1 Timothy Exposition 2 - Maclaren

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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 Timothy 2:8.

THE context shows that this is 'part of the Apostle's directory for public worship, and that, therefore, the terms of the first clause are to be taken somewhat restrictedly. They teach the duty of the male members of the Church to take public, audible part in its worship.

Everywhere, therefore, must here properly be taken in the restricted signification of 'every place of Christian assembly.' And from the whole passage there comes a picture of what sort of thing a meeting of the primitive Church for worship was, very different from anything that we see nowadays. 'Every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath an exhortation.' I fancy that some of the eminently respectable and utterly dead congregations which call themselves Christian Churches would be very much astonished if they could see what used to be the manner of Christian worship nineteen hundred years ago, and would get a new notion of what was meant by 'decently, and in order.'

But we may fairly, I suppose, if once we confess that this is so, widen somewhat the scope of these words, and take them rather as expressive of the Apostle's desire and injunction, for the word that he used here, 'I will' is a very strong one, to all Christian people, be they men or women, that they pray 'everywhere,' in the widest sense of that expression, 'lifting up holy hands without wrath or doubting.'

I do not attempt anything more than just to go, step by step, through the Apostle's words and gather up the duties which each enjoins.

'I will that men pray everywhere.' That is the same in spirit as the Apostle's other command: 'Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks.' A very high ideal, but a very reasonable one, for unless we can find some place where God is not, and where the telegraph between heaven and earth is beyond our reach, there is no place where we 'should not pray. And unless we can find a place where we do not want God, nor need Him, there is no place where we should not pray. Because, then, 'everywhere' is equally near Him,

and the straight road to His throne is of the same length from every hole and corner of the world; therefore, wherever men are, they ought to be clinging to His skirts, and reaching out their open hands for His benefits; and because, wherever a man is, there he utterly depends upon God, and needs the actual intervention of His love, and the energising of His power for everything, even for his physical life, so that he cannot wink his eyelashes without God's help, therefore, 'In every place I will that men pray.'

And how is that to be done? First of all, by keeping out of all places where it is impossible that we should pray; for although He is everywhere, and we want Him everywhere, there are places — and some of us know the roads to them but too well, and are but too often in them — where prayer would be a strange incongruity. A man will not pray over the counter of a public-house. A man will not pray over a sharp bargain. A man will not pray that God may bless his outbursts of anger, or sensuality and the like. A man will not pray when he feels that he is deep down in some pit of self-caused alienation from God. The possibility of praying in given circumstances is a sharp test, although a very rough and ready one, whether we ought to be in these circumstances or not. Do not let us go where we cannot take God with us; and if we feel that it would be something like blasphemy to call to Him from such a place, do not let us trust ourselves there. Jonah could pray out of the belly of the fish, and there was no incongruity in that; but many a professing Christian man gets swallowed up by monsters of the deep, and durst not for very shame send up a prayer to God. Get out of all such false positions.

But if the Apostle wills 'that men pray alway; it must be possible while going about business, study, daily work, work at home amongst the children, work in the factory amongst spindles, work in the counting-house amongst ledgers, work in the study amongst lexicons, not only to pray whilst we are working, but to make work prayer, which is even better. The old saying that is often quoted with admiration, 'work is worship,' is only half true. There is a great deal of work that is anything but worship. But it is true that if, in all that I do, I try to realise my dependence on God for power; to look to Him for direction, and to trust to Him for issue, then, whether I eat, or drink, or pray, or study, or buy and sell, or marry or am given in marriage, all will be worship of God. 'I will that men pray everywhere.' What a noble ideal, and not an impossible or absurd one! This was not the false ideal of a man that had withdrawn himself from duty in order to cultivate his own soul, but the true ideal of one of the hardest workers that ever lived. Paul could say 'I am pressed above measure,

insomuch that I despair of life, and that which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches,' and yet driven, harassed beyond his strength with business and cares as he was, he did himself what he bids us do. His life was prayer, therefore his life was Christ, therefore he was equal to all demands. None of us are as hard-worked, as heavily pressed, as much hunted by imperative and baying dogs of duties as Paul was. It is possible for us to obey this commandment and to pray everywhere. A servant girl down on her knees doing the doorsteps may do that task from such a motive, and with such accompaniments, as she dips her cloth into the hot-water bucket, as to make even it prayer to God. We each can lift all the littlenesses of our lives into a lofty region, if only we will link them on to the throne of God By prayer.

There is another way by which this ideal can be attained, and that is to cultivate the habit, which I think many Christian people do not cultivate, of little short swallow-flights of prayer in the midst of our daily work. 'They cried unto God in the battle, and He was entreated of them.' If a Philistine sword was hanging over the man's head, do you think he would have much time to drop down upon his knees, to make a petition, divided into all the parts which divines tell us go to make up the complete idea of prayer? I should think not; but he could say, 'Save me, O Lord!' 'They cried to God in the battle — little, sharp, short shrieks of prayer — and He was entreated of them.' If you would cast swift electric flashes of that kind more frequently up to heaven, you would bring down the Blessings that very often do not come after the most elaborate and proper and formal petitions. 'Lord, save or I perish!' It did not take long to say that, but it made the difference between drowning and deliverance.

