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***EXPOSITIONS OF  
HOLY SCRIPTURE***

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

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**SECOND CORINTHIANS,  
GALATIANS,  
AND PHILIPPIANS**

**CHAPTERS I TO END**

**COLOSSIANS, THESSALONIANS,  
AND FIRST TIMOTHY**

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**SECOND CORINTHIANS**

***Chaps. VII to End***

**GALATIANS AND  
PHILIPPIANS**

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[1]

**II. CORINTHIANS**

**HOPE AND HOLINESS**

Having therefore these promises . . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.—2 COR. vii. 1.

It is often made a charge against professing Christians that their religion has very little to do with common morality. The taunt has sharpened multitudes of gibes and been echoed in all sorts of tones: it is very often too true and perfectly just, but if ever it is, let it be distinctly understood that it is not so because of Christian men's religion but in spite of it. Their bitterest enemy does not condemn them half so emphatically as their own religion does: the sharpest censure of others is not so sharp as the rebukes of the New Testament. If there is one thing which it insists upon

more than another, it is that religion without morality is nothing—that the one test to which, after all, every man must submit is, what sort of character has he and how has he behaved—is he pure or foul? All high-flown pretension, all fervid emotion has at last to face the question which little children ask, 'Was he a good man?'

The Apostle has been speaking about very high and mystical truths, about all Christians being the temple of God, about God dwelling in men, about men and women being His sons and daughters; these are the very truths on which so often fervid imaginations have built up a mystical piety that had little to do with the common rules of right and wrong. But Paul keeps true to the intensely practical purpose of his preaching and brings his heroes down to the prosaic earth with the homely common sense of this far-reaching exhortation, which he gives as the fitting conclusion for such celestial visions.

[2]

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

This epistle is addressed to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the *saints* which are in all Achaia.

Looking out over that wide region, Paul saw scattered over godless masses a little dispersed company to each of whom the sacred name of Saint applied. They had been deeply stained with the vices of their age and place, and after a black list of criminals he had had to say to them 'such were some of you,' and he lays his finger on the miracle that had changed them and hesitates not to say of them all, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'

The first thing, then, that every Christian has is a cleansing which accompanies forgiveness, and however his garment may have been 'spotted by the flesh,' it is 'washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.' Strange cleansing by which black stains melt out of garments plunged in red blood! With the cleansing of forgiveness and justification comes, wherever they come, the gift of the Holy Spirit—a new life springing up within the old life, and untouched by any contact with its evils. These gifts belong universally to the initial stage of the Christian life and require for their possession only the receptiveness of faith. They admit of no co-operation of human effort, and to possess them men have only to 'take the things that are freely given to them of God.' But of the subsequent stages of the Christian life, the laborious and constant effort to develop and apply that free gift is as essential as, in the earliest stage, it is worse than useless. The gift received has to be wrought into the very substance of the soul, and to be wrought out in all the endless varieties of life and conduct. Christians are cleansed to begin with, but they have still daily to cleanse themselves: the leaven is hid in the three measures of meal, but 'tis a life-long task till the lump be leavened,' and no man, even though he has the life that was in Jesus within him, will grow up 'into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' unless, by patient and persistent effort, he is ever pressing on to 'the things that are before' and daily striving to draw nearer to the prize of his high calling. We are cleansed, but we have still to cleanse ourselves.

[3]

Yet another paradox attaches to the Christian life, inasmuch as God cleanses us, but we have to cleanse ourselves. The great truth that the spirit of God in a man is the fountal source of all his goodness, and that Christ's righteousness is given to us, is no pillow on which to rest an idle head, but should rather be a trumpet-call to effort which is thereby made certain of success. If we were left to the task of self-purifying by our own efforts we might well fling it up as impossible. It is as easy for a man to lift himself from the ground by gripping his own shoulders as it is for us to rise to greater heights of moral conduct by our own efforts; but if we can believe that God gives the impulse after purity, and the vision of what purity is, and imparts the power of attaining it, strengthening at once our dim sight and stirring our feeble desires and energising our crippled limbs, then we can 'run with patience the race that is set before us.'

[4]

We must note the thoroughness of the cleansing which the Apostle here enjoins. What is to be got rid of is not this or that defect or vice, but 'all filthiness of flesh and spirit.' The former, of course, refers primarily to sins of impurity which in the eyes of the Greeks of Corinth were scarcely sins at all, and the latter to a state of mind when fancy, imagination, and memory were enlisted in the service of evil. Both are rampant in our day as they were in Corinth. Much modern literature and the new gospel of 'Art for Art's sake' minister to both, and every man carries in himself inclinations to either. It is no partial cleansing with which Paul would have us to be satisfied: 'all' filthiness is to be cast out. Like careful housewives who are never content to cease their scrubbing while a speck remains upon furniture, Christian men are to regard their work as unfinished as long as the least trace of the unclean thing remains in their flesh or in their spirit. The ideal may be far from being realised at any moment, but it is at the peril of the whole sincerity and peacefulness of their lives if they, in the smallest degree, lower the perfection of their ideal in deference to the imperfection of their realisation of it.

It must be abundantly clear from our own experience that any such cleansing is a very long process. No character is made, whether it be good or bad, but by a slow building up: no man becomes most wicked all at once, and no man is sanctified by a wish or at a jump. As long as men are in a world so abounding with temptation, 'he that is washed' will need daily to 'wash his feet' that have been stained in the foul ways of life, if he is to be 'clean every whit.'

[5]

As long as the spirit is imprisoned in the body and has it for its instrument there will be need for much effort at purifying. We must be content to overcome one foe at a time, and however strong may be the pilgrim's spirit in us, we must be content to take one step at a time, and to advance by very slow degrees. Nor is it to be forgotten that as we get nearer what we ought to

be, we should be more conscious of the things in which we are not what we ought to be. The nearer we get to Jesus Christ, the more will our consciences be enlightened as to the particulars in which we are still distant from Him. A speck on a polished shield will show plain that would never have been seen on a rusty one. The saint who is nearest God will think more of his sins than the man who is furthest from him. So new work of purifying will open before us as we grow more pure, and this will last as long as life itself.

II. The Christian life is to be not merely a continual getting rid of evil, but a continual becoming good.

Paul here draws a distinction between cleansing ourselves from filthiness and perfecting holiness, and these two, though closely connected and capable of being regarded as being but the positive and negative sides of one process, are in reality different, though in practice the former is never achieved without the latter, nor the latter accomplished without the former. Holiness is more than purity; it is consecration. That is holy which is devoted to God, and a saint is one whose daily effort is to devote his whole self, in all his faculties and nature, thoughts, heart, and will, more and more, to God, and to receive into himself more and more of God. [6]

The purifying which Paul has been enjoining will only be successful in the measure of our consecration, and the consecration will only be genuine in the measure of our purifying. Herein lies the broad and blessed distinction between the world's morality and Christian ethics. The former fails just because it lacks the attitude towards a Person who is the very foundation of Christian morality, and changes a hard and impossible law into love. There is no more futile waste of breath than that of teachers of morality who have no message but Be good! Be good! and no motive by which to urge it but the pleasures of virtue and the disadvantages of vice, but when the vagueness of the abstract thought of goodness solidifies into a living Person and that Person makes his appeal first to our hearts and bids us love him, and then opens before us the unstained light of his own character and beseeches us to be like him, the repellent becomes attractive: the impossible becomes possible, and 'if ye love Me keep My commandments' becomes a constraining power and a victorious impulse in our lives.

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

The Apostle seems to connect hope more immediately with the cleansing, and holiness with the fear of God, but probably both hope and fear are in his mind as the double foundation on which both purity and consecration are to rest, or the double emotion which is to produce them both. These promises refer directly to the immediately preceding words, 'I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters,' in which all the blessings which God can give or men can receive are fused together in one lustrous and all-comprehensive whole. So all the great truths of the Gospel and all the blessed emotions of sonship which can spring up in a human heart are intended to find their practical result in holy and pure living. For this end God has spoken to us out of the thick darkness; for this end Christ has come into our darkness; for this end He has lived; for this end He died; for this end He rose again; for this end He sends His Spirit and administers the providence of the world. The purpose of all the Divine activity as regards us men is not merely to make us happy, but to make us happy in order that we may be good. He whom what he calls his religion has only saved from the wrath of God and the fear of hell has not learned the alphabet of religion. Unless God's promises evoke men's goodness it will be of little avail that they seem to quicken their hope. Joyful confidence in our sonship is only warranted in the measure in which we are like our Father. Hope often deludes and makes men dreamy and unpractical. It generally paints pictures far lovelier than the realities, and without any of their shadows; it is too often the stimulus and ally of ignoble lives, and seldom stirs to heroism or endurance, but its many defects are not due to itself but to its false choice of objects on which to fix. The hope which is lifted from trailing along the earth and twining round creatures and which rises to grasp these promises ought to be, and in the measure of its reality is the ally of all patient endurance and noble self-sacrifice. Its vision of coming good is all directed to the coming Christ, and 'every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure.' [7]

In Paul's experience there was no contrariety between hope set on Jesus and fear directed towards God. It is in the fear of God that holiness is to be perfected. There is a fear which has no torment. Yet more, there is no love in sons or daughters without fear. The reverential awe with which God's children draw near to God has in it nothing slavish and no terror. Their love is not only joyful but lowly. The worshipping gaze upon His Divine majesty, the reverential and adoring contemplation of His ineffable holiness, and the poignant consciousness, after all effort, of the distance between us and Him will bow the hearts that love Him most in lowliest prostration before Him. These two, hope and fear, confidence and awe, are like the poles on which the whole round world turns and are united here in one result. They who 'set their hope in God' must 'not forget the works of God but keep His commandments'; they who 'call Him Father,' 'who without respect of persons judgeth' must 'pass the time of their sojourning here in fear,' and their hopes and their fears must drive the wheels of life, purify them from all filthiness and perfect them in all holiness. [8]

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## SORROW ACCORDING TO GOD

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

Very near the close of his missionary career the Apostle Paul summed up his preaching as being all directed to enforcing two points, 'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' These two, repentance and faith, ought never to be separated in thought, as they are inseparable in fact. True repentance is impossible without faith, true faith cannot exist without repentance.

[9]

Yet the two are separated very often, even by earnest Christian teachers. The tendency of this day is to say a great deal about faith, and not nearly enough in proportion about repentance; and the effect is to obscure the very idea of faith, and not seldom to preach 'Peace! peace! when there is no peace.' A gospel which is always talking about faith, and scarcely ever talking about sin and repentance, is denuded, indeed, of some of its most unwelcome characteristics, but is also deprived of most of its power, and it may very easily become an ally of unrighteousness, and an indulgence to sin. The reproach that the Christian doctrine of salvation through faith is immoral in its substance derives most of its force from forgetting that 'repentance towards God' is as real a condition of salvation as is 'faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' We have here the Apostle's deliverance about one of these twin thoughts. We have three stages—the root, the stem, the fruit; sorrow, repentance, salvation. But there is a right and a wrong kind of sorrow for sin. The right kind breeds repentance, and thence reaches salvation; the wrong kind breeds nothing, and so ends in death.

Let us then trace these stages, not forgetting that this is not a complete statement of the case, and needs to be supplemented in the spirit of the words which I have already quoted, by the other part of the inseparable whole, 'faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.'

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

The Apostle takes it for granted that a recognition of our own evil, and a consequent penitent regretfulness, lie at the foundation of all true Christianity. Now I do not insist upon any uniformity of experience in people, any more than I should insist that all their bodies should be of one shape or of one proportion. Human lives are infinitely different, human dispositions are subtly varied, and because neither the one nor the other are ever reproduced exactly in any two people, therefore the religious experience of no two souls can ever be precisely alike.

[10]

We have no right to ask—and much harm has been done by asking—for an impossible uniformity of religious experience, any more than we have a right to expect that all voices shall be pitched in one key, or all plants flower in the same month, or after the same fashion. You can print off as many copies as you like, for instance, of a drawing of a flower on a printing-press, and they shall all be alike, petal for petal, leaf for leaf, shade for shade; but no two hand-drawn copies will be so precisely alike, still less will any two of the real buds that blow on the bush. Life produces resemblance with differences; it is machinery that makes facsimiles.

So we insist on no pedantic or unreal uniformity; and yet, whilst leaving the widest scope for divergencies of individual character and experience, and not asking that a man all diseased and blotched with the leprosy of sin for half a lifetime, and a little child that has grown up at its mother's knee, 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and so has been kept 'innocent of much transgression,' shall have the same experience; yet Scripture, as it seems to me, and the nature of the case do unite in asserting that there are certain elements which, in varying proportions indeed, will be found in all true Christian experience, and of these an indispensable one—and in a very large number, if not in the majority of cases, a fundamental one—is this which my text calls 'godly sorrow.'

[11]

Dear brethren, surely a reasonable consideration of the facts of our conduct and character point to that as the attitude that becomes us. Does it not? I do not charge you with crimes in the eye of the law. I do not suppose that many of you are living in flagrant disregard of the elementary principles of common every-day morality. Some are, no doubt. There are, no doubt, unclean men here; there are some who eat and drink more than is good for them, habitually; there are, no doubt, men and women who are living in avarice and worldliness, and doing things which the ordinary conscience of the populace points to as faults and blemishes. But I come to you respectable people that can say: 'I am not as other men are, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican'; and pray you, dear friends, to look at your character all round, in the light of the righteousness and love of God, and to plead to the indictment which charges you with neglect of many a duty and with sin against Him. How do you plead, 'guilty or not guilty, sinful or not sinful?' Be honest with yourselves, and the answer will not be far to seek.

Notice how my text draws a broad distinction between the right and the wrong kind of sorrow for sin. 'Godly sorrow' is, literally rendered, 'sorrow according to God,' which may either mean sorrow which has reference to God, or sorrow which is in accordance with His will; that is to say, which is pleasing to Him. If it is the former, it will be the latter. I prefer to suppose that it is the former—that is, sorrow which has reference to God. And then, there is another kind of sorrow, which the Apostle calls the 'sorrow of the world,' which is devoid of that reference to God. Here we have the characteristic difference between the Christian way of looking at our own faults and shortcomings, and the sorrow of the world, which has got no blessing in it, and will never lead to anything like righteousness and peace. It is just this—one has reference to God, puts its sin by His side, sees its blackness relieved against the 'fierce light' of the Great White Throne, and the other has not that reference.

[12]

To expand that for a moment,—there are plenty of us who, when our sin is behind us, and its bitter fruits are in our hands, are sorry enough for our faults. A man that is lying in the hospital a wreck, with the sins of his youth gnawing the flesh off his bones, is often enough sorry that he did not live more soberly and chastely and temperately in the past days. That fraudulent bankrupt who has not got his discharge and has lost his reputation, and can get nobody to lend him money enough to start him in business again, as he hangs about the streets, slouching in his rags, is sorry enough that he did not keep the straight road. The 'sorrow of the world' has no thought about God in it at all. The consequences of sin set many a man's teeth on edge who does not feel any compunction for the wrong that he did. My brethren, is that the position of any that are listening to me now?

Again, men are often sorry for their conduct without thinking of it as sin against God. Crime means the transgression of man's law, wrong means the transgression of conscience's law, sin is the transgression of God's law. Some of us would perhaps have to say—'I have done crime.' We are all of us quite ready to say: 'I have done wrong many a time'; but there are some of us who hesitate to take the other step, and say: 'I have done sin.' Sin has, for its correlative, God. If there is no God there is no sin. There may be faults, there may be failures, there may be transgressions, breaches of the moral law, things done inconsistent with man's nature and constitution, and so on; but if there be a God, then we have personal relations to that Person and His law; and when we break His law it is more than crime; it is more than fault; it is more than transgression; it is more than wrong; it is sin. It is when you lift the shutter off conscience, and let the light of God rush in upon your hearts and consciences, that you have the wholesome sorrow that worketh repentance and salvation and life.

[13]

Oh, dear friends, I do beseech you to lay these simple thoughts to heart. Remember, I urge no rigid uniformity of experience or character, but I do say that unless a man has learned to see his sin in the light of God, and in the light of God to weep over it, he has yet to know 'the strait gate that leadeth unto life.'

I believe that a very large amount of the superficiality and easy-goingness of the Christianity of to-day comes just from this, that so many who call themselves Christians have never once got a glimpse of themselves as they really are. I remember once peering over the edge of the crater of Vesuvius, and looking down into the pit, all swirling with sulphurous fumes. Have you ever looked into your hearts, in that fashion, and seen the wreathing smoke and the flashing fire there? If you have, you will cleave to that Christ, who is your sole deliverance from sin.

But, remember, there is no prescription about depth or amount or length of time during which this sorrow shall be felt. If, on the one hand, it is essential, on the other hand there are a great many people who ought to be walking in the light and the liberty of God's Gospel who bring darkness and clouds over themselves by the anxious scrutinising question: 'Is my sorrow deep enough?' Deep enough! What for? What is the use of sorrow for sin? To lead a man to repentance and to faith. If you have as much sorrow as leads you to penitence and trust you have enough. It is not your sorrow that is going to wash away your sin, it is Christ's blood. So let no man trouble himself about the question, Have I sorrow enough? The one question is: 'Has my sorrow led me to cast myself on Christ?'

[14]

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

What is repentance? No doubt many of you would answer that it is 'sorrow for sin,' but clearly this text of ours draws a distinction between the two. There are very few of the great key-words of Christianity that have suffered more violent and unkind treatment, and have been more obscured by misunderstandings, than this great word. It has been weakened down into penitence, which in the ordinary acceptation, means simply the emotion that I have already been speaking about, viz., a regretful sense of my own evil. And it has been still further docked and degraded, both in its syllables and in its substance, into *penance*. But the 'repentance' of the New Testament and of the Old Testament—one of the twin conditions of salvation—is neither sorrow for sin nor works of restitution and satisfaction, but it is, as the word distinctly expresses, a change of purpose in regard to the sin for which a man mourns. I cannot now expand and elaborate this idea as I should like, but let me remind you of one or two passages in Scripture which may show that the right notion of the word is not sorrow but changed attitude and purpose in regard to my sin.

[15]

We find passages, some of which ascribe and some deny repentance to the Divine nature. But if there be a repentance which is possible for the Divine nature, it obviously cannot mean sorrow for sin, but must signify a change of purpose. In the Epistle to the Romans we read, 'The gifts and calling of God are without repentance,' which clearly means without change of purpose on His part. And I read in the story of the mission of the Prophet Jonah, that 'the Lord repented of the evil which He had said He would do unto them, and He did it not.' Here, again, the idea of repentance is clearly and distinctly that of a change of purpose. So fix this on your minds, and lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that the repentance of the New Testament is not idle tears nor the twitchings of a vain regret, but the resolute turning away of the sinful heart from its sins. It is 'repentance toward God,' the turning from the sin to the Father, and that is what leads to salvation. The sorrow is separated from the repentance in idea, however closely they may be intertwined in fact. The sorrow is one thing, and the repentance which it works is another.

Then notice that this change of purpose and breaking off from sin is produced by the sorrow for sin, of which I have been speaking; and that the production of this repentance is the main

characteristic difference between the godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. A man may have his paroxysms of regret, but the question is: Does it make any difference in his attitude? Is he standing, after the tempest of sorrow has swept over him, with his face in the same direction as before; or has it whirled him clean round, and set him in the other direction? The one kind of sorrow, which measures my sin by the side of the brightness and purity of God, vindicates itself as true, because it makes me hate my evil and turn away from it. The other, which is of the world, passes over me like the empty wind through an archway, it whistles for a moment and is gone, and there is nothing left to show that it was ever there. The one comes like one of those brooks in tropical countries, dry and white for half the year, and then there is a rush of muddy waters, fierce but transient, and leaving no results behind. My brother! when your conscience pricks, which of these two things does it do? After the prick, is the word of command that your Will issues 'Right about face!' or is it 'As you were'? Godly sorrow worketh a change of attitude, purpose, mind; the sorrow of the world leaves a man standing where he was. Ask yourselves the question: Which of the two are you familiar with?

[16]

Again, the true means of evoking true repentance is the contemplation of the Cross. Law and the fear of hell may startle into sorrow, and even lead to some kind of repentance. But it is the great power of Christ's love and sacrifice which will really melt the heart into true repentance. You may hammer ice to pieces, but it is ice still. You may bray a fool in a mortar, and his folly will not depart from him. Dread of punishment may pulverise the heart, but not change it; and each fragment, like the smallest bits of a magnet, will have the same characteristics as the whole mass. But 'the goodness of God leads to repentance' as the prodigal is conquered and sees the true hideousness of the swine's trough, when he bethinks himself of the father's love. I beseech you to put yourselves under the influence of that great love, and look on that Cross till your hearts melt.

[17]

III. We come to the last stage here. Salvation is the issue of repentance. 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.'

What is the connection between repentance and salvation? Two sentences will answer the question. You cannot get salvation without repentance. You do not get salvation by repentance.

You cannot get the salvation of God unless you shake off your sin. It is no use preaching to a man, 'Faith, Faith, Faith!' unless you preach along with it, 'Break off your iniquities.' 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord.' The nature of the case forbids it. It is a clear contradiction in terms, and an absolute impossibility in fact, that God should save a man with the salvation which consists in the deliverance from sin, whilst that man is holding to his sin. Unless, therefore, you have not merely sorrow, but repentance, which is turning away from sin with resolute purpose, as a man would turn from a serpent, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But you do not get salvation for your repentance. It is no case of barter, it is no case of salvation by works, that work being repentance:

'Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone,  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.'

Not my penitence, but Christ's death, is the ground of the salvation of every one that is saved at all. Yet repentance is an indispensable condition of salvation.

[18]

What is the connection between repentance and faith? There can be no true repentance without trust in Christ. There can be no true trust in Christ without the forsaking of my sin. Repentance without faith, in so far as it is possible, is one long misery; like the pains of those poor Hindoo devotees that will go all the way from Cape Comorin to the shrine of Juggernaut, and measure every foot of the road with the length of their own bodies in the dust. Men will do anything, and willingly make any sacrifice, rather than open their eyes to see this,—that repentance, clasped hand in hand with Faith, leads the guiltiest soul into the forgiving presence of the crucified Christ, from whom peace flows into the darkest heart.

On the other hand, faith without repentance is not possible, in any deep sense. But in so far as it is possible, it produces a superficial Christianity which vaguely trusts to Christ without knowing exactly what it is trusting Him for, or why it needs Him; and which has a great deal to say about what I may call the less important parts of the Christian system, and nothing to say about its vital centre; which preaches a morality which is not a living power to create; which practises a religion which is neither a joy nor a security. The old word of the Master has a deep truth in it: 'These are they which heard the word, and anon with joy received it.' Having no sorrow, no penitence, no deep consciousness of sin, 'they have no root in themselves, and in time of temptation they fall away.' If there is to be a profound, an all-pervading, life-transforming-sin, and devil-conquering faith, it must be a faith rooted deep in penitence and sorrow for sin.

[19]

Dear brethren, if, by God's grace, my poor words have touched your consciences at all, I beseech you, do not trifle with the budding conviction! Do not seek to have the wound skinned over. Take care that you do not let it all pass in idle sorrow or impotent regret. If you do, you will be hardened, and the worse for it, and come nearer to that condition which the sorrow of the world worketh, the awful death of the soul. Do not wince from the knife before the roots of the cancer are cut out. The pain is merciful. Better the wound than the malignant growth. Yield

yourselves to the Spirit that would convince you of sin, and listen to the voice that calls to you to forsake your unrighteous ways and thoughts. But do not trust to any tears, do not trust to any resolves, do not trust to any reformation. Trust only to the Lord who died on the Cross for you, whose death for you, whose life in you, will be deliverance from your sin. Then you will have a salvation which, in the striking language of my text, 'is not to be repented of,' which will leave no regrets in your hearts in the day when all else shall have faded, and the sinful sweets of this world shall have turned to ashes and bitterness on the lips of the men that feed on them.

'The sorrow of the world works death.' There are men and women listening to me now who are half conscious of their sin, and are resisting the pleading voice that comes to them, who at the last will open their eyes upon the realities of their lives, and in a wild passion of remorse, exclaim: 'I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.' Better to make thorough work of the sorrow, and by it to be led to repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and so secure for our own that salvation for which no man will ever regret having given even the whole world, since he gains his own soul.

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## GIVING AND ASKING

'Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; 2. How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. 3. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; 4. Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God: 6. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. 7. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us; see that ye abound in this grace also. 8. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. 9. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. 10. And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. 11. Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. 12. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.'—2 COR. viii. 1-12.

A collection from Gentile churches for their poor brethren in Jerusalem occupied much of Paul's time and efforts before his last visit to that city. Many events, which have filled the world with noise and been written at length in histories, were less significant than that first outcome of the unifying spirit of common faith. It was a making visible of the grand thought, 'Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' Practical help, prompted by a deep-lying sense of unity which overleaped gulfs of separation in race, language, and social conditions, was a unique novelty. It was the first pulsation of that spirit of Christian liberality which has steadily grown in force and sweep ever since. Foolish people gibe at some of its manifestations. Wiser ones regard its existence as not the least of the marks of the divine origin of Christianity.

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This passage is a striking example of the inimitable delicacy of the Apostle. His words are full of what we should call tact, if it were not manifestly the spontaneous utterance of right feeling. They are a perfect model of the true way to appeal for money, and set forth also the true spirit in which such appeals should be made.

In verses 1 to 5, Paul seeks to stimulate the liberality of the Corinthians by recounting that of the Macedonian churches. His sketch draws in outline the picture of what all Christian money-giving should be. We note first the designation of the Macedonian Christians' beneficence as 'a grace' given by God to them. It is twice called so (vers. 1, 4), and the same name is applied in regard to the Corinthians' giving (vers. 6, 7). That is the right way to look at money contributions. The opportunity to give them, and the inclination to do so, are God's gifts. How many of us think that calls for service or money are troublesome obligations, to be got out of as easily as possible! A true Christian will be thankful, as for a love token from God, for every occasion of giving to Him. It would be a sharp test for many of us to ask ourselves whether we can say, 'To me . . . is this grace given,' that I should part with my money for Christ's sake.

Note, further, the lovely picture of these Macedonian givers. They were plunged in sorrows and troubles, but these did not dry their fountains of sympathy. Nothing is apt to be more selfish than grief; and if we have tears to spare for others, when they are flowing bitterly for ourselves, we have graduated well in Christ's school. Paul calls the Macedonians' troubles 'proof of their affliction,' meaning that it constituted a proof of their Christian character; that is, by the manner in which it was borne; and in it they had still 'abundance of joy,' for the paradox of the Christian life is that it admits of the co-existence of grief and gladness.

[22]

Again, Christian giving gives from scanty stores. 'Deep poverty' is no excuse for not giving, and



will be no hindrance to a willing heart. 'I cannot afford it' is sometimes a genuine valid reason, but oftener an insincere plea. Why are subscriptions for religious purposes the first expenditure to be reduced in bad times?

Further, Christian giving gives up to the very edge of ability, and sometimes goes beyond the limits of so-called prudence. In all regions 'power to its last particle is duty,' and unless power is strained it is not fully exercised. It is in trying to do what we cannot do that we do best what we can do. He who keeps well within the limits of his supposed ability will probably not do half as much as he could. While there is a limit behind which generosity even for Christ may become dishonesty or disregard of other equally sacred claims, there is little danger of modern Christians transgressing that limit, and they need the stimulus to do a little more than they think they can do, rather than to listen to cold-blooded prudence.

Further, Christian giving does not wait to be asked, but takes the opportunity to give as itself 'grace' and presses its benefactions. It is an unwonted experience for a collector of subscriptions to be besought to take them 'with much entreaty,' but it would not be so anomalous if Christian people understood their privileges. [23]

Further, Christian giving begins with the surrender of self to Christ, from which necessarily follows the glad offering of wealth. These Macedonians did more than Paul had hoped, and the explanation of the unexpected largeness of their contributions was their yielding of themselves to Jesus. That is the deepest source of all true liberality. If a man feels that he does not own himself, much less will he feel that his goods are his own. A slave's owner possesses the slave's bit of garden ground, his hut, and its furniture. If I belong to Christ, to whom does my money belong? But the consciousness that my goods are not mine, but Christ's, is not to remain a mere sentiment. It can receive practical embodiment by my giving them to Christ's representatives. The way for the Macedonians to show that they regarded their goods as Christ's, was to give them to Paul for Christ's poor saints. Jesus has His representatives still, and it is useless for people to talk or sing about belonging to Him, unless they verify their words by deeds.

Verse 6 tells the Corinthians that the success of the collection in Macedonia had induced Paul to send Titus to Corinth to promote it there. He had previously visited it on the same errand (chap. xii. 14), and now is coming to complete 'this grace.' The rest of the passage is Paul's appeal to the Corinthians for their help in the matter, and certainly never was such an appeal made in a more dignified, noble, and lofty tone. He has been dilating on the liberality of others, and thereby sanctioning the stimulating of Christian liberality, in the same way as other graces may legitimately be stimulated, by example. That is delicate ground to tread on, and needs caution if it is not to degenerate into an appeal to rivalry, as it too often does, but in itself is perfectly legitimate and wholesome. But, passing from that incitement, Paul rests his plea on deeper grounds. [24]

First, Christian liberality is essential to the completeness of Christian character. Paul's praise in verse 7 is not mere flattery, nor meant to put the Corinthians into good humour. He will have enough to say hereafter about scandals and faults, but now he gives them credit for all the good he knew to be in them. Faith comes first, as always. It is the root of every Christian excellence. Then follow two graces, eminently characteristic of a Greek church, and apt to run to seed in it,—utterance and knowledge. Then two more, both of a more emotional character,—earnestness and love, especially to Paul as Christ's servant. But all these fair attributes lacked completeness without the crowning grace of liberality. It is the crowning grace, because it is the practical manifestation of the highest excellences. It is the result of sympathy, of unselfishness, of contact with Christ, of drinking in of His spirit, Love is best. Utterance and knowledge and earnestness are poor beside it. This grace is like the diamond which clasps a necklace of jewels.

Christian giving does not need to be commanded. 'I speak not by way of commandment.' That is poor virtue which only obeys a precept. Gifts given because it is duty to give them are not really gifts, but taxes. They leave no sweet savour on the hand that bestows, and bring none to that which receives. 'I call you not servants, but friends.' The region in which Christian liberality moves is high above the realm of law and its correlative, obligation.

Further, Christian liberality springs spontaneously from conscious possession of Christ's riches. We cannot here enter on the mysteries of Christ's emptying Himself of His riches of glory. We can but touch the stupendous fact, remembering that the place whereon we stand is holy ground. Who can measure the nature and depth of that self-denuding of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was? But, thank God, we do not need to measure it, in order to feel the solemn, blessed force of the appeal which it makes to us. Adoring wonder and gratitude, unfaltering trust and absolute self-surrender to a love so self-sacrificing, must ever follow the belief of that mystery of Divine mercy, the incarnation and sacrifice of the eternal Son. [25]

But Paul would have us remember that the same mighty act of stooping love, which is the foundation of all our hope, is to be the pattern for all our conduct. Even in His divinest and most mysterious act, Christ is our example. A dewdrop is rounded by the same laws which shape the planetary spheres or the sun himself; and Christians but half trust Christ if they do not imitate Him. What selfishness in enjoyment of our 'own things' could live in us if we duly brought ourselves under the influence of that example? How miserably poor and vulgar the appeals by which money is sometimes drawn from grudging owners and tight-buttoned pockets, sound beside that heart-searching and heart-moving one, 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!'

Further, Christian liberality will not go off in good intentions and benevolent sentiments. The

Corinthians were ready with their 'willing' on Titus's previous visit. Now Paul desires them to put their good feelings into concrete shape. There is plenty of benevolence that never gets to be beneficence. The advice here has a very wide application: 'As there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion also.' We all know where the road leads that is paved with good intentions.

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Further, Christian liberality is accepted and rewarded according to willingness, if that is carried into act according to ability. While the mere wish to help is not enough, it is the vital element in the act which flows from it; and there may be more of it in the widow's mite than in the rich man's large donation—or there may be less. The conditions of acceptable offerings are twofold—first, readiness, glad willingness to give, as opposed to closed hearts or grudging bestowals; and, second, that willingness embodied in the largest gift possible. The absence of either vitiates all. The presence of both gives trifles a place in God's storehouse of precious things. A father is glad when his child brings him some utterly valueless present, not because he must, but because he loves; and many a parent has such laid away in sacred repositories. God knows how to take gifts from His children, not less well than we who are evil know how to do it.

But the gracious saying of our passage has a solemn side; for if only gifts 'according as a man hath' are accepted, what becomes of the many which fall far short of our ability, and are really given, not because we have the willing mind, but because we could not get out of the unwelcome necessity to part with a miserably inadequate percentage of our possessions. Is God likely to be satisfied with the small dividends which we offer as composition for our great debt?

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## RICH YET POOR

'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'—2 COR. viii. 9.

The Apostle has been speaking about a matter which, to us, seems very small, but to him was very great viz., a gathering of pecuniary help from the Gentile churches for the poor church in Jerusalem. Large issues, in his estimation, attended that exhibition of Christian unity, and, be it great or small, he applies the highest of all motives to this matter. 'For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor.' The trivial things of life are to be guided and shaped by reference to the highest of all things, the example of Jesus Christ; and that in the whole depth of His humiliation, and even in regard to His cross and passion. We have here set forth, as the pattern to which the Christian life is to be conformed, the deepest conception of what our Lord's career on earth was.

The whole Christian Church is about to celebrate the nativity of our Lord at this time. This text gives us the true point of view from which to regard it. We have here the work of Christ in its deepest motive, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus.' We have it in its transcendent self-impoverishment, 'Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.' We have it in its highest issue, 'That ye through His poverty might become rich.' Let us look at those points.

I. Here we have the deepest motive which underlies the whole work of Christ, unveiled to us.

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'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Every word here is significant. It is very unusual in the New Testament to find that expression 'grace' applied to Jesus Christ. Except in the familiar benediction, I think there are only one or two instances of such a collocation of words. It is 'the grace of God' which, throughout the New Testament, is the prevailing expression. But here 'grace is attributed to Jesus'; that is to say, the love of the Divine heart is, without qualification or hesitation, ascribed to Him. And what do we mean by grace? We mean love in exercise to inferiors. It is infinite condescension in Jesus to love. His love stoops when it embraces us. Very significant, therefore, is the employment here of the solemn full title, 'the Lord Jesus Christ,' which enhances the condescension by making prominent the height from which it bent. The 'grace' is all the more wonderful because of the majesty and sovereignty, to say the least of it, which are expressed in that title, the Lord. The highest stoops and stands upon the level of the lowest. 'Grace' is love that expresses itself to those who deserve something else. And the deepest motive, which is the very key to the whole phenomena of the life of Jesus Christ, is that it is all the exhibition, as it is the consequence, of a love that, stooping, forgives. 'Grace' is love that, stooping and forgiving, communicates its whole self to unworthy and transgressing recipients. And the key to the life of Jesus is that we have set forth in its operation a love which is not content to speak only the ordinary language of human affection, or to do its ordinary deeds, but is self-impelled to impart what transcends all other gifts of human tenderness, and to give its very self. And so a love that condescends, a love that passes by unworthiness, is turned away by no sin, is unmoved to any kind of anger, and never allows its cheek to flush or its heart to beat faster, because of any provocation and a love that is content with nothing short of entire surrender and self-impartation underlies all that precious life from Bethlehem to Calvary.

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But there is another word in our text that may well be here taken into consideration. 'For your sakes,' says the Apostle to that Corinthian church, made up of people, not one of whom had ever seen or been seen by Jesus. And yet the regard to them was part of the motive that moved the Lord to His life, and His death. That is to say, to generalise the thought, this grace, thus stooping

and forgiving and self-imparting, is a love that gathers into its embrace and to its heart all mankind; and is universal because it is individualising. Just as each planet in the heavens, and each tiny plant upon the earth, are embraced by, and separately receive, the benediction of that all-encompassing arch of the heaven, so that grace enfolds all, because it takes account of each. Whilst it is love for a sinful world, every soul of us may say: 'He loved me, and'—therefore—'gave Himself for me.' Unless we see beneath the sweet story of the earthly life this deep-lying source of it all, we fail to understand that life itself. We may bring criticism to bear upon it; we may apprehend it in diverse affecting, elevating, educating aspects; but, oh! brethren, we miss the blazing centre of the light, the warm heart of the fire, unless we see pulsating through all the individual facts of the life this one, all-shaping, all-vitalising motive; the grace—the stooping, the pardoning, the self-communicating, the individualising, and the universal love of Jesus Christ.

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

## II. Most mysterious and unique self-impoverishment.

'He was . . . He became,' there is one strange contrast. 'He was *rich* . . . He became *poor*,' there is another. 'He was . . . He became.' What does that say? Well, it says that if you want to understand Bethlehem, you must go back to a time before Bethlehem. The meaning of Christ's birth is only understood when we turn to that Evangelist who does not narrate it. For the meaning of it is here; 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.' The surface of the fact is the smallest part of the fact. They say that there is seven times as much of an iceberg under water as there is above the surface. And the deepest and most important fact about the nativity of our Lord is that it was not only the birth of an Infant, but the Incarnation of the Word. 'He was . . . He became.' We have to travel back and recognise that that life did not begin in the manger. We have to travel back and recognise the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

And these two words 'He was . . . He became,' imply another thing, and that is, that Jesus Christ who died because He chose, was not passive in His being born, but as at the end of His earthly life, so at its beginning exercised His volition, and was born because He willed, and willed because of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus.'

Now in this connection it is very remarkable, and well worth our pondering, that throughout the whole of the Gospels, when Jesus speaks of His coming into the world, He never uses the word 'born' but once, and that was before the Roman governor, who would not have understood or cared for anything further, to whom He did say, 'To this end was I born.' But even when speaking to him His consciousness that that word did not express the whole truth was so strong that He could not help adding—though He knew that the hard Roman procurator would pay no attention to the apparent tautology—the expression which more truly corresponded to the fact, 'and for this cause came I into the world.' The two phrases are not parallel. They are by no means synonymous. One expresses the outward fact; the other expresses that which underlay it. 'To this end was I born.' Yes! 'And for this cause came I.' He Himself put it still more definitely when He said, 'I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go unto the Father.' So the two extremities of the earthly manifestation are neither of them ends; but before the one, and behind the other, there stretches an identity or oneness of Being and condition. The one as the other, the birth and the death, may be regarded as, in deepest reality, not only what He passively endured, but what He actively did. He was born, and He died, that in all points He might be 'like unto His brethren.' He 'came' into the world, and He 'went' to the Father. The end circled round to the beginning, and in both He acted because He chose, and chose because He loved.

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So much, then, lies in the one of these two antitheses of my text; and the other is no less profound and significant. 'He was rich; He became poor.' In this connection 'rich' can only mean possessed of the Divine fulness and independence; and 'poor' can only mean possessed of human infirmity, dependence, and emptiness. And so to Jesus of Nazareth, to be born was impoverishment. If there is nothing more in His birth than in the birth of each of us, the words are grotesquely inappropriate to the facts of the case. For as between nothingness, which is the alternative, and the possession of conscious being, there is surely a contrast the very reverse of that expressed here. For us, to be born is to be endowed with capacities, with the wealth of intelligent, responsible, voluntary being; but to Jesus Christ, if we accept the New Testament teaching, to be born was a step, an infinite step, downwards, and He, alone of all men, might have been 'ashamed to call men brethren.' But this denudation of Himself, into the particulars of which I do not care to enter now, was the result of that stooping grace which 'counted it not a thing to be clutched hold of, to be equal with God; but He made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.'

[32]

And so, dear friends, we know the measure of the stooping love of Jesus only when we read the history by the light of this thought, that 'though He was rich' with all the fulness of that eternal Word which was 'in the beginning with God,' 'He became poor,' with the poverty, the infirmity, the liability to temptation, the weakness, that attach to humanity; 'and was found in all points like unto His brethren,' that He might be able to help and succour them all.

The last thing here is—

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

'That we through His poverty might become rich.' Of course, the antithetical expressions must be taken to be used in the same sense, and with the same width of application, in both of the

clauses. And if so, just think reverently, wonderingly, thankfully, of the infinite vista of glorious possibility that is open to us here. Christ was rich in the possession of that Divine glory which Had had with the Father before the world was. 'He became poor,' in assuming the weakness of the manhood that you and I carry, that we, in the human poverty which is like His poverty, may become rich with wealth that is like His riches, and that as He stooped to earth veiling the Divine with the human, we may rise to heaven, clothing the human with the Divine.

[33]

For surely there is nothing more plainly taught in Scriptures, and I am bold to say nothing to which any deep and vital Christian experience even here gives more surely an anticipatory confirmation, than the fact that Christ became like unto us, that each of us may become like unto Him. The divine and the human natures are similar, and the fact of the Incarnation, on the one hand, and of the man's glorification by possession of the divine nature on the other, equally rest upon that fundamental resemblance between the divine nature and the human nature which God has made in His own image. If that which in each of us is unlike God is cleared away, as it can be cleared away, through faith in that dear Lord, then the likeness as a matter of course, comes into force.

The law of all elevation is that whosoever desires to lift must stoop; and the end of all stooping is to lift the lowly to the place from which the love hath bent itself. And this is at once the law for the Incarnation of the Christ, and for the elevation of the Christian. 'We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.' And the great love, the stooping, forgiving, self-communicating love, doth not reach its ultimate issue, nor effect fully the purposes to which it ever is tending, unless and until all who have received it are 'changed from glory to glory even into the image of the Lord.' We do not understand Jesus, His cradle, or His Cross, unless on the one hand we see in them His emptying Himself that He might fill us, and, on the other hand, see, as the only result which warrants them and satisfies Him, our complete conformity to His image, and our participation in that glory which He has at the right hand of God. That is the prospect for humanity, and it is possible for each of us.

[34]

I do not dwell upon other aspects of this great self-emptying of our Lord's, such as the revelation in it to us of the very heart of God, and of the divinest thing in the divine nature, which is love, or such as the sympathy which is made possible thereby to Him, and which is not only the pity of a God, but the compassion of a Brother. Nor do I touch upon many other aspects which are full of strengthening and teaching. That grand thought that Jesus has shared our human poverty that we may share His divine riches is the very apex of the New Testament teaching, and of the Christian hope. We have within us, notwithstanding all our transgressions, what the old divines used to call a 'deiform nature,' capable of being lifted up into the participation of divinity, capable of being cleansed from all the spots and stains which make us so unlike Him in whose likeness we were made.

Brethren, let us not forget that this stooping, and pardoning, and self-imparting love, has for its main instrument to appeal to our hearts, not the cradle but the Cross. We are being told by many people to-day that the centre of Christianity lies in the thought of an Incarnation. Yes. But our Lord Himself has told us what that was for.

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'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' It is only when we look to that Lord in His death, and see there the very lowest point to which He stooped, and the supreme manifestation of His grace, that we shall be drawn to yield our hearts and lives to Him in thankfulness, in trust, and in imitation: and shall set Him before us as the pattern for our conduct, as well as the Object of our trust.

Brethren, my text was spoken originally as presenting the motive and the example for a little piece of pecuniary liability. Do you take the cradle and the Cross as the law of your lives? For depend upon it, the same necessity which obliged Jesus to come down to our level, if He would lift us to His; to live our life and die our death, if He would make us partakers of His immortal life, and deliver us from death; makes it absolutely necessary that if we are to live for anything nobler than our own poor, transitory self-aggrandisement, we too must learn to stoop to forgive, to impart ourselves, and must die by self-surrender and sacrifice, if we are ever to communicate any life, or good of life, to others. He has loved us, and given Himself for us. He has set us therein an example which He commends to us by His own word when He tells us that 'if a corn of wheat' is to bring forth 'much fruit' it must die, else it 'abideth alone.' Unless we die, we never truly live; unless we die to ourselves for others, and like Jesus, we live alone in the solitude of a self-enclosed self-regard. So living, we are dead whilst we live.

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## WILLING AND NOT DOING

'Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will so there may be a performance also.'—2 COR. viii. 11.

The Revised Version reads: 'But now complete the doing also; that as there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion also out of your ability.' A collection of money for the almost pauper church at Jerusalem bulked very largely in the Apostle's mind at the date of the writing of the two letters to the Corinthian church. We learn that that church had been the first to agree to the project, and then had very distinctly hung back from implementing its promises

and fulfilling its good intentions. So the Apostle, in the chapter from which my text is taken, with wonderful delicacy, dignity, and profundity, sets forth the true principle, not only of Christian giving, but of Christian asking. The text advises that the gushing sentiments of brotherly sympathy and liberality which had inspired the Corinthians a year ago should now bear some fruit in action. So Paul is going to send Titus, his right-hand man at the time, to hurry up and finish off the collection and have done with it. The text is in effect the message which Titus was to carry; but it has a far wider application than that. It is a needful advice for us all about a great many other things: 'As there was a readiness to will, so let there be a performance also.'

Resolutions, noble and good and Christlike, have a strange knack of cheating the people who make them. So we all need the exhortation not to be befooled by fancying that we have done, when we have only willed. Of course we shall not do unless we will. But there is a wide gap, as our experience witnesses, between the two things. We all know what place it is to which, according to the old proverb, the road is paved with good intentions; and the only way to pull up that paving is to take Paul's advice here and always, and immediately to put into action the resolves of our hearts. Now I desire to say two or three very plain and simple things about this matter.

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I. I would have you consider the necessity of this commandment.

Consider that the fault here warned against is a universal one. What different men we should be if our resolutions had fruited in conduct! In all regions of life that is true, but most emphatically is it true in regard to religion. The damning tragedy of many lives, and I dare say of those of some of my hearers, is that men have over and over again determined that they would be Christians, and they are not Christians yet; just because they have let 'the native hue of resolution be sicklied over' by some paleness or other, and so have resolved and resolved and resolved till every nerve of action is rotted away, and they will die unchristian. I dare say that there are men or women listening to me now, perhaps with grey hairs upon them, who can remember times, in the springtide of their youth, when they said, 'I will give my heart to Jesus Christ, and set my faith upon Him'; and they have not done it yet. Now, therefore, 'as there was a readiness to will, let there be also the performance.'

But it is not only in regard to that most important of all resolves that I wish to say a word. All Christians, I am sure, know what it is, over and over again, to have had stirrings in their hearts which they have been able to consolidate into determination, but have not been able to carry into act. 'The children have come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth.' That is true about all of us, more or less, and it is very solemnly true of a great many of us professing Christians. We have tried to cure—we have determined that we will cure—manifest and flagrant defects or faults in our Christian life. We have resolved, and some nipping frost has come, and the blossoms have dropped on the grass before they have ever set into fruit. I know that is so about you, because I know that it is so about myself. And therefore, dear brethren, I appeal to you, and ask you whether the exhortation of my text has not a sharp point for every one of us—whether the universality of this defect does not demand that we all should gravely consider the exhortation here before us?

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Then, again, let me remind you how this injunction is borne in upon us by the consideration of the strength of the opposition with which we have always to contend, in every honest attempt to bring to act our best resolutions. Did you ever try to cure some little habit, some mere trifle, a trick of manner or twist of the finger, or some attitude or tone that might be ugly and awkward, and that people told you that it would be better to get rid of? You know how hard it is. There is always a tremendous gulf between the ideal and its realisation in life. As long as we are moving *in vacuo* we move without any friction or difficulty; but as soon as we come out into a world where there are an atmosphere and opposing forces, then friction comes in, and speed diminishes; and we never become what we aim to be. We begin with grand purposes, and we end with very poor results. We all start, in our early days, with the notion that our lives are going to be radiant and beautiful, and all unlike what the limitations of power and the antagonisms that we have to meet make of them at last. The tree of our life's doings has to grow, like those contorted pines on the slopes of the Alps, in many storms, with heavy weights of snow on its branches, and beaten about by tempests from every quarter of the heavens; and so it gets gnarled and knotted and very unlike the symmetrical beauty that we dreamed would adorn it. We begin with saying: 'Come! Let us build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven'; and we are contented at last, if we have put up some little tumble-down shed where we can get shelter for our heads from the blast.

