

# 1 Corinthians Exposition 3 - Maclaren

## 1 CORINTHIANS EXPOSITION: PART 3 of 4 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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## THE SIN OF SILENCE

‘For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel! 17. For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward.’—1 COR. ix. 16, 17.

The original reference of these words is to the Apostle's principle and practice of not receiving for his support money from the churches. Gifts he did accept; pay he did not. The exposition of his reason is interesting, ingenuous, and chivalrous. He strongly asserts his right, even while he as strongly declares that he will waive it. The reason for his waiving it is that he desires to have somewhat in his service beyond the strict line of his duty. His preaching itself, with all its toils and miseries, was but part of his day's work, which he was bidden to do, and for doing which he deserved no thanks nor praise. But he would like to have a little bit of glad service over and above what he is ordered to do, that, as he ingenuously says, he may have ‘somewhat to boast of.’

In this exposition of motives we have two great principles actuating the Apostle—one, his profound sense of obligation, and the other his desire, if it might be, to do more than he was bound to do, because he loved his work so much. And though he is speaking here as an apostle, and his example is not to be unconditionally transferred to us, yet I think that the motives which actuated his conduct are capable of unconditional application to ourselves.

There are three things here. There is the obligation of speech, there is the penalty of silence, and there is the glad obedience which transcends obligation.

I. First, mark the obligation of speech.

No doubt the Apostle had, in a special sense, a ‘necessity laid upon’ him, which was first laid upon him on that road to Damascus, and repeated many a time in his life. But though he differs from us in the direct supernatural commission which was given to him, in the width of the sphere in which he had to work, and in the splendour of the gifts which were entrusted to his stewardship, he does not differ from us in the reality of the obligation which was laid upon him. Every Christian man is as truly bound as was Paul to preach the Gospel. The commission does not depend upon apostolic dignity. Jesus Christ, when He said, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,’ was not speaking to the eleven, but to all generations of His Church. And whilst there are many other motives on which we may rest the Christian duty of propagating the Christian faith, I think that we shall be all the better if we bottom it upon this, the distinct and definite commandment of Jesus Christ, the grip of which encloses all who for themselves have found that the Lord is gracious.

For that commandment is permanent. It is exactly contemporaneous with the duration of the promise which is appended to it, and whosoever suns himself in the light of the latter is bound by the precept of the former. ‘Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world,’ defines the duration of the promise, and it defines also the duration of the duty. Nay, even the promise is made conditional upon the discharge of the duty enjoined. For it is to the Church ‘going into all the world, and preaching the Gospel to every creature,’ that the promise of an abiding presence is made.

Let us remember, too, that, just because this commission is given to the whole Church, it is binding on every individual member of the Church. There is a very common fallacy, not confined to this subject, but extending over the whole field of Christian duty, by which things that are obligatory on the community are shuffled off the shoulders of the individual. But we have to remember that the whole Church is nothing more than the sum total of all its members, and that nothing is incumbent upon it which is not in their measure incumbent upon each of them. Whatsoever Christ says to all, He says to each, and the community has no duties which you and I have not.

Of course, there are diversities of forms of obedience to this commandment; of course, the restrictions of locality and the other obligations of life, come in to modify it; and it is not every man's duty to wander over the whole world doing this work. But the direct work of communicating to others who know it not the sweetness and the power of Jesus Christ belongs to every Christian man. You cannot buy yourselves out of the ranks, as they used to be able to do out of the militia, by paying for a substitute. Both forms of service are obligatory upon each of us. We all, if we know anything of Christ and His love and His power, are bound, by the fact that we do know it, to tell it to those whom we can reach. You have all got congregations if you would look for them. There is not a Christian man or woman in this world who has not somebody that he or she can speak to more efficiently than anybody else can. You have your friends, your relations, the people with whom you are brought into daily contact, if you have no wider congregations. You cannot all stand up and preach in the sense in which I do so. But this is not the meaning of the word in the New Testament. It does not imply a pulpit, nor a set discourse, nor a gathered multitude; it simply implies a herald's task of proclaiming. Everybody who has found Jesus Christ can say, ‘I have found the Messiah,’ and everybody who knows Him can say, ‘Come and hear, and I will tell what the Lord hath done for my soul.’ Since you can do it you are bound to do it; and if you are one of ‘the dumb dogs, lying down and loving to slumber,’ of whom there are such crowds paralysing the energies and weakening the witness of every Church upon earth, then you are criminally and suicidally oblivious of an obligation which is a joy and a privilege as much as a duty.

