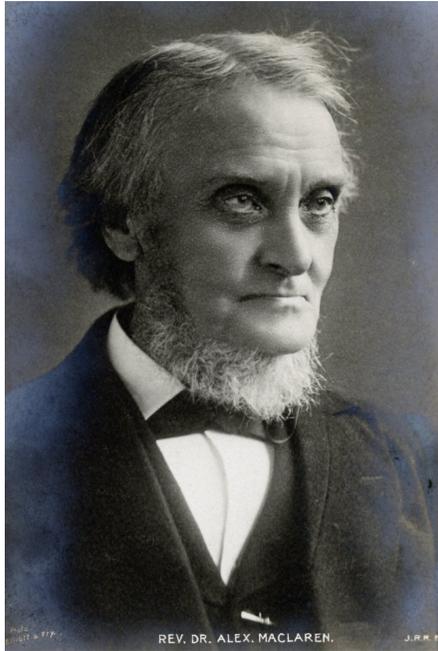


# EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Volume 15

---



by

**ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.**  
(1826-1910)

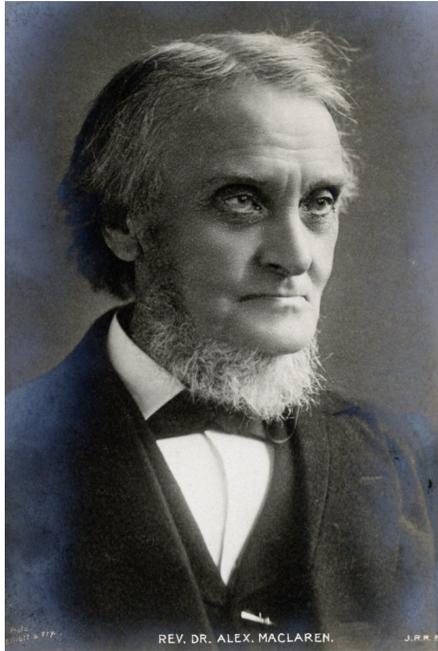
*PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS, 1 & 2  
TIMOTHY, TITUS*



# EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Volume 15

---



by

**ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.**  
(1826-1910)

*PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS, 1 & 2  
TIMOTHY, TITUS*

As Published By  
**Grace-eBooks.com**  
In the Public Domain

# EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

## CONTENTS

PHILIPPIANS.....	9
Phil. i. 1-8 — LOVING GREETINGS.....	9
Phil. i. 9-11 — A COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER.....	15
Phil. i. 12-20 — A PRISONER'S TRIUMPH.....	19
Phil. i. 21-25— A STRAIT BETWIXT TWO.....	26
Phil. i. 27, 28— CITIZENS OF HEAVEN.....	38
Phil. ii. 1-4 — A PLEA FOR UNITY.....	48
Phil. ii. 5-8 — THE DESCENT OF THE WORD.....	55
Phil. ii. 9-11 — THE ASCENT OF JESUS.....	61
Phil. ii. 12, 13— WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION.....	68
Phil. ii. 14-16 — COPIES OF JESUS.....	78
Phil. ii. 16-18 — A WILLING SACRIFICE.....	84
Phil. ii. 19-24 — PAUL AND TIMOTHY.....	91
Phil. ii. 25-30 — PAUL AND EPAPHRODITUS.....	99
Phil. iii. 1-3 — PREPARING TO END.....	104
Phil. iii. 4-8 — THE LOSS OF ALL.....	112
Phil. iii. 8, 9 — THE GAIN OF CHRIST.....	118
Phil. iii. 10-11 — SAVING KNOWLEDGE.....	125

Phil. iii. 12— LAID HOLD OF AND LAYING HOLD.....	135
Phil. iii. 13, 14— THE RACE AND THE GOAL.....	144
Phil. iii. 15— THE SOUL'S PERFECTION.....	152
Phil. iii. 16— THE RULE OF THE ROAD.....	163
Phil. iii. 17-21 — WARNINGS AND HOPES.....	171
Phil. iv. 1— A TENDER EXHORTATION.....	178
Phil. iv. 3— NAMES IN THE BOOK OF LIFE.....	186
Phil. iv. 4— REJOICE EVERMORE.....	195
Phil. iv. 6— HOW TO OBEY AN IMPOSSIBLE INJUNCTION .....	203
Phil. iv. 7— THE WARRIOR PEACE.....	210
Phil. iv. 8— THINK ON THESE THINGS.....	218
Phil. iv. 10-14 — HOW TO SAY 'THANK YOU'.....	226
Phil. iv. 15-19 — GIFTS GIVEN, SEED SOWN.....	233
Phil. iv. 20-23 — FAREWELL WORDS.....	240
COLOSSIANS.....	246
Col. i. 2— SAINTS, BELIEVERS, BRETHREN.....	246
Col. i. 5— THE GOSPEL-HOPE.....	255
Col. i. 11 — 'ALL POWER'.....	261
Col. i. 12 — THANKFUL FOR INHERITANCE.....	267
Col. i. 29— CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR.....	274
Col. ii. 6, 7 — CHRISTIAN PROGRESS.....	282

Col. iii. 1-15— RISEN WITH CHRIST.....	285
Col. iii. 1, 2— RISEN WITH CHRIST.....	290
Col. iv. 5— WITHOUT AND WITHIN.....	298
I. THESSALONIANS.....	308
1 Thess. i. 3— FAITH, LOVE, HOPE, AND THEIR FRUITS	308
1 Thess. i. 8— GOD'S TRUMPET.....	315
1 Thess. ii. 12— WALKING WORTHILY.....	321
1 Thess. iv. 9-18— SMALL DUTIES AND THE GREAT HOPE .....	331
1 Thess. iv. 14— SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS.....	338
1 Thess. v. 8— THE WORK AND ARMOUR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY.....	345
1 Thess. v. 10— WAKING AND SLEEPING.....	354
1 Thess. v. 11— EDIFICATION.....	363
1 Thess. v. 16-18— CONTINUAL PRAYER AND ITS EFFECTS.....	371
1 Thess. v. 27— PAUL'S EARLIEST TEACHING.....	377
II. THESSALONIANS.....	386
2 Thess. i. 10— CHRIST GLORIFIED IN GLORIFIED MEN	386
2 Thess. i. 11, 12— WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING.....	393
2 Thess. ii. 16, 17— EVERLASTING CONSOLATION AND GOOD HOPE.....	402
2 Thess. iii. 5— THE HEART'S HOME AND GUIDE.....	410

2 Thess. iii. 16— THE LORD OF PEACE AND THE PEACE OF THE LORD.....	420
I. TIMOTHY.....	427
1 Tim. 1. 6— THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT.....	427
1 Tim. i. 11— 'THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD'.....	436
1 Tim. i. 15— THE GOSPEL IN SMALL.....	443
1 Tim. i. 15— THE CHIEF OF SINNERS.....	451
1 Tim. i. 16— A TEST CASE.....	459
1 Tim. i. 17— THE GLORY OF THE KING.....	466
1 Tim. ii. 8— WHERE AND HOW TO PRAY.....	474
1 Tim. iv. 7— SPIRITUAL ATHLETICS.....	481
1 Tim. vi. 12-14— ONE WITNESS, MANY CONFESSORS..	488
1 Tim. vi. 19— THE CONDUCT THAT SECURES THE REAL LIFE.....	496
2 TIMOTHY.....	504
2 Timothy 1:1-7, 3:14-17--A VETERAN'S COUNSELS TO A YOUNG SOLDIER.....	504
2 Timothy 1:7--WHAT KIND OF MEN CHRIST MAKES.....	510
2 Timothy 1:12--A QUIET HEART.....	518
2 Timothy 1:12 --'SOUND WORDS'.....	527
2 Timothy 1:14--GOD'S STEWARDS.....	534

2 Timothy 2:4--THE TRUE AIM OF LIFE — PLEASING CHRIST.....	542
2 Timothy 2:13--A FAITHFUL GOD.....	553
2 Timothy 2:19--THE FOUNDATION AND THE SEAL.....	562
2 Timothy 2:20, 21--THE GREAT HOUSE AND ITS VESSELS .....	569
2 Timothy 3:5--FORM AND POWER.....	577
2 Timothy 4:1-5; 16-18--LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.....	585
2 Timothy 4:6-8--A PRISONER’S DYING THOUGHTS.....	589
2 Timothy 4:10, 11--DEMAS, LUKE, MARK.....	601
2 Timothy 4:13--PAUL’S DYING CONFIDENCE.....	609
TITUS.....	616
Titus 2:18--CHRISTIANS MAKING THE GOSPEL BEAUTIFUL.....	616
Titus 2:11, 12--THE SCHOOL OF GRACE.....	623
Titus 2:12--THE PURPOSE OF GRACE.....	630
Titus 2:13--THE HAPPY HOPE.....	638
Titus 2:14--CHRIST’S GIFT OF HIMSELF.....	649
Titus 2:14--ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.....	657
Titus 3:8--MAINTAINING GOOD WORKS.....	664

## PHILIPPIANS

### Phil. i. 1-8 — 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 kindness 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.'

#### **Phil. i. 9-11 — 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.

### **Phil. i. 12-20 — 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 prætorian 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 Prætorian 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,

sacreddest 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 anæsthetic 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?

## **Phil. i. 21-25— 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 bend 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?

### **Phil. i. 27, 28— 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 Cæsar'; 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 Prætorian 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.'

### **Phil. ii. 1-4 — 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 fore heads 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 arc 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.'

### **Phil. ii. 5-8 — 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.

### **Phil. ii. 9-11 — 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 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.'

## Phil. ii. 12, 13— 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 immovable, 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.'

### **Phil. ii. 14-16 — 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 un reasonable, 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.'

### **Phil. ii. 16-18 — 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'?

### **Phil. ii. 19-24 — 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 Berea, 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.'

## **Phil. ii. 25-30 — 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, Syntyche, 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' ministrations 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 clefs 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.

### **Phil. iii. 1-3 — 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.'

### **Phil. iii. 4-8 — 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 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.'

### **Phil. iii. 8, 9 — 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?

### **Phil. iii. 10-11 — 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 coastline 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!

### **Phil. iii. 12— 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 unflinching 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.'

### **Phil. iii. 13, 14— 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.

### **Phil. iii. 15— 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.'

### **Phil. iii. 16— 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-energize 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.'

### **Phil. iii. 17-21 — 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.

#### **Phil. iv. 1— 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 sacred 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, equally 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 *dégagé* 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.'

### **Phil. iv. 3— 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 nebulae 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.

#### **Phil. iv. 4— 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 stanchd one chief source of unrest and sadness, and have opened one pure and sparkling fountain of unfailling 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 sledgehammer, 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.

#### **Phil. iv. 6— 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.'

#### **Phil. iv. 7— 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 yardstick. 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.

## **Phil. iv. 8— 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, 'whatsoever 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.'

#### **Phil. iv. 10-14 — 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 centrifugal 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.'

#### **Phil. iv. 15-19 — 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 sacred 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.'

### **Phil. iv. 20-23 — 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 Cæsar'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 Cæsar's household. He had apparently special opportunities for intercourse with them, and probably his imprisonment brought him through the prætorian guards into association with them, as Cæsar'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 prætorian 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 Cæsar'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 encyclopædial Person who can bestow the encyclopædial 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.

## **COLOSSIANS**

### **Col. i. 2— 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 Cæsar'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.

### **Col. i. 5— 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 earnestings 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.

### **Col. i. 11 — '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 rebel lion 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.'

### **Col. i. 12 — 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.'

### **Col. i. 29— 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 clear before you, or you will go yawing about, and washing here and there, in the trough of the wave, and the tempest will be your master. If you do not know where you are going you will have to say, like the men 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!'

## Col. ii. 6, 7 — 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.'

### **Col. iii. 1-15— 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.

### **Col. iii. 1, 2— 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 greatedened 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!

### **Col. iv. 5— 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,

wearily, 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.'

## **I. THESSALONIANS**

### **1 Thess. i. 3— 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.'

### **1 Thess. i. 8— 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 scannel-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.

### **1 Thess. ii. 12— 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 unforgiveness 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 'Phœbe 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.'

### **1 Thess. iv. 9-18— 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.

### **1 Thess. iv. 14— 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 lose 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.'

## **1 Thess. v. 8— 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!'

### **1 Thess. v. 10— 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 tablelands 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.

### **1 Thess. v. 11—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 our selves, 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.

## 1 Thess. v. 16-18— 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.

### **1 Thess. v. 27— 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 undoctinal 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 overmeasure 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.'

## II. THESSALONIANS

### 2 Thess. i. 10— 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.

## 2 Thess. i. 11, 12— 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'œuvre*, 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.'

## **2 Thess. ii. 16, 17— 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 doeth 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.

## **2 Thess. iii. 5— 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, uncomplaining, 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—uncomplaining 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.'

## **2 Thess. iii. 16— 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 shuttlecocked 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 fulfilled? 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.

## **I. TIMOTHY**

### **1 Tim. 1. 6— 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, incontrovertible 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.'

### **1 Tim. i. 11— '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 fountal 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.

### **1 Tim. i. 15— THE GOSPEL IN SMALL**

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, 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 surgeon. 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 stanchd 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 acceptance,' 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 acceptance,' 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 acceptance,' it is worthy of *your* acceptance. 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 acceptance' 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.'

### **1 Tim. i. 15— 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 *pharmacopœia* 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.'

### **1 Tim. i. 16— 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 kindest 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.'

### **1 Tim. i. 17— 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, and 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.'

## **1 Tim. ii. 8— 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 always,' 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.'

### **1 Tim. iv. 7— 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.'

## **1 Tim. vi. 12-14— 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.'

### **1 Tim. vi. 19— 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.'*

## 2 TIMOTHY

### 2 Timothy 1:1-7, 3:14-17--A VETERAN'S COUNSELS TO A YOUNG SOLDIER

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ By the will of God, according to the promise life which is in Christ Jesus, 2. To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceding I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; 4. Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; 5. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. 6. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. 7. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.' —2 Timothy 1:1-7.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured Of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17. That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.' — 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

PAUL'S heart had been drawn to Timothy long before this letter was written, as far back as the beginning of his second missionary journey, and Timothy had cherished the enthusiastic devotion of a young man for his great leader. He seems to have been the best beloved of the circle which the magnetism of Paul's character bound to him.

The tone of the two epistles suggests that Timothy needed to be braced up, and have a tonic administered. Probably he inclined to be too much affected by difficulties and opposition, and required the ‘soul-animating strains’ which Paul sounded in his ears. Possibly the Apostle’s imprisonment and evidently impending death had discouraged and saddened the younger and weaker man. At all events, it is beautiful and pathetic that the words of cheer and brave trust should come from the martyr, and not from the sorrowing friend. Timothy should have been the encourager of Paul, but Paul was the encourager of Timothy.

The verses of this passage embody mainly two counsels. Verse 6 exhorts Timothy to ‘stir up the gift’ that was in him; 2 Timothy 3:14 bids him ‘abide in the things which’ he has learned. These two — diligent effort to increase his spiritual force and persistent holding by the teaching already received — are based on Paul’s knowledge of his faith and on Timothy’s knowledge of the saving power of that truth. But Paul loved him too ardently to give him cold counsels. The advices are wrapped in the softest covering of gracious affection and recognition of Timothy’s inherited faith and personal devotion to Paul.

I. Before dealing with the advices, look at the lovely prelude in verses 1-5. Paul does not lay aside his apostolic authority, but he uses it to make his greeting more sweet and strong. What had he been made an apostle by? The will of God. What had he been made an apostle for? To make known the promise of the life which is in Christ. Thus clothed with authority, and bearing the great gift of life, he takes Timothy to his heart as his beloved child. The captain stoops to embrace the private. Christ’s apostle pours his love and benediction over the young servant, and when such lips wish ‘grace, mercy, and peace,’ the wish is a prophecy as much as a prayer.

The flow of Paul’s love outstrips that of his words, and there is some verbal obscurity in verses 3-5, but the meaning is plain. Paul’s

thankfulness was for Timothy's 'unfeigned faith,' but when he is about to say that, other tender thoughts start up, and insist on being uttered. The language of love in absence is the same all the world over. It comes across all the intervening centuries like the speech of today: 'I never forget you.' But love should be sublimed by religion, and find its best expression in 'supplications.' Think of the prisoner in Rome, expecting a near death by violence, and yet telling his young friend that he was always thinking about him, Timothy, and wearying for him with a great yearning.

How beautiful is that touch, *too*, that the remembrance of Timothy's tears, when he had had to part from Paul, fed the Apostle's desire to see him again! And how graceful, and evidently more than graceful, is the contrast between the tears of Timothy at parting and the hoped-for joy of Paul at meeting! No wonder that such a leader kindled passionate enthusiasm.

One can fancy the throb of pleasure with which Timothy would read the recognition of his 'unfeigned faith.' It is always a memorable moment to a young beginner when a veteran lays his hand on his shoulder and acknowledges his devotion. Nor less fitted to warm Timothy's heart was the praise of his grandmother and mother. It would not only do that, but would make him feel that his descent added force to the exhortation which followed. Whoever might become careless, one who had such blood in his veins was called on to be true to his ancestral faith. One can well understand how such a beginning prepared Timothy for the succeeding counsels. But this was not art or rhetorical advice on Paul's part, but deep affection. The soil thus watered by love was ready for the seed.

II. The counsel thus delicately introduced is delicately expressed, as putting in remembrance rather than as enjoining authoritatively. Paul gives Timothy credit for having already recognised the duty. The 'gift of God' is the whole bestowments which fitted him for his

work, and which were given from the Holy Spirit, through the imposition of the hands of Paul and of the elders (1 Timothy 4:14).

But whilst there was a special force in the command to Timothy, the principle involved applies to all Christians, and in a wider aspect to all men; for every Christian has received the gift of that self-same Spirit, and every man is endowed with some gifts from God. All God's gifts are held on similar conditions. They may be neglected, and, if so, will cease as surely as an untended fire dies down into grey ashes. The highest and the lowest are alike in this. An unused muscle atrophies, an uncultivated capacity diminishes. The grace of God itself wanes if we are unfaithful stewards.

The gift of the Spirit is not a substitute for our own activity, and the extent to which we possess it is determined by our rousing ourselves to tend the sacred flame.

Timothy had probably been depressed by Paul's imprisonment and the prospect of his death. He had been accustomed to lean upon the Apostle, and now the strong prop was to be withdrawn, and he was to stand alone, and, worst of all, to take up some of the tasks dropped by Paul. Therefore the Apostle tries to brace up his drooping spirit with his clear clarion note. The message comes to us all, that discouraging circumstances and heavy responsibilities are reasons for gathering ourselves up to our work, and for 'stirring up' smouldering fires kindled by God in our hearts, and too often left untended by us.

Paul points to the proper effects of the gift of God, as the ground of his counsel. That Spirit does not infuse cowardice, which blenches at danger or shrinks from duty, as probably Timothy was tempted to do; but it breathes 'power' into the weak, enabling them to do and bear all things, and 'love,' which makes eager for service to God and man, at whatever cost, and 'self-control,' which curbs the tendencies to seek easy tasks and to listen to the voices within or without whispering ignoble avoidance of the narrow way. Surely

this exhortation in its most general form should come to all young hearts, and summon them to open their doors for the entrance of that Divine Helper who will make them strong, loving, and masters of themselves.

III. The second exhortation in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, like the first, presupposes Timothy's previous Christian character, and draws some of its persuasive force from his home and the dear ones there — an argument which, no doubt, Paul knew would tell on such a clinging, affectionate nature. We note the double reason for steadfastness—the teachers, and the early beginning of the knowledge of the truth. It is thought a sign of independence and advancement by many young people nowadays to fling away their mother's faith, just because it was hers, and taught them by her when they were infants. The fact that it was is no bar against investigation, nor against the adoption of other conclusions, if needful; but in the present temper of men, it is well to remember that it creates no presumption against a creed that some white-haired Lois, or some tender mother Eunice has striven to engrave it on the young heart.

But the great reason adduced for steadfast grip of the truth is that the 'sacred writings' (by which are to be understood the Old Testament) have power, as Timothy had experience, to give a wisdom which led to salvation, and to 'furnish' a Christian, especially the Christian teacher, for 'every good *work*.' In either of the two usually adopted renderings of verse 16, the divine origin of Scripture and its value for the manifold processes for perfecting character are broadly asserted. That origin and these uses are unaffected by variety of view as to the methods of inspiration or by critical researches. It will always be true that the Bible is the chief instrument employed by the Spirit of power and of love and of self-control to mould our characters into beauty of holiness. He who has that Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs.

The one exhortation for such is to ‘abide in’ what he has received. That counsel as given to Timothy was probably directed chiefly against temptations very unlike those which attack us. But the spirit of it applies to us. It enjoins no irrational conservatism, scowling at all new thoughts, but it bids us aim at keeping up our personal hold of the central truths of Christ’s incarnation, sacrifice, and gift of the Divine Spirit, which hold is slackened by worldliness and carelessness twenty times for once that it is so from intellectual dissatisfaction with the principles of Christianity.

Timothy was relegated, not only to his early memoriam, but to his own experience. He had not only learned these things from revered lips, but had been ‘assured of’ them by the response they had found and the effects they had produced in himself. That is the deepest ground of our holding fast by the gospel, and it is one we may all have. ‘He that believeth hath the witness in himself,’ and may wait with equanimity while the dust of controversy clears off, for he ‘knows in whom he has believed,’ and what that Saviour has done for and in him;

## **2 Timothy 1:7--WHAT KIND OF MEN CHRIST MAKES**

‘For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.’ — 2 Timothy 1:7.

THE parts which we should naturally have expected Paul and Timothy to fill are reversed in this letter. ‘Paul the aged,’ a prisoner, and soon to be a martyr, might have been expected to receive encouragement and consolation. But Timothy seems to have been of a somewhat weak and timid nature, and this letter of the dying man is one long trumpet-blast to stir his courage. My text is the first of the ‘soul-animating strains’ which he blows. In it the Apostle would have his down-hearted young companion and helper remember what God has given him by the laying on of Paul’s hands. Whether the word ‘spirit’ in my text be regarded as meaning the Divine Spirit which is given, or the human spirit in which that divine gift is

received, the qualities enumerated in the text are those which that Divine Giver creates in that human recipient by His indwelling presence; or to put it into shorter words, my text tells us what sort of people Christianity has a tendency to make, and it tells us, too, how it sets about making them.

The enumeration is by no means intended to be either complete or scientific. It is meant to embrace, mainly, the points which Timothy wanted most. And so it dwells predominantly on the stronger, 'manly virtues,' as men complacently call them.' 'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,' which last word does not stand precisely upon a level with the other three, but rather expresses the notion of self-control.

I think I shall best, in the few remarks that I offer you, bring out the meaning of the words before us if I simply follow the Apostle's rough and ready enumeration, and try to learn what he says about each of these points.

I. The first thing, then, that he would have us understand is that Christ makes fearless men.

'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.' Now, of course, courage or timidity are very largely matters of temperament. But then, you know, the very purpose of the gospel is to mend temperaments, to restrain, and to stimulate, so as that natural defects may become excellences, and excellences may never run to seed and become defects. So whilst we have to admit that religion is not meant to obliterate natural distinctions in character, we must also remember that we insufficiently grasp the intention of the gospel which we say we believe unless we realise that it is meant to deal with the most deeply rooted defects in character, to make the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain.

So I venture to say that any man who lives in the realisation of the truths which the gospel reveals, and in the use of the gifts which the

gospel communicates, will (whatever his natural disposition of apprehensiveness) be stiffened into a fearless man; and be no longer a reed shaken with the wind, but a brazen pillar, and an iron wall, amidst all dangers and enemies.

One sometimes feels as if nothing but clear-sightedness were needed to drive men into insanity. When you think of the possibilities of every life, and of the certainties of every life, of what may come to any of us, any time, and of what must come to all of us one time, the wonder is that men live without a perpetual tremor of heart, and do so largely manage to ignore the evils that ring them round. Think of our relation to God, think of what must be the result of the collision of the perfectly righteous will of His with our wayward rebellions; of what must be the consequence — if there be a God at all, and if there be such a thing as retributive acts on His part — when He sets us down to drink of the brewst that we have brewed, and to reap the harvest that we have sown. Surely, ‘he troubled, ye careless ones,’ is His exhortation of wisdom to men.

And then if we bring in all the other possibilities which to many of us have become in some measure past experiences, but still hang threatening on our horizon, like the half-emptied clouds of a thunderstorm, that is sure to come back again, dread seems to be wisdom. For what have we that we shall not have to part with? What do we that will not disappoint in the fruit? What dangers are there possible to humanity, concerning which you and I can say we know that ‘when the overflowing scourge passes by it will not reach us’? None ! none!

You may remember having seen a gymnast that used to roll a ball up a spiral with the motion of his feet. That is how we are set to roll the ball of our fortunes and prosperities up the twisting ascent, and at every moment there is the possibility of its hurtling down in ruin, and one day it certainly will. So is there anything more empty and foolish than to say to a man whose relations with God are not right,

whose command of the world is so uncertain, as it-surely is, and who has frowning before him the grim certainties of loss and sorrow and broken ties, and empty houses and empty hearts, and disappointments, and pillow stuffed with thorns, and souls wounded to the very quick, and, last of all, a death which has a dim something behind it that touches all consciences — to say to such a man ‘Don’t be afraid’? If he is not a fool he ought to be.

But then Paul comes in and says, ‘God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.’ No, because He has given us the only thing that can exorcise that demon. He has given us the good news of Himself, whereby His name becomes our dearest hope instead of our ghastliest doubt. He has given us the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance and hallowing in Jesus Christ, whereby all the things whereof our consciences — which do ‘make cowards of us all’ — are afraid, are rectified, and some of them swept out of existence. He has given us truths which only need to be grappled and laid upon our hearts and minds to make us brave. He has assured us that ‘all things work together for good,’ that He Himself will never leave us.

And the Master who spoke on earth so often, and in so many connections, His meek and sovereign encouragement, ‘Fear not!’ speaks it from the heavens to all that trust Him. ‘He laid His hand upon me, and said, "Fear not!" I am the first and the last,’ from whom all changes originate, by whom all events are directed, unto whom all things tend. Therefore, whosoever is wedded to Him need fear no evil, for nothing that does not hurt Christ can harm Him,

## II. Christ makes strong men.

‘He hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power.’ Again we have to remember a previous remark as to temperament. There are differences among us in this respect. Some of us, of course, are naturally far more facile, sensitive and yielding than others; some of us have natural force denied to our brethren. These differences will remain, and yet ‘the weakest may be as David,’ and although the

weakest shall be made strong, the strongest shall be stronger still, 'as the angel of God.' The difference between the hind and front ranks will remain, but the whole battalion, as it were, will be shifted forwards.

Let me remind you how a condition of all that is worth doing and being is the cultivation of strength of will and of moral nature. To be weak is to be wicked nine times out of ten. I believe that the bulk of men that go wrong, that 'go to the devil,' as you say, do it, not so much because of a bias towards evil as of a fatal feebleness that is incapable of resistance; and I know of nothing that is more needed to be dinned into the ears — especially of the young who have their chances before them yet — than this truth: the man that cannot say 'No!' is doomed to say 'Yes!' to all bad things that may solicit him. To be weak is to be wicked in such a world as we live in; and many of you know how fatally, facilely, and feebly you have yielded, for no other reason than because the temptation was there and you were not man enough to stop your ears to it, and let it hum past you without touching you. What is the reason why half the men in the world that are drunkards are so?

Pure weakness. And so you may go all round the circle of vices and you will find that weakness is ordinarily wickedness, and it is, always misery. As Milton's Satan tells us, to be 'weak is to be miserable, doing or suffering.' And it is generally failure, as witness the experience of thousands of men who have come into this city and been beaten in the race.

How then is a man to get strength? Brethren, I do not want to exalt the gospel of Jesus Christ by depreciating other and lower means by which feeble natures may get a dose of steel into their system. There are such ways, and they do help men. But if you want to have a power within you that will enable you to 'stand foursquare to every wind that blows,' believe me the surest way of getting it is by faith in Jesus Christ, to open your hearts to the entrance into them of that

‘strong Son of God’ who sends His mighty Spirit into every spirit that will accept it, to be the source of uncreated and triumphant strength. If we would only keep near to Jesus Christ, and live with hearts open for the influx of His great communications, we should need nothing else to make us strong for all service, against all temptation, in the midst of all suffering. There is a gift offered to every one of us in the gospel of Jesus Christ which will make our weakness into strength. A piece of sponge put into a so-called petrifying well is turned into a mass solid as iron by the infiltration of stony particles. So our yielding softness may be converted into firmness which will resist every pressure if we receive into our hearts the grace which Christ gives. He who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and he only, is truly strong. If then you want power learn where it is stored. —

*‘His strength was as the strength of ten, Because his heart was pure.’*

There is part of the secret. But how is the heart to be made pure? By the entrance into it of the purifying Christ. Christ makes fearless and strong men.

III. Christ makes loving men.

*‘Tis excellent to have a giant’s strength ‘Tis tyrannous to use it like a giant!’*

And power ever tends to be tyrannous. The consciousness of strength is ever apt to degenerate into insolence, uncharitableness, want of sympathy with, and contempt for, weakness. And so, very beautifully, side by side with power, Paul puts love. There are some great moral teachers of this generation, and of the last, whose whole teaching has been fatally vitiated, for this amongst other reasons, because they lost sight of the fact that the strongest thing in the universe is love. But Paul, not a philosopher, and not in the least degree trying to set forth scientifically the relations or the limitations

of the virtues that he speaks about, like a skilful painter, instinctively knows what tint will best bring up the one that is laid beside it, or like some jeweller with an eye to effect, understands how to dispose the stones in his bracelet, that the cool green of the emerald may be set off by, and set off, the flashing red of the ruby and the deep blue of the sapphire. So he says, Christ makes strong men, but He makes loving men too. 'Quit you like men, be strong. Let all your deeds be done in charity.' And cultivate no strength for yourselves, nor admire any in others, in which power is divorced from pity and tenderness.

I need not remind you of the one sovereign way by which Jesus Christ in His gospel wins men from that self-centred absorption in which they live, and which is the root of all sin, into that love which is the child of faith and the parent' of all virtue. There is only one thing that makes men loving, and that is that they should be loved. And Jesus Christ, the incarnate Love, and Lover of all our souls, comes to us and shows us His hands and His side, and says, 'God — I in Him and He in *Me* — so loved the world, as these wounds tell.' We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.

Christ makes us love Him because He assures us that we are loved by Him.

IV. And lastly, Jesus Christ makes self-governing men.

I need not trouble you with any vindication of the rendering which for 'sound mind,' substitutes 'self-control.' I need only, in a word, ask you to consider how manifestly we are made so as to need the exercise continually of firm and resolute self-government. We have tastes and desires rooted in the flesh, and others, of which the gratification is perfectly legitimate, but which to make the guides of life, or to gratify without stint and without restraint, is ruinous. Blind passions are not meant to guide seeing reason; but if reason be the eye it is meant to guide the blind. And the men who live 'by nature,' which is a polite way of saying 'live by the worst half of their

nature, and their animal passions,' are sure to land before long in the ditch.

We have only to look at ourselves and see how there are in us a whole clamorous mob of desires, like nine-days' kittens, with their eyes shut and their mouths open, yelping for their sustenance; and, further, to mark how in each man there is a voice that says, 'Thou shalt, thou shalt not; thou oughtest, thou oughtest not' — we need only, I say, look at ourselves to know that he is meant to coerce and keep well down under hatches all these blind propensions and desires, and to set sovereign above them a will that cannot be bribed, a reason that will not be deceived, and a conscience that will be true to God. Govern yourselves, or you will come all to pieces.

Yes, and what is the use of saying that to men who cannot govern themselves, whose very disease is that they cannot; and who cry out often and often, sometimes before they have gone wrong and sometimes afterwards, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' It is no use to tell a discrowned and deposed monarch to rule his kingdom. The mischief is that it is in full revolt, and he has no soldiers behind him. As Bishop Butler says, 'If conscience had power, as it has authority, it would govern the world.' But authority without power is but a jest. So it is no good for conscience to give forth proclamations that are worth no more than the paper that they are written on, when my will has been talked over or enfeebled, and my desires and passions have got the bit between their teeth, and are tearing down the road to the inevitable collision.

Brethren, there is only one thing that will give complete self-command. If you make trial, I will guarantee that it will not fail. Trust to Jesus Christ; ask Him to govern, and He will help you to control yourselves. That is the noblest conquest that any man can make. 'Every man is a king, and crowns himself when he puts on his own hat,' says our quaint moralist. Wherever you are master, be you master inside your own soul. And that you may, be the servant of

Him who alone will make you master of yourself and of the world. In Christ the most timid may 'wax valiant in fight,' the weakest may be made strong,' the most self-centred heart be opened for love which is peace and joy, and the wildest revolt in the little kingdom within may be subdued. If we will only go to Him, and trust Him with ourselves, and live in true communion with Him, and in patient exercise of the gifts that He bestows, then He will say to us as of old, 'Fear not! My strength is made perfect in weakness.' His love will kindle answering flames in us; and He who brought the raging maniac, whom no chains could bind, to sit quietly at His feet, will give us authority over the one city which we have to govern, and will make the flesh the servant of the emancipated and enfranchised spirit.