Still further, notice the conditions o£ true prayer that are here required. I will that men pray everywhere lifting up holy hands. ' That is a piece of symbolism, of course. Apparently the Jewish attitude of prayer was unlike ours. They seem to have stood during devotion and to have elevated their hands with open, empty, upturned palms to heaven. We clasp ours in entreaty, or fold them as a symbol of resignation and submission. They lifted them, with the double idea, I suppose, of offering themselves to God thereby, and of asking Him to put something into the empty hand, just as a beggar says nothing, but holds out a battered hat, in order to get a copper from a passer-by. The psalmist desired that the lifting up of his hands might be as the 'evening sacrifice.'

If a man stands with his open, empty palm held up to God, it is as much as to say 'I need, I desire, I expect.' And these elements are what we must have in our prayers; the sense of want, the longing for supply, the anticipation of an answer. What do you hold out your hand for? Because you expect me to drop something into it, because you want to get something. How do you hold out your hand? Empty. And if I am clasping my five fingers round some earthly good it is of no use to hold up that hand to God. Nothing will come into it. How can it? He must first take the imitation diamonds out of it or we must turn it round and shake them out before He can fill it with real jewels. As for him who continues to clutch worldly goods, 'let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.' Empty the palm before you lift it.

Still further, says Paul, 'lifting up holy hands.' That, of course, needs no explanation. One of the psalms, you may remember, says ' I

will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass Thine altar.' The psalmist felt that unless there was a previous lustration and cleansing, it was vain for him to go round the altar. And you may remember how sternly and eloquently the prophet Isaiah rebukes the hypocritical worshippers in Jerusalem when he says to them, 'Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings,' and then come and pray. A foul hand gets nothing from God.

How can it? God's best gift is of such a sort as cannot be laid upon a dirty palm. A little sin dams back the whole of God's grace, and there are too many men that pray, pray, pray, and never get any of the things that we pray for, because there is something stopping the pipe, and they do not know what it is, and perhaps would be very sorry to clear it out if they did. But all the same, the channel of communication is blocked and stopped, and it is impossible that any blessing should come. Geographers tell us that a microscopic vegetable grows rapidly in one of the upper affluents of the Nile, and makes a great dam across the river which keeps back the water, and so makes one of the lakes which have recently been explored; and then, when the dam breaks, the rising of the Nile fertilises Egypt. Some of us have growing, unchecked; and unnoticed, in the innermost channels of our hearts, little sins that mat themselves together and keep increasing until the grace of God is utterly kept from permeating the parched recesses of our spirits. 'I will that men pray, Hiring up holy hands,' and unless we do, alas I 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 bath no intercepting power. So, though the uplifted hands are stained, He will cleanse them if, as we lift them to Him, we say, 'Lord, they are foul, if thou wilt Thou caner make them clean.'

But the final requirement is: 'Without wrath or doubting.' I do not think that Christian people generally recognise with sufficient clearness the close and inseparable connection which subsists between their right feelings towards their fellow-men and the acceptance of their prayers with God. It is very instructive that here, alongside of requirements which apply to our relations to God, the Apostle should put so emphatically and plainly one which refers to our relations to our fellows. An angry man is a very unfit man to pray, and a man who cherishes in his heart any feelings of that nature towards anybody may be quite sure that he is thereby shutting himself out from blessings which Otherwise might be his. We do not sufficiently realise, or act on the importance, in regard to our relations with God, of our living in charity with all men. 'First, go and be reconciled to thy brother,' is as needful to-day as when the word was spoken.

'Without… doubting.' Have I the right to be perfectly sure that my prayer will be answered? Yes and no. If my prayer is, as all true prayer ought to be, the submission of my will to God's and not the forcing of my will upon God, then I have the right to be perfectly sure. But if I am only asking in self-will, for things that my own heart craves, that is not prayer; that is dictation. That is sending instructions to heaven; that is telling God what He ought to do. That is not the kind of prayer that may be offered 'without doubting.' It might, indeed, be offered, if offered at all; with the certainty that it will not be answered. For this is the assurance on which we are to rest — and some of us may think it is a very poor one — 'we know that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.' To get what we want would often be our ruin. God loves HIS children a great deal too well to give them serpents when they ask for them, thinking they are fish, or to give them stones when they beseech Him for them, believing them to be bread. He will never hand you a scorpion when you ask Him to give it you, because, with its legs and its sting tucked under its body, it is like an egg.

We make mistakes in our naming of things and in our desires after things, and it is only when we have learned to say 'Not my will but Thine be done,' that we have the right to pray, 'without doubting.' If we do so pray, certainly we receive. But a tremulous faith brings little blessing, and small answer. An unsteady hand cannot hold the cup still for Him to pour in the wine of His grace, but as the hand shakes, the cup moves, and the precious gift is spilled. The still, submissive soul will be filled, and the answer to its prayer will be, 'Whatsoever things ye desire believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.'

SPIRITUAL ATHLETICS

'Exercise thyself unto Godliness.' — 1 Timothy 4:7.

TIMOTHY seems to have been not a very strong character: sensitive, easily discouraged, and perhaps with a constitutional tendency to indolence. At all events, it is very touching to notice how the old Apostle — . a prisoner, soon to be a martyr — forgot all about his own anxieties and burdens, and, through both of his letters to his young helper, gives himself to the task of bracing him up. Thus he says to him, in my text, amongst other trumpet-tongued exhortations, 'Exercise thyself unto godliness.'