Oh, brethren! I do want to lay on the consciences of all you Christian people this, that nothing can absolve you from the obligation of personal, direct speech to some one of Christ and His salvation. Unless you can say, ‘I have not refrained my lips, O Lord! Thou

knowest,' there frowns over against you an unfulfilled duty, the neglect of which is laming your spiritual activity, and drying up the sources of your spiritual strength.

But, then, besides this direct effort, there are the other indirect methods in which this commandment can be discharged, by sympathy and help of all sorts, about which I need say no more here.

Jesus Christ's ideal of His Church was an active propaganda, an army in which there were no non-combatants, even although some of the combatants might be detailed to remain in the camp and look after the stuff, and others of them might be in the forefront of the battle. But is that ideal ever fulfilled in any of our churches? How many amongst us there are who do absolutely nothing in the shape of Christian work! Some of us seem to think that the voluntary principle on which our Nonconformist churches are largely organised means, 'I do not need to do anything unless I like. Inclination is the guide of duty, and if I do not care to take any active part in the work of our church, nobody has anything to say.' No man can force me, but if Jesus Christ says to me, 'Go!' and I say, 'I had rather not,' Jesus Christ and I have to settle accounts between us. The less *men* control, the more stringent ought to be the control of Christ. And if the principle of Christian obedience is a willing heart, then the duty of a Christian is to see that the heart is willing.

A stringent obligation, not to be shuffled off by any of the excuses that we make, is laid upon us all. It makes very short work of a number of excuses. There is a great deal in the tone of this generation which tends to chill the missionary spirit. We know more about the heathen world, and familiarity diminishes horror. We have taken up, many of us, milder and more merciful ideas about the condition of those who die without knowing the name of Jesus Christ. We have taken to the study of comparative religion as a science, forgetting sometimes that the thing that we are studying as a science is spreading a dark cloud of ignorance and apathy over millions of men. And all these reasons somewhat sap the strength and cool the fervour of a good many Christian people nowadays. Jesus Christ's commandment remains just as it was.

Then some of us say, 'I prefer working at home!' Well, if you are doing all that you can there, and really are enthusiastically devoted to one phase of Christian service, the great principle of division of labour comes in to warrant your not entering upon other fields which others cultivate. But unless you are thus casting all your energies into the work which you say that you prefer, there is no reason in it why you should do nothing in the other direction. Jesus Christ still says, 'Go ye into all the world.'

Then some of you say, 'Well, I do not much believe in your missionary societies. There is a great deal of waste of money about them. A number of things there are that one does not approve of. I have heard stories about missionaries being very idle, very luxurious, and taking too much pay, and doing too little work.' Well, be it so! Very probably it is partly true; though I do not know that the people whose testimony is so willingly accepted, to the detriment of our brethren in foreign lands, are precisely the kind of people that should talk much about self-sacrifice and luxurious living, or whose estimate of Christian work is to be relied upon. I fancy many of them, if they walked about the streets of an English town, would have a somewhat similar report to give, as they have when they walk about the streets of an Indian one. But be that as it may, does that indictment draw a wet sponge across the commandment of Jesus Christ? or can you chisel out of the stones of Sinai one of the words written there, by reason of the imperfections of those who are seeking to obey them? Surely not! Christ still says, 'Go ye into all the world!'

I sometimes venture to think that the day will come when the condition of being received into, and retained in, the communion of a Christian church will be obedience to that commandment. Why, even bees have the sense at a given time of the year to turn the drones out of the hives, and sting them to death. I do not recommend the last part of the process, but I am not sure but that it would be a benefit to us all, both to those ejected and to those retained, that we should get rid of that added weight that clogs every organised community in this and other lands—the dead weight of idlers who say that they are Christ's disciples. Whether it is a condition of church membership or not, sure I am that it is a condition of fellowship with Jesus Christ, and a condition, therefore, of health in the Christian life, that it should be a life of active obedience to this plain, imperative, permanent, and universal command.