## **2 Timothy 1:12--A QUIET HEART**

'... I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' — 2 Timothy 1:12.

THERE is some ambiguity in the original words of this text, lying in that clause which is translated in our Bibles — both Authorised and Revised — 'that which I have committed unto Him.' The margin of the Revised Version gives as an alternative reading, 'that which He hath committed unto me.' To a mere English reader it may be a puzzle how any words whatever could be susceptible of these two different interpretations. But the mystery is solved by the additional note which the same Revised Version gives, which tells us that the Greek is 'my deposit,' or I might add another synonymous *word*, 'my trust.'

Now you can see that 'my trust' may mean either something with which I trust another, or something with which another trusts me. So the possibility of either rendering arises. It is somewhat difficult to decide between the two. I do not purpose to trouble you with reasons for my preference here. Suffice it to say that, whilst there are strong

arguments in favour of the reading ‘that which He has committed unto me,’ I am inclined to think that the congruity of the whole representation, and especially the thought that this ‘trust,’ whatever it is, is something which God has to keep, rather than which Paul has to keep, shuts us up to the adoption of the rendering which stands in our Bibles.

Adopting it, therefore, though with some hesitation, the next question arises, What is it that Paul committed to God? The answer to that is, himself, in all his complex being, with all his fears and anxieties, during the whole duration of his existence. He has done what another Apostle exhorts us to do, ‘committed the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.’ Now that was a long past act at the time when Paul wrote this letter. And here he looks back upon life, and sees that all the experiences through which he has passed have but confirmed the faith which he rested in God before the experiences, and that, with the axe and the block almost in sight, he is neither ashamed of his faith, nor dissatisfied with what it has brought him.

I. Notice, then, in the first place, ‘the deposit’ of faith. You observe that the two clauses of my text refer to the same act, which in the one is described as ‘In whom I have trusted’; and in the other as ‘*committing* something to Him.’ The metaphor is a plain enough one. A man has some rich treasure. He is afraid of losing it, he is doubtful of his own power to keep it; he looks about for some reliable person and trusted hands, and he deposits it there. That is about as good a description of what the New Testament means by ‘faith’ as *you* will get anywhere.

You and I have one treasure, whatever else we may have or not have; and that is ourselves. The most precious of our possessions is our own individual being.

We cannot ‘keep’ that. There are dangers all round us. We are like men travelling in a land full of pickpockets and highwaymen, laden

with gold and precious stones. On every side there are enemies that seek to rob us of that which is our true treasure — our own souls. We cannot keep ourselves. Slippery paths and weak feet go ill together. The tow in our hearts, and the fiery sparks of temptation that are flying all round about us, are sure to come together and make a blaze. We shall certainly come to ruin if we seek to get through life, to do its work, to face its difficulties, to cope with its struggles, to master its temptations, in our own poor, puny strength. So we must look for trusty hands and lodge our treasure there, where it is safe.

And how am I to do that? By humble dependence upon God revealed, for our faith's feeble fingers to grasp, in the person and work of His dear Son, who has died on the Cross for us all; by constant realisation of His divine presence and implicit reliance on the realities of His sustaining hand in all our difficulties, and His shielding protection in all our struggles, and His sanctifying spirit in all our conflicts with evil. And not only by the realisation of His presence and of our dependence upon Him, nor only by the consciousness of our own insufficiency, and the departing from all self-reliance, but as an essential part of our committing ourselves to God, by bringing our wills into harmony with His will. To commit includes to submit.

‘And, oh, brother! if thus knowing your weakness, you will turn to Him for strength, if the language of your hearts be

*‘Myself I cannot save, Myself I cannot keep,*

*But strength in Thee I surely have, Whose eyelids never sleep.’*

And if thus, hanging upon Him, you believe that when you fling yourself into necessary temptations, and cope with appointed heavy tasks, and receive on *your* hearts the full blow of sent sorrows, He will strengthen you and hold you up; and if with all your hearts you bow, and you say, ‘Lord! keeping me is Thy business far more than

mine; into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' be sure that your trust will not be disappointed.

Notice, further, about this deposit of faith, how Paul has no doubt that he has made it, and is not at all afraid to say that he has. Ay! there are plenty of you professing Christians who have never got the length which all Christian people should arrive at, of a calm certainty in the reality of your own faith. Do you feel, my brother, that there is no doubt about it, that you are trusting upon Jesus Christ? If you *do*, well; if the life confirms the confidence. But whilst the deepened certitude of professing Christians as to the reality of their own faith is much to be desired, there is also much to be dreaded the easy-going assurance which a great many people who call themselves Christians have of the reality of their trust, though it neither bows their wills to God's purposes, nor makes them calm and happy in the assurance of His presence. The question for us all is, have we the right to say 'I have committed myself to Him'? If you have not, you have missed the blessedness of life, and will never carry your treasure safely through the hordes of robbers that lurk upon the road, but some day you will be found there, lying beggared, bleeding, bruised. May it be that you are found there before the end, by the merciful Samaritan who alone can bind up and lead to safety.

IX. Now note, secondly, the serenity of faith.

What a grand picture of a peaceful heart comes out of this letter, and its companion one to the same friend, written a little before, but under substantially the same circumstances! They are both full of autobiographical details, on which some critics look with suspicion, but which seem to me to bear upon their very front the token of their own genuineness.

And what a picture it is that they give! He is 'Paul the aged'; old, if not in years — and he probably was not an old man by years — yet old in thought and care and hardships and toils. He is a prisoner, and

the compulsory cessation of activity, when so much was to be done, might well have fretted a less eager spirit than that which burned in his puny frame. He is alone, but for one faithful friend; and the bitterness of his solitude is increased by the apostasy of some and the negligence of many. He is poor and thinly clad; and he wants his one cloak 'before winter.' He has been before the emperor once, and though he 'was delivered from the mouth of the lion' then, he knows that he cannot expect to put his head into the lion's mouth a second time with impunity, and that his course is run. He has made but a poor thing of life; he has disappointed all the hopes that were formed of the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, who was bidding fair to be the hammer of these heretical Christians. And yet there is no tremor nor despondency in this, his swan-song. It goes up in a clear burst of joyful music. It is the same spirit as that of the Psalmist: 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.' And serenely he sits there, in the midst of dangers, disappointments, difficulties, and struggles, with a life behind him stuffed full of thorns and hard work and many a care, and close before him the martyr's death, yet he says, with a flash of legitimate pride, 'I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have trusted, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

My brother, you must have Paul's faith if you are to have Paul's serenity. A quiet committal of yourself to God, in all the ways in which I have already described that committal as carried out, is the only thing which will give us quiet hearts, amidst the dangers and disappointments and difficulties and conflicts which we have all to encounter in this world. That trust in Him will bring, in the measure of its own depth and constancy, a proportionately deep and constant calm in our hearts.

For even though my faith brought me nothing from God, the very fact that I have rolled my care off my shoulders on to His, though I had made a mistake in doing it, would bring me tranquillity, as long

as I believed that the burden was on His shoulders and not on mine. Trust is always quiet.

When I can say, 'I am not the master of the caravan, and it is no part of my business to settle the route, I have no responsibility for providing food, or watching, or anything else. All my business is to obey orders, and to take the step nearest me and wait for the light,' then I can be very quiet whatever comes. And if I have cast my burden upon the Lord, I am *not* delivered from responsibility, but I am delivered from harassment. I have still tasks and duties, but they are all different when I think of them as His appointing. I have still difficulties and dangers, but I can meet them all with a new peacefulness if I say, 'God is Master here, and I am in His hands, and He will do what He likes with me.' That is not the abnegation of will, it is the vitalising of will. And no man is ever so strong as the man who feels 'it is God's business to take care of me; it is my business to do what He tells me.'

That, dear friends, is the only armour that will resist the cuts and blows that are sure to be aimed at you. What sort of armour do you wear? Is it of pasteboard painted to look like steel, like the breastplates and helmets of actors upon the stage in a theatre? A great deal of our armour is. Do you get rid of all that make-believe, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and for a helmet the hope of salvation, and, above all, take the shield of faith; and trust in the Lord whate'er betide, and you will stand against all assaults. Paul's faith is the only recipe for securing Paul's serenity.

And then, further, note how this same quiet committal of himself into the loving hands of his Father — whom he had learned to know because he had learned to trust His Son — is not only the armour against all the dangers and difficulties in life, but is also the secret of serene gazing into the eyes of close death. Paul knew that his days were nearly at an end; he was under no illusions as to that, for you remember the grand burst of confidence, even grander than this of

my text, in this same letter, with which he seems to greet the coming of the end, and exclaims, with a kind of Hallelujah! in his tone, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. And there is nothing left for me now, now when the struggles are over and the heat and dust of the arena are behind me, but, panting and victorious, to receive the crown.' He knows that death is sure and near; and yet in this same letter he says, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and save me into His everlasting kingdom.' Did he, then, expect to escape from the headsman's block? Was he beginning to falter in his belief that martyrdom was certain? By no means. The martyrdom *was* the deliverance. The striking off of his head by the sharp axe was the 'saving of him into the everlasting kingdom.' His faith, grasping Jesus Christ, who abolished death, changes the whole aspect of death to him; and instead of a terror it becomes God's angel that will come to the prisoner and touch him, and say, 'Arise!' and the fetters will fall from off his feet, and the angel will lead him through 'the gate that opens of its own accord,' and presently he will find himself in the city. That is to say, true confidence in God revealed in Jesus Christ is the armour, not only against the ills of life, but against the inevitable ill of death. It changes the whole aspect of the 'shadow feared of man'

Now I know that there is a danger in urging the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the ground of its preparing us for death. And I know that the main reasons for being Christians would continue in full force if there were no death; but I know also that we are all of us far too apt to ignore that grim certainty that lies gaping for us, somewhere on the road. And if we have certainly to go down into the common darkness, and to tread with our feet the path that all but two of God's favourites have trod, it is as well to look the fact in the face, and be ready. I do not want to frighten any man into being a Christian, but I do beseech each of you, brethren, to lay to heart that you will have to grapple with that last enemy, and I ask you, as you love your own souls, to make honest work of this question, Am

I ready for that summons when it comes, because I have committed my soul, body, and spirit into His hands, and I can quietly say, ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy servant to see corruption’?

Paul’s faith made him serene in life and victorious over death; and it will do the same for you.

III. So note, further, the experience of faith.

In the first clause of our text the Apostle says: — ‘I know whom I have trusted.’ And it is because he knows Him that therefore he is persuaded that ‘He is able to keep.’

How did Paul know Him? By experience. By the experience of his daily life. By all these years of trial and yet of blessedness through which he had passed; by all the revelations that had been made to his waiting heart as the consequence and as the reward of the humble faith that rested upon God. And so the whole past had confirmed to him the initial confidence which knit him to Jesus Christ.

If you want to know the worth of Christian faith, exercise it. We must trust, to begin with, *before* experience. But the faith that is built upon a lifetime is a far stronger thing than the tremulous faith that, out of darkness, stretches a groping hand, and for the first time lays hold upon God’s outstretched hand. We hope then, we tremblingly trust, we believe on the authority of His word. But after years have passed, we can say, ‘We have heard Him ourselves, and we know that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’

Further, none who truly commit themselves to God ever regret it. Is there anything else of which you can say that? Is there any other sort of life that never turns out a disappointment and bitterness and ashes in the mouth of the man that feeds upon it? And is it not something of an evidence of the reality of the Christian’s faith that millions of men are able to stand up and say, ‘Lo! we have put our confidence

in Him and we are not ashamed?’ ‘*This* poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles. They looked unto God and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.’ You cannot share in the conviction, the issue of experience which a Christian man has, if you are not a Christian. My inward evidence of the reality of the Gospel truth, which I have won because I trusted Him when I had not the experience, cannot be shared with anybody besides. You must ‘taste’ before you ‘see that the Lord is good’ But the fact that there is such a conviction, and the fact that there is nothing on the other side of the sheet to contradict it, ought to weigh something in the scale. Try Him and trust Him, and your experience will be, as that of all who have trusted Him has been, ‘that this hope maketh not ashamed.’

IV. Lastly, note here the goal of faith.

‘Against that day.’ The Apostle has many allusions to *that day* in this final letter. It was evidently, as was natural under the circumstances, much in his mind. And the tone of the allusions is remarkable. Remember what Paul believed *that day* was — a day when he ‘and all men would stand before the judgment’ bar of an omniscient and all-righteous, Divine Judge, to receive ‘the deeds done in the body.’ A solemn thought and a firm conviction, and a profound impression as to *that day*, were in his mind.

And in the face of all this, he says, ‘I know that He will keep this poor soul of mine against *that day*.’

Ah, my brother! it is easy for you to shuffle out of your thoughts the judgment-seat before which we must all stand, and *so to be* quiet. It is easy for you to question, in a so-called intellectual scepticism, the New Testament revelations as to the future, and *so to be* quiet. It is easy for you to persuade yourselves of the application there of another standard of judgment than that which Scripture reveals, and to say, ‘If I have done my best God will not be hard upon me,’ and so to be quiet. But, supposing that that certain tribunal blazed upon

you; supposing that you could not get rid of the thought that you were to stand there, and supposing that you realised, further, the rigidity of that judgment, and how it penetrates to the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart, would you be quiet then? *Should* you be quiet then?

This man was. How? Why? Because, in patient trust, he had put his soul into God's hands, and a lifetime had taught him that his trust was not in vain.

If you want like peace in life, like victory in death, like boldness in the Day of Judgment, oh, dear friend! — friend though unknown — let me plead with you to seek it where Paul found it, and where you will find it, in simple faith on God manifest in His Son.

## **2 Timothy 1:12 --‘SOUND WORDS’**

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.’ — 2 Timothy 1:12.

ANY great author or artist passes, in the course of his work, from one manner to another; so that a person familiar with him can date pretty accurately his books or pictures as being in his ‘earlier’ or ‘later’ style. So there is nothing surprising in the fact that there are great differences between Paul's last writings and his previous ones. The surprising thing would have been if there had not been such differences. The peculiarities of the so-called three pastoral Epistles (the two to Timothy, and the one to Titus) are not greater than can fairly be accounted for by advancing years, changed circumstances, and the emergence of new difficulties and enemies.

Amongst them there are certain expressions, very frequent in these letters and wholly unknown in any of Paul's other work. These have been pounced upon as disproving the genuineness of these letters, but they only do so if you assume that a man, when he gets old, must never use any words that he did not use when he was young,

whatever new ideas may have come to him. Now, in this text of mine is one of these phrases peculiar to these later letters — ‘sound words.’ That phrase and its parallel one, ‘sound doctrine,’ occur in all some half-dozen times in these letters, and never anywhere else. The expression has become very common among us. It is more often used than understood; and the popular interpretation of it hides its real meaning and obscures the very important lessons which are to be drawn from the true understanding of it, lessons which, I take leave to think, modern Christianity stands very sorely in need of. I desire now to try to unfold the thoughts and lessons con-rained in this phrase.

I. What does Paul mean by a ‘form of sound words’? I begin the answer by saying that he does not mean a doctrinal formula. The word here rendered ‘form’ is the same which he employs in the first of the letters to Timothy, when he speaks of himself and his own conversion as being ‘a pattern to them that should hereafter believe.’ The notion intended here is not a cut-and-dried creed, but a body of teaching winch will not be compressed within the limits of an iron form, but will be a pattern for the lives of the men to whom it is given. The Revised Version has ‘the pattern; and not ‘the form.’ I take leave to think that there were no creeds in the apostolic time, and that the Church would probably have had a firmer grasp of God’s truth if there had never been any. At all events the idea of a cast- iron creed, into which the whole magnificence of the Christian faith is crushed, is by no means Paul’s idea in the word here. Then, with regard to the other part of the phrase — ‘sound words’ — we all know how that is generally understood by people. Words are supposed to be ‘sound,’ when they are in conformity with the creed of the critic. A sound High Churchman is an entirely different person from a sound Nonconformist.

Puritan and Sacramentarian differ with regard to the standard which they set up, but they use the word in the same way, to express theological statements in conformity with that standard. And we all

know how harshly the judgment is sometimes made, and how easy it is to damn a man by a solemn shake of the head or a shrug of the shoulders, and the question whether he is ‘sound.’

Now, all that is clean away from the apostolic notion of the word in question. If we turn to the other form of this phrase, which occurs frequently in these letters, ‘sound doctrine,’ there is another remark to be made. ‘Doctrine’ conveys to the ordinary reader the notion of an abstract, dry, theological statement of some truth. Now, what the Apostle means is not ‘doctrine’ so much as ‘teaching’; and if you will substitute ‘teaching’ for ‘doctrine’ you get much nearer his thought just as you will get nearer it if for ‘sound,’ with its meaning of conformity to a thee-logical standard, you substitute what the word really means, ‘healthy,’ wholesome, health-giving, healing. All these ideas run into each other. That which is in itself healthy is health-giving as food, and as a medicine is healing. The Apostle is not describing the teaching that he had given to Timothy by its conformity with any standard, but is pointing to its essential nature as being wholesome, sound in a physical sense; and to its effect as being healthy and health-giving. Keep hold of that thought and the whole aspect of this saying changes at once.

There is only one other point that I would suggest in this first part of my sermon, as to the Apostolic meaning of these words, and it is this: ‘healing’ and ‘holy’ are etymologically connected, they tell us. The healing properties of the teaching to which Paul refers are to be found entirely in this — its tendency to make men better, to produce a purer morality, a loftier goodness, a more unselfish love, and so to bring harmony and health into the diseased nature. The one healing for a man is to be holy; and, says

Paul, the way to be holy is to keep a firm hold of that body of teaching which I have presented.

Now, that this tendency to produce nobler manners and purer conduct and holier character is the true meaning of the word ‘

sound' here, and not ' orthodox' as we generally take it, will be quite clear, I think, if you will notice how, in another part of these same letters, the Apostle gives a long catalogue of the things which are contrary to the health-giving doctrine. If the ordinary notion of the expression were correct, that catalogue ought to be a list of heresies. But what is it? A black list of vices — 'deceivers,' 'ungodly, sinners, 'unholy,' profane,' 'murderers,' 'man-slayers,' 'whoremongers,' 'man-stealers,' 'liars,' 'perjured' persons. Not one of these refers to aberration of opinion; all of them point to divergences of conduct, and these are the things that are contrary to the healing doctrine. But they are not contrary, often, to sound orthodoxy. For there have been a great many imitators of that king of France, who carried little leaden images of saints and the Virgin in his hat and the devil in his heart. 'The form of sound words' is the pattern of healing teaching, which proves itself healing because it makes holy. *Now*, that is my first question answered.

## II. Where Paul thought these healing words were to be found.

He had no doubt whatever as to that. They were in the message that he preached of Jesus Christ and His salvation. There and there only, in his estimation and inspired teaching, are such words to be found. The truth of Christ, His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His ascension, the gift of His Divine Spirit, with all the mighty truths on which these great facts rest, and all which flow from these great facts, these, in the aggregate, are the health-giving words for the sickly world.

Now, historically, it is proved to Be so. I do not need to defend, as if it were in full conformity with the dictates and principles of Christianity, the life and practice of any generation of Christian people. But this I do venture to say, that the world has been slowly lifted, all through the generations, by the influence, direct and indirect, of the great truths of Christianity, and that today the very men who, in the name of certain large principles which they have

learned from the gospel, are desirous of brushing aside the old-fashioned gospel, are kicking down the ladder by which they climbed, and that, with all the imperfections, for which we have to take shame to ourselves before God, still the reflection of the perfect Imago which is cast into the world from the mirror of the collective

Christian conduct and character, though it be distorted by many a flaw in the glass, and imperfect by reason of many a piece of the reflecting medium having dropped away, is still the fairest embodiment of character that the world has ever seen. Why, what is the meaning of the sarcasms that we have all heard, till we are wearied of them, about ‘the Nonconformist conscience’? The adjective is wrong; it should be ‘the *Christian* conscience.’ But with that correction I claim the sarcasms as unconscious testimony to the fact that the Christian ideal of character and conduct set forth, and approximately realised, by religious people, is far above the average morality of even a so-called Christian nation. And all that is due to the ‘pattern of health-giving words.’

Now, the historical confirmation of Paul’s claim that these health-giving words were to be found in his gospel is no more than is to be expected, if we look at the contents of that gospel to which he thus appeals. For there never has been such an instrument for regenerating individuals and society as lies in the truths of Christianity, firmly grasped and honestly worked out. Their healing power comes, first, from their giving the sense of pardon and acceptance. Brethren, there is nothing, as I humbly venture to affirm, that will go down to the fountain and origin of all the ills of man, except that teaching ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.’ That reality of guilt, that schism and alienation between man and God, must be dealt with first before you can produce high morality. Unless you deal with that central disease you do very little. Something you do; but the cancer is deep-seated, and the world’s remedies for it may cure pimples on the surface, but are powerless to extirpate the

malignant tumour that has laid hold of the vitals. You must begin by dealing with the disease of sin, not only in its aspect as habit, but in its consequence of guilt and responsibility and separation from God, before you can bring health to the sick man.

And then, beyond that, I need not remind you of how a higher and more wholesome morality is made possible by these health-giving words, inasmuch as they set forth for us the perfect example of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as they bring into operation love, the mightiest of all powers to mould a life, inasmuch as they open up for us, far more solemnly and certainly than ever else has been revealed, the solemn thought of judgment, and of every man giving account of himself to God, and the assurance that 'whatsoever a man soweth here, that,' a thousand-fold increased in the crop, 'shall he also reap' in the eternities. In addition to the example of perfection in the beloved Christ, the mighty motive of love, the solemn urgency of judgment and retribution, the health-giving words bring to us the assurance of a divine power dwelling within us, to lift us to heights of purity and goodness to which our unaided feet can never, never climb. And for all these reasons the message of Christ's incarnation and death is the health-giving word for the world.

But, further, let me remind you that, according to the apostolic teaching, these healing and health-giving effects will not be produced except by that gospel. Some of you, perhaps, may have listened to the first part of my sermon with approbation, because it seemed to fit in with the general disparagement of doctrine prevalent in this day. Will you listen to this part too? I venture to assert that, although there are many men apart from Christ who have as clear a conception of what they ought to be and to do as any Christian, and some men apart from Christ who do aim after high and pure, noble lives, not altogether unsuccessfully, yet on the whole, on the wide scale, and in the long-run, if you change the 'pattern of health-giving words' you lower the health of the world. It seems to me that this generation is an object-lesson in that matter. Why is it that these

two things are running side by side in the literature of these closing years of the century — viz., a rejection of the plain laws of morality, especially in regard of the relations of the sexes, and a rejection of the old-fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ? I venture to think that the two things stand to each other very largely in the relation of cause and effect, and that, if you want to bring back the world to Puritan morality, you will have to go back in the main to Puritan theology. I do not mean to insist upon any pinning of faith to any theological system, but this I am bound to say, and I beseech you to consider, that if you strike out from the ‘pattern of health-giving words’ the truth of the Incarnation, the sacrifice on the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the gift of the Spirit, the ‘health-giving words’ that you have left are not enough to give health to a fly.

III. Lastly, notice what Paul would have us do with these’ health-giving words.’

‘Hold fast the form.., in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.’ Now that exhortation includes three things. Your time will not allow me to do more than just touch them. First it applies to the understanding. ‘Hold fast the teaching’ by letting it occupy your minds Brethren, I am unwillingly bound to acknowledge my suspicion that a very large number of Christian people scarcely ever occupy their thoughts with the facts and principles of the gospel, and that they have no firm and intelligent grasp of these, either singly or in their connection. I would plead for less newspaper and more Bible; for less novel and more gospel. I know how hard it is for busy men to have spare energy for anything beyond their business and the necessary claims of society, but I would even venture to advise a little less of what is called Christian work, in order to get a little more Christian knowledge. ‘Come ye yourselves apart into a solitary place,’ said the Master; and all busy workers need that. ‘Hold fast the health-giving words’ by meditation, a lost art among so many Christians.

The exhortation applies next to the heart. ‘Hold in faith and love.’ If that notion of the expression, which I have been trying to combat, were the correct one, there would be no need for anything beyond familiarising the understanding with the bearings of the doctrinal truths. But Paul sees need for a great deal more. The understanding brings to the emotions that on which they fasten and feed. Faith — which is more than credence, being an act of the will — casts itself on the truth believed, or rather on the Person revealed in the truth; and love, kindled by faith, and flowing out in grateful response, and self-abandonment, are as needful as orthodox belief, in order to hold fast the health-giving words.

The exhortation applies, finally, to Character and conduct. Emotion, even when it takes the shape of faith and love, is as little the end of God’s revelation as is knowledge. He makes Himself known to us in all the greatness of His grace and love in Jesus Christ, not that we may know, and there an end, nor even that knowing, we may feel, and there an end, though a great many emotional Christians seem to think that is all; but that knowing, we may feel, and knowing and feeling, we may be and do what He would have us do and be. We have the great river flowing past our doors. It is not only intended that we should fill our cisterns by knowledge, nor only bathe our parched lips by faith and love, but that we should use it to drive all the wheels of the mill of life. Not he that understands, nor he that glows, but he that does, is the man who holds fast the pattern of sound health-giving words.

The world is like that five-porched pool in which were gathered a great multitude of sick folks. Its name is the ‘House of Mercy,’ for so Bethesda means, tragically as the title seems to be contradicted by the condition of the cripples and diseased lying there. But this fountain once moved gushes up for ever; and whosoever will may step into it, and immediately be made whole of whatsoever disease he has.

## 2 Timothy 1:14--GOD'S STEWARDS

‘That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.’ — 2 Timothy 1:14.

THE Apostle has just been expressing his confidence for himself that ‘God is able to keep that which I have committed’ unto him ‘against that day.’ Here, with intentional parallelism, he repeats the leading ideas and key- words of that great confidence, but in a wholly different connection.

Whether we suppose that the rendering of our version in the twelfth verse is correct or no, there still remains the intentional parallelism between the two verses. In discoursing upon that twelfth verse, I gave reasons for adhering to the translation of our version and regarding the parallel as double. There are two committals. God commits something to us; we commit something to God. But whether that be so or no, there *are*, at all events, two keepings. God keeps, and we have to keep. And if, on the other hand, in both verses the Apostle speaks of a charge committed to men by God, then the contrasted parallel between the two keepings remains and is even increased, because then it is the same thing which God keeps and which we keep. So the whole connection between man’s faithfulness and God’s protection is suggested here. The true Christian life in its entirety may either be regarded as God’s work or the believer’s. We keep ourselves when we let God keep us, and God keeps us by making us able to keep ourselves.

I. Note then, first, our charge.

The Apostle is evidently thinking mainly of the gospel message which was entrusted to Himself and to Timothy. That is shown by the whole context. The previous verse is, ‘ Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.’ And the same connection appears in the First Epistle to Timothy, where the same exhortation is repeated: ‘Keep

that. which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, 'which some professing have erred concerning the faith.' The same idea of the gospel as the deposit committed to the trust of Christian men lies in other words of the first epistle, where the Apostle speaks of the 'gospel of the glory of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.' And it crops up in other expressions of his, such as that he was 'put in trust of the gospel.' It also underlies the very common representation of himself and his colleagues as being 'stewards of the mysteries of God.' But all these expressions describe no prerogative of an apostle, or of a teaching office or order in the Church, but declare the solemn responsibility laid by the great gift bestowed upon all Christian men. Whosoever has accepted the message of salvation for himself is, *ipso facto*, put in charge of that message for carrying it to others. The trust which I place in the gospel makes the gospel a trust which is committed to me. And every believer, howsoever imperfect may be his grasp of the truth, howsoever narrow may be the sphere of his agency, has given into his hands this great charge, that the Word of God is committed to his trust.

You Christian people are responsible in this connection for two things, for the preservation of the truth and for the diffusion of the truth.

You are responsible for its preservation. Some of us, in a special manner, have it given to us in charge to oppose prevailing tendencies which rob the gospel of its glory and of its power, to try to preach it to men, whether they will hear or forbear, in its simplicity and its unwelcomeness, as well as in its sweetness and its graciousness. But for most of us, the responsibility for the preservation of the truth lies mainly in another direction, and we are bound to keep it for the food of our own souls, and to see that the atmosphere in which we live, and the prevailing tendencies around us, the worldliness, the selfishness, the absorption in the things seen to the exclusion of the things that are unseen and eternal, do not rob

us of the treasure which we say that we value. See to it that you keep it as what you profess that it is, the anchor of your hope and the guide of all your lives, binding it upon the palms of your hands that all your work may be sanctified; writing it between your eyes that all your thoughts may be enlightened; and inscribing it on the posts of your doors and your gates that, whensoever you go forth to work, you may go out under its guidance, and when you come back to rest and solitude, you may bear it with you for your meditation and refreshment. The charge that is given to us is the preservation of God's Word, and the gospel which we have received we have received with this written upon it, 'Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

And then, further, all of us Christian people are responsible for the diffusion of that Word. It is given to us that we may spread it, and this is no exclusive prerogative of an apostolic class, or of an order of ministers or clergy in God's Church, but every Christian man and woman who has the Word is thereby bound to tell the Word faithfully.

And then, subordinately and connected with this, I may put another thought, that the reputation and character of our Master are committed to us to keep. People take their notions of Jesus Christ a great deal more from you than from the Bible, and the Christian Church is the true scripture which most men know best. The written revelation is often negated, or at all events neutralised, by the representation which we Christians make of Christ. He has given into our hands His reputation, as if He said: 'Live so that men may know what sort of a Christ I am; and so set forth the spirit of life that was in Me that men may be led to believe that there is something in the truths and principles which make men like you.'

But there is a wider application legitimately to be given to the words of my text, on which I touch for a moment. The great trust which is committed to us all is ourselves; and in connection therewith we are

responsible for two things — first, for the development of character; and second, for the exercise of capacity.

We are responsible for the development of character. We have to cut off and suppress, *or*, at least, to subordinate and regulate, a great deal within us in order that the true self may rise into sovereign majesty and power. We have to cultivate shy graces, unwelcome duties, sides of our character which are not naturally prominent. The faults that we have are not to be cured simply by the repression of them, but by the cultivation of their opposites. All this is given to us to do, and nobody can do it for us. We are stewards of many things, but the most precious gift of which we are stewards is this awful nature of ours, with possibilities that tower heaven- high, and evils that go down to the depths of hell, shut up within the narrow room of our hearts. The man who has *himself* put into his own hands can never want a field for diligent cultivation. And we are responsible for the use of capacities. God gives these to us that we may by exercise strengthen them. And so, brother, as a man, your natural self is your charge; as a Christian, the *word* which brings your' better self, is that which is committed to you to keep.

II. Now, secondly, notice our keeping of our charge. The word rendered here 'to keep' rather means 'to guard' than to keep in the sense of preserving. 'Keeping' is the consequence of the 'guarding' which my text enjoins. We may get a picture which may help us to understand the drift of the apostolic exhortation, if I remind you of two of the uses of the word in its non-metaphorical sense in Scripture. It is the expression employed to describe the occupation of the shepherds on the upland slopes of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. They were 'keeping watch over their flocks by night.' That is how you have to watch yourselves and the word that is committed to your care. Again, it is the word employed to describe the vigilant watchfulness of the sentry outside the prison gates where the apostles lay immured; or of the four quaternions of soldiers that had to take charge of Peter when he was chained to them. And that is

how we have to watch, as the shepherd *over* his flock, as the sentry over the prison house, or as the guard over some treasure. So Christian men and women have to live, exercising all the care needful to prevent the stealing away some of the flock, the escape of some of the prisoners, the filching from them of some of their treasure. Let me expand the apostolic exhortation into two of three precepts.

Cultivate the sense of stewardship. It is a very hard thing for us to keep fresh the feeling that all which we are and have is given to us, and that not for ourselves, but for God. The beginning of evil is the weakening of that sense of responsibility, and the dawning of the dream that we are our own. The prodigal son's downfall began with saying, 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.'

And the next step came naturally after that: 'He gathered all together and went away into a far country.' And the next step came just as naturally after that: 'He wasted his substance in riotous living.'

If sense of stewardship and responsibility is weakened within us, the mainspring of all good is weakened within us, and we shall become self-willed, self-indulgent, self-asserting, God-forgetting. If we think that the talent or the pound is ours, we shall spend it for our own purposes, and that is 'waste.'

And is it not a sad commentary on the tendency of human nature to forget stewardship, and to lose the impression of responsibility, that that very word 'talents,' which is borrowed from Christ's parable, is used in common speech without the slightest sense that it suggests anything about stewardship, faithfulness, or reckoning? Let us, then, take care to cultivate the sense of responsibility.

Again, let us exercise unslumbering vigilance. A great political thinker says, 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' The price of keeping the treasure that God has given us is the same. There are old legends of fabulous riches hid away in some rocky cave amongst the

mountains, guarded by mythological creatures, of whom it is said that their eyes have no lids. They cannot shut them, and they never sleep. And that is what Christians need to be, with lidless, wide-opened, vigilant eyes; watching ever against the evils that are ever around us, and the robbers who are ever seeking to drag the precious deposit from our hands. Live to watch, and watch that you may live.