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And the difficulty in bringing into action our best selves besets us in the matter of translating our resolutions into practice. What are arrayed against it? A feeble will, enslaved too often by passions and flesh and habits, and all about us lie obstacles to our carrying into action our conscientious convictions, our deepest resolutions; obstacles to our being true to our true selves; to which obstacles, alas, far too many of us habitually, and all of us occasionally, succumb. That being the case, do not we all need to ponder in our deepest hearts, and to pray for grace to make the motto of our lives, 'As there was a readiness to will, let there be a performance'?

II. Consider the importance of this counsel.

That is borne in upon mind and conscience by looking at the disastrous effects of letting resolutions remain sterile. Consider how apt we are to deceive ourselves with unfulfilled purposes. The quick response which an easily-moved nature may make to some appeal of noble thought or lofty principle is mistaken for action, and we are tempted to think that willing is

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almost as good as if we had done what we half resolved on. And there is a kind of glow of satisfaction that comes when such a man thinks, 'I have done well in that I have determined.' The Devil will let you resolve as much as you like—the more the better; only the more easily you resolve, the more certainly he will block the realisation. Let us take care of that seducing temptation which is apt to lead us all to plume ourselves on good resolutions, and to fancy that they are almost equivalent to their own fulfilment. Cheques are all very well if there be bullion in the bank cellars to pay them with when they fall due, but if that be not so, then the issuing of them is crime and fraud. Our resolutions, made and forgotten as so many of our good resolutions are, are very little better.

Note, too, how rapidly the habit of substituting lightly-made resolutions for seriously-endeavoured acts grows.

And mark, further, how miserable and debilitating it is to carry the dead weight of such unaccomplished intentions.

Nothing so certainly weakens a man as a multitude of resolves that he knows he has never fulfilled. They weaken his will, burden his conscience, stand in the way of his hopes, make him feel as if the entail of evil was too firm and strong to be ever broken. 'O wretched man that I am!' said one who had made experience of what it was to will what was good, and not to find how to perform, 'who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' It is an awful thing to have to carry a corpse about on your back. And that was what Paul thought the man did who loaded his own shoulders with abortive resolutions, that perished in the birth, and never grew up to maturity. Weak and miserable is always the man who is swift to resolve and slow to carry out his resolutions. [41]

III. And now let me say a word before I close about how this universal and grave disease is to be coped with.

Well, I should say to begin with, let us take very soberly and continually into our consciousness the recognition of the fact that the disease is there. And then may I say, let us be rather slower to resolve than we often are. 'Better is it that thou shouldst not vow than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.' The man who has never had the determination to give up some criminal indulgence—say, drink—is possibly less criminal, and certainly less weak, than the man who, when his head aches, and the consequences of his self-indulgence are vividly realised by him, makes up his mind to be a teetotaller, and soon stumbles into the first dram-shop that is open, and then reels out a drunkard. Do not vow until you have made up your minds to pay. Remember that it is a solemn act to determine anything, especially anything bearing on moral and religious life; and that you had far better keep your will in suspense than spring to the resolution with thoughtless levity and leave it with the same.

Further, the habit of promptly carrying out our resolves is one that, like all other habits, can be cultivated. And we can cultivate it in little things, in the smallest trifles of daily life, which by their myriads make up life itself, in order that it may be a fixed custom of our minds when great resolves have to be made. The man who has trained himself day in and day out, in regard to the insignificances of daily life, to let act follow resolve as the thunder peal succeeds the lightning flash, is the man who, if he is moved to make a great resolve about his religion, or about his conduct, will be most likely to carry it out. Get the magical influence of habit on your side, and you will have done much to conquer the evil of abortive resolutions. [42]

But then there is something a great deal more than that to be said. The Apostle did not content himself, in the passage already referred to, with bewailing the wretchedness of the condition in which to will was present, but how to perform he found not. He asked, and he triumphantly answered, the question, 'Who shall deliver me?' with the great words, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' There is the secret; keep near Him, trust Him, open your hearts to the influences of that Divine Spirit who makes us free from the law of sin and death. And if thus, knowing our weakness, recognising our danger, humbly trying to cultivate the habit of prompt discharge of all discerned duty, we leave ourselves in Jesus Christ's hands, and wait, and ask, and believe that we possess, His cleansing Spirit, then we shall not ask and wait in vain. 'Work out your own salvation, . . . for it is God that worketh in you, both the willing and the doing.'

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## ALL GRACE ABOUNDING

'God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.'—2 COR. ix. 8.

In addition to all his other qualities the Apostle was an extremely good man of business; and he had a field for the exercise of that quality in the collection for the poor saints of Judea, which takes up so much of this letter, and occupied for so long a period so much of his thoughts and efforts. It was for the sake of showing by actual demonstration that would 'touch the hearts' of the Jewish brethren, the absolute unity of the two halves of the Church, the Gentile and the Jewish, that the Apostle took so much trouble in this matter. The words which I have read for my text come in the midst of a very earnest appeal to the Corinthian Christians for their pecuniary help. He is dwelling upon the same thought which is expressed in the well-known words: 'What I [43]

gave I kept; what I kept I lost.'

But whilst the words of my text primarily applied to money matters, you see that they are studiously general, universal. The Apostle, after his fashion, is lifting up a little 'secular' affair into a high spiritual region; and he lays down in my text a broad general law, which goes to the very depths of the Christian life.

Now, notice, we have here in three clauses three stages which we may venture to distinguish as the fountain, the basin, the stream. 'God is able to make all grace abound toward you';—there is the fountain. 'That ye always, having all-sufficiency in all things';—there is the basin that receives the gush from the fountain. 'May abound in every good work';—there is the stream that comes from the basin. The fountain pours into the basin, that the flow from the basin may feed the stream.

Now this thought of Paul's goes to the heart of things. So let us look at it.

### I. The Fountain.

The Christian life in all its aspects and experiences is an outflow from the 'the Fountain of Life,' the giving God. Observe how emphatically the Apostle, in the context, accumulates words that express universality: '*all* grace . . . *all*-sufficiency for *all* things . . . *every* good work.' But even these expressions do not satisfy Paul, and he has to repeat the word 'abound,' in order to give some faint idea of his conception of the full tide which gushes from the fountain. It is 'all grace,' and it is abounding grace. [44]

Now what does he mean by 'grace'? That word is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of the unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ. Primarily, it describes what we, for want of a better expression, have to call a 'disposition' in the divine nature; and it means, then, if so looked at, the unconditioned, undeserved, spontaneous, eternal, stooping, pardoning love of God. That is grace, in the primary New Testament use of the phrase.

But there are no idle 'dispositions' in God. They are always energising, and so the word glides from meaning the disposition, to meaning the manifestation and activities of it, and the 'grace' of our Lord is that love in exercise. And then, since the divine energies are never fruitless, the word passes over, further, to mean all the blessed and beautiful things in a soul which are the consequences of the Promethean truth of God's loving hand, the outcome in life of the inward bestowment which has its cause, its sole cause, in God's ceaseless, unexhausted love, unmerited and free.

That, very superficially and inadequately set forth, is at least a glimpse into the fulness and greatness of meaning that lies in that profound New Testament word, 'grace.' But the Apostle here puts emphasis on the variety of forms which the one divine gift assumes. It is '*all* grace' which God is able to make abound toward you. So then, you see this one transcendent gift from the divine heart, when it comes into our human experience, is like a meteor when it passes into the atmosphere of earth, and catches fire and blazes, showering out a multitude of radiant points of light. The grace is many-sided—many-sided to us, but one in its source and in its character. For at bottom, that which God in His grace gives to us as His grace is what? Himself; or if you like to put it in another form, which comes to the same thing—new life through Jesus Christ. That is the encyclopædial gift, which contains within itself all grace. And just as the physical life in each of us, one in all its manifestations, produces many results, and shines in the eye, and blushes in the cheek, and gives strength to the arm, and flexibility and deftness to the fingers and swiftness to the foot: so also is that one grace which, being manifold in its manifestations, is one in its essence. There are many graces, there is one Grace. [45]

But this grace is not only many-sided, but abounding. It is not congruous with God's wealth, nor with His love, that He should give scantily, or, as it were, should open but a finger of the hand that is full of His gifts, and let out a little at a time. There are no sluices on that great stream so as to regulate its flow, and to give sometimes a painful trickle and sometimes a full gush, but this fountain is always pouring itself out, and it 'abounds.'

But then we are pulled up short by another word in this first clause: 'God is *able* to make.' Paul does not say, 'God will make.' He puts the whole weight of responsibility for that ability becoming operative upon us. There are conditions; and although we may have access to that full fountain, it will not pour on us 'all grace' and 'abundant grace,' unless we observe these, and so turn God's ability to give into actual giving. And how do we do that? By desire, by expectance, by petition, by faithful stewardship. If we have these things, if we have tutored ourselves, and experience has helped in the tuition, to make large our expectancy, God will smile down upon us and 'do exceeding abundantly above all' that we 'think' as well as above all that we 'ask.' Brethren, if our supplies are scant, when the full fountain is gushing at our sides, we are 'not straitened in God, we are straitened in ourselves.' Christian possibilities are Christian obligations, and what we might have and do not have, is our condemnation. [46]

I turn, in the next place, to what I have, perhaps too fancifully, called

### II. The Basin.

'God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may,' . . . etc.

The result of all this many-sided and exuberant outpouring of grace from the fountain is that

the basin may be full. Considering the infinite source and the small receptacle, we might have expected something more than 'sufficiency' to have resulted.

Divine grace is sufficient. Is it not more than sufficient? Yes, no doubt. But what Paul wishes us to feel is this—to put it into very plain English—that the good gifts of the divine grace will always be proportioned to our work, and to our sufferings too. We shall feel that we have enough, if we are as we ought to be. Sufficiency is more than a man gets anywhere else. 'Enough is as good as a feast.' And if we have strength, which we may have, to do the day's tasks, and strength to carry the day's crosses, and strength to accept the day's sorrows, and strength to master the day's temptations, that is as much as we need wish to have, even out of the fulness of God. And we shall get it, dear brethren, if we will only fulfil the conditions. If we exercise expectance, and desire and petition and faithful stewardship, we shall get what we need. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' if the road is a steep and rocky one that would wear out leather. 'As thy days so shall thy strength be.' God does not hurl His soldiers in a blundering attack on some impregnable mountain, where they are slain in heaps at the base; but when He lays a commandment on my shoulders, He infuses strength into me, and according to the good homely old saying that has brought comfort to many a sad and weighted heart, makes the back to bear the burden. The heavy task or the crushing sorrow is often the key that opens the door of God's treasure-house. You have had very little experience either of life or of Christian life, if you have not learnt by this time that the harder your work, and the darker your sorrows, the mightier have been God's supports, and the more starry the lights that have shone upon your path. 'That ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things.'

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One more word: this sufficiency *should be* more uniform, *is* uniform in the divine intention, and in so far as the flow of the fountain is concerned. Always having had I may be sure that I always shall have. Of course I know that, in so far as our physical nature conditions our spiritual experience, there will be ups and downs, moments of emancipation and moments of slavery. There will be times when the flower opens, and times when it shuts itself up. But I am sure that the great mass of Christian people might have a far more level temperature in their Christian experience than they have; that we could, if we would, have far more experimental knowledge of this 'always' of my text. God means that the basin should be always full right up to the top of the marble edge, and that the more is drawn off from it, the more should flow into it. But it is very often like the reservoirs in the hills for some great city in a drought, where great stretches of the bottom are exposed, and again, when the drought breaks, are full to the top of the retaining wall. That should not be. Our Christian life should run on the high levels. Why does it not? Possibilities are duties.

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And now, lastly, we have here what, adhering to my metaphor, I call

III. The stream.

'That ye, always having all-sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.'

That is what God gives us His grace for; and that is a very important consideration. The end of God's dealings with us, poor, weak, sinful creatures, is character and conduct. Of course you can state the end in a great many other ways; but there have been terrible evils arising from the way in which Evangelical preachers have too often talked, as if the end of God's dealings with us was the vague thing which they call 'salvation,' and by which many of their hearers take them to mean neither more nor less than dodging Hell. But the New Testament, with all its mysticism, even when it soars highest, and speaks most about the perfection of humanity, and the end of God's dealings being that we may be 'filled with the fulness of God,' never loses its wholesome, sane hold of the common moralities of daily life, and proclaims that we receive all, in order that we may be able to 'maintain good works for necessary uses.' And if we lay that to heart, and remember that a correct creed, and a living faith, and precious, select, inward emotions and experiences are all intended to evolve into lives, filled and radiant with common moralities and 'good works'—not meaning thereby the things which go by that name in popular phraseology, but 'whatsoever things are lovely . . . and of good report'—then we shall understand a little better what we are here for and what Jesus Christ died for, and what His Spirit is given and lives in us for. So 'good works' is the end, in one very important aspect, of all that avalanche of grace which has been from eternity rushing down upon us from the heights of God.

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There is one more thing to note, and that is that, in our character and conduct, we should copy the 'giving grace.' Look how eloquently and significantly, in the first and last clauses of my text, the same words recur. 'God is able to make *all* grace abound, that ye may *abound* in *all* good work.' Copy God in the many-sidedness and in the copiousness of the good that flows out from your life and conduct, because of your possession of that divine grace. And remember, 'to him that hath shall be given.' We pray for more grace; we need to pray for that, no doubt. Do we use the grace that God has given us? If we do not, the remainder of that great word which I have just quoted will be fulfilled in you. God forbid that any of us should receive the grace of God in vain, and therefore come under the stern and inevitable sentence, 'From him that hath not shall be taken away, even that which he hath!'

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It seems strange that there should ever have been any doubt as to what gift it is which evokes this burst of thanksgiving. There is but one of God's many mercies which is worthy of being thus singled out. There is one blazing central sun which shines out amidst all the galaxy of lights which fill the heavens. There is one gift of God which, beyond all others, merits the designation of 'unspeakable.' The gift of Christ draws all other divine gifts after it. 'How should He not with Him also freely give us all things.'

The connection in which this abrupt jet of praise stands is very remarkable. The Apostle has been dwelling on the Christian obligation of giving bountifully and cheerfully, and on the great law that a glad giver is 'enriched' and not impoverished thereby, whilst the recipients, for their part, are blessed by having thankfulness evoked towards the givers. And that contemplation of the happy interchange of benefit and thanks between men leads the fervid Apostle to the thoughts which were always ready to spring to his lips—of God as the great pattern of giving and of the gratitude to Him which should fill all our souls. The expression here 'unspeakable' is what I wish chiefly to fix upon now. It means literally that which cannot be fully declared. Language fails because thought fails.

#### I. The gift comes from unspeakable love.

God *so* loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The love is the cause of the gift: the gift is the expression of the love. John's Gospel says that the Son which is in the bosom of the Father has *declared* Him. Paul here uses a related word for *unspeakable* which might be rendered 'that which cannot be fully declared.' The declaration of the Father partly consists in this, that He is declared to be undeclarable, the proclamation of His name consists partly in this that it is proclaimed to be a name that cannot be proclaimed. Language fails when it is applied to the expression of human emotion; no tongue can ever fully serve the heart. Whether there be any thoughts too great for words or no, there are emotions too great. Language is ever 'weaker than our grief' and not seldom weaker than our love. It is but the surface water that can be run off through the narrow channel of speech: the central deep remains. If it be so with human affection, how much more must it be so with God's love? With lowly condescension He uses all sweet images drawn from earthly relationships, to help us in understanding His. Every dear name is pressed into the service—father, mother, husband, wife, brother, friend, and after all are exhausted, the love which clothed itself in them all in turn, and used them all to give some faint hint of its own perfection, remains unspoken. We know human love, its limitations, its changes, its extravagances, its shortcomings, and cannot but feel how unworthy it is to mirror for us that perfection in God which we venture to name by a name so soiled. The analogies between what we call love in man and love in God must be supplemented by the differences between them, if we are ever to approach a worthy conception of the unspeakable love that underlies the unspeakable gift.

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#### II. The gift involves unspeakable sacrifice.

Human love desires to give its most precious treasures to its object and is then most blessed: divine love cannot come short of human in this most characteristic of its manifestations. Surely the copy is not to surpass the original, nor the mirror to flash more brightly than the sun which, at the brightest, it but reflects. In such a matter we can but stammer when we try to find words. As our text warns us, we are trying to utter the unutterable when we seek to speak of God's giving up for us; but however such a thought may seem to be forbidden by other aspects of the divine nature, it seems to be involved in the great truth that 'God is love.' Since He is, His blessedness too, must be in imparting, and in parting with what He gives. A humble worshipper in Jewish times loved enough to say that he would not offer unto God an offering that cost him nothing, and that loving height of self-surrender was at the highest, but a lowly imitation of the love to which it looked up. When Paul in the Epistle to the Romans says, 'He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all,' he is obviously alluding to, and all but quoting, the divine words to Abraham, 'Seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me,' and the allusion permits us to parallel what God did when He sent His Son with what Abraham did when, with wrung heart, but with submission, he bound and laid Isaac on the altar and stretched forth his hand with the knife in it to slay him. Such a representation contradicts the vulgar conceptions of a passionless, self-sufficing, icy deity, but reflection on the facts of our own experience and on the blessed secrets of our own love, leads us to believe that some shadow of loss passed across the infinite and eternal completeness of the divine nature when 'God sent forth His Son made of a woman.' And may we not go further and say that when Jesus on the Cross cried from out of the darkness of eclipse, 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?' there was something in the heavens corresponding to the darkness that covered the earth and something in the Father's heart that answered the Son's. But our text warns us that such matters are not for our handling in speech, and are best dealt with, not as matters of possibly erring speculation, but as materials for lowly thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift.

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But whatever may be true about the love of the Father who sent, there can be no doubt about the love of the Son who came. No man helps his fellows in suffering but at the cost of his own suffering. Sympathy means *fellow-feeling*, and the one indispensable condition of all rescue work of any sort is that the rescuer must bear on his own shoulders the sins or sorrows that he is able to bear away. Heartless help is no help. It does not matter whether he who 'stands and says, "Be ye clothed and fed,"' gives or does not give 'the things necessary,' he will be but a 'miserable comforter' if he has not in heart and feeling entered into the sorrows and pains which he seeks to

alleviate. We need not dwell on the familiar truths concerning Him who was a 'man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' All through His life He was in contact with evil, and for Him the contact was like that of a naked hand pressed upon hot iron. The sins and woes of the world made His path through it like that of bare feet on sharp flints. If He had never died it would still have been true that 'He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.' On the Cross He completed the libation which had continued throughout His life and 'poured out His soul unto death' as He had been pouring it out all through His life. We have no measure by which we can estimate the inevitable sufferings in such a world as ours of such a spirit as Christ's. We may know something of the solitude of uncongenial society; of the pain of seeing miseries that we cannot comfort, of the horrors of dwelling amidst impurities that we cannot cleanse, and of longings to escape from them all to some nest in the wilderness, but all these are but the feeblest shadows of the incarnate sorrows whose name among men was Jesus. Nothing is more pathetic than the way in which our Lord kept all these sorrows close locked within His own heart, so that scarcely ever did they come to light. Once He did permit a glimpse into that hidden chamber when He said, 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you?' But for the most part His sorrow was unspoken because it was 'unspeakable.' Once beneath the quivering olives in the moonlight of Gethsemane, He made a pitiful appeal for the little help which three drowsy men could give Him, when He cried, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch with Me,' but for the most part the silence at which His judges 'marvelled greatly,' and raged as much as they marvelled, was unbroken, and as 'a sheep before her shearers is dumb,' so 'He opened not His mouth.' The sacrifice of His death was, for the most part, silent like the sacrifice of His life. Should it not call forth from us floods of praise and thanks to God for His unspeakable gift?

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### III. The gift brings with it unspeakable results.

In Christ are hid 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' When God gave us Him, He gave us a storehouse in which are contained treasures of truth which can never be fully comprehended, and which, even if comprehended, can never be exhausted. The mystery of the Divine Name revealed in Jesus, the mystery of His person, are themes on which the Christian world has been nourished ever since, and which are as full of food, not for the understanding only, but far more for the heart and the will, to-day as ever they were. The world may think that it has left the teaching of Jesus behind, but in reality the teaching is far ahead, and the world's practise is but slowly creeping towards its imperfect attainment. The Gospel is the guide of the race, and each generation gathers something more from it, and progresses in the measure in which it follows Christ; and as for the race, so for the individual. Each of Christ's scholars finds his own gift, and in the measure of his faithfulness to what he has found makes ever new discoveries in the unsearchable riches of Christ. After all have fed full there still remain abundant baskets full to be taken up.

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He who has sounded the depths of Jesus most completely is ever the first to acknowledge that he has been but as a child 'gathering pebbles on the beach while the great ocean lies unsounded before him.' No single soul, and no multitude of souls, can exhaust Jesus; neither our individual experiences, nor the experiences of a believing world can fully realise the endless wealth laid up in Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega of all our speech, the first letter and the last of our alphabet, between which lie all the rest.

The gift is completed in consequences yet unspeakable. Even the first blessings which the humblest faith receives from the pierced hands have more in them than words can tell. Who has ever spoken adequately and in full correspondence with reality what it is to have God's pardoning love flowing in upon the soul? Many singers have sung sweet psalms and hymns and spiritual songs on which generations of devout souls have fed, but none of them has spoken the deepest blessedness of a Christian life, or the calm raptures of communion with God. It is easy to utter the words 'forgiveness, reconciliation, acceptance, fellowship, eternal life'; the syllables can be spoken, but who knows or can utter the depths of the meanings? After all human words the half has not been told us, and as every soul carries within itself unrevealable emotions, and is a mystery after all revelation, so the things which God's gift brings to a soul are after all speech unspeakable, and the words 'cannot be uttered' which they who are caught up into the third heavens hear.

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Then we may extend our thoughts to the future form of Christian experience. 'It doth not yet appear what we should be.' All our conceptions of a future existence must necessarily be inadequate. Nothing but experience can reveal them to us, and our experience there will be capable of indefinite expansion, and through eternity there will be endless growth in the appropriation of the unspeakable gift.

For us the only recompense that we can make for the unspeakable gift is to receive it with 'thanks unto God' and the yielding up of our hearts to Him. God pours this love upon us freely, without stint. It is unspeakable in the depths of its source, in the manner of its manifestation, in the glory of its issues. It is like some great stream, rising in the trackless mountains, broad and deep, and leading on to a sunlit ocean. We stand on the bank; let us trust ourselves to its broad bosom. It will bear us safe. And let us take heed that we receive not the gift of God *in vain*.

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'Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be fulfilled.'—2 COR. X. 5 and 6 (R.V.).

None of Paul's letters are so full of personal feeling as this one is. It is written, for the most part, at a white heat; he had heard from his trusted Titus tidings which on one hand filled him with a thankfulness of which the first half of the letter is the expression; but there had also been tidings of a very different kind, and from this point onwards the letter is seething with the feelings which these had produced. There was in the Corinthian Church a party, probably Judaisers, which denied his authority and said bitter things about his character. They apparently had contrasted the force of his letters and the feebleness of his 'bodily presence' and speech. They insinuated that his 'bark was worse than his bite.' Their language put into plain English would be something like this, 'Ah! He is very bold at a distance, let him come and face us and we shall see a difference. Vapouring in his letters, he will be meek enough when he is here.'

These slanderers seem to have thought of Paul as if he 'warred according to flesh,' and it is this charge, that he was actuated in his opposition to the evils in Corinth by selfish considerations and worldly interests, which seems to have set the Apostle on fire. In answer he pours out quick, indignant questionings, sharp irony, vehement self-vindication, passionate remonstrances, flashes of wrath, sudden jets of tenderness. What a position for him to have to say, 'I am not a low schemer; I am not working for myself.' Yet it is the common lot of all such men to be misread by little, crawling creatures who cannot believe in heroic self-forgetfulness. He answers the taunt that he 'walked according to the flesh' in the context by saying, 'Yes, I live in the flesh, my outward life is like that of other men, but I do not go a-soldiering *according* to the flesh. It is not for my own sinful self that I get the rules of my life's battle, neither do I get my weapons from the flesh. They could not do what they do if that were their origin: they are of God and therefore mighty.' Then the metaphor as it were catches fire, and in our text he expands the figure of a warfare and sets before us the destruction of fortresses, the capture of their garrisons, and the leading of them away into another land, the stern punishment of the rebels who still hold out, and the merciful delay in administering it. It has been suggested that there is an allusion in our text to the extermination of the pirates in Paul's native Cilicia which happened some fifty or sixty years before his birth and ended in destroying their robber-holds and taking some thousands of prisoners. Whether that be so or no, the Apostle's kindled imagination sets forth here great truths as to the effects which his message is meant to produce and, thank God, has produced.

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#### I. The opposing fortresses.

The Apostle conceives of himself and of his brother preachers of Christ as going forth on a merciful warfare. He thinks of strong rock fortresses, with lofty walls set on high, and frowning down on any assailants. No doubt he is thinking first of the opposition which he had to front in Corinth from the Judaisers to whom we have referred, but the application of the metaphor goes far beyond the petty strife in Corinth and carries for us the wholesome lesson that one main cause which keeps men back from Christ is a too high estimate of themselves. Some of us are enclosed in the fortress of self-sufficiency: we will not humbly acknowledge our dependence on God, and have turned self-reliance into the law of our lives. There are many voices, some of them sweet and powerful, which to-day are preaching that gospel. It finds eager response in many hearts, and there is something in us all to which it appeals. We are often tempted to say defiantly, 'Who is Lord over us?' And the teaching that bids us rely on ourselves is so wholly in accord with the highest wisdom and the noblest life that what is good and what is evil in each of us contribute to reinforce it. Self-dependence is a great virtue, and the mother of much energy and nobleness, but it is also a great error and a great sin. To be so self-sufficing as not to need externals is good; to be so self-sufficing as not to need or to see God is ruin and death. The title which, as one of our great thinkers tells us, a humourist put on the back of a volume of heterodox tracts, 'Every man his own redeemer,' makes a claim for self-sufficiency which more or less unconsciously shuts out many men from the salvation of Christ.

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There is the fortress of culture and the pride of it in which many of us are to-day entrenched against the Gospel. The attitude of mind into which persons of culture tend to fall is distinctly adverse to their reception of the Gospel, and that is not because the Gospel is adverse to culture, but because cultured people do not care to be put on the same level with publicans and harlots. They would be less disinclined to go into the feast if there were in it reserved seats for superior people and a private entrance to them. If the wise and prudent were more of both, they would be liker the babes to whom these things are revealed, and they would be revealed to them too. Not knowledge but the superciliousness which is the result of the conceit of knowledge hinders from God, and is one of the strongest fortresses against which the weapons of our warfare have to be employed.

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There is the fortress of ignorance. Most men who are kept from Christ are so because they know neither themselves nor God. The most widely prevailing characteristic of the superficial life of most men is their absolute unconsciousness of the fact of sin; they neither know it as universal nor as personal. They have never gone deeply enough into the depths of their own hearts to have come up scared at the ugly things that lie sleeping there, nor have they ever reflected on their own conduct with sufficient gravity to discern its aberrations from the law of right, hence the average man is quite unconscious of sin, and is a complete stranger to himself. The cup has been drunk by and intoxicated the world, and the masses of men are quite unaware that it has intoxicated them.

They are ignorant of God as they are of themselves, and if at any time, by some flash of light, they see themselves as they are, they think of God as if He were altogether such an one as themselves, and fall back on a vague trust in the vaguer mercy of their half-believed-in God as their hope for a vague salvation. Men who thus walk in a vain show will never feel their need of Jesus, and the lazy ignorance of themselves and the as lazy trust in what they call their God, are a fortress against which it will task the power of God to make any weapons of warfare mighty to its pulling down.

## II. The casting down of fortresses.

The first effect of any real contact with Christ and His Gospel is to reveal a man to himself, to shatter his delusive estimates of what he is, and to pull down about his ears the lofty fortress in which he has ensconced himself. It seems strange work for what calls itself a Gospel to begin by forcing a man to cry out with sobs and tears, Oh, wretched man that I am! But no man will ever reach the heights to which Christ can lift him, who does not begin his upward course by descending to the depths into which Christ's Gospel begins its work by plunging him. Unconsciousness of sin is sure to lead to indifference to a Saviour, and unless we know ourselves to be miserable and poor and blind and naked, the offer of gold refined by fire and white garments that we may clothe ourselves will make no appeal to us. The fact of sin makes the need for a Saviour; our individual sense of sin makes us sensible of our need of a Saviour.

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Paul believed that the weapons of his warfare were mighty enough to cast down the strongest of all strongholds in which men shut themselves up against the humbling Gospel of salvation by the mercy of God. The weapons to which he thus trusted were the same to which Jesus pointed His disciples when, about to leave them, He said, 'When the Comforter is come He will convict the world of sin because they believe not in Me.' Jesus brought to the world the perfect revelation of the holiness of God, and set before us all a divine pattern of manhood to rebuke and condemn our stained and rebellious lives, and He turned us away from the superficial estimate of actions to the careful scrutiny of motives. By all these and many other ways He presented Himself to the world a perfect man, the incarnation of a holy God and the revelation and condemnation of sinful humanity. Yet, all that miracle of loveliness, gentleness, and dignity is beheld by men without a thrill, and they see in Him no 'beauty that they should desire Him,' and no healing to which they will trust. Paul's way of kindling penitence in impenitent spirits was not to brandish over them the whips of law or to seek to shake souls with terror of any hell, still less was it to discourse with philosophic calm on the obligations of duty and the wisdom of virtuous living; his appeal to conscience was primarily the pressing on the heart of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. When the heart is melted, the conscience will not long continue indurated. We cannot look lovingly and believingly at Jesus and then turn to look complacently on ourselves. Not to believe on Him is the sin of sins, and to be taught that it is so is the first step in the work of Him who never merits the name of the Comforter more truly than when He convicts the world of sin.

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For a Christianity that does not begin with the deep consciousness of sin has neither depth nor warmth and has scarcely vitality. The Gospel is no Gospel, and we had almost said, 'The Christ is no Christ' to one who does not feel himself, if parted from Christ, 'dead in trespasses and sins.' Our religion depends for all its force, our gratitude and love for all their devotion, upon our sense that 'the chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him, and that by His stripes we are healed.' Since He gave Himself for us, it is meet that we give ourselves to Him, but there will be little fervour of devotion or self-surrender, unless there has been first the consciousness of the death of sin and then the joyous consciousness of newness of life in Christ Jesus.

## III. The captives led away to another land.

The Apostle carries on his metaphor one step further when he goes on to describe what followed the casting down of the fortresses. The enemy, driven from their strongholds, have nothing for it but to surrender and are led away in captivity to another land. The long strings of prisoners on Assyrian and Egyptian monuments show how familiar an experience this was. It may be noted that perhaps our text regards the obedience of Christ as being the far country into which 'every thought was to be brought.' At all events Paul's idea here is that the end of the whole struggle between 'the flesh' and the weapons of God is to make men willing captives of Jesus Christ. We are Christians in the measure in which we surrender our wills to Christ. That surrender rests upon, and is our only adequate answer to, His surrender for us. The 'obedience of Christ' is perfect freedom; His captives wear no chains and know nothing of forced service; His yoke is easy, not because it does not press hard upon the neck but because it is lined with love, and 'His burden is light' not because of its own weight but because it is laid on us by love and is carried by kindred love. He only commands himself who gladly lets Christ command him. Many a hard task becomes easy; crooked things are straightened out and rough places often made surprisingly plain for the captives of Christ, whom He leads into the liberty of obedience to Him.

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## IV. Fate of the disobedient.

Paul thinks that in Corinth there will be found some stiff-necked opponents of whom he cannot hope that their 'obedience shall be fulfilled,' and he sees in the double issue of the small struggle that was being waged in Corinth a parable of the wider results of the warfare in the world. 'Some believed and some believed not'; that has been the brief summary of the experience of all God's messengers everywhere, and it is their experience to-day. No doubt when Paul speaks of 'being in readiness to avenge all disobedience,' he is alluding to the exercise of his apostolic authority against the obdurate antagonists whom he contemplates as still remaining obdurate, and it is beautiful to note the long-suffering patience with which he will hold his hand until all that can be

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won has been won. But we must not forget that Paul's demeanour is but a faint shadow of his Lord's, and that the weapons which were ready to avenge all disobedience were the weapons of God. If a man steels himself against the efforts of divine love, builds up round himself a fortress of self-righteousness and locks its gates against the merciful entrance of convictions of sin and the knowledge of a Saviour, and if he therefore lives, year in, year out, in disobedience, the weapons which he thinks himself to have resisted will one day make him feel their edge. We cannot set ourselves against the salvation of Jesus without bringing upon ourselves consequences which are wholly evil and harmful. Torpid consciences, hungry hearts, stormy wills, tyrannous desires, vain hopes and not vain fears come to be, by slow degrees, the tortures of the man who drops the portcullis and lifts the bridge against the entrance of Jesus. There are hells enough on earth if men's hearts were displayed.

But the love which is obliged to smite gives warning that it is ready to avenge, long before it lets the blow fall, and does so in order that it may never need to fall. As long as it is possible that the disobedient shall become obedient to Christ, He holds back the vengeance that is ready to fall and will one day fall 'on all disobedience.' Not till all other means have been patiently tried will He let that terrible ending crash down. It hangs over the heads of many of us who are all unaware that we walk beneath the shadow of a rock that at any moment may be set in motion and bury us beneath its weight. It is 'in readiness,' but it is still at rest. Let us be wise in time and yield to the merciful weapons with which Jesus would make His way into our hearts. Or if the metaphor of our text presents Him in too warlike a guise, let us listen to His own gentle pleading, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.'

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## SIMPLICITY TOWARDS CHRIST

'But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.'—2 COR. xi. 3.

The Revised Version, amongst other alterations, reads, 'the simplicity that is *towards* Christ.'

The inaccurate rendering of the Authorised Version is responsible for a mistake in the meaning of these words, which has done much harm. They have been supposed to describe a quality or characteristic belonging to Christ or the Gospel; and, so construed, they have sometimes been made the watchword of narrowness and of intellectual indolence. 'Give us the simple Gospel' has been the cry of people who have thought themselves to be evangelical when they were only lazy, and the consequence has been that preachers have been expected to reiterate commonplaces, which have made both them and their hearers listless, and to sink the educational for the evangelistic aspect of the Christian teacher's function.

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It is quite true that the Gospel is simple, but it is also true that it is deep, and they will best appreciate its simplicity who have most honestly endeavoured to fathom its depth. When we let our little sounding lines out, and find that they do not reach the bottom, we begin to wonder even more at the transparency of the clear abyss. It is not simplicity *in* Christ, but *towards* Christ of which the Apostle is speaking; not a quality in Him, but a quality in *us* towards Him. I wish, then, to turn to the two thoughts that these words suggest. First and chiefly, the attitude towards Christ which befits our relation to Him; and, secondly and briefly, the solicitude for its maintenance.

I. First, then, look at the attitude towards Christ which befits the Christian relation to Him.

The word 'simplicity' has had a touch of contempt associated with it. It is a somewhat doubtful compliment to say of a man that he is 'simple-minded.' All noble words which describe great qualities get oxidised by exposure to the atmosphere, and rust comes over them, as indeed all good things tend to become deteriorated in time and by use. But the notion of the word is really a very noble and lofty one. To be 'without a fold,' which is the meaning of the Greek word and of its equivalent 'simplicity,' is, in one aspect, to be transparently honest and true, and in another to be out and out of a piece. There is no underside of the cloth, doubled up beneath the upper which shows, and running in the opposite direction; but all tends in one way. A man with no under-currents, no by-ends, who is down to the very roots what he looks, and all whose being is knit together and hurled in one direction, without reservation or back-drawing, that is the 'simple' man whom the Apostle means. Such simplicity is the truest wisdom; such simplicity of devotion to Jesus Christ is the only attitude of heart and mind which corresponds to the facts of our relation to Him. That relation is set forth in the context by a very sweet and tender image, in the true line of scriptural teaching, which in many a place speaks of the Bride and Bridegroom, and which on its last page shows us the Lamb's wife descending from Heaven to meet her husband. The state of devout souls and of the community of such here on earth is that of betrothal. Their state in heaven is that of marriage. Very beautiful it is to see how this fiery Paul, like the ascetic John, who never knew the sacred joys of that state, lays hold of the thought of the Bridegroom and the Bride, and of his individual relation to both as indicating the duties of the Church and the solicitude of the Apostle. He says that he has been the intermediary who, according to Oriental custom, arranged the preliminaries of the marriage, and brought the bride to the bridegroom, and, as the friend of the latter, standing by rejoices greatly to hear the bridegroom's voice, and is

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solicitous mainly that in the tremulous heart of the betrothed there should be no admixture of other loves, but a whole-hearted devotion, an exclusive affection, and an absolute obedience. 'I have espoused you,' says he, 'to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear lest . . . your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity that is towards Him.'

Now that metaphor carries in its implication all that anybody can say about the exclusiveness, the depth, the purity, the all-pervasiveness of the dependent love which should knit us to Jesus Christ. The same thought of whole-hearted, single, absolute devotion is conveyed by other Scripture metaphors, the *slave* and the *soldier* of Christ. But all that is repellent or harsh in these is softened and glorified when we contemplate it in the light of the metaphor of my text. [68]

So I might leave it to do its own work, but I may perhaps be allowed to follow out the thought in one or two directions.

The attitude, then, which corresponds to our relation to Jesus Christ is that, first, of a faith which looks to Him exclusively as the source of salvation and of light. The specific danger which was alarming Paul, in reference to that little community of Christians in Corinth, was one which, in its particular form, is long since dead and buried. But the principles which underlay it, the tendencies to which it appealed, and the perils which alarmed Paul for the Corinthian Church, are perennial. He feared that these Judaising teachers, who dogged his heels all his life long, and whose one aim seemed to be to build upon his foundation and to overthrow his building, should find their way into this church and wreck it. The keenness of the polemic, in this and in the contextual chapters, shows how real and imminent the danger was. Now what they did was to tell people that Jesus Christ had a partner in His saving work. They said that obedience to the Jewish law, ceremonial and other, was a condition of salvation, along with trust in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. And because they thus shared out the work of salvation between Jesus Christ and something else, Paul thundered and lightened at them all his life, and, as he tells us in this context, regarded them as preaching another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. That particular error is long dead and buried.

But is there nothing else that has come into its place? Has this old foe not got a new face, and does not it live amongst us as really as it lived then? I think it does; whether in the form of the grosser kind of sacramentarianism and ecclesiasticism which sticks sacraments and a church in front of the Cross, or in the form of the definite denial that Jesus Christ's death on the Cross is the one means of salvation, or simply in the form of the coarse, common wish to have a finger in the pie and a share in the work of saving oneself, as a drowning man will sometimes half drown his rescuer by trying to use his own limbs. These tendencies that Paul fought, and which he feared would corrupt the Corinthians from their simple and exclusive reliance on Christ, and Christ alone, as the ground and author of their salvation, are perennial in human nature, and we have to be on our guard for ever and for ever against them. Whether they come in organised, systematic, doctrinal form, or whether they are simply the rising in our own hearts of the old Adam of pride and self-trust, they equally destroy the whole work of Christ, because they infringe upon its solitariness and uniqueness. It is not Christ and anything else. Men are not saved by a syndicate. It is Jesus Christ alone, and 'beside Him there is no Saviour.' You go into a Turkish mosque and see the roof held up by a forest of slim pillars. You go into a cathedral chapter-house and see one strong support in the centre that bears the whole roof. The one is an emblem of the Christless multiplicity of vain supports, the other of the solitary strength and eternal sufficiency of the one Pillar on which the whole weight of a world's salvation rests, and which lightly bears it triumphantly aloft. 'I fear lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity' of a reasonable faith directed towards Christ. [69]

And in like manner He is the sole light and teacher of men as to God, themselves, their duty, their destinies and prospects. He, and He alone, brings these things to light. His word, whether it comes from His lips or from the deeds which are part of His revelation, or from the voice of the Spirit which takes of His and speaks to the ages through His apostles, should be 'the end of all strife.' What He says, and all that He says, and nothing else than what He says, is the creed of the Christian. He, and He only, is 'the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.' In this day of babblements and confusions, let us listen for the voice of Christ and accept all which comes from Him, and let the language of our deepest hearts be, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life.'

Again, our relation to Jesus Christ demands exclusive love to Him. 'Demands' is an ugly word to bracket with love. We might say, and perhaps more truly, permits or privileges. It is the joy of the betrothed that her duty is to love, and to keep her heart clear from all competing affections. But it is none the less her duty because it is her joy. What Christ is to you, if you are a Christian, and what He longs to be to us all, whether we are Christians or not, is of such a character as that the only fitting attitude of our hearts to Him in response is that of exclusive affection. I do not mean that we are to love nothing but Him, but I mean that we are to love all things else in Him, and that, if any creature so delays or deflects our love as that either it does not pass, by means of the creature, into the presence of the Christ, or is turned away from the Christ by the creature, then we have fallen beneath the sweet level of our lofty privilege, and have won for ourselves the misery due to distracted and idolatrous hearts. Love to one who has done what He has done for us is in its very nature exclusive, and its exclusiveness is all-pervasive exclusiveness. The centre diamond makes the little stones set round it all the more lustrous. We must love Jesus Christ all in all or not at all. Divided love incurs the condemnation that falls heavily upon the head of the faithless bride. [70]

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Dear friends, the conception of the essence of religion as being love is no relaxation, but an increase, of its stringent requirements. The more we think of that sweet bond as being the true union of the soul with God, who is its only rest and home, the more reasonable and imperative will appear the old commandment, 'Thou shalt love Him with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.'

But, further, our relation to Jesus Christ is such as that nothing short of absolute obedience to His commandment corresponds to it. There must be the simplicity, the single-mindedness that thus obeys, obeys swiftly, cheerfully, constantly. In all matters His command is my law, and, as surely as I make His command my law, will He make my desire His motive. For He Himself has said, in words that bring together our obedience to His will and His compliance with our wishes, in a fashion that we should not have ventured upon unless He had set us an example, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments. If ye ask anything in My name I will do it.' The exclusive love that binds us, by reason of our faith in Him alone, to that Lord ought to express itself in unhesitating, unflinching, unreserved, and unreluctant obedience to every word that comes from His mouth.

These brief outlines are but the poorest attempt to draw out what the words of my text imply. But such as they are, let us remember that they do set forth the only proper response of the saved man to the saving Christ. 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.' Anything short of a faith that rests on Him alone, of a love that knits itself to His single, all-sufficient heart, and of an obedience that bows the whole being to the sweet yoke of His commandment is an unworthy answer to the Love that died, and that lives for us all. [72]

II. And now I have only time to glance at the solicitude for the maintenance of this exclusive single-mindedness towards Christ.

Think of what threatens it. I say nothing about the ferment of opinion in this day, for one man that is swept away from a thorough whole-hearted faith by intellectual considerations, there are a dozen from whom it is filched without their knowing it, by their own weaknesses and the world's noises. And so it is more profitable that we should think of the whole crowd of external duties, enjoyments, sweetnesses, bitternesses, that solicit us, and would seek to draw us away. Who can hear the low voice that speaks peace and wisdom when Niagara is roaring past his ears? 'The world is too much with us, late and soon. Buying and selling we lay waste our powers,' and break ourselves away from our simple devotion to that dear Lord. But it is possible that we may so carry into all the whirl the central peace, as that we shall not be disturbed by it; and possible that 'whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to His glory,' so that we can, even in the midst of our daily pressing avocations and cares be keeping our hearts in the heavens, and our souls in touch with our Lord.

But it is not only things without that draw us away. Our own weaknesses and waywardnesses, our strong senses, our passions, our desires, our necessities, all these have a counteracting force, which needs continual watchfulness in order to be neutralised. No man can grasp a stay, which alone keeps him from being immersed in the waves, with uniform tenacity, unless every now and then he tightens his muscles. And no man can keep himself firmly grasping Jesus Christ without conscious effort directed to bettering his hold. [73]

If there be dangers around us, and dangers within us, the discipline which we have to pursue in order to secure this uniform, single-hearted devotion is plain enough. Let us be vividly conscious of the peril—which is what some of us are not. Let us take stock of ourselves lest creeping evil may be encroaching upon us, while we are all unaware—which is what some of us never do. Let us clearly contemplate the possibility of an indefinite increase in the closeness and thoroughness of our surrender to Him—a conviction which has faded away from the minds of many professing Christians. Above all, let us find time or make time for the patient, habitual contemplation of the great facts which kindle our devotion. For if you never think of Jesus Christ and His love to you, how can you love Him back again? And if you are so busy carrying out your own secular affairs, or pursuing your own ambitions, or attending to your own duties, as they may seem to be, that you have no time to think of Christ, His death, His life, His Spirit, His yearning heart over His bride, how can it be expected that you will have any depth of love to Him? Let us, too, wait with prayerful patience for that Divine Spirit who will knit us more closely to our Lord.

Unless we do so, we shall get no happiness out of our religion, and it will bring no praise to Christ or profit to ourselves. I do not know a more miserable man than a half-and-half Christian, after the pattern of, I was going to say, the ordinary average of professing Christians of this generation. He has religion enough to prick and sting him, and not enough to impel him to forsake the evil which yet he cannot comfortably do. He has religion enough to 'inflamm his conscience,' not enough to subdue his will and heart. How many of my hearers are in that condition it is for them to settle. If we are to be Christian men at all, let us be it out and out. Half-and-half religion is no religion. [74]

'One foot in sea, and one on shore;  
To one thing constant never!'

That is the type of thousands of professing Christians. 'I fear lest by any means your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is towards Christ.'

## STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

'For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'—2 COR. xii. 8, 9.

This very remarkable page in the autobiography of the Apostle shows us that he, too, belonged to the great army of martyrs who, with hearts bleeding and pierced through and through with a dart, yet did their work for God. It is of little consequence what his thorn in the flesh may have been. The original word suggests very much heavier sorrow than the metaphor of 'a thorn' might imply. It really seems to mean not a tiny bit of thorn that might lie half concealed in the finger tip, but one of those hideous stakes on which the cruel punishment of impalement used to be inflicted. And Paul's thought is, not that he has a little, trivial trouble to bear, but that he is, as it were, forced quivering upon that tremendous torture. [75]

Unquestionably, what he means is some bodily ailment or other. The hypothesis that the 'thorn in the flesh' was the sting of the animal nature inciting him to evil is altogether untenable, because such a thorn could never have been left when the prayer for its removal was earnestly presented; nor could it ever have been, when left, an occasion for glorifying. Manifestly it was no weakness removable by his own effort, no incapacity for service which in any manner approximated to being a fault, but purely and simply some infliction from God's hand (though likewise capable of being regarded as a 'messenger of Satan') which hindered him in his work, and took down any proud flesh and danger of spiritual exaltation in consequence of the largeness of his religious privileges.

Our text sets before us three most instructive windings, as it were, of the stream of thoughts that passed through the Apostle's mind, in reference to this burden that he had to carry, and may afford wholesome contemplation for us to-day. There is, first, the instinctive shrinking which took refuge in prayer. Then there is the insight won by prayer into the sustaining strength for, and the purposes of, the thorn that was not to be plucked out. And then, finally, there is the peace of acquiescence, and a will that accepts—not the inevitable, but the loving.

I. First of all we see the instinctive shrinking from that which tortured the flesh, which takes refuge in prayer. [76]

There is a wonderful, a beautiful, and, I suppose, an intentional parallel between the prayers of the servant and of the Master. Paul's petitions are the echo of Gethsemane. There, under the quivering olives, in the broken light of the Paschal moon, Jesus 'thrice' prayed that the cup might pass from Him. And here the servant, emboldened and instructed by the example of the Master, 'thrice' reiterates his human and natural desire for the removal of the pain, whatever it was, which seemed to him so to hinder the efficiency and the fulness, as it certainly did the joy, of his service.

But He who prayed in Gethsemane was He to whom Paul addressed his prayer. For, as is almost always the case in the New Testament, 'the Lord' here evidently means Christ, as is obvious from the connection of the answer to the petition with the Apostle's final confidence and acquiescence. For the answer was, 'My strength is made perfect in weakness'; and the Apostle's conclusion is, 'Most gladly will I glorify in infirmity,' that the strength or 'power of Christ may rest upon me.' Therefore the prayer with which we have to deal here is a prayer offered to Jesus, who prayed in Gethsemane, and to whom we can bring our petitions and our desires.