If I were preaching to ministers, I should have a good deal to say about the necessity of this precept for them, and to remind them that it was first spoken, not to a private member of the Church, as an injunction for the Christian life in general, but as having a

special bearing on the temptations and necessities of those who stand in official positions in the Church. For there is nothing that is more likely to sap a man's devotion, and to eat out the earnestness and sincerity of a Christian life, than that he should be — as I, for instance, and every man in my position has to be — constantly occupied with presenting God's Word to other people. We are apt to look upon it as, in some sense, our stock in-trade, and to forget to apply it to ourselves. So it was with a very special bearing on the particular occupation and temptation of his correspondent that Paul said' Exercise thyself unto godliness' before you begin to talk to other people.

But that would not be appropriate to my present audience. And I take this injunction as one of universal application.

I. Notice, then, here expressed the ever-present and universal aim of the Christian life.
Paul does not say 'be godly'; but 'exercise thyself unto' — with a view towards — 'godliness.' In other words, to him godliness is the great aim which every Christian man should set before him as the one supreme purpose of his life.

Now I am not going to spend any time on mere verbal criticism, but I must point to the somewhat unusual word which the Apostle here employs for

'godliness.' It is all but exclusively confined to these last letters of the Apostle. It was evidently a word that had unfolded the depth and fulness and comprehensiveness of its meaning to him in the last stage of his religious experience. For it is only once employed in the Acts of the Apostles, and some two or three times in the doubtful second Epistle of St. Peter. And all the other instances of its use lie in these three letters — the one to Titus and two to Timothy; and eight of them are in this first one. The old Apostle keeps perpetually recurring to this one idea of 'godliness.' What does he mean by it? The etymological meaning of the word is 'well-directed reverence,' but it is to be noticed that the context specifically points to one form of well-directed reverence, viz. as shown in conduct. 'Active godliness' is the meaning of the word; religion embodied in deeds, emotions, and sentiments, and creeds, put into fact.

This noble and pregnant word teaches us, first of all, that all true religion finds its ultimate sphere and best manifestation in the conduct of daily life. That sounds like a platitude. I wish it were. If we believed that, and worked it out, we should be very different people from what the most of us are; and our chapels would be very different places, and the professing Church would have a new breath of life over it. Religion must have its foundation laid deep in the truths revealed by God for our acceptance. And does God tell us anything simply that we may believe it, and there an end? What is the purpose of all the principles and facts which make up the body of the Christian revelation? To enlighten us? Yes! To enlighten us only? A hundred times no! The destination of a principle, of a truth, is to pass out from the understanding into the whole nature of man.

And if, as I said, the foundation of religion is laid in truths, principles, facts, the second story of the building is certain emotions, sentiments, feelings, desires, and affections, and 'experiences' — as people call them which follow from the acceptance of these truths and principles. And is that all? A thousand times no! What do we get the emotions for? What does God give you a Revelation of Himself for, that kindles your love if you believe it? That you may love? Yes! Only that you may love? Certainly not. And so the top story is conduct, based upon the beliefs, and inspired by the emotions.

In former centuries, the period between the Reformation and our fathers' time, the tendency of the Protestant Church was very largely to let the conception of religion as a body of truths overshadow everything else. And

nowadays, amongst a great many people, the temptation is to take the second story for the main one, and to think that if a man loves, and has the glow at his heart of the conscious reception of God's love, and has longings and yearnings, and Christian hopes and desires, and passes into the sweetnesses of communion with God, in his solitary moments, and plunges deep into the truths of God's Word, that is godliness. But the true exhortation to us is — Do not stop with putting in the foundations of a correct creed, nor at the second stage of an emotional religion. Both are needful. Number one and number two are infinitely precious, but both exist for number three. And true religion has its sphere in conduct. 'Exercise thyself unto godliness.' That does not mean only — for it does include that — cultivate devout emotions, or realise the facts and the principles of the Gospel, but it means, take these along with you into your daily life, and work them out there. Bring all the facts and truths of your creed, and all the sweet and select, the secret and sacred, emotions which you have felt, to bear upon your daily life. The soil in which the tree grows, and the roots of the tree, its stem and its blossoms, are all means to the end — fruit. What is the use of the clearest conceptions, and of the most tender, delicate, holy emotions, if they do not drive the wheels of action? God does not give us the Gospel to make us wise, nor even to make us blessed, but He gives it to us to make us good men and women, working His .work in our daily tasks. All true religion has its sphere in conduct.

But then there is another side to that. All true conduct must have its root in religion, and I, for my part — though of course it is extremely 'narrow' and 'antiquated' to profess it I, for my part, do not believe that in the long-run, and in general, you will get noble living apart from the emotions and sentiments which the truths of Christianity, accepted and fed upon, are sure to produce. And so this day, with its very general depreciation of the importance of accurate conceptions of revealed truth, and its exaltation of conduct,

is on the verge of a very serious error. Godliness, well-directed reverence, is the parent of all noble living, and the one infallible way to produce a noble life is faith in Christ, and love which flows from the faith.

If all that is so, if godliness is, not singing psalms, not praying, not saying 'How sweet it is to feel the love of God,' still less saying' I accept the principles of Christianity as they are laid down in the Bible'; but carrying out beliefs and emotions in deeds, then the true aim which we should have continually before us as Christians is plain enough. We may not reach it completely, but we can approximate indefinitely towards it. Aim is more

important than achievement. Direction is more vital in determining the character of a life than progress actually made. Note the form of the exhortation, 'exercise thyself towards godliness,' which involves the same thought as is expressed in Paul's other utterance of irrepressible aspiration and effort, 'Not as if I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after,' or as he had just said, 'press towards the mark,' in continual approximation to the ideal. A complete penetration of all our actions by the principles and emotions of the Gospel is what is set before us here.