Then, again, familiarise yourselves with the truth which you have in charge. I am not half so much afraid that intellectual doubts and the formulated conscious disbelief of this generation will affect Christian people, as I am afraid of the unconscious drift sweeping them away before they know. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has a solemn figure in regard of this matter. He says: 'Let us take the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift past them.' And that is exactly what befalls Christian men and women who do not continually renew their familiarity with God's Word and the gospel to which they trust. Before they know where they are, the silent-flowing, swift stream has swept them down, and the truths to which they fancied they were anchored are almost invisible on the far horizon. For one man who loses his Christianity by yielding to the arguments of the other side there are ten who lose it by evaporation. 'As thy servant was busy here and there,' was the lame excuse of the man in the Old Testament for letting his prisoner run away, 'he was gone!' And God knows how he has gone and Where he went.

That is true about a great many who are professing Christian people. The Word has slipped out of their hands, and they do not know how, nor exactly when it escaped from their slack fingers. If you *will* put plucked flowers into a glass without any water you cannot but expect them to wither; and if you will refrain from refreshing your belief and your trust by familiarity with the truths of the gospel, and by meditating upon these, you cannot wonder that they should shrivel up and lose their sweetness for you. Keep that word hid in your hearts that you sin not against Him and it.

And then, further, exercise your gifts. The very worst way to keep the talent is to keep it in a napkin. The man who buried it in the earth, and then dug it up and presented it to his lord, did not know how much weight it had lost by rust and decay while it was hidden away. For though gold does not rust, the gold of the talent that we possess does; and the sure way to make our gifts dwindle is that we neglect to use them. It seems an odd way to keep corn, to fling it broadcast out of a basket over the fields, but ‘there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.’ Live your faith; let what you believe be the guide of your practice; increase your grasp upon it by meditation and by prayer, use your capacities, exercise your faculties, and they will grow, and you will be strong.

III. Lastly, note our Ally in our keeping of our charge. ‘Through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.’ Then all is to be done, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the great indwelling Guest and Helper. So, then, there arise two thoughts from this.

The one is that we keep ourselves best when we give ourselves to God to keep us. The Apostle has just been doing that for himself, and he now would exhort Timothy to do the same. Our faith brings this great Ally into the field. If we commit to God what God has committed to us, then, as the patriarch, upon his dangerous and doubtful path, beheld in the heavens above him the camp of the angels hovering over his little camp, so, if we commit the keeping of ourselves and of all our responsibility in connection with God’s work, to Him, we too may be sure that ‘the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him,’ and that He will keep us.

Then there will be a fourth in the furnace like unto the Son of Man, and no fire shall consume anything but the bonds of those who, in the very fire, trust themselves to the strong hands of God. We best keep ourselves when we give ourselves to God to keep.

But another thought here is that God keeps us by enabling us to keep ourselves. ‘Through the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us’ — so His protection is no mere outward wall of defence around us, nor any change of circumstances which may avert danger, but it is the putting within us of a divine life-principle which shall mould our thoughts, regulate our desires, reinforce our weakness, and be in us a power that shall preserve us from all evil. God fights for us, not in the sense of fighting instead of us, but in the sense of fighting by our sides when we fight. A faith which says, ‘God will take care of me,’ and does not take care of itself, is no faith, but either hypocrisy or self-deceived presumption. Faith will intensify effort instead of leading to shirk it; and the more we trust Him, the more we should ourselves work. We keep ourselves when God keeps us; God keeps us when we keep ourselves. Both things are true, and therefore our fitting temper is the double one of self-distrusting confidence and of earnest diligence.

Dear brother, we travel on a dangerous road. We never can tell from behind what rock a gun barrel may be levelled at us, or where the highwayman may swoop down upon us to rob us of our treasure. That is no country to travel through carelessly, in loose order, with our gun upon another horse away at the back of the caravan, and we ourselves straying hither and thither gathering flowers, or seeking easy places to walk in; but it is a land in which we must be unslumberingly vigilant, and screw ourselves up to all effort. And it is a country in which we shall certainly be robbed unless we commit ourselves unto Him who alone is able to keep us from falling.

*‘Still let me guard the holy fire, And still stir up Thy gift in me.’*

If we say, in life and in death, ‘Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit,’ then we may be humbly, but not idly confident that the old promise will be fulfilled to us: ‘The Lord will keep thee ever more.’

## 2 Timothy 2:4--THE TRUE AIM OF LIFE — PLEASING CHRIST

‘No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.’ — 2 Timothy 2:4.

PAUL had enough to do to infuse some of his own vigour into the feebler nature of Timothy. If we may judge from the prevailing tone of the Apostle’s letters to him, his young assistant lacked courage and energy; was easily beaten down, needed tonics for the ‘often infirmities’ of his mind as well as of his body. The delicate ingenuity with which this letter accumulates all conceivable encouragements for the drooping heart that was to take up the old lion-heart’s nearly finished work, is very beautiful. One topic of encouragement is conspicuous by its absence. There is no rosy painting of the Christian life, or of a Christian teacher’s life, as easy or pleasant to flesh and blood. On the contrary, none of Paul’s letters give more emphatic utterance to the fact that suffering is the law of both.

That is wise; for the best way to-brace people for difficult work and hardship is to tell them fairly what they will have to face. It will act as a filter and Gideon’s test, no doubt, but it will only filter out impure matter, and it will evoke latent enthusiasm; for there is always fascination to generous natures or fervent disciples in the thought of danger and toil, undertaken for a beloved cause or favourite pursuit. Boys are made sailors by the stories of wreck and hardship told them to keep them ashore.

So Paul *encourages* ‘son Timothy’ by putting before him all the toil and the peril which are the conditions of the work to which he has set his hand. In this context we have a number of illustrations and analogies, according to all of which self-denial and persistent work are indispensable. The *wrestler* has not only to brace every limb in his struggle till the muscles stand out like whipcord, but he has to

abide by the laws of the arena. The *farmer* has to exercise long patience, and to labour hard in the field and wild weather, before he can sit down and eat of the fruit of the harvest. *The soldier* has not only to take his life in hand, but to abandon his civil pursuits and make the pleasure of his commander the law of his life. The diligence of other people in their worldly callings may well put us to shame; and if that is not enough, our own diligence in the one half of our life may shame our laziness in the other. All fire there, and all ice here !

Ready for any sacrifice of time and pains in that, grudging every such sacrifice in this!

Our text constitutes the first of that series of illustrative metaphors, each of which adds something of its own to the general idea. In it we have a whole series of striking thoughts suggested, which can be but very imperfectly worked out in the brief space at our disposal.

I. The first thing that strikes one in the words is their grand statement of the all-comprehensive life's aim of the Christian soldier.

There is savagery and devilry enough about the soldiers' trade to make it remarkable that it should be so constantly chosen to illustrate the life of the servants of the Prince of Peace. But there are grand qualities brought out in warfare, which need but to be transferred to their most worthy object; and for the sake of these, the metaphor is used here. The one great peculiarity of military discipline is prompt, unquestioning obedience. Wheresoever inferiors may discuss their superiors' will, or reason on the limits of obedience, or allow themselves a margin of delay, all that is mutiny in the army, and short and sharp work will be made of it, if it appear. 'Their's not to reason why,' but to do what they are bid, when they are bid, as they are bid. Their only standard of duty is their commander's will, and men have been shot as mutineers for doing grand deeds of heroism contrary to orders. The highest guerdon of

courage and faithfulness is the general's praise, and men have gladly flung away their lives for a smile or a 'well done' from some Alexander or Napoleon, counting the gain far greater than the price paid.

Such an attitude towards a fellow-man makes men machines, and yet there is something in that absolute obedience and out-and-out submission to authority very noble in itself, and going a long way to ennoble even warfare. To obey may be bad or good, according to the master and the service; but obedience is fitting for a man, and there can be no attainment of the highest dignity, beauty, or force of character in lawless 'self-pleasing, but only in willing submission to a law and a lawgiver, discerned by the will to be authoritative, by the conscience to be morally good, and by the heart to be love-worthy. If, then, we can find one ruler, leader, and commander of the people, whose authority is rightfully supreme, whose commands coincide with our highest wisdom and lead to our purest felicity, to obey him must lift a life into dignity. Then we have found the secret which will make little things great, and great things small; which will dignify all life, and make the most absolute service the truest freedom, the kingliest rule.

So our text lays hold of the great central peculiarity of Christian morals, when it makes pleasing Christ to be the great, all-comprehensive aim of the Christian soldier. It is this which makes the law of morality, as re-fashioned by Christianity, altogether new and blessed. How entirely different a thing it is to give a poor, feeble, solitary man a living, loving Lord to serve and to please, and to set him down before a cold, impersonal 'ideal'; and say to him, 'There! live up to that, or it will be the worse for you.' The gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the Pattern and Law of duty, in whom all the statuesque purity of the marble is changed into the warm, breathing flesh and blood of a brother. It sets Him forth as the power for duty, who stoops down from His height to reach forth a helping hand to us poor strugglers in the bogs at the mountain's foot, while

Law but looks on with pure and icy eyes at our floundering, and counts the splashes on our dress. It sets Him forth as the Motive for duty, who draws us to what is right by 'the cords of love and the bands of a man,' while the world's morality knows only how to appeal either to low motives of whips and pay, or to fine-spun considerations of right and obligation that melt like October's morning ice before the faintest heat of temptation. Finally, it sets Him forth as the Reward of obedience, teaching us that the true recompense of well-doing lies in pleasing Him, and that to win a smile, an 'honourable mention,' from the General, life itself would be wisely paid.

Such are the great characteristics of Christian morality. Everything clusters round a living Person. All the coldness and remoteness and powerlessness which incurably weaken all law, whether it be that of a statute-book, or of conscience, or of moralists, are changed into their very opposites. Christ is duty; Love is law. Christ is power; Christ is impulse. Christ is motive; Christ is reward. Therefore the hearts and wills that found no attraction, nor owned any constraining authority in any tables of stone or any voice of conscience or any systems of ethics, yield glad obedience to Him who makes His law love; and feeble hands are strengthened to do His will by His own power breathed into them; and the hope of recompense is freed from selfishness when its highest object is His word of praise and His look of pleasure? This, and this alone, is the morality that will work. This is the new thing in Christianity, not so much the contents of the conception of duty, though even these have been changed, but the new form in which Duty appears, in a Person who being what all men should be, is the new power for its fulfilment which He brings, and the new motive whose touch moves all our conduct.

How much more powerful this thought of pleasing Christ is, as a motive, than that of a bare Theism, needs scarcely be named. 'Thou, God, seest me' grandly restraining and stimulating as it is, may easily become a trembling before 'the great Taskmaster's eye,' or

may fade into a very dim thought of a very far-off God. But when we think that the divine eye which rests upon us wept over the sinful city, and sought the denier with the look of sorrowing reproach, untarnished by one glitter of anger, we need not fear His knowledge, nor doubt that He is as near to each of us, as glad at our obedience, and as grieved by our hardness of heart, as ever He was to the little group that lived on His smile long ago. It is no remote God whom we have to please, but our very Brother, the Captain of the Lord's host, who knows all the conditions of the fight.

The thought implies the reality of Christ's present knowledge of each of us. Who, then, is this, who is supposed to know so accurately the true characters — not only the actions, but the motives which determine the worth of the actions — of men in every age and country to the world's end? Who can exercise such an office, and be the centre of such observance, but One only? This must be God manifest in the flesh. Else it is stark nonsense for people, nineteen centuries after His death, to think of pleasing Him; and it is blasphemy worse than nonsense, to set aside all other law and commandments in order to take our duty from His life, and our reward from His approbation. But when we see in Christ the Word made flesh, then it is reasonable to believe that He knoweth the hearts of all men, and reasonable to 'labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

Such singleness of aim contributes in many ways to make life blessed and noble. It simplifies motives and aims, because, instead of being dragged hither and thither by smaller attractions, and so having our days broken up into fragments, we have one great object which can be pursued through all the variety of our occupations, making them all co-operant to one end — and there is blessedness in that. It lifts us above many temptations, which cease to be temptations to a heart intent on pleasing Christ, as glacial plants and animals fled to the north when cosmic changes put an end to the ice age in England. It delivers from care for men's judgment, for the

opinion of the crowd matters very little to the soldier whose fame is to be praised by his commander. It gives energy for work, and turns hard, dry duty into a joy, for it is ever blessed to toil for One we love, and the work that is done with love for its motive, and with the hope of giving Him pleasure for its inspiration, will not be wearisome, though it may be long; nor grievous, though it may be hard. Freedom and dignity, and happiness and buoyancy, all flow from this one transfiguring thought, that the one all-sufficient aim for life is — pleasing Christ, the Captain of the Lord's host.

II. But our text employs a significant form of speech to designate Jesus Christ: 'Him who hath called him to be a soldier'; or as the Revised Version has it, 'enrolled him as a soldier.' And that phrase is used, I suppose, instead of the simple name, in order to bring out the reference to the great act of Christ's, on which the duty of making His pleasure our sovereign aim rests.

In old-world times when war broke out each chief would summon his clansmen to his standard and enrol them as his force. To raise a troop was the act of the leader, who then took command of the men he had raised, and did so because he had raised them. Christ has enrolled us as His soldiers, and because He has done so, he has the right of command.

Now, while there are many ways by which our Lord summons us to His service, we shall, I think, be true to the usual current of New Testament representations, if we see here mainly a reference to the great act by which He draws us to Himself. The fiery cross used to be the signal which summoned the tribesmen to the fray. So Christ's men are summoned by the Cross. His great work for us, His life of sympathy and sorrow, His death of sacrifice and shame, His resurrection of glory — these are the call which He sends out to all the world, to gather loving souls to His side whom He may honour by using as His servants and soldiers. The Cross is the magnet by which He will 'draw all men unto Him'; or in other words, the one

power which will draw men away from a life of self and sin, and hearten them to fight against the evils in themselves and the world which they used to serve, is the fact of Christ's death, believed and rested on. This, and this alone, changes our tastes and makes us deserters from our old colours, to take service under a new Commander. That mighty and unspeakable proof of Love will bend our hearts to obedience when nothing else will, and the voice of endless pity for us, and awful suffering for our sake, which sounds out from Christ on the Cross, is His heart-reaching call to us all to enlist in His service. The message of the Cross is not only a message of forgiveness and blessedness for ourselves, but it is as a trumpet-note of defiance to all the powers of evil, and a call to us to take our part in the fight, which in one aspect was finished when He overcame by death, but in another will last till that far-off future day when He that is called King of kings shall ride forth, followed by all the armies of those who on earth were his soldiers, to fight the last fight, and win the final victory.

He has given Himself wholly for us, therefore He has absolute right of authority over us. Not merely because of His divine nature, not merely because, as we believe, He has been from the beginning the divine agent of all creation and of all providence, but because of His great love and of His utter and bitter sacrifice for us men, does He possess the right to their absolute obedience. His dominion is a dominion founded on suffering; the many crowns are twined round the crown of thorns, as the iron crown of Monza has for foundation a bit of iron said to be a nail of the cross beaten into a circlet, and covered now with gold and jewels. Nothing but entire self-surrender for us can warrant entire authority over us, and only He who tasted death for every man has the right to assume the captainship over men. He gave Himself for us, therefore are we to give ourselves to Him.

He dies for us, and then living, turns to us with, 'Will you not serve Me?' We owe Him lives, souls — all. They are ours by the purchase

of His exceeding bitter pains and death. Surely we shall not refuse His summons to service, which is also a merciful invitation to joy and blessing, but yield ourselves to the attraction of His cross and the magic of His love. Let Him take the command of your lives, and give Him all the secret springs of nature and desire to control. He has called you to be His soldiers, and your plain duty is to please Him. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,' and most chiefly by that chiefest mercy, the sacrifice of Christ, 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God.'

III. Finally, the text brings prominently forward the discipline of abstinence which this warfare requires.

In Paul's time there were no standing armies, but men were summoned from their ordinary avocations and sent into the field. When the hasty call went forth, the plough was left in the furrow, and the web in the loom; the bridegroom hurried from his bride, and the mourner from the bier. All home industries were paralysed while the manhood of the nation were in the field. That state of things suggests the language here. The word rendered 'that warreth' might be more vividly translated, as the Revised

Version has it, 'on service' — the idea being that as long as a man is on a campaign, he can do nothing else but soldiering. When peace is proclaimed, he may go back to farm or merchandise; but in the field, he has but one thing to do — and that is to fight, He will scarcely win the general's good word on other things.

What, then, is the corresponding Christian duty? Of course our text, though originally spoken in reference to Christian teachers' devotion to their work, is not to be confined to them. The sort of work which a Timothy or a Paul may have to do may be peculiar to their offices, but the spirit in which it is to be done, and the conditions of faithfulness, are the same for all doers of all sorts of work for Christ. If the apostle and the teacher need non-entanglement 'with the affairs of this life,' all Christians need it just as much.

Now it is to be noticed that the parallel of the soldier on service and the Christian in *his* warfare fails in this one respect: that the soldier had to abandon entirely all other occupation, even the most needful and praiseworthy, because he could not both do them and fight; but the abandonment of the affairs of this life is not necessary for us, because occupation with them is not incompatible with our Christian warfare. Nay, so far from that, these 'affairs' furnish the very fields on which a large part of that warfare to be waged. If these are abandoned, what is left to fight about? What is our Christian warfare but the constant struggle with evil in ourselves and temptation in the world; the constant effort to bring all the activities of our spirits and hands under the power of Christ's law, and to yield our whole selves, in heart, mind, will, and deed, to Him? How then can that warfare be waged, and that ennobling self-surrender achieved, but by the heroic, patient effort to deal with all the affairs of this life in a Christ-like temper, and to Christ-pleasing ends? The Christian who abandons any of these is much liker the frightened deserter who runs from his post, and may expect a stern rebuke, if nothing worse, than the faithful soldier, whose face will one day brighten beneath the smile of his chief.

We must put stress on that word 'entangled,' if we would rightly understand this saying. It is not occupation with the things of life, but entanglement in them, that is fatal to the possibility of pleasing the King. The metaphor is plain enough, and vivid enough. As some poor struggling fish in the meshes of a net vainly beats its silver scales off, and gasps out its life, and swims no more in the free deep; or as some panting forest creature is checked in its joyous bounding, and, tangled in the half-seen snares, only tightens the cords by its wild plunging; or as some strong swimmer is caught in the long, brown seaweed which clings to his limbs till it drags him under and drowns; so men are snared and caught and strangled by these multitudinous cords and filaments of earthly things. The fate of Jonah befall, many a professing Christian, who, if he know what had

really come to him, might cry with him, ‘The weeds are wrapped about my head.’

We are not bound to abandon the affairs of this life, but we are called upon to prevent their interfering with our warfare. If we are caught in the thicket whilst we are pressing on to the fight, out with the billhooks and hew it down. It may be full of pretty peeps, where there are shade and singing- birds; but if it stands in our way, it has to be grubbed up. ‘If thy right eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for thee.’

And that interference can easily be detected, if we honestly wish to do so. Does a certain thing — some legitimate, or even praiseworthy occupation, or possession, the exercise of some taste or accomplishment, some recreation, some companionship-clog my feet when I ought to march; clip my wings when I ought to soar; dim my eyes when I ought to gaze on God? Then no matter what others may do about it, my plain duty is to give it up. It is entangling me. It is interfering with my warfare, and I must cut the cords. I can only do so by entire abstinence. Perhaps I may get stronger some day, and be able to use it as not abusing it; but I cannot venture on that at present. So go it must. I judge nobody else, but whoever may be able to retain that thing, whatever it be, without slackening hold on Christ, I cannot.

So, brethren, if you find that legitimate occupation and affairs are absorbing your interests, and interfering with your clear vision of God, and making you less inclined and less apt to high thoughts and noble purposes, to lowly service and to Christ-like life, your safety lies in at once shaking off the venomous beast that has fastened on you into the fire. Unless the occupation be a plain duty, a post where the Captain has set you as sentry, and which it would be fiat disobedience to forsake, leave it at any cost, if you would kept your Christian integrity.

But if you have to stand to your post, perilous though it be, lift your heart to Him who can neutralise the poison, and who will so pour health into the veins of His servants, that, in the execution of His commands, ‘they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.’

The affairs of this life must not entangle us; that is the one indispensable condition to pleasing Him. That they may not, they must always be rigidly subordinated, and used as helps to our higher life. Sometimes, when they cannot be so used, they must be abandoned altogether. Each must settle that for himself. Only let us make it our one great purpose in life that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him; and that single, lofty motive will breathe unity into our life, and giving us clear, sure insight into good and evil, will instruct us, by the instinct of hearts and wills tuned to harmony to His, to shun the evil and cleave strenuously to the good. So living, ever looking to His face to catch His smile as our highest reward, it will not be hard to give up anything that hinders the light of His countenance shining upon us. So surrendering, we may hope to be His obedient, and therefore in highest reality, His victorious soldiers. So fighting, we may possess in our hearts the assurance that His wonderful mercy accepts even our poor service as well-pleasing in His sight, and may lay ourselves down in peace on the field where we seem to ourselves to have borne ourselves so badly and been so often beaten, with the wondrous hope to keep us company in the grave, that when the triumph comes, and our King goes up as conqueror, we, even we, shall follow, and receive from His lips the praise, and from His face the smile, which make the highest heaven of reward for all Christ’s soldiers.

## **2 Timothy 2:13--A FAITHFUL GOD**

‘He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself.’ — 2 Timothy 2:13.

I HAVE chosen this text, not as intending to deal with it only, so much as with the great thought to which it gives such emphatic

expression. The faithfulness of God is a familiar enough phrase, but I suspect that the depth and scope of the thought are not as familiar as the words. It is employed in Scripture in many ways, and with many different applications of exhortation and encouragement. Like a prism held at right angles to the light, the thought flashes out different tints according as the rays impinge upon it. It is a favourite with Paul He speaks it in his very first letter, and here, in his last, after a lifetime spent in testing God, he comes back to it.

He had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles, and now, when he has all but done with earth, he sets to his seal that God is true. But all the other New Testament writers employ the expression likewise, and I have thought that it may be profitable to gather together the various aspects and applications of this great truth in Scripture, and so to draw out, if we may, some of the lofty thoughts and treasures of strength and hope which are shrined in it.

I. Let me ask the question what the faithfulness of God means. Now when we speak of one another as 'faithful,' we mean that we adhere to our word; that we keep faith with men, that we discharge the obligations of our office or position, and that so we are trustworthy. We mean just the same things when we speak about the faithful God.

I suppose that the first thought that occurs to most of us when God is called faithful is that it means that He keeps His promise. That, of course, is included in the idea, but it is very noteworthy that this, which to most of us is the only meaning of the expression, is rarely its meaning in the New Testament. Out of all the cases in which the phrase occurs it only twice has reference to God's fulfilment of His spoken words; and these two instances both occur in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: 'He is faithful that promised,' and 'She judged Him faithful that promised.' Now it is a great truth that out of the darkness God has spoken; that, like some constitutional monarch, He has declared the principles of His government, and so

has bound Himself by articulate expressions to follow out these in His dealings. He is not a despot; He is a King who has laid down the law to which He Himself will adhere. His promises hang out over the troubled stream of life, like boughs from the trees on the bank, for His half-drowned children to grasp at and to hold by.

But great as that thought of our God's fulfilment of His every word is, it does not go half way down to the depths of meaning in the New Testament use of the expression 'the faithful God.' For my text witnesses to a deeper meaning. He cannot *deny Himself.* That is Paul's notion of the faithfulness of God; that His nature and character constitute for Him, if I may so say, a solemn obligation; that He is His own law; that He is bound by what He is, and that He never can be, in the smallest degree, anything contradictory to, or falling beneath, the level of His own equable, consistent, and uniform Self. As God, He must be true to the character of goodness and wisdom which the very name of God brings with it. We drop below our best selves; contradictory impulses and thoughts fight in our nature; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

No man is always himself; God is always *Himself.* We are like the little brooks that are dried in drought and swelled in spate, are parched in summer and frozen in winter, but this great river is always bank-full, and always clear and always flowing. This ocean is tideless and has no ebb or flood; and you can look down into its deepest depths, and as far as the vision of the eye can go, all is clear and pure, and where vision fails, it is not that the ocean is dark but that the sense is limited. So John says, in his infantile-angelic way, with a simplicity that is sublime, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' The sun has spots; it has, as astronomers tell us, a photosphere, an envelope that gives light, but possibly its core is black and dark. But that is not so with the true Light. 'God is faithful; He cannot deny Himself.'

Then there is another deep thought in the word which is recurrent in the various applications of the expression throughout the New Testament — that God's faithfulness implies that He is true, not only to His words, not only to Himself, but also to the trend and drift, so to speak, of His past acts. That thought is applied in the New Testament in two different ways. Peter says to the troubled disciples to whom he was writing, 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' The fact of having made creatures binds God to certain obligations in regard to them, and He will discharge them. The other application of the idea of God's faithfulness is in reference to His past acts bearing on man's redemption. We find verses like these: 'Faithful is He that calleth you';

'God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son; The thought there is that, by the fact of His redeeming work, God has come under certain obligations to the persons who yield to the invitation that is wrapped up in the message and gifts of Christ and of Christ's Spirit, and that He will faithfully discharge these.

II. Now, then, carry these three simple thoughts with you — faithful to His word, faithful to Himself, faithful to His past — and let us ask, in the second place, what does this faithfulness guarantee?

What does His faithfulness as Creator guarantee to the creature whom He has made?

It guarantees, first, that the faithful Creator will care for His creature's well-being. Creation is not merely a work of power, nor merely a necessary process, as some people seem to think. It is the outcome of the love of God, and so the wise psalmist says, 'To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endureth for ever.' He came forth, and poured Himself, as it were, into beings because His name is Love, and having thus created, He recognises the obligations under which He has thereby come. The smallest microscopic animal, because it has the mysterious gift of life, has a claim on God; and He

is bound — I was going to say to do His utmost, but all that He does is His utmost — to care for that creature's well-being. The birds lay their eggs, and hatch their young, and then let these go as they will. Men sometimes forget the duties of parents and the responsibilities that are involved therein; but God the Creator lets us plead His faithfulness with Him, and turn round to Him and say, 'Thou hast made me; therefore-I bring in 'my hand Thine own bill, with Thine own name to it. Pay it, O God!' 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him as to a faithful Creator.'

Especially does this conception of His faithfulness to His past in creation guarantee to us that all desires implanted by Him will be satisfied, and all needs created by Him will be supplied. Our wishes, when they are right, are prophecies of our possessions. God has put no craving in a man's heart which He does not mean to fill. Remember the homely old proverb: 'He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them.' And if in thy heart there are longings which thou knowest are not sinful, be sure that these are veiled prophets of a divine gift. All these necessities of ours, all these hungry desires, all these sometimes painful thirsts of the soul that we try to slake at muddy and broken cisterns — all these are meant to take us straight to God. They are like the long indentations of the coast on our western shores, openings by which the flashing waters may run far inland and bathe the roots of the everlasting hills. So when God gives us a desire, He binds Himself to fulfil it. The world is a bewildering and unanswerable riddle and mystery, and human life is one long misery, unless we believe and know that because He is the faithful Creator no man need hunger with a ravening desire after food that is not provided, nor need any man thirst with a thirst that there is no water anywhere to slake.

Again, his great thought of the divine faithfulness as Creator guarantees that our tasks shall be proportioned to *our* strength. So Paul uses the thought in one tender sentence, when he says 'God is faithful; who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are

able.’ Or as the psalmist has it in his sweet words, ‘He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.’ Nothing above our power will ever be laid upon us. Careless and cruel drivers load their horses beyond their strength, and the patient drudge pulls until it drops. Unwise engineers put too much pressure on their boilers, or try to get too much work out of their engine. But God knows how much pressure the hearts that He makes can stand, and what is the utmost weight of the load that we can lift; and He will not be less merciful and faithful to His creatures than is the merciful man to his Beast. He is the faithful Creator who recognises His obligations to care for the works of His own hands, who will satisfy their desires, and supply the needs that He has made, who will shape their burdens according to the strength of their shoulders.

And if we turn to the other side of the thought, and ask what is guaranteed by God’s calling of us in Christ Jesus, then we get three answers.

The first thing that is guaranteed is forgiveness. The Apostle John, in words that are often misunderstood, grasps the thought of God’s faithfulness in this application when he says, ‘He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Since Christ has come, and has died in order that men might be pardoned and cleansed, God’s faithfulness is implicated in God’s pardoning mercy; and He would neither be faithful to His promises, nor to His past act in Christ’s mission, nor to the invitation and call that He has sounded in our *ears*, unless, when we obeyed that call, we entered into the full possession of His pardoning grace. So the gentle, tender attribute of Mercy becomes solemn, and stately, and eternal, when it is regarded as the outcome of His faithfulness. In some tropical forests you will find strong tree-trunks out of which spring the most radiant and ethereal-looking blossoms. So the fair flower of forgiving mercy springs from the steadfast bole of the divine faithfulness. He is ‘Just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus’

Again, God's faithfulness guarantees the progressive perfecting of Christian character. That is the application of the thought which is most frequent in Paul's letters. We find it, for instance, in the passage Where the prayer that the saints in Thessalonica might be 'preserved, body, soul, and spirit, blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus,' is, by the Apostle, based on the words 'faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.' And a similar collocation of ideas is found in other passages, which I need not quote to you now. The progressive perfecting of the Christian life is guaranteed by the thought of the faithfulness of God. He does not begin a work and then get disgusted with it, or turn to something *else, or* find that His resources will not avail to work it out to completion-That is how we do. He never stops till He ends. As the prophet says about another matter, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house; His hands shall also finish it.'

I remember a place on our coasts where some man, who had not calculated his resources, nor the strength of the ocean, began to build a breakwater' and sea-walls, and to-day the blocks of dislodged concrete are lying in wild confusion on the beach, and the victorious waves break over them at every tide, and laugh at the abortive design. None that look on God's work will ever have the right to say, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' There are no half-completed failures in God's workshop. Only you have to keep yourself under His influences. It is useless to talk about the 'final perseverance of the *saints,*' unless you remember that only they who continuously yield themselves to God are continuously the subjects of His cleansing and hallowing grace, If they do, the progressive perfecting of those upon whom He has begun to work is sure. Like some patient artist, He lays touch upon touch on the canvas, or smites piece after piece off the marble, till the ideal is realised, and stands there before Him. Like some patient seamstress, He works needleful after needleful of varying colours of silk on the tapestry, until the whole pattern is accomplished. 'He is faithful; He also will do it.'

But again, that conception of the divine faithfulness guarantees ultimate blessedness. That thought is always taken in connection with the preceding one, in the various passages to which reference has just been made. Paul says in another place, basing his assurance on the same thought of the divine faithfulness; 'He will confirm you unto the day of the Lord Jesus.' And so we have to think that just because God is faithful, therefore the Christian life here on earth, because it is so much and because it is so little, because of its devotion and because of its selfishness, bears in itself the prophecy of a time when all that is here checked tendency shall become triumphant realisation; and when the plant that here was an exotic, and did put forth buds, though poor and pale compared with what it would give in its natural soil, shall be transplanted into the higher house, and there shall blossom for evermore. God is a liar unless heaven is to complete the experiences of earth. If these poor natures of ours at their best here were all that Christ had won by the travail of His soul, do you think He would be satisfied? Certainly not. We need heaven to vindicate the faithfulness of God.

III. And now one word is all that I can spare on what I meant to make the last point of my sermon, and that is, what attitude in us corresponds to the faithfulness of God?

I need only quote one of the expressions in the Epistle to the Hebrews to give the answer, 'Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.' Our faith corresponds with and is the answer to God's faithfulness. As with two instruments tuned to the same pitch, when a note is struck on the *one*, the chords of the other vibrate it back again, so God's faithfulness should awake the music of answering faith in our responsive and vibrating hearts. If He is worth trusting let us trust Him.

But, further, unwavering faith is the only thing that truly corresponds to unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock, and

since He is faithful, do not answer his steadfast faithfulness with a tremulous and vacillating confidence. What would you think of a man that had given to him some magnificent site on which to rear a fortress; some impregnable crag which he might crown with a sure defence; if, on the top of it, instead of rearing granite walls that might match their foundation, he should run up some hasty shelter of lath and plaster, or of fluttering canvas, and so think that he had adorned, when he had insulted the rock on which he built. Make your faith to match God's faithfulness, and 'commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator, leaving all things in His hands, and trusting them absolutely unto Him.

Imitate the faithfulness in such fashion as you may. Paul in one place says, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not yea and nay.' It does not become a man who is trusting to the faithful God to be shift and unreliable in his own utterances and manifestations to men.

Let us turn away from the illusions of vain hope, from all doubtful refuges, from all the fleeting defences and treasures that earth can give. Why should we build upon a sandbank when we can build on the Rock of Ages? Why should we trust mere wealth, creaturely love, success, to do for us what only the faithful God can do? All these deceive or betray or fail *or* pass.