Notice how this thought of prayer directed to the Master Himself helps to lead us deep into the sacrest and most blessed characteristics of prayer. It is only telling Christ what is in our hearts. Oh, if we lived in the true understanding of what prayer really is—the emptying out of our inmost desire and thoughts before our Brother, who is likewise our Lord—questions as to what it was permissible to pray for, and what it was not permissible to pray for, would be irrelevant, and drop away of themselves. If we had a less formal notion of prayer, and realised more thoroughly what it was—the speech of a confiding heart to a sympathising Lord—then everything that fills our hearts would be seen to be a fitting object of prayer. If anything is large enough to interest me, it is not too small to be spoken about to Him. [77]

So the question, which is often settled upon very abstract and deep grounds that have little to do with the matter—the question as to whether prayer for outward blessings is permissible—falls away of itself. If I am to talk to Jesus Christ about everything that concerns me, am I to keep my thumb upon all that great department and be silent about it? One reason why our prayers are often so unreal is, because they do not fit our real wants, nor correspond to the thoughts that are busy in our minds at the moment of praying. Our hearts are full of some small matter of daily interest, and when we kneel down not a word about it comes to our lips. Can that be right?

The difference between the different objects of prayer is not to be found in the rejection of all temporal and external, but in remembering that there are two sets of things to be prayed about, and over one set must ever be written 'If it be Thy will,' and over the other it need not be written, because we are sure that the granting of our wishes *is* His will. We know about the one that 'if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.' That may seem to be a very poor and shrunken kind of hope to give a man, that if his prayer is in conformity with the previous determination of the divine will, it will be answered. But it availed for the joyful confidence of



that Apostle who saw deepest into the conditions and the blessedness of the harmony of the will of God and of man. But about the other set we can only say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.' With that sentence, not as a formula upon our lips but deep in our hearts, let us take everything into His presence—thorns and stakes, pinpricks and wounds out of which the life-blood is ebbing—let us take them all to Him, and be sure that we shall take none of them in vain.

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So then we have the Person to whom the prayer is addressed, the subjects with which it is occupied, and the purpose to which it is directed. 'Take away the burden' was the Apostle's petition; but it was a mistaken petition and, therefore, unanswered.

II. That brings me to the second of the windings, as I have ventured to call them, of this stream—viz. the insight into the source of strength for, and the purpose of, the thorn that could not be taken away. The Lord said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee. For My strength' (where the word 'My' is a supplement, but a necessary one) 'is made perfect in weakness.'

The answer is, in form and in substance, a gentle refusal of the form of the petition, but it is a more than granting of its essence. For the best answer to such a prayer, and the answer which a true man means when he asks, 'Take away the burden,' need not be the external removal of the pressure of the sorrow, but the infusing of power to sustain it. There are two ways of lightening a burden, one is diminishing its actual weight, the other is increasing the strength of the shoulder that bears it. And the latter is God's way, is Christ's way, of dealing with us.

Now mark that the answer which this faithful prayer receives is no communication of anything fresh, but it is the opening of the man's eyes to see that already he has all that he needs. The reply is not, 'I *will* give thee grace sufficient,' but 'My grace' (which thou hast now) 'is sufficient for thee.' That grace is given and possessed by the sorrowing heart at the moment when it prays. Open your eyes to see what you have, and you will not ask for the load to be taken away. Is not that always true? Many a heart is carrying some heavy weight; perhaps some have an incurable sorrow, some are stricken by disease that they know can never be healed, some are aware that the shipwreck has been total, and that the sorrow that they carry to-day will lie down with them in the dust. Be it so! 'My grace (not shall be, but) *is* sufficient for thee.' And what thou hast already in thy possession is enough for all that comes storming against thee of disease, disappointment, loss, and misery. Set on the one side all possible as well as all actual weaknesses, burdens, pains, and set on the other these two words—'My grace,' and all these dwindle into nothingness and disappear. If troubled Christian men would learn what they have, and would use what they already possess, they would less often beseech Him with vain petitions to take away their blessings which are in the thorns in the flesh. 'My grace is sufficient.'

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How modestly the Master speaks about what He gives! 'Sufficient'? Is not there a margin? Is there not more than is wanted? The overplus is 'exceeding abundant,' not only 'above what we ask or think,' but far more than our need. 'Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient* that every one may take a little,' says Sense. Omnipotence says, 'Bring the few small loaves and fishes unto Me'; and Faith dispensed them amongst the crowd; and Experience 'gathered up of the fragments that remained' more than there had been when the multiplication began. So the grace utilised increases; the gift grows as it is employed. 'Unto him that hath shall be given.' And the 'sufficiency' is not a bare adequacy, just covering the extent of the need, with no overlapping margin, but is large beyond expectation, desire, or necessity; so leading onwards to high hopes and a wider opening of the open mouths of our need that the blessing may pour in.

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The other part of this great answer, that the Christ from Heaven spoke in or to the praying spirit of this not disappointed, though refused, Apostle, unveiled the purpose of the sorrow, even as the former part had disclosed the strength to bear it. For, says He, laying down therein the great law of His kingdom in all departments and in all ways, 'My strength is made perfect'—that is, of course, perfect in its manifestation or operations, for it is perfect in itself already. 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.' It works in and through man's weakness.

God works with broken reeds. If a man conceits himself to be an iron pillar, God can do nothing with or by him. All the self-conceit and confidence have to be taken out of him first. He has to be brought low before the Father can use him for His purposes. The lowlands hold the water, and, if only the sluice is open, the gravitation of His grace does all the rest and carries the flood into the depths of the lowly heart.

His strength loves to work in weakness, only the weakness must be conscious, and the conscious weakness must have passed into conscious dependence. There, then, you get the law for the Church, for the works of Christianity on the widest scale, and in individual lives. Strength that conceits itself to be such is weakness; weakness that knows itself to be such is strength. The only true source of Power, both for Christian work and in all other respects, is God Himself; and our strength is ours but by derivation from Him. And the only way to secure that derivation is through humble dependence, which we call faith in Jesus Christ. And the only way by which that faith in Jesus Christ can ever be kindled in a man's soul is through the sense of his need and emptiness. So when we know ourselves weak, we have taken the first step to strength; just as, when we know ourselves sinners, we have taken the first step to righteousness; just as in all regions the recognition of the doleful fact of our human necessity is the beginning of the joyful confidence in the glad, triumphant fact of the divine fulness. All our hollownesses, if I may so say, are met with His fulness that fits into them. It only needs that a man be aware of that which he is, and then turn himself to Him who is all that he is not, and then into his empty being will flow rejoicing the whole fulness of God. 'My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

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III. Lastly, mark the calm final acquiescence in the loving necessity of continued sorrow. 'Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' The will is entirely harmonised with Christ's. The Apostle begins with instinctive shrinking, he passes onwards to a perception of the purpose of his trial and of the sustaining grace; and he comes now to acquiescence which is not passivity, but glad triumph. He is more than submissive, he gladly glories in his infirmity in order that the power of Christ may 'spread a tabernacle over' him. 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted,' said the old prophet. Paul says, in a yet higher note of concord with God's will, 'I am glad that I sorrow. I rejoice in weakness, because it makes it easier for me to cling, and, clinging, I am strong, and conquer evil.' Far better is it that the sting of our sorrow should be taken away, by our having learned what it is for, and having bowed to it, than that it should be taken away by the external removal which we sometimes long for. A grief, a trial, an incapacity, a limitation, a weakness, which we use as a means of deepening our sense of dependence upon Him, is a blessing, and not a sorrow. And if we would only go out into the world trying to interpret its events in the spirit of this great text, we should less frequently wonder and weep over what sometimes seem to us the insoluble mysteries of the sorrows of ourselves and of other men. They are all intended to make it more easy for us to realise our utter hanging upon Him, and so to open our hearts to receive more fully the quickening influences of His omnipotent and self-sufficing grace.

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Here, then, is a lesson for those who have to carry some cross and know they must carry it throughout life. It will be wreathed with flowers if you accept it. Here is a lesson for all Christian workers. Ministers of the Gospel especially should banish all thoughts of their own cleverness, intellectual ability, culture, sufficiency for their work, and learn that only when they are emptied can they be filled, and only when they know themselves to be nothing are they ready for God to work through them. And here is a lesson for all who stand apart from the grace and power of Jesus Christ as if they needed it not. Whether you know it or not, you are a broken reed; and the only way of your ever being bound up and made strong is that you shall recognise your sinfulness, your necessity, your abject poverty, your utter emptiness, and come to Him who is righteousness, riches, fulness, and say, 'Because I am weak, be Thou my strength.' The secret of all noble, heroic, useful, happy life lies in the paradox, 'When I am weak, then am I strong,' and the secret of all failures, miseries, hopeless losses, lies in its converse, 'When I am strong, then am I weak.'

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## NOT YOURS BUT YOU

'I seek not yours, but you.'—2 COR. xii. 14.

Men are usually quick to suspect others of the vices to which they themselves are prone. It is very hard for one who never does anything but with an eye to what he can make out of it, to believe that there are other people actuated by higher motives. So Paul had, over and over again, to meet the hateful charge of making money out of his apostleship. It was one of the favourite stones that his opponents in the Corinthian Church, of whom there were very many, very bitter ones, flung at him. In this letter he more than once refers to the charge. He does so with great dignity, and with a very characteristic and delicate mixture of indignation and tenderness, almost playfulness. Thus, in the context, he tells these Corinthian grumblers that he must beg their pardon for not having taken anything of them, and so honoured them. Then he informs them that he is coming again to see them for the third time, and that that visit will be marked by the same independence of their help as the others had been. And then he just lets a glimpse of his pained heart peep out in the words of my text. 'I seek not yours, but you.' *There* speaks a disinterested love which feels obliged, and yet reluctant, to stoop to say that it *is* love, and that it *is* disinterested. Where did Paul learn this passionate desire to possess these people, and this entire suppression of self in the desire? It was a spark from a sacred fire, a drop from an infinite ocean, an echo of a divine voice. The words of my text would never have been Paul's if the spirit of them had not first been Christ's. I venture to take them in that aspect, as setting forth Christ's claims upon us, and bearing very directly on the question of Christian service and of Christian liberality.

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I. So, then, first of all, I remark, Christ desires personal surrender.

'I seek not yours, but *you*,' is the very mother-tongue of love; but upon our lips, even when our love is purest, there is a tinge of selfishness blending with it, and very often the desire for another's love is as purely selfish as the desire for any material good. But in so far as human love is pure in its desire to possess another, we have the right to believe the deep and wonderful thought that there is something corresponding to it in the heart of Christ, which is a revelation for us of the heart of God; and that, however little we may be able to construe the whole meaning of the fact, He does stretch out an arm of desire towards us; and for His own sake, as for ours, would fain draw us near to Himself, and is 'satisfied,' as He is not without it, when men's hearts yield themselves up to Him, and let Him love them and lavish Himself upon them. I do not venture into these depths, but I would lay upon our hearts that the very inmost meaning of all that Jesus Christ has said, and is saying, to each of us by the records of His life, by the pathos of His death, by the miracle of His Resurrection, by the glory of His Ascension, by the power of His granted Spirit, is, 'I seek you.'

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And, brethren, our self-surrender is the essence of our Christianity. Our religion lies neither in

our heads nor in our acts; the deepest notion of it is that it is the entire yielding up of ourselves to Jesus Christ our Lord. There is plenty of religion which is a religion of the head and of creeds. There is plenty of religion which is the religion of the hand and of the tongue, and of forms and ceremonies and sacraments; external worship. There is plenty of religion which surrenders to Him some of the more superficial parts of our personality, whilst the ancient Anarch, Self, sits undisturbed on his dark throne, in the depths of our being. But none of these are the religion that either Christ requires or that we need. The only true notion of a Christian is a man who can truly say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

And that is the only kind of life that is blessed; our only true nobleness and beauty and power and sweetness are measured by, and accurately correspond with, the completeness of our surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ. As long as the earth was thought to be the centre of the planetary system there was nothing but confusion in the heavens. Shift the centre to the sun and all becomes order and beauty. The root of sin, and the mother of death, is making myself my own law and Lord; the germ of righteousness, and the first pulsations of life, lie in yielding ourselves to God in Christ, because He has yielded Himself unto us.

I need not remind you, I suppose, that this self-surrender is a great deal more than a vivid metaphor: that it implies a very hard fact; implies at least two things, that we have yielded ourselves to Jesus Christ, by the love of our hearts, and by the unreluctant submission of our wills, whether He commands or whether He sends sufferings or joys.

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And, oh, brethren, be sure of this, that no such giving of myself away, in the sweet reciprocities of a higher than human affection, is possible, in the general, and on the large scale, if you evacuate from the Gospel the great truth, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' I believe—and therefore I am bound to preach it—that the only power which can utterly annihilate and cast out the dominion of self from a human soul is the power that is lodged in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross for sinful men.

And whilst I would fully recognise all that is noble, and all that is effective, in systems either of religion, or of irreligious morality, which have no place within their bounds for that great motive, I am sure of this, that the evil self within us is too strong to be exorcised by anything short of the old message, 'Jesus Christ has given His life for thee, wilt thou not give thyself unto Him?'

## II. Christ seeks personal service.

'I seek . . . you'; not only for My love, but for My tools; for My instruments in carrying out the purposes for which I died, and establishing My dominion in the world. Now I want to say two or three very plain things about this matter, which lies very near my heart, as to some degree responsible for the amount of Christian activity and service in this my congregation. Brethren, the surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ in acts of direct Christian activity and service, will be the outcome of a real surrender of ourselves to Him in love and obedience.

I cannot imagine a man who, in any deep sense, has realised his obligations to that Saviour, and in any real sense has made the great act of self-renunciation, and crowned Christ as his Lord, living for the rest of his life, as so many professing Christians do, dumb and idle, in so far as work for the Master is concerned. It seems to me that, among the many wants of this generation of professing Christians, there is none that is more needed than that a wave of new consecration should pass over the Church. If men who call themselves Christians lived more in habitual contact with the facts of their redeeming Saviour's sacrifice for them, there would be no need to lament the fewness of the labourers, as measured against the overwhelming multitude of the fields that are white to harvest. If once that flood of a new sense of Christ's gift, and a consequent new completeness of our returned gifts to Him, flowed over the churches, then all the little empty ravines would be filled with a flashing tide. Not a shuttle moves, not a spindle revolves, until the strong impulse born of fire rushes in; and then, all is activity. It is no use to flog, flog, flog, at idle Christians, and try to make them work. There is only one thing that will set them to work, and that is that they shall live nearer their Master, and find out more of what they owe to Him; and so render themselves up to be His instruments for any purpose for which He may choose to use them.

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This surrender of ourselves for direct Christian service is the only solution of the problem of how to win the world for Jesus Christ. Professionals cannot do it. Men of my class cannot do it. We are clogged very largely by the fact that, being necessarily dependent on our congregations for a living, we cannot, with as clear an emphasis as you can, go to people and say, 'We seek not yours, but you.' I have nothing to say about the present ecclesiastical arrangements of modern Christian communities. That would take me altogether from my present purposes, but I want to lay this upon your consciences, dear brethren, that you who have other means of living than proclaiming Christ's name have an advantage, which it is at your peril that you fling away. As long as the Christian Church thought that an ordained priest was a man who could do things that laymen could not do, the limitation of Christian service to the priesthood was logical. But when the Christian Church, especially as represented by us Nonconformists, came to believe that a minister was only a man who preached the Gospel, which every Christian man is bound to do, the limitations of Christian service to the official class became an illogical survival, utterly incongruous with the fundamental principles of our conception of the Christian Church. And yet here it is, devastating our churches to-day, and making hundreds of good people perfectly comfortable, in an unscriptural and unchristian indolence, because, forsooth, it is the minister's business to preach the Gospel. I know that there is not nearly as much of that indolence as there used to be. Thank God for that. There are far more among our congregations than in former

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times who have realised the fact that it is *every* Christian man's task, somehow or other, to set forth the great name of Jesus Christ. But still, alas, in a church with, say, 400 members, you may knock off the last cypher, and you will get a probably not too low statement of the number of people in it who have realised and fulfilled this obligation. What about the other 360 'dumb dogs, that will not bark'? And in that 360 there will probably be several men who can make speeches on political platforms, and in scientific lecture-halls, and about social and economical questions, only they cannot, for the life of them, open their mouths and say a word to a soul about Him whom they say they serve, and to whom they say they belong.

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Brethren, this direct service cannot be escaped from, or commuted by a money payment. In the old days a man used to escape serving in the militia if he found a substitute, and paid for him. There are a great many good Christian people who seem to think that Christ's army is recruited on that principle. But it is a mistake. 'I seek you, not yours.'

III. Lastly, and only a word. Christ seeks us, *and* ours.

Not you *without* yours, still less yours without you. This is no place, nor is the fag end of a sermon the time, to talk about so wide a subject as the ethics of Christian dealing with money. But two things I will say—consecration of self is extremely imperfect which does not include the consecration of possessions, and, conversely, consecration of possessions which does not flow from, and is not accompanied by, the consecration of self, is nought.

If, then, the great law of self-surrender is to run through the whole Christian life, that law, as applied to our dealing with what we own, prescribes three things. The first is *stewardship*, not ownership; and that all round the circumference of our possessions. Depend upon it, the angry things that we hear to-day about the unequal distribution of wealth will get angrier and angrier, and will be largely justified in becoming so by the fact that so many of us, *Christians included*, have firmly grasped the notion of possession, and utterly forgotten the obligation of stewardship.

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Again, the law of self-surrender, in its application to all that we have, involves our continual reference to Jesus Christ in our disposition of these our possessions. I draw no line of distinction, in this respect, between what a man spends upon himself, and what he spends upon 'charity,' and what he spends upon religious objects. *One* principle is to govern, getting, hoarding, giving, enjoying, and that is, that in it all Christ shall be Master.

Again, the law of self-surrender, in its application to our possessions, implies that there shall be an element of sacrifice in our use of these; whether they be possessions of intellect, of acquirement, of influence, of position, or of material wealth. The law of help is sacrifice, and the law for a Christian man is that he shall not offer unto the Lord his God that which costs him nothing.

So, dear friends, let us all get near to that great central fire till it melts our hearts. Let the love which is our hope be our pattern. Remember that though only faintly, and from afar, can the issues of Christ's great sacrifice be reproduced in any actions of ours, the spirit which brought Him to die is the spirit which must instruct and inspire us to live. Unless we can say, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me; I yield myself to Him'; and unless our lives confirm the utterance, we have little right to call ourselves His disciples.

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## GALATIANS

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### FROM CENTRE TO CIRCUMFERENCE

'The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.'—GAL. ii. 20.

We have a bundle of paradoxes in this verse. First, 'I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.' The Christian life is a dying life. If we are in any real sense joined to Christ, the power of His death makes us dead to self and sin and the world. In that region, as in the physical, death is the gate of life; and, inasmuch as what we die to in Christ is itself only a living death, we live because we die, and in proportion as we die.

The next paradox is, 'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' The Christian life is a life in which an indwelling Christ casts out, and therefore quickens, self. We gain ourselves when we lose ourselves. His abiding in us does not destroy but heightens our individuality. We then most truly live when we can say, 'Not I, but Christ liveth in me'; the soul of my soul and the self of myself.

And the last paradox is that of my text, 'The life which I live in the flesh, I live in' (not 'by') 'the faith of the Son of God.' The true Christian life moves in two spheres at once. Externally and superficially it is 'in the flesh,' really it is 'in faith.' It belongs not to the material nor is dependent upon the physical body in which we are housed. We are strangers here, and the true region and atmosphere of the Christian life is that invisible sphere of faith.

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So, then, we have in these words of my text a Christian man's frank avowal of the secret of his

own life. It is like a geological cutting, it goes down from the surface, where the grass and the flowers are, through the various strata, but it goes deeper than these, to the fiery heart, the flaming nucleus and centre of all things. Therefore it may do us all good to make a section of our hearts and see whether the *strata* there are conformable to those that are here.

I. Let us begin with the centre, and work to the surface. We have, first, the great central fact named last, but round which all the Christian life is gathered.

'The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' These two words, the 'loving' and the 'giving,' both point backwards to some one definite historical fact, and the only fact which they can have in view is the great one of the death of Jesus Christ. That is His giving up of Himself. That is the signal and highest manifestation and proof of His love.

Notice (though I can but touch in the briefest possible manner upon the great thoughts that gather round these words) the three aspects of that transcendent fact, the centre and nucleus of the whole Christian life, which come into prominence in these words before us. Christ's death is a great act of self-surrender, of which the one motive is His own pure and perfect love. No doubt in other places of Scripture we have set forth the death of Christ as being the result of the Father's purpose, and we read that in that wondrous surrender there were two givings up The Father 'freely gave Him up to the death for us all.' That divine surrender, the Apostle ventures, in another passage, to find dimly suggested from afar, in the silent but submissive and unreluctant surrender with which Abraham yielded his only begotten son on the mountain top. But besides that ineffable giving up by the Father of the Son, Jesus Christ Himself, moved only by His love, willingly yields Himself. The whole doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been marred by one-sided insisting on the truth that God sent the Son, to the forgetting of the fact that the Son 'came'; and that He was bound to the Cross neither by cords of man's weaving nor by the will of the Father, but that He Himself bound Himself to that Cross with the 'cords of love and the bands of a man,' and died from no natural necessity nor from any imposition of the divine will upon Him unwilling, but because He would, and that He would because He loved. 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

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Then note, further, that here, most distinctly, that great act of self-surrendering love which culminates on the Cross is regarded as being for man in a special and peculiar sense. I know, of course, that from the mere wording of my text we cannot argue the atoning and substitutionary character of the death of Christ, for the preposition here does not necessarily mean 'instead of,' but 'for the behoof of.' But admitting that, I have another question. If Christ's death is for 'the behoof of' men, in what conceivable sense does it benefit them, unless it is in the place of men? The death 'for me' is only for me when I understand that it is 'instead of' me. And practically you will find that wherever the full-orbed faith in Christ Jesus as the death for all the sins of the whole world, bearing the penalty and bearing it away, has begun to falter and grow pale, men do not know what to do with Christ's death at all, and stop talking about it to a very large extent.

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Unless He died as a sacrifice, I, for one, fail to see in what other than a mere sentimental sense the death of Christ is a death for men.

And lastly, about this matter, observe how here we have brought into vivid prominence the great thought that Jesus Christ in His death has regard to single souls. We preach that He died for all. If we believe in that august title which is laid here as the vindication of our faith on the one hand, and as the ground of the possibility of the benefits of His death being world-wide on the other—viz. the Son of God—then we shall not stumble at the thought that He died for all, because He died for each. I know that if you only regard Jesus Christ as human I am talking utter nonsense; but I know, too, that if we believe in the divinity of our Lord, there need be nothing to stumble us, but the contrary, in the thought that it was not an abstraction that He died for, that it was not a vague mass of unknown beings, clustered together, but so far away that He could not see any of their faces, for whom He gave His life on the Cross. That is the way in which, and in which alone, *we* can embrace the whole mass of humanity—by losing sight of the individuals. We generalise, precisely because we do not see the individual units; but that is not God's way, and that is not Christ's way, who is divine. For Him the *all* is broken up into its parts, and when we say that the divine love loves all, we mean that the divine love loves each. I believe (and I commend the thought to you) that we do not fathom the depth of Christ's sufferings unless we recognise that the sins of each man were consciously adding pressure to the load beneath which He sank; nor picture the wonders of His love until we believe that on the Cross it distinguished and embraced each, and, therefore, comprehended all. Every man may say, 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.'

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II. So much, then, for the first central fact that is here. Now let me say a word, in the second place, about the faith which makes that fact the foundation of my own personal life.

'I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.' I am not going to plunge into any unnecessary dissertations about the nature of faith; but may I say that, like all other familiar conceptions, it has got worn so smooth that it glides over our mental palate without roughening any of the *papillæ* or giving any sense or savour at all? And I do believe that dozens of people like you, who have come to church and chapel all your lives, and fancy yourselves to be fully *au fait* at all the Christian truth that you will ever hear from my lips, do not grasp with any clearness of apprehension the meaning of that fundamental word 'faith.'

It is a thousand pities that it is confined by the accidents of language to our attitude in reference to Jesus Christ. So some of you think that it is some kind of theological juggle which

has nothing to do with, and never can be seen in operation in, common life. Suppose, instead of the threadbare, technical 'faith' we took to a new translation for a minute, and said '*trust*,' do you think that would freshen up the thought to you at all? It is the very same thing which makes the sweetness of your relations to wife and husband and friend and parent, which, transferred to Jesus Christ and glorified in the process, becomes the seed of immortal life and the opener of the gate of Heaven. Trust Jesus Christ. That is the living centre of the Christian life; that is the process by which we draw the general blessing of the Gospel into our own hearts, and make the world-wide truth, our truth.

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I need not insist either, I suppose, on the necessity, if our Christian life is to be modelled upon the Apostolic lines, of our faith embracing the Christ in all these aspects in which I have been speaking about His work. God forbid that I should seem to despise rudimentary and incomplete feelings after Him in any heart which may be unable to say 'Amen' to Paul's statement here. I want to insist very earnestly, and with special reference to the young, that the true Christian faith is not merely the grasp of the person, but it is the grasp of the Person who is 'declared to be the Son of God,' and whose death is the voluntary self-surrender motivated by His love, for the carrying away of the sins of every single soul in the whole universe. That is the Christ, the full Christ, cleaving to whom our faith finds somewhat to grasp worthy of grasping. And I beseech you, be not contented with a partial grasp of a partial Saviour; neither shut your eyes to the divinity of His nature, nor to the efficacy of His death, but remember that the true Gospel preaches Christ and Him crucified; and that for us, saving faith is the faith that grasps the Son of God 'Who loved me and gave Himself for me.'

Note, further, that true faith is personal faith, which appropriates, and, as it were, fences in as my very own, the purpose and benefit of Christ's giving of Himself. It is always difficult for lazy people (and most of us are lazy) to transfer into their own personal lives, and to bring into actual contact with themselves and their own experience, wide, general truths. To assent to them, when we keep them in their generality, is very easy and very profitless. It does no man any good to say 'All men are mortal'; but how different it is when the blunt end of that generalisation is shaped into a point, and I say 'I have to die!' It penetrates then, and it sticks. It is easy to say 'All men are sinners.' That never yet forced anybody down on his knees. But when we shut out on either side the lateral view and look straight on, on the narrow line of our own lives, up to the Throne where the Lawgiver sits, and feel 'I am a sinful man,' that sends us to our prayers for pardon and purity. And in like manner nobody was ever wholesomely terrified by the thought of a general judgment. But when you translate it into 'I must stand there,' the terror of the Lord persuades men.

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In like manner that great truth which we all of us say we believe, that Christ has died for the world, is utterly useless and profitless to us until we have translated it into Paul's world, 'loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*.' I do not say that the essence of faith is the conversion of the general statement into the particular application, but I do say that there is no faith which does not realise one's personal possession of the benefits of the death of Christ, and that until you turn the wide word into a message for yourself alone, you have not yet got within sight of the blessedness of the Christian life. The whole river may flow past me, but only so much of it as I can bring into my own garden by my own sluices, and lift in my own bucket, and put to my own lips, is of any use to me. The death of Christ for the world is a commonplace of superficial Christianity, which is no Christianity; the death of Christ for myself, as if He and I were the only beings in the universe, that is the death on which faith fastens and feeds.

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And, dear brother, you have the right to exercise it. The Christ loves each, and therefore He loves all; that is the process in the divine mind. The converse is the process in the revelation of that mind; the Bible says to us, Christ loves all, and therefore we have the right to draw the inference that He loves each. You have as much right to take every 'whosoever' of the New Testament as your very own, as if on the page of your Bible that 'whosoever' was struck out, and your name, John, Thomas, Mary, Elizabeth, or whatever it is, were put in there. 'He loved *me*.' Can *you* say that? Have you ever passed from the region of universality, which is vague and profitless, into the region of personal appropriation of the person of Jesus Christ and His death?

III. And now, lastly, notice the life which is built upon this faith.

The true Christian life is dual. It is a life in the flesh, and it is also a life in faith. These two, as I have said, are like two spheres, in either of which a man's course is passed, or, rather, the one is surface and the other is central. Here is a great trailing spray of seaweed floating golden on the unquiet water, and rising and falling on each wave or ripple. Aye! but its root is away deep, deep, deep below the storms, below where there is motion, anchored upon a hidden rock that can never move. And so my life, if it be a Christian life at all, has its surface amidst the shifting mutabilities of earth, but its root in the silent eternities of the centre of all things, which is Christ in God. I live in the flesh on the outside, but if I am a Christian at all, I live in the faith in regard of my true and proper being.

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This faith, which grasps the Divine Christ as the person whose love-moved death is my life, and who by my faith becomes Himself the Indwelling Guest in my heart; this faith, if it be worth anything, will mould and influence my whole being. It will give me motive, pattern, power for all noble service and all holy living. The one thing that stirs men to true obedience is that their hearts be touched with the firm assurance that Christ loved them and died for them.

We sometimes used to see men starting an engine by manual force; and what toil it was to get the great cranks to turn, and the pistons to rise! So we set ourselves to try and move our lives into holiness and beauty and nobleness, and it is dispiriting work. There is a far better, surer way

than that: let the steam in, and that will do it. That is to say—let the Christ in His dying power and the living energy of His indwelling Spirit occupy the heart, and activity becomes blessedness, and work is rest, and service is freedom and dominion.

The life that I live in the flesh is poor, limited, tortured with anxiety, weighed upon by sore distress, becomes dark and gray and dreary often as we travel nearer the end, and is always full of miseries and of pains. But if within that life in the flesh there be a life in faith, which is the life of Christ Himself brought to us through our faith, that life will be triumphant, quiet, patient, aspiring, noble, hopeful, gentle, strong, Godlike, being the life of Christ Himself within us.

So, dear friends, test your faith by these two tests, what it grasps and what it does. If it grasps a whole Christ, in all the glory of His nature and the blessedness of His work, it is genuine; and it proves its genuineness if, and only if, it works in you by love; animating all your action, bringing you ever into the conscious presence of that dear Lord, and making Him pattern, law, motive, goal, companion and reward. 'To me to live is Christ.'

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If so, then we live indeed; but to live in the flesh is to die; and the death that we die when we live in Christ is the gate and the beginning of the only real life of the soul.

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## THE EVIL EYE AND THE CHARM

'Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eye Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?'—GAL. iii. 1.

The Revised Version gives a shorter, and probably correct, form of this vehement question. It omits the two clauses 'that ye should not obey the truth' and 'among you.' The omission increases the sharpness of the thrust of the interrogation, whilst it loses nothing of the meaning.

Now, a very striking metaphor runs through the whole of this question, which may easily be lost sight of by ordinary readers. You know the old superstition as to the Evil Eye, almost universal at the date of this letter and even now in the East, and lingering still amongst ourselves. Certain persons were supposed to have the power, by a look, to work mischief, and by fixing the gaze of their victims, to suck the very life out of them. So Paul asks who the malign sorcerer is who has thus fascinated the fickle Galatians, and is draining their Christian life out of their eyes.

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Very appropriately, therefore, if there is this reference, which the word translated 'bewitched' carries with it, he goes on to speak about Jesus Christ as having been displayed before their eyes. They had seen Him. How did they come to be able to turn away to look at anything else?

But there is another observation to be made by way of introduction, and that is as to the full force of the expression 'evidently set forth.' The word employed, as commentators tell us, is that which is used for the display of official proclamations, or public notices, in some conspicuous place, as the Forum or the market, that the citizens might read. So, keeping up the metaphor, the word might be rendered, as has been suggested by some eminent scholars, 'placarded'—'Before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been placarded.' The expression has acquired somewhat ignoble associations from modern advertising, but that is no reason why we should lose sight of its force. So, then, Paul says, 'In my preaching, Christ was conspicuously set forth. It is like some inexplicable enchantment that, having seen Him, you should turn away to gaze on others.' It is insanity which evokes wonder, as well as sin which deserves rebuke; and the fiery question of my text conveys both.

I. Keeping to the metaphor, I note first the placard which Paul had displayed.

'Jesus Christ crucified has been conspicuously set forth before you,' he says to these Galatians. Now, he is referring, of course, to his own work of preaching the Gospel to them at the beginning. And the vivid metaphor suggests very strikingly two things. We see in it the Apostle's notion of what He had to do. His had been a very humble office, simply to hang up a proclamation. The one virtue of a proclamation is that it should be brief and plain. It must be authoritative, it must be urgent, it must be 'writ large,' it must be easily intelligible. And he that makes it public has nothing to do except to fasten it up, and make sure that it is legible. If I might venture into modern phraseology, what Paul means is that he was neither more nor less than a bill-sticker, that he went out with the placards and fastened them up.

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Ah! if we ministers universally acted up to the implications of this metaphor, do you not think the pulpit would be more frequently a centre of power than it is to-day? And if, instead of presenting our own ingenuities and speculations, we were to realise the fact that we have to hide ourselves behind the broad sheet that we fasten up, there would be a new breath over many a moribund church, and we should hear less of the often warrantable sarcasms about the inefficiency of the modern pulpit.

But I turn from Paul's conception of the office to his statement of his theme. '*Jesus* was displayed amongst you.' If I might vary the metaphor a little, the placard that Paul fastened up was like those that modern advertising ingenuity displays upon all our walls. It was a picture-placard, and on it was portrayed one sole figure—Jesus, the Person. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is Christianity; and wherever there is a pulpit or a book which deals rather with doctrines

than with Him who is the Fountain and Quarry of all doctrine, there is divergence from the primitive form of the Gospel.

I know, of course, that doctrines—which are only formal and orderly statements of principles involved in the facts—must flow from the proclamation of the person, Christ. I am not such a fool as to run amuck against theology, as some people in this day do. But what I wish to insist upon is that the first form of Christianity is not a theory, but a history, and that the revelation of God is the biography of a man. We must begin with the person, Christ, and preach Him. Would that all our preachers and all professing Christians, in their own personal religious life, had grasped this—that, since Christianity is not first a philosophy but a history, and its centre not an ordered sequence of doctrines but a living person, the act that makes a man possessor of Christianity is not the intellectual process of assimilating certain truths, and accepting them, but the moral process of clinging, with trust and love, to the person, Jesus.

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But, further, if any of you consult the original, you will see that the order of the sentence is such as to throw a great weight of emphasis on that last word 'crucified.' It is not merely a person that is portrayed on the placard, but it is that person *upon the Cross*. Ah! brethren, Paul himself puts his finger, in the words of my text, on what, in his conception, was the throbbing heart of all his message, the vital point from which all its power, and all the gleam of its benediction, poured out upon humanity—'Christ crucified.' If the placard is a picture of Christ in other attitudes and in other aspects, without the picture of Him crucified, it is an imperfect representation of the Gospel that Paul preached and that Christ was.

II. Now, think, secondly, of the fascinators that draw away the eyes.

Paul's question is not one of ignorance, but it is a rhetorical way of rebuking, and of expressing wonder. He knew, and the Galatians knew, well enough who it was that had bewitched them. The whole letter is a polemic worked in fire, and not in frost, as some argumentation is, against a very well-marked class of teachers—viz. those emissaries of Judaism who had crept into the Church, and took it as their special function to dog Paul's steps amongst the heathen communities that he had gathered together through faith in Christ, and used every means to upset his work.

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I cannot but pause for a moment upon this original reference of my text, because it is very relevant to the present condition of things amongst us. These men whom Paul is fighting as if he were in a sawpit with them, in this letter, what was their teaching? This: they did not deny that Jesus was the Christ; they did not deny that faith knit a man to Him, but what they said was that the observance of the external rites of Judaism was necessary in order to entrance into the Church and to salvation. They did not in their own estimation detract from Christ, but they added to Him. And Paul says that to add is to detract, to say that anything is necessary except faith in Jesus Christ's finished work is to deny that that finished work, and faith in it, are the means of salvation; and the whole evangelical system crumbles into nothingness if once you admit that.

Now, is there anybody to-day who is saying the same things, with variations consequent upon change of external conditions? Are there no people within the limits of the Christian Church who are reiterating the old Jewish notion that external ceremonies—baptism and the Lord's Supper—are necessary to salvation and to connection with the Christian Church? And is it not true now, as it was then, that though they do not avowedly detract, they so represent these external rites as to detract, from the sole necessity of faith in the perfected work of Jesus Christ? The centre is shifted from personal union with a personal Saviour by a personal faith to participation in external ordinances. And I venture to think that the lava stream which, in this Epistle to the Galatians, Paul pours on the Judaisers of his day needs but a little deflection to pour its hot current over, and to consume, the sacramentarian theories of this day. 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?' Is it not like some malignant sorcery, that after the Evangelical revival of the last century and the earlier part of this, there should spring up again this old, old error, and darken the simplicity of the Gospel teaching, that Christ's work, apprehended by faith, without anything else, is the means, and the only means, of salvation?

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But I need not spend time upon that original application. Let us rather come more closely to our own individual lives and their weaknesses. It is a strange thing, so strange that if one did not know it by one's own self, one would be scarcely disposed to believe it possible, that a man who has 'tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come,' and has known Jesus Christ as Saviour and Friend, should decline from Him, and turn to anything besides. And yet, strange and sad, and like some enchantment as it is, it is the experience at times and in a measure, of us all; and, alas! it is the experience, in a very tragical degree, of many who have walked for a little while behind the Master, and then have turned away and walked no more with Him. We may well wonder; but the root of the mischief is in no baleful glitter of a sorcerer's eye without us, but it is in the weakness of our own wills and the waywardness of our own hearts, and the wandering of our own affections. We often court the coming of the evil influence, and are willing to be fascinated and to turn our backs upon Jesus. Mysterious it is, for why should men cast away diamonds for paste? Mysterious it is, for we do not usually drop the substance to get the shadow. Mysterious it is, for a man does not ordinarily empty his pockets of gold in order to fill them with gravel. Mysterious it is, for a thirsty man will not usually turn away from the full, bubbling, living fountain, to see if he can find any drops still remaining, green with scum, stagnant and odorous, at the bottom of some broken cistern. But all these follies are sanity as compared with the folly of which we are guilty, times without number, when, having known the sweetness of Jesus Christ, we turn away to the fascinations of the world. Custom, the familiarity that we have with Him, the attrition of daily cares—like the minute grains of sand that are

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cemented on to paper, and make a piece of sandpaper that is strong enough to file an inscription off iron—the seductions of worldly delights, the pressure of our daily cares—all these are as a ring of sorcerers that stand round about us, before whom we are as powerless as a bird in the presence of a serpent, and they bewitch us and draw us away.

The sad fact has been verified over and over again on a large scale in the history of the Church. After every outburst of renewed life and elevated spirituality there is sure to come a period of reaction when torpor and formality again assert themselves. What followed the Reformation in Germany? A century of death. What followed Puritanism in England? An outburst of lust and godlessness.

So it has always been, and so it is with us individually, as we too well know. Ah, brethren! the seductions are omnipresent, and our poor eyes are very weak, and we turn away from the Lord to look on these misshapen monsters that are seeking by their gaze to draw us into destruction. I wonder how many professing Christians are in this audience who once saw Jesus Christ a great deal more clearly, and contemplated Him a great deal more fixedly, and turned their hearts to Him far more lovingly, than they do to-day? Some of the great mountain peaks of Africa are only seen for an hour or two in the morning, and then the clouds gather around them, and hide them for the rest of the day. It is like the experience of many professing Christians, who see Him in the morning of their Christian life far more vividly than they ever do after. 'Who hath bewitched you?' The world; but the arch-sorcerer sits safe in our own hearts.

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III. Lastly, keeping to the metaphor, let me suggest, although my text does not touch upon it, the Amulet.

One has seen fond mothers in Egypt and Palestine who hang on their babies' necks charms, to shield them from the influence of the Evil Eye; and there is a charm that we may wear if we will, which will keep us safe. There is no fascination in the Evil Eye if you do not look at it.

The one object that the sorcerer has is to withdraw our gaze from Christ; it is not illogical to say that the way to defeat the object is to keep our gaze fixed on Christ. If you do not look at the baleful glitter of the Evil Eye it will exercise no power over you; and if you will steadfastly look at Him, then, and only then, you will not look at it. Like Ulysses in the legend, bandage the eyes and put wax in the ears, if you would neither be tempted by hearing the songs, nor by seeing the fair forms, of the sirens on their island. To look fixedly at Jesus Christ, and with the resolve never to turn away from Him, is the only safety against these tempting delights around us.

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But, brethren, it is the crucified Christ, looking to whom, we are safe amidst all seductions and snares. I doubt whether a Christ who did not die for men has power enough over men's hearts and minds to draw them to Himself. The cords which bind us to Him are the assurance of His dying love which has conquered us. If only we will, day by day, and moment by moment, as we pass through the duties and distractions, the temptations and the trials, of this present life, by an act of will and thought turn ourselves to Him, then all the glamour of false attractiveness will disappear from the temptations around us, and we shall see that the sirens, for all their fair forms, end in loathly fishes' tails and sit amidst dead men's bones.

Brethren, 'looking *off* unto Jesus' is the secret of triumph over the fascinations of the world. And if we will habitually so look, then the sweetness that we shall experience will destroy all the seducing power of lesser and earthly sweetness, and the blessed light of the sun will dim and all but extinguish the deceitful gleams that tempt us into the swamps where we shall be drowned. Turn away, then, from these things; cleave to Jesus Christ; and though in ourselves we may be as weak as a humming-bird before a snake, or a rabbit before a tiger, He will give us strength, and the light of His face shining down upon us will fix our eyes and make us insensible to the fascinations of the sorcerers. So we shall not need to dread the question, 'Who hath bewitched you?' but ourselves challenge the utmost might of the fascination with the triumphant question, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'

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Help us, O Lord! we beseech Thee, to live near Thee. Turn away our eyes from beholding vanity, and enable us to set the Lord always before us that we be not moved.

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## LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

'Have ye suffered so many things in vain?'—GAL. iii 4.

Preached on the last Sunday of the year.

This vehement question is usually taken to be a reminder to the fickle Galatians that their Christian faith had brought upon them much suffering from the hands of their unbelieving brethren, and to imply an exhortation to faithfulness to the Gospel lest they should stultify their past brave endurance. Yielding to the Judaising teachers, and thereby escaping the 'offence of the Cross,' they would make their past sufferings vain. But it may be suggested that the word 'suffered' here is rather used in what is its known sense elsewhere, namely, with the general idea of *feeling*, the nature of the feeling being undefined. It is a touching proof of the preponderance of pain and sorrow that by degrees the significance of the word has become inextricably intertwined with the thought of sadness; still, it is possible to take it in the text as meaning

*experienced or felt*, and to regard the Apostle as referring to the whole of the Galatians' past experience, and as founding his appeal for their steadfastness on all the joys as well as the sorrows, which their faith had brought them.

Taking the words in this more general sense they become a question which it is well for us to ask ourselves at such a time as this, when the calendar naturally invites us to look backwards and ask ourselves what we have made of all our experiences in the past, or rather what, by the help of them all, we have made of ourselves. [110]

#### I. The duty of retrospect.

For almost any reason it is good for us to be delivered from our prevailing absorption in the present. Whatever counterpoises the overwhelming weight of the present is, so far, a blessing and a good, and whatever softens the heart and keeps up even the lingering remembrance of early, dewy freshness and of the high aspirations which, even for a brief space, elevated our past selves is gain amidst the dusty commonplaces of to-day. We see things better and more clearly when we get a little away from them, as a face is more distinctly visible at armslength than when held close.

But our retrospects are too often almost as trivial and degrading as is our absorption in the present, and to prevent memory from becoming a minister of frivolity if not of sin, it is needful that such a question as that of our text be urgently asked by each of us. Memory must be in closest union with conscience, as all our faculties must be, or she is of little use. There is a mere sentimental luxury of memory which finds a pensive pleasure in the mere passing out from the hard present into the soft light, not without illusion in its beams, of the 'days that are no more.' Merely to live over again our sorrows and joys without any clear discernment of what their effects on our moral character have been, is not the retrospect that becomes a man, however it might suit an animal. We have to look back as a man might do escaping from the ocean on to some frail sand-bank which ever breaks off and crumbles away at his very heels. To remember the past mainly as it affected our joy or our sorrow is as unworthy as to regard the present from the same point of view, and robs both of their highest worth. To remember is only then blessed and productive of its highest possible good in us, when the question of our text insists on being faced, and the object of retrospect is not to try to rekindle the cold coals of past emotions, but to ascertain what effect on our present characters our past experiences have had. We have not to turn back and try to gather some lingering flowers, but to look for the fruit which has followed the fallen blossoms. [111]

#### II. The true test for the past.

The question of our text implies, as we have already suggested, that our whole lives, with all their various and often opposite experiences, are yet an ordered whole, having a definite end. There is some purpose beyond the moment to be served. Our joys and our sorrows, our gains and our losses, the bright hours and the dark hours, and the hours that are neither eminently bright nor supremely dark, our failures and our successes, our hopes disappointed or fulfilled, and all the infinite variety of condition and environment through which our varying days and years have led us, co-operate for one end. It is life that makes men; the infant is a bundle of possibilities, and as the years go on, one possible avenue of development after another is blocked. The child might have been almost anything; the man has become hardened and fixed into one shape. [112]

But all this variety of impulses and complicated experiences need the co-operation of the man himself if they are to reach their highest results in him. If he is simply recipient of these external forces acting upon him, they will shape him indeed, but he will be a poor creature. Life does not make men unless men take the command of life, and he who lets circumstances and externals guide him, as the long water weeds in a river are directed by its current, will, from the highest point of view, have experienced the variations of a lifetime in vain.

No doubt each of our experiences has its own immediate and lower purpose to serve, and these purposes are generally accomplished, but beyond these each has a further aim which is not reached without diligent carefulness and persistent effort on our parts. If we would be sure of what it is to suffer life's experiences in vain, we have but to ask ourselves what life is given us for, and we all know that well enough to be able to judge how far we have used life to attain the highest ends of living. We may put these ends in various ways in our investigation of the results of our manifold experiences. Let us begin with the lowest—we received life that we might learn truth, then if our experience has not taught us wisdom it has been in vain. It is deplorable to have to look round and see how little the multitude of men are capable of forming anything like an independent and intelligent opinion, and how they are swayed by gusts of passion, by blind prejudice, by pretenders and quacks of all sorts. It is no less sad for us to turn our eyes within and discover, perhaps not without surprise and shame, how few of what we are self-complacent enough to call our opinions are due to our own convictions. [113]

If we ever are honest enough with ourselves to catch a glimpse of our own unwisdom, the question of our text will press heavily upon us, and may help to make us wiser by teaching us how foolish we are. An infinite source of wisdom is open to us, and all the rich variety of our lives' experiences has been lavished on us to help us, and what have we made of it all?

But we may rise a step higher and remember that we are made moral creatures. Therefore, whatever has not developed infant potentialities in us, and made them moral qualities, has been experienced in vain. 'Not enjoyment and not sorrow is our destined end and way.' Life is meant to

make us love and do the good, and unless it has produced that effect on us, it has failed. If this be true, the world is full of failures, like the marred statues in a bad sculptor's studio, and we ourselves have earnestly to confess that the discipline of life has too often been wasted upon us, and that of us the divine complaint from of old has been true: 'In vain have I smitten thy children, they have received no correction.'

There is no sadder waste than the waste of sorrow, and alas! we all know how impotent our afflictions have been to make us better. But not afflictions only have failed in their appeal to us, our joys have as often been in vain as our sorrows, and memory, when it turns its lamp on the long past, sees so few points at which life has taught us to love goodness, and be good, that she may well quench her light and let the dead past bury its dead.

