; and only His hand,

pierced upon Calvary, is able to open the seals, to read the Book. The

King of the ages is the Father of Christ.

And in like manner, that incorruptible God, far away from us because He

is so, and to whom we look up here doubtingly and despairingly and

often complainingly and ask, 'Why hast Thou made us thus, to be weighed

upon with the decay of all things and of ourselves?' comes near to us

all in the Christ who knows the mystery of death, and thereby makes us

partakers of an inheritance incorruptible. Brethren, we shall never

adore, or even dimly understand, the blessedness of believing in a God

who cannot decay nor change, unless from the midst of graves and griefs

we lift our hearts to Him as revealed in the face of the dying Christ.

He, though He died, did not see corruption, and we through Him shall

pass into the same blessed immunity.

'The King . . . the God invisible.' No man hath seen God 'at any time,

nor can see Him.' Who will honour and glorify that attribute which

parts Him wholly from our sense, and so largely from our apprehension,

as will he who can go on to say, 'the only begotten Son which is in the

bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' We look up into a waste

Heaven; thought and fear, and sometimes desire, travel into its

tenantless spaces. We say the blue is an illusion; there is nothing

there but blackness. But 'he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

And we can lift thankful praise to Him, the King invisible, when we

hear Jesus saying, 'thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh

with thee.'

'The only God.' How that repels men from His throne! And yet, if we

apprehend the meaning of Christ's Cross and work, we understand that

the solitary God welcomes my solitary soul into such mysteries and

sacred sweetnesses of fellowship with Himself that, the humanity

remaining undisturbed, and the divinity remaining unintruded upon, we

yet are one in Him, and partakers of a divine nature. Unless we come to

God through Jesus Christ, the awful attributes in the text spurn a man

from His throne, and make all true fellowship impossible.

So let me remind you that the religion which does not blend together in

indissoluble union these two, the majesty and the lowliness, the power

and the love, the God inaccessible and the God who has tabernacled with

us in Jesus Christ, is sure to be almost an impotent religion. Deism in

all its forms, the religion which admits a God and denies a revelation;

the religion which, in some vague sense, admits a revelation and denies

an incarnation; the religion which admits an incarnation and denies a

sacrifice; all these have little to say to man as a sinner; little to

say to man as a mourner; little power to move his heart, little power

to infuse strength into his weakness. If once you strike out the

thought of a redeeming Christ from your religion, the temperature will

go down alarmingly, and all will soon be frost bound.

Brethren, there is no real adoration of the loftiness of the King of

the ages, no true apprehension of the majesty of the God incorruptible,

invisible, eternal, until we see Him in the face and in the Cross of

Jesus Christ. The truths of this gospel of our salvation do not in the

smallest degree impinge upon or weaken, but rather heighten, the glory

of God. The brightest glory streams from the Cross. It was when He was

standing within a few hours of it, and had it full in view, that Jesus

Christ broke out into that strange strain of triumph, 'Now is God

glorified.' 'The King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only

God,' is more honoured and glorified in the forgiveness that comes

through Jesus Christ, and in the transforming power which He puts forth

in the Gospel, than in all besides.

III. Lastly, let me draw your attention to the praise which should fill

the lives of those who know these facts.

I said that this Apostle seems always, when he refers to his own

individual conversion, to have been melted into fresh outpourings of

thankfulness and of praise. And that is what ought to be the life of

all of you who call yourselves Christians; a continual warmth of

thankfulness welling up in the heart, and not seldom finding utterance

in the words, but always filling the life.

Not seldom, I say, finding utterance in the words. It is a delicate

thing for a man to speak about himself, and his own religious

experience. Our English reticence, our social habits, and many other

even less worthy hindrances rise in the way; and I should be the last

man to urge Christian people to cast their pearls before swine, or too

fully to

'Open wide the bridal chamber of the heart,'

to let in the day. There is a wholesome fear of men who are always

talking about their own religious experiences. But there are times and

people to whom it is treason to the Master for us not to be frank in

the confession of what we have found in Him. And I think there would be

less complaining of the want of power in the public preaching of the

Word if more professing Christians more frequently and more simply said

to those to whom their words are weighty, 'Come and hear and I will

tell you what God hath done for my soul.' 'Ye are my witnesses,' saith

the Lord. It is a strange way that Christian people in this generation

have of discharging their obligations that they should go, as so many

of them do, from the cradle of their Christian lives to their graves,

never having opened their lips for the Master who has done all for

them.

Only remember, if you venture to speak you will have to live your

preaching. 'There is no speech nor language, their voice is not heard,

their sound is gone out through all the earth.' The silent witness of

life must always accompany the audible proclamation, and in many cases

is far more eloquent than it. Your consistent thankfulness manifested

in your daily obedience, and in the transformation of your character,

will do far more than all my preaching, or the preaching of thousands

like me, to commend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One last word, brethren. This revelation is made to us all. What is God

to you, friend? Is He a remote, majestic, unsympathising, terrible

Deity? Is He dim, shadowy, unwelcome; or is He God whose love softens

His power; Whose power magnifies his love? Oh! I beseech you, open your

eyes and your hearts to see that that remote Deity is of no use to you,

will do nothing for you, cannot help you, may probably judge you, but

will never heal you. And open your hearts to see that 'the only God'

whom men can love is God in Christ. If here we lift up grateful praise

'unto Him that loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in His

blood,' we, too, shall one day join in that great chorus which at last

will be heard saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto

Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'

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WHERE AND HOW TO PRAY

'I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands

without wrath and doubting.'--1 Tim. ii. 8.

The context shows that this is part of the Apostle's directory for

public worship, and that, therefore, the terms of the first clause are

to be taken somewhat restrictedly. They teach the duty of the male

members of the Church to take public, audible part in its worship.

Everywhere, therefore, must here properly be taken in the restricted

signification of 'every place of Christian assembly.' And from the

whole passage there comes a picture of what sort of thing a meeting of

the primitive Church for worship was, very different from anything that

we see nowadays. 'Every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath

an exhortation.' I fancy that some of the eminently respectable and

utterly dead congregations which call themselves Christian Churches

would be very much astonished if they could see what used to be the

manner of Christian worship nineteen hundred years ago, and would get a

new notion of what was meant by 'decently, and in order.'

But we may fairly, I suppose, if once we confess that this is so, widen

somewhat the scope of these words, and take them rather as expressive

of the Apostle's desire and injunction, for the word that he used here,

'I will,' is a very strong one, to all Christian people, be they men or

women, that they pray 'everywhere,' in the widest sense of that

expression, 'lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting.'

I do not attempt anything more than just to go, step by step, through

the Apostle's words and gather up the duties which each enjoins.