II. Secondly, a word as to the penalty of silence.

'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' I suppose Paul is thinking mainly of a future issue, but not exclusively of that. At all events, let me point you, in a word or two, to the plain penalties of silence here, and to the awful penalties of silence hereafter.

'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' If you are a dumb and idle professor of Christ's truth, depend upon it that your dumb idleness will rob you of much communion with Jesus Christ. There are many Christians who would be ever so much happier, more joyous, and more assured Christians if they would go and talk about Christ to other people. Because they have locked up God's word in their hearts it melts away unknown, and they lose more than they suspect of the sweetness and buoyancy and assured confidence that might mark them, for no other reason than because they seek to keep their morsel to themselves. Like that mist that lies white and dull over the ground on a winter's morning, which will be blown away with the least puff of fresh air, there lie doleful dampnesses, in their sooty folds, over many a Christian heart, shutting out the sun from the earth, and a little whiff of wholesome activity in Christ's cause would clear them all away, and the sun would shine down upon men again. If you want to be a happy Christian, work for Jesus Christ. I do not lay that down as a specific by itself. There are other things to be taken in conjunction with it,

but yet it remains true that the woe of a languid Christianity attaches to the men who, being professing Christians, are silent when they should speak, and idle when they should work.

There is, further, the woe of the loss of sympathies, and the gain of all the discomforts and miseries of a self-absorbed life. And there is, further, the woe of the loss of one of the best ways of confirming one's own faith in the truth—viz. that of seeking to impart it to others. If you want to learn a thing, teach it. If you want to grasp the principles of any science, try to explain it to somebody who does not understand it. If you want to know where, in these days of jangling and controversy, the true, vital centre of the Gospel is, and what is the essential part of the revelation of God, go and tell sinful men about Jesus Christ who died for them; and you will find out that it is the Cross, and Him who died thereon, as dying for the world, that is the power which can move men's hearts. And so you will cleave with a closer grasp, in days of difficulty and unsettlement, to that which is able to bring light into darkness and to harmonise the discord of a troubled and sinful soul. And, further, there is the woe of having none that can look to you and say, 'I owe myself to thee.' Oh, brethren! there is no greater joy accessible to a man than that of feeling that through his poor words Christ has entered into a brother's heart. And you are throwing away all this because you shut your mouths and neglect the plain commandment of your Lord.

Ay! but that is not all. There is a future to be taken into account, and I think that Christian people do far too little realise the solemn truth that it is not all the same *then* whether a man has kept his Master's commandments or neglected them. I believe that whilst a very imperfect faith saves a man, there is such a thing as being 'saved, yet so as through fire,' and that there is such a thing as having 'an abundant entrance ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom.' He whose life has been very slightly influenced by Christian principle, and who has neglected plain, imperative duties, will not stand on the same level of blessedness as the man who has more completely yielded himself in life to the constraining power of Christ's love, and has sought to keep all His commandments.

Heaven is not a dead level. Every man there will receive as much blessedness as he is capable of, but capacities will vary, and the principal factor in determining the capacity, which capacity determines the blessedness, will be the thoroughness of obedience to all the ordinances of Christ in the course of the life upon earth. So, though we know, and therefore dare say, little about that future, I do beseech you to take this to heart, that he who there can stand before God, and say, 'Behold! I and the children whom God hath given me' will wear a crown brighter than the starless ones of those who saved themselves, and have brought none with them.

'Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, they all came safe to land.' But the place where they stand depends on their Christian life, and of that Christian life one main element is obedience to the commandment which makes them the apostles and missionaries of their Lord.