They are unworthy of trust. 'God is faithful'; Christ is 'the faithful and true witness.' 'This is the faithful saying... that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' If we will join ourselves to the faithful God and accept the faithful saying of His faithful witness, our hearts will be calm, our lives will be steadied, we shall be delivered from the misery of leaning on props which, like rotten branches, break beneath our weight. On earth we shall attain growing completeness, and shall pass thence to that perfecting in the day of the Lord Jesus which the faithful God, by His words, by His great redeeming act, and by His present workings on us, has bound

Himself to give us. There we may hope to hear the wondrous welcome, which points to our assimilation to Him in whom we trust: ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’

## **2 Timothy 2:19--THE FOUNDATION AND THE SEAL**

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’ — 2 Timothy 2:19.

THERE was a great deal in the Apostle Paul’s last days to excuse despondency and sadness. For himself he was poor, and a prisoner, lonely and *old*, looking forward to the near approach of a bloody death. For the gospel and the Church the outlook was black too. Evil had already begun to lift its head, and was threatening to increase. So this, his last letter, is full of gloomy vaticinations, but in it there is none of the pessimism that belongs to old people, none of the despondency which so often seizes upon leaders of thought and action when they come to the end of their lives, and see how little they have done, and how threateningly the clouds are gathering. But throughout, side by side with the clearest perception of evil symptoms and growing dangers, there is unconquerable confidence.

This text is a remarkable illustration of that. He has just been speaking about errors that are threatening to flood the Church, and he speaks with very grave and vehement words. And then all at once with this ‘nevertheless’ he, as it were, swings right round, and his whole soul leaps up in the glad confidence that, whatever may happen, and whatever has to be abandoned, and whoever may go away, ‘the foundation of God stands sure.’ So he heartens up his young brother Timothy, who seems to have been of a great deal softer stuff than the old man, and bids him be of good cheer and quit himself like a man.

The words of my text, then, seem to me to be very precious to us in regard to the widest interests of Christianity, and in regard to our

own individual standing, especially in times like those in which our lot is cast; times of transition, when a great deal is going that past generations used to think sacred, and a great many timid people are trembling for the Ark of God; and a great many old people like me are thinking that the old gospel is in danger of passing away from the face of the earth. 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.' So let me just say a word or two about this text.

I. Look at this joyous confidence of the old man, side by side with the clearest perceptions of encircling dangers.

The 'foundation,' in the New Testament, is generally Jesus Christ Himself. Here the metaphor is used in a somewhat different fashion. The 'foundation' in the present case is not a part of a building, but the whole building, conceived of as being founded by God. 'The foundation of God' is, in other words, that which is founded by God — that is to say, the whole house, whatever that may be, which he himself has 'established on the tops of the mountains.' And you will find that that explanation is borne out by the fact that in the very next verse the Apostle speaks about 'the house,' which he also meant when he spoke of the foundation of God. Of course that 'house' is, in one aspect, the Church, but the Church not as a mere institution or external organisation, but as being the witness to the gospel. It is that, and the Christ who is the gospel, which stands firm, whatever may happen. There is a great deal of idolatry of the Church.

What makes it precious, and what makes it eternal, is the message that is committed to its charge.

Now it seems to me to be of very prime importance that this joyous confidence, calm and assured, should be the habitual temper of us all. The more distinctly and clearly we apprehend, and the more painfully we feel the perils, the imperfections, and the threatening errors of the present, the more should we take our stand upon this one truth, that what God has founded is indestructible, and, standing

there, we may look all round the three hundred and sixty degrees of the horizon, and no matter what formidable dangers may arise, and hurry across, darkening the sea like the thunder-clouds in the heavens, we may be sure that no tempest can break which will damage the ship that carries Christ and His fortunes. Man may go, ‘nevertheless’; errors may arise, ‘nevertheless’; Churches, individuals, may become unfaithful, ‘nevertheless’; candlesticks may be removed, lights quenched, communities may be honeycombed by worldliness, if the salt may lose its savour, ‘nevertheless that which is founded by God stands sure.’ The history of the past tells us that. Why, it is the miracle of miracles that Christian people having been what they have been, and being what they are, the Church of God has not been annihilated long, long ago. Why is it? Only because that which it bears and He who is in it are indestructible, and whilst the envelope may be changed, the central Truth and the living Person who is in the Church, in spite of all its corruptions and infirmities, cannot die, nor be suppressed *nor* removed.

So, brethren, standing firmly as we may upon this rock of a Church indestructible, because of the immortal Christ who is in it and the eternal gospel which is committed to it, it does not become us to have our hearts in our mouths at every change that may be passing, and that must necessarily pass, upon the external organisation, which is subject, like other institutions, to time and change. What can *go*, let it go. It is the dead leaves that are blown off the trees. Men make breakwaters with endless pains, and deposit great blocks of concrete that they think will fling back the wildest waves in vain spray, and a winter storm comes, and one wave puts out its tongue and licks up the whole structure, and it is a mass of ruins. Yes; and the same storm that smashed the breakwater runs up harmlessly on the humble sand which God has made to be His breakwater, and which has the power to say to the wildest tempest: ‘Here shall thy proud waves be stayed.’ Much may go, ‘nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure.’ So do not be frightened out of your wits — that

is to say, out of your confidence — by ‘higher criticism’ and ‘advanced *views*,’ and right-hand defections and left-hand corruptions, and the failures of communities that call themselves churches to live up to the height of their responsibilities, or at the approach of new ways of looking at old truths. And do not fancy that because the cart that carries the ark jogs, and the oxen stumble, there is any harm coming to the ark. ‘The foundation of God standeth sure.’ So let us welcome change of all that is human in the doctrine, and polity, and practice of God’s Church, and never mind what becomes of men-made creeds, and men-made ceremonies, and men-made churches. What is of God will stand. Let us be glad when ‘the things that can be shaken’ are ‘removed,’ that ‘the things which cannot be shaken’ may stand all the more firmly.

II. Notice here the divine side of the guarantee of this confidence.

‘The firm foundation of God stands’; and then the Apostle goes on, in a very picturesque fashion, ‘having this seal.’ That is a mixture of metaphors which makes a rhetorician’s hair stand on end. Paul does not mind about mingling metaphors. You cannot very well seal a foundation, but the idea in his mind is that of the confirmation, the guarantee, the pledge of the confidence that he has just been expressing. He goes on to expand the metaphor. The seal has two inscriptions on it, like the obverse and reverse of a coin, or like two sentences which might be written on the two lintels of a door. The one gives the divine and the other the human sides of the guarantee.

As for the former, the divine, it is, ‘The Lord knoweth them that are His.’ ‘The *Lord*’ here is, I take it, Christ. And what is the guarantee that is contained in these words? If you seek for the explanation of that phrase in its deepest, most blessed, most courage-giving sense, listen to diviner words than Paul’s. ‘I know My sheep, and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father.’ That knowledge is not the mere divine attribute of omniscience, which may have in it consolation, or may not, but it is something far

more tender, close, gracious, and strength- giving than the bare thought of an all-seeing eye. The 'knowledge' which Jesus has of His sheep is a knowledge based upon, and perfected in, closest love and tenderest sympathy, and of which that ineffable communion from the depths of eternity, in which the Father knoweth the Son, and the Son knoweth the Father, and the two knowledges intertwine and interflow into one sacred, and, to us, inconceivable bond, is the example. Thus close, though we cannot say so close; thus tender, though we cannot say so tender; thus loving, though we cannot say so loving, is the bond of that knowledge which unites Jesus Christ to every soul that belongs to Him.

And with that guarantee of a knowledge which means the closest union that is possible, the individuality of the two united persons being preserved, surely there comes, floated, as it were, like some precious treasure in a cedar ark upon the surface of that ocean of divine knowledge, the assurance that such a knowledge will guard against all evil and all danger its peaceful and happy objects. If the Lord thus 'knows them that are His,' the knowledge will be a wall of fire round about them, as well as a glory in the midst of them.

That knowledge means, then, protection and care. He will not lose what belongs to Him. He is not such a careless Owner as that a sheep may stray out of the fold and the Shepherd never notice it. He is not such a careless Householder as that from His purse there may drop, and into some dusty corner may roll away, a coin, and He not know that He has lost one of the pieces. He is not such a heartless Brother as that the younger brother may go away into the far-off land and there be starving, and the Brother's heart at home have no pangs and no sense of separation. But He 'knows them that are His,' and, knowing them, He holds them with the grip of tenacious possession as well as of tender love.

So there is the deep, the sure, the divine guarantee that the foundation standeth firm. So, brethren, it is wise for us to look at the

dangers, to be fully aware of the perils, to be tremblingly conscious of our own weakness, but it is folly and faithlessness to look at the danger so exclusively, or to feel our own weakness so keenly as that either one or the other, or both of them combined, shall obscure to our sight the far greater and confidence-giving truth of the knowledge, the sympathy, and the extended protecting hand, of our Brother and our Lord. We belong to Him if we have yielded our hearts to Him, and He will not 'suffer His Holy One to see corruption,' here or hereafter. If you look down from the narrow ledge of the Alpine *arrete* to the thousand feet of precipice on either side of the two or three inches where you have your footing you will get giddy and fall. If you look up you will walk steadily. Do not ignore the danger, nor presumptuously forget your own weakness, but remember 'when I said my foot slippeth Thy mercy held me up.' Recognise the slippery ice and the feeble foot, and couple with them the other thought, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.'

III. Now, lastly, here we have the human side of the guarantee.

The reverse of the coin, the other side of the foundation bears, deep-cut, this inscription: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,' and the two inscriptions are always to be held together. Look how they fit one another. The one is a promise; the other is a commandment. The one says a deep thing about God; the other says a plain thing about us. It is of no use going up into the heights of 'the Lord knoweth them that are His,' unless you also come down to the simple teaching, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' The Jews believed the first of these two inscriptions, and it was all their religion; look what wild work it made of them and their morality, and their whole nation. There have been plenty of Christian people who have been so absorbed in the contemplation of 'unconditional election,' 'eternal predestination,' 'final perseverance,' and all the rest of the theological formularies that have been spun out of these words, that they have forgotten the other side altogether. And so there has been

licence, and a presumptuous building upon a supposed past; there has been a contempt for the ‘outsiders,’ and the driving of a coach and six through the plainest teachings of common righteousness and morality. And the only way to keep ‘the Lord knoweth them that are His’ from being a minister of sin is, in the same breath, to say, ‘Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’

To name the Name of Christ is the same as to say that you are His. And if you are, the best proof that you do belong to Jesus Christ is your living the life of plain, practical righteousness, and putting away from yourself everything that is evil. People talk about looking into themselves for evidences of their being ‘saved,’ as they say. I would rather take your neighbour’s opinion as to whether you are saved or not than yours; and you will be far more likely to come to the possession of calm assurance that you do belong to Jesus Christ, if your assurance is based upon this, ‘I am living as He would have me to do.’ That is the infallible sign that you are His. That homely, pedestrian righteousness, down amongst the commonplaces of daily life, and the little things of it, that, and not emotions, however soaring; not aspirations, however ardent; not the consciousness of communion apart, however deep and sweet, is the sign that we are Christ’s. However necessary all these things are, still they are necessary mainly as means to an end, and the end of all the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all these joys and experiences of the individual Christian soul, is to make us live righteously, soberly, godly, in this present world. And the more we do thus live, the more we shall get, not only the consciousness of belonging to Jesus Christ, but the help by which we shall be able to stand.

So, dear brethren, my one last word to you is, hold these two things ever together in your minds and thoughts. ‘What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.’ You have a right to be confident, because, far deeper than, and prior to, anything that you do, there are the knowledge, the love, the sympathy, and the outstretched hand of

the loving and upholding Saviour. But you have only the right to the confidence based upon his knowledge of you, if that confidence is working in you a departing from iniquity. If you know that you are trying, in your poor way, to do that, and that you are trying to do it for His sake, and because you think that you are His, then, whatever may happen to others, whatever may befall some of the outworks of your faith or belief, whatever changes may impend, you may be sure of this, that ‘the foundation of God standeth sure,’ and that, weak as we are, building upon Him who is the foundation, we shall be able to resist all the assaults of evil

Only remember, that Christ Himself has told us that many would come to Him and say, ‘Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?’ And He will say unto them,

‘Depart from Me, I never knew you,’ and the proof that He never did is that He has to address them as ‘Ye that work iniquity’

## **2 Timothy 2:20, 21--THE GREAT HOUSE AND ITS VESSELS**

‘But In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.’ — 2 Timothy 2:20, 21

OUR text begins with a ‘but.’ It, therefore, suggests something which may seem to contradict or to modify what has gone before. The Apostle has been speaking about what he calls the ‘foundation of God,’ or the building founded by God, whereby he means the Church. He has been expressing triumphant confidence that, as thus founded, it is indestructible, whatever dangers may threaten or defections may weaken it. But the very contemplation of that grand ideal suggests darker thoughts. He carries on his metaphor, for the ‘great house’ is suggested by ‘the foundation of God,’ and yet the

two things do not refer to precisely the same object. The building founded by God which stands fast, whatever happens, is what we call in our abstract way, the 'invisible Church,' the ideal community or aggregate of all who are truly joined to Jesus Christ. The great house is what we call the visible Church, the organisation, institution, or institutions comprising those who profess to be thus joined. The one is indestructible, as founded by God; the other is not, being made by men, and composed of heterogeneous elements.

This heterogeneousness of its elements is suggested by the further metaphor, of the vessels of different materials, value, and use. The members of the Church are the various vessels. When we come down from the heights of ideal contemplation to face the reality of the Church as an organisation in the world, we are confronted with this grave fact, that its members are some of them 'gold and silver,' some of them 'wood' and 'earth.' And that fact modifies the triumphant confidence already uttered, and imposes upon us all very plain duties. So I wish to look now at the three things that are suggested to me here. First, a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution; second, an inspiring possibility open to us all; and, lastly, a plain direction as to the way by which the possibility may become a reality.

I. Then we have here a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution.

'In a great house there are vessels of gold and silver.' There they stand, ranged on some *buffet*, precious and sparkling, and taken care of; and away down in kitchens or sculleries there are vessels of wood, or of cheap common crockery and pottery. Now, says Paul, that is like the Church as we have to see it in the world. What is the principle of the distinction here? At first sight one might suppose that it refers to the obvious inequality of intellectual and spiritual and other gifts or graces bestowed upon men; that the gold and silver are the more brilliantly endowed in the Christian community,

and the wood and the earth are humbler members who have less conspicuous and less useful service to perform. But that is not so. The Bible never recognises that distinction which the world makes so much of, between the largely and slenderly endowed, between the men who do what are supposed to be great things, and those who have to be content with humbler service. Its principle is, 'small service is true service whilst it lasts,' and although there are diversities of operation, the man who has the largest share of gifts stands, in Heaven's estimate, no whit above the man who has the smallest. All are on the one level; in God's great army the praise and the honours do not get monopolised by the general officers, but they come down to the privates just as abundantly, if they are equally faithful.

And then another consideration which shows us that it will not do to take gold and silver on the one hand, and wood and earth on the other, as marking the cleavage between the largely and the slenderly endowed members of the Church, is the fact that the way to get out of the one class and into the other, as we shall have to see presently, is by moral purity and not by the increase of intellectual or other endowments. The man that cleanses himself comes out of the category of 'wood' and 'earth,' and passes into that of 'gold and silver.' Thus the basis of the distinction, the ground of classification, lies altogether in goodness or badness, purity or impurity, worthiness or unworthiness. They who are in the highest degree pure are the 'gold and silver.' They who are less so, or not at all so, are the 'wooden' and the 'earthen' vessels. The same line of demarcation is suggested in another passage which employs several of the same phrases and ideas that are found in my text. We read in it about the foundation which is laid, and about the teachers building upon it various elements.

Now these elements, on the one hand 'gold, silver, and precious stones,' and on the other hand 'wool, hay, and stubble,' may be the doctrines that these teachers proclaimed, or perhaps they may be the

converts that they brought in. But in any case notice the parallelism, not only in regard to the foundation, but in regard to the distinction of the component parts of the structure — ‘gold and silver,’ as here, and the less valuable list headed, as here, by ‘wood; and then, by reason of the divergence of the metaphor, ‘hay and stubble,’ in the one ease, and ‘earthenware’ in the other. But the suggestion of both passages is that the Church, the visible institution, has in it, and will always have in it, those who, by their purity and consistency of Christian life, answer to the designation of the gold and the silver, and those who, by their lack of that, fail into the other class, of wooden and earthen vessels.

Of course it must be so. ‘What act is all its thought had been?’ Every ideal, when it becomes embodied in an institution, becomes degraded; just as, when you expose quicksilver to the air, a non-transparent film and scum creeps across the surface. The ‘drag-net’ in one of Christ’s parables suggests the same idea, There are no meshes that ever man’s knitting-needle has formed that are fine enough to keep out the bad, as the Church necessarily includes both sets of people.

I do not need to dwell upon the question as to whether in these least worthy members of that community are included people that have some faint flickering light of God in their hearts, real though very imperfect Christians, or whether it means only those who are nominally, and not at all really, joined to the Lord. The parting lines between these two classes are very evanescent and very slight; and it is scarcely worth while calling them two classes at all. But only let me remind you that this recognition of the necessary intermingling of unworthy and worthy professors in every Christian Church is no reason for us Nonconformists departing from our fundamental principle that we should try to keep Christ’s Church clear, as far as may be, of the intrusion of unworthy members. The Apostle is not speaking about the conditions that ought to be imposed as precedent to connection with the visible Church, but he is speaking about the

evil, whatever the conditions may be, that is sure to attach to it. It attaches to *this* community of ours here, which, in accordance with New Testament usage, we have no hesitation in calling a Church. We try to keep our communion pure; we do not succeed; we never shall succeed. That is no reason why we should give up trying. But in this little house there are ‘vessels of gold and silver,’ and ‘vessels of wood and earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour.’

But whilst this necessity is no reason for indiscriminate admission of all manner of people into the Christian Church, it is a reason for you that are in it not to make so much as some of you do of the fact that you are in, and not to trust, as some of you do, to the mere nominal, external connection with the ‘great house.’ You may be in it, but you may be down in the back premises, and one of the vessels that have no honourable use. Lay that to heart, dear friends. It is not for me to apply general principles to individual cases, but I may venture to say that, like every true pastor of a Christian community, I cannot help seeing that there are names of people on Our rolls who have a name to live and are dead.

II. Now, secondly, here we have an inspiring possibility open to us all.

On certain conditions any man may be ‘a vessel unto honour,’ by which, of course, is meant that the vessel — that is to say, the man — gets honour.

And how does he get it? By service. If you will look at the passage carefully, you will see that after this general designation of ‘a vessel unto honour,’ there follow three characteristics of the vessel, which taken together make its honour. I shall speak about them in detail presently, but in the meantime let me point out how here there is embodied the great principle of the New Testament that the true honour is service. ‘It shall not be so among you; he that is chief amongst you let him be your servant.’ Just as Jesus Christ, ‘knowing that He came from God and went to God, and that the Father had

given all things into His hand, laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet,' so we, if we desire honour and prominence, must find it in service; and if we have by God's gift, and the concurrence of circumstances, possessions or resources of mind, body, or estate, which make us prominent and above our brethren, we are thereby the more bound to utilise all that we have, and all that we are, for His service. If a man is ambitious let him remember this that service is honour, use is dignity, and there are none other.

But now turn for a moment to these three characteristics which are here set forth as constituting the honour of the vessels of gold and silver. The first is 'sanctified,' or as it might perhaps better be expressed, consecrated. For, as I suppose many of us know, the idea of sanctification or holiness is not the moral purity which goes along with the expression in our thoughts, but that which is the root of all evangelical purity — via, the yielding of ourselves to God. Consecration is the beginning of purity, and consecration is honour. No man stands higher, in the true Legion of Honour of the Heavens, than he who bears on his breast and in his heart, not a knot of ribbon, but the imprint of a bloody Cross, and for the sake of that yields himself, body, soul, and spirit to God's service. The vessels that are devoted are the sacrificial vessels of the Temple, which are sacred beyond the golden cups of household use, and yet the commonest domestic utensils may become honourable by virtue of their being thus consecrated. So one of the old prophets, using the same metaphor as my text, with a slightly different application, says that in the day when the Kingdom of God assumes its perfect form upon earth, every pot in Jerusalem shall be as the bowls of the altar, and on the very horse-bells shall be written, 'Consecrated to the Lord.' The vessel unto honour must be sanctified.

Then again, 'meet for the master's use.' On the great buffet in the banqueting hall, the cup in the centre, that belongs to the householder, and is lifted to his glowing lips, is the most honourable

of all. Every Christian man amongst us may be used by the Christ, and may — more wonderful still! — be useful to Christ. That is condescension, is it not? You remember how, when He would, in modest prophetic pomp, once for all assert in public His claim to be the King of Israel, He sent two of His servants ‘into the village over against’ them with this message, ‘The Lord hath need of him,’ the humble ass. Jesus Christ needs you to carry out His purposes, to be His representatives and the executors of His will, His viceroys and servants in this world. And there is no honour higher than that I, for all my imperfections and limitations, with all my waywardness and slothfulness, should yet be taken by Him, and made use of by Him. Brother I have you any ambition to be used by Jesus, and to be useful to Jesus? And are you of any use to Him? Have you ever been? The questions are for our own hearts, in the privacy of communion with God. I leave them with you.

‘Ready for every good work.’ The habit of service will grow. A man that is consecrated, and being used by Jesus Christ, will become more and more useful all round. It ought to be our ambition to be men-of-all-work to our Lord. There is great danger of our all yielding to natural limitations, as we suppose them, and confining ourselves to what we take to be our role. It is all right that that should be the prominent part of our ministry in the world. But let us beware of the limitations and the onesidedness that attaches to us, and be ready for the distasteful work, for the uncongenial work, for the work to which our natural fastidiousness and temperaments do not call us. Let us, as I say, try to be many-sided, and to stand with our loins girt and our lamps burning, and our wills held well down, and say ‘ Lord! what wouldst Thou have me to do? Here am I; send me.’

III. Now a word about the last point that is here, and that is the plain direction as to the way in which this possibility may become a reality for us all.

‘If a man purge himself from these.’ These; whom? The vessels to dishonour.’ Get out of that class. And how? By purifying yourselves. So, then, there is no necessity of any sort which determines the class to which we belong except our own earnestness and effort. You remember our Lord’s other parable of the four sowings in four different soils. Was there any unconquerable necessity which compelled the wayside soil to be hard and beaten, or the rocky one to be impermeable, or the thorny one to be productive only of thorns and briars? Could they not all have become good soil? And why did they not? Because the men that they represented did not care to become so. And in like manner there is no reason why the earthen pot should not become gold, or the wooden one silver, or the silver one gold — ay! or the gold silver, or the silver wood, or the wood earth. Paul was an earthen vessel, and he became ‘a chosen vessel’ of gold. Judas was a vessel of silver, and he became a vessel of earth, and was dashed in pieces like a potter’s vessel. So you can settle your place. How do you settle it?

By purity. Character makes us serviceable. Christ’s kingdom is more helped, His purposes advanced, His will furthered, by holy lives than by shining gifts. And whether you can do much for Him by the latter or no, you can do more for Him by far by means of the former. And you can all have that if you will.

Only notice that purity which makes serviceable, and therefore honourable, and is capable of degrees as between silver and gold, is to be won by our own efforts. ‘If a man therefore shall purify *himself*.’ I know, of course, that whoever has honestly set himself, for Christ’s sake, to the task of purifying himself, very soon finds out that he, with his ten thousand, cannot beat the king that comes against him with twenty thousand; and if he is a wise man he sends an embassy, not to the enemy, but to the Emperor, and says, ‘Come Thou and help me.’ If we try to purify ourselves, we are necessarily thrown back upon God’s help to do it. But there must be the personal effort, and that effort must go mainly, I think, in the

direction of effort to grasp and hold by faith and obedience the Divine Life which come into us and purifies us; and in the other direction of effort to apply to every part of our character and conduct the divine help which we bring to our aid by our humble faith.

So, brethren, we can, if we will, purify ourselves, and we shall do it most surely when we fall back upon him, and say, ‘Give me the power — that I may perfect holiness in the fear of the *Lord*.’

Some of us are vessels in another house. But Christ has bound the strong man and spoiled his goods, and taken from him all the armour in which he trusted, and the vessels which he used. And if we will only take Christ’s liberation, and cast ourselves on His grace and power, then we shall be lifted from the dark and doleful house of the strong man, and set in the great house of the great Lord. Yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves unto God, and your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.

## **2 Timothy 3:5--FORM AND POWER**

‘Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.’ — 2 Timothy 3:5.

IN this, his last letter and legacy, the Apostle Paul is much occupied with the anticipation of coming evils. It is most natural that the faithful watchman, knowing that the hour of relieving guard was very near at hand, should eagerly scan the horizon in quest of the enemies that might approach when he was no longer there to deal with them. Old men are apt to take a gloomy view of coming days, but the frequent references to the corruptions of the Church which occur in this letter are a great deal more than an old man’s pessimism. They were warnings, which were amply vindicated by the history of the post-apostolic age of the Church, which was the seed-bed of all manner of corruptions, and they point to permanent

dangers, the warning against which is as needful for us as for any period.

The Apostle draws here a very dark picture of the corrupt forms of Christianity, the advent of which he tremblingly anticipated. I do not mean to enter at all upon the dark catalogue of the vices which he enumerates, except to point out that its beginning and the middle and the end are very significant. It begins with 'lovers of self' — that is the root of all forms of sin. In the centre there stands 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'; and at the end, summing up the whole, are the words of our text, 'having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.'

I do not suppose that these words need much explanation. 'Godliness,' in the New Testament, means not only the disposition which we call piety, but the conduct which flows from it, and which we may call practical religion. The form or outward appearance of that we all understand. But what is the 'denying the power thereof?' It does not consist in words, but in deeds. In these latter epistles we find 'denying' frequently used as equivalent to *abjuring*, renouncing, casting off. For instance, in a passage singularly and antithetically parallel to that of my text, we read 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,' which simply means throwing off their dominion. And in like manner the denial here is no verbal rejection of the principles of the gospel, which would be inconsistent with the notion of still retaining the form of godliness; but it is the practical renunciation of the power, which is inherent in all true godliness, of moulding the life and character — the practical renunciation of that even whilst preserving a superficial, unreal appearance of being subject to it.

This, then, being the explanation, and the rough out. line of the state of things which the Apostle contemplates as hurrying onwards to corrupt the Church after his departure, let us look at some of the thoughts connected with it.

I. Observe the sad frequency of such a condition. Wherever any great cause *or* principle is first launched into the world, it evokes earnest enthusiasm, and brings men to heroisms of consecration and service. And so when Christianity was first launched, there was less likelihood of its attracting to itself men who were not in earnest, and who were mere formalists. But even in the Apostolic Church there were an Ananias and a Sapphira, a Simon Magus, and a Demas. As years go on, and primitive enthusiasms die out, and the cause which was once all freshly radiant and manifestly heaven-born becomes an earthly institution, there is a growing tendency to gather round it superficial, half-and-half adherents. What soever is respectable, and whatsoever is venerable, and whatsoever is customary will be sure to have attached to it a mass of loose and nominal adherents; and the gospel has had its full share of such.

I was talking not very long ago to a leading man belonging to another denomination than my own; and he quietly, as a matter of course said, 'Our communicants are so many hundred thousands. I reckon that a quarter of them, or thereabouts, are truly spiritual men!' and he seemed to think that nobody would question the correctness of the calculation and the proportion. Why, 'Christendom' is largely a mass of pagans masquerading as Christians.

And every church has its full share of such people; loose adherents, clogs upon all movement, who bring down the average of warmth like the great icebergs that float in the Atlantic and lower the temperature of the summer all over Europe. They make consecration 'eccentric'; they make consistent, out-and-out Christian living 'odd,' 'unlike the ordinary thing,' and they pull down the spirituality of the Church almost to the level of the world. Every communion of so-called Christian men has its full share of these. The same thing applies to us, and every Church of God on the face of the earth has a little core of earnest Christians, who live the life, and a great

envelope and surrounding of men who, as my text says, have the form of godliness, and

practically deny the power thereof. Widespread, and all but universal, this condition of things is. And so let each of us say, 'Lord! Is it I?'

II. Think, next, of the underground working of this evil

These people about whom Paul is speaking in my text were, I suppose, mostly, though by no means exclusively, conscious pretenders to what they did not possess. But the number of hypocrites, in the full sense of the word, is amazingly small, and the men whom you would brand as most distinctly so, if you came to talk to them, would amaze you to find how entirely ignorant they were of the fact that they were dramatising and pretending to piety, and that there was next to no reality of it in them. A very little bit of gold, beaten out very thin, will cover over, with a semblance of value, an enormous area. And men beat out the little modicum of sincerity that they have so very thin that it covers, and gives a deceptive appearance of brilliancy and solidity to an enormous amount of windy flatulence and mere pretence. Hypocrites, in the rude, vulgar sense of the word, are, I was going to say, as rare as, but I will say a great deal rarer than, thoroughgoing and intensely earnest and sincere Christians.

These men, the precursors of Gnostic heresies and a hundred others, had no notion that their picture was like this, and if they had been shown Paul's grim catalogue they would have said, 'Oh! a gross caricature, and not the least like me.' And that is what a great many other men do as well.

But it is an unconscious hypocrisy, an unconscious sliding away from the basis of reality on to the slippery basis of pretence and appearance that I want to say a word or two about. The worse a man is, the less he knows it. The more completely a professing Christian

has lost his hold of the substance and is clinging only to the form, the less does he suspect that this indictment has any application to him. The very sign and symptom of spiritual degeneracy and corruption is unconsciousness, as the great champion of Israel, when his locks were cropped in Delilah's lap, went out to exercise his mighty limbs as at other times, and knew not, till he vainly tried feats which their ebbing strength was no longer equal to perform, that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. The more completely a man's limbs are frost-bitten the more comfortable and warm they are, and the less does he know it. If a man says, 'Your text has no sort of application to me,' he thereby shows that it has a very close application to him.

I need say little about the reasons for this unconsciousness. We are all accustomed to take very lenient views, when we take any at all, of our own character; and the tendency of all conduct is to pull down conscience to the level of conduct, and to vindicate that conduct by biased decisions of a partial conscience. And so I have no doubt that there are people thinking how well my words fit some other man from whom there has, without there knowing it, ebbed away, by slow, sad drops, almost all the lifeblood of their Christianity, like some great tree that stands in the woods, fair to appearance, with solid bole and widespread leafage, and expanded branches, and yet the heart is out of it; and when the tempest comes and it falls, everybody can look into the hollow trunk and see that for years it has been rotten.

Brethren, the underground enemies of *our* Christian earnestness are far more dangerous than the apparent and manifest antagonists; and there are many men amongst us who would repel with indignation a manifest assault against their godliness, who yield without resistance, and almost without consciousness, to the sly seductions of unsuspected evil. The arrow that flies in darkness is more deadly than the pestilence that wasteth at noonday.

III. Further, notice the ever-operating causes that produce this condition.

I suppose that one, at any rate, of the main examples of this 'form' was participation in the simple worship of the primitive Church. And although the phrase by no means refers merely to acts of worship, still that is one of the main fields in which this evil is manifest. Many of us substitute outward connection with the Church for inward union with Jesus Christ. All external forms have a tendency to assert themselves, and to detain in themselves, instead of helping to rise above themselves, our poor sense-ridden natures. How many of us are there whose religion consists very largely in coming to this place, standing up when other people sing, seeming to unite in prayer and praise, perhaps participating in the sacred rites of the Church; but having most of their religion safely locked up in their pews along with their hymn-books when they leave the chapel, and waiting for them quietly, without troubling them, until next Sunday! We need outward forms of worship. It is a sign of our weakness that we do, but they are so full of danger that one sometimes wishes that they could be broken up and made fluent, and, at least for a time, that something else could be substituted for them.

Seeing that the purest and the simplest of forms may become like a dirty window, an obscuring medium which shuts out instead of lets in the light, it seems to me that the Churches are wisest which admit least of the dangerous element into their external worship, and try to have as little of form as may keep the spirit. I know that simple forms may be abused quite as much as elaborate ones. I know that a Quakers' meetinghouse is often quite as much a house of formal and not of real communion as a Roman Catholic cathedral. Let us remember how full of dangers they all, and always are. And let us be very sure that we do not substitute church membership, coming to church or chapel, going to prayer-meeting, teaching in Sunday-schools, reading devout *books*, and the like, for inward submission to the power.

Another cause always operating is the tendency which all action of every kind has to escape from the dominion of its first motives, and to become merely mechanical and habitual. Habit is a most precious ally of goodness, but habitual goodness tends to become involuntary and mechanical goodness, and so to cease to be goodness at all. And the more that we can, in each given case, make each individual act of godliness, whether it be in worship or in practical life, the result of a fresh approach to the one central and legitimate impulse of the Christian life, the better it will be for ourselves. All great causes, as I was saying a moment or two ago, tend to pass from the dominion of impulse into that of use and wont and mere routine, and our religion and practical godliness in daily life is apt to do that, as well as all our other actions.