And that is the only aim that corresponds to what and where I am and to what I need. I fall back upon the grandly simple old words, very dear to some of us, perhaps, by boyish associations, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and (so) to enjoy Him for ever.' 'Unto Godliness' is to be the aim of every true life, and it is the only aim which corresponds to our circumstances and our relations, our powers and possibilities.

II. Notice the discipline which such an aim demands.

'Exercise thyself.' Now, I have no doubt that the bulk of my hearers know that the word here rendered 'exercise' is drawn from the athlete's training-ground, and is, in fact, akin to the word which is transported into English under the form 'gymnasium.' The Apostle's notion is that, just as the athlete, racer or boxer goes through a course of training, so there is a training as severe, necessary for the godliness which Paul regards as the one true aim of life.

You Christian people ought to train your spirits at least as carefully as the athlete does his muscles. There are plenty of people, calling themselves Christians, who never give one-hundredth part as much systematic and diligent pains to fulfil the ideal of their Christian life as men will take to learn to ride a bicycle or to pull the stroke oar in a college boat. The self-denial and persistence and concentration which are freely spent upon excellence in athletic pursuits might well put to shame the way in which Christians go about the task of 'doing' their religion.

I suppose there never was a time, in England's history at any rate, whatever it may have been in Greece, when modern instances might give more point to an old saw than to-day does for this text, when athletic sports of all kinds are taking up so much of the time and the energy of our young men. I do not want to throw cold water on that, but I do say it is a miserable thing to think that so many professing Christians will give a great deal more pains to learn to play lawn tennis than ever they did to learn to be good, Christian people.

'Exercise thyself unto godliness.' Make a business of living your Christianity. Be in earnest about it. A tragically large number of professing Christians never were in earnest about mending themselves. And that is why they are so far, far behind. 'Exercise thyself.' You say, How? 'Well, I say, first of all, concentration. 'This one thing I do.' That does not mean narrowing, because this 'one thing' can be done by means of all the legitimate things that we have to do in the world. Next Friday, when you go on 'Change, you can be exercising yourself to godliness there. Whatever may be the form of our daily occupation, it is the gymnasium where God has put us to exercise our muscles in, and so to gain' the wrestling thews that throw the world.' 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.' The concentration for which I plead does not shut us out from any place but the devil's wrestling-ground. All that is legitimate, all that is innocent, may be made a means for manifesting and for increasing our godliness. Only you have to take God with you into your life, and to try, more and more consciously, to make Him the motive-power of all that you do. Then the old saying which is profoundly true as it was originally meant, and has of late years been so misused as to become profoundly false, will be true again, 'Laborare est orate. ' Yes! it is; if worship underlies the work, but not else.

Again I say, exercise yourselves by abstinence. How many things did the athlete at Corinth do without in his training? How many things do prizefighters and rowing men do without when in training today? How rigidly, for a while at any rate, they abstain — whether they recompense themselves afterwards or not has nothing to do with my present purpose. And is it not a shame that some sensual man shall, for the sake of winning a medal or a cup, be able gladly to abandon the delights of sense — eating, drinking, and the like — and content himself with a hermit's Spartan fare, and that Christian people so seldom, and so reluctantly, and so partially turn away from the poisoned cups and the indigestible dainties which the world provides for them? I think that any Christian man who complains of the things which he is shut out from doing if he is to cultivate the godliness which should be his life need only go to any place where horse-jockeys congregate to get a lesson that he may well lay to heart. 'Exercise thyself,' for it is unto godliness.

And then what I said in a former part of this sermon about the various stages of religion may suggest another view of the method of discipline proper to the Christian life. The strenuous exercise of all our powers is called for. But if it is true that the godliness of my

text is the last outcome of the emotions which spring from the reception of certain truths, then if we work backwards, as it were, we shall get the best way of producing the godliness. That is to say, the main effort for all men who are in earnest in regard to their own growth in Christlikeness is to keep themselves in touch with the truths of the Gospel, and in the exercise of the sentiments and emotions which flow from these. Or, to put it into other words, the 'gymnastic' is to be, mainly, the man's clinging, with all his might of mind and heart, to Christ, and the truths that are wrapped up in Him; and the cultivation of the habit of continual faith and love turned to that Lord. If I see to number one — the creed, and to number two — the emotions, they will see to number three — the conduct. Keep the truths of the Gospel well in your minds, and keep yourselves well in the attitude of contact with Jesus Christ, and power for life will come into you. But if the fountain is choked, the bed of the stream will be dry. They tell us that away up in Abyssinia there form across the bed of one of the branches of the Nile great fields of weed. And as long as they continue unbroken the lower river is shrunken. But when the stream at the back of them bursts its way through them, then come the inundations down in Egypt, and bring fertility. And there are hundreds of professing Christians whose fields lie barren and baked in the sunshine, because they have stopped with weeds, far away up amongst the hills, the stream that would water them Clear out the weeds, and the water will do the rest.

And, exercise thyself unto godliness' by keeping the crown and the prize often and clear in view. 'Paul the aged' in this very letter says: 'I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory.' He had said, in the midst of the strife: 'Not as though I had already attained — I press toward the mark for the prize.' And the prize which gleamed before him through all the dust of the arena now shone still more brightly when his hand had all hut 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.'