'I will that men pray everywhere.' That is the same in spirit as the

Apostle's other command: 'Pray without ceasing; in everything give

thanks.' A very high ideal, but a very reasonable one, for unless we

can find some place where God is not, and where the telegraph between

heaven and earth is beyond our reach, there is no place where we should

not pray. And unless we can find a place where we do not want God, nor

need Him, there is no place where we should not pray. Because, then,

'everywhere' is equally near Him, and the straight road to His throne

is of the same length from every hole and corner of the world;

therefore, wherever men are, they ought to be clinging to His skirts,

and reaching out their open hands for His benefits; and because,

wherever a man is, there he utterly depends upon God, and needs the

actual intervention of His love, and the energising of His power for

everything, even for his physical life, so that he cannot wink his

eyelashes without God's help, therefore, 'In every place I will that

men pray.'

And how is that to be done? First of all, by keeping out of all places

where it is impossible that we should pray; for although He is

everywhere, and we want Him everywhere, there are places--and some of

us know the roads to them but too well, and are but too often in

them--where prayer would be a strange incongruity. A man will not pray

over the counter of a public-house. A man will not pray over a sharp

bargain. A man will not pray that God may bless his outbursts of anger,

or sensuality and the like. A man will not pray when he feels that he

is deep down in some pit of self-caused alienation from God. The

possibility of praying in given circumstances is a sharp test, although

a very rough and ready one, whether we ought to be in these

circumstances or not. Do not let us go where we cannot take God with

us; and if we feel that it would be something like blasphemy to call to

Him from such a place, do not let us trust ourselves there. Jonah could

pray out of the belly of the fish, and there was no incongruity in

that; but many a professing Christian man gets swallowed up by monsters

of the deep, and durst not for very shame send up a prayer to God. Get

out of all such false positions.

But if the Apostle wills 'that men pray alway,' it must be possible

while going about business, study, daily work, work at home amongst the

children, work in the factory amongst spindles, work in the

counting-house amongst ledgers, work in the study amongst lexicons, not

only to pray whilst we are working, but to make work prayer, which is

even better. The old saying that is often quoted with admiration, 'work

is worship,' is only half true. There is a great deal of work that is

anything but worship. But it is true that if, in all that I do, I try

to realise my dependence on God for power; to look to Him for

direction, and to trust to Him for issue, then, whether I eat, or

drink, or pray, or study, or buy and sell, or marry or am given in

marriage, all will be worship of God. 'I will that men pray

everywhere.' What a noble ideal, and not an impossible or absurd one!

This was not the false ideal of a man that had withdrawn himself from

duty in order to cultivate his own soul, but the true ideal of one of

the hardest workers that ever lived. Paul could say 'I am pressed above

measure, insomuch that I despair of life, and that which cometh upon me

daily is the care of all the churches,' and yet driven, harassed beyond

his strength with business and cares as he was, he did himself what he

bids us do. His life was prayer, therefore his life was Christ,

therefore he was equal to all demands. None of us are as hard-worked,

as heavily pressed, as much hunted by imperative and baying dogs of

duties as Paul was. It is possible for us to obey this commandment and

to pray everywhere. A servant girl down on her knees doing the

doorsteps may do that task from such a motive, and with such

accompaniments, as she dips her cloth into the hot-water bucket, as to

make even it prayer to God. We each can lift all the littlenesses of

our lives into a lofty region, if only we will link them on to the

throne of God by prayer.

There is another way by which this ideal can be attained, and that is

to cultivate the habit, which I think many Christian people do not

cultivate, of little short swallow-flights of prayer in the midst of

our daily work. 'They cried unto God in the battle, and He was

entreated of them.' If a Philistine sword was hanging over the man's

head, do you think he would have much time to drop down upon his knees,

to make a petition, divided into all the parts which divines tell us go

to make up the complete idea of prayer? I should think not; but he

could say, 'Save me, O Lord!' 'They cried to God in the battle--little,

sharp, short shrieks of prayer--and He was entreated of them.' If you

would cast swift electric flashes of that kind more frequently up to

heaven, you would bring down the blessings that very often do not come

after the most elaborate and proper and formal petitions. 'Lord, save

or I perish!' It did not take long to say that, but it made the

difference between drowning and deliverance.

Still further, notice the conditions of true prayer that are here

required. I will that men pray everywhere 'lifting up holy hands.' That

is a piece of symbolism, of course. Apparently the Jewish attitude of

prayer was unlike ours. They seem to have stood during devotion and to

have elevated their hands with open, empty, upturned palms to heaven.

We clasp ours in entreaty, or fold them as a symbol of resignation and

submission. They lifted them, with the double idea, I suppose, of

offering themselves to God thereby, and of asking Him to put something

into the empty hand, just as a beggar says nothing, but holds out a

battered hat, in order to get a copper from a passer-by. The psalmist

desired that the lifting up of his hands might be as the 'evening

sacrifice.'

If a man stands with his open, empty palm held up to God, it is as much

as to say 'I need, I desire, I expect.' And these elements are what we

must have in our prayers; the sense of want, the longing for supply,

the anticipation of an answer. What do you hold out your hand for?

Because you expect me to drop something into it, because you want to

get something. How do you hold out your hand? Empty. And if I am

clasping my five fingers round some earthly good it is of no use to

hold up that hand to God. Nothing will come into it. How can it? He

must first take the imitation diamonds out of it or we must turn it

round and shake them out before He can fill it with real jewels. As for

him who continues to clutch worldly goods, 'let not that man think that

he shall receive anything of the Lord.' Empty the palm before you lift

it.

Still further, says Paul, 'lifting up holy hands.' That, of course,

needs no explanation. One of the psalms, you may remember, says 'I will

wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass Thine altar.' The

psalmist felt that unless there was a previous lustration and

cleansing, it was vain for him to go round the altar. And you may

remember how sternly and eloquently the prophet Isaiah rebukes the

hypocritical worshippers in Jerusalem when he says to them, 'Your hands

are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your

doings,' and then come and pray. A foul hand gets nothing from God. How

can it? God's best gift is of such a sort as cannot be laid upon a

dirty palm. A little sin dams back the whole of God's grace, and there

are too many men that pray, pray, pray, and never get any of the things

that we pray for, because there is something stopping the pipe, and

they do not know what it is, and perhaps would be very sorry to clear

it out if they did. But all the same, the channel of communication is

blocked and stopped, and it is impossible that any blessing should

come. Geographers tell us that a microscopic vegetable grows rapidly in

one of the upper affluents of the Nile, and makes a great dam across

the river which keeps back the water, and so makes one of the lakes

which have recently been explored; and then, when the dam breaks, the

rising of the Nile fertilises Egypt. Some of us have growing,

unchecked, and unnoticed, in the innermost channels of our hearts,

little sins that mat themselves together and keep increasing until the

grace of God is utterly kept from permeating the parched recesses of

our spirits. 'I will that men pray, lifting up holy hands,' and unless

we do, alas! for us.

If these are the requirements, you will say, 'How can I pray at all?'