III. Lastly, note the glad obedience which transcends the limits of obligation.

'If I do this thing willingly I have a reward.' Paul desired to bring a little more than was required, in token of his love to his Master, and of his thankful acceptance of the obligation. The artist who loves his work will put more work into his picture than is absolutely needed, and will linger over it, lavishing diligence and care upon it, because he is in love with his task. The servant who seeks to do as little as he can scrape through with without rebuke is actuated by no high motives. The trader who barely puts as much into the scale as will balance the weight in the other is grudging in his dealings; but he who, with liberal hand, gives 'shaken down, pressed together, and running over' measure, gives because he delights in the giving.

And so it is in the Christian life. There are many of us whose question seems to be, 'How little can I get off with? how much can I retain?'—many of us whose effort is to find out how much of the world is consistent with the profession of Christianity, and to find the minimum of effort, of love, of service, of gifts which may free us from obligation.

And what does that mean? It means that we are slaves. It means that if we durst we would give nothing, and do nothing. And what does that mean? It means that we do not care for the Lord, and have no joy in our work. And what does that mean? It means that our work deserves no praise, and will get no reward. If we love Christ we shall be anxious, if it were possible, to do more than He commands us, in token of our loyalty to the King, and of our delight in the service. Of course, in the highest view, nothing can be more than necessary. Of course He has the right to all our work; but yet there are heights of Christian consecration and self-sacrifice which a man will not be blamed if he has not climbed, and will be praised if he has. What we want, if I might venture to say so, is extravagance of service. Judas may say, 'To what purpose is this waste?' but Jesus will say, He 'hath wrought a good work on Me,' and the fragrance of the ointment will smell sweet through the centuries.

So, dear brethren, the upshot of the whole thing is, Do not let us do our Christian work reluctantly, else it is only slave's work, and there is no blessing in it, and no reward will come to us from it. Do not let us ask, 'How little may I do?' but 'How much can I do?' Thus, asking, we shall not offer as burnt offering to the Lord that which doth cost us nothing. On His part He has given the commandment as a sign of His love. The stewardship is a token that He trusts us, the duty is an honour, the burden is a grace. On our parts let us seek for the joy of service which is not contented with the bare amount of the tribute that is demanded, but gives something over, if it were possible, because of our love to Him. They who thus give to Jesus Christ their all of love and effort and

service will receive it all back a hundredfold, for the Master is not going to be in debt to any of His servants, and He says to them all, 'I will repay it, howbeit I say not unto thee how thou owest unto Me even thine own self besides.'

## A SERVANT OF MEN

'For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21. To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.'—1 COR. ix. 19-23.

Paul speaks much of himself, but he is not an egotist. When he says, 'I do so and so,' it is a gracious way of enjoining the same conduct on his readers. He will lay no burden on them which he does not himself carry. The leader who can say 'Come' is not likely to want followers. So, in this section, the Apostle is really enjoining on the Corinthians the conduct which he declares is his own.

The great principle incumbent on all Christians, with a view to the salvation of others, is to go as far as one can without untruthfulness in the direction of finding points of resemblance and contact with those to whom we would commend the Gospel. There is a base counterfeit of this apostolic example, which slurs over distinctive beliefs, and weakly tries to please everybody by differing from nobody. That trimming to catch all winds never gains any. Mr. Facing-both-ways is not a powerful evangelist. The motive of becoming all things to all men must be plainly disinterested, and the assimilation must have love for the souls concerned and eagerness to bring the truth to them, and them to the truth, legibly stamped upon it, or it will be regarded, and rightly so, as mere cowardice or dishonesty. And there must be no stretching the assimilation to the length of either concealing truth or fraternising in evil. Love to my neighbour can never lead to my joining him in wrongdoing.

But, while the limits of this assumption of the colour of our surroundings are plainly marked, there is ample space within these for the exercise of this eminently Christian grace. We must get near people if we would help them. Especially must we identify ourselves with them in sympathy, and seek to multiply points of assimilation, if we would draw them to Jesus Christ. He Himself had to become man that He might gain men, and His servants have to do likewise, in their degree. The old story of the Christian teacher who voluntarily became a slave, that he might tell of Christ to slaves, has in spirit to be repeated by us all.