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 Timothy 6:12-14.

You will observe that 'a good confession.' or rather 'the good confession,' is said here to have been made both by Timothy and by Christ, But you will observe also that whilst the subject-matter is the same, the action of Timothy and Jesus respectively is different. The former professes, or rather confesses, the good confession; the latter witnesses. There must be some reason for the significant variation of terms to indicate that the relation of Timothy and Jesus to the good confession which they both made was, in some way, a different one, and that though what they said was identical, their actions in saying it were different.

Then there is another point of parallelism to be noticed. Timothy made his profession 'before many witnesses,' but the Apostle calls to his remembrance, and summons up before the eye of his imagination, a more august tribunal than that before which he had confessed his faith, and says that he gives him charge 'before God' (for the same word is used in the original in both verses), 'who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus.' So the earthly witnesses of the man's confession dwindle into insignificance when compared with the heavenly ones. And upon these thoughts is based the practical exhortation, 'Keep the commandment without spot.' So, then, we have three things: the great Witness and His confession, the subordinate confessors who echo His witness, and the practical issue that comes out of both thoughts.

I. We have the great Witness and His confession

Now, you will remember, perhaps, that if we turn to the Gospels, we find that all of them give the subject-matter of Christ's confession before Pilate, as being that He was the King of the Jews. But the Evangelist John expands that conversation, and gives us details which present a remarkable verbal correspondence with the words of the Apostle here, and must suggest to us that, though John's Gospel was not written at the date of this Epistle, the fact that is enshrined for us in it was independently known by the Apostle Paul.

For, if I may for a moment recall the incident to you, you will remember that when Pilate put to the Saviour the question, 'Art Thou a King?' our Lord, before He would answer, took pains to make quite clear the sense in which the judge asked Him of His royal state. For He said, 'Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me? If it is your Roman idea of a king, the answer must be, "No." If it is the Jewish Messianic idea, the answer must be, "Yes." I must know first what the question means, in the mind of the questioner, before I answer it.' And when Pilate brushes aside Christ's question, with a sort of impatient contempt, and returns to the charge, 'What hast Thou done?' our Lord, whilst He makes the claim of sovereignty, takes care to make it in such a way as to show that Rome need fear nothing from Him, and that His dominion rested not upon force. 'My Kingdom is not of this world.' And then, when Pilate, like a practical Roman, bewildered with all these fine-spun distinctions, sweeps them impatiently out of the field, and

comes back to ‘Yes, or No; are you a King?’ our Lord gives a distinct affirmative answer, but at once soars up into the region where Pilate had declined to follow Him: ‘To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth.’ ‘Before Pontius Pilate he witnessed the good confession.’ And His confession was His royalty, His relation to the truth, and His pre-existence. ‘To this end was I born,’ and the next clause is no mere tautology, nor a nonsignificant parallelism, ‘and for this cause came I into the world.’ Then He was before He came, and birth to Him was not the beginning of being, but the beginning of a new relation.

So, then, out of this great word of our text, which falls into line with great many other words of the New Testament, we may gather important and significant truths with regard to two things, the matter and the manner of Christ’s witnessing. You remember how the same Apostle John — for whom that word ‘witness’ has a fascination in all its manifold applications — in that great vision of the Apocalypse, when to his blessed sight the vision of the Master was once given, extols Him as ‘the faithful witness, and the First-begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.’ And you may remember how our Lord Himself, after His conversation with Nicodemus, says, ‘We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen,’ and how again, in answer to the taunts of the Jews, He takes the taunt as the most intimate designation of the peculiarity of His person and of His work, when He says, ‘I am one that bear witness of Myself.’ So, then, we have to interpret his declaration before Pilate in the light of all these other sayings, and to remember that He who said that He came to bear witness to the truth, said also,’ I am the truth,’ and therefore that his great declaration that He was the witness-bearer to the truth is absolutely synonymous with His other declaration that He bears witness of Himself.

Now, here we come upon one of the great peculiarities of Christ as a religious teacher. The new thing, the distinctive peculiarity, the difference between Him and all other teachers, lies just here, that His theme is not so much moral or religious principles, as His own nature and person. He was the most egotistical man that ever lived on the face of the earth, with an egotism only to be accounted for, if we believe, as He Himself said, that in His person was the truth that He proclaimed, and that when He witnessed to Himself He revealed God. And thus He stands, separate from all other teachers, by this, that He is His own theme and His own witness.

So much for the matter of the good confession to which we need only add here its pendant in the confession before the High Priest. To the representative of the civil government He said, ‘I am a king,’ and then, as I remarked, He soared up into regions where no Roman official could rise to follow Him, and to the representative of the Theocratic government He said, ‘Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right band 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 be 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 beard. The whole question is as to his veracity and competency. Jesus Christ states it for the characteristic of His work, ‘We speak that we do know, and bear witness to that we have seen.’ His relation to the truth which He brings to us is not that of a man who has thought it out, who has been brought to it by experience, or by feeling, or by a long course of investigation; still less is it the relation which a man would bear to a truth that he had learnt from others originally, however much he had made it his own thereafter: but it is that of one who is not a thinker, or a learner, or a reasoner, but who is simply an attester, a witness. And so He stands before us, and says,’ The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, they are life. Believe Me, and believe the words, for no other reason, primarily, than because I speak them.’ In these two respects, then, the matter and the manner of His witness, He stands alone, and we have to bow Before Him and say, ‘Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth.’ Before Pontius Pilate He witnessed a good confession.