And then, still further, there is the constant operation of earth and sense and daily duties and pressing cares, which war against the reality and completeness of our submission to the power of godliness. Grains of sand, microscopically minute in the aggregate, bury the temples and the images of the gods in the Nile Valley. The multitude of small cares and duties which are blown upon us by every wind have the effect of withdrawing us, unless we are continually watchful, from that one foundation of all, the love of Jesus Christ felt in our daily lives. Unless we perpetually tighten our hold, it will loosen, by very weariness of the muscles. Unless the boat be firmly anchored it will be drifted down the stream. Unless we take care, our Christian life and earnestness will ooze out at our finger-tips, and we shall never know that it is gone. The world, our own weakness, our very tasks and duties, the pressure of circumstances, the sway of our senses, and the very habit of doing right — all of these may tend to make us mechanical and formal participators in the religious life, and unconscious hypocrites.

IV. So, lastly, let me point you to the discipline which may avert this evil.

First and foremost, I would say, let us cherish a clear and continual recognition of the reality of ‘the danger Forewarned is forearmed. He that will take counsel of his own weakness, and be taught by God’s Word how unreliable he himself is, and how strong the forces are which tend to throw his religion all to the surface, will thereby be, if not insured against the danger, at least made a great deal more competent to deal with it. ‘Blessed is the man that feareth always,’ and that knows how likely he is to go wrong unless he carefully seeks to keep himself right.

Rigid, habitual self-inspection, in the light of God’s Word, is an all-important help to prevent this sliding of our Christian life into superficiality. If what I was saying about the unconsciousness of decline be at all true, then most eloquently and impressively does it say to us all, ‘Watch! for we know not what may be going on underground unless we have a continual carefulness of inspection.’ We should watch our own characters, the movement of our spiritual nature, and the effect and operation of our habits and of our participation in outward forms of Christianity; we should watch these as carefully as men in the tropics look into their beds and their clothing before they put them on, or get into them, for snakes and scorpions. In a country which is only preserved by the dykes from Being swallowed up by the sea, the minutest inspection of the rampart is the condition of security, and if there be a hole big enough for a mouse to creep through, the water will come in and make a gap wide enough to drown a province in a little while. And so, brethren, seeing that we have such dangers round about us, and that the most formidable of them all are powers that work in the dark, let us be very sure that our eyes have searched, as well as we can, the inmost corners of our lives, and that no lurking vermin lie beneath the unturned up stones.

And then, lastly, and as that without which all else is vain, let us make continual and earnest and contrite efforts day by day to renew and deepen our personal communion with Jesus Christ. He is the

source of the power which godliness operates in our lives, and the closer we keep to Him the more it will flood our hearts and make us real, out-and-out Christians, and not shallow and self-deceived pretenders.

The tree that had nothing but leaves upon it hid its absence of fruit by its abundance of foliage. The Master came, as He comes to you and to me, seeking fruit, and if He finds it not He will perpetuate the barrenness by His blasting word, 'No fruit grow upon thee henceforward for ever.'

## **2 Timothy 4:1-5; 16-18--LIGHT AT EVENTIDE**

'I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; 3. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long- suffering and doctrine. 3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry .... 16. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. 17. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. — 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 16-18.

TIMOTHY does not appear to have been a strong man, either in body or mind, if we may judge from the exhortations and tonics which Paul felt it needful to administer in this letter. The young, gentle soul was more overwhelmed by Paul's trial and impending death than the heroic martyr himself was. Nothing shook that

steadfast heart, and from the very grave's mouth he spoke brave encouragement.

Verses 1-5 are a rousing appeal to Timothy to fulfil his ministry. Embedded in it there is a sad prophecy of coming dark days for the Church, which constitutes, not a reason for despondency or for abandoning the work, but for doing it with all one's might. But the all-powerful motive for every Christian teacher, whether of old or young, is pressed on Timothy in the solemn thoughts that he works in the sight of God and of Jesus, and that he and those to whom he speaks, and whose blood may be laid to his charge, are to see him when he appears, and to stand at his judgment bar.

The master's eye makes diligent servants; the tremendous issues for speaker and hearer suspended on the preaching of the gospel, if they were ever burning before our inward vision, would make superfluous all other motives for straining every nerve and using every opportunity and power. How we should preach and teach and live if the great white throne and He who will sit on it were ever shining before us! Would not that sight burn up slothfulness, cowardice, perfunctory discharge of duty, mechanical repetition of scarcely felt words, and all the other selfishnesses and worldlinesses which sap our earnestness in our work.

The special duties enjoined are, first and foremost, the most general one to 'preach the word,' which is, indeed, a duty incumbent on all Christians; and then, subordinate to it, and descriptive of how it is to be done, the duty of persevering attention to that great life task — 'be instant'; that is, be at it, be always at it. But is not 'in season, out of season' an unwise and dangerous precept? Do we not do more harm than good by thrusting gospel teaching down people's throats at unfitting times? No doubt tact and prudence are as needful as zeal, but perhaps they are rather more abundant at present than it, and at a time that looks out of season to a man who does not wish to hear of Christ at any time, or to one who does not wish to speak of Him at

any time, may be 'in season' for the very reason that it seems out of season. Felix is not an infallible judge of 'a convenient season.' It would do no harm if Christian people 'obtruded' their religion a little more.

But the general work of 'preaching the word' is to be accompanied with special care over the life of believers, which is to be active in three closely connected forms. Timothy is, where needful, to 'convict' of sin; for so the word rendered 'reprove' means, as applied to the mission of the Comforter in John 16:8. 'Rebuke' naturally follows conviction, and exhortation, or, rather, consolation or encouragement, as naturally follows rebuke. If the faithful teacher has sometimes to use the lancet, he must have the balm and the Bandage at hand. And this triple ministry is to be 'with all longsuffering' and 'teaching.' Chrysostom beautifully comments, 'Not as in anger, not as in hatred, not as insulting over him,... as loving, as sympathising, as more distressed than himself at his grief.' And we may add, as letting 'the teaching' do the convicting and rebuking, not the teacher's judgment or tongue.

The prospect of dark days coming, which so often saddens the close of a strenuous life for Christ and the Church, shadowed Paul's spirit, and added to his burdens. At Ephesus he had spoken forebodings of 'grievous wolves' entering in after his death, and now he feels that he will be powerless to check the torrent of corruption, and is eager that, when he is gone, Timothy and others may be wise and brave to cope with the tendencies to turn from the simple truth and to prefer 'fables.'

The picture which he draws is true to-day. Healthful teaching is distasteful Men's ears itch, and want to be tickled. The desire of the multitude is to have teachers who will reflect their own opinions and prejudices, who will not go against the grain or rub them the wrong way, who will flatter the mob which itself the people, and will keep 'conviction' and 'rebuke' well in the background. That is no reason

for any Christian teacher's being cast down, but is a reason for his buckling to his work, and not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God.

The true way to front and conquer these tendencies is by the display of an unmistakable self-sacrifice in the life, by sobriety in all things and willing endurance of hardship where needful, and by redoubled earnestness in proclaiming the gospel, which men need whether they want it or not, and by filling to the full the sphere of our work, and discharging all its obligations.

The final words in verses 16-18 carry on the triumphant strain. There had been some previous stage of Paul's trial, in his second imprisonment, of which we have no details except those here — when the Roman Christians and all his friends had deserted him, and that he had thus been conformed unto Christ's sufferings, and tasted the bitterness of friendship failing when needed most. But no trace of bitterness remained in his spirit, and, like his Lord, he prayed for them who had thus deserted him. He was left alone, but the Christ, who had borne his burden alone, died that none of His servants might ever have to know the same dreary solitude, and the absence of other comforters had made the more room, as well as need, for Him.

Paul's predecessor, Stephen, had seen Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Paul had an even more blessed experience; for Jesus stood by him, there in the Roman court, in which, perhaps, the emperors ate on the tribunal. What could terrify him with that Advocate at his side?

But it is beautiful that the Apostle does not first think of his Lord's presence as ministering to his comfort, but as nerving him to 'fulfil His message.' The trial was to him, first, a crowning opportunity of preaching the gospel, and, no doubt, it gave him an audience of such a sort as he had never had. What did it matter even to himself what became of him, if 'all the Gentiles,' and among them, no doubt,

senators, generals, statesmen, and possibly Nero, ‘might bear’? Only as a second result of Christ’s help does he add that he was rescued, as from between the very teeth of the lion. The peril was extreme; his position seemed hopeless, the jaws were wide open, and he was held by the sharp fangs, but Christ dragged him out. The true David delivered his lamb out of the lion’s mouth.

The past is the prophecy of the future to those that trust in a changeless Christ, who has all the resources of the universe at command. ‘That which hath been is that which shall be,’ and he who can say ‘he *hath* delivered from so great a death’ ought to have no hesitation in adding ‘in whom I trust that He *will* yet deliver me.’ That was the use that Paul made of his experience, and so his last words are an utterance of unfaltering faith and a doxology.

There appears to be an interesting echo of the Lord’s Prayer in verse 18. Observe the words ‘deliver,’ ‘from evil,’ ‘kingdom,’ ‘glory.’ Was Paul’s confidence disappointed? No; for surely he was delivered from every evil work, when the sharp sword struck off his head as he knelt outside the walls of Rome. And Death was Christ’s last messenger, sent to ‘save him unto His heavenly kingdom,’ that there he might, with loftier words than even he could utter on earth, ascribe to Him ‘glory for ever. Amen.’

## **2 Timothy 4:6-8--A PRISONER’S DYING THOUGHTS**

‘I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. — 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

PAUL’S long day’s work is nearly done. He is a prisoner in Rome, all but forsaken by his friends, in hourly expectation of another summons before Nero. To appear before him was, he says, like putting his head into ‘the mouth of the lion.’ His horizon was darkened by sad anticipations of decaying faith and growing

corruptions in the Church. What a road he had travelled since that day when, on the way to Damascus, he saw the living Christ, and heard the words of His mouth!

It had been but a failure of a life, if judged by ordinary standards. He had suffered the loss of all things, had thrown away position and prospects, had exposed himself to sorrows and toils, had been all his days a poor man and solitary, had been hunted, despised, laughed at by Jew and Gentile, worried and badgered even by so-called brethren, loved the less, the more he loved. And now the end is near. A prison-and-the-headsman's sword are the world's wages to its best teacher. When Nero is on the throne, the only possible place for Paul is a dungeon opening on to the scaffold. Better to be the martyr than the Caesar!

These familiar words of our text bring before us a very sweet and wonderful picture of the prisoner, so near his end. How beautifully they show his calm waiting for the last hour and the bright forms which lightened for him the darkness of his cell! Many since have gone to their rest with their hearts stayed on the same thoughts, though their lips could not speak them to our listening ears. Let us be thankful for them, and pray that for ourselves, when we come to that hour, the same quiet heroism and the same sober hope mounting to calm certainty may be ours.

These words refer to the past, the present, the future. 'I have fought — the time of my departure is come — henceforth there is laid up.'

I. So we notice, first, the quiet courage which looks death full in the face without a tremor. The language implies that Paul knows his death hour is all but here. As the Revised Version more accurately gives it, 'I am already being offered' — the process is begun, his sufferings at the moment are, as it were, the initial steps of his sacrifice — 'and the time of my departure is come.' The tone in which he tells Timothy this is very noticeable. There is no sign of excitement, no tremor of emotion, no affectation of stoicism in the

simple sentences. He is not playing up to a part, nor pretending to be anything which he is not. If ever language sounded perfectly simple and genuine, this does.

And the occasion of the whole section is as remarkable as the tone. He is led to speak about himself at all, only in order to enforce his exhortation to Timothy to put his shoulder to the wheel, and do his work for Christ with all his might. All he wishes to say is simply, do your work with all your might, for I am going off the field. But having begun on that line of thought, he is carried on to say more than was needed for his immediate purpose, and thus inartificially to let us see what was filling his mind.

And the subject into which he subsides after these lofty thoughts is as remarkable as either tone or occasion. Minute directions about such small matters as books and parchments, and perhaps a warm cloak for winter, and homely details about the movements of the little group of his friends immediately follow. All this shows with what a perfectly unforced courage Paul fronted his fate, and looked death in the eyes. The anticipation did not dull his interest in God's work in the world, as witness the warnings and exhortations of the context. It did not withdraw his sympathies from his companions. It did not hinder him from pursuing his studies and pursuits, nor from providing for small matters of daily convenience. If ever a man was free from any taint of fanaticism or morbid enthusiasm, it was this man waiting so calmly in his prison for his death.

There is great beauty and force in the expressions which he uses for death here. He will not soil his lips with its ugly name, but calls it an offering and a departure. There is a widespread unwillingness to say the word 'Death.' It falls on men's hearts like clods on a coffin. So all people and languages have adopted euphemisms for it, fair names which wrap silk round its dart and somewhat hide its face. But there are two opposite reasons for their use — terror and confidence. Some men dare not speak of death because they dread it so much,

and try to put some kind of shield between themselves and the very thought of it, by calling it something less dreadful to them than itself. Some men, on the other hand, are familiar with the thought, and though it is solemn, it is not altogether repellent to them.

Gazing on death with the thoughts and feelings which Jesus Christ has given them concerning it, they see it in new aspects, which take away much of its blackness. And so they do not feel inclined to use the ugly old name, but had rather call it by some which reflect the gentler aspect that it now wears to them. So 'sleep,' and 'rest' and the like are the names which have almost driven the other out of the New Testament — witness of the fact that in inmost reality Jesus Christ 'has abolished death,' however the physical portion of it may still remain master of our bodies.

But looking for a moment at the specific metaphors used here, we have first, that of an offering, or more particularly of a drink offering, or libation, 'I am already being poured out.' No doubt the special reason for the selection of this figure here is Paul's anticipation of a violent death. The shedding of his blood was to be an offering poured out like some costly wine upon the altar, but the power of the figure reaches far beyond that special application of it. We may all make our deaths a sacrifice, an offering to God, for we may yield up our will to God's will, and so turn that last struggle into an act of worship and self surrender. When we recognise His hand, when we submit our wills to His purposes, when 'we live unto the Lord,' if we live, and 'die unto Him,' if we die, then Death will lose all its terror and most of its pain, and will become for us what it was to Paul, a true offering up of self in thankful worship. Nay, we may even say, that so we shall in a certain subordinate sense be 'made conformable unto His death' who committed His spirit into His Father's hands, and laid down His life, of His own will. The essential character and far-reaching effects of this sacrifice we cannot imitate, but we can so yield up our wills to God and leave life

so willingly and trustfully as that death shall make our sacrifice complete.

Another more familiar and equally striking figure is next used, when Paul speaks of the time of his 'departure.' The thought is found in most tongues. Death is a going away, or, as Peter calls it (with a glance, possibly, at the special meaning of the word in the Old Testament, as well as at its use in the solemn statement of the theme of converse on the Mountain of Transfiguration), an Exodus. But the well-worn image receives new depth and sharpness of outline in Christianity. To those who have learned the meaning of Christ's resurrection, and feed their souls on the hopes which it warrants, Death is merely a change of place or state, an accident affecting locality, and little more. We have had plenty of changes before. Life has been one long series of departures. This is different from the others mainly in that it is the last, and that to go away from this visible and fleeting show, where we wander aliens among things which have no true kindred with us, is to go home, where there will be no more pulling up the tent-pegs, and toiling across the deserts in monotonous change. How strong is the conviction, spoken in this name for death, that the essential life lasts on quite unaltered through it all! How slight the else formidable thing is made! We may change climates, and for the stormy bleakness of life may have the long still days of heaven, but we do not change ourselves. We lose nothing worth keeping when we leave behind the body, as a dress not fitted for home, where we are going. We but travel one more stage, though it be the last, and part of it be in pitchy darkness. Some pass over it as in a fiery chariot, like Paul and many a martyr. Some have to toil through it with slow steps and bleeding feet and fainting heart; but all may have a Brother with them, and, holding His hand, may find that the journey is not so hard as they feared, and the home from which they shall remove no more, better than they hoped when they hoped the most.

II. We have here, *too*, the peaceful look backwards. There is something very noteworthy in the threefold aspect under which his past life presents itself to the Apostle who is so soon to leave it. He thinks of it as a contest, as a race, as a stewardship. The first image suggests the tension of a long struggle with opposing wrestlers who have tried to throw him, but in vain. The world, both of men and things, has had to be grappled with and mastered. His own sinful nature and especially his animal nature has had to be kept under by sheer force, and every moment has been resistance to subtle omnipresent forces that have sought to thwart his aspirations and hamper his performances. His successes have had to be fought for, and everything that he has done has been done after a struggle. So is it with all noble life; so will it be to the end.

He thinks of life as a race. That speaks of continuous advance in one direction, and more emphatically still, of effort that sets the lungs panting and strains every muscle to the utmost. He thinks of it as a stewardship. He has kept the faith (whether by that word we are to understand the body of truth believed or the act of believing) as a sacred deposit committed to him, of which he has been a good steward, and which he is now ready to return to his Lord. There is much in these letters to Timothy about keeping treasures entrusted to one's care. Timothy is bid to 'keep that good thing which is committed to thee,' as Paul here declares that he has done. Nor is such guarding of a precious deposit confined to us stewards on earth, but the Apostle is sure that his loving Lord, to whom he has entrusted himself, will with like tenderness and carefulness 'keep that which he has committed unto Him against that day.' The confidence in that faithful Keeper made it possible for Paul to be faithful to his trust, and as a steward who was bound by all ties to his Lord, to guard His possessions and administer His affairs. Life was full of voices urging him to give up the faith. Bribes and threats, and his own sense-bound nature, and the constant whispers of the world had tempted him all along the road to fling it away as a worthless thing, but he had kept it safe; and now, nearing

the end and the account, he can put his hand on the secret place near his heart where it lies, and feel that it is there, ready to be restored to his Lord, with the thankful confession, ‘Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.’

So life looks to this man in his retrospect as mainly a field for struggle, effort, and fidelity. This world is not to be for us an enchanted garden of delights, any more than it should appear a dreary desert of disappointment and woe. But it should be to us mainly a palaestra, or gymnasium and exercising ground. You cannot expect many flowers or much grass in the place where men wrestle and run. We need not much mind though it be bare, if we can only stand firm on the hard earth, nor lament that there are so few delights to stay our eyes from the goal. We are here for serious work; let us not be too eager for pleasures that may hinder our efforts and weaken our vigour, but be content to lap up a hasty draught from the brooks by the way, and then on again to the fight.

Such a view of life makes it radiant and fair while it lasts, and makes the heart calm when the hour comes to leave it all behind. So thinking of the past, there may be a sense of not unwelcome lightening from a load of responsibility when we have got all the stress and strain of the conflict behind us, and have at any rate not been altogether beaten. We may feel like a captain who has brought his ship safe across the Atlantic, through foul weather and past many an iceberg, and gives a great sigh of relief as he hands over the charge to the pilot, who will take her across the harbour bar and bring her to her anchorage in the landlocked bay where no tempests rave any more forever.

Prosaic theologians have sometimes wondered at the estimate which Paul here makes of his past services and faithfulness, but the wonder is surely unnecessary. It is very striking to notice the difference between his judgment of himself while he was still in the thick of the conflict, and now when he is nearing the end. Then one main

hope which animated all his toils and nerved him for the sacrifice of life itself was 'that I might finish my course with joy.' Now in the quiet of his dungeon, that hope is fulfilled, and triumphant thoughts, like shining angels, keep him company in his solitude. Then he struggled, and wrestled, touched by the haunting fear lest after that he has preached to others he himself should be rejected. Now the dread has passed, and a meek hope stands by his side.

What is this change of feeling but an instance of what, thank God, we so often see, that at the end the heart, which has been bowed with fears and self-depreciation, is filled with peace? They who tremble most during the conflict are most likely to look back with solid satisfaction, while they who never knew a fear all along the course will often have them surging in upon their souls too late, and will see the past in a new lurid light, when they are powerless to change it. Blessed is the man who thus feareth always. At the end he will have hope. The past struggles are joyful in memory, as the mountain ranges, which were all black reek and white snow while we toiled up their inhospitable steeps, lie purple in the mellowing distance, and burn like fire as the sunset strikes their peaks. Many a wild winter's day has a fair, cloudless close, and lingering opal hues diffused through all the quiet sky. 'At eventide it shall be light.' Though we go all Our lives mourning and timid, there may yet be granted us ere the end some vision of the true significance of these lives, and some humble hope that they have not been wholly in vain.

Such an estimate has nothing in common with self-complacency. It co-exists with a profound consciousness of many a sin, many a defeat, and much unfaithfulness. It belongs only to a man who, conscious of these, is 'looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,' and is the direct result, not the antagonist, of lowly self-abasement, and contrite faith in Him by whom alone our stained selves and poor broken services can ever be acceptable. Let us learn too that the only life that bears being looked back upon is a life of Christian devotion and effort. It shows fairer when seen in the

strange cross lights that come when we stand on the boundary of two worlds, with the white radiance of eternity beginning to master the vulgar oil lamps of earth, than when seen by these alone. All others have their shabbiness and their selfishness disclosed then. I remember ones seeing a mob of revellers streaming out from a masked ball in a London theatre in the early morning sunlight; dragged and heavy-eyed, the rouge showing on the cheeks, and the shabby tawdriness of the foolish costumes pitilessly revealed by the pure light. So will many a life look when the day dawns, and the wild riot ends in its unwelcome beams.

The one question for us all, then, will be, Have I lived for Christ, and by Him? Let it be the one question for us now, and let it be answered, Yes. Then we shall have at the last a calm confidence, equally far removed from presumption and from dread, which will let us look back on life with peace, though it be full of failures and sins, and forward with humble hope of the reward which we shall receive from His mercy.

III. The climax of all is the triumphant look forward. 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' In harmony with the images of the conflict and the race, the crown here is not the emblem of sovereignty, but of victory, as indeed is almost without exception the case in the New Testament. The idea of the royal dignity of Christians in the future is set forth rather under the emblem of association with Christ on His throne, while the wreath on their brows is the coronal of laurel, 'meed of mighty conquerors,' or the twine of leaves given to him who, panting, touched the goal. The reward, then, which is meant by the emblem, whatever be its essence, comes through effort and conflict. 'A man is not crowned, except he strive.'

That crown, according to other words of Scripture, consists of 'life,' or 'glory' — that is to say, the issue and outcome of believing service and faithful stewardship here is the possession of the true

life, which stands in union with God, in measure so great, and in quality so wondrous that it lies on the pure locks of the victors like a flashing diadem, all ablaze with light in a hundred jewels. The completion and exaltation of our nature and characters by the illapse of 'life' so sovereign and transcendent that it is 'glory' is the consequence of all Christian effort here in the lower levels, where the natural life is always weakness and sometimes shame, and the spiritual life is at the best but a hidden glory and a struggling spark. There is no profit in seeking to gaze into that light of glory so as to discern the shapes of those who walk in it, or the elements of its lambent flames.

Enough that in its gracious beauty transfigured souls move as in their native atmosphere. Enough that even our dim vision can see that they have for their companion 'One like unto the Son of Man.' It is Christ's own life which they share; it is Christ's own glory which irradiates them.

That crown is 'a crown of righteousness' in another sense from that in which it is 'a crown of life.' The latter expression indicates the material, if we may say so, of which it is woven, but the former rather points to the character to which it belongs or is given. Righteousness alone can receive that reward. It is not the struggle or the conflict which wins it, but the character evolved in the struggle, not the works of strenuous service, but the moral nature expressed in these. There is such a congruity between righteousness and the crown of life, that it can be laid on none other head but that of a righteous man, and if it could, all its amaranthine flowers would shrivel and fall when they touched an impure brow. It is, then, the crown of righteousness, as belonging by its very nature to such characters alone.

But whatever is the essential congruity between the character and the crown, we have to remember too that, according to this Apostle's constant teaching, the righteousness which clothes us in

fair raiment, and has a natural right to the wreath of victory, is a gift, as truly as the crown itself, and is given to us all on condition of our simple trust in Jesus Christ, If we are to be ‘found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless,’ we must be ‘found *in* Him, not having our own righteousness, but that which is ours through faith in Christ.’ Toil and conflict and anxious desire to be true to our responsibilities will do much for a man, but they will not bring him that righteousness which brings down on the head the crown of life. We must trust to Christ to give us the righteousness in which we are justified, and to give us the righteousness by the working out of which in our life and character we are fitted for that great reward. He crowns our works and selves with exuberant and unmerited honours, but what he crowns is His Own gift to us, and His great love must bestow both the righteousness and ‘the crown.’

The crown is given at a time called — by Paul ‘at that day,’ which is not the near day of his martyrdom, but that of His Lord’s appearing. He does not speak of the fulness of the reward as being ready for him at death, but as being ‘henceforth laid up for him in heaven.’ So he looks forward beyond the grave. The immediate future after death was to his view a period of blessedness indeed, but not yet full. The state of the dead in Christ was a state of consciousness, a state of rest, a state of felicity, hut also a state of expectation- To the full height of their present capacity they who sleep in Jesus are blessed, being still in His embrace, and their spirits pillowed on His heart, nor so sleeping that, like drowsy infants, they know not where they lie so safe, but only sleeping in so much as they rest from weariness, and have closed their eyes to the ceaseless turmoil of this

fleeting world, and are lapped about for ever with the sweet, unbroken consciousness that they are ‘present with the Lord.’ What perfect repose, perfect fruition of all desires, perfect union with the perfect End and Object of all their being, perfect exemption from all sorrow, tumult, and sin can bring of blessedness, that they possess in over measure unfailingly. And, in addition, they still know the joy of

hope, and have carried that jewel with them into another world, for they wait for ‘the redemption of the body,’ in the reception of which, ‘at that day,’ their life will be filled up to a yet fuller measure, and gleam with a more lustrous ‘glory.’ Now they rest and wait. Then shall they be crowned.

Nor must self-absorbed thoughts be allowed to bound our anticipations of that future. It is no solitary blessedness to which Paul looked forward Alone in his dungeon, alone before his judge when ‘no man stood by’ him, soon to be alone in his martyrdom, he leaps up in spirit at the thought of the mighty crowd among whom he will stand in that day, on every head a crown, in every heart the same love to the Lord whose life is in them all and makes them all one. So we may cherish the hope of a social heaven.

Man’s course begins in a garden, but it ends in a city. The final condition will be the perfection of human society. There all who love Christ will be drawn together, and old ties, broken for a little while here, be reknit in yet holier form, never to be sundered more.

Ah, friends, the all-important question for each of us is how may we have such a hope, like a great sunset light shining into the western windows of our souls? There is but one answer — Trust Christ. That is enough.

Nothing else is. Is your life built on Jesus Christ? Are you trusting your salvation to Him? Are you giving Him your love and service? Does your life bear looking at to-day? Will it bear looking at in death? Will it bear His looking at in Judgment?

If you can humbly say, To me to live is Christ, then is it well Living by Him we may fight and conquer, may win and obtain. Living by Him, we may be ready quietly to lie down when the time comes, and may have all the future filled with the blaze of a great hope that glows brighter as the darkness thickens. That peaceful hope will not leave us till consciousness fails, and then, when it has ceased to

guide us, Christ Himself will lead us, scarcely knowing where we are, through the waters, and when we open our half-bewildered eyes in brief wonder, the first thing we see will be his welcoming smile, and His voice will say, as a tender surgeon might to a little Child waking after an operation, 'It is all over.' We lift our hands wondering and find wreaths on our poor brows. We lift our eyes, and lo! all about us a crowned crowd of conquerors,

*'And with the morn those angel faces smile Which we have loved  
long since, and lost awhile,'*

## **2 Timothy 4:10, 11--DEMAS, LUKE, MARK**

'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.... 11. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me the ministry.' — 2 Timothy 4:10, 11.

THIS last of Paul's letters is written, as is generally supposed, in his second imprisonment, and very near his martyrdom. The condition in which it represents him is remarkably contrasted, in several respects, with the conditions of his first imprisonment, as shown in the letters dating from that period. In these — in two of them, at all events — we find him surrounded by troops of friends, among whom the same three names as occur in my text appear as united with him in loyal confidence, and joining with him in greetings to his correspondents. Here they are again, but under what different circumstances! 'Demas hath forsaken me... Only Luke is with me. Take Mark' — who is also absent — 'and bring him with thee.' The lonely Apostle has none of the Old Guard around him, except the faithful Luke, and he longs, before he dies, to see once more the familiar faces, and to be ministered to once more by accustomed and tender hands. That touch of humanity brings him very near us.

But what I have chosen my texts for is the sharp contrast which the three prominent names in them present in their attitude to the Apostle — Demas the renegade, Mark the restored runaway, Luke,

the ever steadfast and faithful companion- Now of course these three men's relation to Jesus Christ was not identical with their relation to Paul. But at the same time their relation to Paul, one has little doubt, fluctuated with their relation to Jesus. It is scarcely possible to believe that the first of them would have done so base an act as to abandon the Apostle at the very crisis of his fate, unless his attachment to Jesus had become slender, nor that Mark's love to his Lord had not cooled when he 'went not with Paul and Barnabas to the work.' I take these three names as representations of three different types of character and spiritual experience, and I wish to look at the three portraits in succession; only I venture to alter the order in which they appear in the text. First, then —

I. Demas the renegade. We know nothing of him except that in the letters of the earlier imprisonment his name appears, honoured by Paul with the designation of his ' fellow-worker,' evidently admitted into the inner circle, living in amity and close communion with the other members of it, trusted and honoured, a man of some maturity and advancement, and now guilty of the base act of leaving the Apostle. How deeply that wounded Paul's sensitive heart the language of our text sufficiently shows. It is a sad fate that all the world should know that fact, and only that, about Demas, that he should be cursed and condemned to such an immortality, and go down through the ages branded with ' he hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' He was not a monster, but just a man like the rest of us; and he came to his bad eminence by a very well-trodden and familiar path. He 'hath forsaken me, having loved this present world' — that is to say, he was a religious man who had not religion enough to resist the constant attractions and seductions of this present, and because he loved it, in one or other of its forms — wealth, ease, comfort, a whole skin, reputation, or whatever it may have been — more than he loved Paul's Master, he turned his back upon principle, friendship, honour, duty, everything noble, and buried himself in the far-off Thessalonica. There are a great many Demases amongst us, and a great many different kinds of

Thessalonians to which we run. But we are all exposed to that same danger, and so we may well look at this one soul that fell under its spell, and was too weak to resist its pertinacious solicitations, and say to ourselves: ‘Lord, is it I?’

For there is nothing in human sin that is alien from any of us, and no depth of lapse and apostasy is so profound but that the tendencies towards it, and the possibilities of it, are in us, even us also. So let me translate into less well-worn words the language of the text which, for all its force, is so familiar that it does not appeal to us as it ought to do.

‘This present world,’ what is that? Well, it is Protean, as I have already hinted, in its shapes, and all manner of solicitations come from it, but we may say in general terms that it is the aggregate of ‘things seen and temporal’ which, subtle, and certainly corresponding to our own weakest sides, appealing to some of us in the shape of wealth, to some of us in the shape of earthly loves, to some of us in the shape of material advantages, to some of us in the form of the ‘hollow wraith of dying fame,’ to some of us in the nobler guise of scientific pursuits, lie confined within the limits of the phenomenal and the material, but to all of us being essentially the presentation of the visible, the material, the transient as the aim to strain after, and the good to count as our treasure.

Let us remember how persistent and how terribly strong the appeal of ‘this present world’ is to us all. Its operation is continual upon us. Here it is, and we are in necessary connection with it, and it is our duty to be occupied with it, and it is cowardice to shirk the duty because of the peril that lies in it. You have to go to your business to-morrow morning, and I have to go to my books or my work; and the task for each of us is — and God knows how hard a task it is — to have our hearts in heaven whilst our hands are busy with the things around us. Christianity enjoins no false asceticism.

There is little need to preach that to-day, but still it is to be remembered that it is duty to be occupied with the world, and fatal sin to love it, And just because it is so difficult to keep upon that knife-edge, so difficult to put all our pith and power into our occupation with material things, and yet never to be tempted into the love of them which fights against all nobleness of life, is it incumbent on me, over and over again, to reiterate to you and to myself the old threadbare commonplace, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.' Leave your mark on them, work on them diligently, and with all your heart, bend them to be your servants, and to help you to rise to the things above them, but on your soul's peril keep clear of that bowing down before them, that trusting in them, that longing for them, that despair if you lose them, which together make up the love of the world, and the lust thereof which passes away. There is an enemy within the fortress who is always ready and eager to fling open the gates to the besiegers. For the things 'seen and temporal' correspond with, and have their ally in, the senses by which we are brought into contact with them. And unless there is a very strong religious impulse dominant in our minds, or to put it into more Christian words, unless 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us,' it cannot be but that we shall follow Demas, and run away to our Thessalonica, and leave Paul, and duty, and, Paul's Master, and duty's Source, behind us.