We can do no good by standing aloof on a height and flinging down the Gospel to the people below. They must feel that we enter into their circumstances, prejudices, ways of thinking, and the like, if our words are to have power. That is true about all Christian teachers, whether of old or young. You must be a boy among boys, and try to show that you enter into the boy's nature, or you may lecture till doomsday and do no good.

Paul instances three cases in which he had acted, and still continued to do so, on this principle. He was a Jew, but after his conversion he had to 'become a Jew' by a distinct act; that is, he had receded so far from his old self, that he, if he had had only himself to think of, would have given up all Jewish observances. But he felt it his duty to conciliate prejudice as far as he could, and so, though he would have fought to the death rather than given countenance to the belief that circumcision was necessary, he had no scruple about circumcising Timothy; and, though he believed that for Christians the whole ancient ritual was abolished, he was quite willing, if it would smooth away the prejudices of the 'many thousands of Jews who believed,' to show, by his participation in the temple worship, that he 'walked orderly, keeping the law.' If he was told 'You must,' his answer could only be 'I will not'; but if it was a question of conciliating, he was ready to go all lengths for that.

The category which he names next is not composed of different persons from the first, but of the same persons regarded from a somewhat different point of view. 'Them that are under the law' describes Jews, not by their race, but by their religion; and Paul was willing to take his place among them, as we have just observed. But he will not do that so as to be misunderstood, wherefore he protests that in doing so he is voluntarily abridging his freedom for a specific purpose. He is not 'under the law'; for the very pith of his view of the Christian's position is that he has nothing to do with that Mosaic law in any of its parts, because Christ has made him free.

The second class to whom in his wide sympathies he is able to assimilate himself, is the opposite of the former—the Gentiles who are 'without law.' He did not preach on Mars' Hill as he did in the synagogues. The many-sided Gospel had aspects fitted for the Gentiles who had never heard of Moses, and the many-sided Apostle had links of likeness to the Greek and the barbarian. But here, too, his assimilation of himself to those whom he seeks to win is voluntary; wherefore he protests that he is not without law, though he recognises no longer the obligations of Moses' law, for he is 'under [or, rather, "in"] law to Christ.'

'The weak' are those too scrupulous-conscienced Christians of whom he has been speaking in chapter viii. and whose narrow views he exhorted stronger brethren to respect, and to refrain from doing what they could do without harming their own consciences, lest by doing it they should induce a brother to do the same, whose conscience would prick him for it. That is a lesson needed to-day as much as, or more than, in Paul's time, for the widely different degrees of culture and diversities of condition, training, and associations among Christians now necessarily result in very diverse views of Christian conduct in many matters. The grand principle laid down here should guide us all, both in regard to fellow-Christians and others. Make yourself as like them as you honestly can; restrict yourself of allowable acts, in deference to even narrow prejudices; but let the motive of your assimilating yourself to others be clearly their highest good, that you may 'gain' them, not for yourself but for your Master.

Verse 23 lays down Paul's ruling principle, which both impelled him to become all things to all men, with a view to their salvation, as he has been saying, and urged him to effort and self-discipline, with a view to his own, as he goes on to say. 'For the Gospel's sake' seems to point backward; 'that I may be a joint partaker thereof' points forward. We have not only to preach the Gospel to others, but to live on it and be saved by it ourselves.

## HOW THE VICTOR RUNS

'So run, that ye may obtain.'—1 COR. ix. 24.

'So run.' Does that mean 'Run so that ye obtain?' Most people, I suppose, superficially reading the words, attach that significance to them, but the 'so' here carries a much greater weight of meaning than that. It is a word of comparison. The Apostle would have the Corinthians recall the picture which he has been putting before them—a picture of a scene that was very familiar to them; for, as most of us know, one of the most important of the Grecian games was celebrated at intervals in the immediate neighbourhood of Corinth. Many of the Corinthian converts had, no doubt, seen, or even taken part in them. The previous portion of the verse in which our text occurs appeals to the Corinthians' familiar knowledge of the arena and the competitors, 'Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?' He would have them picture the eager racers, with every muscle strained, and the one victor starting to the front; and then he says, 'Look at that panting conqueror. That is how you should run. So run—'meaning thereby not, 'Run so that you may obtain the prize,' but 'Run so' as the victor does, 'in order that you may obtain.' So, then, this victor is to be a lesson to us, and we are to take a leaf out of his book. Let us see what he teaches us.