Well, do you remember what the Psalmist says? 'If I regard iniquity in

my heart, the Lord will not hear me,' but then he goes on, 'Blessed be

God, who hath not turned away my prayer nor His mercy from me.' It is

always true that if we regard iniquity in our hearts, if in our inmost

nature we love the sin, that stops the prayer from being answered. But,

blessed be God, it is not true that our having done the sin prevents

our petitions being granted. For the sin that is not regarded in the

heart, but is turned away from with loathing hath no intercepting

power. So, though the uplifted hands art stained, He will cleanse them

if, as we lift them to Him, we say, 'Lord, they are foul, if thou wilt

Thou canst make them clean.'

But the final requirement is: 'Without wrath or doubting.' I do not

think that Christian people generally recognise with sufficient

clearness the close and inseparable connection which subsists between

their right feelings towards their fellow-men and the acceptance of

their prayers with God. It is very instructive that here, alongside of

requirements which apply to our relations to God, the Apostle should

put so emphatically and plainly one which refers to our relations to

our fellows. An angry man is a very unfit man to pray, and a man who

cherishes in his heart any feelings of that nature towards anybody may

be quite sure that he is thereby shutting himself out from blessings

which otherwise might be his. We do not sufficiently realise, or act on

the importance, in regard to our relations with God, of our living in

charity with all men. 'First, go and be reconciled to thy brother,' is

as needful to-day as when the word was spoken.

'Without . . . doubting.' Have I the right to be perfectly sure that my

prayer will be answered? Yes and no. If my prayer is, as all true

prayer ought to be, the submission of my will to God's and not the

forcing of my will upon God, then I have the right to be perfectly

sure. But if I am only asking in self-will, for things that my own

heart craves, that is not prayer; that is dictation. That is sending

instructions to heaven; that is telling God what He ought to do. That

is not the kind of prayer that may be offered 'without doubting.' It

might, indeed, be offered, if offered at all, with the certainty that

it will not be answered. For this is the assurance on which we are to

rest--and some of us may think it is a very poor one--'we know that, if

we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.' To get what we

want would often be our ruin. God loves His children a great deal too

well to give them serpents when they ask for them, thinking they are

fish, or to give them stones when they beseech Him for them, believing

them to be bread. He will never hand you a scorpion when you ask Him to

give it you, because, with its legs and its sting tucked under its

body, it is like an egg.

We make mistakes in our naming of things and in our desires after

things, and it is only when we have learned to say 'Not my will but

Thine be done,' that we have the right to pray, 'without doubting.' If

we do so pray, certainly we receive. But a tremulous faith brings

little blessing, and small answer. An unsteady hand cannot hold the cup

still for Him to pour in the wine of His grace, but as the hand shakes,

the cup moves, and the precious gift is spilled. The still, submissive

soul will be filled, and the answer to its prayer will be, 'Whatsoever

things ye desire believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.'

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SPIRITUAL ATHLETICS

'Exercise thyself unto Godliness.'--1 Tim. iv. 7.

Timothy seems to have been not a very strong character: sensitive,

easily discouraged, and perhaps with a constitutional tendency to

indolence. At all events, it is very touching to notice how the old

Apostle--a prisoner, soon to be a martyr--forgot all about his own

anxieties and burdens, and, through both of his letters to his young

helper, gives himself to the task of bracing him up. Thus he says to

him, in my text, amongst other trumpet-tongued exhortations, 'Exercise

thyself unto godliness.'

If I were preaching to ministers, I should have a good deal to say

about the necessity of this precept for them, and to remind them that

it was first spoken, not to a private member of the Church, as an

injunction for the Christian life in general, but as having a special

bearing on the temptations and necessities of those who stand in

official positions in the Church. For there is nothing that is more

likely to sap a man's devotion, and to eat out the earnestness and

sincerity of a Christian life, than that he should be--as I, for

instance, and every man in my position has to be--constantly occupied

with presenting God's Word to other people. We are apt to look upon it

as, in some sense, our stock-in-trade, and to forget to apply it to

ourselves. So it was with a very special bearing on the particular

occupation and temptation of his correspondent that Paul said 'Exercise

thyself unto godliness' before you begin to talk to other people.

But that would not be appropriate to my present audience. And I take

this injunction as one of universal application.

I. Notice, then, here expressed the ever-present and universal aim of

the Christian life.

Paul does not say 'be godly'; but 'exercise thyself unto'--with a view

towards--'godliness.' In other words, to him godliness is the great aim

which every Christian man should set before him as the one supreme

purpose of his life.

Now I am not going to spend any time on mere verbal criticism, but I

must point to the somewhat unusual word which the Apostle here employs

for 'godliness.' It is all but exclusively confined to these last

letters of the Apostle. It was evidently a word that had unfolded the

depth and fulness and comprehensiveness of its meaning to him in the

last stage of his religious experience. For it is only once employed in

the Acts of the Apostles, and some two or three times in the doubtful

second Epistle of St. Peter. And all the other instances of its use lie

in these three letters--the one to Titus and two to Timothy; and eight

of them are in this first one. The old Apostle keeps perpetually

recurring to this one idea of 'godliness.' What does he mean by it? The

etymological meaning of the word is 'well-directed reverence,' but it

is to be noticed that the context specifically points to one form of

well-directed reverence, viz. as shown in conduct. 'Active godliness'

is the meaning of the word; religion embodied in deeds, emotions, and

sentiments, and creeds, put into fact.

This noble and pregnant word teaches us, first of all, that all true

religion finds its ultimate sphere and best manifestation in the

conduct of daily life. That sounds like a platitude. I wish it were. If

we believed that, and worked it out, we should be very different people

from what the most of us are; and our chapels would be very different

places, and the professing Church would have a new breath of life over

it. Religion must have its foundation laid deep in the truths revealed

by God for our acceptance. And does God tell us anything simply that we

may believe it, and there an end? What is the purpose of all the

principles and facts which make up the body of the Christian

revelation? To enlighten us? Yes! To enlighten us only? A hundred times

no! The destination of a principle, of a truth, is to pass out from the

understanding into the whole nature of man.

And if, as I said, the foundation of religion is laid in truths,

principles, facts, the second story of the building is certain

emotions, sentiments, feelings, desires, and affections, and

'experiences'--as people call them--which follow from the acceptance of

these truths and principles. And is that all? A thousand times no! What

do we get the emotions for? What does God give you a Revelation of

Himself for, that kindles your love if you believe it? That you may

love? Yes! Only that you may love? Certainly not. And so the top story

is conduct, based upon the beliefs, and inspired by the emotions.