For, brethren, if once this love of the world, which is always soliciting each of us, gets a footing in our hearts, it is impossible — as impossible as it is for two bodies to occupy the same place at the same time — for the love of Christ, which is the love of *God, to* continue dominant there. There cannot be two masters. That is plain common sense. If my head is full of thoughts and schemes, concerned only with the fleeting illusory present, then there is no room in it for His serene, ennobling presence. If my hands are laden with pebbles, I cannot clasp the diamonds that are offered to me.

Unless you fling out the sand-bags the balloon will cleave to the earth, and unless we turn the world out of our hearts, it is no use to say to Him, 'Come! Lord Jesus.' There is no room for Him. And though He comes through the narrowest opening of the door of the soul, He will not come unless we have to some extent conquered the world, and the love of the world.

If I could get you to translate for yourselves the threadbare theological terminology of this text into the vital facts that it represents, I should thank God. Only, dear brethren, take this with *you*, either we forsake Christ because we love the world, or we forsake the world because we love Christ. On the one alternative we choose restlessness and feverish desires unsatisfied, and craving, all the misery of mistaking mist for land and cloud-wrack for solid ground; on the other, we choose all the blessedness of having set our love on that which satisfies, of having loved the worthiest, the best, the most loving. Which of the two shall we choose? It may be that the one choice shall mean, as it did for Paul, a prison cell and a martyrdom, and that the other may mean, as it did for Demas, comfort and safety, and many an unmistakably good thing, in some Thessalonica or other. But are we going to vote with Demas, or is it going to be Paul?

Whether is it better to love the world, and get what the renegade presumably got for a time, or is it better to get what Paul speaks of in the words before my text, 'a crown of righteousness laid up for all them that love' — not the world — 'but His appearing.' like the martyr Apostle.

II. Now look at that other portrait, Mark, the restored runaway. You remember the little that Scripture tells us about him, how he was chosen to be the personal attendant, private secretary, factotum, travelling agent, of Paul and Barnabas on their first journey, how his courage and faith lasted as long as the two missionaries were on familiar ground, on his native soil, in the island of Cyprus; and how

when they crossed to the mainland both courage and faith oozed out at his finger ends, and he hurried back to his mother's house in Jerusalem. When Paul would go again with Barnabas, to visit the churches, the latter, with a relative's too great kindness which was cruelty, insisted on taking the runaway with them, and Paul, with hot indignation which was kinder than the misplaced affection of the uncle, steadfastly refused his consent. Then Barnabas and Mark slip out of the narrative and disappear, and long years pass during which we know nothing about them. But in time, somehow or other, things are made up; no doubt Mark was penitent. Therefore it was as right for Paul to forgive then, as it had been right for him before not to forgive.

It is very beautiful to notice that here he desires to have Mark for the very office which he had, in such shameful and cowardly fashion, flung up long years ago. For the book of Acts says, 'They had also John (Mark) to their minister,' and here Paul says, 'Bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' He was reinstating him in the very position which he had once abandoned.

Now what does Mark's restoration teach us? This great gospel, that from any departure, no matter how far, no matter with what aggravations attended, no matter for how long it has lasted, from any departure from duty and from Christ a man can come back. Those of us professing Christians who know ourselves best, and who fight most vigorously against the creeping encroachments of the love of the world, know best how often and how far we have yielded to them, and gone away from them. Brother, no matter how remote we have made ourselves from Him, we cannot travel beyond the reach of His seeking love. And the wisest thing we can do—and it is a possible thing for us all — is to go back to the beginning, and at the Cross to receive, what is never withheld, pardon for our lapses. Christ laid down the measure of human forgiveness when He said 'seventy times seven' — the two perfect numbers multiplied into themselves, and their product again multiplied by perfection; and are

His love, and His placability, and His pardoning mercy less than that which He prescribed for us? Surely not. So we all may go back again, however far we have wandered, and must go back if we would not be swept into outer darkness for ever. The possibility of return, and, therefore, the blessed duty of repentance, is preached to all us imperfect Christians by this example before us.

I would also remind you how in the restored runaway, or rather in the Apostle's conduct to him, we see as I have already hinted, an adumbration, because a consequence of the divine forgiveness. Paul trusted this unreliable man at last. As the Acts of the Apostles says, 'He thought it not good to take him with them who had departed from the work,' and his severity was an instrument of cure far more effectual than Barnabas' flaccid good nature. The shrug of the shoulders that overlooks transgression and says, 'Oh! it does not matter,' is a much more cruel and a much less curative thing than the hot indignation which says, 'No, you have been unworthy, and until you repent there is no restoration possible.' That is how God does with us, not because He loves us less, but because He loves us more, and because He seeks to make thorough work, and to purge the bosom of the perilous stuff which, unless it is purged, will ever keep us from union with Him. Inasmuch as the law of the divine forgiveness is here set forth in the severity towards the impenitent, and in the generous confidence towards the penitent, and the restoration to his old office, let us Christian people learn our duty to those who have gone astray, and how there is no surer way of helping them to be reliable and profitable than showing them that we trust them to be both.

Still further, from out of this second of our portraits, there comes the other lesson, that failure in a task may tend to make us successful in it hereafter. Mark shirked the ministry; he became 'profitable for the ministry.' That is to say, though all sin weakens, yet sin repented and sin cast out may strengthen, because it may drive us nearer to God, because it may lead us to deeper humility, because it may

kindle a livelier flame of gratitude, the gas that drives the engine, and because it may set us upon closer examination of our own selves, and putting up barriers at the weak places where the enemy poured in like a flood. So for all these reasons, in a far higher sense than the poet meant it, we may make stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things. There is no fatal entail of sin upon us, by which the past is always to set the time and prescribe the measure for the future. The Israelites fought two battles, on the same field, against the same foes, the fights at Aphek against the Philistines. In one of them they were ignominiously routed and beaten from the field; and in the other, on the same spot, against the same enemy, with the same weapons, the same men triumphed; and reared upon the field a memorial alike of their present victory and of their past defeat, and called it the Stone of Help, saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'

III. Lastly, we have here a third picture, that of the steadfast companion, Luke. 'Only Luke is with me,' and he had been with Paul for years, having joined him first at Troas, on the eve of his first missionary enterprise in Europe, having remained, as it appears, at Philippi whilst the Apostle traversed Greece, having rejoined him at Philippi on his return journey, travelled with him to Jerusalem, Caesarea, in a shipwreck, in Rome in the first imprisonment, presumably during the interval; and now again we find him Paul's only companion, in the second imprisonment. He is a type of the steadfast souls who never stray, but by patient continuance in communion with Paul's Lord, 'go from strength to strength,' until 'every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' 'Abide with me,' says Paul's Master, and if we keep ourselves in the love of God, and resist the temptations to be drawn aside, steadfastly cleave unto the Lord, then the world will not have power over us, and we shall neither repeat the experience of the renegade, nor of the restored runaway, but find that day by day we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, and run with unwearied patience and perseverance the race that is set before us. A continuous

development as the result of a quiet constancy of abiding with Jesus Christ is possible for us all And if we do not come to it absolutely and with the completeness of the ideal, in our earthly experience, still we may approximate indefinitely towards it, and interruptions may become fewer and fewer and shorter and shorter, until what were broken dots, as it were, run into a continuous line, and we dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

Brethren! are we to be Demas? Are we to be Mark? Are we to be Luke? We may be all three. We have run away; we can go back; and thenceforward we can continue steadfast and immovable, cleaving to the Lord, and ‘loving’ — not the world, but — ‘His appearing.’

## **2 Timothy 4:13--PAUL’S DYING CONFIDENCE**

The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly Kingdom: to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ — 2 Timothy 4:13.

If we leave out of notice for a moment the two or three salutations and personal messages which follow, these are the last words of Paul’s last letter. So he disappears from history with this ringing cry of confidence upon his lips. There was enough in his circumstances to breed the very opposite disposition. He was half-way through his trial before Nero, and suspense, we all know, gnaws at the very roots of courage. He was all but absolutely certain that death was near, as he had said a minute before: ‘I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is’ nothing but the crown to look for. His heart was wrung by the desertion of friends; Demas had forsaken him, and when the pinch of his trial came, and his head was, as it were, in the lion’s open mouth, none of his friends plucked up heart of grace to stand beside him. But in spite of all, indomitable courage and a bright flame of hope, that nothing could blow or batter out, burned in the Apostle’s heart still Therefore he rays, even while facing the block, ‘the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto His everlasting Kingdom.’ He is so sure of

this that he brings his thanks beforehand — ‘to whom be glory for ever and ever. The thing is as good as done; and so I render my praise.’

Note here a very striking trace and echo of —

I. Christ’s words. I suppose you will often have observed that my text is a variation on the theme of the Lord’s Prayer. That said, ‘Deliver us from evil’; Paul says, ‘The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.’ That, according to one form of Matthew’s version, ends with the doxology: ‘Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen’ Paul echoes that ascription of praise with his ‘to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ So we have here a little window through which we can see a wide prospect. For the gospels are later in date than Paul’s letters, and the text shows that long before they were in existence the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ was familiar, so that allusions to it were made tacitly, and would be recognised. This allusion is interesting in another point of view, in so far as it seems to prove that, in Paul’s time, at any rate, the doxology was appended to the

Lord’s Prayer; and that, therefore, the fuller form of that prayer with the doxology is more original than the truncated form without it.

But passing from such considerations, let us note this word of Paul’s as an instance of how his mind was saturated with the Lord’s utterances. So it should be with us. Christ’s words should have so entered into the very substance of our minds and thoughts as that we give them freely forth again, in other shapes and in other connections; and the sweetness of them, like that of some perfume diffused through else scentless air, shall make all our words and thoughts fragrant, Do you so summer and winter with the Master’s words that they suggest themselves spontaneously to you often when you scarcely know that they are His, and that you speak them, not with formal quotation marks in front and behind, but in that allusive

fashion, which indicates familiarity and the free use, in other combinations, of the great truths which He has spoken?

Notice, too, that Paul turned the prayer into confidence. In the prayer his Master had taught him to say, 'Deliver us from evil.' He had offered the *petition*, and therefore he had no more doubt than he had of his own existence or of Timothy's, that, having asked, he would receive. Therefore he is sure that 'the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.' Is that how you treat your prayers? Are they worth treating so? Are they offered with such confidence as that you have any right to be sure that they will be answered? Are they offered with such submission as that you may well be certain of it; and do you wait, as this Apostle did, quietly expecting to have the answers? And are your eyes anointed to see the answers in things that some people might take to be the contradictions of them? Unless we have so moulded our petitions into assurances there is something wrong with them. If we pray aright, 'Deliver us from evil,' there will rise up in our hearts the quiet confidence, 'the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.'

Here we have a beautiful illustration of the true use of —

II. Past experience. Paul links two clauses together. He says, describing how these faint-hearted if not faithless friends had run away from him when the pinch of peril came, 'They all forsook me, but the Lord stood with me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' He looks back to that recent instance of Christ's protecting care and delivering might, and so he changes his tenses, and brings the light of the past to flood the darkness of the present, and to flash into the obscurity of the future, and he says, 'I was delivered..., and the Lord will deliver me, from every evil.'

He has the same collocation of thoughts, as you may remember in another place where, speaking of other kinds of deliverances, he says that the Lord 'delivered him from so great a death' — that was in the past — 'and doth deliver' — that is the thrilling consciousness

that the same power is in the present as in the past; that to-day is no more prosaic and devoid of God than any yesterday; and then he adds, 'In whom we trust that He will deliver us.' Such is the true attitude *for a Christian man*. Experience is not meant only, as is too often its sole effect, to throw light upon the past, but also to flash a cheery beam on the else dim. future; just as the eastern sky will sometimes throw a hint of its own glory upon the western heaven. To a Christian, every yesterday is a prophecy of a to-morrow that will be like it, and God's past is a pledge for God's future.

If we, if we are truly trusting in Him, may have the prerogative which belongs to His children alone, of being absolutely certain that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,' For there is nothing in the past, nothing in the miracles of former generations, nothing in the great deeds by which God has vindicated HIS protecting care over His people in the days that are gone, and nothing in the mercies and blessings and deliverances and immunities which we ourselves have received that is not available for to-morrow's consumption. The psalmist said, 'As we have heard so have we seen, in the City of our God.' The deeds of ancient days were repeated in the prosaic present.

And that is as true about the individual life as it is about the corporate life of the community. All of us, looking back to what God has done for us, may find therein the basis of the surest confidence that all that is but a specimen and pledge of what He will do. Nobody else but a Christian has the right to say, 'I have had this, that, and the other good; therefore I shall have it.' Rather, alas! a man that has wrenched himself away from God has to say sadly, 'I have had; therefore the likelihood is that I shall not have any more.'

Have you ever thought that the belief which we all have, and cannot get rid of, in the uniformity of nature, has no scientific basis? Everybody expects that the sun will rise to-morrow, and for a great many millions of years, perhaps the expectation is right; but there is

coming a day when it will not rise. There is a last time — ‘positively the very last’ — for everything in the world, and in the order of nature, and the expectation of permanence by which we guide our lives is, at bottom, absolutely unfounded, and yet there it is, and we have to act upon it. But you can give no rational explanation of it, and it will not always serve., There was once made a calculating machine. You turned a handle, and ground out a succession of numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc., each increasing on the preceding by one. And after that had gone on for a long series the sequence was broken, and there came out a number which did not stand in the series at all. That is how God has made nature; grinding away for millions of years, and everything going in regular sequence; but then there comes a break, and the old order changeth. A day will come which is the last day. The sun will set and not rise again, and the world, and all there is in it, shall cease to be.

And as with nature, so with our little lives, and with the men that we trust to. We have no right to say, ‘I have been delivered, and therefore shall be delivered,’ unless we have the Lord, who is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever at the back of our confidence. For men’s resources fail and men’s dispositions change. If I have helped a man a hundred times, that is not a reason for my helping him the hundred and first time. I may get tired, or perhaps I have not the wherewithal, or circumstances alter. Continuity does not guarantee permanence. You can weary out the most patient patience, and chill the warmest love. And so we have to turn from all the limited and changeful grounds of confidence in ourselves, in others, in the order of things about us, and to acknowledge that we do not know what to-morrow is going to do for us. We have had a great many blessings, but the future may be beggared and bankrupt of them all, unless we can say, like Paul, ‘the Lord delivered me, and the *Lord* will deliver me.’ For His past is the parent and the prophecy of His present, and He does not let His resources be exhausted or His patience wearied or His love disgusted.

Thou hast been with me in six troubles, says Job-art Thou tired of being with me? — ‘in the seventh Thou wilt not forsake me.’ Thy past is the revelation of Thine eternal Self, and as Thou hast been so Thou wilt be. Christ, as the Incarnation of Divinity, lives, if I might use such a phrase, in a region that is high above the tenses of our verbs, in one eternal now, far below which, Past, Present, and Future, as we know them, are like the little partitions in our fields, which from the mountain-top melt away into invisibility, and do not divide the far-reaching plain.

Travellers see, in deserted, ancient cities, half-hewn statues, with one part polished and the rest rough, and the block not detached from the native rock. They were meant to be carried by ‘the subjects of some forgotten king to build up some unfinished and never-to-be-finished temple or palace. There are no half-finished works in God’s workshop; no pictures begun and uncompleted in Christ’s studio: and so we can go to Him with the old prayer of the psalmist: ‘The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.

Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of Thine own hands.’

Lastly, we have here a great lesson of how —

III. A man close to death may think of it, ‘The Lord will deliver me.’ Did He? ‘The Lord will save me... into His everlasting kingdom.’ Was that a mistake on Paul’s part? Very soon after he wrote these words, perhaps even before the winter against the cold of which he asked Timothy to bring his one cloak that he had left at Troas, he was again brought before the Emperor, and then was led outside the walls of Rome, where a gorgeous church now bears his name, and there, according to tradition was decapitated. Yes; that was just what he expected. For, as I have already pointed out, a verse or two before my text says, ‘I have finished my course.’ And yet, with the certainty that Death was close by him, he lifts up this ringing song Of triumph, ‘The Lord will deliver me from every evil

work, and will save me into His heavenly Kingdom,' He expected that deliverance and saving into the Kingdom to be accomplished precisely by the fact of his death.

A man who has a firm grip of Christ's hand sees all things differently from him who has no such stay. If Jesus is standing by us, and strengthening us, we can look with a smile at the worst that Nero can *do*, and can tell even the executioner: You do not mean it; do you know what you are doing? You think you are inflicting evil upon me. You are delivering me from every evil.' Death is the great emancipator from all manner of evil, be it the evil of sorrows or the evil of their parent sins. And he who rightly understands the operation of that, the last of earthly incidents, understands that it is, in the fullest sense, the smiting off of his chains, and the lifting of him up high into a region where no malaria of evil can ever rise.

Death is not merely to be looked at on the side of what it takes a man away from, but on the side of what it introduces him to. 'He shall deliver me from every evil'; that is much, but it might be effected by crushing the man's consciousness and annihilating him. Bare exemption and escape from the ills that flesh is heir to are not all the choice gifts with which

Death-comes laden. In his bony left hand is the gift of deliverance from all evil. In his right there is the positive gift of participation in all good. 'He shall deliver me from evil, and shall save me into His everlasting Kingdom.' And so that grim form is the porter at the gate, who ushers the man who has hoped in Christ into the royalty of His presence.

Mark that here, for the only time in Scripture, we have the expression, the 'heavenly Kingdom.' Why? Because Paul knew and felt that he was in the Kingdom already, and so he could not say barely that Christ through death was going to save him into the Kingdom. He was already there, but just because he was, therefore the last enemy assumed this friendly and familiar form to him, and

was sure to bring him into the heavenly form of the Kingdom, of whose earthly form he was already a subject. If — and only if

— you are in the Kingdom here, can you quietly look forward and be sure that the Lord, when He sends His messenger, will send Him to do the double work of delivering you out of all evil, and ushering you into all glory of good.

## **TITUS**

### **Titus 2:18--CHRISTIANS MAKING THE GOSPEL BEAUTIFUL**

‘That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.  
—Titus 2:18

THAT is a wonderful hope to hold forth before any man, that he may add beauty to the gospel. And it is still more wonderful when we remember that these words were originally addressed to a handful of slaves — the lowest of the population, whose lives were passed in sordid squalor; whose duties were narrow and often repulsive, and yet they in their limited sphere and lowly lot might make fairer the truth which is already beautiful with all the beauty of God.

I. Let us then think for a moment of this wonderful possibility that is opened out here before every Christian, that he may add beauty to the gospel.

He may paint the lily and gild the refined gold; for men do quite rightly and legitimately, judge of systems by their followers. It would not be a fair thing to test a philosophy or a body of political or scientific truth by the conduct and character of the men who professed it; but it is a perfectly fair thing, under certain conditions and in certain limits, to test a system of practical morality, which professes to do certain things with people’s character and conduct,

by its professors. It is just as fair, when a creed comes before our notice which assumes to influence men's conduct, to say: 'Well, I should like to see it working,' as it is for any of you mill-owners to say, when a man comes to you with a fine invention upon paper, 'Have you got a working model of it? Has it ever been tried? What have been the results that have been secured by it?' Or as it would be to say to anybody that claimed to have got a 'medicine that will cure consumption,' to say: 'Have you any cases? Can you quote any cures?' So when we Christians stand up and say, 'We have a faith which is able to deaden men's minds to the world; which is able to make them unselfish; which is able to lift them up above cares and sorrows; which is able to take men and transform their whole nature, and put new desires and hopes and joys into them'; it is quite fair for the world to say: 'Have you? Does it? Does it do so with you? Can you produce your lives as working models of Christianity? Can you produce your cure as a proof of the curative power of the gospel that you profess?'

So, dear friends, this possibility does lie before all Christian men, that they may by their lives conciliate prejudices, prepare people to listen favourably to the message of God's love, win over men from their aura-gonism, and make them say: 'Well, after all, there is something in that Christianity.'

It is not altogether and without limitation a fair thing to do to argue back from the lives of disciples to the truth of the creed, because all men are worse than their principles; and because, *too*, though a Christian man's goodness ought to be put down to the credit of his creed, a Christian man's badness ought to be put down to the debit of himself. But somehow or other the world, when it sees Christian people that do not live up to the level of their profession, does say, however illogically, both of two things, both of which cannot be true; first of all, 'A pretty kind of Christians these are!' and second, 'There cannot be much in the system that produces such!' One or other of the two things they ought to say. They ought either to say:

‘You are a hypocrite!’ or they ought to say: ‘Your Christianity is not worth much!’ But, illogically enough, they generally say both. And so you both damage yourselves in their eyes, and damage the religion you profess, by your inconsistencies and your faults.

Our lives ought to be like the mirror of a reflecting telescope. The astronomer does not look directly up into the sky when he wants to watch the heavenly bodies, but down into the mirror on which their reflection is cast. And so our little, low lives down here upon earth should so give back the starry bodies and infinitudes above us that some dim eyes, which peradventure could not gaze into the violet abysses with their lustrous points, may behold them reflected in the beauty of our life. The doctrines of Christianity, when they are only in words, are less fair than the same truths when they are embodied in a life. It is beautiful to say: ‘If ye love Me keep My commandments’; but the beauty of the words is less than when they are illustrated in a life. Our lives should be like the old missals, where you find the loving care of the monastic scribe has illuminated and illustrated the holy text, or has rubricated and gilded some of the letters.

The best Illustrated Bible is the conduct of the people who profess to take it for their guide and law.

II. So much, then, for the first point, the wondrous possibility that is opened in this text. Now let me say a word about the other side the solemn alternative.

If you look at the context you will see that a set of exhortations preceding these to the slaves, which are addressed to the wives, end with urging as the great motive to the conduct enjoined, ‘that the Word of God be not blasphemed.’ That is the other side of the same thought as is in my text.

The issues of the conduct of professing Christians are the one or other of these two, either to add beauty to the gospel or to cause the

Word of God to be blasphemed. If you do not the one you will be doing the other. If my life is not throwing back honour upon the gospel from which it manifestly flows, and by which it is manifestly moulded, it will be throwing back discredit. Your lives, professing Christians, are not neutral in their effect upon men's estimate of your creed. Either you attract or repel. The one pole of the magnet or the other you do present. Either you make men think better of God's truth, or you make them think worse of it. There are no worse enemies of the gospel than its inconsistent friends. That is especially true in lands where the Christian Church is a little band amongst heathens, as was the case with the churches of which Titus had charge. Who is it that thwarts missionary work in India? Englishmen. Who is it that, wherever they go with their ships, put a taunt into the lips of the enemy which Christian workers find it hard to meet? English sailors. The notorious dissipation and immorality amongst the representatvres of English commerce in the various Eastern centres of trade puts a taunt into the mouth of the abstemious Hindu and of the Chinaman. 'These are your Christians, are they?' England, that sends out missionaries in the cabin, and Bibles and rum side by side amongst the *cargo*, has to listen, and her people have to take to themselves the awful words with which the ancient Jewish inconsistencies were rebuked: 'Through you the name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles.'

And in less solemn manner perhaps, but just truly, here, in a so-called Christian land, the inconsistencies, the selfishness, the worldliness of professing Christian people, the absolute absence of all apparent difference between them and the most godless man in the same circumstances, are the things which perhaps more than anything else counteract the evangelistic efforts of the Christian Church. What is the good of my one voice preaching, if so many live in diametrical opposition to that which has been preached? One man pulls one way for twenty-five minutes, and hundreds pull the other way for a week; which will pull the most? If the Christian Church, and we as members of it, were living as we ought to do, and

as we might do, far more than all eloquent teaching would be the result of our simple lives of transparent godliness. My brother! I bring to each of you the very solemn question: Do you repel or attract? You have, perhaps, children. Are they favourably disposed to Christianity because of what they see in the lives of their father and mother? or do your inconsistencies, which the sharp eyes that see you in your easy moments at home cannot but notice however loving they may be, drive them away and disgust them with a profession of *religion*, and with religion itself?

You have friends and acquaintances, and a circle whom you influence. Do you influence them to look with favour upon that Word which has made you what you are? Or do you turn them away from it?

Remember, remember, either you beautify or you blaspheme the gospel by your conduct.

III. Once more, let me ask you to consider the sort of life that will thus commend and adorn the gospel

First of all it must be a life conspicuously and uniformly under the influence of Christian principles. I put emphasis upon these two words ‘conspicuously’ and ‘uniformly.’ You will be of very little use if your Christian principle is so buried in your life, embedded beneath a mass of selfishness and worldliness and indifference as that it takes a microscope, and a week’s looking for to find it. And you will be of very little use, either, if your life is by fits and starts under the influence of Christian principle ; a minute guided by that and ten minutes guided by the other thing ; — if here and there, sprinkled thinly over the rotting mass, there be a handful of the saving salt. We want uniformity and we want conspicuousness of Christian principle in our lives if they are to be a power to witness for our Master.

And remember, too, as the context teaches us, that the lives which commend and adorn the doctrine must be such as manifest Christian principle in the smallest details. These slaves, in their smoky huts, with their little tasks, and by the exercise of very homely virtues, were to ‘adorn the doctrine.’ Do you ever notice what it is that Paul tells them to ‘do that they *may*’ adorn the doctrine? Here is the list — ‘Obedient to their masters, not answering again, not purloining but showing all good fidelity.’ Very homely virtues; there is nothing at all lofty or transcendent or above the pedestrian level of a prosaic life in that. Obedience, keeping a civil tongue in their heads in the midst of *provocation*, not indulging in petty pilfering, being true to the trust that was given to them. ‘That is no great thing,’ you may say, but in these little things they were to adorn the great doctrine of God their Saviour. Ay! the smallest duties are in some sense the largest sphere for the operation of great principles. For it is the little duties which by their minuteness tempt men to think that they can do them without calling in the great principles of conduct, that give the colour to every life after all. You can write the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments in the space of a threepenny bit; you can make all the beauty and all the sanctifying power of the gospel visible and manifest within the narrow circle of the smallest duties that the lowest station has to perform. The little banks of mud in the wheel-tracks in the road are shaped upon the same slopes, and moulded by the same law that carves the mountains and lifts the precipices of the Himalayas. And a handful of snow in the hedge in the winter time will fall into the same curves, and be obedient to the same great physical laws which shape the glaciers that lie on the sides of the Alps. You do not want big things in order, largely and nobly, to manifest big principles. The smallest duties, distinctly done for Christ’s sake, will adorn the doctrine: —

*‘A servant, with this clause, Makes drudgery divine;*

*Who sweeps a house as by Thy laws Makes that and the calling  
fine.’*

‘Adorn the doctrine of God in *all* things.’ And then again, I may say that the manner of life which commends the gospel will be one conspicuously above the level of the morality of the class to which you belong. These slaves were warned not to fall into the vices that were proper to their class, in order that by not falling into them, and so being unlike their fellows, they might glorify the gospel. For the things that Paul warns them not to do are the faults which all history and experience tell us are exactly the vices of the slave — petty pilfering, a rank tongue blossoming into insolent speech, a disregard of the master’s interests, sulky disobedience or sly evasion of the command. These are the kind of things that the devilish institution of slavery makes almost necessary on the part of the slave, unless some higher motive and loftier principle come in to counteract the effects.

And in like manner all of us have, in the class to which we belong, and the sort of life which we have to live, certain evils natural to our position; and unless you are unlike the non-Christian men of your own profession and the people that are under the same worldly influence as you are — unless you are unlike them in that your righteousness exceeds their righteousness, ‘Ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’ My brother, if you and the godless man whose warehouse is up the same staircase pursue your business on the same maxims, have the same ideas as to what is desirable, press towards the same end, take the same short cuts through some morality in order to reach it, what is the good of your saying you are a Christian? If there is no difference between you and them, to your advantage and to the advantage of the gospel that you profess, say no more about your being dead to the world by the Cross of Christ, and living for higher and other motives.

If you are to adorn the doctrine you must conspicuously and uniformly, in great things and in small things, be living by other laws than those obey who believe not the doctrine. Unless it can be said of us: ‘There is a people here whose laws are different from all

people that be on the earth,' we shall never beautify the gospel of Christ.

And now one last word. How is such a manner of life to be attained? I know of only one way, and that is by continually living near Jesus Christ. If we are to beautify Him, He must first beautify us. If we are to adorn the doctrine, the doctrine must adorn us. That is to say, it is only when we live near Him, are in constant touch of His hand, and communion with His spirit, it is only then that His beauty shall pass into our faces, and that beholding the glory of the *Lord* 'we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory.' We must be on the mountain like Moses in fellowship with our Master, if we are to come down and walk amongst men with radiance streaming from our countenance, so as that all that look upon us shall behold our face 'as it had been the face of an angel.' 'Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord; this people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise'

### **Titus 2:11, 12--THE SCHOOL OF GRACE**

'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to on men, teaching...'— Titus 2:11, 12.

THE Apostle has been giving fatherly admonitions as to very elementary pieces of morality, addressed to both sexes, and to all ages. He winds up with inculcating on Christian slaves some obvious duties, such as obedience and honesty. In my text he bases all these on what was to him the motive and the power for all sorts of righteous living — viz., the fact of Christ's mission. The 'for' with which my text begins carries with it the whole relation between Christian thinking and Christian action, and shows us that the loftiest truths are then most honoured when they are brought to bear on the lowliest duties. Slaves are not to pilfer nor wrangle, 'for the grace that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching.'

Now there are two remarks that I must make of an expository kind in order to come to the understanding of the words before us. One is that the collocation in our Authorised Version, ‘hath appeared to all men,’ is not what Paul means, but these last words, ‘to all men,’ should be connected with the previous ones, ‘that bringeth salvation.’ It is not part of his purpose to declare, what was not in fact true then, and is not true *now*, that the grace of God has appeared to all men, but it was part of his purpose to declare that that grace brings salvation to all men, howsoever the present range of its manifestation may historically be contracted. The other remark that I would make is that ‘teaching’ is by no means a sufficiently comprehensive expression to cover the Apostle’s thought, for the word which he employs, whilst it does mean the communication of instruction, carries with it inseparably the other ideas of correcting faults and of chastisement. It is the same which is used in the well-known words, ‘Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.’ So that what the Apostle says here is that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *schooling*, or *training*, or *disciplining*.

I. Let us, then, first look at the appearance of the grace.

Now that word ‘grace’ played a much larger part in the thoughts of our fathers than it does in ours; and I am not sure that many things are more needed by the ordinary Christian of this generation than that he should rediscover the amplitude and the majesty of that old-fashioned and unfashionable word. For what does ‘grace’ mean? It means a self- originated love. Grace is love that has no motive but itself. Grace is a self- motivated love that is in full energetic exercise. Grace is a self-motivated, ever- acting love that delights to impart. Grace is a self-motivated, ever-acting, communicating love which bends in tenderness over and floods with gifts those that stand far beneath itself. Grace is a self-motivated, ever-acting, communicating, and stooping love which brings in its hands the gift of forgiveness, and deals with those on whom it lavishes this tenderness, not according to their merits, but according to the pulsations of its own

heart. And thus grace is the shorthand word for the self-motived, ever-acting, communicating, stooping, and pardoning mercy which has its very home and throne in the heart of God Himself. It is this galaxy of stars blended into one diffused light, and yet capable of being resolved into so many suns, which the Apostle here says 'hath appeared.' He uses a most significant and picturesque word, for it is the expression which is proper to describe the raying out in the heavens of its great lights, and in the only place in Scripture in which it is applied to physical things is in reference to the sun and stars which, clouded by tempest, for many days did not 'appear,' *nor* could beam their sweet light on the darkened earth. In all other cases where the word is employed it has a definite and plain meaning. It always refers to the coming of Jesus Christ, either his first coming in the Incarnation, or his second coming to Judgment. That manifests-tion is the raying out, as it were, of a sun, which has been obscured by the mists of sin, rising from the undrained swamps of our own hearts, and it pours itself down upon the mists; and thins them away until its radiant light is spread *over all* the glittering and rejoicing earth.

So the Apostle has a definite meaning, and points to a definite historical fact, when he declares that, in the Person and life of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, all this self-originated, active, communicating stooping, pardoning love finds its highest manifestation. The fire-mist, if I might so say, which was diffused through a chaotic universe, is gathered together into a sun, and it blazes down upon the world.

Now, of course, that conception of the life of Jesus Christ as the appearance of the grace of God rests upon the other belief that Jesus Christ has a special and unique relation to the God whose love He manifests. And this is the point of view from which the approaching Christmas festival has to be regarded by Christian people. Unless we can say, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' we cannot go on to say, 'We beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the

Father, full of grace and truth.’ Christmas celebrates not merely the birth of a man: but the Incarnation of a God. The ‘grace that bringeth salvation to all men hath *appeared*.’ Ay, there is the great peculiarity, there are the power and the blessedness of Christianity in its teaching, that now we no longer need to grope after God, searching painfully for traces of His footsteps in the maze of the world’s history, or consulting the ambiguous oracles of nature, or looking for Him in the intuitions of our own hearts, our hopes and fears, but that we can turn to historical facts and say, ‘Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.’ The day of peradventures is past, when we listen to his ‘Verily! verily! I say unto you... he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’

*And so the Word was flesh, and wrought*

*With human hands the creed of creeds*

*In loveliness of perfect deeds,*

*Higher than all poetic thought.’*

*‘The grace of God hath appeared.’*

II. Note the gift of the grace.

It ‘bringeth salvation to all men.’ Now I suppose one reason which recommended what I have already designated as an erroneous connection of words in our Authorised Version is the difficulty of believing in the face of facts that Christ, in His character of the embodied grace of God, did bring salvation to all men. But the explanation of the seeming difficulty is not to be found in twisting the words out of their proper order, but in understanding the words in the order in which they occur. For when the Apostle says that this grace brings salvation unto all, he does not say that all receive the salvation which is brought to them. There is a whole world of difference between the two expressions. And the word that he employs — for it is one word in the original which is rendered in

our Version by the three ‘that bringeth salvation’ — does not describe an actuality, but a potentiality and a possibility. The aim and purpose, not the realised effect, is what is pointed out in this great word of our text.