II. We have here suggested to us the subordinate confessors who echo the Lord’s witness.

It is a matter of no consequence when, and before whom, this Timothy professed his good profession. It may have been at his baptism. It may have been when he was installed in his office. It may have been before some tribunal of which we know nothing. That does not matter. The point is that a Christian man is to be an echo of the Lord’s good confession, and is to keep within the lines of it, and to be sure that all of it is echoed in his life. Christ has told us what to say, and we are here to say it over again. Christ has witnessed; we are to confess. Our relation to that truth is different from His. We hear it; He speaks it. i We accept it; He reveals it. We are influenced by it; He is it. He brings it to the world on His own authority; we are to carry it to the world on His.

Be sure that you Christian men are echoes of your Master. Be sure that you reverberate the note that He struck. Be sure that all its music is repeated by you. And take care that you neither fall short of it, nor go beyond it, in your faith and in your profession. Echoes of Christ — that is the highest conception of a Christian life.

But though there is all the difference between the Witness and the confessors, do not let us forget that, if we are truly Christian, there is a very deep and blessed sense in which we, too, may witness what we have seen and heard. A Christian preacher of any sort — and by that I mean, not merely a man who stands in a pulpit, as I do, but all Christian people, in their measure and degree — will do nothing by professing the best profession, unless that profession sounds like the utterance of a man who speaks that he knows, and who can say, 'that which our eyes have beheld, that which we have handled, of the Word of life, we make known unto you.' And so, by the power of personal experience speaking out in our lives, and by the power of it alone, as I Believe, will victories be won, and the witness of Jesus Christ be repeated in the world. Christian men and women, the old saying which was addressed by a prophet to Israel is more true, more solemnly true of us, and presses on us with a heavier weight of obligation, as well as lifts us up into a position of greater blessedness: 'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord.' That is what you and I are here for — to bear witness, different and yet like to, the witness borne by the Lord. We have all to do that, by words, though not only by them. That is the obligation that a great many Christian people take very lightly. That yoke of Jesus Christ many of us slip our necks out of. If He has witnessed, you have to confess. But some of you carry your Christianity in secret, and button your coats over the cockade that should tell whose soldiers you are, and are ashamed, or too shy, or too nervous, or too afraid of ridicule, or not sufficiently sure of your own grip of the Master, to confess Him before mere 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 He 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 con-detonation, 'Nothing but leaves,' and shall fall under the punishment of the continuance of unfruitfulness, which is our crime as well as our punishment. There is a great deal more done by consistent living for, and by inconsistent living against, the truth of the Gospel, than by all the words of all the preachers in the world. Your faults go further, and tell more, than my sermons, and your Christian characters will go further than all the eloquence of the most devoted preachers. 'There is no voice nor language, where their sound is not heard. Their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.'

Again, let the thought of the Great Witness stimulate us. He, too, took His place by our sides, though with the differences that I have pointed out, yet with resemblances which bring Him very near us. He, too, knew what it was to stand amongst those who shrugged their shoulders, and knit their brows at His utterances, and turned away from Him, calling Him sometimes 'dreamer,' sometimes' revolutionary,' sometimes 'blasphemer,' and now and then a messenger of good tidings and a preacher of the gospel of peace. He knows all our hesitations, all our weaknesses, all our temptations. He was the first of the martyrs, in the narrower sense of the word. He is the leader of the great band of witnesses for God. Let us stand by His side, and Be like Him in our Bearing witness in this world.

Again, let the thought of the great tribunal stimulate us. 'I give thee charge Before God, who quickeneth all things — and who therefore will quicken you — and before Jesus Christ, that thou keep this commandment.' Jesus, who witnessed to the truth, witnesses, in the sense of beholding and watching, us, knowing our weakness and ready to help us. 'The faithful witness, and the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth, ' is by us, as we witness for Him. And so, though we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the saints in the past who have witnessed for God, and been witnessed to by Him, we have to turn away from them, and 'look off' from all others, 'unto Jesus.' And we may, like the first of the noble army of martyrs, see the heavens opened, and Jesus ' standing ' — started to His feet, to see and to help Stephen — 'at the right hand of God.'

Brethren, let us listen to His witness, let us accept it, setting to our seals that God is true. Then let us try to echo it back by word, and to attest our confession by our conduct, and then we may comfort ourselves with the great word, 'He that confesseth Me before men, Him will I also confess before My Father which is in Heaven.'

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 Timothy 6:19.

IN the first flush of the sense of brotherhood, the Church of Jerusalem tried the experiment of having all things in common. It was not a success, it was soon abandoned, it never spread. In the later history of the Church, and especially in these last Pauline letters, we see clearly that distinctions of pecuniary position were very definitely marked amongst the believers. There were ‘rich men’ in the churches of which Timothy had charge. No doubt they were rich after a very modest fashion, for Paul’s standard of opulence is not likely to have been a very high one, seeing that he himself ministered with his own hands to his necessities, and had only one cloak to keep him warm in winter time. But great or small as were the resources of these men, they were rich in comparison with some of their brethren. The words of my text are the close of the very plain things which Paul commands Timothy to tell them. He assures them that if they will be rich in good works, and ready to distribute, they will lay up for themselves a good ‘foundation against the time to come.’