In former centuries, the period between the Reformation and our

fathers' time, the tendency of the Protestant Church was very largely

to let the conception of religion as a body of truths overshadow

everything else. And nowadays, amongst a great many people, the

temptation is to take the second story for the main one, and to think

that if a man loves, and has the glow at his heart of the conscious

reception of God's love, and has longings and yearnings, and Christian

hopes and desires, and passes into the sweetnesses of communion with

God, in his solitary moments, and plunges deep into the truths of God's

Word, that is godliness. But the true exhortation to us is--Do not stop

with putting in the foundations of a correct creed, nor at the second

stage of an emotional religion. Both are needful. Number one and number

two are infinitely precious, but both exist for number three. And true

religion has its sphere in conduct. 'Exercise thyself unto godliness.'

That does not mean only--for it does include that--cultivate devout

emotions, or realise the facts and the principles of the Gospel, but it

means, take these along with you into your daily life, and work them

out there. Bring all the facts and truths of your creed, and all the

sweet and select, the secret and sacred, emotions which you have felt,

to bear upon your daily life. The soil in which the tree grows, and the

roots of the tree, its stem and its blossoms, are all means to the

end--fruit. What is the use of the clearest conceptions, and of the

most tender, delicate, holy emotions, if they do not drive the wheels

of action? God does not give us the Gospel to make us wise, nor even to

make us blessed, but He gives it to us to make us good men and women,

working His work in our daily tasks. All true religion has its sphere

in conduct.

But then there is another side to that. All true conduct must have its

root in religion, and I, for my part--though of course it is extremely

'narrow' and 'antiquated' to profess it--I, for my part, do not believe

that in the long-run, and in general, you will get noble living apart

from the emotions and sentiments which the truths of Christianity,

accepted and fed upon, are sure to produce. And so this day, with its

very general depreciation of the importance of accurate conceptions of

revealed truth, and its exaltation of conduct, is on the verge of a

very serious error. Godliness, well-directed reverence, is the parent

of all noble living, and the one infallible way to produce a noble life

is faith in Christ, and love which flows from the faith.

If all that is so, if godliness is, not singing psalms, not praying,

not saying 'How sweet it is to feel the love of God,' still less saying

'I accept the principles of Christianity as they are laid down in the

Bible'; but carrying out beliefs and emotions in deeds, then the true

aim which we should have continually before us as Christians is plain

enough. We may not reach it completely, but we can approximate

indefinitely towards it. Aim is more important than achievement.

Direction is more vital in determining the character of a life than

progress actually made. Note the form of the exhortation, 'exercise

thyself towards godliness,' which involves the same thought as is

expressed in Paul's other utterance of irrepressible aspiration and

effort, 'Not as if I had already attained, either were already perfect,

but I follow after,' or as he had just said, 'press towards the mark,'

in continual approximation to the ideal. A complete penetration of all

our actions by the principles and emotions of the Gospel is what is set

before us here.

And that is the only aim that corresponds to what and where I am and to

what I need. I fall back upon the grandly simple old words, very dear

to some of us, perhaps, by boyish associations, 'Man's chief end is to

glorify God, and (so) to enjoy Him for ever.' 'Unto Godliness' is to be

the aim of every true life, and it is the only aim which corresponds to

our circumstances and our relations, our powers and possibilities.

II. Notice the discipline which such an aim demands.

'Exercise thyself.' Now, I have no doubt that the bulk of my hearers

know that the word here rendered 'exercise' is drawn from the athlete's

training-ground, and is, in fact, akin to the word which is transported

into English under the form 'gymnasium.' The Apostle's notion is that,

just as the athlete, racer, or boxer goes through a course of training,

so there is a training as severe, necessary for the godliness which

Paul regards as the one true aim of life.

You Christian people ought to train your spirits at least as carefully

as the athlete does his muscles. There are plenty of people, calling

themselves Christians, who never give one-hundredth part as much

systematic and diligent pains to fulfil the ideal of their Christian

life as men will take to learn to ride a bicycle or to pull the stroke

oar in a college boat. The self-denial and persistence and

concentration which are freely spent upon excellence in athletic

pursuits might well put to shame the way in which Christians go about

the task of 'doing' their religion.

I suppose there never was a time, in England's history at any rate,

whatever it may have been in Greece, when modern instances might give

more point to an old saw than to-day does for this text, when athletic

sports of all kinds are taking up so much of the time and the energy of

our young men. I do not want to throw cold water on that, but I do say

it is a miserable thing to think that so many professing Christians

will give a great deal more pains to learn to play lawn tennis than

ever they did to learn to be good, Christian people.

'Exercise thyself unto godliness.' Make a business of living your

Christianity. Be in earnest about it. A tragically large number of

professing Christians never were in earnest about mending themselves.

And that is why they are so far, far behind. 'Exercise thyself.' You

say, How?

'Well, I say, first of all, concentration. 'This one thing I do.' That

does not mean narrowing, because this 'one thing' can be done by means

of all the legitimate things that we have to do in the world. Next

Friday, when you go on 'Change, you can be exercising yourself to

godliness there. Whatever may be the form of our daily occupation, it

is the gymnasium where God has put us to exercise our muscles in, and

so to gain 'the wrestling thews that throw the world.' 'Be strong in

the Lord, and in the power of His might.' The concentration for which I

plead does not shut us out from any place but the devil's

wrestling-ground. All that is legitimate, all that is innocent, may be

made a means for manifesting and for increasing our godliness. Only you

have to take God with you into your life, and to try, more and more

consciously, to make Him the motive-power of all that you do. Then the

old saying which is profoundly true as it was originally meant, and has

of late years been so misused as to become profoundly false, will be

true again, 'Laborare est orare.' Yes! it is; if worship underlies the

work, but not else.

Again I say, exercise yourselves by abstinence. How many things did the

athlete at Corinth do without in his training? How many things do

prizefighters and rowing men do without when in training to-day? How

rigidly, for a while at any rate, they abstain--whether they recompense

themselves afterwards or not has nothing to do with my present purpose.

And is it not a shame that some sensual man shall, for the sake of

winning a medal or a cup, be able gladly to abandon the delights of

sense--eating, drinking, and the like--and content himself with a

hermit's Spartan fare, and that Christian people so seldom, and so

reluctantly, and so partially turn away from the poisoned cups and the

indigestible dainties which the world provides for them? I think that

any Christian man who complains of the things which he is shut out from

doing if he is to cultivate the godliness which should be his life need

only go to any place where horse-jockeys congregate to get a lesson

that he may well lay to heart. 'Exercise thyself,' for it is unto

godliness.