For there is a condition necessary from the very nature of the case. If God could save all men, be sure that He would do it; the love that thus takes its rise in the councils of Eternity, and flows on for ever through the waste and barren ages of human history, and is ever waiting to bestow itself, in its tenderness and in its liberality upon all men, is not made less universal, but it is conditioned by the nature of the gift that it brings. Salvation cannot be flung broadcast and indiscriminately upon all men of all sorts, whatever their relation to God. If it could, be sure that it would be. But just because it is a deep and inward thing, affecting men’s moral and religious state, and not only their position in regard to some future hell, it cannot be given thus broadcast, it must be sown in the fitting places. The one thing that is requisite, and it is indispensably requisite, is that I shall trust Him who brings salvation, and, trusting Him, shall take it out of His hand. If the medicine stands on the shelf, in the bottle with the stopper in, the sick man will not be cured. That is not the fault of the medicine; it is a panacea, but no remedy can work where it is not applied. This great ocean of the divine love goes, as it were, feeling along the black cliffs that front it, for some cranny into which it may pour itself, but the obstinate rock can fling it all back in impotent spray. Though the whole Atlantic surges against the cliff, it is dry an inch inwards. Thus the universality of the gift, the universal potency of the gift, is not in the slightest degree affected by the fact that, where it is not taken, its benefits are not realised. Have you shut your hearts to it, or have you opened them?

Paul recognised that this grace of God came with a gift that was meant for everybody, mainly because he knew that it had come with a gift that had done what it aimed at for him. Like every true Christian man, he felt, as you and I ought to feel, that if it were able

to save me it is able to save anybody, and that if it can cast out my faults and sins, though I may not have fallen into gross sins, or what the world calls crimes, there is no man whose iniquities will foil it. 'Of whom I am chief' is not an exaggeration, but it is the verdict of an honest conscience that knows the inside of one man, at all events, and knows how much of his surface innocence is deceptive, and how much of it is due not to himself, but to circumstances.

*'The arms of love that compassed me Would all mankind embrace.'*

You know, some of you, that He has cleansed you. You know that He would have cleansed you more completely if you had let Him; and, knowing that, can you doubt that He would cleanse everybody?

The universality of the gift is manifest in the fact that it addresses itself only to needs which belong to every man, for the deepest of all needs is the need that our relations to God shall be set right, and that we shall be delivered from the bondage and the tyranny of our sins.

And that universal potentiality and universal aim are still further written in unmistakable characters upon the mission and work of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it requires only, as its condition, that which all men can render. For if it had been meant for sections it would have called for qualifications which only classes can possess. If our understanding had been the organ for receiving the truth, it would have been a gospel for the wise men of the world, and the wayfaring man, the fool, would have been shut out. But now there is but the one condition of trust in the one omnipotent grace, and since all men, if they would, could put forth a believing hand, the very condition, instead of being a limitation, is a demonstration of the universality of the gift.

We have to look out over all the world, the outcasts, the slum-dwellers, the barbarian races, and as the main thought about them, to cherish the undying assurance that not one of them but is capable of being lifted by the grace of God from the depths into which they

have fallen. That is not the way in which people look at ‘the dangerous classes’ of civilisation and at the savage races outside its pale. Some of us are looking now at the latter mainly as beasts of burden, and hoping to exploit their muscles in the search after wealth and glory. Jesus Christ looks at them, and you and I ought to look at them, as possible candidates for the elevating influences of His grace. There is no metal so hard but, cast into that furnace of love, it will melt and flow. There is no reed so broken and trampled into the mud but that His gracious hands, with His deft and loving gentleness of touch, can bind it up and make it whole, and make it blossom. And there is no foulness so black but that this detergent can wash it white. There is no man on the face of the earth, nor ever has been, so brutalised but that, by the grace of God, he may be deified, made ‘partaker of a divine nature.’ Grace ‘brings salvation to all men.’

III. Lastly, let me point you to the discipline of the Grace.

As I have already said, ‘teaching’ here implies not only the communication of instruction, either outwardly or inwardly, but also a disciplinary process of correction that includes necessarily chastisement. Jesus Christ comes to us, and brings the external means of communicating instruction in the record of His life in this book. And He comes to us, also doing what no other teacher can do, for He passes into our spirits, and communicates not only instruction but the Spirit which teaches them in whom it abides, and guides them with gentle illumination into ‘all truth! concerning God, Christ, and themselves, which it is needful for them to know.

Nor does His work stop there, for He corrects and rebukes.

Nor does His work stop there, for as He Himself has said, ‘As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten’ He comes ‘with a rod’ sometimes, but always ‘in the spirit of meekness.’ He uses not only inward but also outward chastisements. The knife mercilessly cuts away the tender, pliant tendrils of the vine, and the sap bleeds out at the

wound, but the life does not; and the result of the pruning is larger and mellow clusters, ruddy in the sunlight and full of generous juice. So be sure of two things, dear friends, that it is grace which chastens, that the knife is held by a loving hand, and that the purpose of our outward sorrows, as well as of our inward discipline, is ‘that we may be partakers of His holiness.’ That grace is not like some unskilful surgeon, who cuts so deep that, in the effort to remove the tumour, he kills the sufferer; but His surgery knows to a hairsbreadth where to *stop*, and when the incision has Served its purpose.

‘The grace of God hath appeared disciplining.’ Disciplining? What for? Is the discipline to be sedulously carried on for threescore years and ten, and there an end? If we will only think of life as Christ’s school, we shall understand it better than from any other point of view; and be certain that all these capacities, which are imparted and unfolded and trained by us, exercised here, will find a better field beyond. Jesus Christ, the embodied Grace, has appeared to us. He prays us with much entreaty to receive His gift. If we will enroll ourselves in His school, and learn His lessons, and accept His corrections, and submit to His chastisements as tokens of His love and of His desire that we shall bear better fruit, then, as schoolboys say, we shall ‘get our remove’ when we are ready for it, and go up into the top form. And there not only Grace but Glory will be our teacher, and we shall learn from the Glory more than ever on earth we learned from the Grace.

### **Titus 2:12--THE PURPOSE OF GRACE**

‘That, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.’ — Titus 2:12.

To appreciate the full force of these words, we must observe that they are the Apostle’s statement of the ultimate design of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all the wonderful powers and gifts which Christ brought with Him. In our text, the end for

which that grace has appeared and exercises its corrective discipline is defined. It comes *in order that*, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly.

Now, remember that Paul thought that the life and the death of Jesus Christ were the most stupendous of miracles, nothing less than the entrance of divinity in a human form into the limitations of our lives, and His participation in the darkness of our deaths.

Remember that he believed that Jesus Christ's coming had led to a continual gift of an actual divine life to men who trusted Him; then you will see the grandeur and significance of the words of my text. What has this divine miracle of mercy been for? Nothing but this, to help men here to-day to live good lives. If there were no future at all, says Paul, the expenditure of the divine love is amply vindicated. The sun does not disdain to shine in order to ripen the vegetables in the humble cottage garden, and the love of God did not conceive that it had too small an object to warrant all that lavish gift which is in Christ, in helping us to live as becomes us. How dear we must be to God, and how infinitely important in His eyes must conduct and character be if such an abundance and variety of divine influences were set in motion to produce such an effect! Now, the first thing that strikes me about these words is the fair picture that they draw of what every life should be; and next, the hard conditions which they impose upon men who would live so; and then, what God has given us to make such lives possible. So I ask you to look at these three points.

#### I. The fair picture of what our lives should be.

Paul is saying nothing more than conscience, reason, the instincts of men everywhere endorse. His requirements in the rough division of virtues which he adopts, not for scientific accuracy but for practical force, are really said 'Amen!' to by every honest conscience 'Soberly, righteously, godly' — that is what everybody, if he will be fair with himself, feels to be the sort of life he ought to live. Let me

just touch upon these three things very briefly. They may be said, roughly, though not very accurately, perhaps, to cover the ground of a man's duties to himself, to his neighbours, and to God.

'Soberly' — that is what you owe to your own nature. 'Righteously' — that is what you owe to people round you. 'Godly' — that is what you owe to Him. I need not explain, I suppose, that the word 'soberly' has by no means the narrow signification which the besetting vice of England has given to it now — viz., abstinence from, or a very restrained use of, intoxicating liquors, nor even the wider one of a curbing of the desires of sense. But the meaning may be better represented by *self-control* than by any other rendering. Now if there were no man in the world but myself, and if I had no thought or knowledge of God, and if there were no other standard to which I ought to conform, I should have, in my own nature, with its crowd of desires, tastes, inclinations, and faculties, plain indication that self-government was essential. For human nature is not constituted on the plan of a democracy or an ochlocracy — a mob rule — but there is a clear hierarchy and order of predominance in it; and, as plainly as a ship is made to need a rudder, so plainly on your make is there stamped the necessity for rigid self-control.

For we all carry with us desires, inclinations, appetites — some of them directly connected with our physical frame, and some of them a little more refined — which are mere blind inclinations to a given specific good, and will be stirred up, apart altogether from the question of whether it is expedient or right to gratify them. To a hungry man the odour of food is equally enticing, whether the food belongs to himself or his neighbour; and if he had to steal for it, it would still tempt him. Because, then, we are to a large extent made up of blind desires which take no account of anything except their appropriate food, the commandment comes from the deepest recesses of each nature, as well as from the great throne in the heavens — 'Live soberly.' The engines will work on all the same, though the bows of the ship be turned to the rocks, and driving

straight on the reef. It is the engineer's business to start them and keep them going; it is their business to turn the screw; it is somebody else's business to look after the navigation. We have our 'humours under lock and key' in order that we may control them. And if we do not, we shall go all to rack and ruin. So, 'live soberly,' says Paul.

The next requirement is, 'righteously.' Now, I said that that might, perhaps, be roughly explained as referring mainly to our duties to one another. But that is not by any means an exhaustive — and perhaps, a scarcely approximate — description. For the attitude expressed in 'righteously' does not so much point to other people as to the existence of a certain standard, external to ourselves, to which it is our business and wisdom to conform. I said that, if there were nothing in the world except a man and his own nature, the duty of sober self-government would necessarily arise. But the supposed isolation does not exist. We stand in certain relations to a whole universe of things and of people, and there does rise before every man, however it may be accounted *for*, or explained away, or tampered with, or neglected, a standard of right and wrong. And what Paul here, means by 'live righteously' is, 'Do as you know you ought to *do*,' and in shaping your character, have reference not merely to its constitution, but to its relations to all this universe of outside facts.

So far as the word may include our duty to others, I may just remind you that 'righteousness' in reference to our fellows demands mercy. The common antithesis which is drawn between a just man who will give everybody what they deserve, and not one scrap more nor less if he can help it, and a kindly man is erroneous, because every man has a claim upon every other man for lenient judgment and undeserved help. He may not deserve it, being such a man as he is; but he has a right to it, being a man at all. And no man is righteous who is not merciful. We do not fulfil the prophet's exhortation, 'do

justice,' unless we fulfil his other, 'love mercy.' For mercy is the right of all men.

The last of the phases under which the perfect life is represented here takes us up at once into another region. If there were nobody but myself in the world, it must be my duty to live controlling myself; since I stand in relations manifold to creatures manifold and to the whole order of things, it is my duty to conform to the standard, and to do what is right. And just as plainly as the obligations to sobriety and righteousness press on every man, so plainly is godliness necessary to his perfection. For I am not only Bound by ties which knit me to my fellows, or to this visible order, but the closest of all bonds, the most real of all relations, is that which hinds us each to God.

And if 'man's chief end be to glorify God,' and then and thus, 'to enjoy Him for ever,' then that end, in its very nature, must be all pervasive, and diffuse its sweetness into the other two. For you cannot sliver up the unity of life into little sections and say, 'This deed has to be done soberly, and that one righteously, and this one godly,' but godliness must cover the whole life, and be the power of self-control and of righteousness. 'All in all or not at all.' Godliness must Be uniform and universal. Lacking their supreme beauty are the lives of all who endeavour to keep these other two departments of duty and forget this third. There are many men — I have no doubt there are some of them among us — punctiliously trying to control their natures, and to live righteously; but all their thoughts run along the low levels, and they are absolutely blind and deaf to voices and sights from heaven-They are like some of those truncated pyramids, broad-based upon the solid earth, and springing with firm lines to a certain height, and then coming to a dead stop, and so being but stumps, which leave a sense of incompleteness, because all the firm lines have not gathered themselves up into the sky-piercing point which aspires still higher than it has reached. 'Soberly,' that is much; 'righteously,' that is more; 'godly,' that is, not *most*, but *all*.

II. Secondly, notice what a hard task the man has who will live so.

The Apostle, very remarkably, puts first, in my text, a negative clause. The things that he says we are to deny are the exact opposites of the characteristics that he says we are to aim after. ‘Denying ungodliness’ — that is clearly the opposite of ‘godly’; and ‘worldly lusts,’ though perhaps not so obviously, yet certainly is the antithesis of ‘soberly’ and ‘righteously.’ I need not remind you, I suppose, that the word ‘lusts’ here has not the carnal associations cleaving to it which have gradually accrued to it in the changes of language since our translation was made, but that it implies simply ‘desires,’ longings, of however refined and incorporeal a sort, which attach themselves to the fleeting things of this life. Pride, ambition, and all the more refined and less sensual desires are as much included as the grossest animalism in which any swine of a man can wallow. Worldly lusts are desires which say to earth, and to what earth can give, in any of its forms, ‘Thou art my god, and having thee I am satisfied.’

Now, says Paul, there is no good to be done in the matter of acquiring these positive graces, without which a life is contemptible and poor, unless, side by side with the continual effort at the acquisition of the one, there be the continual and resolute effort at the excision and casting out of the other. Why? Because they are in possession. A man cannot be godly unless he casts out the ungodliness that cleaves to his nature; nor can he rule himself and seek after *righteousness* unless he ejects the desires that are in possession of his heart. You have to get rid of the bad tenant if you would bring in the good one. You have to *turn* the current, which is running in the wrong direction. And so it comes to be a very hard, painful thing for a man to acquire these graces of which my text speaks. People talk as if what was needed was the cultivation of what we have. Aye! that is needed; but there is something else than that needed. ‘You have to turn out a great deal of bad in order to make room for the good. Not that the evil can be expelled without

the entrance of the good, as I shall have to say in a moment. But still the two things must go on side by side.

And so it is hard work for a man to grow better. If we had only to advance in practice, or knowledge, or sentiment, or feeling, that would not be so difficult to do; but you have to reverse the action of the machine; and that is hard. Can it be done? Who is to keep the keepers? It is difficult for the same self to be sacrifice and priest. It is a hard matter for a man to crucify himself, and we may well say, if there can be no progress in goodness without this violent and thorough mutilation and massacre of the evil that be in us, alas! for us all I am sure, as sure as I stand here, that there are plenty of young men and women among my hearers now who have tried once and again, and have failed once and again, to 'live soberly, righteously, and godly,' because the evil that is in them has been too strong for them.

III. I come, lastly, on the strength of that grand first word of my text, 'in order that,' to remind you of what God gives us to make such life possible.

'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared disciplining us,' for this purpose, that the things which are impossible with men may be possible with God. Christ and His love; Christ and His life; Christ and His death; Christ and His Spirit; in these are new hopes, motives, powers, which avail to do the thing that no man can do. An infant's finger cannot reverse the motion of some great engine. But the hand that made it can touch some little tap or lever, and the mighty masses of polished iron begin to move the other way. And *so God*, and *God only*, can make it possible for us to deny ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to 'live soberly, righteously, godly, in this present world.' That Jesus who comes to us to mould our hearts into hitherto unfelt love, by reason of His own great love, and who gives to us His own Spirit to be the life of our lives, gives us by these gifts new motives, new powers,

new tastes, new affections. He puts the reins into our hands, and enables us to control and master our unruly tempers and inclinations. If you want to clear out a tube of any sort, the way to do it is to insert some solid substance, and push, and that drives out the clogging matter. Christ's love coming into the heart expels the evil, just as the sap rising in the tree pushes off the old leaves that have hung there withered all the winter. As Luther used to say, 'You cannot clean out the stable with barrows and shovels. Turn the Elbe into it.' Let that great flood of life pour into our hearts, and it will not be hard to 'live soberly.'

He comes to help us to live 'righteously.' He gives us His own life to dwell in our hearts, in no mere metaphor, but in simple fact. And they who trust in Jesus Christ are righteous by no mere fiction of a righteousness reckoned, but by the blessed reality of a righteousness imparted.

He comes to make it possible for us to live 'godly.' For He, and He alone, has the secret of drawing hearts to God; because He, and He alone, has opened the secret of God's heart to us. As long as we think of that Father in the heavens as demanding and commanding, we shall not love Him, nor serve Him, nor live 'godly.' 'I knew thee that thou wast an austere man... 'therefore I was afraid, and hid my talent in the earth.' But when we learn that 'God' and 'Love' spell with the same letters, and that He gives us in Christ the power to be what He commands us to become, then our spirits are stirred into thankful obedience.

So, dear friends, you that have been, as I am sure many of you have been, trying over and over again to mend yourselves, and have failed, listen to this gospel. You that have been sitting at the foot of the mountain, and seeing the shining towers of the fair palace-temple on its summit, and have made two or three feeble and foiled efforts to reach it, and then have fallen back again, do not despair or fancy that the heights are inaccessible. Trust yourselves to Christ,

and let His life come into your spirits, and He will ‘make your feet as hind’s feet, to tread upon the high places.’ He will be the path, and will show the path, and will give His angels charge concerning thee, to bear thee up in their hands, and to carry thee at last thither, whither He desires to bring thee. ‘Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend up into the heavens? The word is nigh thee.’ Trust thyself to that Son of Man who came down from heaven, and was in heaven when He came, and He will become the ladder, with its foot on the earth, by which even your feeble steps may rise to God.

### **Titus 2:13--THE HAPPY HOPE**

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ — Titus 2:13.

THERE are two appearances spoken of in this context — the appearance of ‘the grace of God that bringeth salvation’; and parallel with that, though at the same time contrasted with it, as being in very important senses one in nature and principle, though diverse in purpose and diverse in manner, is what the Apostle here calls ‘the glorious appearing of the great God.’

The antithesis of contrast and of parallel is still more striking in the original than in our version, where our translators have adopted a method of rendering of which they are very fond, and which very often obscures the full meaning of the text. Paul wrote, ‘Looking for that blessed [or ‘happy’] hope, even the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour,’ where you see he contrasts, even more sharply than our Bible makes him *do*, the past appearance of the grace, and the future appearance of the glory.

Then, further, this appearance of the glory; however bright with the terrible beauty and flashing lustre of divine majesty it may be, seems to the Apostle to be infinitely desirable, and becomes to him a happy hope. The reality, when it comes, will be pure joy. The irradiation of its approach shines from afar on his brightening face, and lightens

his heart with a hope which is a prophetic joy. And the attitude of the Christian soul towards it is to be that of glad expectation, watching the dawning east and ready to salute the sun.

And yet further, this attitude of happy expectation of the glory is one chief object to be attained by the grace that has appeared. It came 'teaching,' or rather (as the word more accurately means) 'disciplining, that we should live looking for that happy hope.'

So, then, we have here for our consideration three points embodied in these words — The grace of God has appeared, the glory of God is to appear; the appearance of the glory is a blessed hope; the disciplining of the grace prepares us for the expectation of the glory.

I. First, then, take that thought — The appearance of the grace leads to the appearance of the glory.

The identity of the form of expression in the two clauses is intended to suggest the *likeness* of and the *connection* between the two appearances. In both there is a visible manifestation of God, and the latter rests upon the former, and completes and crowns it.

But the difference between the two is as strongly marked as the analogy; and it is not difficult to grasp distinctly the difference which the Apostle intends. While both are manifestations of the divine character in exercise, the specific phase (so to speak) of that character which appears is in one case 'grace,' and in the other 'glory.' If one might venture on any illustration in regard to such a subject, it is as when the pure white light is sent through glass of different colours, and at one moment beams mild through refreshing green, and at the next flames in fiery red that warns of danger.

The two words which are pitted against each other here have each a very wide range of meaning. But, as employed in this place, their antithetical force is clear enough. 'Grace' is active love, exercised towards inferiors, and towards those who deserve something else.

So the grace of God is the active energy of His love, which stoops from the throne to move among men, and departing from the strict ground of justice and retribution, deals with us not according to our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities!

And then the contrasted word ‘glory’ has not only a very wide meaning, but also a definite and specific force, which the very antithesis suggests. The ‘glory of God,’ I believe, in one very important sense, is His ‘grace.’ The highest glory of God is the exhibition of forgiving and long-suffering love. Nothing can be grander. Nothing can be more majestic. Nothing, in the very profoundest sense of the word, can be more truly divine — more lustrous with all the beams of manifest deity, than the gentle raying forth of His mercy and His goodness.

But then, while that is the profoundest thought of the glory of God, there is another truth to be taken in conjunction with it. The phrase has, in scripture, a well marked and distinct sense, which may be illustrated from the Old Testament, where it generally means not so much the total impression of majesty and power made upon men by the whole revealed divine character, but rather the visible light which shone between the cherubim and proclaimed the present God. Connected with this more limited sense is the wider one of that which the material light above the mercy-seat symbolised — and which we have no better words to describe than to call it the ineffable and inaccessible brightness of that awful Name.

The contrast between the two will be suggested by a passage to which I may refer. The ancient lawgiver said, ‘I beseech thee show me thy *glory*.’ The answer was ‘I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee.’ The eye of man is incapable of apprehending the uncreated divine lustrousness and splendour of light, but capable of receiving some dim and partial apprehensions of the goodness, not indeed in its fulness, but in its consequences. And that goodness, though it be the brightest of ‘the glories that compose His Name,’ is

not the only possible, nor the only actual manifestation of the glory of God. The prayer was unfulfilled when offered; for to answer it, as is possible for earth, would have been to antedate the slow evolution of the counsels of God. But answered it will be, and that on this globe. 'Every eye shall see Him.'

The grace has appeared, when Divine Love is incarnate among us. The long-suffering gentleness we have seen. And in it we have seen, in a very real sense, the glory, for 'we beheld His *glory*, full of grace.' But beyond that lies ready to be revealed in the last time the glory, the lustrous light, the majestic splendour, the flaming fire of manifest Divinity.

Again, the two verses thus bracketed together, and brought into sharp contrast, also suggest how like, as well as how unlike, these manifestations are to be.

In both cases there is an appearance, in the strictest sense of the word, that is to say, a thing visible to men's senses. Can we see the grace of God? We can see the love in exercise, cannot we? How? 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?' The appearance of Christ was the making visible, in human form, of the love of God.

My brother, the appearance of the glory will be the same — the making visible in human form of the light of throned and sovereign Deity. The one was incarnation; the other will be incarnation. The one was patent to men's senses — so will the other be. The grace has appeared. The glory is to appear. 'Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' An historical fact, a bodily visibility, a manifestation of the divine nature and character in human form upon earth, and living and moving amongst men i As ' Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, 'so unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' The two are strictly parallel. As the grace was visible in action by a Man among

men, so the glory will be. What we look for is an actual bodily manifestation in a human form, on the solid earth, of the glory of God.

And then I would notice how emphatically this idea of the glory being all sphered and embodied in the living person of Jesus Christ proclaims His divine nature. It is 'the appearance of the glory' — then mark the next words — 'of the great God and our Saviour.'

I am not going to enter upon the question of the interpretation of these words, which by many very competent authorities have been taken as all referring to Jesus Christ, and as being a singular instance in scripture of the attribution to Him directly, and without any explanation or modification, of the name, 'the great God!' I do not think that either grammar or dogma require that interpretation here. But I think that, if we take the words to refer distinctly to the Father and to the Son, the inference as to Christ's true and proper divinity which comes from them, so understood, is no less strong than the other interpretation would make it. For, in that case, the same one and indissoluble glory is ascribed to God the Father and to Christ our Lord, and the same act is the appearance of both. The human possesses the divine glory in such reality and fulness as it would be insanity if it were not blasphemy, and blasphemy if it were not absurdity, to predicate of any single man. The words coincide with His own saying, 'The Son of Man shall come in *His glory and of the Father,*' and point us necessarily and inevitably to the wonderful thought that the glory of God is capable of being fully imparted to, possessed by, and revealed through Jesus Christ; that the glory of God is Christ's glory, and the glory of Christ is God's. In deep, mysterious, real, eternal Union the Father and the Son, the light and the ray, the fountain and the source, pour themselves out in loving-kindness on the world, and shall flash themselves in splendour at the last, when the Son of Man 'shall be manifested in His own glory and of the Father!'

And then I must touch very briefly another remarkable and plain contrast indicated in our text between these two ‘appearings.’ They are not only unlike in the subject (so to speak) or substance of the manifestation, but also in the purpose. The grace comes, patient, gentle, sedulous, labouring for our training and discipline. The glory comes — there is no word of training there! What does the glory come for? The one rises upon a benighted world — lambent and lustrous and gentle, like the slow, silent, climbing of the silvery moon through the darkling sky. But the other blazes out with a leap upon a stormy heaven — ‘as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the *west*,’ writing its fierce message across all the black page of the sky in one instant, ‘so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.’ Like some patient mother, the ‘grace of God’ has moved amongst men, with entreaty, with loving rebuke, with loving chastisement. She has been counsellor and comforter. She has disciplined and fostered with more than maternal wisdom and love. ‘Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’ But the glory appears for another purpose and in another guise — ‘Who is this that cometh with dyed garments? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel? I have trodden the winepress alone — for the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come.’

II. But we have now to look at the second thought which is involved in these words, and that is, the appearing of the glory is a blessed hope.

The hope is blessed; or as we have already remarked, the word ‘happy’ may perhaps be substituted with advantage. Because it will be full of blessedness when it is a reality, therefore it is full of joy, while it is but a hope.

The characteristics of that future manifestation of glory are not such that its coming is wholly and universally a joy. There is something terrible in the beauty, something menacing in the brightness. But it

is worth noticing that, notwithstanding all that gathers about it of terror, all that gathers about it of awful splendour, all that is solemn and heartshaking in the thought of judgment and retribution for the past, the irreversible and irrevocable past, yet to Paul it was the very crown of all his expectations *of*, and the very shining summit of all his desires for, the future — that Christ should appear.

The primitive Church thought a great deal more about the coming of Jesus Christ than about death — thought a great deal more about His coming than about ‘Heaven.’ To them the future was not so much a time of rest for themselves as the manifestation of their Lord. To them the way of passing out of life was not so much seeing corruption as being caught up together in the air.

And how far the darkness, which our Lord declared to be the divine counsel in regard to that future coming, enwrapped even those who, upon all other points, received the divine inspiration which made and makes them for evermore the infallible teachers and authorities for the Christian Church, is a moot question. If it were certain that the Apostle expected Christ’s coming during his own lifetime, I do not know that we need be troubled at that as if it shook their authority, seeing that almost the last words which Christ spoke to His Apostles were a distinct declaration that He had not to reveal to them, and they were not to know ‘the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own power,’ and seeing that the office of that Holy Spirit, as whose organs Paul and the other writers of the New Testament are our authoritative teachers, is expressly declared to be the bringing all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had revealed. If, then, He expressly excepts from the compass of His revelation this point, it can be no derogation from the completeness of an inspired writer’s authority, if he knows it not.

And if one takes into account the whole of Paul’s words on the subject, they seem to express rather the same double anticipation, which we too have to cherish, desiring and looking, on the one hand,

for the Saviour from heaven; desiring on the other hand to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. The numerous places in which Paul speaks of his own decease, sometimes as longed for, sometimes as certain; and, latterly, as near, are inconsistent with the theory that he looked for Christ's coming as certain in his own lifetime. So, too, are other anticipations which he expresses as to the future course of the Church, and progress of the Gospel in the world. He, like us, would appear to have had before his expectations the alternative. He knew not when the glory might burst upon the world, therefore he was ever standing as one that waits for his Lord. He knew not when he might have to die, therefore he laboured that, 'whether present or absent, he might be pleasing to Him.'

But that is not the point upon which I want to say a word. Dear brethren, the hope is a *happy* one. If we know the grace, we shall not be afraid of the glory.' If the grace has disciplined in any measure, we may be sure that we shall partake in its perfection. They that have seen the face of Christ looking down, as it were, upon them from the midst of the great darkness of the cross, and beneath the crown of thorns, need not be afraid to see the same face looking down upon them from amidst the blaze of the light, and from beneath the many crowns of the kingdoms of the world and the royalties of the heavens. Whosoever hath learnt to love and believe in the manifestation of the grace, he, and he only, can believe and hope for the manifestation of the glory.

And, Christian men and women, whilst thus the one ground upon which that assurance, 'The Lord cometh,' can be anything to us except a dread, if it is a belief at all, is the simple reliance upon his past work — let me urge the further consideration upon you and myself, how shamefully all of us neglect and overlook that blessed expectation! We live by hope. God, indeed, is above all hope. To that infinite eye, before which all things that were, and are, and are to come, lie open and manifest, or, rather, are insphered in His own person and self; to Him, who is the living past, the abiding present,

the present future, there is no expectation. The animal creation is below hope. But for us that live on the central level — half-way between a beast and God, if I may so say — for us our lives are tossed about between memory and expectation.

We all of us possess, and most of us prostitute that wonderful gift — of shaping out some conception of the future. And what do we do with it? It might knit us to God, bear us up amid the glories of the abysses of the skies. We use it for making to ourselves pictures of fools' paradises of present pleasures or of successful earthly joys. The folly of men is not that they live by hope, but that they set their hopes on such things.

*'They build too low Who build beneath the stars!'*

As for every other part of human nature, so for this strange faculty of our being, the gospel points to its true object, and the gospel gives its only consecration.

Dear brethren, is it true of us that into our hearts there steals subtle, impalpable, but quickening as the land breeze laden with the fragrance of flowers to the sailor tossing on the barren sea, a hidden but yet mighty hope of an inheritance with Him — when He shall appear? With eye lifted above and fixed upon the heavens do I look beyond the clouds to the stars? Alas! alas! the world drives that hope out of our hearts It is with us as with the people in some rude country fair and scene of riot, where the booths and the shows and the drinking-places are pitched upon the edge of the common, and one step from the braying of the trumpets brings you into the solemn stillness of the night; and high above the stinking flare of the oil lamps there is the pure light of the stars in the sky, and not one amongst the many clowns that are stumbling about in the midst of sensual dissipation ever looks up to see that calm home that is arched above them!

We live for the present, do not we? And there, if only we would lift our eyes, there, even now, is the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. My friend, it is as much an element of a Christian's character, and a part of his plain, imperative duty, to look for His appearing as it is to live 'soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world!'

III. Well then, finally, one word about the last consideration here, viz., The grace disciplines us to hope for the glory.

The very idea of discipline involves the notion that it is a preparatory stage, a transient process for a permanent result. It carries with it the idea of immaturity, of apprenticeship, so to speak. If it is discipline, it is discipline for some condition which is not yet reached. And so if the grace of God comes 'disciplining,' then there must be something beyond the epoch and era within which the discipline is confined.

And that just runs out into two considerations, upon which I have not time to dwell. Take the characteristics of the grace — clearly enough, it is preparing men for something beyond itself. Yield to the discipline and the hope will grow.

Take the characteristics of the grace. Here is a great system, based upon a stupendous and inconceivable act of divine sacrifice, involving a mysterious identification of the whole race of sinful men with the Saviour, embodying the most wonderful love of *God*, and being the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Here is a life perfectly innocent, perfectly stainless, brought to the extremity of evil, and having never swerved one inch from the divine commandments, yet dying at last under a consciousness of separation and desertion from God! Here are a cross, a resurrection, an ascension, an omnipotent Spirit, an all-guiding Word, a whole series of powers and agencies brought to bear! Does any man believe that such a wealth of divine energy and resource would be put forth and employed for purposes that break short off when a man

is put into his coffin, and that have nothing beyond this world for their field?

Here is a perfect instrument for making men perfect, and what does it do? It makes men so good and leaves them so bad that unless they are to be made still better and perfected, God's work on the soul is at once an unparalleled success and a confounding failure — a puzzle, in that having done so much it does not do more; in that having done so little it has done so much. The achievements of Christianity upon single souls, and its failures upon those for whom it has done most, when measured against, and compared with, its manifest adaptation to a loftier issue than it has ever reached here on earth, all coincide to say — the grace (because its purpose is discipline, and because its purpose is but partially achieved here on earth) *demand*s a glory, when they whose darkness has been partially made 'light in the Lord,' by the discipline of grace, shall 'blaze forth as the sun' in the Heavenly Father's Kingdom of Glory.