I. The first thing is, the utmost tension and energy and strenuous effort.

It is very remarkable that Paul should pick out these Grecian games as containing for Christian people any lesson, for they were honeycombed, through and through, with idolatry and all sorts of immorality, so that no Jew ventured to go near them, and it was part of the discipline of the early Christian Church that professing Christians should have nothing to do with them in any shape.

And yet here, as in many other parts of his letters, Paul takes these foul things as patterns for Christians. 'There is a soul of goodness in things evil, if we would observantly distil it out.' It is very much as if English preachers were to refer their people to a racecourse, and say, 'Even there you may pick out lessons, and learn something of the way in which Christian people ought to live.'

On the same principle the New Testament deals with that diabolical business of fighting. It is taken as an emblem for the Christian soldier, because, with all its devilishness, there is in it this, at least, that men give themselves up absolutely to the will of their commander, and are ready to fling away their lives if he lifts his finger. That at least is grand and noble, and to be imitated on a higher plane.

In like manner Paul takes these poor racers as teaching us a lesson. Though the thing be all full of sin, we can get one valuable thought out of it, and it is this—If people would work half as hard to gain the highest object that a man can set before him, as hundreds of people are ready to do in order to gain trivial and paltry objects, there would be fewer stunted and half-dead Christians amongst us. 'That is the way to run,' says Paul, 'if you want to obtain.'

Look at the contrast that he hints at, between the prize that stirs these racers' energies into such tremendous operation and the prize which Christians profess to be pursuing. 'They do it to obtain a corruptible crown'—a twist of pine branch out of the neighbouring grove, worth half-a-farthing, and a little passing glory not worth much more. They do it to obtain a corruptible crown; we do *not* do it, though we professedly have an incorruptible one as our aim and object. If we contrast the relative values of the objects that men pursue so eagerly, and the objects of the Christian course, surely we ought to be smitten down with penitent consciousness of our own unworthiness, if not of our own hypocrisy.

It is not even there that the lesson stops, because we Christian people may be patterns and rebukes to ourselves. For, on the one side of our nature we show what we can do when we are really in earnest about getting something; and on the other side we show

with how little work we can be contented, when, at bottom, we do not much care whether we get the prize or not. If you and I really believed that that crown of glory which Paul speaks about might be ours, and would be all sufficing for us if it were ours, as truly as we believe that money is a good thing, there would not be such a difference between the way in which we clutch at the one and the apathy which scarcely cares to put out a hand for the other. The things that are seen and temporal do get the larger portion of the energies and thoughts of the average Christian man, and the things that are unseen and eternal get only what is left. Sometimes ninety per cent. of the water of a stream is taken away to drive a milldam or do work, and only ten per cent. can be spared to trickle down the half-dry channel and do nothing but reflect the bright sun and help the little flowers and the grass to grow. So, the larger portion of most lives goes to drive the mill-wheels, and there is very little left, in the case of many of us, in order to help us towards God, and bring us closer into communion with our Lord. 'Run' for the crown as eagerly as you 'run' for your incomes, or for anything that you really, in your deepest desires, want. Take yourselves for your own patterns and your own rebukes. Your own lives may show you how you *can* love, hope, work, and deny yourselves when you have sufficient inducement, and their flame should put to shame their frost, for the warmth is directed towards trifles and the coldness towards the crown. If you would run for the incorruptible prize of effort in the fashion in which others and yourselves run for the corruptible, your whole lives would be changed. Why! if Christian people in general really took half—half? ay! a tenth part of—the honest, persistent pains to improve their Christian character, and become more like Jesus Christ, which a violinist will take to master his instrument, there would be a new life for most of our Christian communities. Hours and hours of patient practice are not too much for the one; how many moments do we give to the other? 'So run, that ye obtain.'