But we must rise still higher, and think of men as being made for God, and as being the only creatures known to us who are capable of religion. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' And this chief end is in fullest harmony with the lower ends to which we have just referred, and they will never be realised in their fullest completeness unless that completeness is sought in this the chief end. From of old meditative souls have known that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and that that fear is as certainly the beginning of goodness. It was not an irrelevant rebuke to the question, 'What good thing shall I do?' when Jesus set the eager young soul who asked it, to justify to himself his courteous and superficial application to Him of the abused and vulgarised title of 'Good,' and pointed him to God as the only Being to whom that title, in its perfectness, could be given. If 'there is none good but one, that is God,' man's goodness must be drawn from Him, and morality without religion will in theory be incomplete, and in practice a delusion. If, then, men are made to need God, and capable of possessing Him, and of being possessed by Him, then the great question for all of us is, has life, with all its rapid whirl of changing circumstance and varying fortunes, drawn us closer to God, and made us more fit to receive more of Him? So supreme is this chief end that a life which has not attained it can only be regarded as 'in vain' whatever other successes it may have attained. So unspeakably more important and necessary is it, that compared with it all else sinks into nothingness; hence many lives which are dazzling successes in the eyes of men are ghastly failures in reality.

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Now, if we take these plain principles with us in our retrospect of the past year we shall be launched on a very serious inquiry, and brought face to face with a very penitent answer. Some of us may have had great sorrows, and the tears may be scarcely dry upon our cheeks: some of us may have had great gladnesses, and our hearts may still be throbbing with the thrill: some of us may have had great successes, and some of us heavy losses, but the question for us to ask is not of the quality of our past experiences, but as to their effects upon us. Has life been so used by us as to help us to become wiser, better, more devout? And the answer to that question, if we are honest in our scrutiny of ourselves, and if memory has not been a mere sentimental luxury, must be that we have too often been but unfaithful recipients alike of God's mercies and God's chastisements, and have received much of the discipline of life, and remained undisciplined. The question of our text, if asked by me, would be impertinent, but it is asked of each of us by the stern voice of conscience, and for some of us by the lips of dear ones whose loss has been among our chiefest sufferings. God asks us this question, and it is hard to make-believe to Him.

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### III. The best issue of the retrospect.

The world says, 'What I have written I have written,' and there is a very solemn and terrible reality in the thought of the irrevocable past. Whether life has achieved the ends for which it was given or no, it has achieved some ends. It may have made us into characters the very opposite of God's intention for us, but it has made us into certain characters which, so far as the world sees, can never be unmade or re-made. The world harshly preaches the indelibility of character, and proclaims that the Ethiopian may as soon be expected to change his skin or the leopard his spots as the man accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. That dreary fatalism which binds the effects of a dead past on a man's shoulders, and forbids him to hope that anything will obliterate the marks of 'what once hath been,' is in violent contradiction to the large hope brought into the world by Jesus Christ. What we have written we *have* written, and we have no power to erase the lines and make the sheet clean again, but Jesus Christ has taken away the handwriting 'that was against us,' nailing it to His cross. Instead of our old sin-worn and sin-marked selves, He proffers to each of us a new self, not the outcome of what we have been, but the image of what He is and the prophecy of what we shall be. By the great gift of holiness for the future by the impartation of His own life and spirit, Jesus makes all things new. The Gospel recognises to the full how bad some who have received it were, but it can willingly admit their past foulness, because it contrasts with all that former filth their present cleanness, and to the most inveterately depraved who have trusted in Christ rejoices to say, 'Ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

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## THE UNIVERSAL PRISON

'But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.'—GAL. iii. 22.

The Apostle uses here a striking and solemn figure, which is much veiled for the English reader by the ambiguity attaching to the word 'concluded.' It literally means 'shut up,' and is to

be taken in its literal sense of confining, and not in its secondary sense of inferring. So, then, we are to conceive of a vast prison-house in which mankind is confined. And then, very characteristically, the Apostle passes at once to another metaphor when he goes on to say 'under sin.' What a moment before had presented itself to his vivid imagination as a great dungeon is now represented as a heavy weight, pressing down upon those beneath; if, indeed, we are not, perhaps, rather to think of the low roof of the dark dungeon as weighing on the captives.

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Further, he says that Scripture has driven men into this captivity. That, of course, cannot mean that revelation makes us sinners, but it does mean that it makes us more guilty, and that it declares the fact of human sinfulness as no other voice has ever done. And then the grimness of the picture is all relieved and explained, and the office ascribed to God's revelation harmonised with God's love, by the strong, steady beam of light that falls from the last words, which tell us that the prisoners have not been bound in chains for despair or death, but in order that, gathered together in a common doleful destiny, they may become recipients of a common blessed salvation, and emerge into liberty and light through faith in Jesus Christ.

So here are three things—the prison-house, its guardian, and its breaker. 'The Scripture hath shut up all under sin, in order that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given unto all them that believe.'

I. First, then, note the universal prison-house.

Now the Apostle says two things—and we may put away the figure and look at the facts that underlie it. The one is that all sin is imprisonment, the other is that all men are in that dungeon, unless they have come out of it through faith in Jesus Christ.

All sin is imprisonment. That is the direct contrary of the notion that many people have. They say to themselves, 'Why should I be fettered and confined by these antiquated restrictions of a conventional morality? Why should I not break the bonds, and do as I like?' And they laugh at Christian people who recognise the limitations under which God's law has put them; and tell us that we are 'cold-blooded folks who live by rule,' and contrast their own broad 'emancipation from narrow prejudice.' But the reality is the other way. The man who does wrong is a slave in the measure in which he does it. If you want to find out—and mark this, you young people, who may be deceived by the false contrasts between the restraints of duty and the freedom of living a dissolute life—if you want to find out how utterly 'he that committeth sin is the slave of sin,' try to break it off, and you will find it out fast enough. We all know, alas! the impotence of the will when it comes to hand grips with some evil to which we have become habituated; and how we determine and determine, and try, and fail, and determine again, with no better result. We are the slaves of our own passions; and no man is free who is hindered by his lower self from doing that which his better self tells him he ought to do. The tempter comes to you, and says, 'Come and do this thing, just for once. You can leave off when you like, you know. There is no need to do it a second time.' And when you have done it, he changes his note, and says, 'Ah! you are in, and you cannot get out. You have done it once; and in my vocabulary once means twice, and once and twice mean *always*.'

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Insane people are sometimes tempted into a house of detention by being made to believe that it is a grand mansion, where they are just going to pay a flying visit, and can come away when they like. But once inside the walls, they never get past the lodge gates any more. The foolish birds do not know that there is lime on the twigs, and their little feet get fastened to the branch, and their wings flutter in vain. 'He that committeth sin is the slave of sin—shut up,' dungeoned, 'under sin.'

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But do not forget, either, the other metaphor in our text, in which the Apostle, with characteristic rapidity, and to the horror of rhetorical propriety, passes at once from the thought of a dungeon to the thought of an impending weight, and says, 'Shut up *under* sin.'

What does that mean? It means that we are guilty when we have done wrong; and it means that we are under penalties which are sure to follow. No deed that we do, howsoever it may fade from the tablets of our memory, but writes in visible characters, in proportion to its magnitude, upon our characters and lives. All human acts have perpetual consequences. The kick of the rifle against the shoulder of the man that fires it is as certain as the flight of the bullet from its muzzle. The chalk cliffs that rise above the Channel entomb and perpetuate the relics of myriads of evanescent lives; and our fleeting deeds are similarly preserved in our present selves. Everything that a man wills, whether it passes into external act or not, leaves, in its measure, ineffaceable impressions on himself. And so we are not only dungeoned in, but weighed upon by, and lie under, the evil that we do.

Nor, dear friends, dare I pass in silence what is too often passed in silence in the modern pulpit, the plain fact that there is a future waiting for each of us beyond the grave, of which the most certain characteristic, certified by our own forebodings, required by the reasonableness of creation, and made plain by the revelation of Scripture, is that it is a future of retribution, where we shall have to carry our works; and as we have brewed so shall we drink; and the beds that we have made we shall have to lie upon. 'God shut up all under sin.'

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Note, again, the universality of the imprisonment.

Now I am not going to exaggerate, I hope. I want to keep well within the limits of fact, and to say nothing that is not endorsed by your own consciences, if you will be honest with yourselves. And I say that the Bible does not charge men universally with gross transgressions. It does not

talk about the virtues that grow in the open as if they were splendid vices; but it does say, and I ask you if our own hearts do not tell us that it says truly, that no man is, or has been, does, or has done, that which his own conscience tells him he should have been and done. We are all ready to admit faults, in a general way, and to confess that we have come short of what our own consciousness tells us we ought to be. But I want you to take the other step, and to remember that since we each stand in a personal relation to God, therefore all imperfections, faults, negligences, shortcomings, and, still more, transgressions of morality, or of the higher aspirations of our lives, are sins. Because sin—to use fine words—is the correlative of God. Or, to put it into plainer language, the deeds which in regard to law may be crimes, or those which in regard to morality may be vices, or in regard to our own convictions of duty may be shortcomings, seeing they all have some reference to Him, assume a very much graver character, and they are all sins.

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Oh, brethren, if we realise how intimately and inseparably we are knit to God, and how everything that we do, and do not do, but should have done, has an aspect in reference to Him, I think we should be less unwilling to admit, and less tinged with levity and carelessness in admitting, that all our faults are transgressions of His law, and we should find ourselves more frequently on our knees before Him, with the penitent words on our lips and in our hearts, 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.'

That was the prayer of a man who had done a foul evil in other people's sight; who had managed to accumulate about as many offences to as many people in one deed as was possible. For, as a king he had sinned against his nation, as a friend he had sinned against his companion, as a captain he had sinned against his brave subordinate, as a husband he had sinned against his wife, and he had sinned against Bathsheba. And yet, with all that tangle of offences against all these people, he says, 'Against Thee, Thee only.' Yes! Because, accurately speaking, the *sin* had reference to God, and to God alone. And I wish for myself and for you to cultivate the habit of connecting, thus, all our actions, and especially our imperfections and our faults, with the thought of God, that we may learn how universal is the enclosure of man in this dreadful prison-house.

II. And so, I come, in the second place, to look at the guardian of the prison.

That is a strange phrase of my text attributing the shutting of men up in this prison-house to the merciful revelation of God in the Scripture. And it is made still more striking and strange by another edition of the same expression in the Epistle to the Romans, where Paul directly traces the 'concluding all in disobedience' to God Himself.

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There may be other subtle thoughts connected with that expression which I do not need to enter upon now. But one that I would dwell upon, for a moment, is this, that one great purpose of Scripture is to convince us that we are sinful in God's sight. I do not need to remind you, I suppose, how that was, one might almost say, the dominant intention of the whole of the ceremonial and moral law of Israel, and explains its many else inexplicable and apparently petty commandments and prohibitions. They were all meant to emphasise the difference between right and wrong, obedience and disobedience, and so to drive home to men's hearts the consciousness that they had broken the commandments of the living God. And although the Gospel comes with a very different guise from that ancient order, and is primarily gift and not law, a Gospel of forgiveness, and not the promulgation of duty or the threatening of condemnation, yet it, too, has for one of its main purposes, which must be accomplished in us before it can reach its highest aim in us, the kindling in men's hearts of the same consciousness that they are sinful men in God's sight.

Ah, brethren, we all need it. There is nothing that we need more than to have driven deep into us the penetrating point of that conviction. There must be some external standard by which men may be convinced of their sinfulness, for they carry no such standard within them. Your conscience is only *you* judging on moral questions, and, of course, as you change, it will change too. A man's whole state determines the voice with which conscience shall speak to him, and so the worse he is, and the more he needs it, the less he has it. The rebels cut the telegraph wires. The waves break the bell that hangs on the reef, and so the black rocks get many a wreck to gnaw with their sharp teeth. A man makes his conscience dumb by the very sins that require a conscience trumpet-tongued to reprehend them. And therefore it needs that God should speak from Heaven, and say to us, '*Thou art the man,*' or else we pass by all these grave things that I am trying to urge upon you now, and fall back upon our complacency and our levity and our unwillingness to take stock of ourselves, and front the facts of our condition. And so we build up a barrier between ourselves and God, and God's grace, which nothing short of that grace and an omnipotent love and an all-powerful Redeemer can ever pull down.

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I wish to urge in a few words, yet with much earnestness, this thought, that until we have laid to heart God's message about our own personal sinfulness we have not got to the place where we can in the least understand the true meaning of His Gospel, or the true work of His Son. May I say that I, for one, am old-fashioned enough to look with great apprehension on certain tendencies of present-day presentations of Christianity which, whilst they dwell much upon the social blessings which it brings, do seem to me to be in great peril of obscuring the central characteristic of the Gospel, that it is addressed to sinful men, and that the only way by which individuals can come to the possession of any of its blessings is by coming as penitent sinners, and casting themselves on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ? The beginning of all lies here, where Paul puts it, 'the Scripture hath herded all men,' in droves, into the prison, that it might have

Dear friend, as the old proverb has it, deceit lurks in generalities. I have no doubt you are perfectly willing to admit that all are sinful. Come a little closer to the truth, I beseech you, and say each is sinful, and I am one of the captives.

III. And so, lastly, the breaker of the prison-house.

I need not spend your time in commenting on the final words of this text. Suffice it to gather their general purport and scope. The apparently stern treatment which God by revelation applies to the whole mass of mankind is really the tenderest beneficence. He has shut them up in the prison-house in order that, thus shut up, they may the more eagerly apprehend and welcome the advent of the Deliverer. He tells us each our state, in order that we may the more long for, and the more closely grasp, the great mercy which reverses the state. And so how shallow and how unfair it is to talk about evangelical Christianity as being gloomy, stern, or misanthropical! You do not call a doctor unkind because he tells an unsuspecting patient that his disease is far advanced, and that if it is not cured it will be fatal. No more should a man turn away from Christianity, or think it harsh and sour, because it speaks plain truths. The question is, are they true? not, are they unpleasant?

If you and I, and all our fellows, are shut up in this prison-house of sin, then it is quite clear that none of us can do anything to get ourselves out. And so the way is prepared for that great message with which Jesus opened His ministry, and which, whilst it has a far wider application, and reference to social as well as to individual evils, begins with the proclamation of liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

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There was once a Roman emperor who wished that all his enemies had one neck, that he might slay them all at one blow. The wish is a fact in regard to Christ and His work, for by it all our tyrants have been smitten to death by one stroke; and the death of Jesus Christ has been the death of sin and death and hell—of sin in its power, in its guilt, and in its penalty. He has come into the prison-house, and torn the bars away, and opened the fetters, and every man may, if he will, come out into the blessed sunshine and expatiate there.

And if, brethren, it is true that the universal prison-house is opened by the death of Jesus Christ, who is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the power by which the most polluted may become clean, then there follows, as plainly, that the only thing which we have to do is, recognising and feeling our bound impotence, to stretch out chained hands and take the gift that He brings. Since all is done for each of us, and since none of us can do sufficient for himself to break the bond, then what we should do is to trust to Him who has broken every chain and let the oppressed go free.

Oh, dear friend, if you want to get to the heart of the sweetness and the blessedness and power of the Gospel, you must begin here, with the clear and penitent consciousness that you are a sinful man in God's sight, and can do nothing to cleanse, help, or liberate yourself. Is Jesus Christ the breaker of the bond for you? Do you learn from Him what your need is? Do you trust yourself to Him for Pardon, for cleansing, for emancipation? Unless you do, you will never know His most precious preciousness, and you have little right to call yourself a Christian. If you do, oh, than a great light will shine in the prison-house, and your chains will drop from your wrists, and the iron door will open of its own accord, and you will come out into the morning sunshine of a new day, because you have confessed and abhorred the bondage into which you have cast yourselves, and accepted the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.

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## THE SON SENT

'When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.'—GAL. iv. 4, 5 (R.V.).

It is generally supposed that by the 'fulness of time' Paul means to indicate that Christ came at the moment when the world was especially prepared to receive Him, and no doubt that is a true thought. The Jews had been trained by law to the conviction of sin; heathenism had tried its utmost, had reached the full height of its possible development, and was decaying. Rome had politically prepared the way for the spread of the Gospel. Vague expectations of coming change found utterance even from the lips of Roman courtier poets, and a feeling of unrest and anticipation pervaded society; but while no doubt all this is true and becomes more certain the more we know of the state of things into which Christ came, it is to be noted that Paul is not thinking of the fulness of time primarily in reference to the world which received Him, but to the Father who sent Him. Our text immediately follows words in which the air is described as being 'under guardians and stewards' until the time appointed of His Father, and the fulness of time is therefore the moment which God had ordained from the beginning for His coming. He, from of old, had willed that at that moment this Son should be born, and it is to the punctual accomplishment of His eternal purpose that Paul here directs our thoughts. No doubt the world's preparedness is part of the reason for the divine determination of the time, but it is that divine determination rather than the world's preparedness to which the first words of our text must be

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taken to refer.

The remaining portion of our text is so full of meaning that one shrinks from attempting to deal with it in our narrow space, but though it opens up depths beyond our fathoming, and gathers into one concentrated brightness lights on which our dim eyes can hardly look, we may venture to attempt some imperfect consideration even of these great words. Following their course of thought we may deal with

#### I. The mystery of love that sent.

The most frequent form under which the great fact of the incarnation is represented in Scripture is that of our text—'God sent His Son.' It is familiar on the lips of Jesus, but He also says that 'God gave His Son.' One can feel a shade of difference in the two modes of expression. The former bringing rather to our thoughts the representative character of the Son as Messenger, and the latter going still deeper into the mystery of Godhead and bringing into view the love of the Father who spared not His Son but freely bestowed Him on men. Yet another word is used by Jesus Himself when He says, 'I came forth from God,' and that expression brings into view the perfect willingness with which the Son accepted the mission and gave Himself, as well as was given by God. All three phases express harmonious, though slightly differing aspects of the same fact, as the facets of a diamond might flash into different colours, and all must be held fast if we would understand the unspeakable gift of God. Jesus was sent; Jesus was given; Jesus came. The mission from the Father, the love of the Father, the glad obedience of the Son, must ever be recognised as interpenetrating, and all present in that supreme act. [128]

There have been many men specially sent forth from God, whose personal existence began with their birth, and so far as the words are concerned, Jesus might have been one of these. There was a man sent from God whose name was John, and all through the ages he has had many companions in his mission, but there has been only one who 'came' as well as 'was sent,' and He is the true light which lighteth every man. To speak in theological language of the pre-existence of the Son is cold, and may obscure the truth which it formulates in so abstract a fashion, and may rob it of power to awe and impress. But there can be no question that in our text, as is shown by the juxtaposition of 'sent' and 'born,' and in all the New Testament references to the subject, the birth of Jesus is not regarded as the beginning of the being of the Son. The one lies far back in the depths of eternity and the mystery of the divine nature, the other is a historical fact occurring in a definite place and at a dated moment. Before time was the Son was, delighting in the Father, and 'in the beginning was the word and the word was with God,' and He who in respect of His expression of the Father's mind and will was the Word, was the Son in respect of the love that bound the Father and Him in one. Into the mysteries of that love and union no eyes can penetrate, but unless our faith lays hold of it, we know not the God whom Jesus has declared to us. The mysteries of that divine union and communion lie beyond our reach, but well within the grasp of our faith and the work of the Son in the world, ever since there was a world, is not obscurely declared to all who have eyes to see and hearts to understand. For He has through all ages been the active energy of the divine power, or as the Old Testament words it, 'The Arm of the Lord,' the Agent of creation, the Revealer of God, the Light of the world and the Director of Providence. 'He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' [129]

Now all this teaching that the Son was long before Jesus was born is no mere mysterious dogma without bearing on daily needs, but stands in the closest connection with Christ's work and our faith in it. It is the guarantee of His representative character; on it depends the reliableness of His revelation of God. Unless He is the Son in a unique sense, how could God have spoken unto us in Him, and how could we rely on His words? Unless He was 'the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His person': how could we be sure that the light of His countenance was light from God and that in His person God was so presented as that he who had seen Him had seen the Father? The completeness and veracity of His revelation, the authoritative fulness of His law, the efficacy of His sacrifice and the prevalence of His intercession all depend on the fact of His divine life with God long before His human life with men. It is a plain historical fact that a Christianity which has no place for a pre-existent Son in the bosom of the Father has only a maimed Christ in reference to the needs of sinful men. If our Christ were not the eternal Son of God, He will not be the universal Saviour of men. [130]

Nor is this truth less needful in its bearing on modern theories which will have nothing to say to the supernatural, and in a fatalistic fashion regard history as all the result of an orderly evolution in which the importance of personal agents is minimised. To it Jesus, like all other great men, is a product of His age, and the immediate result of the conditions under which He appeared. But when we look far beyond the manger of Bethlehem into the depths of Eternity and see God so loving the world as to give His Son, we cannot but recognise that He has intervened in the course of human history and that the mightiest force in the development of man is the eternal Son whom He sent to save the world.

#### II. The miracle of lowliness that came.

The Apostle goes on from describing the great fact which took place in heaven to set forth the great fact which completed it on earth. The sending of the Son took effect in the birth of Jesus, and the Apostle puts it under two forms, both of which are plainly designed to present Christ's manhood as His full identification of Himself with us. The Son of God became the son of a woman; from His mother He drew a true and complete humanity in body and soul. The humanity which He received was sufficiently kindred with the divinity which received it to make it possible that the one should dwell in the other and be one person. As born of a woman the Son of God

took upon Himself all human experiences, became capable of sharing our pure emotions, wept our tears, partook in our joys, hoped and feared as we do, was subject to our changes, grew as we grow, and in everything but sin, was a man amongst men.

But the Son of God could not be as the sons of men. Him the Father heard always. Even when He came down from Heaven and became the Son of Man, He continued to be 'The Son of Man which is in Heaven.' Amid all the distractions and limitations of His earthly life, the continuity and depth of His communion with the Father were unbroken and the completeness of His obedience undiminished. He was a Man, but He was also the Man, the one realised ideal of humanity that has ever walked the earth, to whom all others, even the most complete, are fragments, the fairest foul, the most gracious harsh. In Him and in Him only has been 'given the world assurance of a man.'

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The other condition which is here introduced is 'born under the law,' by which it may be noted that the Apostle does not mean the Jewish law, inasmuch as he does not use the definite article with the word. No doubt our Lord was born as a Jew and subject to the Jewish law, but the thought here and in the subsequent clause is extended to the general notion of law. The very heart of our Lord's human identification is that He too had duties imperative upon Him, and the language of one of the Messianic psalms was the voice of His filial will during all His earthly life; 'Lo! I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will and Thy law is within My heart.' The very secret of His human life was discovered by the heathen centurion, at whose faith He marvelled, who said, 'I *also* am a man under authority'; so was Jesus. The Son had ever been obedient in the sweet communion of Heaven, but the obedience of Jesus was not less perfect, continual and unstained. It was the man Jesus who summed up His earthly life in 'I do always the things that please Him'; it was the man Jesus who, under the olives in Gethsemane, made the great surrender and yielded up His own will to the will of the Father who sent Him.

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He was under law in that the will of God dominated His life, but He was not so under it as we are on whom its precepts often press as an unwelcome obligation, and who know the weight of guilt and condemnation. If there is any one characteristic of Jesus more conspicuous than another it is the absence in Him of any consciousness of deficiency in His obedience to law, and yet that absence does not in the smallest degree infringe on His claim to be 'meek and lowly in heart.' 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' would have been from any other man a defiance that would have provoked a crushing answer if it had not been taken as a proof of hopeless ignorance of self, but when Christ asks the question, the world is silent. The silence has been all but unbroken for nineteen hundred years, and of all the busy and often unfriendly eyes that have been occupied with Him and the hostile pens that have been eager to say something new about Him, none have discovered a flaw, or dared to 'hint a fault.' That character has stamped its own impression of perfectness on all eyes even the most unfriendly or indifferent. In Him there is seen the perfect union and balance of opposite characteristics; the rest of us, at the best, are but broken arcs; Jesus is the completed round. He is under law as fully, continuously and joyfully obedient; but for Him it had no accusing voice, and it laid on Him no burden of broken commandments. He was born of a woman, born under law, but he lived separate from sinners though identified with them.

### III. The marvel of exaltation that results.

Our Lord's lowliness is described in the two clauses which we have just been considering. They express His identification with us from a double point of view, and that double point of view is continued in the final clauses of our text which state the double purpose of God in sending His Son. He became one with us that we might become one with Him. The two elements of this double purpose are stated in the reverse order to the two elements of Christ's lowliness. The redemption of them that were under law is presented as the reason for His being born under law, and our reception of the 'adoption of sons' is the purpose of the Son's being sent and born of a woman. The order in which Paul here deals with the two parts of the divine purpose is not to be put down to mere rhetorical ornament, but corresponds to the order in which these two elements are realised by men. For there must be redemption from law before there is the adoption of sons.

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We have already had occasion to point out that 'law' here must be taken in the wide sense and not restricted to the Jewish law. It is a world-wide redemption which the Father's love had in view in sending His Son, but that all-comprehending, fatherly love could not reach its aim by the mere forth-putting of its own energy. A process was needed if the divine heart was to accomplish its desire, and the majestic stages in that process are set forth here by Paul. The world was under law in a very sad fashion, and though Jesus has come to redeem them that are under law, the crushing weight of commandments flouted, of duties neglected, of sins done, presses heavily upon many of us. And yet how many of us there are who do not know the burden that we carry and have had no personal experience like that of Bunyan's Christian with the pack on his back all but weighing him down? Jesus Christ has become one of us, and in His sinless life has 'magnified the law and made it honourable,' and in His sinless death He endures the consequences of sin, not as due to Himself, but because they are man's. But we must carefully keep in view, that as we have already pointed out, we are to think of Christ's mission as His coming as well as the Father's sending, and that therefore we do not grasp the full idea of our Lord's enduring the consequences of sin unless we take it as meaning His voluntary identification of Himself in love with us sinful men. His obedience was perfect all His life long, and His last and highest act of obedience was when He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

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This is the only means by which the burden of law in any of its forms can be taken away from us. For a law which is not loved will be heavy and hard however holy and just and good it may be,



and a law which we have broken will become sooner or later its own avenger. Faithful in *Pilgrim's Progress* tells how 'So soon as a man overtook me he was but a word and a blow, for down he knocked me and laid me for dead. . . . He struck me another deadly blow on the breast and beat me down backward, so I lay at his foot as dead as before, so when I came to myself again I cried him "Mercy," but he said, "I know not how to show mercy," and with that knocked me down again; he had doubtless made an end of me but that one came by and bid him forbear. . . . I did not know him at first, but as he went by I perceived the holes in his hands and in his sides.' He was born under law that He might redeem them that were under law.

The slaves bought into freedom are received into the great family. The Son has become flesh that they who dwell in the flesh may rise to be sons, but the Son stands alone even in the midst of His identification with us, and of the great results which follow for us from it. He is the Son by nature; we are sons by adoption. He became man that we might share in the possession of God. When the burden of law is lifted off it is possible to bestow the further blessing of sonship, but that blessing is only possible through Him in whom, and from whom, we derive a life which is divine life. There is a profound truth in the prophetic sentence, 'Behold I and the children which God hath given me!' for, in one aspect, believers are the children of Christ, and in another, they are sons of God. [135]

We have been speaking of the Son's identification with us in His mission, and our identification with Him, but that identification depends on ourselves and is only an accomplished fact through our faith. When we trust in Him it is true that all His—His righteousness, His Sonship, His union with the Father—is ours, and that all ours—our sins, our guilt, our alienation from God and our dwelling in the far-off land of rags and vice—is His. In His voluntary identification with us, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. It is for us to determine whether we will lay on Him our iniquities, as the Father has already laid the iniquities of us all. Are we by faith in Him who was born of a woman, born under law, making our very own the redemption from the law which He has wrought and the adoption of sons which He bestows? [136]

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## WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN: CIRCUMCISION OR FAITH?

'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'—GAL. v. 6.

It is a very singular instance of imaginative misreading of plain facts that the primitive Church should be held up as a pattern Church. The early communities had apostolic teaching; but beyond that, they seem to have been in no respect above, and in many respects below, the level of subsequent ages. If we may judge of their morality by the exhortations and dehortations which they received from the Apostle, Corinth and Thessalonica were but beginners in holiness. If we may judge of their intelligence by the errors into which they were in danger of falling, these first congregations had indeed need that one should teach them which were the first principles of the oracles of God. It could not be otherwise. They were but just rescued from heathenism, and we need not wonder if their spirits long bore the scars of their former bondage. If we wish to know what the apostolic churches were like, we have but to look at the communities gathered by modern missionaries. The same infantile simplicity, the same partial apprehensions of the truth, the same danger of being led astray by the low morality of their heathen kindred, the same openness to strange heresy, the same danger of blending the old with the new, in opinion and in practice, beset both.

The history of the first theological difference in the early churches is a striking confutation of the dream that they were perfect, and a striking illustration of the dangers to which they were exposed from the attempt, so natural to us all, to put new wine into old bottles. The Jewish and the Gentile elements did not coalesce. The point round which the strife was waged was not whether Gentiles might come into the Church. That was conceded by the fiercest Judaizers. But it was whether they could come in as Gentiles, without first being incorporated into the Jewish nation by circumcision, and whether they could remain in as Gentiles, without conforming to Jewish ceremonial and law. [137]

Those who said 'No' were members of the Christian communities, and, being so, they still insisted that Judaism was to be eternal. They demanded that the patched and stiff leathern bottle, which had no elasticity or pliability, should still contain the quick fermenting new wine of the kingdom. And certainly, if ever man had excuse for clinging to what was old and formal, these Judaizing Christians held it. They held by a law written with God's own finger, by ordinances awful by reason of divine appointment, venerable by reason of the generations to which they had been of absolute authority, commended by the very example of Christ Himself. Every motive which can bind heart and conscience to the reverence and the practice of the traditions of the Fathers, bound them to the Law and the ordinances which had been Israel's treasure from Abraham to Jesus.

Those who said 'Yes' were mostly Gentiles, headed and inspired by a Hebrew of the Hebrews. They believed that Judaism was preparatory, and that its work was done. For those among themselves who were Jews, they were willing that its laws should still be obligatory; but they fought against the attempt to compel all Gentile converts to enter Christ's kingdom through the gate of circumcision. [138]

The fight was stubborn and bitter. I suppose it is harder to abolish forms than to change opinions. Ceremonies stand long after the thought which they express has fled, as a dead king may sit on his throne stiff and stark in his golden mantle, and no one come near enough to see that the light is gone out of his eyes, and the will departed from the hand that still clutches the sceptre. All through Paul's life he was dogged and tormented by this controversy. There was a deep gulf between the churches he planted and this reactionary section of the Christian community. Its emissaries were continually following in his footsteps. As he bitterly reproaches them, they entered upon another man's line of things made ready to their hand, not caring to plant churches of circumcised Gentiles themselves, but starting up behind him as soon as his back was turned, and spoiling his work.

This Epistle is the memorial of that foot-to-foot feud. It is of perennial use, as the tendencies against which it is directed are constant in human nature. Men are ever apt to confound form and substance, to crave material embodiments of spiritual realities, to elevate outward means into the place of the inward and real, to which all the outward is but subsidiary. In every period of strife between the two great opponents, this letter has been the stronghold of those who fight for the spiritual conception of religion. With it Luther waged his warfare, and in this day, too, its words are precious.

My text contains Paul's condensed statement of his whole position in the controversy. It tells us what he fought for, and why he fought, against the attempt to suspend union to Christ on an outward rite. [139]

I. The first grand principle contained in these words is that faith working by love makes a Christian.

The antithesis of our text appears in somewhat varied forms in two other places in the Apostle's writings. To the Corinthians he says, 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.' His last word to the Galatians—the gathering up into one strong sentence of his whole letter—is, 'In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.'

Now, all these assertions embody substantially the same opposition between the conception of Christianity as depending upon a ceremonial rite, and as being a spiritual change. And the variations in the second member of the contrast throw light on each other. In one, the essential thing is regarded from the divine side as being not a rite performed on the body, but a new nature, the result of a supernatural regeneration. In another, the essential thing is set forth as being not an outward act, but an inward principle, which produces appropriate effects on the whole being. In yet another the essential thing is conceived as being not a mere ceremonial, but practical obedience, the consequence of the active principle of faith, and the sign of the new life. There is an evident sequence in the three sayings. They begin with the deepest, the divine act of a new creation—and end with the outermost, the last result and object of both the others—deeds of conformity to God's law.

This one process in its triple aspects, says Paul, constitutes a man a Christian. What correspondence is there between it, in any of its parts, and a carnal ordinance? They belong to wholly different categories, and it is the most preposterous confusion to try to mix them up together. Are we to tack on to the solemn powers and qualities, which unite the soul to Christ, this beggarly addition that the Judaisers desire, and to say, the essentials of Christianity are a new creature, faith, obedience—and circumcision? That is, indeed, sewing old cloth on a new garment, and huddling together in grotesque chaos things which are utterly diverse. It is as absurd bathos as to say the essentials of a judge are integrity, learning, patience—and an ermine robe! [140]

There would be less danger of being entangled in false notions of the sort which devastated Galatia and have afflicted the Church ever since, if people would put a little more distinctly before their own minds what they mean by 'religion'; what sort of man they intend when they talk about 'a Christian.' A clear notion of the thing to be produced would thin away a wonderful deal of mist as to the way of producing it. So then, beginning at the surface, in order to work inward, my first remark is that religion is the harmony of the soul with God, and the conformity of the life to His law.

The loftiest purpose of God, in all His dealings, is to make us like Himself; and the end of all religion is the complete accomplishment of that purpose. There is no religion without these elements—consciousness of kindred with God, recognition of Him as the sum of all excellence and beauty, and of His will as unconditionally binding upon us, aspiration and effort after a full accord of heart and soul with Him and with His law, and humble confidence that that sovereign beauty will be ours. 'Be ye imitators of God as dear children' is the pure and comprehensive dictate which expresses the aim of all devout men. 'To keep His commandments' goes deeper than the mere external deeds. Were it not so, Paul's grand words would shrink to a very poor conception of religion, which would then have its shrine and sphere removed from the sacred recesses of the inmost spirit to the dusty Babel of the market-place and the streets. But with that due and necessary extension of the words which results from the very nature of the case, that obedience must be the obedience of a man, and not of his deeds only, and must include the submission of the will and the prostration of the whole nature before Him; they teach a truth which, fully received and carried out, clears away whole mountains of theoretical confusion and practical error. Religion is no dry morality; no slavish, punctilious conforming of actions to a hard law. Religion is not right thinking alone, nor right emotion alone, nor right action alone. Religion [141]

is still less the semblance of these in formal profession, or simulated feeling, or apparent rectitude. Religion is not nominal connection with the Christian community, nor participation in its ordinances and its worship. But to be godly is to be godlike. The full accord of all the soul with His character, in whom, as their native home, dwell 'whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely,' and the full glad conformity of the will to His sovereign will, who is the life of our lives—this, and nothing shallower, nothing narrower, is religion in its perfection; and the measure in which we have attained to this harmony with God, is the measure in which we are Christians. As two stringed instruments may be so tuned to one keynote that, if you strike the one, a faint ethereal echo is heard from the other, which blends undistinguishably with its parent sound; so, drawing near to God, and brought into unison with His mind and will, our responsive spirits vibrate in accord with His, and give forth tones, low and thin indeed, but still repeating the mighty music of heaven. 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.'

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But our text tells us, further, that if we look backwards from character and deed to motive, this harmony with God results from love becoming the ruling power of our lives. The imitation of the object of worship has always been felt to be the highest form of worship. Many an ancient teacher, besides the Stoic philosopher, has said, 'He who copies the gods worships them adequately.' One of the prophets lays it down as a standing rule, 'The people will walk every one in the name of his God.' But it is only in the Christian attitude towards God that the motive power is found which makes such imitation more than an impossible duty, even as it is only in the revealed character of God that a pattern is found, to imitate which is to be perfect. Everywhere besides, harmony with the gods meant discord with conscience and flagrant outrages of the commonest moralities. Everywhere else, the task of copying them was one lightened by no clear confidence in their love, and by no happy consciousness of our own. But for us, the love revealed is the perfect law, and the love evoked is the fulfilling of the law.

And this is the might and nobleness of the Christian love to God; that it is no idle emotion or lazy rapture, no vague sentiment, but the root of all practical goodness, of all strenuous effort, of all virtue, and of all praise. That strong tide is meant to drive the busy wheels of life and to bear precious freightage on its bosom; not to flow away in profitless foam. Love is the fruitful mother of bright children, as our great moralist-poet learned when he painted her in the House of Holiness:

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'A multitude of babes about her hung,  
Playing their sport that joyed her to behold.'

Her sons are Strength and Justice, and Self-control and Firmness, and Courage and Patience, and many more besides; and her daughters are Pity with her sad eyes, and Gentleness with her silvery voice, and Mercy whose sweet face makes sunshine in the shade of death, and Humility all unconscious of her loveliness; and linked hand in hand with these, all the radiant band of sisters that men call Virtues and Graces. These will dwell in our hearts, if Love their mighty mother be there. If we are without her, we shall be without them.

There is discord between man and God which can only be removed by the sweet commerce of love, established between earth and heaven. God's love has come to us. When ours springs responsive to Him, then the schism is ended, and the wandering child forgets his rebellion, as he lays his aching head on the father's bosom, and feels the beating of the father's heart. Our souls by reason of sin are 'like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.' Love's master hand laid upon them restores to them their part in 'the fair music that all creatures make to their great Lord,' and brings us into such accord with God that

'We on earth with undiscording voice  
May rightly answer'

even the awful harmonies of His lips. The essential of religion is concord with God, and the power which makes that concord is love to God.

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But this text leads to a still further consideration, namely, the dominion of love to God in our hearts arises from faith.

We thus reach the last link, or rather the staple, of the chain from which all hangs. Religion is harmony with God; that harmony is produced by love; and that love is produced by faith. Therefore the fundamental of all Christianity in the soul is faith. Would this sound any fresher and more obvious if we varied the language, and said that to be religious we must be like God, that to be like Him we must love Him, and that to love Him we must be sure that He loves us? Surely that is too plain to need enlarging on.

And is it not true that faith must precede our love to God, and affords the only possible basis on which that can be built? How can we love Him so long as we are in doubt of His heart, or misconceive His character, as if it were only power and wisdom, or awful severity? Men cannot love an unseen person at all, without some very special token of his personal affection for them. The history of all religions shows that where the gods have been thought of as unloving, the worshippers have been heartless too. It is only when we know and believe the love that God hath to us, that we come to cherish any corresponding emotion to Him. Our love is secondary, His is primary; ours is reflection, His the original beam; ours is echo, His the mother-tone. Heaven must bend to earth before earth can rise to heaven. The skies must open and drop down love, ere love can spring in the fruitful fields. And it is only when we look with true trust to that great unveiling

of the heart of God which is in Jesus Christ, only when we can say, 'Herein is love—that He gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,' that our hearts are melted, and all their snows are dissolved into sweet waters, which, freed from their icy chains, can flow with music in their ripple and fruitfulness along their course, through our otherwise silent and barren lives. Faith in Christ is the only possible basis for active love to God.

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And this thought presents the point of contact between the teaching of Paul and John. The one dwells on faith, the other on love, but he who insists most on the former declares that it produces its effects on character by the latter; and he who insists most on the latter is forward to proclaim that it owes its very existence to the former.

It presents also the point of contact between Paul and James. The one speaks of the essential of Christianity as faith, the other as works. They are only striking the stream at different points, one at the fountain-head, one far down its course among the haunts of men. They both preach that faith must be 'faith that worketh,' not a barren assent to a dogma, but a living trust that brings forth fruits in the life. Paul believes as much as James that faith without works is dead, and demands the keeping of the commandments as indispensable to all true Christianity. James believes as much as Paul that works without faith are of none effect. So all three of these great teachers of the Church are represented in this text, to which each of them might seem to have contributed a word embodying his characteristic type of doctrine. The threefold rays into which the prism parts the white light blend again here, where faith, love, and work are all united in the comprehensive saying, 'In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'

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The sum of the whole matter is this—He who is one in will and heart with God is a Christian. He who loves God is one in will and heart with Him. He who trusts Christ loves God. That is Christianity in its ultimate purpose and result. That is Christianity in its means and working forces. That is Christianity in its starting-point and foundation.

II. But we have to consider also the negative side of the Apostle's words. They affirm that in comparison with the essential—faith, all externals are infinitely unimportant.

Paul's habit was always to settle questions by the widest principles he could bring to bear upon them—which one may notice in passing is the very opposite to the method that has been in favour with many Church teachers and guides since, who have preferred to live from hand to mouth, and to dispose of difficulties by the narrowest considerations that would avail to quiet them. In our text the question in hand is settled on a ground which covers a great deal more than the existing dispute. Circumcision is regarded as one of a whole class—namely, the class of outward rites and observances; and the contrast drawn between it and faith extends to all the class to which it belongs. It is not said to be powerless because it is an Old Testament rite, but because it is a rite. Its impotence lies in the very nature which it has in common with all external institutions, whether they be of the Old Testament or of the New, whether they be enjoined of God or invented by men. To them all the same characteristic cleaves. Compared with faith they are of no avail. Not that they are absolutely useless. They have their place, but '*in Christ Jesus*' they are nothing. Union to Him depends on quite another order of facts, which may or may not exist along with circumcision, or with baptism, or with the Lord's Supper. However important these may be, they have no place among the things which bind a soul to its Saviour. They may be helps to these things, but nothing more. The rite does not ensure the faith, else the antithesis of our text were unmeaning. The rite does not stand in the place of faith, or the contrast implied were absurd. But the two belong to totally different orders of things, which may co-exist indeed, but may also be found separately; the one is the indispensable spiritual experience which makes us Christians, the other belongs to a class of material institutions which are much as helps to, but nothing as substitutes or equivalents for, faith.

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Keep firm hold of the positive principle with which we have been dealing in the former part of this sermon, and all forms and externals fall as a matter of course into their proper place. If religion be the loving devotion of the soul to God, resting upon reasonable faith, then all besides is, at the most, a means which may further it. If loving trust which apprehends the truth, and cleaves to the Person, revealed to us in the Gospel, be the link which binds men to God, then the only way by which these externals can be 'means of grace' is by their aiding us to understand better and to feel more the truth as it is in Jesus, and to cleave closer to Him who is the truth. Do they enlighten the understanding? Do they engrave deeper the loved face carven on the tablets of memory, which the attrition of worldly cares is ever obliterating, and the lichens of worldly thoughts ever filling up? Do they clear out the rubbish from the channels of the heart, that the cleansing stream may flow through them? Do they, through the senses, minister to the soul its own proper food of clear thought, vivid impressions, loving affections, trustful obedience? Do they bring Christ to us, and us to Him, in the only way in which approach is possible—through the occupation of mind and heart and will with His great perfectness? Then they are means of grace, precious and helpful, the gifts of His love, the tokens of His wise knowledge of our weakness, the signs of His condescension, in that He stoops to trust some portion of our remembrance of Him to the ministry of sense. But in comparison with that faith which they cannot plant, though they may strengthen it, they are nothing; and in the matter of uniting the soul to God and making men 'religious,' they are of no avail at all.

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And such thoughts as these have a very wide sweep, as well as a very deep influence. Religion is the devotion of the soul to God. Then *everything* besides is not religion, but at most a means to it. That is true about all Christian ordinances. Baptism is spoken about by Paul in terms which

plainly show that he regarded it as 'nothing' in the same sense, and under the same limitations, as he thought that circumcision was nothing. 'I baptized some of you,' says he to the Corinthians; 'I scarcely remember whom, or how many. I have far more important work to do—to preach the Gospel.' It is true about all acts and forms of Christian worship. These are not religion, but means to it. Their only value and their only test is—Do they help men to know and feel Christ and His truth? It is true about laws of life, and many points of conventional morality. Remember the grand freedom with which the same Apostle dealt with questions about meats offered to idols, and the observance of days and seasons. The same principle guided him there too, and he relegated the whole question back to its proper place with, 'Meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse.' 'He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.' It is true, though less obviously and simply, about subordinate doctrines. It is true about the mere intellectual grasp of the fundamental truths of God's revelation. These, and the belief of these, are not Christianity, they are helps towards it.

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The separation is broad and deep. On one side are all externals, rites, ceremonies, politics, Church arrangements, forms of worship, modes of life, practices of morality, doctrines, and creeds—all which are externals to the soul: on the other is faith working through love, the inmost attitude and deepest emotion of the soul. The great heap is fuel. The flame is loving faith. The only worth of the fuel is to feed the flame. Otherwise it is of no avail, but lies dead and cold, a mass of blackness. We are joined to God by faith. Whatever strengthens that faith is precious as a help, but is worthless as a substitute.

III. There is a constant tendency to exalt these unimportant externals into the place of faith.

The whole purpose of the Gospel may be described to be our deliverance from the dominion of sense, and the transference of the centre of our life to the unseen world. This end is no doubt partly accomplished by the help of sense. So long as men have bodily organisations, there will be need for outward helps. Men's indolence, and men's sense-ridden natures, will take symbols for royalties, bank-notes for wealth. The eye will be tempted to stay on the rich colours of the glowing glass, instead of passing through them to heaven's light beyond. To make the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to heaven by, will be perilously likely to end in the soul going down the ladder instead of up. Forms are sure to encroach, to overlay the truth that lies at their root, to become dimly intelligible, or quite unmeaning, and to constitute at last the end instead of the means. Is it not then wise to minimise these potent and dangerous allies? Is it not needful to use them with the remembrance that a minute quantity may strengthen, but an overdose will kill—ay, and that the minute quantity may kill too? Christ instituted two outward rites. There could not have been fewer if there was to be an outward community at all, and they could not have been simpler; but look at the portentous outgrowth of superstition, and the unnumbered evils, religious, moral, social, and even political, which have come from the invincible tendency of human nature to corrupt forms, even when the forms are the sweet and simple ones of Christ's own appointment. What a lesson the history of the Lord's Supper, and its gradual change from the domestic memorial of the dying love of our Lord to the 'tremendous sacrifice,' reads us as to the dangerous ally which spiritual religion—and there is no other religion than spiritual—enlists when it seeks the help of external rites!

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But remember that this danger of converting religion into outward actions has its root in us all, and is not annihilated by our rejection of an elaborate ceremonial. There is much significance in the double negation of my text, 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.' If the Judaisers were tempted to insist on the former, as indispensable, their antagonists were as much tempted to insist on the latter. The one were saying, 'A man cannot be a Christian unless he be circumcised.' The other would be in danger of replying, 'He cannot be a Christian if he is.' There may be as much formalism in protesting against forms as in using them. Extremes meet; and an unspiritual Quaker, for instance, is at bottom of the same way of thinking as an unspiritual Roman Catholic. They agree in their belief that certain outward acts are essential to worship, and even to religion. They only differ as to what these acts are. The Judaiser who says, 'You must be circumcised,' and his antagonist who says, 'You must be uncircumcised,' are really in the same boat.

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And this is especially needful to be kept in mind by those who, like the most of us, hold fast by the free and spiritual conception of Christianity. That freedom we may turn into a bondage, and that spirituality into a form, if we confound it with the essentials of Christianity, and deny the possibility of the life being developed except in conjunction with it. My text has a double edge. Let us use it against all this Judaising which is going on round about us, and against all the tendency to it in our own hearts. The one edge smites the former, the other edge the latter. Circumcision is nothing, as most of us are forward to proclaim. But, also, remember, when we are tempted to trust in our freedom, and to fancy that in itself it is good, *uncircumcision is nothing*. You are no more a Christian for your rejection of forms than another man is for his holding them. Your negation no more unites you to Christ than does his affirmation. One thing alone does that,—faith which worketh by love, against which sense ever wars, both by tempting some of us to place religion in outward acts and ceremonies, and by tempting others of us to place it in rejecting the forms which our brethren abuse.

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IV. When an indifferent thing is made into an essential, it ceases to be indifferent, and must be fought against.

Paul proclaimed that circumcision and uncircumcision were alike unavailing. A man might be a good Christian either way. They were not unimportant in all respects, but in regard to being

united to Christ, it did not matter which side one took. And, in accordance with this noble freedom, he for himself practised Jewish rites; and, when he thought it might conciliate prejudice without betraying principle, had Timothy circumcised. But when it came to be maintained as a principle that Gentiles *must* be circumcised, the time for conciliation was past. The other side had made further concession impossible. The Apostle had no objection to circumcision. What he objected to was its being forced upon all as a necessary preliminary to entering the Church. And as soon as the opposite party took that ground, then there was nothing for it but to fight against them to the last. They had turned an indifferent thing into an essential, and he could no longer treat it as indifferent.