And then what I said in a former part of this sermon about the various

stages of religion may suggest another view of the method of discipline

proper to the Christian life. The strenuous exercise of all our powers

is called for. But if it is true that the godliness of my text is the

last outcome of the emotions which spring from the reception of certain

truths, then if we work backwards, as it were, we shall get the best

way of producing the godliness. That is to say, the main effort for all

men who are in earnest in regard to their own growth in Christlikeness

is to keep themselves in touch with the truths of the Gospel, and in

the exercise of the sentiments and emotions which flow from these. Or,

to put it into other words, the 'gymnastic' is to be, mainly, the man's

clinging, with all his might of mind and heart, to Christ, and the

truths that are wrapped up in Him; and the cultivation of the habit of

continual faith and love turned to that Lord. If I see to number

one--the creed, and to number two--the emotions, they will see to

number three--the conduct. Keep the truths of the Gospel well in your

minds, and keep yourselves well in the attitude of contact with Jesus

Christ, and power for life will come into you. But if the fountain is

choked, the bed of the stream will be dry. They tell us that away up in

Abyssinia there form across the bed of one of the branches of the Nile

great fields of weed. And as long as they continue unbroken the lower

river is shrunken. But when the stream at the back of them bursts its

way through them, then come the inundations down in Egypt, and bring

fertility. And there are hundreds of professing Christians whose fields

lie barren and baked in the sunshine, because they have stopped with

weeds, far away up amongst the hills, the stream that would water them.

Clear out the weeds, and the water will do the rest.

And 'exercise thyself unto godliness' by keeping the crown and the

prize often and clear in view. 'Paul the aged' in this very letter

says: 'I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me a

crown of glory.' He had said, in the midst of the strife: 'Not as

though I had already attained--I press toward the mark for the prize.'

And the prize which gleamed before him through all the dust of the

arena now shone still more brightly when his hand had all but clasped

it. If we desire to 'run with perseverance the race that is set before

us' we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and see in Him, not only the

Rewarder, but the Reward, of the 'exercise unto godliness.'

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ONE WITNESS, MANY CONFESSORS

'Thou . . . hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 13.

I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and

before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good

confession, 14. That thou keep this commandment. . . .'--1 Tim. vi.

12-14.

You will observe that 'a good confession,' or rather 'the good

confession,' is said here to have been made both by Timothy and by

Christ. But you will observe also that whilst the subject-matter is the

same, the action of Timothy and Jesus respectively is different. The

former professes, or rather confesses, the good confession; the latter

witnesses. There must be some reason for the significant variation of

terms to indicate that the relation of Timothy and Jesus to the good

confession which they both made was, in some way, a different one, and

that though what they said was identical, their actions in saying it

were different.

Then there is another point of parallelism to be noticed. Timothy made

his profession 'before many witnesses,' but the Apostle calls to his

remembrance, and summons up before the eye of his imagination, a more

august tribunal than that before which he had confessed his faith, and

says that he gives him charge 'before God' (for the same word is used

in the original in both verses), 'who quickeneth all things, and before

Christ Jesus.' So the earthly witnesses of the man's confession dwindle

into insignificance when compared with the heavenly ones. And upon

these thoughts is based the practical exhortation, 'Keep the

commandment without spot.' So, then, we have three things: the great

Witness and His confession, the subordinate confessors who echo His

witness, and the practical issue that comes out of both thoughts.

I. We have the great Witness and His confession.

Now, you will remember, perhaps, that if we turn to the Gospels, we

find that all of them give the subject-matter of Christ's confession

before Pilate, as being that He was the King of the Jews. But the

Evangelist John expands that conversation, and gives us details which

present a remarkable verbal correspondence with the words of the

Apostle here, and must suggest to us that, though John's Gospel was not

written at the date of this Epistle, the fact that is enshrined for us

in it was independently known by the Apostle Paul.

For, if I may for a moment recall the incident to you, you will

remember that when Pilate put to the Saviour the question, 'Art Thou a

King?' our Lord, before He would answer, took pains to make quite clear

the sense in which the judge asked Him of His royal state. For He said,

'Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?

If it is your Roman idea of a king, the answer must be, "No." If it is

the Jewish Messianic idea, the answer must be, "Yes." I must know first

what the question means, in the mind of the questioner, before I answer

it.' And when Pilate brushes aside Christ's question, with a sort of

impatient contempt, and returns to the charge, 'What hast Thou done?'

our Lord, whilst He makes the claim of sovereignty, takes care to make

it in such a way as to show that Rome need fear nothing from Him, and

that His dominion rested not upon force. 'My Kingdom is not of this

world.' And then, when Pilate, like a practical Roman, bewildered with

all these fine-spun distinctions, sweeps them impatiently out of the

field, and comes back to 'Yes, or No; are you a King?' our Lord gives a

distinct affirmative answer, but at once soars up into the region where

Pilate had declined to follow Him: 'To this end was I born, and for

this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the

truth.' 'Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the good confession.' And

His confession was His royalty, His relation to the truth, and His

pre-existence. 'To this end was I born,' and the next clause is no mere

tautology, nor a non-significant parallelism, 'and for this cause came

I into the world.' Then He was before He came, and birth to Him was not

the beginning of being, but the beginning of a new relation.

So, then, out of this great word of our text, which falls into line

with a great many other words of the New Testament, we may gather

important and significant truths with regard to two things, the matter

and the manner of Christ's witnessing. You remember how the same

Apostle John--for whom that word 'witness' has a fascination in all its

manifold applications--in that great vision of the Apocalypse, when to

his blessed sight the vision of the Master was once given, extols Him

as 'the faithful witness, and the First-begotten from the dead, and the

Prince of the kings of the earth.' And you may remember how our Lord

Himself, after His conversation with Nicodemus, says, 'We speak that we

do know, and bear witness to that we have seen,' and how again, in

answer to the taunts of the Jews, He takes the taunt as the most

intimate designation of the peculiarity of His person and of His work,

when He says, 'I am one that bear witness of Myself.' So, then, we have

to interpret his declaration before Pilate in the light of all these

other sayings, and to remember that He who said that He came to bear

witness to the truth, said also, 'I am the truth,' and therefore that

his great declaration that He was the witness-bearer to the truth is

absolutely synonymous with His other declaration that He bears witness

of Himself.

Now, here we come upon one of the great peculiarities of Christ as a

religious teacher. The new thing, the distinctive peculiarity, the

differentia between Him and all other teachers, lies just here, that

His theme is not so much moral or religious principles, as His own

nature and person. He was the most egotistical man that ever lived on

the face of the earth, with an egotism only to be accounted for, if we

believe, as He Himself said, that in His person was the truth that He

proclaimed, and that when He witnessed to Himself He revealed God. And

thus He stands, separate from all other teachers, by this, that He is

His own theme and His own witness.

So much for the matter of the good confession to which we need only add

here its pendant in the confession before the High Priest. To the

representative of the civil government He said, 'I am a king,' and

then, as I remarked, He soared up into regions where no Roman official

could rise to follow Him, and to the representative of the Theocratic

government He said, 'Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at

the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.' These two

truths, that He is the Son of God, who by His witness to the truth,

that is, Himself, lays the foundations of a Monarchy which shall

stretch far further than the pinions of the Roman eagles could ever

fly, and that he is the Son of Man who, exalted to the right hand of

God, is to be the Judge of mankind--these are the good confessions to

which the Lord witnessed.