## II. The victorious runner sets Christians an example of rigid self-control.

Every man that is striving for the mastery is 'temperate in all things.' The discipline for runners and athletes was rigid. They had ten months of spare diet—no wine—hard gymnastic exercises every day, until not an ounce of superfluous flesh was upon their muscles, before they were allowed to run in the arena. And, says Paul, that is the example for us. They practise this rigid discipline and abstinence by way of preparation for the race, and after it was run they might dispense with the training. You and I have to practise rigid abstinence as part of the race, as a continuous necessity. *They* did not abstain only from bad things, they did not only avoid criminal acts of sensuous indulgence; but they abstained from many perfectly legitimate things. So for us it is not enough to say, 'I draw the line there, at this or that vice, and I will have nothing to do with these.' You will never make a growing Christian if abstinence from palpable sins only is your standard. You must 'lay aside' every sin, of course, but also 'every *weight*.' Many things are 'weights' that are not 'sins'; and if we are to run fast we must run light, and if we are to do any good in this world we have to live by rigid control and abstain from much that is perfectly legitimate, because, if we do not, we shall fail in accomplishing the highest purposes for which we are here. Not only in regard to the gross sensual indulgences which these men had to avoid, but in regard to a great deal of the outgoings of our interests and our hearts, we have to apply the knife very closely and cut to the quick, if we would have leisure and sympathy and affection left for loftier objects. It is a very easy thing to be a Christian in one aspect, inasmuch as a Christian at bottom is a man that is trusting to Jesus Christ, and that is not hard to do. It is a very hard thing to be a Christian in another aspect, because a real Christian is a man who, by reason of his trusting Jesus Christ, has set his heel upon the neck of the animal that is in him, and keeps the flesh well down, and not only the flesh, but the desires of the mind as well as of the flesh, and subordinates them all to the one aim of pleasing Him. 'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life' if his object is to please Him that has called him to be a soldier. Unless we cut off a great many of the thorns, so to speak, by which things catch hold of us as we pass them, we shall not make much advance in the Christian life. Rigid self-control and abstinence from else legitimate things that draw us away from Him are needful, if we are so to run as the poor heathen racer teaches us.

## III. The last grace that is suggested here, the last leaf to take out of these racers' book, is definiteness and concentration of aim.

'I, therefore,' says the Apostle, 'so run not as uncertainly.' If the runner is now heading that way and now this, making all manner of loops upon his path, of course he will be left hopelessly in the rear. It is the old fable of the Grecian mythology transplanted into Christian soil. The runner who turned aside to pick up the golden apple was disappointed of his hopes of the radiant fair. The ship, at the helm of which is a steersman who has either a feeble hand or does not understand his business, and which therefore keeps yawing from side to side, with the bows pointing now this way and now that, is not holding a course that will make the harbour first in the race. The people that to-day are marching with their faces towards Zion, and to-morrow making a loop-line to the world, will be a long time before they reach their terminus. I believe there are few things more lacking in the average Christian life of to-day than resolute, conscious concentration upon an aim which is clearly and always before us. Do you know what you are aiming at? That is the first question. Have you a distinct theory of life's purpose that you can put into half a dozen words, or have you not? In the one case, there is some chance of attaining your object; in the other one, none. Alas! we find many Christian people who do not set before themselves, with emphasis and constancy, as their aim the doing of God's will, and so sometimes they do it, when it happens to be easy, and sometimes, when temptations are strong, they do not. It needs a strong hand on the tiller to keep it steady when the wind is blowing in puffs and gusts, and sometimes the sail bellies full and sometimes it is almost empty. The various strengths of the temptations that blow us out of our course are such that we shall never keep a straight line of direction, which is the shortest line, and the only one on which we shall 'obtain,' unless we know very distinctly where we want to go, and have a good strong will that

has learned to say 'No!' when the temptations come. 'Whom resist steadfast in the faith.' 'I therefore so run, not as uncertainly,' taking one course one day and another the next.