So whenever parties or Churches insist on external rites as essential, or elevate any of the subordinate means of grace into the place of the one bond which fastens our souls to Jesus, and is the channel of grace as well as the bond of union, then it is time to arm for the defence of the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, and to resist the attempt to bind on free shoulders the iron yoke. Let men and parties do as they like, so long as they do not turn their forms into essentials. In broad freedom of speech and spirit, which holds by the one central principle too firmly to be much troubled about subordinate matters—in tolerance of diversities, which does not spring from indifference, but from the very clearness of our perception of, and from the very fervour of our adherence to, the one essential of the Christian life—let us take for our guide the large, calm, lofty thoughts which this text sets forth before us. Let us thankfully believe that men may love Jesus, and be fed from His fulness, whether they be on one side of this undying controversy or on the other. Let us watch jealously the tendencies in our own hearts to trust in our forms or in our freedom. And whensoever or wheresoever these subordinates are made into things essential, and the ordinances of Christ's Church are elevated into the place which belongs to loving trust in Christ's love, then let *our* voices at least be heard on the side of that mighty truth that 'in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'

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## 'WALK IN THE SPIRIT'

'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.'—GAL. v. 16.

We are not to suppose that the Apostle here uses the familiar contrast of spirit and flesh to express simply different elements of human nature. Without entering here on questions for which a sermon is scarcely a suitable vehicle of discussion, it may be sufficient for our present purpose to say that, as usually, when employing this antithesis the Apostle means by Spirit the divine, the Spirit of God, which he triumphed in proclaiming to be the gift of every believing soul. The other member of the contrast, 'flesh,' is similarly not to be taken as equivalent to body, but rather as meaning the whole human nature considered as apart from God and kindred with earth and earthly things. The flesh, in its narrower sense, is no doubt a predominant part of this whole, but there is much in it besides the material organisation. The ethics of Christianity suffered much harm and were degraded into a false and slavish asceticism for long centuries, by monastic misunderstandings of what Paul meant by the flesh, but he himself was too clear-sighted and too high-toned to give his adhesion to the superficial notion that the body is the seat and source of sin. We need look no further than the catalogue of the 'works of the flesh' which immediately follows our text, for, although it begins with gross sins of a purely fleshly kind, it passes on to such as hatred, emulations, wrath, envyings and suchlike. Many of these works of the flesh are such as an angel with an evil heart could do, whether he had a body or not. It seems therefore right to say that the one member of the contrast is the divine Spirit of holiness, and the other is man as he is, without the life-giving influence of the Spirit of God. In Paul's thought the idea of the flesh always included the idea of sin, and the desires of the flesh were to him not merely rebellious, sensuous passion, but the sinful desires of godless human nature, however refined, and as some would say, 'spiritual' these might be. We do not need to inquire more minutely as to the meaning of the Apostle's terms, but may safely take them as, on the one hand, referring to the divine Spirit which imparts life and holiness, and on the other hand, to human nature severed from God, and distracted by evil desires because wrenched away from Him.

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The text is Paul's battle-cry, which he opposed to the Judaising disturbers in Galatia. They said 'Do this and that; labour at a round of observances; live by rule.' Paul said, 'No! That is of no use; you will make nothing of such an attempt nor will ever conquer evil so. Live by the spirit and you will not need a hard outward law, nor will you be in bondage to the works of the flesh.' That feud in the Galatian churches was the earliest battle which Christianity had to fight between two eternal tendencies of thought—the conception of religion as consisting in outward obedience to a law, and consequently as made up of a series of painful efforts to keep it, and the conception of religion as being first the implanting of a new, divine life, and needing only to be nourished and cared for in order to drive forth evils from the heart, and so to show itself living. The difference goes very far and very deep, and these two views of what religion is have each their adherents to-day. The Apostle throws the whole weight of his authority into the one scale, and emphatically declares this as the one secret of victory, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

I. What it is to walk in the Spirit.

The thought which is but touched upon here is set forth more largely, and if we may so say, profoundly, in the Epistle to the Romans (chap. viii.). There, to walk after the flesh, is substantially the same as to be carnally minded, and that 'mind of the flesh' is regarded as being by fatal necessity not 'subject to the law of God,' and consequently as in itself, with regard to future consequences, to be death. The fleshly mind which is thus in rebellion against the law of God is sure to issue in 'desires of the flesh,' just as when the pressure is taken off, some ebullient liquid will bubble. They that are after the flesh of course will 'mind the things of the flesh.' The vehement desires which we cherish when we are separated from God and which we call sins, are graver as a symptom than even they are in themselves, for they show which way the wind blows, and are tell-tales that betray the true direction of our nature. If we were not after the flesh we should not mind the things of the flesh. The one expression points to the deep-seated nature, the other to the superficial actions to which it gives rise.

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And the same duality belongs to the life of those who are 'after the Spirit.' 'To walk,' of course, means to carry on the practical life, and the Spirit is here thought of not so much perhaps as the path on which we are to travel, but rather as the norm and direction by which we are to travel on life's common way. Just as the desires of the flesh were certain to be done by those who in their deepest selves belonged to the flesh, so every soul which has received the unspeakable gift of newness of life through the Spirit of God will have the impulses to mind and do the things of the Spirit. If we live in the Spirit we shall also—and let us also—walk in the Spirit.

But let us make no mistakes, or think that our text in its great commandment and radiant hope has any word of cheer to those who have not received into their hearts, in however feeble a manner and minute a measure, the Spirit of the Son. The first question for us all is, have we received the Holy Ghost?—and the answer to that question is the answer to the other, have we accepted Christ? It is through Him and through faith in Him that that supreme gift of a living spirit is bestowed. And only when our spirits bear witness with that Spirit that we are the children of God, have we a right to look upon the text as pointing our duty and stimulating our hope. If our practical life is to be directed by the Spirit of God, He must enter into our spirits, and we shall not be in Him but in the measure that He is in us. Nor will our spirits be life because of righteousness unless He dwells in us and casts forth the works of the flesh. There will be no practical direction of our lives by the Spirit of God unless we make conscience of cultivating the reception of His life-giving and cleansing influences, and unless we have inward communion with our inward guide, intimate and frank, prolonged and submissive. If we are for ever allowing the light of our inward godliness to be blown about by gusts, or to show in our inmost hearts but a faint and flickering spark, how can we expect that it will shine safe direction on our outward path?

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## II. Such walking in the Spirit conquers the flesh.

We all know it as a familiar experience that the surest way to conquer any strong desire or emotion is to bring some other into operation. To concentrate attention on any overmastering thought or purpose, even if our object is to destroy it, is but too apt to strengthen it. And so to fix our minds on our own desires of the flesh, even though we may be honestly wishing to suppress them, is a sure way to invest them with new force; therefore the wise counsels of sages and moralists are, for the most part, destined to lead those who listen to them astray. Many a man has, in good faith, set himself to conquer his own evil lusts and has found that the nett result of his struggles has been to make the lusts more conspicuous and correspondingly more powerful. The Apostle knows a better way, which he has proved to his own experience, and now, with full confidence and triumph, presses upon his hearers. He would have them give up the monotonous and hopeless fight against the flesh and bring another ally into the field. His chief exhortation is a positive, not a negative one. It is vain to try to tie up men with restrictions and prohibitions, which when their desires are stirred will be burst like Samson's bonds. But if once the positive exhortation here is obeyed, then it will surely make short work of the desires and passions which otherwise men, for the most part, do not wish to get rid of, and never do throw off by any other method.

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We have pointed out that in our text to walk in the Spirit means to regulate the practical life by the Spirit of God, and that the 'desires of the flesh' mean the desires of the whole human nature apart from God. But even if we take the contrasted terms in their lower and commonly adopted sense, the text is true and useful. A cultivated mind habituated to lofty ideas, and quick to feel the nobility of 'spiritual' pursuits and possessions, will have no taste for the gross delights of sense, and will recoil with disgust from the indulgences in which more animal natures wallow. But while this is true, it by no means exhausts the great principle laid down here. We must take the contrasted terms in their fullest meaning if we would arrive at it. The spiritual life derived from Jesus Christ and lodged in the human spirit has to be guarded, cherished and made dominant, and then it will drive out the old. If the Spirit which is life because of righteousness is allowed free course in a human spirit, it will send forth its powers into the body which is 'dead because of sin,' will regulate its desires, and if needful will suppress them. And it is wiser and more blessed to rely on this overflowing influence than to attempt the hopeless task of coercing these desires by our own efforts.

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If we walk in the Spirit, we shall thereby acquire new tastes and desires of a higher kind which will destroy the lower. They to whom manna is sweet as angel's food find that they have lost their relish for the strong-smelling and rank-flavoured Egyptian leeks and garlic. A guest at a king's table will not care to enter a smoky hovel and will not be hungry for the food to be found there. If we are still dependent on the desires of the flesh we are still but children, and if we are walking

in the Spirit we have outgrown our childish toys. The enjoyment of the gifts which the Spirit gives deadens temptation and robs many things that were very precious of their lustre.

We may also illustrate the great principle of our text by considering that when we have found our supreme object there is no inducement to wander further in the search after delights. Desires are confessions of discontent, and though the absolute satisfaction of all our nature is not granted to us here, there is so much of blessedness given and so many of our most clamant desires fully met in the gift of life in Christ, that we may well be free from the prickings of desires which sting men into earnest seeking after often unreal good. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,' and surely if we have these we may well leave the world its troubled delights and felicities. Christ's joy remains in us and our joy is full. The world desires because it does not possess. When a deeper well is sunk, a shallower one is pretty sure to give out. If we walk in the Spirit we go down to the deepest water-holding stratum, and all the surface wells will run dry. [160]

Further, we may note, that this walking in the Spirit brings into our lives the mightiest motives of holy living and so puts a bridle on the necks and a bit in the mouths of our untamed desires. Holding fellowship with the divine Indweller and giving the reins into His strong hand, we receive from Him the spirit of adoption and learn that if we are children then are we heirs. Is there any motive that will so surely still the desires of the flesh and of the mind as the blessed thought that God is ours and we His? Surely their feet should never stumble or stray, who are aware of the Spirit of the Son bearing witness with their spirit that they are the children of God. Surely the measure in which we realise this will be the measure in which the desires of the flesh will be whipped back to their kennels, and cease to disturb us with their barks.

The whole question here as between Paul and his opponents just comes to this; if a field is covered with filth, whether is it better to set to work on it with wheel-barrows and shovels, or to turn a river on it which will bear away all the foulness? The true way to change the fauna and flora of a country is to change the level, and as the height increases they change themselves. If we desire to have the noxious creatures expelled from ourselves, we must not so much labour at their expulsion as see to the elevation of our own personal being and then we shall succeed. That is what Paul says, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

### III. Such a life is not freed from the necessity of struggle.

The highest condition, of course, would be that we had only to grow, not to fight. It will come some day that all evil shall drop away, and that to walk in the Spirit will need no effort, but that time has not come yet. So in addition to all that we have been saying in this sermon, we must further say that Paul's exhortation has always to be coupled with the other to fight the good fight. The highest word for our earthly lives is not 'victory' but 'contest.' We shall not walk in the Spirit without many a struggle to keep ourselves within that charmed atmosphere. The promise of our text is not that we shall not feel, but that we shall not fulfil, the desires of the flesh. [161]

Now this is very commonplace and threadbare teaching, but it is none the less important, and is especially needful to be strongly emphasised when we have been speaking as we have just been doing. It is a historical fact, illustrated over and over again since Paul wrote, and not without illustration to-day, that there is constant danger of lax morality infecting Christian life under pretence of lofty spirituality. So it must ever be insisted upon that the test of a true walking in the Spirit is that we are thereby fitted to fight against the desires of the flesh. When we have the life of the Spirit within us, it will show itself as Paul has said in another place by the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us, and by our 'mortifying the deeds of the body.' The gift of the Spirit does not take us out of the ranks of the combatants, but teaches us to fight, and arms us with its own sword for the conflict. There will be abundant opportunities of courage in attacking the sin that doth so easily beset us, and in resisting temptations which come to us by reason of our own imperfect sanctification. But there is all the difference between fighting at our own hand and fighting with the help of God's Spirit, and there is all the difference between fighting with the help of an unseen ally in heaven and fighting with a Spirit within us who helpeth our infirmities and Himself makes us able to contend, and sure, if we keep true to Him, to be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us. [162]

Such a conflict is a gift and a joy. It is hard but it is blessed, because it is an expression of our truest love; it comes from our deepest will; it is full of hope and of assured victory. How different is the painful, often defeated and monotonous attempt to suppress our nature by main force, and to tread a mill-horse round! The joyous freedom and buoyant hope taught us in the gospel way of salvation have been cramped and confined and all their glories veiled as by a mass of cobwebs spun beneath a golden roof, but our text sweeps away the foul obstruction. Let us learn the one condition of victorious conflict, the one means of subduing our natural humanity and its distracting desires, and let nothing rob us of the conviction that this is God's way of making men like angels. 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

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## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23. Meekness, temperance'—GAL. v. 22, 23.



'The fruit of the Spirit,' says Paul, not the fruits, as we might more naturally have expected, and as the phrase is most often quoted; all this rich variety of graces, of conduct and character, is thought of as one. The individual members are not isolated graces, but all connected, springing from one root and constituting an organic whole. There is further to be noted that the Apostle designates the results of the Spirit as fruit, in strong and intentional contrast with the results of the flesh, the grim catalogue of which precedes the radiant list in our text. The works of the flesh have no such unity, and are not worthy of being called fruit. They are not what a man ought to bring forth, and when the great Husbandman comes, He finds no fruit there, however full of activity the life has been. We have then here an ideal of the noblest Christian character, and a distinct and profound teaching as to how to attain it. I venture to take the whole of this list for my text, because the very beauty of each element in it depends on its being but part of a whole, and because there are important lessons to be gathered from the grouping.

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#### I. The threefold elements of character here.

It is perhaps not too artificial to point out that we have here three triads of which the first describes the life of the Spirit in its deepest secret; the second, the same life in its manifestations to men; and the third, that life in relation to the difficulties of the world, and of ourselves.

The first of these three triads includes love, joy, and peace, and it is not putting too great a strain on the words to point out that the source of all three lies in the Christian relation to God. They regard nothing but God and our relation to Him; they would be all the same if there were no other men in the world, or if there were no world. We cannot call them duties or virtues; they are simply the results of communion with God—the certain manifestations of the better life of the Spirit. Love, of course, heads the list, as the foundation and moving principle of all the rest. It is the instinctive act of the higher life and is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is the life sap which rises through the tree and given form to all the clusters. The remaining two members of this triad are plainly consequences of the first. Joy is not so much an act or a grace of character as an emotion poured into men's lives, because in their hearts abides love to God. Jesus Christ pledged Himself to impart His joy to remain in us, with the issue that our joy should be full. There is only one source of permanent joy which takes possession of and fills all the corners and crannies of the heart, and that is a love towards God equally abiding and all-pervasive. We have all known joys so perturbed, fragmentary and fleeting, that it is hard to distinguish them from sorrows, but there is no need that joys should be like green fruits hard and savourless and ready to drop from the tree. If God is 'the gladness of our joy,' and all our delights come from communion with Him, our joy will never pass and will fill the whole round of our spirits as the sea laves every shore.

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Peace will be built upon love and joy, if our hearts are ever turning to God and ever blessed with the inter-communion of love between Him and us. What can be strong enough to disturb the tranquillity that fills the soul independent of all externals? However long and close may be the siege, the well in the castle courtyard will be full. True peace comes not from the absence of trouble but from the presence of God, and will be deep and passing all understanding in the exact measure in which we live in, and partake of, the love of God.

The second triad is long-suffering, kindness, goodness. All these three obviously refer to the spiritual life in its manifestations to men. The first of them—long-suffering—describes the attitude of patient endurance towards inflictors of injury or enemies, if we come forth from the blessed fellowship with God, where love, joy, and peace reign unbroken, and are met with a cold gust of indifference or with an icy wind of hate. The reality of our happy communion and the depth of our love will be tested by the patience of our long-suffering. Love suffereth long, is not easily provoked, is not soon angry. He has little reason to suppose that the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, or that the Spirit of God is bringing forth fruit in him, who has not got beyond the stage of repaying hate with hate, and scorn with scorn. Any fool can answer a fool according to his folly, but it takes a wise and a good man to overcome evil with good, and to love them that hate; and yet how certainly the fires of mutual antagonism would go out if there were only one to pile on the fuel! It takes two to make a quarrel, and no man living under the influence of the Spirit of God can be one of such a pair.

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The second and third members of this triad—kindness, goodness, slide very naturally into one another. They do not only require the negative virtue of not retaliating, but express the Christian attitude towards all of meeting them, whatever their attitude, with good. It is possible that kindness here expresses the inward disposition and goodness, the habitual actions in which that disposition shows itself. If that be the distinction between them, the former would answer to benevolence and the latter to beneficence. These three graces include all that Paul presents as Christian duty to our fellows. The results of the life of the Spirit are to pass beyond ourselves and to influence our whole conduct. We are not to live only as mainly for the spiritual enjoyments of fellowship with God. The true field of religion is in moving amongst men, and the true basis of all service of men is love and fellowship with God.

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The third triad—faithfulness, meekness, temperance—seems to point to the world in which the Christian life is to be lived as a scene of difficulties and oppositions. The rendering of the Revised Version is to be preferred to that of the Authorised in the first of the three, for it is not faith in its theological sense to which the Apostle is here referring. Possibly, however, the meaning may be trustfulness just as in 1 Corinthians xiii. it is given as a characteristic of love that it 'believeth all things.' More probably, however, the meaning is faithfulness, and Paul's thought is that the Christian life is to manifest itself in the faithful discharge of all duties and the honest handling of

all things committed to it. Meekness even more distinctly contemplates a condition of things which is contrary to the Christian life, and points to a submissiveness of spirit which does not lift itself up against oppositions, but bends like a reed before the storm. Paul preached meekness and practised it, but Paul could flash into strong opposition and with a resonant ring in his voice could say 'To whom we gave place by subjection, No! not for an hour.' The last member of the triad—temperance—points to the difficulties which the spiritual life is apt to meet with in the natural passions and desires, and insists upon the fact that conflict and rigid and habitual self-control are sure to be marks of that life.

## II. The unity of the fruit.

We have already pointed out the Apostles remarkable use of the word 'fruit' here, by which he indicates that all the results of the life of the Spirit in the human spirit are to be regarded as a whole that has a natural growth. The foundation of all is of course that love which is the fulfilling of the law. It scarcely needs to be pointed out how love brings forth both the other elements of the first triad, but it is no less important to note that it and its two companions naturally lead on to the relations to men which make up the second triad. It is, however, worth while to dwell on that fact because there are many temptations for Christian people to separate between them. The two tables of the law are not seldom written so far apart that their unity ceases to be noted. There are many good people whose notions of religious duties are shut up in churches or chapels and limited to singing and praying, reading the Bible and listening to sermons, and who, even while they are doing good service in common life, do not feel that it is as much a religious duty to suppress the wish to retaliate as it is to sit in the sunshine of God's love and to feel Christ's joy and peace filling the heart. On the other hand many loud voices, some of them with great force of words and influence on the popular mind, are never wearied of preaching that Christianity is worn out as a social impulse, and that the service of man has nothing to do with the love of God. As plainly Paul's first triad naturally leads to his third. When the spiritual life has realised its deepest secret it will be strong to manifest itself as vigorous in reference to the difficulties of life. When that heart is blessed in its own settled love, abounding joy and untroubled peace, faithfulness and submission will both be possible and self-control will not be hard.

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## III. The culture of the tree which secures the fruit.

Can we suppose that the Apostle here is going back in thought to our Lord's profound teaching that every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit? The obvious felicity of that metaphor often conceals for us the drastic force of its teaching, it regards all a man's conduct as but the outcome of his character, and brushes aside as trifling all attempts at altering products, whilst the producer remains unaltered. Whether Paul was here alluding to a known saying of Jesus or no, he was insisting upon the very centre of Christian ethics, that a man must first be good in order to do good. Our Lord's words seemed to make an impossible demand—'Make the tree good'—as the only way of securing good fruit, and it was in accordance with the whole cast of the Sermon on the Mount that the means of realising that demand was left unexpressed. But Paul stood on this side of Pentecost, and what was necessarily veiled in Christ's earlier utterances stood forth a revealed and blessed certainty to him. He had not to say 'Make the tree good' and be silent as to how that process was to be effected; to him the message had been committed, 'The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.' There is but one way by which a corrupt tree can be made good, and that is by grafting into the wild briar stock a 'layer' from the rose. The Apostle had a double message to proclaim, and the one part was built upon the other. He had first to preach—and this day has first to believe that God has sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin—and then he had to proclaim that, through that mission, it became possible that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who 'walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.' The beginning, then, of all true goodness is to be sought in receiving into our corrupt natures the uncorrupted germs of the higher life, and it is only in the measure in which that Spirit of God moves in our spirits and, like the sap in the vine, permeates every branch and tendril, that fruit to eternal life will grow. Christian graces are the products of the indwelling divine life, and nothing else will succeed in producing them. All the preachings of moralists and all the struggles after self-improvement are reduced to impotence and vanity by the stern, curt sentence—'a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.' Surely it should come to us all as a true gospel when we feel ourselves foiled by our own evil nature in our attempts to be better, that the first thing we have to do is not to labour at either of the two impossible tasks of the making our bad selves good, or of the getting good fruits from bad selves, but to open our spirits through faith in Jesus for the entrance into us of His Spirit which will change our corruption into incorruption, and cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Shall we not seek to become recipient of that new life, and having received it, should we not give diligence that it may in us produce all its natural effects?

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These fruits, though they are the direct results of the indwelling Spirit and will never be produced without its presence, are none the less truly dependent upon our manner of receiving that Spirit and on our faithfulness and diligence in the use of its gifts. It is, alas! sadly too true, and matter of tragically common experience that instead of 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord' heavy with ruddy clusters, there are but dwarfed and scrubby bushes which have scarcely life enough to keep up a little show of green leaves and 'bring no fruit to perfection'. Would that so-called Christian people would more earnestly and searchingly ask themselves why it is that, with such possibilities offered to them, their actual attainments should be so small. They have a power which is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or think, and its actual effects on them are well on this side of both their petitions and their

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conceptions. There need be no difficulty in answering the question why our Christian lives do not correspond more closely to the Spirit that inspires them. The plain answer is that we have not cultivated, used, and obeyed Him. The Lord of the vineyard would less often have to ask 'Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' if we listened more obediently to the pathetic command which surely should touch a grateful heart—'Grieve not the holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

#### IV. How this is the only worthy fruit.

We have already pointed out that the Apostle in the preceding context varies his terms, and catalogues the actions that come from the godless self as works, whilst those which are the outcome of the Spirit are fruit. The distinction thus drawn is twofold. Multiplicity is contrasted with unity and fruit with works. The deeds of the flesh have no consistency except that of evil; they are at variance with themselves—a huddled mob without regularity or order; and they are works indeed, but so disproportionate to the nature of the doer and his obligations that they do not deserve to be called fruit. It is not to attach too much importance to an accidental form of speech to insist upon this distinction as intended to be drawn, and as suggesting to us very solemn thoughts about many apparently very active lives. The man who lives to God truly lives; the busiest life which is not rooted in Him and directed towards Him has so far missed its aim as to have brought forth no good fruit, and therefore to have incurred the sentence that it is cut down and cast into the fire. There is a very remarkable expression in Scripture, 'The unfruitful works of darkness,' which admits the busy occupation and energy of the doers and denies that all that struggling and striving comes to anything. Done in the dark, they seemed to have some significance, when the light comes in they vanish. It is for us to determine whether our lives shall be works of the flesh, full, perhaps, of a time of 'sound and fury,' but 'signifying nothing,' or whether they shall be fruits of the Spirit, which we 'who have gathered shall eat in the courts of His holiness.' They will be so if, living in the Spirit, we walk in the Spirit, but if we 'sow to the flesh' we shall have a harder husbandry and a bitterer harvest when 'of the flesh we reap corruption,' and hear the awful and unanswerable question, 'What fruit had ye then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?'

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## BURDEN-BEARING

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. . . . 5. For every man shall bear his own burden.'—GAL. vi. 25.

The injunction in the former of these verses appears, at first sight, to be inconsistent with the statement in the latter. But Paul has a way of setting side by side two superficially contradictory clauses, in order that attention may be awakened, and that we may make an effort to apprehend the point of reconciliation between them. So, for instance, you remember he puts in one sentence, and couples together by a 'for,' these two sayings: 'Work out your own salvation'; 'It is God that worketh in you.' So here he has been exhorting the Galatian Christians to restore a fallen brother. That is one case to which the general commandment, 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' is applicable.

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I cannot here enter on the intervening verses by which he glides from the one to the other of these two thoughts which I have coupled together, but I may just point out in a word the outline of his course of thought. 'Bear ye one another's burden,' says he; and then he thinks, 'What is it that keeps men from bearing each other's burdens?' Being swallowed up with themselves, and especially being conceited about their own strength and goodness. And so he goes on: 'If a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.' And what is the best cure for all these fancies inside us of how strong and good we are? To look at our work with an impartial and rigid judgment. It is easy for a man to plume himself on being good, and strong, and great; but let him look at what he has done, and try that by a high standard, and that will knock the conceit out of him. Or, if his work stands the test, then 'he shall have rejoicing in himself, and not' by comparing himself with other people. Two blacks do not make a white, and we are not to heighten the lustre of our own whiteness by comparing it with our neighbour's blackness. Take your act for what *it* is worth, apart altogether from what other people are. Do not say, 'God! I thank thee that I am not as other men are . . . or even as this publican'; but look to yourself. There is an occupation with self which is good, and is a help to brotherly sympathy.

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And so the Apostle has worked round, you see, to almost an opposite thought from the one with which he started. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' Yes, but a man's work is his own and nobody else's, and a man's character is his own and nobody else's, so 'every man shall bear his own burden.' The statements are not contradictory. They complete each other. They are the north and the south poles, and between them is the rounded orb of the whole truth. So then, let me point out that:

#### I. There are burdens which can be shared, and there are burdens which *cannot*.

Let us take the case from which the whole context has arisen. Paul was exhorting the Galatians, as I explained, in reference to their duty to a fallen brother; and he speaks of him—according to our version—as 'overtaken in a fault.' Now, that is scarcely his idea, I think. The phrase, as it stands in our Bibles, suggests that Paul is trying to minimise the gravity of the man's

offence; but just in proportion as he minimised its gravity would he weaken his exhortation to restore him. But what he is really doing is not to make as little as possible of the sin, but to make as much of it as is consistent with the truth. The word 'overtaken' suggests that some sin, like a tiger in a jungle, springs upon a man and overpowers him by the suddenness of the assault. The word so rendered may perhaps be represented by some such phrase as 'discovered'; or, if I may use a 'colloquialism,' if a man be caught 'red-handed.' That is the idea. And Paul does not use the weak word 'fault,' but a very much stronger one, which means stark staring sin. He is supposing a bad case of inconsistency, and is not palliating it at all. Here is a brother who has had an unblemished reputation; and all at once the curtain is thrown aside behind which he is working some wicked thing; and there the culprit stands, with the bull's-eye light flashed upon him, ashamed and trembling. Paul says, 'If you are a spiritual man'—there is irony there of the graver sort—'show your spirituality by going and lifting him up, and trying to help him.' When he says, 'Restore such an one,' he uses an expression which is employed in other connections in the New Testament, such as for mending the broken meshes of a net, for repairing any kind of damage, for setting the fractured bones of a limb. And that is what the 'spiritual' man has to do. He is to show the validity of his claim to live on high by stooping down to the man bemired and broken-legged in the dirt. We have come across people who chiefly show their own purity by their harsh condemnation of others' sins. One has heard of women so very virtuous that they would rather hound a fallen sister to death than try to restore her; and there are saints so extremely saintly that they will not touch the leper to heal him, for fear of their own hands being ceremonially defiled. Paul says, 'Bear ye one another's burdens'; and especially take a lift of each other's sin.

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I need not remind you how the same command applies in relation to pecuniary distress, narrow circumstances, heavy duties, sorrows, and all the 'ills that flesh is heir to.' These can be borne by sympathy, by true loving outgoing of the heart, and by the rendering of such practical help as the circumstances require.

But there are burdens that cannot be borne by any but the man himself.

There is the awful burden of personal existence. It is a solemn thing to be able to say 'I.' And that carries with it this, that after all sympathy, after all nestling closeness of affection, after the tenderest exhibition of identity of feeling, and of swift godlike readiness to help, each of us lives alone. Like the inhabitants of the islands of the Greek Archipelago, we are able to wave signals to the next island, and sometimes to send a boat with provisions and succour, but we are parted, 'with echoing straits between us thrown.' Every man, after all, lives alone, and society is like the material things round about us, which are all compressible, because the atoms that compose them are not in actual contact, but separated by slenderer or more substantial films of isolating air. Thus there is even in the sorrows which we can share with our brethren, and in all the burdens which we can help to bear, an element which cannot be imparted. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness', and neither 'stranger' nor other 'intermeddler' with the deepest fountains of 'its joy.'

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Then again, there is the burden of responsibility which can be shared by none. A dozen soldiers may be turned out to make a firing party to shoot the mutineer, and no man knows who fired the shot, but one man did fire it. And however there may have been companions, it was his rifle that carried the bullet, and his finger that pulled the trigger. We say, 'The woman that Thou gavest me tempted me, and I did eat.' Or we say, 'My natural appetites, for which I am not responsible, but Thou who madest me art, drew me aside, and I fell', or we may say, 'It was not I; it was the other boy.' And then there rises up in our hearts a veiled form, and from its majestic lips comes 'Thou art the man'; and our whole being echoes assent—*Mea culpa; mea maxima culpa*—'My fault, my exceeding great fault.' No man can bear that burden.

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And then, closely connected with responsibility there is another—the burden of the inevitable consequences of transgression, not only away yonder in the future, when all human bonds of companionship shall be broken, and each man shall 'give account of himself to God,' but here and now; as in the immediate context the Apostle tells us, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' The effects of our evil deeds come back to roost; and they never make a mistake as to where they should alight. If I have sown, I, and no one else, will gather. No sympathy will prevent to-morrow's headache after to-night's debauch, and nothing that anybody can do will turn the sleuth-hounds off the scent. Though they may be slow-footed, they have sure noses and deep-mouthed fangs. 'If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself, and if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it.' So there are burdens which can, and burdens which cannot, be borne.

II. Jesus Christ is the Burden-bearer for both sorts of burdens.

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,' not only as spoken by His lips, but as set forth in the pattern of His life. We have, then, to turn to Him, and think of Him as Burden-bearer in even a deeper sense than the psalmist had discerned, who magnified God as 'He who daily beareth our burdens.'

Christ is the Burden-bearer of our sin. 'The Lord hath laid'—or made to meet—'upon Him the iniquity of us all.' The Baptist pointed his lean, ascetic finger at the young Jesus, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God which beareth'—and beareth away—'the sin of the world.' How heavy the load, how real its pressure, let Gethsemane witness, when He clung to human companionship with the unutterably solemn and plaintive words, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch with Me.' He bore the burden of the world's sin.

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Jesus Christ is the bearer of the burden of the consequences of sin, not only inasmuch as, in

His sinless humanity, He knew by sympathy the weight of the world's sin, but because in that same humanity, by identification of Himself with us, deeper and more wonderful than our plummets have any line long enough to sound the abysses of, He took the cup of bitterness which our sins have mixed, and drank it all when He said, 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Consequences still remain: thank God that they do! 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou didst inflict retribution on their inventions.' So the outward, the present, the temporal consequences of transgression are left standing in all their power, in order that transgressors may thereby be scourged from their evil, and led to forsake the thing that has wrought them such havoc. But the ultimate consequence, the deepest of all, separation from God, has been borne by Christ, and need never be borne by us.

I suppose I need not dwell on the other aspects of this burden-bearing of our Lord, how that He, in a very deep and real sense, takes upon Himself the sorrows which we bear in union with, and faith on, Him. For then the griefs that still come to us, when so borne, are transmitted into 'light affliction which is but for a moment.' 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted.' Oh, brethren! you with sad hearts, you with lonely lives, you with carking cares, you with pressing, heavy duties, cast your burden on the Christ, and He 'will sustain you,' and sorrows borne in union with Him will change their character, and the very cross shall be wreathed in flowers. [178]

Jesus bears the burden of that solemn solitude which our personal being lays upon us all. The rest of us stand round, and, as I said, hoist signals of sympathy, and sometimes can stretch a brotherly hand out and grasp the sufferer's hand. But their help comes from without; Christ comes in, and dwells in our hearts, and makes us no longer alone in the depths of our being, which He fills with the effulgence and peace of His companionship. And so for sin, for guilt, for responsibility, for sorrow, for holiness, Christ bears our burdens.

Yes! And when He takes ours on His shoulders, He puts His on ours. 'My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' As the old mystics used to say, Christ's burden carries him that carries it. It may add a little weight, but it gives power to soar, and it gives power to progress. It is like the wings of a bird, it is like the sails of a ship.

III. Lastly, Christ's carrying our burdens binds us to carry our brother's!

'So fulfil the law of Christ.' There is a very biting sarcasm, and, as I said about another matter, a grave irony in Paul's use of that word 'law' here. For the whole of this Epistle has been directed against the Judaizing teachers who were desirous of cramming Jewish law down Galatian throats, and is addressed to their victims in the Galatian churches who had fallen into the trap. Paul turns round on them here, and says, 'You want law, do you? Well, if you *will* have it, here it is—the law of Christ.' Christ's life is our law. Practical Christianity is doing what Christ did. The Cross is not only the ground of our hope, but the pattern of our conduct. [179]

And, says Paul in effect, the example of Jesus Christ, in all its sweep, and in all the depth of it, is the only motive by which this injunction that I am giving you will ever be fulfilled. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' You will never do that unless you have Christ as the ground of your hope, and His great sacrifice as the example for your conduct. For the hindrance that prevents sympathy is self-absorption; and that natural selfishness which is in us all will never be exorcised and banished from us thoroughly, so as that we shall be awake to all the obligations to bear our brother's burdens, unless Christ has dethroned self, and is the Lord of our inmost spirits.

I rejoice as much as any man in the largely increased sense of mutual responsibility and obligation of mutual aid, which is sweetening society by degrees amongst us to-day, but I believe that no Socialistic or other schemes for the regeneration of society which are not based on the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ will live and grow. There is but one power that will cast out natural selfishness, and that is love to Christ, apprehending His Cross as the great example to which our lives are to be conformed. I believe that the growing sense of brotherhood amongst us, even where it is not consciously connected with any faith in Christianity, is, to a very large extent, the result of the diffusion through society of the spirit of Christianity, even where its body is rejected. Thank God, the river of the water of life can percolate through many a mile of soil, and reach the roots of trees far away, in the pastures of the wilderness, that know not whence the refreshing moisture has come. But on the wide scale be sure of this: it is the law of Christ that will fight and conquer the natural selfishness which makes bearing our brother's burdens an impossibility for men. Only, Christian people! let us take care that we are not robbed of our prerogative of being foremost in all such things, by men whose zeal has a less heavenly source than ours ought to have. Depend upon it, heresy has less power to arrest the progress of the Church than the selfish lives of Christian professors. [180]

So, dear friends, let us see to it that we first of all cast our own burdens on the Christ who is able to bear them all, whatever they are. And then let us, with lightened hearts and shoulders, make our own the heavy burdens of sin, of sorrow, of care, of guilt, of consequences, of responsibility, which are crushing down many that are weary and heavy laden. For be sure of this, if we do not bear our brother's burdens, the load that we thought we had cast on Christ will roll back upon ourselves. He is able to bear both us and our burdens, if we will let Him, and if we will fulfil that law of Christ which was illustrated in all His life, 'Who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,' and was written large in letters of blood upon that Cross where there was 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

## DOING GOOD TO ALL

'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all. . . .'—GAL. vi. 10.

'As we have therefore'—that points a finger backwards to what has gone before. The Apostle has been exhorting to unwearied well-doing, on the ground of the certain coming of the harvest season. Now, there is a double link of connection between the preceding words and our text; for 'do good' looks back to 'well-doing,' and the word rendered 'opportunity' is the same as that rendered 'season.' So, then, two thoughts arise—'well-doing' includes doing good to others, and is not complete unless it does. The future, on the whole, is the season of reaping; the present life on the whole is the season of sowing; and while life as a whole is the seed-time, in detail it is full of opportunities, openings which make certain good deeds possible, and which therefore impose upon us the obligation to do them. If we were in the habit of looking on life mainly as a series of opportunities for well-doing, how different it would be; and how different we should be!

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Now, this injunction is seen to be reasonable by every man, whether he obeys it or not. It is a commonplace of morality, which finds assent in all consciences, however little it may mould lives. But I wish to give it a particular application, and to try to enforce its bearing upon Christian missionary work. And the thought that I would suggest is just this, that no Christian man discharges that elementary obligation of plain morality, if he is indifferent to this great enterprise. 'As we have an opportunity, let us do good to all.' That is the broad principle, and one application is the duty of Christian men to diffuse the Gospel throughout the world.

I. Let me ask you to look at the obligation that is thus suggested.

As I have said, well-doing is the wider, and doing good to others the narrower, expression. The one covers the whole ground of virtue, the other declares that virtue which is self-regarding, the culture which is mainly occupied with self, is lame and imperfect, and there is a great gap in it, as if some cantle had been cut out of the silver disc of the moon. It is only full-orbed when in well-doing, and as a very large constituent element of it, there is included the doing good to others. That is too plain to need to be stated. We hear a great deal to-day about altruism. Well, Christianity preaches that more emphatically than any other system of thought, morals, or religion does. And Christianity brings the mightiest motives for it, and imparts the power by which obedience to that great law that every man's conscience responds to is made possible.

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But whilst thus we recognise as a dictate of elementary morality that well-doing must necessarily include doing good to others, and feel, as I suppose we all do feel, when we are true to our deepest convictions, that possessions of all sorts, material, mental, and all others, are given to us in stewardship, and not in absolute ownership, in order that God's grace in its various forms may fructify through us to all, my present point is that, if that is recognised as being what it is, an elementary dictate of morality enforced by men's relationships to one another, and sealed by their own consciences, there is no getting away from the obligation upon all Christian men which it draws after it, of each taking his share in the great work of imparting the gospel to the whole world.

For that gospel is our highest good, the best thing that we can carry to anybody. We many of us recognise the obligation that is devolved upon us by the possession of wealth, to use it for others as well as for ourselves. We recognise, many of us, the obligation that is devolved upon us by the possession of knowledge, to impart it to others as well as ourselves. We are willing to give of our substance, of our time, of our effort, to impart much that we have. But some of us seem to draw a line at the highest good that we have, and whilst responding to all sorts of charitable and beneficent appeals made to us, and using our faculties often for the good of other people, we take no share and no interest in communicating the highest of all goods, the good which comes to the man in whose heart Christ rests. It is our highest good, because it deals with our deepest needs, and lifts us to the loftiest position. The gospel brings our highest good, because it brings eternal good, whilst all other benefits fade and pass, and are left behind with life and the dead flesh. It is our highest good, because if that great message of salvation is received into a heart, or moulds the life of a nation, it will bring after it, as its ministers and results, all manner of material and lesser benefit. And so, giving Christ we give *our* best, and giving Christ we give the highest gift that a weary world can receive.

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Remember, too, that the impartation of this highest good is one of the main reasons why we ourselves possess it. Jesus Christ can redeem the world alone, but it cannot become a redeemed world without the help of His servants. He needs us in order to carry into all humanity the energies that He brought into the midst of mankind by His Incarnation and Sacrifice; and the cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Cavalry are not sufficient for the accomplishment of the purpose for which they respectively came to pass, without the intervention and ministry of Christian people. It was for this end amongst others, that each of us who have received that great gift into our hearts have been enriched by it. The river is fed from the fountains of the hills, in order that it may carry verdure and life whithersoever it goes. And you and I have been brought to the Cross of Christ, and made His disciples, not only in order that we ourselves might be blessed and quickened by the gift unspeakable, but in order that through us it may be communicated, just as each particle when leavened in the mass of the dough communicates its energy to its adjacent particle until the whole is leavened.

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I am afraid that indifference to the communication of the highest good, which marks sadly too many Christian professors in all ages, and in this age, is a suspicious indication of a very slight

realisation of the good for themselves. Luther said that justification was the article of a standing or a falling church. That may be true in the region of theology, but in the region of practical life I do not know that you will find a test more reliable and more easy of application than this, Does a man care for spreading amongst his fellows the gospel that he himself has received? If he does not, let him ask himself whether, in any real sense, he has it. 'Well-doing' includes doing good to others, and the possession of Christ will make it certain that we shall impart Him.

II. Notice the bearing of this elementary injunction upon the scope of the obligation.

'Let us do good to all men.' It was Christianity that invented the word 'humanity'; either in its meaning of the aggregate of men or its meaning of a gracious attitude towards them. And it invented the word because it revealed the thing on which it rests. 'Brotherhood' is the sequel of 'Fatherhood,' and the conception of mankind, beneath all diversities of race and culture and the like, as being an organic whole, knit together by a thousand mystical bands, and each atom of which has connection with, and obligations to, every other—that is a product of Christianity, however it may have been in subsequent ages divorced from a recognition of its source. So, then, the gospel rises above all the narrow distinctions which call themselves patriotism and are parochial, and it says that there is 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,' but all are one. Get high enough up upon the hill, and the hedges between the fields are barely perceptible. Live on the elevation to which the Gospel of Jesus Christ lifts men, and you look down upon a great prairie, without a fence or a ditch or a division. So my text comes with profound significance, 'Let us do good to all,' because all are included in the sweep of that great purpose of love, and in the redeeming possibilities of that great death on the Cross. Christ has swept the compass, if I may say so, of His love and work all round humanity; and are we to extend our sympathies or our efforts less widely? The circle includes the world; our sympathies should be as wide as the circle that Christ has drawn.

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Let me remind you, too, that only such a world-wide communication of the highest good that has blessed ourselves will correspond to the proved power of that Gospel which treats as of no moment diversities that are superficial, and can grapple with and overcome, and bind to itself as a crown of glory, every variety of character, of culture, of circumstance, claiming for its own all races, and proving itself able to lift them all. 'The Bread of God which came down from heaven' is an exotic everywhere, because it came down from heaven, but it can grow in all soils, and it can bring forth fruit unto eternal life everywhere amongst mankind. So 'let us do good to all.'

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And then we are met by the old objection, 'The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. Keep your work for home, that wants it.' Well! I am perfectly ready to admit that in Christian work, as in all others there must be division of labour, and that one man's tastes and inclinations will lead him to one sphere and one form of it; and another man's to another; and I am quite ready, not to admit, but strongly to insist, that, whatever happens, home is not to be neglected. 'All men' includes the slums in England as well as the savages in Africa, and it is no excuse for neglecting either of these departments that we are trying to do something in the other. But it is not uncharitable to say that the objection to which I am referring is most often made by one or other of two classes, either by people who do not care about the Gospel, nor recognise the 'good' of it at all, or by people who are ingenious in finding excuses for not doing the duty to which they are at the moment summoned. The people that do the one are the people that do the other. Where do you get your money from for home work? Mainly from the Christian Churches. Who is it that keeps up missionary work abroad? Mainly the Christian Churches. There is a vast deal of unreality in that objection. Just think of the disproportion between the embarrassment of riches in our Christian appliances here in England and the destitution in these distant lands. Here the ships are crammed into a dock, close up against one another, rubbing their yards upon each other; and away out yonder on the waters there are leagues of loneliness, where never a sail is seen. Here, at home, we are drenched with Christian teaching, and the Churches are competing with each other, often like rival tradespeople for their customers; and away out yonder a man to half a million is considered a fair allowance. 'Let us do good to all.'

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III. Lastly, note the bearing of this elementary precept on the occasions that rise for the discharge of the duty.

'As we have opportunity.' As I have already said, the Christian way to look at our circumstances is to regard them as openings for the exercise of Christian virtue, and therefore summonses to its discharge. And if we regarded our own position individually, so we should find that there were many, many doors that had long been opened, into which we had been too blind or too lazy, or too selfishly absorbed in our own concerns, to enter. The neglected opportunities, the beckoning doors whose thresholds we have never crossed, the good that we might have done and have not done—these are as weighty to sink us as the positive sins, the opportunities for which have appealed to our worse selves.

But I desire to say a word, not only about the opportunities offered to us individually, but about those offered to England for this great enterprise. The prophet of old represented the proud Assyrian conqueror as boasting, 'My hand hath gathered as a nest the riches of the peoples . . . and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.' It might be the motto of England to-day. It is not for nothing that we and our brethren across the Atlantic, the inheritors of the same faith and morals and literature, and speaking the same tongue, have had given to us the wide dominion that we possess, I know that England has not climbed to her place without many a crime, and that in her 'skirts is found the blood of poor innocents,' but yet we have that connection, for good or for evil, with subject races all over the earth. And I ask whether

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or not that is an opportunity that the Christian Church is bound to make use of. What have we been intrusted with it for? Commerce, dominion, the impartation of Western knowledge, literature, laws? Yes! Is that all? Are you to send shirting and not the Gospel? Are you to send muskets that will burst, and gin that is poison, and not Christianity? Are you to send Shakespeare, and Milton, and modern science, and Herbert Spencer, and not Evangelists and the Gospels? Are you to send the code of English law and not Christ's law of love? Are you to send godless Englishmen, 'through whom the name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles,' and are you not to send missionaries of the Cross? A Brahmin once said to a missionary, 'Look here! Your Book is a good Book. If you were as good as your Book you would make India Christian in ten years.'

Brethren! the European world to-day is fighting and scrambling over what it calls the unclaimed corners of the world; looking upon all lands that are uncivilised by Western civilisation either as markets, or as parts of their empire. Is there no other way of looking at the heathen world than that? How did Christ look at it? He was moved when He saw the multitudes as 'sheep having no shepherd.' Oh! if Christian men, as members of this nation, would rise to the height of Christ's place of vision, and would look at the world with His eyes, what a difference it would make! I appeal to you, Christian men and women, as members of this nation, and therefore responsible, though it may be infinitesimally, for what this nation is doing in the distant corners of the world, and urge on you that you are bound, so far as your influence goes, to protest against the way of looking at these heathen lands as existing to be exploited for the material benefit of these Western Powers. You are bound to lend your voice, however weak it may be, to the protests against the savage treatment of native races—against the drenching of China with narcotics, and Africa with rum; to try to look at the world as Christ looked at it, to rise to the height of that great vision which regards all men as having been in His heart when He died on the Cross, and refuses to recognise in this great work 'Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free.' We have awful responsibilities; the world is open to us. We have the highest good. How shall we obey this elementary principle of our text, unless we help as we can in spreading Christ's reign? Blessed shall we be if, and only if, we fill the seed-time with delightful work, and remember that well-doing is imperfect unless it includes doing good to others, and that the best good we can do is to impart the Unspeakable Gift to the men that need it.

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## THE OWNER'S BRAND

'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'—GAL. vi. 17.

The reference in these words is probably to the cruel custom of branding slaves as we do cattle, with initials or signs, to show their ownership. It is true that in old times criminals, and certain classes of Temple servants, and sometimes soldiers, were also so marked, but it is most in accordance with the Apostle's way of thinking that he here has reference to the first class, and would represent himself as the *slave* of Jesus Christ, designated as His by the scars and weaknesses which were the consequences of his apostolic zeal. Imprisonment, beating by the Jewish rod, shipwrecks, fastings, weariness, perils, persecutions, all these he sums up in another place as being the tokens by which he was approved as an apostle of Jesus Christ. And here he, no doubt, has the same thought in his mind, that his bodily weakness, which was the direct issue of his apostolic work, showed that he was Christ's. The painful infirmity under which, as we learn, he was more especially suffering, about the time of writing this letter, may also have been in his mind.

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All through this Epistle he has been thundering and lightning against the disputers of this apostolic authority. And now at last he softens, and as it were, bares his thin arm, his scarred bosom, and bids these contumacious Galatians look upon them, and learn that he has a right to speak as the representative and messenger of the Lord Jesus.