The teaching in the text is, of course, a great deal wider than any specific application of it. It is very remarkable, especially as coming from Paul. ‘Lay up a good foundation’ has he not said, ‘Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’? ‘That they may lay hold on eternal life’ — has he not said, ‘The gift of God is eternal life’? Is he not going dead in the teeth of his own teaching, ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us’? I think not. Let us see what he does say.

I. First, then, he says that the real life is the future life.

Those of you who use the Revised Version will see that it makes an alteration in the last clause of our text, and instead of ‘eternal life’ it reads ‘the life which is life indeed,’ the true life; not simply designating it as eternal, but designating it as being the only thing that is worth calling by the august name of life.

Now it is quite clear that Paul here is approximating very closely to the language of his brother John, and using this great word ‘life’ as being, in substance, equivalent to his own favourite word of ‘salvation,’ as including in one magnificent generalisation all that is necessary for the satisfaction of man’s needs, the perfection of his blessedness, and the glorifying of his nature. Paul’s notion of life, like John’s, is that it is the one all-comprehensive good which men need and seek.

And here he seems to relegate that ‘life which is life indeed’ to the region of the future, because he contemplates it as being realised ‘in the time to come,’ and as being the result of the conduct which is here enjoined. But you will find that substantially the same exhortation is given in the 12th verse of this chapter, ‘Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on the life eternal’ — where the process of grasping this ‘ life,’ and therefore the possession of it, are evidently regarded as possible here, and the duty of every Christian man in this present world. That is to say, there is a double aspect of this august conception of the’ life which is life indeed.’ In one aspect it is present, may be and ought to be ours, here and now; in another aspect it lies beyond the flood, and is the inheritance reserved in the heavens. That double aspect is parallel with the way in which the New Testament deals with the other cognate conception of salvation, which it sometimes regards as past, sometimes as present, sometimes as future. The complete idea is that the life of the Christian soul here and yonder, away out into the furthest extremities of eternity, and up to the loftiest climax of perfectness, is in essence one, whilst yet the differences between the degree in which its germinal possession here and its full-fruited enjoyment hereafter differ is so great as that, in comparison with the completion that is waiting the Christian soul beyond the grave, all of the same life that is here enjoyed dwindles into nothingness. It appears to me that these two sides of the truth, the essential identity of the life of the Christian soul beyond and here, and the all but infinite differences and progresses which separate the two, are both needful, very needful, to be kept in view by us.

There is here on earth, amidst all our imperfections and weakness and sin, a root in the heart that trusts in Christ, which only needs to be transplanted into its congenial soil to blossom and burgeon into undreamed of beauty, and to bear fruit the savour of which no mortal lips can ever taste. The dwarfed rhododendrons in our shrubberies have in them the same nature as the giants that adorn the slopes oft he Himalayas. Transplant these exotics to their native soil, and you would see what it was in them to be. Think of the life that is now at its best; its weakness, its blighted hopes, its thwarted aims, its foiled endeavours; think of its partings, its losses, its conflicts.

Think of its disorders, its sins, and consequent sufferings; think of the shadow at its close, which flings long trails of blackness over many preceding years. Think of its swift disappearance, and then say if such a poor, fragmentary thing is worthy of the name of life, if that were all that the man was for.

But it is not all. There is a ‘life which is life indeed,’ over which no shadow can pass, nor any sorrow darken the Blessed faces or clog the happy hearts of those who possess it. They ‘have all and abound.’ They know all and are at rest. They dread nothing, and nothing do they regret. They leave nothing behind as they advance, and of their serenity and their growth there is no end. That is worth calling life. It lies beyond this dim spot of earth. It is ‘hid with Christ in God.’

II. Secondly, notice that conduct here determines the possession of the true life.

Paul never cares whether he commits the rhetorical blunder of mixing up metaphors or not. That matters , very little, except to a pedant and a rhetorician. In his impetuous way he blends three here, and has no time to stop to disentangle them. They all mean substantially the same thing which I have stated in the words that conduct here determines the possession of life hereafter; but they put it in three different figurative fashions which we may separate and look at one by one.

The first of them is this, that by our actions here we accumulate treasure hereafter. ‘Laying up in store for themselves’ is one word in the original, and it contains even more than is expressed in our paraphrase, for it is really ‘treasuring off.’ And the idea is that the rich man is bade to take a portion of his worldly goods, and, by using these for beneficent purposes, out of them to store a treasure beyond the grave. What is employed thus, and from the right motives and in the right way, is not squandered, but laid up in store. You remember the old epitaph,

‘What I spent I lost; What I gave I have’

Now that is Christ’s teaching, for did He not say: ‘Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven’? Did He not say: ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth … But lay up treasures in heaven’? And if anybody’s theology finds it difficult to incorporate these solemn teachings of our Lord with the rest of it, so much the worse for the theology.

I have no doubt at all that Christianity has yet a great deal to teach the Christian Church and the world about the acquisition of money and the disposal of money; and, though I do not want to dwell now upon that specific application of the general principle of my text, I cannot help reminding you, dear friends, that for a very large number of us, almost the most important influence shaping our characters is the attitude that we take in regard to these things — the getting and the distribution of worldly wealth. For the bulk of Christian people there are few things more important as sharp tests of the reality of their religion, or more effective in either ennobling or degrading their whole character, than what they do about these two plain matters.

But then my text goes a great deal further than that; and whilst it applies unflinchingly this principle to the one specific ease, 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 clay of wrath’; or, contrariwise, ‘glory, immortality, honour, eternal life.’ We are like men digging a trench on one side of a hedge and flinging the spadefuls over to the other. They are all being piled up behind the barrier, and when we go round the end of it we shall find them all waiting for us.