Then with regard to the manner of His witness. That brings us to

another of the peculiarities of Christ's teaching. I have said that He

was the most egotistical of men. I would say, too, that there never was

another who clashed down in the front of humanity such tremendous

assertions, with not the faintest scintilla of an attempt to prove them

to our understandings, or commend them by any other plea than this,

'Verily, verily, I say unto you!'

A witness does not need to argue. A witness is a man who reports what

he has seen and heard. The whole question is as to his veracity and

competency. Jesus Christ states it for the characteristic of His work,

'We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen.' His

relation to the truth which He brings to us is not that of a man who

has thought it out, who has been brought to it by experience, or by

feeling, or by a long course of investigation; still less is it the

relation which a man would bear to a truth that he had learnt from

others originally, however much he had made it his own thereafter: but

it is that of one who is not a thinker, or a learner, or a reasoner,

but who is simply an attester, a witness. And so He stands before us,

and says, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are

life. Believe Me, and believe the words, for no other reason,

primarily, than because I speak them.' In these two respects, then, the

matter and the manner of His witness, He stands alone, and we have to

bow before Him and say, 'Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth.' 'Before

Pontius Pilate He witnessed a good confession.'

II. We have here suggested to us the subordinate confessors who echo

the Lord's witness.

It is a matter of no consequence when, and before whom, this Timothy

professed his good profession. It may have been at his baptism. It may

have been when he was installed in his office. It may have been before

some tribunal of which we know nothing. That does not matter. The point

is that a Christian man is to be an echo of the Lord's good confession,

and is to keep within the lines of it, and to be sure that all of it is

echoed in his life. Christ has told us what to say, and we are here to

say it over again. Christ has witnessed; we are to confess. Our

relation to that truth is different from His. We hear it; He speaks it.

We accept it; He reveals it. We are influenced by it; He is it. He

brings it to the world on His own authority; we are to carry it to the

world on His.

Be sure that you Christian men are echoes of your Master. Be sure that

you reverberate the note that He struck. Be sure that all its music is

repeated by you And take care that you neither fall short of it, nor go

beyond it, in your faith and in your profession. Echoes of Christ--that

is the highest conception of a Christian life.

But though there is all the difference between the Witness and the

confessors, do not let us forget that, if we are truly Christian, there

is a very deep and blessed sense in which we, too, may witness what we

have seen and heard. A Christian preacher of any sort--and by that I

mean, not merely a man who stands in a pulpit, as I do, but all

Christian people, in their measure and degree--will do nothing by

professing the best profession, unless that profession sounds like the

utterance of a man who speaks that he knows, and who can say, 'that

which our eyes have beheld, that which we have handled, of the Word of

life, we make known unto you.' And so, by the power of personal

experience speaking out in our lives, and by the power of it alone, as

I believe, will victories be won, and the witness of Jesus Christ be

repeated in the world. Christian men and women, the old saying which

was addressed by a prophet to Israel is more true, more solemnly true

of us, and presses on us with a heavier weight of obligation, as well

as lifts us up into a position of greater blessedness: 'Ye are my

witnesses, saith the Lord.' That is what you and I are here for--to

bear witness, different and yet like to, the witness borne by the Lord.

We have all to do that, by words, though not only by them. That is the

obligation that a great many Christian people take very lightly. That

yoke of Jesus Christ many of us slip our necks out of. If He has

witnessed, you have to confess. But some of you carry your Christianity

in secret, and button your coats over the cockade that should tell

whose soldiers you are, and are ashamed, or too shy, or too nervous, or

too afraid of ridicule, or not sufficiently sure of your own grip of

the Master, to confess Him before men. I beseech you remember that a

Christian man is no Christian unless 'with the mouth confession is made

unto salvation,' as well as 'with the heart' belief is exercised unto

righteousness.

III. Lastly, we have here the practical issue of all this.

'I charge thee before God, who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus

Christ, that thou keep the commandment without spot.' The

'commandment,' of course, may be used in a specific sense, referring to

what has just been enjoined, but more probably we are to regard the

same thing which, considered in its relation to Jesus Christ, is His

testimony, as being, in its relation to us, His commandment. For all

Christ's gospel of revelation that He has made of Himself to the world,

is meant to influence, not only belief and feeling, but conduct and

character as well. All the New Testament, in so far as it is a record

of what Christ is, and thereby a declaration of what God is, is also

for us an injunction as to what we ought to be. The whole Gospel is

law, and the testimony is commandment, and we have to keep it, as well

as to confess it. Let me put the few things that I have to say, under

this last division of my subject, the practical issue, into the shape

of three exhortations, not for the sake of seeming to arrogate any kind

of superiority, but for the sake of point and emphasis.

Let the life bear witness to the confession. What is the use of

Timothy's standing there, and professing himself a Christian before

many witnesses if, when he goes out into the world, his conduct gives

the lie to his creed, and he lives like the men that are not

Christians? Back up your confession by your conduct, and when you say

'I believe in Jesus Christ,' let your life be as true an echo of His

life as your confession is of His testimony. Else we shall come under

the condemnation, 'Nothing but leaves,' and shall fall under the

punishment of the continuance of unfruitfulness, which is our crime as

well as our punishment. There is a great deal more done by consistent

living for, and by inconsistent living against, the truth of the

Gospel, than by all the words of all the preachers in the world. Your

faults go further, and tell more, than my sermons, and your Christian

characters will go further than all the eloquence of the most devoted

preachers. 'There is no voice nor language, where their sound is not

heard. Their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to

the end of the world.'

Again, let the thought of the Great Witness stimulate us. He, too, took

His place by our sides, though with the differences that I have pointed

out, yet with resemblances which bring Him very near us. He, too; knew

what it was to stand amongst those who shrugged their shoulders, and

knit their brows at His utterances, and turned away from Him, calling

Him sometimes 'dreamer,' sometimes 'revolutionary,' sometimes

'blasphemer,' and now and then a messenger of good tidings and a

preacher of the gospel of peace. He knows all our hesitations, all our

weaknesses, all our temptations. He was the first of the martyrs, in

the narrower sense of the word. He is the leader of the great band of

witnesses for God. Let us stand by His side, and be like Him in our

bearing witness in this world.

Again, let the thought of the great tribunal stimulate us. 'I give thee

charge before God, who quickeneth all things--and who therefore will

quicken you--and before Jesus Christ, that thou keep this commandment.'

Jesus, who witnessed to the truth, witnesses, in the sense of beholding

and watching, us, knowing our weakness and ready to help us. 'The

faithful witness, and the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince

of the kings of the earth,' is by us, as we witness for Him. And so,

though we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the

saints in the past who have witnessed for God, and been witnessed to by

Him, we have to turn away from them, and 'look off' from all others,

'unto Jesus.' And we may, like the first of the noble army of martyrs,

see the heavens opened, and Jesus 'standing'--started to His feet, to

see and to help Stephen--'at the right hand of God.'