So we have here two or three points, I think, worth considering. First, think for a moment of the slave of Christ; then of the brands which mark the ownership; then of the glory in the servitude and the sign; and then of the immunity from human disturbances which that service gives. 'From henceforth let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

I. First, then, a word or two about that conception of the slave of Christ.

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It is a pity that our Bible has not rendered the title which Paul ever gives himself at the beginning of his letters, by that simple word 'slave,' instead of the feebler one, 'servant.' For what he means when he calls himself the 'servant of Jesus Christ' is not that he bore to Christ the kind of relation which servants among us bear to those who have hired and paid them, and to whom they have come under obligations of their own will which they can terminate at any moment by their own caprice; but that he was in the roughest and simplest sense of the word, Christ's slave.

What lies in that metaphor? Well, it is the most uncompromising assertion of the most absolute authority on the one hand, and claim of unconditional submission and subjection on the other.

The slave belonged to his master; the master could do exactly as he liked with him. If he killed him nobody had anything to say. He could set him to any task; he could do what he liked with any little possession or property that the slave seemed to have. He could break all his relationships,



and separate him from wife and kindred.

All that is atrocious and blasphemous when it is applied to the relations between man and man, but it is a blessed and magnificent truth when it is applied to the relations between a man and Christ. For this Lord has absolute authority over us, and He can do what He likes with everything that belongs to us; and we, and our duties, and our circumstances, and our relationships, are all in His hands, and the one thing that we have to render to Him is utter, absolute, unquestioning, unhesitating, unintermittent and unreserved obedience and submission. That which is abject degradation when it is rendered to a man, that which is blasphemous presumption when it is required by a man, that which is impossible, in its deepest reality, as between man and man, is possible, is blessed, is joyful and strong when it is required by, and rendered to, Jesus Christ. We are His slaves if we have any living relationship to Him at all. Where, then, in the Christian life, is there a place for self-will; where a place for self-indulgence; where for murmuring or reluctance; where for the assertion of any rights of my own as against that Master? We owe absolute obedience and submission to Jesus Christ.

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And what does the metaphor carry as to the basis on which this authority rests? How did men acquire slaves? Chiefly by purchase. The abominations of the slave market are a blessed metaphor for the deep realities of the Christian life. Christ has bought you for His own. The only thing that gives a human soul the right to have any true authority over another human soul is that it shall have yielded itself to the soul whom it would control. We must first of all give ourselves away before we have the right to possess, and the measure in which we give ourselves to another is the measure in which we possess another. And so Christ our Lord, according to the deep words of one of Paul's letters, 'gives Himself for us, that He might purchase unto Himself a people for His possession.' 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.'

Therefore the absolute authority, and unconditional surrender and submission which are the very essence of the Christian life, at bottom are but the corresponding and twofold effects of one thing, and that is love. For there is no possession of man by man except that which is based on love. And there is no submission of man to man worth calling so except that which is also based therein.

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'Thou hearts alone wouldst move;  
Thou only hearts dost love.'

The relation in both its parts, on the side of the Master and on the side of the captive bondsman, is the direct result and manifestation of that love which knits them together.

Therefore the Christian slavery, with its abject submission, with its utter surrender and suppression of mine own will, with its complete yielding up of self to the control of Jesus, who died for me; because it is based upon His surrender of Himself to me, and in its inmost essence it is the operation of love, is therefore co-existent with the noblest freedom.

This great Epistle to the Galatians is the trumpet call and clarion proclamation of Christian liberty. The breath of freedom blows inspiringly through it all. The very spirit of the letter is gathered up in one of its verses, 'I have been called unto liberty,' and in its great exhortation, 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.' It is then sufficiently remarkable and profoundly significant that in this very letter, which thus is the protest of the free Christian consciousness against all limitations and outward restrictions, there should be this most emphatic declaration that the liberty of the Christian is slavery and the slavery of the Christian is freedom. He is free whose will coincides with his outward law. He is free who delights to do what he must do. He is free whose rule is love, and whose Master is Incarnate Love. 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, Thou hast loosed my bands.' 'I bear in my body' the charter of my liberty, for I bear in my body the 'brand of the Lord Jesus.'

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II. And so now a word in the next place about these marks of ownership.

As I have said, the Apostle evidently means thereby distinctly the bodily weaknesses, and possibly diseases, which were the direct consequences of his own apostolic faithfulness and zeal. He considered that he proved himself to be a minister of God by his stripes, imprisonments, fastings, by all the pains and sufferings and their permanent consequences in an enfeebled constitution, which he bore because he had preached the Cross of Christ. He knew that these things were the result of his faithful ministry. He believed that they had been sent by no blundering, blind fate; by no mere secondary causes; but by his Master Himself, whose hand had held the iron that branded into the hissing flesh the marks of His ownership. He felt that by means of these he had been drawn nearer to his Master, and the ownership had been made more perfect. And so in a rapture of contempt of pain, this heroic soul looks upon even bodily weakness and suffering as being the signs that he belonged to Christ, and the means of that possession being made more perfect.

Now, what is all that to us Christian people who have no persecutions to endure, and none of whom I am afraid have ever worked hard enough for Christ to have damaged our health by it? Is there anything in this text that may be of general application to us all? Yes! I think so. Every Christian man or woman ought to bear, in his or her body, in a plain, literal sense, the tokens that he or she belongs to Jesus Christ. You ask me how? 'If thy foot or thine hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.'

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There are things in your physical nature that you have to suppress; that you have always to regulate and coerce; that you have sometimes entirely to cast away and to do without, if you mean to be Jesus Christ's at all. The old law of self-denial, of subduing the animal nature, its passions, appetites, desires, is as true and as needful to-day as it ever was; and for us all it is essential to the loftiness and purity of our Christian life that our animal nature and our fleshly constitution should be well kept down under heel and subdued. As Paul himself said in another place, 'I bring under my body, and I keep it in subjection, lest by any means I should myself, having proclaimed to others the laws of the contest, be rejected from the prize.' Oh, you Christian men and women! if you are not living a life of self-denial, if you are not crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts, if you are not bearing 'about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Christ may be manifested in your mortal body,' what tokens are there that you are Christ's slaves at all?

Then, besides this, we may expand the thought even further, and say that, in a very real sense, all the pains and sorrows and disappointments and afflictions that mainly touch our mortal part should be taken by us as, and made by us to be, the tokens that we belong to the Master.

But it is not only in limitations and restrictions and self-denials and pains that Christ's ownership of us ought to be manifested in our daily lives, and so by means of our mortal bodies, but if there be in our hearts a deep indwelling possession of the grace and sweetness of Christ, it will make itself visible, ay! even in our faces, and 'beauty born of' our communion with Him 'shall pass into' and glorify even rugged and care-lined countenances. There may be, and there ought to be, in all Christian people, manifestly visible the tokens of the indwelling serenity of the indwelling Christ. And it should not be left to some moment of rapture at the end of life, for men to look upon us, to behold our faces, 'as it had been the face of an angel,' but by our daily walk, by our countenances full of a removed tranquillity, and a joy that rises from within, men ought to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and it should be the truth—I bear in my body the tokens of His possession.

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III. Now, once more notice the glorying in the slavery and its signs.

'I bear,' says Paul; and he uses, as many of you may know, a somewhat remarkable word, which does not express mere bearing in the sense of toleration and patient endurance, although that is much; nor mere bearing in the sense of carrying, but implies bearing with a certain triumph as men would do who, coming back victorious from conflict, and being received into the city, were proud to show their scars, the honourable signs of their courage and constancy. So, with a triumph that is legitimate, the Apostle solemnly and proudly bears before men the marks of the Lord Jesus. Just as he says in another place:—'Thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us about in triumph in Jesus Christ,' He was proud of being dragged at the conqueror's chariot wheels, chained to them by the cords of love; and so he was proud of being the slave of Christ.

It is a degradation to a man to yield abject submission, unconditional service to another man. It is the highest honour of our natures so to bow before that dear Lord. To prostrate ourselves to Him is to lift ourselves high in the scale of being. The King's servant is every other person's master. And he that feels that he is Christ's, may well be, not proud but conscious, of the dignity of belonging to such a Lord. The monarch's livery is a sign of honour. In our old Saxon kingdom the king's menials were the first nobles. So it is with us. The aristocracy of humanity are the slaves of Jesus Christ.

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And let us be proud of the marks of the branding iron, whether they come in the shape of sorrows and pains, or otherwise. It is well that we should have to carry these. It is blessed, and a special mark of the Master's favour that He should think it worth His while to mark us as His own, by any sorrow or by any pain. Howsoever hot may be the iron, and howsoever deeply it may be pressed by His firm, steady, gentle hand upon the quivering flesh and the shrinking heart, let us be thankful if He, even by it, impresses on us the manifest tokens of ownership. Oh, brethren! if we could come to look upon sorrows and losses with this clear recognition of their source, meaning and purpose, they change their nature, the paradox is fulfilled that we do 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles.' 'I bear in my body,' with a solemn triumph and patient hope, 'the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

IV. And now, lastly, the immunity from any disturbance which men can bring, which these marks, and the servitude they express, secure.

'From henceforth let no man trouble me.' Paul claims that his apostolic authority, having been established by the fact of his sufferings for Christ, should give him a sacredness in their eyes; that henceforth there should be no rebellion against his teaching and his word. We may expand the thought to apply more to ourselves, and say that, in the measure in which we belong to Christ, and hear the marks of His possession of us, in that measure are we free from the disturbance of earthly influences and of human voices; and from all the other sources of care and trouble, of perturbation and annoyance, which harass and vex other men's spirits. 'Ye are bought with a price,' says Paul elsewhere. 'Be not the servants of men.' Christ is your Master; do not let men trouble you. Take your orders from Him; let men rave as they like. Be content to be approved by Him; let men think of you as they please. The Master's smile is life, the Master's frown is death to the slave; what matters it what other people may say? 'He that judgeth me is the Lord.' So keep yourselves above the cackle of 'public opinion'; do not let your creed be crammed down your throats even by a consensus of however venerable and grave human teachers. Take your directions from your Master, and pay no heed to other voices if they would command. Live to please Him, and do not care what other people think. You are Christ's servant;

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'let no man trouble' you.

And so it should be about all the distractions and petty annoyances that disturb human life and harass our hearts. A very little breath of wind will ruffle all the surface of a shallow pond, though it would sweep across the deep sea and produce no effect. Deepen your natures by close union with Christ, and absolute submission to Him, and there will be a great calm in them, and cares and sorrows, and all the external sources of anxiety, far away, down there beneath your feet, will 'show scarce so gross as beetles,' whilst you stand upon the high cliff and look down upon them all. 'From henceforth no man shall trouble me.' 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

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My brother! Whose marks do you bear? There are only two masters. If an eye that could see things as they are, were to go through this congregation, whose initials would it discern in your faces? There are some of us, I have no doubt, who in a very horrid sense bear in our bodies the marks of the idol that we worship. Men who have ruined their health by dissipation and animal sensualism—are there any of them here this morning? Are there none of us whose faces, whose trembling hands, whose diseased frames, are the tokens that they belong to the flesh and the world and the devil? Whose do *you* bear?

Oh! when one looks at all the faces that pass one upon the street—this all drawn with avarice and earthly-mindedness; that all bloated with self-indulgence and loose living—when one sees the mean faces, the passionate faces, the cruel faces, the vindictive faces, the lustful faces, the worldly faces, one sees how many of us bear in our bodies the marks of *another* lord. They have no rest day nor night who worship the beast; and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

I pray you, yield yourselves to your true Lord, so on earth you may bear the beginnings of the likeness that stamps you His, and hereafter, as one of His happy slaves, shall do priestly service at His throne and see His face, and His name shall be in your foreheads.

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## PHILIPPIANS

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### LOVING GREETINGS

'Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, 4. Always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, 5. For your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now; 6. Being confident of this very thing that He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ: 7. Even as it is right for me to be thus minded on behalf of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as, both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace. 8. For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus.'—PHIL. i. 1-8 (R.V.).

The bond between Paul and the church at Philippi was peculiarly close. It had been founded by himself, as is narrated at unusual length in the book of Acts. It was the first church established in Europe. Ten years had elapsed since then, possibly more. Paul is now a prisoner in Rome, not suffering the extremest rigour of imprisonment, but still a prisoner in his own hired house, accessible to his friends and able to do work for God, but still in the custody of soldiers, chained and waiting till the tardy steps of Roman law should come up to him, or perhaps till the caprice of Nero should deign to hear his cause. In that imprisonment we have his letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, which latter three are closely connected in time, the two former in subject, and the two latter in destination. This letter stands apart from those to the great Asiatic churches.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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#### 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.

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#### 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.'

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## A COMPREHENSIVE PRAYER

'And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; 10. So that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; 11. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.'—PHIL. i. 9-11 (R.V.).

What a blessed friendship is that of which the natural language is prayer! We have many ways, thank God, of showing our love and of helping one another, but the best way is by praying for one another. All that is selfish and low is purged out of our hearts in the act, suspicions and doubts fade away when we pray for those whom we love. Many an alienation would have melted like morning mists if it had been prayed about, added tenderness and delicacy come to our friendships so like the bloom on ripening grapes. We may test our loves by this simple criterion—Can we pray about them? If not, should we have them? Are they blessings to us or to others?

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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The prayer closes with a reference to the highest end of all our perfecting—the glory and praise of God; the former referring rather to the transcendent majesty of God in itself, and the latter to the exaltation of it by men. The highest glory of God comes from the gradual increase in redeemed men's likeness to Him. They are 'the secretaries of His praise,' and some portion of that great honour and responsibility lies on each of us. If all Christian men were what they all might be and should be, swift and sure in their condemnation of evil and loyal fidelity to conscience, and if their lives were richly hung with ripened clusters of the fruits of righteousness, the glory of God would be more resplendent in the world, and new tongues would break into praise of Him who had made men so like Himself.

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## A PRISONER'S TRIUMPH

'Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; 13. So that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole 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 shy 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,

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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.

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'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, sacrest 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.

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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

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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.

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### 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 never-ending 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.

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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.

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### 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?

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## A STRAIT BETWIXT TWO

'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. 25. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.'—PHIL. i. 21-25.

A preacher may well shrink from such a text. Its elevation of feeling and music of expression make all sermons on it sound feeble and harsh, like some poor shepherd's pipe after an organ. But, though this be true, it may not be useless to attempt, at least, to point out the course of thought in these grand words. They flow like a great river, which springs at first with a strong jet from some deep cave, then is torn and chafed among dividing rocks, and after a troubled middle course, moves at last with stately and equable current to the sea. The Apostle's thoughts and feelings have here, as it were, a threefold bent in their flow. First, we have the clear, unhesitating statement of the comparative advantages of life and death to a Christian man, when thought of as affecting himself alone. The one is Christ, the other gain. But we neither live nor die to ourselves; and no man has a right to think of life or death only from the point of view of his own advantage. So the problem is not so simple as it looked. Life here is the condition of fruitful labour here. There are his brethren and his work to think of. These bring him to a stand, and check the rising wish. He knows not which state to prefer. The stream is dammed back between rocks, and it chafes and foams and seems to lose its way among them. Then comes a third bend in the flow of thought and feeling, and he gladly apprehends it as his present duty to remain at his work. If his own joy is thereby less, his brethren's will be more. If he is not to depart and be with Christ, he will remain and be with Christ's friends, which is, in some sort, being with Him too. If he may not have the gain of death, he will have the fruit of work in life.

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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.

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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

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!

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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.

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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

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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 dreadful, 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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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

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done.'

The true attitude, then, for us is patient service till He withdraws us from the field. We do not count him a diligent servant who is always wearying for the hour of leaving off to strike. Be it ours to labour where He puts us, patiently waiting till 'death's mild curfew' sets us free from the long day's work, and sends us home.

Brethren! there are but two theories of life; two corresponding aspects of death. The one says, 'To me to live is Christ, and to die gain'; the other, 'To me to live is self, and to die is loss and despair.' One or other must be your choice. Which?

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## CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

'Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28. And in nothing terrified by your adversaries.'—PHIL. i. 27, 28.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that Philippi was the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a 'colony.' Now, the connection between a Roman colony and Rome was a great deal closer than that between an English colony and England. It was, in fact, a bit of Rome on foreign soil.

The colonists and their children were Roman citizens. Their names were enrolled on the lists of Roman tribes. They were governed not by the provincial authorities, but by their own magistrates, and the law to which they owed obedience was not that of the locality, but the law of Rome.

No doubt some of the Philippian Christians possessed these privileges. They knew what it was to live in a community to which they were less closely bound than to the great city beyond the sea. They were members of a mighty polity, though they had never seen its temples nor trod its streets. They lived in Philippi, but they belonged to Rome. Hence there is a peculiar significance in the first words of our text. The rendering, 'conversation,' was inadequate even when it was made. It has become more so now. The word then meant 'conduct.' It now means little more than words. But though the phrase may express loosely the Apostle's general idea, it loses entirely the striking metaphor under which it is couched. The Revised Version gives the literal rendering in its margin—'Behave as citizens'—though it adopts in its text a rendering which disregards the figure in the word, and contents itself with the less picturesque and vivid phrase—'let your manner of life be worthy.' But there seems no reason for leaving out the metaphor; it entirely fits in with the purpose of the Apostle and with the context.

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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.

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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. [236]

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. [237]

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. [238]

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.' [239]

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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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Such courage is a prophecy of victory. Such courage is based upon a sure hope. 'Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus as Saviour.' The little outlying colony in this far-off edge of the empire is ringed about by wide-stretching hosts of dusky barbarians. Far as the eye can reach their myriads cover the land, and the watchers from the ramparts might well be dismayed if they had only their own resources to depend on. But they know that the Emperor in his progress will come to this sorely beset outpost, and their eyes are fixed on the pass in the hills where they expect to see the waving banners and the gleaming spears. Soon, like our countrymen in Lucknow, they will hear the music and the shouts that tell that He is at hand. Then when He comes, He will raise the siege and scatter all the enemies as the chaff of the threshing-floor, and the colonists who held the post will go with Him to the land which they have never seen, but which is their home, and will, with the Victor, sweep in triumph 'through the gates into the city.'

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## A PLEA FOR UNITY

'If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, 2. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; 3. Doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; 4. Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.'—PHIL. ii. 1-4 (R.V.).

There was much in the state of the Philippian church which filled Paul's heart with thankfulness, and nothing which drew forth his censures, but these verses, with their extraordinary energy of pleading, seem to hint that there was some defect in the unity of heart and mind of members of the community. It did not amount to discord, but the concord was not as full as it might have been. There is another hint pointing in the same direction in the appeal to Paul's true yoke-fellow, in chapter iv., to help two good women who, though they had laboured much in the gospel, had not managed to keep 'of the same mind in the Lord,' and there is perhaps a still further indication that Paul's sensitive heart was conscious of the beginnings of strife in the air, in the remarkable emphasis with which, at the very outset of the letter, he over and over again pours out his confidence and affection on them 'all,' as if aware of some incipient rifts in their brotherhood. There are always forces at work which tend to part the most closely knit unities even when these are consecrated by Christian faith. Where there are no dogmatical grounds of discord, nor any open alienation, there may still be the beginnings of separation, and a chill breeze may be felt even when the sun is shining with summer warmth. Wasps are attracted by the ripest fruit.

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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.

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I. The motives and bonds of Christian unity.

It is not a pedantic dissection (and vivisection) of the Apostle's earnest words, if we point out that they fall into four clauses, of which the first and third ('any comfort in Christ, any fellowship



of the Spirit') urge the objective facts of Christian revelation, and the second and fourth ('any consolation of love, any tender mercies and compassions') put emphasis on the subjective emotions of Christian experience. We may lay the warmth of all of these on our own hearts, and shall find that these hearts will be drawn into the blessedness of Christian unity in the precise measure in which they are affected by them.

As to the first of them, it may be suggested that here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, the true idea of the word rendered 'comfort' is rather 'exhortation.' The Apostle is probably not so much pointing to the consolations for trouble which come from Jesus, as to the stimulus to unity which flows from Him. It would rather weaken the force of Paul's appeal, if the two former grounds of it were so nearly identical as they are, if the one is based upon 'comfort' and the other on 'consolation.' The Apostle is true to his dominant belief, that in Jesus Christ there lies, and from Him flows, the sovereign exhortation that rouses men to 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.' In Him we shall find in the measure in which we are in Him, the most persuasive of all exhortations to unity, and the most omnipotent of all powers to enforce it. Shall we not be glad to be in the flock of the Good Shepherd, and to preserve the oneness which He gave His life to establish? Can we live in Him, and not share His love for His sheep? Surely those who have felt the benediction of His breath on their foreheads when He prayed 'that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee,' cannot but do what is in them to fulfil that prayer, and to bring a little nearer the realisation of their Lord's purpose in it, 'that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.' Surely if we lay to heart, and enter into sympathy with, the whole life and death of Jesus Christ, we shall not fail to feel the dynamic power fusing us together, nor fail to catch the exhortation to unity which comes from the lips that said, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.'

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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.

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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

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oneness. The unity which Christian people have hitherto reached is at its best but a small are of the great circle which the Apostle drew, and none of us can read these fervid words without shame. His joy is not yet fulfilled.

That exhortation to be 'of the same mind,' not only points to a deep and vital unity, but suggests that the ground of the unity is to be found without us, in the common direction of our 'minds,' which means far more than popular phraseology means by it, to an external object. It is having our hearts directed to Christ that makes us one. He is the bond and centre of unity. We have just said that the object is external, but that has to be taken with a modification, for the true basis of unity is the common possession of 'Christ in us.' It is when we have this mind in us 'which was also in Christ Jesus,' that we have 'the same mind' one with another.

The very keynote of the letter is joy, as may be seen by a glance over it. He joys and rejoices with them all, but his cup is not quite full. One more precious drop is needed to make it run over. Probably the coldness which he had heard of between Euodias and Syntyche had troubled him, and if he could be sure of the Philippians' mutual love he would rejoice in his prison. We cannot tell whether that loving and careful heart is still aware of the fortunes of the Church, but we know of a more loving and careful heart which is, and we cannot but believe that the alienations and discords of His professed followers bring some shadow over the joy of Christ. Do we not hear His voice again asking, 'what was it that you disputed among yourselves by the way?' and must we not, like the disciples, 'hold our peace' when that question is asked? May we not hear a voice sweeter in its cadence, and more melting in its tenderness than Paul's, saying to us 'Fulfil ye My joy that ye be of the same mind.'

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### 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.

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The cure for all these evils is lowliness of mind. That is a Christian word. Used by Greek thinkers, it meant abjectness; and it is one conspicuous instance of the change effected in morals by Christian teaching that it has become the name of a virtue. We are to dwell not on our gifts but on our imperfections, and if we judge ourselves with constant reference to the standard in Christ's life, we shall need little more to bring us to our knees in true lowliness of mind. The man who has been forgiven so many talents will not be in a hurry to take his brother by the throat and leave the marks of his fingers for tenpence.

Christian unity is further broken by selfishness. To be absorbed in self is of course to have the heart shut to others. Our own interests, inclinations, possessions, when they assert themselves in our lives, build up impassable barriers between us and our fellows. To live to self is the real root of every sin as it is of all loveless life. The Apostle uses careful language: he admits the necessity for attention to our 'own things,' and only requires that we should look 'also' on the things of others. His cure for the hindrances to Christian unity is very complete, very practical, and very simple. Each counting other better than himself, and each 'looking also to the things of others' seem very homely and pedestrian virtues, but homely as they are we shall find that they grip us tight, if we honestly try to practise them in our daily lives, and we shall find also that the ladder which has its foot on earth has its top in the heavens, and that the practice of humility and unselfishness leads straight to having 'the mind which was also in Christ Jesus.'

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## THE DESCENT OF THE WORD

'Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus: 6. Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, 7. But emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; 8. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.'—PHIL. ii. 5-8 (R.V.).

The purpose of the Apostle in this great passage must ever be kept clearly in view. Our Lord's example is set forth as the pattern of that unselfish disregard of one's own things, and devotion

to the things of others, which has just been urged on the Philippians, and the mind which was in Him is presented as the model on which they are to fashion their minds. This purpose in some measure explains some of the peculiarities of the language here, and may help to guide us through some of the intricacies and doubtful points in the interpretation of the words. It explains why Christ's death is looked at in them only in its bearing upon Himself, as an act of obedience and of condescension, and why even that death in which Jesus stands most inimitable and unique is presented as capable of being imitated by us. The general drift of these verses is clear, but there are few Scripture passages which have evoked more difference of opinion as to the precise meaning of nearly every phrase. To enter on the subtle discussions involved in the adequate exposition of the words would far exceed our limits, and we must perforce content ourselves with a slight treatment of them, and aim chiefly at bringing out their practical side.

The broad truth which stands sun-clear amid all diverse interpretations is—that the Incarnation, Life, and Death are the great examples of living humility and self-sacrifice. To be born was His supreme act of condescension. It was love which made Him assume the vesture of human flesh. To die was the climax of His voluntary obedience, and of His devotion to us.

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#### 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.

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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.

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#### 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.

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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.

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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.

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The lifelong humbling of Himself was further manifested in His becoming 'obedient.' That obedience was, of course, to God. And here we cannot but pause to ask the question, How comes it that to the man Jesus obedience to God was an act of humiliation? Surely there is but one explanation of such a statement. For all men but this one to be God's slaves is their highest honour, and to speak of obedience as humiliation is a sheer absurdity.

Not only was the life of Jesus so perfect an example of unbroken obedience that He could safely front His adversaries with the question, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' and with the claim to 'do always the things that pleased Him,' but the obedience to the Father was perfected in His death. Consider the extraordinary fact that a man's death is the crowning instance of his humility, and ask yourselves the question, Who then is this who chose to be born, and stooped in the act of dying? His death was obedience to God, because by it He carried out the Father's will for the salvation of the world, His death is the greatest instance of unselfish self-sacrifice, and the loftiest example of looking on the 'things of others' that the world has ever seen. It dwindles in significance, in pathos, and in power to move us to imitation unless we clearly see the divine glory of the eternal Lord as the background of the gentle lowliness of the Man of Sorrows, and the Cross. No theory of Christ's life and death but that He was born for us, and died for us, either explains the facts and the apostolic language concerning them, or leaves them invested with their full power to melt our hearts and mould our lives. There is a possibility of imitating Him in the most transcendent of His acts. The mind may be in us which was in Christ Jesus. That it may, His death must first be the ground of our hope, and then we must make it the pattern of our lives, and draw from it the power to shape them after His blessed Example.

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'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. [261]

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. [262]

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. [263]

But Paul is not content with simply asserting the sovereign glory of the name of Jesus. He goes on to set it forth as being what no other name borne by man can be, the ground and object of

worship, when he declares, that 'in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' The words are quoted from the second Isaiah, and occur in one of the most solemn and majestic utterances of the monotheism of the Old Testament. And Paul takes these words, undeterred by the declaration which precede them, 'I Am am God and there is none else,' applies them to Jesus, to the manhood of our Lord. Bowing the knee is of course prayer, and in these great words the issue of the work of Jesus is unmistakably set forth, as not only being that He has declared God to men, who through Him are drawn to worship the Father, but that their emotions of love, reverence, worship, are turned to *Him*, though as the Apostle is careful immediately to note, they are not thereby intercepted from, but directed to, the glory of God the Father. In the eternities before His descent, there was equality with God, and when He returns, it is to the Father, who in Him has become the object of adoration, and round whose throne gather with bended knees all those who in Jesus see the Father.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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### 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

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'To us with Thy dear name are given,  
Pardon, and holiness, and heaven.'

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## WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'—PHIL. ii. 12, 13.

'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder!' Here are, joined together, in the compass of one practical exhortation, the truths which, put asunder, have been the war-cries and shibboleths of contending sects ever since. *Faith* in a finished salvation, and yet *work*; God working all *in me*, and yet I able and bound to work likewise; God upholding and sustaining His child to the very end; 'perfecting that which concerns him,' making his salvation certain and sure, and yet the Christian working 'with fear and trembling,' lest he should be a castaway and come short of the grace of God;—who does not recognise in these phrases the mottoes that have been written on the opposing banners in many a fierce theological battle, waged with much harm to both sides, and ending in no clear victory for either? Yet here they are blended in the words of one who was no less profound a thinker than any that have come after, and who had the gift of a divine inspiration to boot.

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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!

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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!'

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III. Lastly: The Christian has his salvation secured, and yet he is to fear and tremble.

'Fear and trembling.' 'But,' you may say, 'perfect love casts out fear.' So it does. The fear which has torment it casts out. But there is another fear in which there is no torment, brethren; a fear and trembling which is but another shape of confidence and calm hope! Scripture does tell us that the believing man's salvation is certain. Scripture tells us it is certain since he believes. And your faith can be worth nothing unless it have, bedded deep in it, that trembling distrust of your own power which is the pre-requisite and the companion of all thankful and faithful reception of God's infinite mercy. Your horizon ought to be full of fear, if your gaze be limited to yourself; but oh! above our earthly horizon with its fogs, God's infinite blue stretches untroubled by the mist and cloud which are earth-born. I, as working, have need to tremble and to fear, but I, as wrought upon, have a right to confidence and hope, a hope that is full of immortality, and an assurance which is the pledge of its own fulfilment. The worker is nothing, the Worker in him is all. Fear and trembling, when the thoughts turn to mine own sins and weaknesses, hope and confidence when they turn to the happier vision of God! 'Not I'—there is the tremulous self-distrust; 'the grace of God in me'—there is the calm assurance of victory. Forasmuch, then, as God worketh all things, be *you* diligent, faithful, prayerful, confident. Forasmuch as Christ has perfected the work for you, do *you* 'go on unto perfection.' Let all fear and trembling be yours, as a man; let all confidence and calm trust be yours as a child of God. Turn your confidence and your fears alike into prayer. 'Perfect, O Lord, that which concerneth me; forsake not the work of Thine own hands!'—and the prayer will evoke the merciful answer, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee God is faithful, who hath called you unto the Gospel of His Son; and *will* keep you unto His everlasting kingdom of glory.'

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## COPIES OF JESUS

'Do all things without murmurings and disputings; 15. That ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, 16. Holding forth the word of life.'—PHIL. ii. 14-16 (R.V.).

We are told by some superfine modern moralists, that to regard one's own salvation as the great work of our lives is a kind of selfishness, and no doubt there may be a colour of truth in the charge. At least the meaning of the injunction to work out our own salvation may have been sometimes so misunderstood, and there have been types of Christian character, such as the ascetic and monastic, which have made the representation plausible. I do not think that there is much danger of anybody so misunderstanding the precept now. But it is worthy of notice that there stand here side by side two paragraphs, in the former of which the effort to work out one's own salvation is urged in the strongest terms, and in the other of which the regard for others is predominant. We shall see that the connection between these two is not accidental, but that one great reason for working out our salvation is here set forth as being the good we may thereby do to others.

## I. We note the one great duty of cheerful yielding to God's will.

It is clear, I think, that the precept to do 'all things without murmurings and disputings' stands in the closest connection with what goes before. It is, in fact, the explanation of how salvation is to be wrought out. It presents the human side which corresponds to the divine activity, which has just been so earnestly insisted on. God works in us 'willing and doing,' let us on our parts do with ready submission all the things which He so inspires to will and to do. [282]

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). [283]

## II. The conscious aim in all our activity.

What God works in us for is that for which we too are to yield ourselves to His working, 'without murmurings and disputings,' and to co-operate with glad submission and cheerful obedience. We are to have as our distinct aim the building up of a character 'blameless and harmless, children of God without rebuke.' The blamelessness is probably in reference to men's judgment rather than to God's, and the difficulty of coming untarnished from contact with the actions and criticisms of a crooked and perverse generation is emphasised by the very fact that such blamelessness is the first requirement for Christian conduct. It was a feather in Daniel's cap that the president and princes were foiled in their attempt to pick holes in his conduct, and had to confess that they would not 'find any occasion against him, except we find it concerning the laws of his God.' God is working in us in order that our lives should be such that malice is dumb in their presence. Are we co-operating with Him? We are bound to satisfy the world's requirements of Christian character. They are sharp critics and sometimes unreasonable, but on the whole it would not be a bad rule for Christian people, 'Do what irreligious men expect you to do.' The worst man knows more than the best man practises, and his conscience is quick to decide the course for other people. Our weaknesses and compromises, and love of the world, might receive a salutary rebuke if we would try to meet the expectations which 'the man in the street' forms of us. [284]

'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. [285]

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.'

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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.

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'The word was flesh and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds.'

If we keep near to Him we too shall witness, and if our faces shine like Moses' as he came down from the mountain, or like Stephen's in the council chamber, men will 'take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus.'

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## A WILLING SACRIFICE

'That I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain neither labour in vain. 17. Yea, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. 18. And in the same manner do ye also joy, and rejoice with me.'—PHIL. ii. 16-18 (R.V.).

We come here to another of the passages in which the Apostle pours out all his heart to his beloved Church. Perhaps there never was a Christian teacher (always excepting Christ) who spoke more about himself than Paul. His own experience was always at hand for illustration. His preaching was but the generalisation of his life. He had felt it all first, before he threw it into the form of doctrine. It is very hard to keep such a style from becoming egotism.

This paragraph is remarkable, especially if we consider that this is introduced as a motive to their faithfulness, that thereby they will contribute to his joy at the last great testing. There must have been a very deep love between Paul and the Philippians to make such words as these true and appropriate. They open the very depths of his heart in a way from which a less noble and fervid nature would have shrunk, and express his absolute consecration in his work, and his eager desire for their spiritual good, with such force as would have been exaggeration in most men.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 ministrations, 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

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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.

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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.

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The Philippians might well have thought, as we all are tempted to think, that the withdrawal of those round whom our hearts desperately cling, and who seem to us to bring love and trust nearer to us, can only be loss, but surely the example in our text may well speak to our hearts of the way in which we should look at death for ourselves, and for our dearest. Their very withdrawal may send us nearer to Christ. The holy memories which linger in the sky, like the radiance of a sunken sun, may clothe familiar truths with unfamiliar power and loveliness. The thought of where the departed have gone may lift our thoughts wistfully thither with a new feeling of home. The path that they have trodden may become less strange to us, and the victory that they have won may prophesy that we too shall be 'more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.' So the mirror broken may turn us to the sun, and the passing of the dearest that can die may draw us to the Dearer who lives.

Paul, living, rejoiced in the prospect of death. We may be sure that he rejoiced in it no less dead than living. And we may permissibly think of this text as suggesting how

'The saints on earth and all the dead  
But one communion make,'

and are to be united in one joy. They rejoice for their own sakes, but their joy is not self-absorbed, and so putting them farther away from us. They look back upon earth, the runnings and labourings of the unforgotten life here; and are glad to bear in their hearts the indubitable token that they have 'not run in vain neither laboured in vain.' But surely the depth of their own repose will not make them indifferent to those who are still in the midst of struggle and toil, nor the fulness of their own felicity make them forget those whom they loved of old, and love now with the perfect love of Heaven. It is hard for us to rise to complete sympathy with these serenely blessed spirits, but yet we too should rejoice. Not indeed to the exclusion of sorrow, nor to the neglect of the great purpose to be effected in us by the withdrawal, as by the presence of dear ones, the furtherance of our faith, but having made sure that that purpose has been effected in us, we should then give solemn thanksgivings if it has. It is sad and strange to think of how opposite are the feelings about their departure, of those who have gone and of those who are left. Would it not be better that we should try to share theirs and so bring about a true union? We may be sure that their deepest desire is that we should. If some lips that we shall never hear any more, till we come where they are, could speak, would not they bring to us as their message from Heaven, Do 'ye also joy and rejoice with me'?

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## PAUL AND TIMOTHY

'But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20. For I have no man like-minded, who will care truly for your state. 21. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. 22. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in furtherance of the gospel. 23. Him therefore I hope to send forthwith, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me: 24. But I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall come shortly.'—PHIL. ii. 19-24 (R.V.).

Like all great men Paul had a wonderful power of attaching followers to himself. The mass of the planet draws in small aerolites which catch fire as they pass through its atmosphere. There is no more beautiful page in the history of the early Church than the story of Paul and his companions. They gathered round him with such devotion, and followed him with such love. They were not small men. Luke and Aquila were among them, and they would have been prominent in most companies, but gladly took a place second to Paul. He impressed his own personality and his type of teaching on his followers as Luther did on his, and as many another great teacher has done. [296]

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. [297]

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. [298]

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.'

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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.'

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## 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.

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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?

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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.'

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### 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.

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Christian unity is very good and infinitely to be desired, but the true field on which it should display itself is that of united work for the common Lord. The men who have marched side by side through a campaign are knit together as nothing else would bind them. Even two horses drawing one carriage will have ways and feelings and a common understanding, which they would never have attained in any other way. There is nothing like common work for clearing away mists. Much so-called Christian sympathy and like-mindedness are something like the penal cranks that used to be in jails, which generated immense power on this side of the wall but ground out nothing on the other.

Let us not forget that in the field of Christian service there is room for all manner of workers, and that they are associated, however different their work. Paul often calls Timothy his 'fellow-labourer,' and once gives him the eulogium, 'he worketh the work of the Lord as I also do.' Think of the difference between the two men in age, endowment, and sphere! Apparently Timothy at first had very subordinate work taking John Mark's place, and is described as being one of those who 'ministered' to Paul. It is the cup of cold water over again. All work done for the same Lord, and with the same motive is the same; 'he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' When Paul associates Timothy with himself he is copying from afar off his Lord, who lets us think of even our poor deeds as done by those whom He does not disdain to call His fellow-workers. It would be worth living for if, at the last, He should acknowledge us, and say even of us, 'he hath served with Me in the Gospel.'

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## PAUL AND EPAPHRODITUS

'But I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need. 26. Since he longed after you all, and was sore troubled, because ye had heard that he was

sick. 27. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28. I have sent him therefore the more diligently, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. 29. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy; and hold such in honour: 30. Because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me.'—PHIL. ii. 25-30 (R.V.).

Epaphroditus is one of the less known of Paul's friends. All our information about him is contained in this context, and in a brief reference in Chapter iv. His was a singular fate—to cross Paul's path, and for one short period of his life to be known to all the world, and for all the rest before and after to be utterly unknown. The ship sails across the track of the moonlight, and then vanishes ghost-like into darkness. Of all the inhabitants of Philippi at that time we know the names of but three, Euodias, 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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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Epaphroditus, in supplying that, made his work in a real sense theirs. All the loving thoughts, and all the material expressions of them which Epaphroditus brought to Paul were fragrant with the perfume of the Philippians' love, 'an odour of a sweet smell, acceptable' to Paul as to Paul's Lord.

We briefly note some general lessons which may be suggested by the picture of Epaphroditus as he stands by the side of Paul.

The first one suggested is the very familiar one of the great uniting principle which a common faith in Christ brought into action. Think of the profound clefts of separation between the Macedonian and the Jew, the antipathies of race, the differences of language, the dissimilarities of manner, and then think of what an unheard-of new thing it must have been that a Macedonian should 'serve' a Jew! We but feebly echo Paul's rapture when he thought that there was 'neither Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free, but all were one in Christ Jesus,' and for all our talk about the unity of humanity and the like, we permit the old gulfs of separation to gape as deeply as ever. Dreadnoughts are a peculiar expression of the brotherhood of men after nineteen centuries of so-called Christianity.

The terms in which the work of Epaphroditus is spoken of by Paul are very significant. He has no hesitation in describing the work done for himself as 'the work of Christ,' nor in using, as the name for it, the word ('service'), which properly refers to the service rendered by priestly hands. Work done for Paul was done for Jesus, and that, not because of any special apostolic closeness of relation of Paul to Jesus, but because, like all other Christians, he was one with his Lord. 'The cup of cold water' given 'in the name of a disciple' is grateful to the lips of the Master. We have no reason to suppose that Epaphroditus took part with Paul in his more properly apostolic work, and the fact that the purely material help, and pecuniary service which most probably comprised all his 'ministering,' is honoured by Paul with these lofty designations, carries with it large lessons as to the sanctity of common life. All deeds done from the same motive are the same, however different they may be in regard to the material on which they are wrought. If our hearts are set to 'hallow all we find,' the most secular duties will be acts of worship. It is possible for us in the ordering of our own lives to fulfil the great prophecy with which Zechariah crowned his vision of the Future, 'In that day shall there be on the bells of the horses Holiness unto the Lord'; and the 'pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.'

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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.

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Epaphroditus but passes across the illuminated disc of the lantern for a moment, and we have scarcely time to catch a glimpse of his face before it is lost to us. He and all his brethren are gone, but his name lives for ever, and Paul's praise of him and of his work outshines all else remembered of the city, where conquerors once reigned, and outside whose walls was fought a battle that decided for a time the fate of the world.

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## PREPARING TO END

'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome, but for you it is safe. 2. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision: 3. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.'—PHIL. iii. 1-3 (R.V.).

The first words of the text show that Paul was beginning to think of winding up his letter, and the preceding context also suggests that. The personal references to Timothy and Epaphroditus would be in their appropriate place near the close, and the exhortation with which our text begins is also most fitting there, for it is really the key-note of the letter. How then does he come to desert his purpose? The answer is to be found in his next advice, the warning against the Judaising teachers who were his great antagonists all his life. A reference to them always roused him, and here the vehement exhortation to mark them well and avoid them opens the flood-gates. Forgetting all about his purpose to come to an end, he pours out his soul in the long and precious passage which follows. Not till the next chapter does he get back to his theme in the reiterated exhortation (iv. 4), 'Rejoice in the Lord alway; again I will say, rejoice.' This outburst is very remarkable, for its vehemence is so unlike the tone of the rest of the letter. That is calm, joyous, bright, but this is stormy and impassioned, full of flashing and scathing words, the sudden thunder-storm breaks in on a mellow, autumn day, but it hurtles past and the sun shines out

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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 Judaizers? 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—

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#### 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.'

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#### 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.

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#### 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

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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'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

We have said that the final result set forth here by Paul is, 'We worship by the Spirit of God.' The expression translated worship is the technical word for rendering priestly service. Just as Paul has asserted that uncircumcised Christians, not circumcised Jews, are the true circumcision, so he asserts that they are the true priests, and that these officials in the outward temple at Jerusalem have forfeited the title, and that it has passed over to the despised followers of the despised Nazarene. If we have 'no confidence in the flesh,' and are 'glorying in Christ Jesus,' we are all priests of the most high God. 'Worship in the Spirit' is our function and privilege. The externals of ceremonial worship dwindle into insignificance. They may be means of helping, or they may be means of hindering, the 'worship in the Spirit,' which I venture to think all experience shows is the more likely to be pure and real, the less it invokes the aid of flesh and sense. To make the senses the ladder for the soul by which to climb to God is quite as likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder as up it. Aesthetic aids to worship are crutches which keep a lame soul lame all its days.

Such worship is the obligation as well as the prerogative of the Christian. We have no right to say that we have truly forsaken confidence in ourselves, and are truly 'glorying' in Christ Jesus, unless our daily life is communion with God, and all your work 'worshipping by the Spirit of God.' Such communion and worship are possible for those, and for those only, who have 'no confidence in the flesh' and who 'glory in Christ Jesus.'

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## THE LOSS OF ALL

'Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung.'—PHIL. iii. 4-8 (R.V.).

We have already noted that in the previous verses the Apostle is beginning to prepare for closing his letter, but is carried away into the long digression of which our text forms the beginning. The last words of the former verse open a thought of which his mind is always full. It is as when an excavator strikes his pickaxe unwittingly into a hidden reservoir and the blow is followed by a rush of water, which carries away workmen and tools. Paul has struck into the very deepest thoughts which he has of the Gospel and out they pour. That one antithesis, 'the loss of all, the gain of Christ,' carried in it to him the whole truth of the Christian message. We may well ask ourselves what are the subjects which lie so near our hearts, and so fill our thoughts, that a chance word sets us off on them, and we cannot help talking of them when once we begin.

The text exemplifies another characteristic of Paul's, his constant habit of quoting his own experience as illustrating the truth. His theology is the generalisation of his own experience, and yet that continual autobiographical reference is not egotism, for the light in which he delights to present himself is as the recipient of the great grace of God in pardoning sinners. It is a result of the complete saturation of himself with the Gospel. It was to him no mere body of principles or thoughts, it was the very food and life of his life. And so this characteristic reveals not only his natural fervour of character, but the profound and penetrating hold which the Gospel had on his whole being.

In our text he presents his own experience as the type to which ours must on the whole be conformed. He had gone through an earthquake which had shattered the very foundations of his life. He had come to despise all that he had counted most precious, and to clasp as the only true treasures all that he had despised. With him the revolution had turned his whole life upside down. Though the change cannot be so subversive and violent with us, the forsaking of self-confidence must be as real, and the clinging to Jesus must be as close, if our Christianity is to be fervid and dominant in our lives.

### I. The treasures that were discovered to be worthless.

We have already had occasion in the previous sermon to refer to Paul's catalogue of 'things that were gain' to him, but we must consider it a little more closely here. We may repeat that it is important for understanding Paul's point of view to note that by 'flesh' he means the whole self considered as independent of God. The antithesis to it is 'spirit,' that is humanity regenerated and vitalised by Divine influence. 'Flesh,' then, is humanity not so vitalised. That is to say, it is 'self,' including both body and emotions, affections, thoughts, and will.

As to the points enumerated, they are those which made the ideal to a Jew, including purity of race, punctilious orthodoxy, flaming zeal, pugnacious antagonism, and blameless morality. With reference to race, the Jewish pride was in 'circumcision on the eighth day,' which was the exclusive privilege of one of pure blood. Proselytes might be circumcised in later life, but one of

the 'stock of Israel' only on the 'eighth day.' Saul of Tarsus had in earlier days been proud of his tribal genealogy, which had apparently been carefully preserved in the Gentile home, and had shared ancestral pride in belonging to the once royal tribe, and perhaps in thinking that the blood of the king after whom he was named flowed in his veins. He was a 'Hebrew of the Hebrews,' which does not mean, as it is usually taken to do, intensely, superlatively Hebrew, but simply is equivalent to 'myself a Hebrew, and come from pure Hebrew ancestors on both sides.' Possibly also the phrase may have reference to purity of language and customs as well as blood. These four items make the first group. Paul still remembers the time when, in the blindness which he shared with his race, he believed that these wholly irrelevant points had to do with a man's acceptance before God. He had once agreed with the Judaizers 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.

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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!

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## 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.

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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.

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We are not to suppose that the act of renunciation must be completed before a second act of possession is begun. That is the error of many ascetic books. The two go together, and abandonment in order to win merges into abandonment because we have won. The strongest power to make renunciation possible is 'the expulsive power of a new affection.' When the heart is filled with love to Christ there is no sense of 'loss,' but only of 'exceeding gain,' in casting away all things for Him.

### III. The continuous repetition of the discovery.

Paul compares his present self with his former Christian self, and with a vehement 'Yea, verily,' affirms his former judgment, and reiterates it in still more emphatic terms. It is often easy to depreciate the treasures which we possess. They sometimes grow in value as they slip from our hands. It is not usual for a man who has 'suffered the loss of all things' to follow their disappearance by counting them 'but dung.' The constant repetition through the whole Christian course of the depreciatory estimate of grounds of confidence is plainly necessary. There are subtle temptations to the opposite course. It is hard to keep perfectly clear of all building on our own blamelessness or on our connection with the Christian Church, and we have need ever to renew the estimate which was once so epoch-making, and which 'cast down all our imaginations and high things.' If we do not carefully watch ourselves, the whispering tempter that was silenced will recover his breath again, and be once more ready to drop into our ears his poisonous suggestions. We have to take pains and 'give earnest heed' to the initial, revolutionary estimate, and to see that it is worked out habitually in our daily lives. It is a good exchange when we count 'all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.'

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## THE GAIN OF CHRIST

'That I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'—PHIL. iii. 8, 9 (R.V.).

It is not everybody who *can* say what is his aim in life. Many of us have never thought enough about it to have one beyond keeping alive. We lose life in seeking for the means of living. Many of us have such a multitude of aims, each in its turn drawing us, that no one of them is predominant and rules the crowd. There is no strong hand at the tiller, and so the ship washes about in the trough of the waves.