Then the Apostle superimposes upon this another metaphor. He does not care to unravel it. ‘Laying up in store for themselves a store,’ he would have said if he had been a pedant, ‘which is also a good foundation.’ Now I take it that that does not mean a basis for hope, or anything of that sort, but that it conveys this thought, that our actions here are putting in the foundations on which the eternal building of our future life shall be reared. When a man excavates and lays the first courses of the stones of his building, he thereby determines every successive stage of it, until the headstone is brought forth with rejoicing. We are laying foundations in that profound sense in this world. Our nature takes a set here, and I fail to see any reason cognisable by us why that ply of the nature should ever be taken out of it in any future. I do not dogmatise; but it seems to me that all that we do know of life and of God’s dealings in regard to man leads us to suppose that the next world is a world of continuations, not of beginnings; that it is the second volume of the book, and hangs logically and necessarily upon the first that was finished when a man died. Our lives here and hereafter appear to me to be like some geometrical figure that wants two sheets of paper for its completion: on the first the lines run up to the margin, and on the second they are carried on in the direction which was manifest in the section that was visible here.

And so, dear friends, let us remember that this is the reason why our smallest acts are so tremendous that by our actions we are making character, and that character is destiny, here and hereafter. You are putting in the foundations of the building that you have to live in; see that they are of such a sort as will support a house eternal in the heavens.

The last of the metaphors under which the Apostle suggests the one idea is that our conduct here determines our capacity to lay hold of the prize. It seems to me that the same allusion is lingering in his mind which is definitely stated in the previous verse to which I have already referred, where the eternal life which Timothy is exhorted to lay hold of is regarded as being the prize of the

good fight of faith, which he is exhorted to fight. And so the third metaphor here is that which is familiar in Paul's writings, where eternal life is regarded as a garland or prize, given to the victor in race or arena. It is exactly the same notion as he otherwise expresses when he says that he follows after if that he may 'lay hold of that for which also he is laid hold of by Jesus Christ.' This is the underlying thought, that according to a Christian man's acts here is his capacity of receiving the real life yonder.

That is not given arbitrarily. Each man gets as much of it when he goes home as he can hold. The tiniest vessel is filled, the largest vessel is filled. But the little vessel may, and will, grow bigger if that which is deposited in it be rightly employed. Let us lay this to heart, that Christian men dare not treat it as a matter of indifference whether to the full they live lives consistent with their profession, and do the will of their Master or no. It is not all the same, and it will not be all the same yonder, whether we have adorned the teaching, or whether our lives have habitually and criminally fallen beneath the level of our professions. Brethren, we are too apt to forget that there is such a thing as being 'saved, yet so as by fire'; and that there is such a thing as 'having an entrance ministered abundantly into the Kingdom.' Be you sure of this, that if the hands of your spirits are ever to be capable of grasping the prize, it must be as the result of conduct here on earth, which has been treasuring up treasures yonder, and laying a foundation on which the incorruptible house may solidly rest.

III. And now the last word that I have to say is that these principles are perfectly compatible with the great truth of salvation by faith.

For observe to whom the text is spoken. It is to men who have professed to be believers, and it is on the ground of their faith that these rich men in Timothy's churches are exhorted to this conduct. There is no incompatibility between the doctrine that eternal life is the gift of God, and the placing of those who have received that gift under a strict law of recompense.

That is the teaching of the whole New Testament. It was to Christian men that it was said: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked, whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' It is the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself.

But there is a dreadful danger that we, with our partial vision, shall see one side of the truth so clearly that we do not see the other; and so you get two antagonistic schools of Christian teaching who have torn the one word into halves. One of them says, 'Man is saved by faith only,' and forgets' faith without works is dead'; and the other says, 'Do your duty, and never mind about your belief,' and forgets that the belief — the trust — is the only sure foundation on which conduct can be based, and the only source from which it is certain to flow.

Now, if I should not he misunderstood by that same narrow and contracted vision of which I have been speaking, I would venture to say that salvation by faith alone may be so held as to be a very dangerous doctrine, and that there is a very real sense in which a man is saved by works. And if you do not like that, go home and read the Epistle of James, and see what you make of his teaching: 'Ye see, brethren, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.' 'Faith wrought with his works, and by his works was his faith made perfect.'

Only let us understand where the exhortation of the text comes in. We have to begin with absolute departure from all merit in work, and the absolute casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ. If you have not done that, my brother, the teaching' Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation' has no application to you, but this teaching has, 'Other foundation can no man lay. Behold, I lay in Zion a tried corner-stone. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not make haste.' If you have not committed your souls and selves and lives and hopes to Jesus Christ, the teaching 'Lay hold on eternal life' has only a very modified application to you, because the only hand that can grasp that life is the hand of faith that is content to receive it from His hands with the prints of the nails in them. But if you have given yourselves to that Saviour, and received the germinal gift of eternal life from Him, then, take my text as absolutely imperative for you. Remember that it is for you, resting on Christ, to treasure up eternal life; for you to build on that sure foundation gold and silver and precious stones which may stand the fire; for you, by faithful continuance in well-doing, to lay hold of that for which you have been laid hold of by Jesus Christ. May it be true of all of us that 'our works do follow us'!

'Thy works, thine alms, and all thy good endeavour
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod,
But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.'