Brethren, let us listen to His witness, let us accept it, setting to

our seals that God is true. Then let us try to echo it back by word,

and to attest our confession by our conduct, and then we may comfort

ourselves with the great word, 'He that confesseth Me before men, Him

will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven.'

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THE CONDUCT THAT SECURES THE REAL LIFE

'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time

to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.'--1 Tim. vi. 19.

In the first flush of the sense of brotherhood, the Church of Jerusalem

tried the experiment of having all things in common. It was not a

success, it was soon abandoned, it never spread. In the later history

of the Church, and especially in these last Pauline letters, we see

clearly that distinctions of pecuniary position were very definitely

marked amongst the believers. There were 'rich men' in the churches of

which Timothy had charge. No doubt they were rich after a very modest

fashion, for Paul's standard of opulence is not likely to have been a

very high one, seeing that he himself ministered with his own hands to

his necessities, and had only one cloak to keep him warm in winter

time. But great or small as were the resources of these men, they were

rich in comparison with some of their brethren. The words of my text

are the close of the very plain things which Paul commands Timothy to

tell them. He assures them that if they will be rich in good works, and

ready to distribute, they will lay up for themselves a good 'foundation

against the time to come.'

The teaching in the text is, of course, a great deal wider than any

specific application of it. It is very remarkable, especially as coming

from Paul. 'Lay up a good foundation'--has he not said, 'Other

foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus

Christ'? 'That they may lay hold on eternal life'--has he not said,

'The gift of God is eternal life'? Is he not going dead in the teeth of

his own teaching, 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done,

but by His mercy He saved us'? I think not. Let us see what he does

say.

I. First, then, he says that the real life is the future life.

Those of you who use the Revised Version will see that it makes an

alteration in the last clause of our text, and instead of 'eternal

life' it reads 'the life which is life indeed,' the true life; not

simply designating it as eternal, but designating it as being the only

thing that is worth calling by the august name of life.

Now it is quite clear that Paul here is approximating very closely to

the language of his brother John, and using this great word 'life' as

being, in substance, equivalent to his own favourite word of

'salvation,' as including in one magnificent generalisation all that is

necessary for the satisfaction of man's needs, the perfection of his

blessedness, and the glorifying of his nature. Paul's notion of life,

like John's, is that it is the one all-comprehensive good which men

need and seek.

And here he seems to relegate that 'life which is life indeed' to the

region of the future, because he contemplates it as being realised 'in

the time to come,' and as being the result of the conduct which is here

enjoined. But you will find that substantially the same exhortation is

given in the 12th verse of this chapter, 'Fight the good fight of

faith; lay hold on the life eternal'--where the process of grasping

this 'life,' and therefore the possession of it, are evidently regarded

as possible here, and the duty of every Christian man in this present

world. That is to say, there is a double aspect of this august

conception of the 'life which is life indeed.' In one aspect it is

present, may be and ought to be ours, here and now; in another aspect

it lies beyond the flood, and is the inheritance reserved in the

heavens. That double aspect is parallel with the way in which the New

Testament deals with the other cognate conception of salvation, which

it sometimes regards as past, sometimes as present, sometimes as

future. The complete idea is that the life of the Christian soul here

and yonder, away out into the furthest extremities of eternity, and up

to the loftiest climax of perfectness, is in essence one, whilst yet

the differences between the degree in which its germinal possession

here and its full-fruited enjoyment hereafter differ is so great as

that, in comparison with the completion that is waiting the Christian

soul beyond the grave, all of the same life that is here enjoyed

dwindles into nothingness. It appears to me that these two sides of the

truth, the essential identity of the life of the Christian soul beyond

and here, and the all but infinite differences and progresses which

separate the two, are both needful, very needful, to be kept in view by

us.

There is here on earth, amidst all our imperfections and weakness and

sin, a root in the heart that trusts in Christ, which only needs to be

transplanted into its congenial soil to blossom and burgeon into

undreamed of beauty, and to bear fruit the savour of which no mortal

lips can ever taste. The dwarfed rhododendrons in our shrubberies have

in them the same nature as the giants that adorn the slopes of the

Himalayas. Transplant these exotics to their native soil, and you would

see what it was in them to be. Think of the life that is now at its

best; its weakness, its blighted hopes, its thwarted aims, its foiled

endeavours; think of its partings, its losses, its conflicts. Think of

its disorders, its sins, and consequent sufferings; think of the shadow

at its close, which flings long trails of blackness over many preceding

years. Think of its swift disappearance, and then say if such a poor,

fragmentary thing is worthy of the name of life, if that were all that

the man was for.

But it is not all. There is a 'life which is life indeed,' over which

no shadow can pass, nor any sorrow darken the blessed faces or clog the

happy hearts of those who possess it. They 'have all and abound.' They

know all and are at rest. They dread nothing, and nothing do they

regret. They leave nothing behind as they advance, and of their

serenity and their growth there is no end. That is worth calling life.

It lies beyond this dim spot of earth. It is 'hid with Christ in God.'

II. Secondly, notice that conduct here determines the possession of the

true life.

Paul never cares whether he commits the rhetorical blunder of mixing up

metaphors or not. That matters very little, except to a pedant and a

rhetorician. In his impetuous way he blends three here, and has no time

to stop to disentangle them. They all mean substantially the same thing

which I have stated in the words that conduct here determines the

possession of life hereafter; but they put it in three different

figurative fashions which we may separate and look at one by one.

The first of them is this, that by our actions here we accumulate

treasure hereafter. 'Laying up in store for themselves' is one word in

the original, and it contains even more than is expressed in our

paraphrase, for it is really 'treasuring off.' And the idea is that the

rich man is bade to take a portion of his worldly goods, and, by using

these for beneficent purposes, out of them to store a treasure beyond

the grave. What is employed thus, and from the right motives and in the

right way, is not squandered, but laid up in store. You remember the

old epitaph,

'What I spent I lost;

What I gave I have.'

Now that is Christ's teaching, for did He not say: 'Sell all that thou

hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven'?

Did He not say: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, . . .

but lay up treasures in heaven'? And if anybody's theology finds it

difficult to incorporate these solemn teachings of our Lord with the

rest of it, so much the worse for the theology.

I have no doubt at all that Christianity has yet a great deal to teach

the Christian Church and the world about the acquisition of money and

the disposal of money; and, though I do not want to dwell now upon that

specific application of the general principle of my text, I cannot help

reminding you, dear friends, that for a very large number of us, almost

the most important influence shaping our characters is the attitude

that we take in regard to these things--the getting and the

distribution of worldly wealth. For the bulk of Christian people there

are few things more important as sharp tests of the reality of their

religion, or more effective in either ennobling or degrading their

whole character, than what they do about these two plain matters.