It is not everybody who *dares* to say what is his aim in life. We are ashamed to acknowledge even to ourselves what we are not at all ashamed to do. Paul knew his aim, and was not afraid to speak it. It was high and noble, and was passionately and persistently pursued. He tells us it here, and we can see his soul kindling as he speaks. We may note how there is here the same double reference as we found in the previous verses, gaining Christ corresponding to the previous loss for Christ, and the later words of our text being an expansion of the 'excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.' No man will ever succeed in any life's purpose, unless like Paul he is enthusiastic about it. If his aim does not rouse his fervour when he speaks of it, he will never accomplish it. We may just remark that Paul does not suppose his aim to be wholly unattained, even although he does not count himself to 'have apprehended.' He knows that he has gained Christ, and is 'found in Him,' but he knows also that there stretch before him the possibilities of infinite increase.

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### 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

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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.'

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## 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.

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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.

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### 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 overconfident 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.

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We should ever have before us that hour, and our life's aim should ever definitely include the final scrutiny in which many a hidden thing will come to light, many a long-lost thing be found, and each man's ultimate place in relation to Jesus Christ will be freed from uncertainties, ambiguities, hypocrisies, and disguises, and made plain to all beholders. In that great day of 'finding,' some of us will have to ask with sinking hearts, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' and others will break forth into the glad acclaim, 'I have found Him,' or rather 'been found of Him.'

So we have before us the one reasonable aim for a man to have Christ, to be found in Him, to have His righteousness. It is reasonable, it is great enough to absorb all our energies, and to reward them. It will last a lifetime, and run on undisturbed beyond life. Following it, all other aims will fall into their places. Is this my aim?

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## SAVING KNOWLEDGE

'That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead.'—PHIL. iii. 10-11 (R.V.).

We have seen how the Apostle was prepared to close his letter at the beginning of this chapter, and how that intention was swept away by the rush of new thoughts. His fervid faith caught fire when he turned to think of what he had lost, and how infinitely more he had gained in Christ. His wealth is so great that it cannot be crowded into the narrow space of one brief sentence, and after all the glowing words which precede our text, he feels that he has not yet adequately set forth either his present possessions or his ultimate aims. So here he continues the theme which might have seemed most fully dealt with in the great thoughts that occupied us in the former sermon, but which still wait to be completed here. They are most closely connected with the former, and the unity of the sentence is but a parallel to the oneness of the idea. The elements of our present text constitute a part of the Apostle's aim in life, and may be dealt with as such.

### I. Paul's life's aim was the knowledge of Christ.

That sounds an anti-climax after 'Gain' and 'Be in Him.' These phrases seem to express a much more intimate relation than this, but we must note that it is no mere theoretical or intellectual knowledge which is intended. Such knowledge would need no surrender or suffering 'the loss of all things.' We can only buy the knowledge of Christ at such a rate, but we can buy knowledge about Him very much cheaper. Such knowledge would not be worth the price; it lies on the surface of the soul, and does nothing. Many a man amongst us has it, and it is of no use to him. If Paul had undergone all that he had undergone and sacrificed all that he had given up, and for his reward had only gained accurate knowledge about Christ, he had certainly wasted his life and made a bad bargain. But as always, so here, to know means knowledge based upon experience. Did Christ mean that a correct creed was eternal life when He said, 'This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent?' Did Paul mean the dry light of the understanding when he prayed that the Ephesians might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, in order to be filled with all the fulness of God? Clearly we have to go much deeper down than that superficial interpretation in order to reach the reality of the New Testament conception of knowledge. It is co-extensive with life, and is built upon inward experience. In a word, it is one aspect of winning Jesus. It is consciousness contemplating its riches, counting its gains. As a man knows the bliss of parental or wedded love only by having it, or as he knows the taste of wine only by drinking it, or the glory of music only by hearing it, and the brightness of the day only by seeing it, so we know Christ only by winning Him. There must first be the perception and possession by sense or emotion, and then the reflection on the possession by understanding. This applies to all religious truth. It must be possessed ere it be fully known. Like the new name written upon the Apocalyptic stone, 'No one knoweth but he that receiveth it.'

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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.

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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.

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It has a revealing power in regard to the condition of humanity in death. It is the one fact which establishes immortality, and which not only establishes it, but casts some light on the manner of it. The possibility of personal life after, and therefore, in death, the unbroken continuity of being, the possibility of a resurrection, and a glorifying of this corporeal frame, with all the far-reaching consequences of these truths in the triumph they give over death, in the support and substance they afford to the else-shadowy idea of immortality, in the lofty place which they assign to the bodily frame, and the conception which they give of man's perfection as consisting of body, soul, and spirit—these thoughts have flashed light into all the darkness of the grave, have narrowed to a mere strip of coast-line the boundaries of the kingdom of death, have proclaimed love as the victor in her contest with that shrouded horror. The basis of them all is

Christ's Resurrection; its power in this respect is the power to illuminate, to console, to certify, to wrench the sceptre from the hands of death, and to put it in the pierced hands of the Living One that was dead, and is Lord both of the dead and the living.

Further, the Resurrection is treated by Paul as having a power for our justification, in so far as the risen Lord bestows upon us by His risen life the blessings of His righteousness. Paul also represents the Resurrection of Christ as having the power of quickening our Spiritual life. I need not spend time in quoting the many passages where His rising from the dead, and His life after the Resurrection, are treated as the type and pattern of our lives: and are not only regarded as pattern, but are also regarded as the power by which that new life of ours is brought about. It has the power of raising us from the death of sin, and bringing us into a new life of the Spirit. And finally, the Resurrection of Christ is regarded as having the power of raising His servants from the grave to the full possession of His own glorious life, and so it is the power of our final victory over death.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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#### 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.

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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.

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So that resurrection from the dead is the end of a supernatural life begun here and destined to culminate hereafter. It is the last step in the manifestation of our being in Christ, and so is being prepared for here by every step in advance in gaining Jesus. It should ever be before every Christian soul that participation in Christ hereafter is conditioned by its progress in likeness to Him here. The Resurrection from the dead is not a gift which can be bestowed apart from a man's moral state. If he dies having had no knowledge by experience of the power of Christ's Resurrection, there is nothing in the fact of death to give him that knowledge, and it is impossible to bring 'any means' to bear on him by which he will attain unto the 'resurrection from the dead.'

If God could give that gift irrespective of a man's relations to Jesus, He would give it to all. Let us ask ourselves, then, is it not worth making the dominant aim of our lives the same as that of Paul's? How stands our account then? Are we not wise traders presenting a good balance-sheet when we show entered on the one side the loss of all things, and on the other the gaining of Christ, and the attaining the resurrection from the dead, the perfect transformation of body, soul, and spirit, into the perfect likeness of the perfect Lord? Does the other balance-sheet show the man as equally solvent who enters on one side the gain of a world, and on the other a Christless life, to be followed by a resurrection in which is no joy, no advance, no life, but which is a resurrection of judgment? May we all be found in Him, and attain to the resurrection from the dead!

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## LAI D 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—

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### 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.

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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

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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.

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Let us take the clauses *seriatim*, and say a word about each of them. 'That I may know Him.' Ah! there is a great deal more in Jesus Christ than a man sees when he first sees Him through his tears and his fears, and apprehends Him as the Saviour of his soul, and the sacrifice on whom the burden and the guilt of his sins were laid. We must begin there, as I believe. But woe to us if we stop there. There is far more in Christ than that; although all that is in Him is included in that, yet you have to dig deep before you find all that is included in it. You have to live with Him day by day, and year by year, and to learn to know Him as we learn to know husbands and wives, by continual intercourse, by continual experience of a sweet and unfailing love, by many a sacred hour of interchange of affection and reception of gifts and counsels. It is only thus that we learn to know what Jesus Christ is. When He lays hold of us, He comes like the angel that came to Peter in the prison in the dark and awoke him out of his sleep and said 'Rise! and follow me.' It is only when we get out into the street, and have been with Him for awhile, and the daylight begins to stream in, that we see clearly the face of our Deliverer, and know Him for all that He is. This knowledge is not the sort of knowledge that you can get by thinking, or out of a book. It is the knowledge of experience. It is the knowledge of love, it is the knowledge of union, and it is in order that we may know Christ that He lays his hand upon us.

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'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.

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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

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.

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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.

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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.'

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Dear friends—and especially you younger Christians—Christ has laid hold of you. Well and good! that is the beginning. He has laid hold of you for an end. That end will not be reached without your effort, and that effort must be perpetual. It is a life-long task. Ay! and even up



yonder the apprehending will be incomplete. Like those mathematical lines that ever approximate to a point which they never reach, we shall through Eternity be, as it were, rising, in ascending and ever-closer drawing spirals, to that great Throne, and to Him that sits upon it. So that, striking out the humble 'may' from our text, the rest of it describes the progressive blessedness of the endless life in the heavens, as truly as it does the progressive duty of the Christian life here, and the glorified flock that follows the Lamb in the heavenly pastures may each say: I follow after in order to apprehend that 'for which,' long ago and down amidst the dim shadows of earth, 'I was apprehended of Christ Jesus.'

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## THE RACE AND THE GOAL

'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize.'—PHIL. iii. 13, 14.

This buoyant energy and onward looking are marvellous in 'Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.' Forgetfulness of the past and eager anticipation for the future are, we sometimes think, the child's prerogatives. They may be ignoble and puerile, or they may be worthy and great. All depends on the future to which we look. If it be the creation of our fancies, we are babies for trusting it. If it be, as Paul's was, the revelation of God's purposes, we cannot do a wiser thing than look.

The Apostle here is letting us see the secret of his own life, and telling us what made him the sort of Christian that he was. He counsels wise obliviousness, wise anticipation, strenuous concentration, and these are the things that contribute to success in any field of life. Christianity is the perfection of common sense. Men become mature Christians by no other means than those by which they become good artisans, ripe scholars, or the like. But the misery is that, though people know well enough that they cannot be good carpenters, or doctors, or fiddlers without certain habits and practices, they seem to fancy that they can be good Christians without them.

So the words of my text may suggest appropriate thoughts on this first Sunday of a new year. Let us listen, then, to Paul telling us how he came to be the sort of Christian man he was.

I. First, then, I would say, make God's aim your aim.

Paul distinguishes here between the 'mark' and the 'prize.' He aims at the one for the sake of the other. The one is the object of effort; the other is the sure result of successful effort. If I may so say, the crown hangs on the winning post; and he who touches the goal clutches the garland.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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## THE SOUL'S PERFECTION

'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.'—PHIL. iii. 15.

'As many as be perfect'; and how many may they be? Surely a very short bede-roll would contain their names; or would there be any other but the Name which is above every name upon it? Part of the answer to such a question may be found in observing that the New Testament very frequently uses the word to express not so much the idea of moral completeness as that of physical maturity. For instance, when Paul says that he would have his converts to be '*men* in understanding,' and when the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of 'them that are of full age,' the same word is used as this 'perfect' in our text. Clearly in such cases it means 'full grown,' as in contrast with 'babes,' and expresses not absolute completeness, but what we may term a relative perfection, a certain maturity of character and advanced stage of Christian attainment, far removed from the infantile epoch of the Christian life.

Another contribution to the answer may be found in observing that in this very context these 'perfect' people are exhorted to cultivate the sense of not having 'already attained,' and to be constantly reaching forth to unattained heights, so that a sense of imperfection and a continual effort after higher life are parts of Paul's 'perfect man.' And it is to be still further noticed that on the same testimony 'perfect' people may probably be 'otherwise minded'; by which we understand not divergently minded from one another, but 'otherwise' than the true norm or law of life would prescribe, and so may stand in need of the hope that God will by degrees bring them into conformity with His will, and show them 'this,' namely, their divergence from His Pattern for them.

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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

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'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.

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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. [373]

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. [374]

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. [375]

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! [376]

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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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So for us, the true temper is confidence in His power and will, an earnest waiting on Him, a brave forward yearning hope blended with a lowly consciousness of imperfection, which is a spur not a clog, and vigorous increasing efforts to bring into life and character the fulness and beauty of God. Presumption should be as far from us as despair—the one because we have not already attained, the other because 'God will reveal even this unto us.' Only let us keep in mind the caution which the Apostle, knowing the possible abuses which might gather round His teaching, has here attached to it, 'Nevertheless'—though all which I have been saying is true, it is only on this understanding—'Whereto we have already attained, by the same let us walk.' God will perfect that which concerneth you if—and only if—you go on as you have begun, if you make your creed a life, if you show what you are. If so, then all the rest is a question of time. A has been said, and Z will come in its proper place. Begin with humble trust in Christ, and a process is commenced which has no natural end short of that great hope with which this chapter closes, that the change which begins in the deepest recesses of our being, and struggles slowly and with many interruptions, into partial visibility in our character, shall one day triumphantly irradiate our whole nature out to the very finger-tips, and 'even the body of our humiliation shall be fashioned like unto the body of Christ's glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.'

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## THE RULE OF THE ROAD

'Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.'—PHIL. iii. 16.

Paul has just been laying down a great principle—viz. that if the main direction of a life be right, God will reveal to a man the points in which he is wrong. But that principle is untrue and dangerous, unless carefully guarded. It may lead to a lazy tolerance of evil, and to drawing such inferences as, 'Well! it does not much matter about strenuous effort, if we are right at bottom it will all come right by-and-by,' and so it may become a pillow for indolence and a clog on effort. This possible abuse of a great truth seems to strike the Apostle, and so he enters here, with this 'Nevertheless,' a *caveat* against that twist of his meaning. It is as if he said, 'Now mind! while all that is perfectly true, it is true on conditions; and if they be not attended to, it is not true.' God will reveal to a man the things in which he is wrong if, and only if, he steadfastly continues in the course which he knows and sees to be right. Present attainments, then, are in some sense a standard of duty, and if we honestly and conscientiously observe that standard we shall get light as we journey. In this exhortation of the Apostle's there are many exhortations wrapped up; and in trying to draw them out I venture to adhere to the form of exhortation for the sake of impressiveness and point.

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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

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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IV. Lastly, cherish the consciousness of imperfection and the confidence of success.

'Whereunto we have attained' implies that that is only a partial possession of a far greater whole. The road is not finished at the stage where we stand. And, on the other hand, 'by the same let us walk,' implies that beyond the present point the road runs on equally patent and pervious to our feet. These two convictions, of my own imperfection and of the certainty of my reaching the great perfectness beyond, are indispensable to all Christian progress. As soon as a man begins to think that he has realised his ideal, Good-bye! to all advance. The artist, the student, the man of business, all must have gleaming before them an unattained object, if they are ever to be stirred to energy and to run with patience the race that is set before them.

The more distinctly that a man is conscious of his own imperfection in the Christian life, the more he will be stung and stirred into earnestness and energy of effort, if only, side by side with the consciousness of imperfection, there springs triumphant the confidence of success. That will give strength to the feeble knees; that will lift a man buoyant over difficulties; that will fire desire; that will stimulate and solidify effort; that will make the long, monotonous stretches of the road easy, the rough places plain, the crooked things straight. Over all reluctant, repellent duties it will bear us, in all weariness it will re-invigorate us. We are saved by hope, and the more brightly there burns before us, not as a tremulous hope, but as a future certainty, the thought, 'I

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shall be like Him, for I shall see Him as He is,' the more shall I set my face to the loved goal and my feet to the dusty road, and 'press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God.' Christian progress comes out of the clash and collision of these two things, like that of flint and steel—the consciousness of imperfection and the confidence of success. And they who thus are driven by the one and drawn by the other, in all their consciousness of failure are yet blessed, and are crowned at last with that which they believed before it came.

'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house'—the prize won is heaven. But 'blessed are they in whose hearts are the ways'—the prize desired and strained after is heaven upon earth. We may all live a life of continual advancement, each step leading upwards, for the road always climbs, to purer air, grander scenery, and a wider view. And yonder, progress will still be the law, for they who here have followed the Lamb, and sought to make Him their pattern and Commander, will there 'follow Him whithersoever He goeth.' If here we walk according to that 'whereunto we have attained,' there He shall say, 'They will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

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## WARNINGS AND HOPES

'Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them which so walk even as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose God is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto Himself.'—PHIL. iii. 17-21 (R.V.).

There is a remarkable contrast in tone between the sad warnings which begin this section and the glowing hopes with which it closes, and that contrast is made the more striking when we notice that the Apostle binds the gloom of the one and the radiance of the other by 'For,' which makes the latter the cause of the former.

The exhortation in which the Apostle begins by proposing himself as an example sounds strange on any lips, and, most of all, on his, but we have to note that the points in which he sets himself up as a pattern are obviously those on which he touched in the preceding outpouring of his heart, and which he has already commended to the Philippians in pleading with them to be 'thus minded.' What he desires them to copy is his self-distrust, his willingness to sacrifice all things to win Christ, his clear sense of his own shortcomings, and his eager straining towards as yet unreached perfection. His humility is not disproved by such words, but what is remarkable in them is the clear consciousness of the main direction and set of his life. We may well hesitate to take them for ours, but every Christian man and woman ought to be able to say this much. If we cannot in some degree declare that we are so walking, we have need to look to our foundations. Such words are really in sharp contrast to those in which Jesus is held forth as an example. Notice, too, how quickly he passes to associate others with him, and to merge the 'Me' into 'Us.' We need not ask who his companions were, since Timothy is associated with him at the beginning of the letter.

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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.

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### 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. [394]

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. [395]

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.' [396]

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.

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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.

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But we must not forget that the Apostle regards even this overwhelming change as but part of a mightier process, even the universal subjection of all things unto Christ Himself. The Emperor reduces the whole world to subjection, and the glorifying of the body as the climax of the universal subjugation represents it as the end of the process of assimilation begun in this mortal life. There is no possibility of a resurrection unto life unless that life has been begun before death. That ultimate glorious body is needed to bring men into correspondence with the external universe. As is the locality so is the body. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. This whole series of thoughts makes our glorious resurrection the result not of death, but of Christ's living power on His people. It is only in the measure in which He lives in us and we in Him, and are partaking by daily participation in the power of His Resurrection, that we shall be made subjects of the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself, and finally be conformed to the body of His glory.

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## ***EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE***

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

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### **PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, FIRST AND SECOND THESSALONIANS AND FIRST TIMOTHY**

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[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,

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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?

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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.'

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Steadfast continuance of personal union with Jesus Christ, extending through all the faculties of our nature, and into every corner of our lives, is the kernel of this great exhortation. And he who fulfils it has little left unfulfilled. Of course, as I said, there is a very strong suggestion that such 'standing' is by no means an easy thing, or accomplished without much antagonism; and it may help us if, just for a moment, we run over the various forms of resistance which they have to overcome who stand fast. Nothing stands where it is without effort. That is true in the moral world, although in the physical world the law of motion is that nothing moves without force being applied to it.

What are the things that would shake our steadfastness, and sweep us away? Well, there are, first, the tiny, continuously acting, and therefore all but omnipotent forces of daily life—duties, occupations, distractions of various kinds—which tend to move us imperceptibly away, as by the slow sliding of a glacier, from the hope of the Gospel. There is nothing so strong as a gentle pressure, equably and unintermittently applied. It is far mightier than thrusts and hammerings and sudden assaults. I stood some time ago looking at the Sphinx. The hard stone—so hard that it turns the edge of a sculptor's chisel—has been worn away, and the solemn features all but obliterated. What by? The continual attrition of multitudinous grains of sand from the desert. The little things that are always at work upon us are the things that have most power to sweep us away from our steadfastness in Jesus Christ.

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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.'

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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*.

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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 dawns 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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.

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'Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved.'

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## NAMES IN THE BOOK OF LIFE

'Other my fellow-labourers whose names are in the book of life.'—PHIL. iv. 3.

Paul was as gentle as he was strong. Winsome courtesy and delicate considerateness lay in his character, in beautiful union with fiery impetuosity and undaunted tenacity of conviction. We have here a remarkable instance of his quick apprehension of the possible effects of his words, and of his nervous anxiety not to wound even unreasonable susceptibilities.

He had had occasion to mention three of his fellow-workers, and he wishes to associate with them others whom he does not purpose to name. Lest any of these should be offended by the omission, he soothes them with this graceful, half-apologetic reminder that their names are inscribed on a better page than his. It is as if he had said, 'Do not mind though I do not mention you individually. You can well afford to be anonymous in my letter since your names are inscribed in the Book of Life.'

*There* is a consolation for obscure good people, who need not expect to live except in two or three loving hearts; and whose names will only be preserved on mouldering tombstones that will convey no idea to the reader. We may well dispense with other commemoration if we have this.

Now, this figure of the Book of Life appears in Scripture at intervals, almost from the beginning to the very end. The first instance of its occurrence is in that self-sacrificing, intercessory prayer of Moses, when he expressed his willingness to be 'blotted out of Thy book' as an atonement for the sin of Israel. Its last appearance is when the Apocalyptic Seer is told that none enter into the City of God come down from Heaven 'save those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.' Of course in plain English the expression is just equivalent to being a real disciple of Jesus Christ. But then it presents that general notion under a metaphor which, in its various aspects, has a very distinct and stringent bearing upon our duties as well as upon our blessings and our hopes. I, therefore, wish to work out, as well as I can, the various thoughts suggested by this emblem.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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 nebulæ 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.

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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.

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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.

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I have but one or two more words to add. Remember that Paul had no hesitation in taking upon himself to declare that the names of these anonymous saints in Philippi were written in the Book of Life. What business had he to do that? Had he looked over the pages, and marked the entries? He had simply the right of estimating their state by their conduct. He saw their works; he knew that these works were the fruit of their faith; and he knew that, therefore, their faith had united them to Jesus Christ. So, Christian men and women, two things: show your faith by your works, and make it impossible for anybody that looks at you to doubt what King you serve, and to what city you belong. Again, do not ask, 'Is my name there?' Ask, 'Have I faith, and does my faith work the works that belong to the Kingdom of Heaven?'

Remember that names can be blotted out of the book. The metaphor has often been pressed into the service of a doctrine of unconditional and irreversible predestination. But rightly looked at, it points in the opposite direction. Remember Moses's agonised cry, 'Blot me out of Thy book'; and the Divine answer, 'Him that sinneth against Me, his name will I blot out of My book.' And remember that it is only to 'him that overcometh' that the promise is made, 'I will not blot him out.' We are made partakers of Christ if we 'hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.'

Remember that it depends upon ourselves whether our names are there or not. John Bunyan describes the armed man who came up to the table, where the man with the book and the inkhorn was seated, and said: 'Set down my name.' And you and I may do that. If we cast ourselves on Jesus Christ and yield our wills to be guided by Him, and give our lives for His service, then He will write our names in His book. If we trust Him we shall be citizens of the City of God; shall be filled with the life of Christ; shall be objects of an individualising love and care; shall be accepted in that Day; and shall enter in through the gates into the city. 'They that forsake me shall be written on the earth'; and there wiped out as are the children's scribbles on the sand when the ocean come up. They that trust in Jesus Christ shall have their names written in the Book of Life; graven on the High Priest's breastplate, and inscribed on His mighty hand and His faithful heart.

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## REJOICE EVERMORE

'Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice!'—PHIL. iv. 4.

It has been well said that this whole epistle may be summed up in two short sentences: 'I rejoice'; 'Rejoice ye!' The word and the thing crop up in every chapter, like some hidden brook, ever and anon sparkling out into the sunshine from beneath the shadows. This continual refrain of gladness is all the more remarkable if we remember the Apostle's circumstances. The letter shows him to us as a prisoner, dependent on Christian charity for a living, having no man like-minded to cheer his solitude; uncertain as to 'how it shall be with me,' and obliged to contemplate the possibility of being 'offered,' or poured out as a libation, 'on the sacrifice and service of your faith.' Yet out of all the darkness his clear notes ring jubilant; and this sunny epistle comes from the pen of a prisoner who did not know but that to-morrow he might be a martyr.

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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,

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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.

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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 unflinching 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 'Lucifers' 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.

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II. So, secondly, notice that this joy is capable of being continuous.

'Rejoice in the Lord *always*,' says Paul. That is a hard nut to crack. I can fancy a man saying, 'What is the use of giving me such exhortations as this? My gladness is largely a matter of temperament, and I cannot rule my moods. My gladness is largely a matter of circumstances, and I do not determine these. How vain it is to tell me, when my heart is bleeding, or beating like a sledge-hammer, to be glad!' Yes! Temperament has a great deal to do with joy; and circumstances have a great deal to do with it; but is not the mission of the Gospel to make us masters of temperament, and independent of circumstances? Is not the possibility of living a life that has no dependence upon externals, and that may persist permanently through all varieties of mood, the very gift that Christ Himself has come to bestow upon us—bringing us into communion with Himself, and so making us lords of our own inward nature and of externals: so that 'though the fig-tree shall not blossom, and there be no fruit in the vine,' yet we may 'rejoice in the Lord, and be glad in the God of our salvation.' If a ship has plenty of water in its casks or tanks in its hold, it does not matter whether it is sailing through fresh water or salt. And if you and I have that union with Jesus Christ of which my text speaks, then we shall be, not wholly, but with indefinite increase of approximation towards the ideal, independent of circumstances and masters of our temperaments. And so it is possible, if not absolutely to reach this fair achievement of an unbroken continuity of gladness, at least to bring the lucent points so close to

one another as that the intervals of darkness between shall be scarcely visible, and the whole will seem to form one continuous ring of light.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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Surely, dear friends, if there be offered to us, as there is, a gladness which is perfect in the two points in which all other gladness fails, it is wise for us to take it. The commonplace which all men believe, and most men neglect, is that nothing short of an infinite Person can fill a finite soul. And if we look for our joys anywhere but to Jesus Christ, there will always be some bit of our nature which, like the sulky elder brother in the parable, will scowl at the music and dancing, and refuse to come in. All earthly joys are transient as well as partial. Is it not better that we should have gladness that will last as long as we do, that we can hold in our dying hands, like a flower clasped in some cold palm laid in the coffin, that we shall find again when we have crossed the bar, that will grow and brighten and broaden for evermore? My joy shall remain . . . full.

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## HOW TO OBEY AN IMPOSSIBLE INJUNCTION

'Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.'—PHIL. iv. 6.

It is easy for prosperous people, who have nothing to trouble them, to give good advices to suffering hearts; and these are generally as futile as they are easy. But who was he who here said to the Church at Philippi, 'Be careful for nothing?' A prisoner in a Roman prison; and when Rome fixed its claws it did not usually let go without drawing blood. He was expecting his trial, which might, so far as he knew, very probably end in death. Everything in the future was entirely dark and uncertain. It was this man, with all the pressure of personal sorrows weighing upon him, who, in the very crisis of his life, turned to his brethren in Philippi, who had far fewer causes of anxiety than he had, and cheerfully bade them 'be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make their requests known unto God.' Had not that bird learned to sing when his cage was darkened? And do you not think that advice of that sort, coming not from some one perched up on a safe hillock to the strugglers in the field below, but from a man in the thick of the fight, would be like a trumpet-call to them who heard it?

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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.'

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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

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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 wrong 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.'

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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.'

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'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.

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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.

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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.'

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'Casting all your *anxieties* upon him,' says Peter, 'for He'—not *is anxious*; that dark cloud does not rise much above the earth—but, 'He careth for you.' And that loving guardianship and tender care is the one shield, armed with which we can smile at the poisoned darts of anxiety which would else fester in our hearts and, perhaps, kill. 'Be careful for nothing'—an impossibility unless 'in everything' we make 'our requests known unto God.'

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## THE WARRIOR PEACE

'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.'—PHIL. iv. 7.

The great Mosque of Constantinople was once a Christian church, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. Over its western portal may still be read, graven on a brazen plate, the words, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.' For four hundred years noisy crowds have fought, and sorrowed, and fretted, beneath the dim inscription in an unknown tongue; and no eye has looked at it, nor any heart responded. It is but too sad a symbol of the reception which Christ's offers meet amongst men, and—blessed be His name!—its prominence there, though unread and unbelieved, is a symbol of the patient forbearance with which rejected blessings are once and again pressed upon us, and He stretches out His hand though no man regards, and calls though none do hear. My text is Christ's offer of peace. The world offers excitement, Christ promises repose.

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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

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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.

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Our unrest comes from yet another source. We have not peace, because we have not found and grasped the true objects for any of our faculties. God is the only possession that brings quiet. The heart hungers until it feeds upon Him. The mind is satisfied with no truth until behind truth it finds a Person who is true. The will is enslaved and wretched until in God it recognises legitimate and absolute authority, which it is blessing to obey. Love puts out its yearnings, like the filaments that gossamer spiders send out into the air, seeking in vain for something to fasten upon, until it touches God, and clings there. There is no rest for a man until he rests in God. The reason why this world is so full of excitement is because it is so empty of peace, and the reason why it is so empty of peace is because it is so void of God. The peace of God brings peace with Him, and peace within. It unites our hearts to fear His name, and draws all the else turbulent and confusedly flowing impulses of the great deep of the spirit after itself, in a tidal wave, as the moon draws the waters of the gathered ocean. The peace of God is peace with Him, and peace within.

I need not, I suppose, do more than say one word about that descriptive clause in my text, 'It passeth understanding.' The understanding is not the faculty by which men lay hold of the peace of God any more than you can see a picture with your ears or hear music with your eyes. To everything its own organ; you cannot weigh truth in a tradesman's scales or measure thought with a yard-stick. Love is not the instrument for apprehending Euclid, nor the brain the instrument for grasping these divine and spiritual gifts. The peace of God transcends the understanding, as well as belongs to another order of things than that about which the understanding is concerned. You must experience it to know it; you must have it in order that you may feel its sweetness. It eludes the grasp of the wisest, though it yields itself to the patient and loving heart.

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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.

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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. [45]

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. [46]

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. [47]

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, [48]

and come to the true Salem, the city of peace, where they beat their swords into ploughshares, and learn and fear war no more.

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## THINK ON THESE THINGS

' . . . Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'—PHIL. iv. 8.

I am half afraid that some of you may think, as I have at times thought, that I am too old to preach to the young. You would probably listen with more attention to one less remote from you in years, and may be disposed to discount my advices as quite natural for an old man to give, and quite unnatural for a young man to take. But, dear friends, the message which I have to bring to you is meant for all ages, and for all sorts of people. And, if I may venture a personal word, I proved it, when I stood where you stand, and it is fresher and mightier to me to-day than it ever was.

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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.

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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, 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.'

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'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. [52]

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. [53]

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. [54]

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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.'

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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.'

## 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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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### 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.

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We note here the combination of that grand independence with loving thankfulness for brotherly help. The self-sufficingness of Stoicism is essentially inhuman and isolating. It is contrary to God's plan and to the fellowship which is meant to knit men together. So we have always to take heed to blend with it a loving welcome to sympathy, and not to fancy that human help and human kindness is useless. We should be able to do without it, but that need not make it

the less sweet when it comes. We may be carrying water for the march, but shall not the less prize a brook by the way. Our firm souls should be like the rocking stones in Cornwall, poised so truly that tempests cannot shake them, and yet vibrating at the touch of a little child's soft hand. That lofty independence needs to be humanised by grateful acceptance of the refreshment of human sympathy even though we can do without it.

Paul shows us here what is the true thing in a brother's help for which to be thankful. The reason why he was glad of their help was because it spoke to his heart and told him that they were making themselves sharers with him in his troubles. As he tells us in the beginning of the letter, their fellowship in his labours had been from the beginning a joy to him. It was not so much their material help as their true sympathy that he valued. The high level to which he lifts what was possibly a very modest contribution, if measured by money standards, carries with it a great lesson for all receivers and for all givers of such gifts, teaching the one that they are purely selfish if they are glad of what they get, and bidding the other remember that they may give so as to hurt by a gift more than by a blow, that they may give infinitely more by loving sympathy than by much gold, and that a £5 note does not discharge all their obligations. We have to give after His pattern who does not toss us our alms from a height, but Himself comes to bestow them, and whose gift, though it be the unspeakable gift of eternal life, is less than the love it speaks, in that He Himself has in wondrous manner become partaker of our weakness. The pattern of all sympathy, the giver of all our possessions, is God. Let us hold to Him in faith and love, and all earthly love will be sweeter and sympathy more precious. Our own hearts will be refined and purified to a delicacy of consideration and a tenderness beyond their own. Our souls will be made lords of all circumstances and strengthened according to our need. He will say to us 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' and we, as we feel His strength being made perfect in our weakness, shall be able to say with humble confidence, 'I can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth me within.'

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## GIFTS GIVEN, SEED SOWN

'And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, but ye only; for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need. Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account. But I have all things, and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'—PHIL. iv. 15-19 (R.V.).

Paul loved the Philippians too well and was too sure of their love to be conscious of any embarrassment in expressing his thanks for money help. His thanks are profuse and long drawn out. Our present text still strikes the note of grateful acknowledgment. It gives us a little glimpse into earlier instances of their liberality, and beautifully suggests that as they had done to him so God would do to them, and that their liberality was in a fashion a prophecy, because it was in some measure an imitation, of God's liberality. He had just said 'I am full, having received the things which were sent from you,' and now he says, 'My God shall fill full all your needs.' The use of the same word in these two connections is a piece of what one would call the very ingenuity of graceful courtesy, if it were not something far deeper, even the utterance of a loving and self-forgetting heart.

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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,

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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?

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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.'

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Paul says to us 'My God shall supply all your need.' Let us answer, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.'

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## FAREWELL WORDS

'Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever, Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me salute you. All the saints salute you, especially they that are of 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

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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### 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.

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That great gift is to be the companion of every spirit which looks to that Jesus in the reality of His humanity, in the greatness of His office, in the loftiness of His divinity, and finds in each of His names an anchor for its faith and an authoritative claim for its obedience.

Such a wish as this benediction is the truest expression of human friendship; it is the highest desire any of us can form for ourselves or for those dearest to us. Do we keep it clear before us in our intercourse with them so that the end of that intercourse will naturally be such a prayer?

Our human love has its limitations. We can but wish for others the grace which Christ can give, but neither our wishes nor His giving can make the grace ours unless for ourselves we take the great gift that is freely given to us of God. It is no accident that all his letters close thus. This benediction is the last word of God's revelation to man, the brightness in the clear west, the last strain of the great oratorio. The last word or last book of Scripture is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' Let us take up the solemn Amen in our lips and in our hearts.

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## COLOSSIANS

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### SAINTS, BELIEVERS, BRETHREN

' . . . The saints and faithful brethren in Christ.'—COL. i. 2.

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,' says the Acts of the Apostles. It was a name given by outsiders, and like most of the instances where a sect, or school, or party is labelled with the name of its founder, it was given in scorn. It hit and yet missed its mark. The early believers were Christians, that is, Christ's men, but they were not merely a group of followers of a man, like many other groups of whom the Empire at that time was full. So they never used that name themselves. It occurs twice only in Scripture, once when King Agrippa was immensely amused at the audacity of Paul in thinking that he would easily make 'a Christian' of him; and once when Peter speaks of 'suffering as a Christian,' where he is evidently quoting, as it were, the indictment on which the early believers were tried and punished. What did they call themselves then?

I have chosen this text not for the purpose of speaking about it only, but because it gathers together in brief compass the three principal designations by which the early believers knew themselves. 'Saints'—that tells their relation to God, as well as their character, for it means 'consecrated,' set apart for Him, and therefore pure; 'faithful'—that means 'full of faith' and is substantially equivalent to the usual 'believers,' which defines their relation to Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God; 'brethren'—that defines their relation and sentiment towards their fellows. These terms go a great deal deeper than the nickname which the wits of Antioch invented. The members of the Church were not content with the vague 'Christian,' but they called themselves 'saints,' 'believers,' 'brethren.' One designation does not appear here, which we must take into account for completeness: the earliest of all—disciples. Now, I purpose to bring together these four names, by which the early believers thought and spoke of themselves, in order to point the lessons as to our position and our duty, which are wrapped up in them. And I may just say that, perhaps, it is no sign of advance that the Church, as years rolled on, accepted the world's name for itself, and that people found it easier to call themselves 'Christians'—which did not mean very much—than to call themselves 'saints' or 'believers.'

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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.

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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!

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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 clefs 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 clefs 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. [90]

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. [91]

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. [92]

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## THE GOSPEL-HOPE

'The hope of the Gospel.'—COL. i. 5.

'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them,' says the old proverb. And yet it seems as if that were scarcely true in regard to that strange faculty called Hope. It may well be a question whether on the whole it has given us more pleasure than pain. How seldom it has been a true prophet! How perpetually its pictures have been too highly coloured! It has cast illusions over the future, colouring the far-off hills with glorious purple which, reached, are barren rocks

and cold snow. It has held out prizes never won. It has made us toil and struggle and aspire and fed us on empty husks. Either we have not got what we expected or have found it to be less good than it appeared from afar.

If we think of all the lies that hope has told us, of all the vain expenditure of effort to which it has tempted us, of the little that any of us have of what we began by thinking we should surely attain, hope seems a questionable good, and yet how obstinate it is, living on after all disappointments and drawing the oldest amongst us onwards. Surely somewhere there must be a reason for this great and in some respects awful faculty, a vindication of its existence in an adequate object for its grasp.

The New Testament has much to say about hope. Christianity lays hold of it and professes to supply it with its true nourishment and support. Let us look at the characteristics of Christian hope, or, as our text calls it, the hope of the Gospel, that is, the hope which the Gospel creates and feeds in our souls. [93]

#### 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. [94]

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. [95]

#### 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 [96]



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.

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### 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.

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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.

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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.

# '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. [100]

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. [101]

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.' [102]

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.

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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.

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That strength is to be manifested by us in 'patience and longsuffering,' both of which are to have blended with them a real though apparently antagonistic joy. True and profound grief is not opposed to such patience, but the excess of it, the hopeless and hysterical outbursts certainly are. We are all like the figures in some old Greek temples which stand upright with their burdens on their heads. God's strength is given that we may bear ours calmly, and upright like these fair forms that hold up the heavy architecture as if it were a feather, or like women with water-jars on their heads, which only make their carriage more graceful and their step more firm.

How different the patience which God gives by His own imparted strength, from the sullen submission or hysterical abandonment to sorrow, or the angry rebellion characterising Godless grief! Many of us think that we can get on very well in prosperity and fine weather without Him. We had better ask ourselves what we are going to do when the storm comes, which comes to all some time or other.

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The word here rendered 'patience' is more properly 'perseverance.' It is not merely a passive but an active virtue. We do not receive that great gift of divine strength to bear only, but also to work, and such work is one of the best ways of bearing and one of the best helps to doing so. So in our sorrows and trials let us feel that God's strength is not all given us to be expended in our own consolation, but also to be used in our plain duties. These remain as imperative though our hearts are beating like hammers, and there is no more unwise and cowardly surrender to trouble than to fling away our tools and fold our hands idly on our laps.

But Paul lays a harder duty on us even in promising a great gift to us, when he puts before us an ideal of joy mingling with patience and longsuffering. The command would be an impossible one if there were not the assurance that we should be 'strengthened with all might.' We plainly need an infusion of diviner strength than our own, if that strange marriage of joy and sorrow should take place, and they should at once occupy our hearts. Yet if His strength be ours we shall be strong to submit and acquiesce, strong to look deep enough to see His will as the foundation of all and as ever busy for our good, strong to hope, strong to discern the love at work, strong to trust the Father even when He chastens. And all this will make it possible to have the paradox practically realised in our own experience, 'As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.' One has seen potassium burning underwater. Our joy may burn under waves of sorrow. Let us bring our weakness to Jesus Christ and grasp Him as did the sinking Peter. He will breathe His own grace into us, and speak to our feeble and perchance sorrowful hearts, as He had done long before Paul's words to the Colossians, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

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'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.

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### 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.

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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.

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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

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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. [111]

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. [112]

## 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. [113]

Our thankfulness ought to be constant. The fire on the altar should never be quenched. The odour of the sweet-smelling incense should ever ascend. Why is it that we have so little of this grace which the Apostle in our text regards as the precious stone that binds all Christian graces together, the sparkling crest of the wave of a Christian life? Mainly because we have so little of the habit of regarding all things as God's Fatherly discipline and meditating on that for which they are making us meet. We need a far more habitual contemplation of our inheritance, of our experience as lovingly given by God to fit us for it and of the darkest hours which would otherwise try our faith and silence our praise as necessary parts of that preparation. If this be our habitual attitude of mind, and these be ever present to us, our song will be always of His

mercy and our whole lives a thank-offering.

The text is a prophecy describing the inheritance in its perfect form. Earthly life must be ended before it is fully understood. Down in the valleys we praised God, but tears and mysteries sometimes saddened our songs; but now on the summit surveying all behind, and knowing by a blessed eternity of experience to what it has led, even an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, we shall praise Him with a new song for ever.

Thankfulness is the one element of worship common to earth and heaven, to angels and to us. Whilst they sing, 'Bless the Lord all ye His hosts,' redeemed men have still better reason to join in the chorus and answer, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.'

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## CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR

'I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.'—COL. i. 29.

I have chosen this text principally because it brings together the two subjects which are naturally before us to-day. All 'Western Christendom,' as it is called, is to-day commemorating the Pentecostal gift. My text speaks about that power that 'worketh in us mightily.' True, the Apostle is speaking in reference to the fiery energy and persistent toil which characterised him in proclaiming Christ, that he might present men perfect before Him. But the same energy which he expended on his apostolic office he expended on his individual personality. And he would not have discharged the one unless he had first laboured on the other. And although in a letter contemporary with this one from which my text is taken he speaks of himself as no longer young, but 'such an one as Paul the aged, and likewise, also a prisoner of Jesus Christ,' the young spirit was in him, and the continual pressing forward to unattained heights. And that is the spirit, not only of a section of the Church divided from the rest by youth and by special effort, but of the whole Church if it is worth calling a Church, and unless it is thus instinct, it is a mere dead organisation.

So I hope that what few things I have to say may apply to, and be felt to be suitable by all of us, whether we are nominally Christian Endeavourers or not. If we are Christian people, we are such. If we are not endeavouring, shall I venture to say we are not Christians? At any rate, we are very poor ones.

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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.

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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.

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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 yawning 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.'

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There is but one thought more in this last part of my text, which I must not leave untouched, and that is that this sufficient and universal gift is not only the means by which the great universal duty can be discharged, but it ought to be the measure in which it is discharged. 'I work according to the working in me.' That is, all the force that came into Paul by that Divine Spirit, came out of Paul in his Christian conduct, and the gift was not only the source, but also the measure, of this man's Christian Endeavour. Is that true about us? They say that the steam-engine is a most wasteful application of power, that a great deal of the energy which is generated goes without ever doing any work. They tell us that one of the great difficulties in the way of economic application of electricity is the loss which comes through using accumulators. Is not that like a great many of us? So much power poured into us; so little coming out from us and translated into actual work! Such a 'rushing mighty wind,' and the air about us so heavy and stagnant and corrupt! Such a blaze of fire, and we so cold! Such a cataract of the river of the water of life, and our lips parched and our crops seared and worthless! Ah, brethren! when we look at ourselves, and when we think of the condition of so many of the churches to which we belong, the old rebuke of the prophet comes back to us in this generation, 'Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' We have an all-sufficient power. May our working and striving be according to it, and may we work mightily, being 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!'

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'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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

## 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.

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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.

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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

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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. [131]

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. [132]

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.' [133]

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. [134]

## 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.

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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.'

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'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

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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

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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? [142]

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!' [143]

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## WITHOUT AND WITHIN

'Them that are without.'—COL. iv. 5.

That is, of course, an expression for the non-Christian world; the outsiders who are beyond the pale of the Church. There was a very broad line of distinction between it and the surrounding world in the early Christian days, and the handful of Christians in a heathen country felt a great gulf between them and the society in which they lived. That distinction varies in form, and varies somewhat in apparent magnitude according as Christianity has been rooted in a country for a longer or a shorter time, but it remains, and is as real to-day as it ever was, and there is neither wisdom nor kindness in ignoring the distinction.

The phrase of our text may sound harsh, and might be used, as it was by the Jews, from whom it was borrowed, in a very narrow and bitter spirit. Close corporations of any sort are apt to generate, not only a wholesome *esprit de corps*, but a hostile contempt for outsiders, and Christianity has too often been misrepresented by its professors, who have looked down upon those that are without with supercilious and unchristian self-complacency.

There is nothing of that sort in the words themselves; the very opposite is in them. They sound to me like the expression of a man conscious of the security and comfort and blessedness of the home where he sat, and with his heart yearning for all the houseless wanderers that were abiding the pelting of the pitiless storm out in the darkness there. The spirit and attitude of Christianity to such is one of yearning pity and urgent entreaty to come in and share in the blessings. There is deep pathos in the words, as well as solemn earnestness, and in such a spirit I wish to dwell upon them now for a short time. [144]

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.'

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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.

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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.

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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

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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 pitying 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. [149]

First, then, there is a figure drawn from the Old Testament which is often applied, and correctly applied, to this subject—Noah's Ark.

Think of that safe abode floating across the waters, whilst all without it was a dreary waste. Without were death and despair, but those that were within sat warm and dry and safe and fed and living. The men that were without, high as they might climb upon rocks and hills, strong as they might be—when the dreary rainstorm wept itself dry, 'they were all dead corpses.' To be in was life, to be out was death.

That is the first metaphor. Take another. That singular institution of the old Mosaic system, in which the man who inadvertently, and therefore without any guilt or crime of his own, had been the cause of death to his brother, had provided for him, half on one side Jordan and half on the other, and dotted over the land, so that it should not be too far to run to one of them, Cities of Refuge. And when the wild vendetta of those days stirred up the next of kin to pursue at his heels, if he could get inside the nearest of these he was secure. They that were within could stand at the city gates and look out upon the plain, and see the pursuer with his hate glaring from his eyes, and almost feel his hot breath on their cheeks, and know that though but a yard from him, his arm durst not touch them. To be inside was to be safe, to be outside was certain bloody death.

That is the second figure; take a third; one which our Lord Himself has given us. Here is the picture—a palace, a table abundantly spread, lights and music, delight and banqueting, gladness and fulness, society and sustenance. The guests sit close and all partake. To be within means food, shelter, warmth, festivity, society; to be without, like Lear on the moor, is to stand the pelting of the storm, weary, stumbling in the dark, starving, solitary, and sad. Within is brightness and good cheer; without is darkness, hunger, death. [150]

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. [151]



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. [152]

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. [153]

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. [154]

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.' [155]

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## I. THESSALONIANS

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### FAITH, LOVE, HOPE, AND THEIR FRUITS

'Your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope.'—1 THESS. i. 3.

This Epistle, as I suppose we all know, is Paul's first letter. He had been hunted out of Thessalonica by the mob, made the best of his way to Athens, stayed there for a very short time, then betook himself to Corinth, and at some point of his somewhat protracted residence there,

this letter was written. So that we have in it his first attempt, so far as we know, to preach the Gospel by the pen. It is interesting to notice how, whatever changes and developments there may have been in him thereafter, all the substantial elements of his latest faith beam out in this earliest letter, and how even in regard to trifles we see the germs of much that came afterwards. This same triad, you remember, 'faith, hope, charity,' recurs in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, though with a very significant difference in the order, which I shall have to dwell upon presently.

The letter is interesting on another account. Remembering that it was only a very short time since these Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve the living God, there is something very beautiful in the overflowing generosity of commendation, which never goes beyond veracity, with which he salutes them. Their Christian character, like seeds sown in some favoured tropical land, had sprung up swiftly; yet not with the dangerous kind of swiftness which presages decay of the growth. It was only a few days since they had been grovelling before idols, but now he can speak of 'your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope' . . . and declare that the Gospel 'sounded out' from them—the word which he employs is that which is technically used for the blast of a trumpet—'so that we need not to speak anything.' Rapid growth is possible for us all, and is not always superficial.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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'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.'

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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.

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'Hope' helps us both to bear and to do. They tell us nowadays that it is selfish for a Christian man to animate himself, either for endurance or for activity, by the contemplation of those great glories that lie yonder. If that is selfishness, God grant we may all become a great deal more selfish than we are! No man labours in the Christian life, or submits to Christian difficulty, for the sake of going to heaven. At least, if he does, he has got on the wrong tack altogether. But if the motive for both endurance and activity be faith and love, then hope has a perfect right to come in as a subsidiary motive, and to give strength to the faith and rapture to the love. We cannot afford to throw away that hope, as so many of us do—not perhaps, intellectually, though I am afraid there is a very considerable dimming of the clearness, and a narrowing of the place in our thoughts, of the hope of a future blessedness, in the average Christian of this day—but practically we are all apt to lose sight of the recompense of the reward. And if we do, the faith and love, and the work and toil, and the patience will suffer. Faith will relax its grasp, love will cool down its fervour; and there will come a film over Hope's blue eye, and she will not see the land that is very far off. So, dear brethren, remember the sequence, 'faith, love, hope,' and remember the issues, 'work, toil, patience.'