Yield to the discipline, and the hope will be strengthened. You will never entertain in any vigour and operative power upon *your* lives the expectation of that coming of the glory unless you live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

That discipline submitted to is, if I may so say, like that great apparatus which you find by the side of an astronomer's biggest telescope, to wheel it upon its centre and to point 'its tube to the star on which he would look.

So our anticipation and desire, the faculty of expectation which we have, is wont to be directed along the low level of earth, and it needs the pinions and levers of that gracious discipline, making us sober, righteous, godly, in order to heave it upwards, full-front against the sky, that the stars may shine into it.

The speculum, the object-glass, must be polished and cut by many a stroke and much friction ere it will reflect 'the image of the

heavenly'; so grace disciplines us, patiently, slowly, by repeated strokes, by much rubbing, by much pain — disciplines us to live in self-restraint, in righteousness and godliness, and then the cleared eye beholds the heavens, and the purged heart grows towards ' the Coming' as its hope and its life.

Dear brethren, let us not fling away the treasures of our hearts' desires upon trifles and earth. Let us not set our hopes on that which is not, nor paint that misty wall that rings round our present with evanescent colours like the landscapes of a dream. We may have a hope which is a certainty, as sure as a history, as vivid as a present fact. Let us love and trust Him who has been manifested to save us from our sins, and in whom we behold all the grace and truth of God. If our eyes have learnt to behold and our hearts to love Him whom we have not seen, amid all the bewildering glares and false appearances of the present, our hopes will happily discern Him and be at rest, amid the splendours of that solemn hour when He shall come in His glory to render to every man according to His works.

With that hope the future, near *or* far, has no fears hidden in its depths. Without it, there is no real anchorage for our trembling hearts, and nothing to hold by when the storm comes. The alternative is before each of us, 'having no hope,' or 'looking for that blessed hope.' God help us all to believe that Christ has come for me! Then I shall be glad when I think that Christ will come again to receive me unto Himself!

### **Titus 2:14--CHRIST'S GIFT OF HIMSELF**

'Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself at peculiar people.' — Titus 2:14.

We have seen in former sermons on the preceding context that the Apostle has been setting forth the appearing of the grace of God as having for its great purpose the production of a holy and godly character and conduct. In these words which close the section he

returns substantially to the same theme, only, as a great composer, will do with some favourite musical movement, he repeats it in a somewhat different key and with variations.

The variations are mainly two. Instead of the more general and less definite expression, 'the grace of God hath appeared,' he now specifies the precise act in which that grace did appear. 'He gave Himself for us.' Christ's self-sacrifice is the 'appearing of the grace of God.' The diffused flame is gathered into a focus, and thus concentrated. It has appeared to melt hearts. Then there is a second variation in the treatment of the theme here, and that is that the actor is different. In the former case it was 'we' who, trained by 'the appearing of the grace,' were to deny ourselves and 'live soberly, righteously, and godly.' Here it is 'He' who redeems and purifies us by His gift of Himself. He and we, the human and the divine, cooperate. If we 'deny ourselves,' and 'live soberly, righteously, and godly,' it is because He 'has redeemed us.' If He has purified us, it is in the measure in which we deny ourselves and yield ourselves to His influences. And so the two views stereoscope and become a solid reality.

Now then, there are three points to which I would turn especially in the words before us — Christ's great self-bestowment, Christ's great emancipation, Christ's great acquisition. 'He gave Himself,' the great self-bestowment; 'that He might redeem us,' the great emancipation; 'and purify unto Himself a people for a possession,' the great acquisition.

I. First, then, the great self-bestowment.

'He gave Himself,' the supreme token of love every where, the natural expression of love everywhere. We know inferior instances of the same sort, and they make the very salt of life. The most self-engrossed recognises their nobility, and the most cold-blooded thrills at the sight. We know what it is for benefactors, and well-wishers, and enthusiasts of all sorts to yield up themselves joyfully

for some great cause not their *own*, or for some persons who appeal to their hearts. The one noble thing in the devilish trade of war is that there sometimes we can see men flinging their lives away gladly in the thrill of devotion to the cause for which they fight. In the narrower regions of our hearts and homes, happy husbands and wives, mothers to their children, know what it is joyfully to give themselves away. All these illustrations do help us, but they help us only a very little bit along the road to understand that supreme and transcendent gift of a self of which Paul is speaking here as the basis of all nobleness in the characters of men. After we have travelled as far as any human illustration or analogy will help us, we are still infinitely far from that great fact. They lead us along the road, but it is not only a question of travelling along a road, it is a question of springing from the furthest point attained up into the very heaven itself, for this gift is unique, and to be paralleled by naught beside.

It began earlier, the initial step was when ‘the Word became flesh.’ There was one Man who willed to be Man, and whose not being ‘ashamed to call us brethren,’ and taking upon Himself part of the children’s flesh and blood, was the supreme instance of condescending self-abandonment and bestowment. It began earlier; it went deeper; for not only is His self-surrender unstained by the smallest self-regard, as is manifest by the records of His life, but it goes down deep and deep and deep into such an utter gift of Himself as no mere human beneficence can ever emulate or even approximate to. And it brought with it heavier burdens and deeper sorrows, which culminated in that great act which, by its very greatness, has sometimes led men to separate it from the life of which it was the climax and superlative degree, and to declare that only in His death does the Lord give Himself for the life of the world, whereas the life among men, with all its pains of contact, with all its pains Of sympathy, with all its self-oblivion, was as really a part of Christ’s giving Himself to the world as was even that death upon the Cross, by which the gift was perfected and sealed. So then, brethren, whilst we thankfully accept the analogies which lead

us a little way, let us never forget that in this matter degree is not the only difference, and quality as well as quantity are unlike.

But mark the other word. 'He gave Himself for us.' Now the Apostle here uses a word which does not imply 'instead of,' but 'for our behoof.' He is not for the moment dwelling upon the way in which that gift benefits — that comes in the next clause — but simply upon the fact that it does benefit. And Christ gave Himself — in a way to be subsequently declared—for the advantage of whoever may be included in the 'us.' And who are the 'us'? Paul was talking to Titus, and was including with him these Cretan Christians, none of whom had ever been seen by or seen Jesus. So that 'us' is universal, and includes all humanity. But it does more than that. Jesus Christ's giving of Himself to us was no indefinite gift of a general beneficence, which had no knowledge of, or feeling towards, the individual units that make up the company, but as I venture to believe, and as I would press upon you to consider whether our Christian conception of Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word does not necessarily carry with it, the human heart of Christ loved each unit of the mass, that the divine eye separated and distinguished. We cannot 'see the wood for the trees.' We generalise our beneficence, and we lose sight of the individuals that are to be benefited by it. Who of us can specify the single souls or bodies that may be helped by our contributions to a fund for dealing with some general disaster? But Jesus Christ takes men one by one, and 'He gave Himself for us' because 'He gave Himself for me,' and thee, and thee, and all the single souls that make up mankind. Each was in His loving desire a recipient of the gift.

Brethren, I venture to assert, though it is impossible for me to go on here at any length to establish the assertion, that this conception of a Christ who not merely spoke, and was gentle and gracious, and the type of excellence, and the realised ideal of human perfection, but who came to do and to give Himself for the behoof of every soul of man, is the heart of Christianity.

This is the view which, like a key, will unlock the rusty gates of our wills and spirits. This is the conception which alone adequately represents the teaching of scripture, the requirements of the deepest reason, and what is even more authoritative, the instinctive needs of hungry, sin-laden hearts. Here is the lever that moves the world: 'He gave Himself for us.'

II. Now, secondly, notice Christ's great emancipation.

The Apostle states the object of the gift in a twofold fashion, 'That He might redeem us all from iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Let me deal now with the former of these two expressions. The object of Christ's gift is man's redemption. And what is redemption? Well, it is no doubt a metaphorical expression, and there lies beneath it the image of a slave set free by a ransom. That is in the word, and no fair interpretation of the word can strike that out of the depth of its meaning. So then we begin as the fundamental fact, without which we shall never come either to understand the meaning of Christ's whole appearance, or get the highest good out of it for our own souls, with this conception of our condition — that we are in bondage to what the Apostle here calls 'iniquity,' or lawlessness.

Now do not say that this is Pauline, and that the Christ of the gospels does not say so. He does. Do you remember what He said when the people, with that strange but yet universal forgetfulness or ignoring of the facts of their condition, said to Him, whilst the Roman garrison in the castle might have heard the boast: 'We were never in bondage to any man'? He answered: 'He that doeth sin is the slave of sin.' You may like it or not like it; you may believe that it is the deepest view of human nature; or you may brush it aside as being narrow and pessimistic and old-fashioned, and all the rest of it, but it is Christ's view. Do not say it is Paul's. It *is* Paul's; but he got it from Jesus, and you have Him to reckon with, and Him to contradict, if *you* do not. And, alas! a great many of us do not

recognise that, after all is said and done, the fact of sin, considered as setting up myself as my own centre and law, in antagonism to, or in neglect of, God, who ought to be my centre, is the universal experience of humanity. The fetters are on our limbs. I remember a story of an English author in the early part of last century, who was put into prison for some imaginary offence, and who pleased himself in a peurile fashion by twisting flowers round the grating of his window, and making believe that he was a free man. Yes, that is what a great many of us do. We try to hide the fetters by putting silk handkerchiefs over them. We, too, like these presumptuous Jews, say: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' No, not in bondage to any *man*, but in bondage worse than that. What about those tendencies in yourself — these lusts and passions, these temptations to ignoring God and living for self, and to other sins that, like springing tigers, have fixed their talons in us and keep us down, in spite of our kicking and struggling? The root cause of almost all the inadequate conceptions of Christ and His work which depart from the plain teaching of Christ and Scripture, lies here, that men do not recognise the fact of their bondage to sin. Wherever that recognition is weak, you will have a maimed Christ and an impotent Christ. It is of small profit to argue about theological doctrines unless you can get a man to feel that he is a sinful man in God's sight. And when he has learnt what sin means, what guilt means, what the tyranny of a committed transgression means, what the awful voice of a roused conscience means, he will be ready to fling aside all his superficial, easygoing thoughts about

Jesus of Nazareth, and to clutch as his one hope the great word: 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' 'He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us.'

And so we come to the conception that that giving Himself for us is more than a giving of Himself on behalf of us, in some vague way, and that the way in which Jesus Christ gives Himself for us is that He gives 'Himself instead of us.'

And there, as I humbly venture to believe, is the point of view at which we must stand, if we would give due weight either to His words or to His Cross. There is the point of view at which, as I humbly venture to believe, we must stand if we would receive into our hearts the greatest blessing that that Lord can give — emancipation from sin's guilt by that great Sacrifice of His, emancipation from sin's power by the presence within us of His own life and spirit. Christ came into the world 'to give His life a ransom for many.' Again I say, therefore, do not pooh-pooh such teaching as this of my text, or may I venture to say — I do it with all humility — such teaching as I am trying to give now, with the easy and superficial remarks that it is Pauline. It is Christ's — 'The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.' Oh, dear friends, there is the power. Christianity *minus* that Sacrifice is not a Christianity that the world or the flesh or the devil have ever been, or ever need to have been, much afraid of. We may gather metaphors in crowds to illustrate that Sacrifice, but they all fail, for it is unique and transcendent. Men have given themselves up to fetters that others might be made free. Men have given themselves up to the death that others might live. There was a Swiss soldier in one fight who gathered the spears of the enemy into a sheaf, and pointed them to his own breast, that a path might be cleared for the advance of his comrades. The angel that came into Peter's cell touched him and the fetters fell from his limbs. Christ has come into the dark prison of our humanity, and a drop of His blood on the fetters that bind me to my sin, and my sin to me, corrodes them into dust, and my limbs are free. He fronts all our tyrants as He fronted the Roman soldiers, and says, 'I am He; if ye seek Me, let these go their way.' He 'gave Himself for us that He might redeem us.'

III. And now your time will not allow me to speak, except very inadequately, about the last point that is here, and that is Christ's great acquisition.

‘That He might purify unto Himself a people for a possession’ — as is the proper rendering — ‘zealous of good works.’ The Apostle is quoting, as I suppose we all know, from the ancient words which make the charter of the Israelitish nation, in which God declared that they were to Him a ‘people of a possession above all the nations that are on the earth,’ and he transfers these great words to Christ, and our relation to Him. He, *too*, has won a people for His very own. Christ wins us for His because He has given Himself to be ours. Mark how beautifully the reciprocalness of the relation is suggested by the former clause of our text, ‘He gave Himself for us,’ that He might win us for Himself ‘for a possession.’ Yes, in the commerce of love, nothing but a heart can buy a heart, nothing but a heart can pay for a heart. Jesus gives Himself to me, that I may give myself to Him. That is the only gift that satisfies Him. The only result which He recognises as being the fruit of the travail of His soul, which is sufficient for Him, is that we poor men, delivered from our selfishness, emancipated from our sins, with our wills set free, should go to Him and say, ‘Lord, Thou art mine, and I, poor as I am, little as the gift is, I am Thine.’

We shall only be His in the measure in which we are ‘purified.’ And it is His love that purifies us, and His gift that purifies. For that gift sets in *operation* within us a multitude of new motives and new desires. And, more than that, He gave Himself that our sins might be taken away. But there is the present gift, as well as the past one, for He is giving Himself still, moment by moment, and hour by hour, to every one that cleaves to Him. And that gift of Himself comes into our hearts as, according to Luther’s old metaphor, the Elbe was turned into the stable to sweep out all the filth, and make all things clean.

So, dear friends, let us cleave to that Lord. Let us see to it that we have fathomed, and not only fathomed, but accepted, the great gift of Himself in its most transcendent form, in its mightiest efficacy, the gift by which, by His death, He has taken away the guilt, and by

His life within us, breaks the power of our sins, and makes us eager zealots, enthusiasts for all manner of ‘good works.’

### **Titus 2:14--ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS**

‘... Zealous of good works.’ — Titus 2:14.

WE have seen in previous sermons on the preceding context how emphatically the Apostle reiterates that the end of the gospel is the production of Christlike and Christ-pleasing character. For this purpose our Lord came, and in Him the grace of God broke through the clouds which wrapped men in dark folds of ignorance and sin. For this end Christ died, giving Himself for us, that ‘He might redeem us from iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for a possession.’ That insistence on practice as the upshot of doctrine is characteristic of the three last letters of the Apostle, which are called the Pastoral Epistles, and it is very natural in an old man. Just as tradition tells us that when John was too feeble to walk, and too old to say much, he was carried Sunday by Sunday into the assembly of the Church to say nothing more than ‘Little children, love one another,’ so Paul, having laid the foundations in the great doctrinal Epistles of his early time, now an old man, deals rather with practice than with doctrine. But the practice is, in his mind, the offshoot of, and inseparably connected with, the doctrine, and to pit the one against the other, as Some people do nowadays, is to say, ‘I do not care much about root; fruit is what I want’; or, ‘I make little account of what a man eats; what I look to is his muscle and his strength.’ But will there be any fruit without a root, or any muscle and strength that is not nourished? Paul’s gospel is ethical because it *is* a gospel.

Now these words of my text are a kind of appendix to what precedes them, in which the Apostle has been sketching the sort of people that Christ’s mission and work are intended to make. He says they are to be redeemed, they are to be purified, they are to be won for Christ’s own, and to be conscious that they are His; and then he adds this

remarkable expression which I have not been able to deal with at length in former sermons, but which is too important to pass by — ‘zealous’ — what for? — ‘good works.’

Now I think, if we will consider these words, we shall find that they convey, some lessons, always important, and, as it seems to me, extremely important for the Church of this generation.

I. A consistent Christian will be a zealous Christian. I do not need to waste your time in trying to define what zeal is. We all know it. When we approve of its object we admire it and call it ‘beautiful consecration’; when we are not in sympathy with its objects we call it ‘ridiculous exaggeration’ and ‘fanaticism.’ Its elements are threefold, an overmastering recognition of the greatness of some truth, or cause, or person, for which, or for whom, we are ‘zealous’ — a glow of emotion arising from that recognition, and a consciousness of obligation to strain all our powers for the diffusion of the truth, or the advancement of the cause, or the honour of the person, for whom we are zealous. Now, of course, when a man gets hold of some truth that masters him, there is always the danger of his losing the sense of proportion, of his getting his perspective wrong, and being so swallowed up in the one thing that he sees, that, like a horse with blinkers, he does not see anything except that one narrow line that lies in front of him. And so zeal is always in danger of being deformed into fanaticism, but it is God’s way in working the world onwards, to raise up successions of men, each of whom recognises with overwhelming clearness some one little segment of the great orb of truth, and the world advances because there are men that believe in one thing, that see one thing, and that give themselves, body and soul, to the setting forth of that one thing. All the rest of us stand by and say, ‘What ridiculous exaggeration! how entirely oblivious he is counter-balancing considerations; how he has narrowed himself down into being the instrument and the apostle of this one thing!’ Yes; and if you want to bore a hole through a six-inch plank, you have to put a pretty sharp point upon

your tool, and to make it very 'narrow.' The world never gets to see any truth, until it has been hammered into it by some man who did not see any other truth.

There will come, too, with that overwhelming conception of the greatness of the truth, or of the person, or of the cause, a glow of emotion.

Argument may be worked in fire or in frost, and the arguments that melt are warm, or if I might go back to my former figure, your boring tool will penetrate more quickly and easily if it has been heated as well as pointed. And zeal glows, and it is the glow rather than reasoning that convinces men.

I need not dwell upon other characteristics of zeal, but my next thought is—Christianity is such as that, if a man really and fully accepts it, he cannot help being zealous. Look at the truths that we say we believe. We believe in ideas about the significance and issues of this earthly life, so solemn, so great, so transcending all present experience, that it is incredible that they can enter into a man's mind in any deep sense, and leave him cold and indifferent. We believe in such truths about Sin and Judgment and Eternity that they might kindle a soul beneath the ribs of death, and burn up all indifference, so as that the extremist, enthusiastic grasp of them is only moderation and rational. We say that we believe that the infinite, divine nature was incarnated in a Man, and that that Man lived and died because He loved every soul, and that that death brings to the world emancipation, and that Life brings to the world life, and that these things are true for all men. What I maintain is, that if a man really believes these things, not with the mere conventional faith that characterises multitudes of professing Christians, it is impossible that he should be left cold. If the sun is shining the temperature will go up; and if the thermometer does not rise it is because something or other has come between the sunbeam and the mercury. If the iceberg floats down into the warm oceans of

the temperate or tropical zones it will melt into sweet water, and it cannot remain ice. If it continue grim and cold, it is because there is only the sun of the Arctic winter, which has a pale light, and scarcely any warmth at all, shining down upon it. An indifferent Christian, who believes in sin and in redemption and in an incarnate Christ and in a sacrifice on the Cross and in a Divine Spirit and in a future Judgment and remains cold, is all but an impossibility; he is a contradiction in terms, and a living monster.

Brethren, I venture to plead with you that there are few things which the conventional Christianity of this day needs more than to awake to the fact that the 'sober standard of feeling in matters of religion,' which some so much admire, is contrary to the genius of the gospel, and the importance of the truths which it con-rains. And when I say a sober standard I do not mean the sobriety which the New Testament enjoins, but I mean the sobriety which the conventional Christianity of this day so much admires, and which is scarcely distinguishable with a microscope from absolute indifference. We are frequently besought to beware of enthusiasm. I hear from quarters where one would not expect to hear it, the cynical politician's advice, 'Not too much zeal, I beg of you.' And I venture to oppose to all that what the voice of the Master from heaven said, 'I would thou were cold or hot.' This Christianity that never turns a hair, that does not know what zeal means, seems to me uncommonly like no Christianity at all.

We all want to be roused from our torpor. This community, like every church of professing Christians, is weighted by a mass of loosely attached and half-believing professing Christians who are nothing better than clogs on the wheel, and instruments for Bringing down the temperature of the whole mass. And what we want, I believe more than anything else, is that we should be zealous, as dominated by the overwhelming greatness and solemnity of the truths, and melted into a passion of love by the overwhelming greatness and love of the Person whom the gospel reveals to us. We

are to be 'zealous,' and whilst I dare not say that a true Christian will be a zealous one, I dare not conceal my conviction that a consistent Christian will be.

II. Now notice that such zeal finds its best field in our personal character.

'Zealous' — the word suggests, I suppose, pictures of men, devoted to a cause, and going out into the world to try and persuade other people to believe it, becoming the apostles and missionaries of some truth, or of some movement, or of some great principle, religious or social. But Paul suggests here another region in which zeal is to find exercise — 'zealous for good works'

Now do not let us interpret these last two words in the narrow, conventional sense which they have come to bear in the Church. It is a very significant and a very sad thing that this wide expression 'good works,' which in the Apostle's mind covered the whole ground of Christian morality, has been narrowed down to mean specific acts of beneficence, bits of charity, giving away blankets and soup, visiting the poor, and the like, which have got stamped on them, with just a soul. on of contempt in the expression, the name 'good works.' He means a great deal more than that. He means exactly the same thing which he has already twice described as being the end of the gospel, that we should 'live soberly, righteously, godly,' and again, that we should be redeemed from all iniquity, and purified. Within the four corners of this expression, 'good works,' lie 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' every virtue and every praise. That is the width of the object which the Apostle here proposes for Christian zeal.

Now the word which he here employs, and which is rightly translated 'zealous,' is literally 'a Zealot.' In Jewish history the Zealots were a class of men *who*, from the days of the Maccabees downwards, were fanatically devoted to the ritual and law of Judaism, and vehemently opposed any relaxation of or departure

from it. But their religious zeal, as they thought it, did not keep them from the blackest crimes, and there were no more turbulent and no more immoral men in the dying agonies of the Jewish State than these zealots who had a zeal for God, but neither according to knowledge nor according to morality. One of the apostles, Simon Zelotes—the Zealot—had probably belonged to that class, and had found out a better Object for his zeal, when he turned to Jesus Christ and became an apostle. Paul uses the word in reference to himself when he speaks about himself as having been exceedingly ‘zealous for the traditions of the fathers,’ and it is used in Acts of the many Jewish Christians who are spoken of as being all ‘zealous for the Law.’ That is one type of zeal — a zeal that fastens on externals, that tries to enforce specific acts of conduct, that is devoted to ceremonial and regulations and red tape. And Paul points us here to another type, ‘Zealous for good works.’ Jehu, with His hands carmined with wholesale slaughter, turned to the son of Rechab and said, ‘Come and see my zeal for the Lord.’ Yes, a little bit for the Lord, and a great deal for Jehu. That is the sort of thing that goes about the world as zeal. A turbid river in spate picks up and carries along a great many foul elements; and zeal is always in danger of becoming passionate indignation against a man who will not believe what I want him to believe, not so much because it is true as because I think it is. A great many very impure elements mix themselves up with our zeal, when it is directed to amending the world. If we set to amend ourselves, and direct our zeal in that direction, we shall find ‘ample scope and verge enough’ for its operations.

And, brethren, what different lives we should live if instead of feeling bound to the exercise of virtues and graces Which do not come sweet and easy to us, and instead of feeling that we ought to do so and so, and that we do not one bit wish to do it, we had this overmastering enthusiasm for holiness and passion for perfection which is involved in the words before us. To be ‘zealous of good works’ is to be eagerly desirous of being beautiful and pure and true and noble and Christlike, to be panting after perfection, and casting

ourselves with all the energy of our nature into the work of growing like Christ. That is what Paul wants us all to be. Let us ask ourselves, is it the least like what I am? Does my Christian zeal go all out in the work of amending other people, or do I begin with amending myself?

III. And now my last word is, that this passion for perfection will come to us just in the measure in which we let the gospel He upon our hearts and minds and influence us.

The truths will produce it, but not unless they are wrought into our minds and hearts. Christ, whom the truths reveal, will produce it, but not unless we keep ourselves by honest effort of mind and heart and will in close contact with Him. The upshot of all that I have been trying to say is this, that the one thing which the superficial half-and-half Christianity of this day needs is that it should come into closer contact with the truths of the gospel. I plead for no blind, unintelligent zeal, I plead for no worked-up, artificial fervour. I want no engine without a driver, I want no zeal that, like Phaeton, will upset the car and set everything on fire. I want that Christian men should believe what they believe, and that they should meditate on the truths of the gospel intelligently, systematically, as a whole, and that they should be in touch with Him whom the truths reveal. A ruminant belief that chews the cud of the truths it professes is what today's Christianity sorely wants. And if we in such a fashion keep ourselves under the spell of these truths, then the zeal will come; not else. The spurious zeal which is excited by other stimulants will do more harm than good, and will be not like the river that flows, bringing fertility and freshness, but like the furious torrents of the spring when the ice is melting and the snows running down, which sweep away the very soil where growth was possible, and leave behind only barren rock.

Fix in your hearts and minds, and God grant that they may influence your conduct, these two things — on the one hand, that your

Christianity is very suspicious if it has no flow in it towards Jesus, and if it has no passion towards perfection; and, on the other hand, that the surest way to bring all beauties of a moral and spiritual sort into your character and out into your lives is to gaze believingly on the appearing of She grace which God has sent us for the very purpose even of Him who gave Himself for us. When we are moved thereby to give ourselves to Him, we shall ‘covet earnestly the best gifts,’ and be ‘zealous for,’ and not merely reluctant and grudging doers of, ‘good works.’

### **Titus 3:8--MAINTAINING GOOD WORKS**

These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. — Titus 3:8.

THERE is so much about ‘good works’ in the so-called Pastoral Epistles (the two to Timothy, and this to Titus), that some critics who think they have sharp eyes have concluded that Paul was not their author. But surely it is very natural that as a man gets older he shall get more practical, and it is equally natural that he should fight the enemies who are in front of him at the moment, and not thrice slay the slain. Obviously the churches whom he had in view in his letters to Timothy and Titus did not stand in need of the elaborate and far-reaching argumentation of the Epistle to the Romans, or of the great protest against Jewish ritualism in the Epistle to the Galatians, or of the profound teaching about the Church which is in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The foundation had been laid, and, like a sensible man, Paul proceeded to build upon it. So instead of the difference in tone between those more theological letters and this more practical one being a cause of suspicion as to the authorship of the latter, it seems to me to be an argument in favour of the identity of authorship. The variation in tone corresponds to what happens in the case of every thoughtful Christian teacher as he grows in years, and comes to feel more and more that all doctrine is for practice.

Here, then, we have the Apostle's last will and testament, so to speak, left to all the churches, that 'they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works.'

According to that, the hall-mark of a Christian is conduct — 'good works.'

But we must beware of narrowing the meaning of that expression, as is too often done, so as to include in it mainly certain conventional forms of charity or beneficence, like 'slumming' or tract-distributing, or Sunday-school teaching, and the like. These and such as these are, no doubt, one form of good works, but by no means the whole, and their having all but monopolised the name is one reason why many Christian people fail to apprehend the full significance of New Testament teaching on the subject. These acts are but as a creek in a great sea. Paul tells us what he takes to be included in the designation, when he bids the Philippians think on 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,' and having thought on them, do them.

I have omitted one word in that quotation, for Paul speaks also of 'whatsoever things are lovely.' Loveliness is an essential quality of the highest kind of good works. Many of us know that the Greeks, wise beyond many who have clearer light but duller eyes, used the same word to express goodness and beauty. The Apostle uses that pregnant word in our text, and we should well ponder the teaching given by that word. For it tells Christians that they are to take heed to make their goodness lovely, not to 'graft grace on a crab-stock,' nor to present a frowning goodness to the world. It is not enough that they who believe in God should be careful to exhibit conduct which commends itself to every man's conscience as right and pure. They should also commend themselves as being fair with a more than earthly beauty, and lustrous with a more than earthly radiance.

There are many Christian people who spoil the effect of high-principled, self-sacrificing conduct by forgetting that beautifulness is an essential part of the highest goodness. Sour grapes are not the grapes that are intended to be grown on the true vine.

But now, will you notice, as a further light upon Paul's notion of how to go about growing these grapes, what goes before? 'These things. I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works.' What are 'these things'? They are a brief summary of what we call 'the Gospel'; the evangelical teaching that 'the kindness and love of God our Saviour' had 'appeared,' and that 'He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost... that.. 'we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.' In effect Paul says to Timothy: 'Now keep on insisting upon that.' The word translated 'affirm constantly' is a very strong one. It means a forcible and continually repeated enunciation, and the plain English of Paul's injunction to Timothy is: Keep on preaching the gospel as the surest way to produce disciples full of good works. People say to us: 'Come down to daily life and conduct; never mind your dogmas.' If you leave out what these critics mean by dogma, and try to make daily life beautiful without it, you may as well hold your tongue. And the men who forget to 'affirm' these things 'constantly,' and preach morals without gospel, are like Builders who begin to build on the second story, whose baseless castles in the air are sure to come down in ruins. The true way to produce moral conduct is to bring into clear prominence evangelical truth.

But notice again, it is 'those which believe in God who will be careful to maintain good works.' That is to say, faith is the productive cause of good works, and good works are, as I said,' the hall-mark of faith.' If a man believes, then he will do 'good works.' The converse must also be true. If a man does not do good works, what, then, about his belief? 'Show me thy faith without thy works' — that is an impossible demand. The only way to show faith is by

our works, and so all attempts to rend them apart, either in theory or in practice, are as absurd as it would be to take a piece of cloth, and try to tear away the inside from the outside. 'Faith' is the underside, 'good works' is the upper, and the web is one. Faith is the principle of works; works are the manifestation and making visible of faith.

So now turn for a moment to another point. The Apostle's command here implies a principle, that Christian work should always, and will always, if the faith is genuine, be in advance of all other sorts of good work. That is implied in one of the words used here which means literally 'be foremost, stand in the front,' and I see no reason why the literal meaning should not be retained here. If it is retained, we have the thought implied — if you are a Christian man you should be ahead of the world in your goodness. You should lead, and not follow, or keep step with those who are not Christians. The Church's morality on the wide scale and individual practice on the *narrow*, ought to be, and will be, if we are true to the gospel, far in advance of the ordinary opinion and practice of the day in which we live. If we are Christians, we are meant to be leaders, and that means that we shall often, like other leaders, have to endure a great deal of obloquy and calumny from the people whom we are trying to lead, and who are loitering behind us. The Christian Church, as the Apostle James says, is meant to be a 'kind of first fruits of God's creatures,' ripe before the others, riper than the others always. Does the Christian Church lead the conscience of England to-day? Does it even try to do it? Does it recognise that its function is not to re-echo the morality of the street or of the newspaper, but to peal out the morality of Jesus Christ? Is it enough that Christian people should be as good, as charitable, as beneficent, as much interested in social questions as others, or should have the better, the purer, and the happier lives of the community for their great aim, as much as other people have them? Would it be enough to say 'the electric light is about as bright as a tallow candle?' Is it enough to say, 'Christian people keep abreast of the world's morality?' Let them go in advance, and if they go very far ahead sometimes, none the

worse; the laggards will perhaps come up. But at all events, whether they do or not, 'I will that these things thou affirm constantly, in order that they which believe in God may take the lead in good works.'

And now there is a last point to be noted, and that is the Apostle's warning that, although thus the belief of the gospel, and the faith which springs from the belief, are the spring of good work, yet these will not become ours unless we are careful to stand in front.

What does that carefulness mean? The word implies two things, and the first of them may be put in the shape of an exhortation — bring your brains to bear on these truths that are being thus 'constantly affirmed.' Bring them into your hearts through your minds, that they may filter into and shape the life. I believe that one main reason why the morality of the Christian Church is not much further in advance of the morality of the world than it is, is because the individual members of the Church do not bring their minds into contact with the great truths of the gospel in such a fashion as they should. Christian practice is thin and poor and inconsistent, because Christian meditation on the gospel and on the Lord of the gospel, is shallow and infrequent. The truths that are to be 'affirmed' are the fuel that feeds the fire, and if there are no coals put on, the fire will very soon die down—And so there must be 'carefulness,' which means the occupation of the mind with the truths that produce holiness of life.

And there must be another thing, there must be a definite and direct and continuous effort to increase our faith. I have been saying that faith is the underside of all noble conduct; and in the measure in which it is strengthened, in that measure accurately will our 'good works' increase. Suppose Manchester had had two pipes from Thirlmere instead of *one*, during recent droughts, should we have been in such straits for water?

There was plenty in the lake, but we could not get it into our houses because we had not piping enough. There is plenty of power in our gospel and in our God to make us rich in 'good works.' What is lacking is that we have not that connection, which is made by faith, through which the fulness of God will flow into our lives. If they want to grow crops in Eastern lands they have little to do but to sow the seed and to irrigate. Christ has sown the seed in His gospel. We have to look after the irrigation, and the crops will come of themselves. So our main effort should be to keep ourselves in touch with that great Lord, and to increase the faith by which we make all His power our very own.