But then my text goes a great deal further than that; and whilst it

applies unflinchingly this principle to the one specific case, it

invites us to apply it all round the circumference of our earthly

conduct. What you are doing here is piling up for you, on the other

side of the wall, what you will have to live with, and either get good

or evil out of, through all eternity. A man who is going to Australia

pays some money into a bank here, and when he gets to Melbourne it is

punctually paid out to him across the counter. That is what we are

doing here, lodging money on this side that we are going to draw on

that. And it is this which gives to the present its mystical

significance and solemnity, that all our actions are piling up for us

future possessions: 'treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath'; or,

contrariwise, 'glory, immortality, honour, eternal life.' We are like

men digging a trench on one side of a hedge and flinging the spadefuls

over to the other. They are all being piled up behind the barrier, and

when we go round the end of it we shall find them all waiting for us.

Then the Apostle superimposes upon this another metaphor. He does not

care to unravel it. 'Laying up in store for themselves a store,' he

would have said if he had been a pedant, 'which is also a good

foundation.' Now I take it that that does not mean a basis for hope, or

anything of that sort, but that it conveys this thought, that our

actions here are putting in the foundations on which the eternal

building of our future life shall be reared. When a man excavates and

lays the first courses of the stones of his building, he thereby

determines every successive stage of it, until the headstone is brought

forth with rejoicing. We are laying foundations in that profound sense

in this world. Our nature takes a set here, and I fail to see any

reason cognisable by us why that ply of the nature should ever be taken

out of it in any future. I do not dogmatise; but it seems to me that

all that we do know of life and of God's dealings in regard to man

leads us to suppose that the next world is a world of continuations,

not of beginnings; that it is the second volume of the book, and hangs

logically and necessarily upon the first that was finished when a man

died. Our lives here and hereafter appear to me to be like some

geometrical figure that wants two sheets of paper for its completion:

on the first the lines run up to the margin, and on the second they are

carried on in the direction which was manifest in the section that was

visible here.

And so, dear friends, let us remember that this is the reason why our

smallest acts are so tremendous that by our actions we are making

character, and that character is destiny, here and hereafter. You are

putting in the foundations of the building that you have to live in;

see that they are of such a sort as will support a house eternal in the

heavens.

The last of the metaphors under which the Apostle suggests the one idea

is that our conduct here determines our capacity to lay hold of the

prize. It seems to me that the same allusion is lingering in his mind

which is definitely stated in the previous verse to which I have

already referred, where the eternal life which Timothy is exhorted to

lay hold of is regarded as being the prize of the good fight of faith,

which he is exhorted to fight. And so the third metaphor here is that

which is familiar in Paul's writings, where eternal life is regarded as

a garland or prize, given to the victor in race or arena. It is exactly

the same notion as he otherwise expresses when he says that he follows

after if that he may 'lay hold of that for which also he is laid hold

of by Jesus Christ.' This is the underlying thought, that according to

a Christian man's acts here is his capacity of receiving the real life

yonder.

That is not given arbitrarily. Each man gets as much of it when he goes

home as he can hold. The tiniest vessel is filled, the largest vessel

is filled. But the little vessel may, and will, grow bigger if that

which is deposited in it be rightly employed. Let us lay this to heart,

that Christian men dare not treat it as a matter of indifference

whether to the full they live lives consistent with their profession,

and do the will of their Master or no. It is not all the same, and it

will not be all the same yonder, whether we have adorned the teaching,

or whether our lives have habitually and criminally fallen beneath the

level of our professions. Brethren, we are too apt to forget that there

is such a thing as being 'saved, yet so as by fire'; and that there is

such a thing as 'having an entrance ministered abundantly into the

Kingdom.' Be you sure of this, that if the hands of your spirits are

ever to be capable of grasping the prize, it must be as the result of

conduct here on earth, which has been treasuring up treasures yonder,

and laying a foundation on which the incorruptible house may solidly

rest.

III. And now the last word that I have to say is that these principles

are perfectly compatible with the great truth of salvation by faith.

For observe to whom the text is spoken. It is to men who have professed

to be believers, and it is on the ground of their faith that these rich

men in Timothy's churches are exhorted to this conduct. There is no

incompatibility between the doctrine that eternal life is the gift of

God, and the placing of those who have received that gift under a

strict law of recompense.

That is the teaching of the whole New Testament. It was to Christian

men that it was said: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatsoever a

man soweth that shall he also reap.' It is the teaching of Jesus Christ

Himself.

But there is a dreadful danger that we, with our partial vision, shall

see one side of the truth so clearly that we do not see the other; and

so you get two antagonistic schools of Christian teaching who have torn

the one word into halves. One of them says, 'Man is saved by faith

only,' and forgets 'faith without works is dead'; and the other says,

'Do your duty, and never mind about your belief,' and forgets that the

belief--the trust--is the only sure foundation on which conduct can be

based, and the only source from which it is certain to flow.

Now, if I should not be misunderstood by that same narrow and

contracted vision of which I have been speaking, I would venture to say

that salvation by faith alone may be so held as to be a very dangerous

doctrine, and that there is a very real sense in which a man is saved

by works. And if you do not like that, go home and read the Epistle of

James, and see what you make of his teaching: 'Ye see, brethren, how

that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.' 'Faith

wrought with his works, and by his works was his faith made perfect.'

Only let us understand where the exhortation of the text comes in. We

have to begin with absolute departure from all merit in work, and the

absolute casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ. If you have not done

that, my brother, the teaching 'Laying up in store for themselves a

good foundation' has no application to you, but this teaching has,

'Other foundation can no man lay. Behold, I lay in Zion a tried

corner-stone. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not make haste.' If you

have not committed your souls and selves and lives and hopes to Jesus

Christ, the teaching 'Lay hold on eternal life' has only a very

modified application to you, because the only hand that can grasp that

life is the hand of faith that is content to receive it from His hands

with the prints of the nails in them. But if you have given yourselves

to that Saviour, and received the germinal gift of eternal life from

Him, then, take my text as absolutely imperative for you. Remember that

it is for you, resting on Christ, to treasure up eternal life; for you

to build on that sure foundation gold and silver and precious stones

which may stand the fire; for you, by faithful continuance in

well-doing, to lay hold of that for which you have been laid hold of by

Jesus Christ. May it be true of all of us that 'our works do follow

us'!

'Thy works, thine alms, and all thy good endeavour

Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod,

But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,

Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.'

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Transcriber's Notes

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763. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_363a

764. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_364a

765. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_365a

766. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_366a

767. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_367a

768. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_368a

769. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_369a

770. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.viii-Page\_370a

771. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_371a

772. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_372a

773. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_373a

774. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_374a

775. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_375a

776. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_376a

777. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_377a

778. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.ix-Page\_378a

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781. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_381a

782. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_382a

783. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_383a

784. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_384a

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786. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_386a

787. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_387a

788. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_388a

789. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/iicor\_tim/cache/iicor\_tim.html3#iii.v.x-Page\_389a