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## GOD'S TRUMPET

'From you sounded out the word of God.'—1 THESS. i. 8.

This is Paul's first letter. It was written very shortly after his first preaching of the Gospel in the great commercial city of Thessalonica. But though the period since the formation of the Thessalonian Church was so brief, their conversion had already become a matter of common notoriety; and the consistency of their lives, and the marvellous change that had taken place upon them, made them conspicuous in the midst of the corrupt heathen community in which they dwelt. And so says Paul, in the text, by reason of their work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope, they had become ensamples to all that believe, and loud proclaimers and witnesses of the Gospel which had produced this change.

The Apostle employs a word never used anywhere else in the New Testament to describe the conspicuous and widespread nature of this testimony of theirs. He says, 'The word of the Lord *sounded out*' from them. That phrase is one most naturally employed to describe the blast of a trumpet. So clear and ringing, so loud, penetrating, melodious, rousing, and full was their proclamation, by the silent eloquence of their lives, of the Gospel which impelled and enabled them to lead such lives. A grand ideal of a community of believers! If our churches to-day were nearer its realisation there would be less unbelief, and more attraction of wandering prodigals to the Father's house. Would that this saying were true of every body of professing believers! Would that from each there sounded out one clear accordant witness to Christ, in the purity and unworldliness of their Christlike lives!

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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.

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Of course all this is true, not only about communities, but it is true of a community, just because it is true of each individual member of it. The Church is worse than as 'sounding brass,' it is as *silent* brass and an *untinkling* cymbal, unless the individuals that belong to it recognise God's meaning in making them His children, and do their best to fulfil it. 'Ye are my witnesses,'

saith the Lord. You are put into the witness-box; see that you speak out when you are there.

II. Another point that this figure may suggest is, the *sort* of sound that should come from the trumpet.

A trumpet note is, first of all, clear. There should be no hesitation in our witness; nothing uncertain in the sound that we give. There are plenty of so-called Christian people whose lives, if they bear any witness for the Master at all, are like the notes that some bungling learner will bring out of a musical instrument: hesitating, uncertain, so that you do not know exactly what note he wants to produce. How many of us, calling ourselves Christian people, testify on both sides; sometimes bearing witness for Christ; and alas! alas! oftener bearing witness against Him. Will the trumpet, the instrument of clear, ringing, unmistakable sounds, be the emblem of your Christian testimony? Would not some poor scrannel-pipe, ill-blown, be nearer the mark? The note should be clear.

The note should be penetrating. There is no instrument, I suppose, that carries further than the ringing clarion that is often heard on the field of battle, above all the strife; and this little church at Thessalonica, a mere handful of people, just converted, in the very centre of a strong, compact, organised, self-confident, supercilious heathenism, insisted upon being heard, and got itself made audible, simply by the purity and the consistency of the lives of its members. So that Paul, a few weeks, or at most a few months, after the formation of the church, could say, 'From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia,' your own province and the one next door to it, 'but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad.' No man knows how far his influence will go. No man can tell how far his example may penetrate. Thessalonica was a great commercial city. So is Manchester. Hosts of people of all sorts came into it as they come here. There were many different circles which would be intersected by the lives of this Christian church, and wherever its units went they carried along with them the conviction that they had turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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In a tropical country, when the sun goes behind a cloud, all the insect life that was cheerily chirping is hushed. In the Christian life, when the Son of Righteousness is obscured by the clouds born of our own carelessness and sin, all the music in our spirit ceases, and no more can we witness for Him. A scentless substance lying in a drawer, with a bit of musk, will become perfumed by contact, and will bring the fragrance wherever it is carried. Live near God, and let Him speak to you and in you; and then He will speak through you. And if He be the breath of your spiritual lives, and the soul of your souls, then, and only then, will your lives be music, the music witness, and the witness conviction. And only then will there be fulfilled what I pray there may be more and more fulfilled in us as a Christian community, this great word of our text, 'from you sounded out,' clear, rousing, penetrating, melodious, 'the word of the Lord,' so that we, with our poor preaching, need not to speak anything.

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## WALKING WORTHILY

'Walk worthy of God.'—1 THESS. ii. 12.

Here we have the whole law of Christian conduct in a nutshell. There may be many detailed commandments, but they can all be deduced from this one. We are lifted up above the region of petty prescriptions, and breathe a bracing mountain air. Instead of regulations, very many and very dry, we have a principle which needs thought and sympathy in order to apply it, and is to be carried out by the free action of our own judgments.

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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.

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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.

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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. [174]

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. [175]

It is both by the same act. In the very facts on which our redemption depends lies the law of our lives.

What was Paul's Gospel? According to Paul's own definition of it, it was this: 'How that Jesus Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.' And the message that I desire now to bring to all you professing Christians is this: Do not always be looking at Christ's Cross only as your means of acceptance. Do not only be thinking of Christ's Passion as that which has barred for you the gates of punishment, and has opened for you the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. It has done all that; but if you are going to stop there you have only got hold of a very maimed and imperfect edition of the Gospel. The Cross is your *pattern*, as well as the anchor of your hope and the ground of your salvation, if it is anything at all to you. And it is not the ground of your salvation and the anchor of your hope unless it is your pattern. It is the one in exactly the same degree in which it is the other.

So all self-pleasing, all harsh insistence on your own claims, all neglect of suffering and sorrow and sin around you, comes under the lash of this condemnation: 'They are not worthy of the Gospel.' And all unforgivingness of spirit and of temper in individuals and in nations, in public and in private matters, that, too, is in flagrant contradiction to the principles that are taught on the Cross to which you say you look for your salvation. Have you got forgiveness, and are you going out from the presence-chamber of the King to take your brother by the throat for the beggarly coppers that he owes you, and say: 'Pay me what thou owest!' when the Master has forgiven you all that great mountain of indebtedness which you owe Him? Oh, my brother! if Christian men and women would only learn to take away the scales from their eyes and souls; not looking at Christ's Cross with less absolute trustfulness, as that by which all their salvation comes, but also learning to look at it as closely and habitually as yielding the pattern to which their lives should be conformed, and would let the heart-melting thankfulness which it evokes when gazed at as the ground of our hope prove itself true by its leading them to an effort at imitating that great love, and so walking worthy of the Gospel, how their lives would be transformed! It is far easier to fetter your life with yards of red-tape prescriptions—do this, do not do that—far easier to out-pharisee the Pharisees in punctilious scrupulosities, than it is honestly, and for one hour, to take the Cross of Christ as the pattern of your lives, and to shape yourselves by that. [176]

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).

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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.'

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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.'

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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.

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'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. [181]

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. [182]

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.' [183]

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## SMALL DUTIES AND THE GREAT HOPE

'But as touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; 11. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12. That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. 13. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14. For if

we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. 15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; 17. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.'—1 THESS. iv. 9-18.

'But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2. For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.'—1 THESS. v. 1-2.

This letter was written immediately on the arrival of Silas and Timothy in Corinth (1 Thess. iii. 6, 'even now'), and is all flushed with the gladness of relieved anxiety, and throbs with love. It gains in pathetic interest when we remember that, while writing it, the Apostle was in the thick of his conflict with the Corinthian synagogue. The thought of his Thessalonian converts came to him like a waft of pure, cool air to a heated brow.

The apparent want of connection in the counsels of the two last chapters is probably accounted for by supposing that he takes up, as they occurred to him, the points reported by the two messengers. But we may note that the plain, prosaic duties enjoined in verses 7-12 lead on to the lofty revelations of the rest of the context without any sense of a gap, just because to Paul the greatest truths had a bearing on the smallest duties, and the vision of future glory was meant to shape the homely details of present work. [184]

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. [185]

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. [186]

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!

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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.

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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.

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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.

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Paul took for granted that the Thessalonians remembered the Lord's word, which he had, no doubt, told them, that He would come 'as a thief in the night.' So he discourages a profitless curiosity, and exhorts to a continual vigilance. When He comes, it will be suddenly, and will wake some who live from a sinful sleep with a shock of terror, and the dead from a sweet sleep in Him with a rush of gladness, as in body and spirit they are filled with His life, and raised to share in His triumph.

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## SLEEPING THROUGH JESUS

' . . . Them also which sleep in Jesus . . . '—1 THESS. iv. 14.

That expression is not unusual, in various forms, in the Apostle's writings. It suggests a very tender and wonderful thought of closeness and union between our Lord and the living dead, so close as that He is, as it were, the atmosphere in which they move, or the house in which they dwell. But, tender and wonderful as the thought is, it is not exactly the Apostle's idea here. For, accurately rendered—and accuracy in regard to Scripture language is not pedantry—the words run, 'Them which sleep *through* Jesus.'

Now, that is a strange phrase, and, I suppose, its strangeness is the reason why our translators have softened it down to the more familiar and obvious 'in Jesus.' We can understand living through Christ, on being sacred through Christ, but what can *sleeping* through Christ mean? I shall hope to answer the question presently, but, in the meantime, I only wish to point out what the Apostle does say, and to plead for letting him say it, strange though it sounds. For the strange and the difficult phrases of Scripture are like the hard quartz reefs in which gold is, and if we slur them over we are likely to lose the treasure. Let us try if we can find what the gold here may be.

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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.

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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?

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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:—

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'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.'

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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?'

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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,

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'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.

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Two men die by one railway accident, sitting side by side upon one seat, smashed in one collision. But though the outward fact is the same about each, the reality of their deaths is infinitely different. The one falls asleep through Jesus, in Jesus; the other dies indeed, and the death of his body is only a feeble shadow of the death of his spirit. Do you knit yourself to the Life, which is Christ, and then 'he that believeth on Me shall never die.'

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## THE WORK AND ARMOUR OF THE CHILDREN OF THE DAY

'Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet the hope of salvation.'—1 THESS. v. 8.

This letter to the Thessalonians is the oldest book of the New Testament. It was probably written within something like twenty years of the Crucifixion; long, therefore, before any of the Gospels were in existence. It is, therefore, exceedingly interesting and instructive to notice how this whole context is saturated with allusions to our Lord's teaching, as it is preserved in these Gospels; and how it takes for granted that the Thessalonian Christians were familiar with the very words.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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!'

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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!

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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And so the reins will come into your hands in an altogether new manner, and you will be able to be king over your own nature in a fashion that you did not dream of before, if only you will trust in Christ, and love Him, and fix your desires on the things above.

Then you will be able to govern yourself when you let Christ govern you. The glories that are to be done away, that gleam round you like foul, flaring tallow-candles, will lose all their fascination and brightness, by reason of the glory that excelleth, the pure starlike splendour of the white inextinguishable lights of heaven.

And when by faith, charity, and hope you have drunk of the new wine of the kingdom, the drugged and opiate cup which a sorceress world presents, jewelled though it be, will lose its charms, and it will not be hard to turn from it and dash it to the ground.

God help you, brother, to be 'sober,' for unless you are 'you cannot see the kingdom of God!'

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## WAKING AND SLEEPING

'Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.'—1 THESS. v. 10.

In these words the Apostle concludes a section of this, his earliest letter, in which he has been dealing with the aspect of death in reference to the Christian. There are two very significant usages of language in the context which serve to elucidate the meaning of the words of our text, and to which I refer for a moment by way of introduction.

The one is that throughout this portion of his letter the Apostle emphatically reserves the word 'died' for Jesus Christ, and applies to Christ's followers only the word 'sleep.' Christ's death makes the deaths of those who trust Him a quiet slumber. The other is that the antithesis of waking and sleep is employed in two different directions in this section, being first used to express, by the one term, simply physical life, and by the other, physical death; and secondly, to designate respectively the moral attitude of Christian watchfulness and that of worldly apathy to things unseen and drowsy engrossment with the present.

So in the words immediately preceding my text, we read, 'let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober.' The use of the antithesis in our text is chiefly the former, but there cannot be discharged from one of the expressions, 'wake,' the ideas which have just been associated with it, especially as the word which is translated 'wake' is the same as that just

translated in the sixth verse, 'let us watch.' So that here there is meant by it, not merely the condition of life but that of Christian life—sober-minded vigilance and wide-awakeness to the realities of being. With this explanation of the meanings of the words before us, we may now proceed to consider them a little more minutely.

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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?'

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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?

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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

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'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.

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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.

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Sleep is rest; sleep is consciousness; sleep is the prophecy of waking. We know not what the condition of those who sleep in Jesus may be, but we know that the child on its mother's breast, and conscious somehow, in its slumber, of the warm place where its head rests, is full of repose. And they that sleep in Jesus will be *so*. Then, whether we wake or sleep does not seem to matter so very much.

### III. The united life of all who live with Christ.

Christ's gift to men is the gift of life in all senses of that word, from the lowest to the highest. That life, as our text tells us, is altogether unaffected by death. We cannot see round the sharp angle where the valley turns, but we know that the path runs straight on through the gorge up to the throat of the pass—and so on to the 'shining table-lands whereof our God Himself is Sun and Moon.' There are some rivers that run through stagnant lakes, keeping the tinge of their waters, and holding together the body of their stream undiverted from its course, and issuing undiminished and untarnished from the lower end of the lake. And so the stream of our lives may run through the Dead Sea, and come out below none the worse for the black waters through which it has forced its way. The life that Christ gives is unaffected by death. Our creed is a risen Saviour, and the corollary of that creed is, that death touches the circumference, but never gets near the man. It is hard to believe, in the face of the foolish senses; it is hard to believe, in the face of aching sorrow. It is hard to-day to believe, in the face of passionate and ingenious denial, but it is true all the same. Death is sleep, and sleep is life.

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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. [219]

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. [220]

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## EDIFICATION

'Edify one another.'—1 THESS. v. 11.

I do not intend to preach about that clause only, but I take it as containing, in the simplest form, one of the Apostle's favourite metaphors which runs through all his letters, and the significance of which, I think, is very little grasped by ordinary readers.

'Edify one another.' All metaphorical words tend to lose their light and colour, and the figure to get faint, in popular understanding. We all know that 'edifice' means a building; we do not all realise that 'edify' means *to build up*. And it is a great misfortune that our Authorised Version, in accordance with the somewhat doubtful principle on which its translators proceeded, varies the rendering of the one Greek word so as to hide the frequent recurrence of it in the apostolic teaching. The metaphor that underlies it is the notion of building up a structure. The Christian idea of the structure to be built up is that it is a temple. I wish in this sermon to try to bring out some of the manifold lessons and truths that lie in this great figure, as applied to the Christian life.

Now, glancing over the various uses of the phrase in the New Testament, I find that the figure of 'building,' as the great duty of the Christian life, is set forth under three aspects; self-edification, united edification, and divine edification. And I purpose to look at these in order. [221]

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.'

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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.

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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.

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There is also the other metaphor by which this Christian progress, which is indispensable to the Christian life, and is to be carried on, whatever may oppose it, is regarded as a race. There the idea of the great, attractive, but far-off future reward comes into view, as well as the strained muscles and the screwed-up energy with which the runner presses towards the mark. But we have not only to fling the result forward into the future, and to think of the Christian life as all tending towards an end, which end is not realised here; but we have to think of it, in accordance with this metaphor of my text, as being continuously progressive, so as that, though unfinished, the building is there; and much is done, though all is not accomplished, and the courses rise slowly, surely, partially realising the divine Architect's ideal, long before the headstone is brought out with shoutings and tumult of acclaim. A continuous progress and approximation towards the perfect ideal of the temple completed, consecrated, and inhabited by God, lies in this metaphor.

Is that *you*, Christian man and woman? Is the notion of progress a part of *your* working belief? Are *you* growing, fighting, running, building up yourselves more and more in your holy faith? Alas! I cannot but believe that the very notion of progress has died out from a great many professing Christians.

There is one more idea in this metaphor of self-edification, viz., that our characters should be being modelled by us on a definite plan, and into a harmonious whole. I wonder how many of us in this chapel this morning have ever spent a quiet hour in trying to set clearly before ourselves

what we want to make of ourselves, and how we mean to go about it. Most of us live by haphazard very largely, even in regard to outward things, and still more entirely in regard to our characters. Most of us have not consciously before us, as you put a pattern-line before a child learning to write, any ideal of ourselves to which we are really seeking to approximate. Have you? And could you put it into words? And are you making any kind of intelligent and habitual effort to get at it? I am afraid a great many of us, if we were honest, would have to say, No! If a man goes to work as his own architect, and has a very hazy idea of what it is that he means to build, he will not build anything worth the trouble. If your way of building up yourselves is, as Aaron said his way of making the calf was, putting all into the fire, and letting chance settle what comes out, nothing will come out better than a calf. Brother! if you are going to build, have a plan, and let the plan be the likeness of Jesus Christ. And then, with continuous work, and the exercise of continuous faith, which knits you to the foundation, 'build up yourselves for an habitation of God.'

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## 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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What are you building? 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone.' Let every man take heed *what* and *how* and *that* he buildeth thereon.

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## CONTINUAL PRAYER AND ITS EFFECTS

'Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.'—1 THESS. v. 16-18.

The peculiarity and the stringency of these three precepts is the unbroken continuity which they require. To rejoice, to pray, to give thanks, are easy when circumstances favour, as a taper burns steadily in a windless night; but to do these things always is as difficult as for the taper's flame to keep upright when all the winds are eddying round it. 'Evermore'—'without ceasing'—'in everything'—these qualifying words give the injunctions of this text their grip and urgency. The Apostle meets the objections which he anticipates would spring to the lips of the Thessalonians, to the effect that he was requiring impossibilities, by adding that, hard and impracticable as they might think such a constant attitude of mind and heart, 'This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' So, then, a Christian life may be lived continuously on the high level; and more than that, it is our duty to try to live ours thus.

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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

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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.'

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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.'

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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.

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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

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yet the crest of every wave flashing in the sunshine. 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.'

III. Lastly, the duty of continual thankfulness.

That, too, is possible only on condition of continual communion with God. As I said in reference to joy, so I say in reference to thankfulness; the look of things in this world depends very largely on the colour of the spectacles through which you behold them.

'There's nothing either good or bad  
But thinking makes it so.'

And if a man in communion with God looks at the events of his life as he might put on a pair of coloured glasses to look at a landscape, it will be tinted with a glory and a glow as he looks. The obligation to gratitude, often neglected by us, is singularly, earnestly, and frequently enjoined in the New Testament. I am afraid that the average Christian man does not recognise its importance as an element in his Christian experience. As directed to the past it means that we do not forget, but that, as we look back, we see the meaning of these old days, and their possible blessings, and the loving purposes which sent them, a great deal more clearly than we did whilst we were passing through them. The mountains that, when you are close to them, are barren rock and cold snow, glow in the distance with royal purples. And so if we, from our standing point in God, will look back on our lives, losses will disclose themselves as gains, sorrows as harbingers of joy, conflict as a means of peace, the crooked things will be straight, and the rough places plain; and we may for every thing in the past give thanks, if only we 'pray without ceasing.' The exhortation as applied to the present means that we bow our wills, that we believe that all things are working together for our good, and that, like Job in his best moments, we shall say, 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord.' Ah, that is hard. It is possible, but it is only possible if we 'pray without ceasing,' and dwell beside God all the days of our lives, and all the hours of every day. Then, and only then, shall we be able to thank Him for all the way by which He hath led us these many years in the wilderness, that has been brightened by the pillar of cloud by day, and the fire by night.

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## PAUL'S EARLIEST TEACHING

'I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren,'—  
1 THESS. v. 27.

If the books of the New Testament were arranged according to the dates of their composition, this epistle would stand first. It was written somewhere about twenty years after the Crucifixion, and long before any of the existing Gospels. It is, therefore, of peculiar interest, as being the most venerable extant Christian document, and as being a witness to Christian truth quite independent of the Gospel narratives.

The little community at Thessalonica had been gathered together as the result of a very brief period of ministration by Paul. He had spoken for three successive Sabbaths in the synagogue, and had drawn together a Christian society, mostly consisting of heathens, though with a sprinkling of Jews amongst them. Driven from the city by a riot, he had left it for Athens, with many anxious thoughts, of course, as to whether the infant community would be able to stand alone after so few weeks of his presence and instruction. Therefore he sent back one of his travelling companions, Timothy by name, to watch over the young plant for a little while. When Timothy returned with the intelligence of their steadfastness, it was good news indeed, and with a sense of relieved anxiety, he sits down to write this letter, which, all through, throbs with thankfulness, and reveals the strain which the news had taken off his spirit.

There are no such definite doctrinal statements in it as in the most of Paul's longer letters; it is simply an outburst of confidence and love and tenderness, and a series of practical instructions. It has been called the least doctrinal of the Pauline Epistles. And in one sense, and under certain limitations, that is perfectly true. But the very fact that it is so makes its indications and hints and allusions the more significant; and if this letter, not written for the purpose of enforcing any special doctrinal truth, be so saturated as it is with the facts and principles of the Gospel, the stronger is the attestation which it gives to the importance of these. I have, therefore, thought it might be worth our while now, and might, perhaps, set threadbare truth in something of a new light, if we put this—the most ancient Christian writing extant, which is quite independent of the four Gospels—into the witness-box, and see what it has to say about the great truths and principles which we call the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is my simple design, and I gather the phenomena into three or four divisions for the sake of accuracy and order.

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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.

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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 unflinching proclamation of that fundamental truth of the Gospel than this altogether undocctrinal 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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And so, dear friends, we come back to this, the Christianity that flings away the risen Christ is a mere mass of tatters with nothing in it to cover a man's nakedness, an illusion with no vitality in it to quicken, to comfort, to ennoble, to raise, to teach aspiration or hope or effort. The human heart needs the 'Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And this independent witness confirms the Gospel story: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

IV. Lastly, let us hear what this witness has to say about the returning Christ.

That is the characteristic doctrinal subject of the letter. We all know that wonderful passage of unsurpassed tenderness and majesty, which has soothed so many hearts and been like a gentle hand laid upon so many aching spirits, about the returning Jesus 'coming in the clouds,' with the dear ones that are asleep along with Him, and the reunion of them that sleep and them that are alive and remain, in one indissoluble concord and concourse, when we shall ever be with the Lord, and 'clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss in over-measure for ever.' The coming of the Master does not appear here with emphasis on its judicial aspect. It is rather intended to bring hope to the mourners, and the certainty that bands broken here may be re-knit in holier fashion hereafter. But the judicial aspect is not, as it could not be, left out, and the Apostle further tells us that 'that day cometh as a thief in the night.' That is a quotation of the Master's own words, which we find in the Gospels; and so again a confirmation, so far as it goes, from an independent witness, of the Gospel story. And then he goes on, in terrible language, to speak of 'sudden destruction, as of travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.'

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These, then, are the points of this witness's testimony as to the returning Lord—a personal coming, a reunion of all believers in Him, in order to eternal felicity and mutual gladness, and the destruction that shall fall by His coming upon those who turn away from Him.

What a revelation that would be to men who had known what it was to grope in the darkness of heathendom, and to have new light upon the future!

I remember once walking in the long galleries of the Vatican, on the one side of which there are Christian inscriptions from the catacombs, and on the other heathen inscriptions from the tombs. One side is all dreamy and hopeless; one long sigh echoing along the line of white marbles—'Vale! vale! in aeternum vale!' (Farewell, farewell, for ever farewell.) On the other side—'In Christo, in pace, in spe.' (In Christ, in peace, in hope.) That is the witness that we have to lay to our hearts. And so death becomes a passage, and we let go the dear hands, believing that we shall clasp them again.

My brother! this witness is to a gospel that is the gospel for Manchester as well as for Thessalonica. You and I want just the same as these old heathens there wanted. We, too, need the divine Christ, the dying Christ, the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, the returning Christ. And I beseech you to take Him for *your* Christ, in all the fulness of His offices, the manifoldness of His power, and the sweetness of His love, so that of you it may be said, as this Apostle says about these Thessalonians, 'Ye received it not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, as the word of God.'

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## II. THESSALONIANS

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### CHRIST GLORIFIED IN GLORIFIED MEN

'He shall come to be glorified in His saints; and to be admired in all them that believe.'—2 THESS. i. 10.

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the Apostle's earliest letters, both give very great prominence to the thought of the second coming of our Lord to judgment. In the immediate context we have that coming described, with circumstances of majesty and of terror. He 'shall be revealed . . . with the angels of His power.' 'Flaming fire' shall herald His coming; vengeance shall be in His hands, punishment shall follow His sentence; everlasting destruction shall be the issue of evil confronted with 'the face of the Lord'—for so the words in the previous verse rendered 'the presence of the Lord' might more accurately be translated.

And all these facts and images are, as it were, piled up in one half of the Apostle's sky, as in thunderous lurid masses; and on the other side there is the pure blue and the peaceful sunshine. For all this terror and destruction, and flashing fire, and punitive vengeance come to pass in the day when 'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be wondered at in all them that believe.'

There be the two halves—the aspect of that day to those to whom it is the revelation of a stranger, and the aspect of that day to those to whom it is the glorifying of Him who is their life.

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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.'

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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.'

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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You and I will be there. Choose which of the two halves of that sky that I was speaking about in my introductory remarks will be your sky; whether He shall be revealed, and the light of His face be to you like a sword whose flashing edge means destruction, or whether the light of His face shall fall upon your heart because you love Him and trust Him, like the sunshine on the Alpine snow, lifting it to a more lustrous whiteness, and tingeing it with an ethereal hue of more than earthly beauty, which no other power but an indwelling Christ can give. He shall come with 'everlasting destruction from the face'; and 'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be wondered at in all them that believed.' Do you choose which of the two shall be your portion in that day.

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## WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING

'We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power; 12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him.'—2 THESS. i. 11, 12.

In the former letter to the Church of Thessalonica, the Apostle had dwelt, in ever-memorable words—which sound like a prelude of the trump of God—on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world, and to gather His servants into His rest. That great thought seems to have

excited some of the hotter heads in Thessalonica, and to have led to a general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach or actual dawn of the day. This letter is intended as a supplement to the former Epistle, and to damp down the fire which had been kindled. It, therefore, dwells with emphasis on the necessary preliminaries to the dawning of that day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the excited spirits to patience and persistent work, and to calm their feverish expectations. This purpose colours the whole letter.

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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.

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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.'

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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

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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?'

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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On the other hand, there is glory accruing to perfected saints in Christ. 'And ye in Him.' There will be a union so close as that nothing closer is possible, personality being preserved, between Christ and the saints above, who trust Him and love Him and serve Him there. And that union will lead to a participation in His glory which shall exalt their limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' Astronomers tell us that dead, cold matter falls from all corners of the system into the sun, drawn by its magic magnetism from farthest space, and, plunging into that great reservoir of fire, the deadest and coldest matter glows with fervid heat and dazzling light. So you and I, dead, cold, dull, opaque, heavy fragments, drawn into mysterious oneness with Christ, the Sun of our souls, shall be transformed into His own image, and like Him be light and heat which shall radiate through the universe.

Brethren, meditate on your calling, the fact, its method, its aim, its obligations, and its powers. Cherish hopes and desires after goodness, the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate the life of faith working by love, and let us all live in the light of that solemn expectation that the Lord will judge His people. Then we may hope that the voice which summoned us will welcome us, and proclaim even of us, stained and undeserving as we rightly feel ourselves to be: 'They have not defiled their garments, therefore they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

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## EVERLASTING CONSOLATION AND GOOD HOPE

'Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace. 17. Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.'—2 THESS. ii. 16, 17.

This is the second of the four brief prayers which, as I pointed out in my last sermon, break the current of Paul's teaching in this letter, and witness to the depth of his affection to his Thessalonian converts. We do not know the special circumstances under which these then were, but there are many allusions, both in the first and second epistles, which seem to indicate that

they specially needed the gift of consolation.

They were a young Church, just delivered from paganism. Like lambs in the midst of wolves, they stood amongst bitter enemies, their teacher had left them alone, and their raw convictions needed to be consolidated and matured in the face of much opposition. No wonder then that over and over again, in both letters, we have references to the persecutions and tribulations which they endured, and to the consolations which would much more abound.

But whatever may have been their specific circumstances, the prayer which puts special emphasis on comfort is as much needed by each of us as it could ever have been by any of them. For there are no eyes that have not wept, or will not weep; no breath that has not been, or will not be, drawn in sighs; and no hearts that have not bled, or will not bleed. So, dear friends, the prayer that went up for these long since comforted brothers, in their forgotten obscure sorrows, is as needful for each of us—that the God who has given everlasting consolation may apply the consolations which He has supplied, and 'comfort our hearts and stablish them in every good word and work.'

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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.'

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Note, still further, the distinct address to Christ as the Hearer of Prayer. And, note, last of all, about this matter, the singular grammatical irregularity in my text, which is something much more than a mere blunder or slip of the pen. The words which follow, viz., 'comfort' and 'stablish,' are in the singular, whilst these two mighty and august names are their nominatives, and would therefore, by all regularity, require a plural to follow them. That this peculiarity is no mere accident, but intentional and deliberate, is made probable by the two instances in our text, and is made certain, as it seems to me, by the fact that the same anomalous and eloquent construction occurs in the previous epistle to the same church, where we have in exact parallelism with our text, 'God Himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ,' with the singular verb, 'direct our way unto you.' The phraseology is the expression, in grammatical form, of the great truth, 'Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doth the Son likewise.' And from it there gleam out unmistakably the great principles of the unity of action and the distinction of person between Father and Son, in the depths of that infinite and mysterious Godhead.

Now all this, which seems to me to be irrefragable, is made the more remarkable and the stronger as a witness of the truth, from the fact that it occurs in this perfectly incidental fashion, and without a word of explanation or apology, as taking for granted that there was a background of teaching in the Thessalonian Church which had prepared the way for it, and rendered it intelligible, as well as a background of conviction which had previously accepted it.

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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

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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 roots 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. [272]

'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. [273]

'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. [274]

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.

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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.'

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The comforted and stable heart will be a fruitful heart. 'In *every* good word and work.' Ah! how fragmentary is our goodness, like the broken torsos of the statues of fair gods dug up in some classic land. There is no reason why each of us should not appropriate and make our own the forms of goodness to which we are least naturally inclined, and cultivate and possess a symmetrical, fully-developed, all-round goodness, in some humble measure after the pattern of Jesus Christ our Lord. Practical righteousness, 'in every good word and work,' is the outcome of all the sacred and secret consolations and blessings that Jesus Christ imparts. There are many Christian people who are like those swallow-holes, as they call them, characteristic of limestone countries, where a great river plunges into a cave and is no more heard of. You do not get your comforts and your blessing for that, brother, but in order that all the joy and peace, all the calmness and the communion, which you realise in the secret place of the Most High, may be translated into goodness and manifest righteousness in the market-place and the street. We get our goodness where we get our consolation, from Jesus Christ and His Cross.

And so, dear friends, all your comforts will die, and your sorrows will live, unless you have Christ for your own. The former will be like some application that is put on a poisoned bite, which will soothe it for a moment, but as soon as the anodyne dries off the skin, the poison will tingle and burn again, and will be working in the blood, whilst the remedy only touched the surface of the flesh. All your hopes will be like a child's castles on the sand, which the next tide will smooth out and obliterate, unless your hope is fixed on Him. You may have everlasting consolation, you may have a hope which will enable you to look serenely on the ills of life, and on the darkness of death, and on what darkly looms beyond death. You may have a calmed and steadied heart; you may have an all-round, stable, comprehensive goodness. But there is only one way to get these blessings, and that is to grasp and make our own, by simple faith and constant clinging, that great gift, given once for all in Jesus Christ, the gift of comfort that never dies, and of hope that never deceives, and then to apply that gift day by day, through God's good Spirit, to sorrows and trials and duties as they emerge.

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## THE HEART'S HOME AND GUIDE

'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.'—2 THESS. iii. 5.

A word or two of explanation of terms may preface our remarks on this, the third of the Apostle's prayers for the Thessalonians in this letter. The first point to be noticed is that by 'the Lord' here is meant, as usually in the New Testament, Jesus Christ. So that here again we have the distinct recognition of His divinity, and the direct address of prayer to Him.

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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. [279]

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.' [280]

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.' [281]

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.

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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, un murmuring, 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—un murmuring 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.

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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 unrelenting, 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?'

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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.

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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. [286]

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.' [287]

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.' [288]

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## THE LORD OF PEACE AND THE PEACE OF THE LORD

'Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means. The Lord be with you all.'—2 THESS. iii. 16.

We have reached here the last of the brief outbursts of prayer which characterise this letter, and bear witness to the Apostle's affection for his Thessalonian converts. It is the deepening of the ordinary Jewish formula of meeting and parting. We find that, in most of his letters, the Apostle begins with wishing 'grace and peace,' and closes with an echo of the wish. 'Peace be unto you' was often a form which meant nothing. But true religion turns conventional insincerities into real, heartfelt desires. It was often a wish destined to remain unfulfilled. But loving wishes are potent when they are changed into petitions.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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Being thus the Lord of Peace, inasmuch as it was His own constant and unbroken possession, He is the sole giver of it to others.

Ah! brethren, our hearts want far more, for their stable restfulness, than we can find in any hand, or in any heart, except those of Jesus Christ Himself. For what do we need? We need, in order that we should know the sweetness of repose, an adequate object for every part of our nature. If we find something that is good and sweet and satisfying for some portion of this complex being of ours, all its other hungry desires are apt to be left unappeased. So we are shuttle-cocked from one wish to another, and bandied about from one partial satisfaction to another, and in them all it is but segments of our being that are satisfied, whilst all the rest of the circumference remains disquieted. We need that, in one attainable and single object, there shall be at once that which will subjugate the will, that which will illuminate and appease the conscience, that which will satisfy the seeking intellect, and hold forth the promise of endless progress in insight and knowledge, that which will meet all the desires of our ravenous clamant nature, and that which will fill every creek and cranny of our empty hearts as with the flashing brightness of an inflowing tide.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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So, dear brethren, 'in the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me ye shall have peace.' Keep inside the fortress and nothing will disturb. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.' The only place where that hungry, passion-ridden heart of yours, conscious of alienation from God, can find rest, is close by Jesus Christ. 'The Lord be with us all,' and then the peace of that Lord shall clothe and fill our hearts in Christ Jesus.

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## I. TIMOTHY

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### THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT

'Now, the end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.'—1 TIM. 1. 6.

The Apostle has just said that he left Timothy in Ephesus, in order to check some tendencies there which were giving anxiety. Certain teachers had appeared, the effect of whose activity was to create parties, to foster useless speculations, and to turn the minds of the Ephesian Christians away from the practical and moral side of Christianity. In opposition to these, the Apostle here lays down the broad principle that God has spoken, not in order to make acute theologians, or to provide materials for controversy, but in order to help us to love. The whole of these latest letters of the Apostle breathe the mellow wisdom of old age, which has learned to rate brilliant intellectualism, agility, incontestable 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.

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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. [300]

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— [301]

'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. [302]

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 [303]

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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So, brethren, let us learn the secret of all nobility, of all power, of all righteousness of character and conduct. Put your foot on the lowest round of the ladder, and then aspire and climb, and you will reach the summit. Take the first step, and be true to it after you have taken it, and the last will surely come. He that can say, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' will also be able to say, 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'And this commandment have we of God, that he who loves God loves his brother also.'

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## 'THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD'

'The glorious gospel of the blessed God.'—1 TIM. i. 11.

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for our consideration of this text. The first is, that the proper rendering is that which is given in the Revised Version—'the gospel of the glory,' not the 'glorious gospel.' The Apostle is not telling us what kind of thing the Gospel is, but what it is about. He is dealing not with its quality, but with its contents. It is a Gospel which reveals, has to do with, is the manifestation of, the glory of God.

Then the other remark is with reference to the meaning of the word 'blessed.' There are two Greek words which are both translated 'blessed' in the New Testament. One of them, the more common, literally means 'well spoken of,' and points to the action of praise or benediction; describes what a man is when men speak well of him, or what God is when men praise and magnify His name. But the other word, which is used here, and is only applied to God once more in Scripture, has no reference to the human attribution of blessing and praise to Him, but describes Him altogether apart from what men say of Him, as what He is in Himself, the 'blessed,' or, as we might almost say, the 'happy' God. If the word happy seems too trivial, suggesting ideas of levity, of turbulence, of possible change, then I do not know that we can find any better word than that which is already employed in my text, if only we remember that it means the solemn, calm, restful, perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God.

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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,

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.'

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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.

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III. And so, lastly, the revelation of God in Christ is good news for us all.

'The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God.' How that word 'Gospel' has got tarnished and enfeebled by constant use and unreflective use, so that it slips glibly off my tongue and falls without producing any effect upon your hearts! It needs to be freshened up by considering what really it means. It means this: here are we like men shut up in a beleaguered city, hopeless, helpless, with no power to break out or to raise the siege; provisions failing, death certain. Some of you older men and women remember how that was the case in that awful siege of Paris, in the Franco-German War, and what expedients were adopted in order to get some communication from without. And here to us, prisoned, comes, as it did to them, a despatch borne under a dove's wing, and the message is this:—God is love; and that you may know that He is, He has sent you His Son who died on the Cross, the sacrifice for a world's sin. Believe it, and trust it, and all your transgressions will pass away.

My brother, is not that good news? Is it not *the* good news that you need—the news of a Father, of pardon, of hope, of love, of strength, of purity, of heaven? Does it not meet our fears, our forebodings, our wants at every point? It comes to you. What do you do with it? Do you welcome it eagerly, do you clutch it to your hearts, do you say, 'This is *my* Gospel'? Oh! let me beseech you, welcome the message; do not turn away from the word from heaven, which will bring life and blessedness to all your hearts! Some of you have turned away long enough, some of you, perhaps, are fighting with the temptation to do so again even now. Let me press that ancient Gospel upon your acceptance, that Christ the Son of God has died for you, and lives to bless and help you. Take it and live! So shall you find that, 'as cold water to a thirsty soul,' so is this best of all news from the far country.

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## THE GOSPEL IN SMALL

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all 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.

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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.'

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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.'

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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!

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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'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.

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Brother! take it. And, if you do, begin where it begins, with your sins; and be contented to be saved as a sinner in danger and sickness, who can neither defend nor heal yourself. And thus coming, you will test the rope and find it hold; you will take the medicine and know that it cures; and, by your own experience, you will be able to say, 'This *is* a faithful saying, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.'

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## THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

'Of whom I am chief.'—1 TIM. i. 15.

The less teachers of religion talk about themselves the better; and yet there is a kind of personal reference, far removed from egotism and offensiveness. Few such men have ever spoken more of themselves than Paul did, and yet none have been truer to his motto: 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus.' For the scope of almost all his personal references is the depreciation of self, and the magnifying of the wonderful mercy which drew him to Jesus Christ. Whenever he speaks of his conversion it is with deep emotion and with burning cheeks. Here, for instance, he adduces himself as the typical example of God's long-suffering. If *he* were saved none need despair.

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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.'

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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.

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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 shortsighted, or phenomenally self-complacent.

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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,

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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. [332]

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. [333]

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. [334]

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

And without it there will be little pity of, and love for, our fellows. Unless we feel the common evil, and estimate by the intensity of its working in ourselves how sad are its ravages in others, our charity to men will be as tepid as our love to God. Did you ever notice that, historically, the widest benevolence to men goes along with what some people call the 'narrowest' theology? People tell us, for instance, to mark the contrast between the theology which is usually called evangelical and the wide benevolence usually accompanying it, and ask how the two things agree. The 'wide' benevolence comes directly from the 'narrow' theology. He that knows the plague of his own heart, and how Christ has redeemed him, will go, with the pity of Christ in his heart, to help to redeem others.

So, dear friends, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

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## A TEST CASE

'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.'—1 TIM. i. 16.

The smallest of God's creatures, if it were only a gnat dancing in a sunbeam, has a right to have its well-being considered as an end of God's dealings. But no creature is so isolated or great as that it has a right to have its well-being regarded as the sole end of God's dealings. That is true about all His blessings and gifts; it is eminently true about His gift of salvation. He saves men because He loves them individually, and desires to make them blessed; but He also saves them because He desires that through them others shall be brought into the living knowledge of His love. It is most especially true about great religious teachers and guides.

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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?

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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

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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.

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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.'

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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.

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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. [342]

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. [343]

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.' [344]

For us all the fountain to which Paul had recourse is open. Why do we draw so little from it? The fire which burned, refining and illuminating, in him may be kindled in all our hearts. Why are we so icy? His convictions are of some value, as subsidiary evidence to Gospel facts; his experience is of still more value as an attestation and an instance of Gospel blessings. Believe like Paul and you will be saved like Paul. Jesus Christ will show to you all long-suffering. For though Paul received it all he did not exhaust it, and the same long-suffering which was lavished on him is available for each of us. Only you too must say like him, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'

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## THE GLORY OF THE KING

'Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.'—1 TIM. i. 17.

With this burst of irrepressible praise the Apostle ends his reference to his own conversion as a transcendent, standing instance of the infinite love and transforming power of God. Similar doxologies accompany almost all his references to the same fact. This one comes from the lips of 'Paul the aged,' looking back from almost the close of a life which owed many sorrows and troubles to that day on the road to Damascus. His heart fills with thankfulness that overflows into the great words of my text. He had little to be thankful for, judged according to the rules of [345]

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. [346]

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. [347]

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. [348]

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. [349]

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 doubtfully 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. [350]

'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. [351]

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. [352]

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.

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One last word, brethren. This revelation is made to us all. What is God to you, friend? Is He a remote, majestic, unsympathising, terrible Deity? Is He dim, shadowy, unwelcome; or is He God whose love softens His power; Whose power magnifies his love? Oh! I beseech you, open your eyes and your hearts to see that that remote Deity is of no use to you, will do nothing for you, cannot help you, may probably judge you, but will never heal you. And open your hearts to see that 'the only God' whom men can love is God in Christ. If here we lift up grateful praise 'unto Him that loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in His blood,' we, too, shall one day join in that great chorus which at last will be heard saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'

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## WHERE AND HOW TO PRAY

'I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting.'—1 TIM. ii. 8.

The context shows that this is part of the Apostle's directory for public worship, and that, therefore, the terms of the first clause are to be taken somewhat restrictedly. They teach the duty of the male members of the Church to take public, audible part in its worship.

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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.'

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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.

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But if the Apostle wills 'that men pray alway,' it must be possible while going about business, study, daily work, work at home amongst the children, work in the factory amongst spindles, work in the counting-house amongst ledgers, work in the study amongst lexicons, not only to pray whilst we are working, but to make work prayer, which is even better. The old saying that is often quoted with admiration, 'work is worship,' is only half true. There is a great deal of work that is anything but worship. But it is true that if, in all that I do, I try to realise my dependence on God for power; to look to Him for direction, and to trust to Him for issue, then, whether I eat, or drink, or pray, or study, or buy and sell, or marry or am given in marriage, all will be worship of God. 'I will that men pray everywhere.' What a noble ideal, and not an impossible or absurd one! This was not the false ideal of a man that had withdrawn himself from duty in order to cultivate his own soul, but the true ideal of one of the hardest workers that ever lived. Paul could say 'I am pressed above measure, insomuch that I despair of life, and that which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches,' and yet driven, harassed beyond his strength with business and cares as he was, he did himself what he bids us do. His life was prayer, therefore his life was Christ, therefore he was equal to all demands. None of us are as hard-worked, as heavily pressed, as much hunted by imperative and baying dogs of duties as Paul was. It is possible for us to obey this commandment and to pray everywhere. A servant girl down on her knees doing the doorsteps may do that task from such a motive, and with such accompaniments, as she dips her cloth into the hot-water bucket, as to make even it prayer to God. We each can lift all the littlenesses of our lives into a lofty region, if only we will link them on to the throne of God by prayer.

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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.'

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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 innocence, 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,

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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.'

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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.

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We make mistakes in our naming of things and in our desires after things, and it is only when we have learned to say 'Not my will but Thine be done,' that we have the right to pray, 'without doubting.' If we do so pray, certainly we receive. But a tremulous faith brings little blessing, and small answer. An unsteady hand cannot hold the cup still for Him to pour in the wine of His grace, but as the hand shakes, the cup moves, and the precious gift is spilled. The still, submissive soul will be filled, and the answer to its prayer will be, 'Whatsoever things ye desire believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.'

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## SPIRITUAL ATHLETICS

'Exercise thyself unto Godliness.'—1 TIM. iv. 7.

Timothy seems to have been not a very strong character: sensitive, easily discouraged, and perhaps with a constitutional tendency to indolence. At all events, it is very touching to notice how the old Apostle—a prisoner, soon to be a martyr—forgot all about his own anxieties and burdens, and, through both of his letters to his young helper, gives himself to the task of bracing him up. Thus he says to him, in my text, amongst other trumpet-tongued exhortations, 'Exercise thyself unto godliness.'

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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. [363]

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. [364]

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. [365]

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 [366]

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. [367]

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. [368]

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. [369]

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 [370]

of them bursts its way through them, then come the inundations down in Egypt, and bring fertility. And there are hundreds of professing Christians whose fields lie barren and baked in the sunshine, because they have stopped with weeds, far away up amongst the hills, the stream that would water them. Clear out the weeds, and the water will do the rest.

And 'exercise thyself unto godliness' by keeping the crown and the prize often and clear in view. 'Paul the aged' in this very letter says: 'I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory.' He had said, in the midst of the strife: 'Not as though I had already attained—I press toward the mark for the prize.' And the prize which gleamed before him through all the dust of the arena now shone still more brightly when his hand had all but clasped it. If we desire to 'run with perseverance the race that is set before us' we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and see in Him, not only the Rewarder, but the Reward, of the 'exercise unto godliness.'

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## ONE WITNESS, MANY CONFESSORS

'Thou . . . hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 13. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, 14. That thou keep this commandment. . . .'—1 TIM. vi. 12-14.

You will observe that 'a good confession,' or rather 'the good confession,' is said here to have been made both by Timothy and by Christ. But you will observe also that whilst the subject-matter is the same, the action of Timothy and Jesus respectively is different. The former professes, or rather confesses, the good confession; the latter witnesses. There must be some reason for the significant variation of terms to indicate that the relation of Timothy and Jesus to the good confession which they both made was, in some way, a different one, and that though what they said was identical, their actions in saying it were different.

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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.

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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,

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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. [374]

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.' [375]

## 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. [376]

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 [377]



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.'

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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.

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Again, let the thought of the great tribunal stimulate us. 'I give thee charge before God, who quickeneth all things—and who therefore will quicken you—and before Jesus Christ, that thou keep this commandment.' Jesus, who witnessed to the truth, witnesses, in the sense of beholding and watching, us, knowing our weakness and ready to help us. 'The faithful witness, and the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth,' is by us, as we witness for Him. And so, though we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the saints in the past who have witnessed for God, and been witnessed to by Him, we have to turn away from them, and 'look off' from all others, 'unto Jesus.' And we may, like the first of the noble army of martyrs, see the heavens opened, and Jesus 'standing'—started to His feet, to see and to help Stephen—'at the right hand of God.'

Brethren, let us listen to His witness, let us accept it, setting to our seals that God is true. Then let us try to echo it back by word, and to attest our confession by our conduct, and then we may comfort ourselves with the great word, 'He that confesseth Me before men, Him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven.'

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## THE CONDUCT THAT SECURES THE REAL LIFE

'Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.'—1 TIM. vi. 19.

In the first flush of the sense of brotherhood, the Church of Jerusalem tried the experiment of having all things in common. It was not a success, it was soon abandoned, it never spread. In the later history of the Church, and especially in these last Pauline letters, we see clearly that distinctions of pecuniary position were very definitely marked amongst the believers. There were 'rich men' in the churches of which Timothy had charge. No doubt they were rich after a very modest fashion, for Paul's standard of opulence is not likely to have been a very high one, seeing that he himself ministered with his own hands to his necessities, and had only one cloak to keep him warm in winter time. But great or small as were the resources of these men, they were rich

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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. [381]

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. [382]

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.' [383]

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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. [388]

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'! [389]

'Thy works, thine alms, and all thy good endeavour  
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod,  
But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,  
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.'

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### Transcriber's Notes

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

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