Now, that definite aim is one that can be equally pursued in all varieties of life. 'This one thing I do' said one who did about as many things as most people, but the different kinds of things that Paul did were all, at bottom, one thing. And we, in all the varieties of our circumstances, may keep this one clear aim before us, and whether it be in this way or in that, we may be equally and at all times seeking the better country, and bending all circumstances and all duty to make us more like our Master and bring us closer to Him.

The Psalmist did not offer an impossible prayer when he said: '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, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple.' Was David in 'the house of the Lord' when he was with his sheep in the wilderness, and when he was in Saul's palace, and when he was living with wild beasts in dens and caves of the earth, and when he was a fugitive, hunted like a partridge upon the mountains? Was he always in the Lord's house? Yes! At any rate he could be. All that we do may be doing His will, and over a life, crowded with varying circumstances and yet simplified and made blessed by unvarying obedience, we may write, 'This one thing I do.'

But we shall not keep this one aim clear before our eyes, unless we habituate ourselves to the contemplation of the end. The runner, according to Paul's vivid picture in another of his letters, forgets the things that are behind, and stretches out towards the things that are before. And just as a man runs with his body inclining forward, and his eager hand nearer the prize than his body, and his eyesight and his heart travelling ahead of them both to grasp it, so if we want to live with the one worthy aim for ours, and to put all our effort and faith into what deserves it all—the Christian race—we must bring clear before us continually, or at least with the utmost frequency, the prize of our high calling, the crown of righteousness. Then we shall run so that we may, at the last, be able to finish our course with joy, and dying to hope with all humility that there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness.

## **'CONCERNING THE CROWN'**

'They do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we are incorruptible.'—1 COR. ix. 25.

One of the most famous of the Greek athletic festivals was held close by Corinth. Its prize was a pine-wreath from the neighbouring sacred grove. The painful abstinence and training of ten months, and the fierce struggle of ten minutes, had for their result a twist of green leaves, that withered in a week, and a little fading fame that was worth scarcely more, and lasted scarcely longer. The struggle and the discipline were noble; the end was contemptible. And so it is with all lives whose aims are lower than the highest. They are greater in the powers they put forth than in the objects they compass, and the question, 'What is it for?' is like a douche of cold water from the cart that lays the clouds of dust in the ways.

So, says Paul, praising the effort and contemning the prize, 'They do it to obtain a corruptible crown.' And yet there was a soul of goodness in this evil thing. Though these festivals were indissolubly intertwined with idolatry, and besmirched with much sensuous evil, yet he deals with them as he does with war and with slavery; points to the disguised nobility that lay beneath the hideousness, and holds up even these low things as a pattern for Christian men.

But I do not mean here to speak so much about the general bearing of this text as rather to deal with its designation of the aim and reward of Christian energy, that 'incorruptible crown' of which my text speaks. And in doing so I desire to take into account likewise other places in Scripture in which the same metaphor occurs.

### **I. The crown.**

Let me recall the other places where the same metaphor is employed. We find the Apostle, in the immediate prospect of death, rising into a calm rapture in which imprisonment and martyrdom lose their terrors, as he thinks of the 'crown of righteousness' which the Lord will give to him. The Epistle of James, again, assures the man who endures temptation that 'the Lord will give him the crown of life which He has promised to all them that love Him.' The Lord Himself from heaven repeats that promise to the persecuted Church at Smyrna: 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.' The elders cast their crowns before the feet of Him that sitteth upon the throne. The Apostle Peter, in his letter, stimulates the elders upon earth to faithful discharge of their duty, by the hope that thereby they shall 'receive a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away.' So all these instances taken together with this of my text enable us to gather two or three lessons.

It is extremely unlikely that all these instances of the occurrence of the emblem carry with them reference, such as that in my text, to the prize at the athletic festivals. For Peter and James, intense Jews as they were, had probably never seen, and possibly never heard of, the struggles at the Isthmus and at Olympus and elsewhere. The Book of the Revelation draws its metaphors almost exclusively from the circle of Jewish practices and things. So that we have to look in other directions than the arena or the



racecourse to explain these other uses of the image. It is also extremely unlikely that in these other passages the reference is to a crown as the emblem of sovereignty, for that idea is expressed, as a rule, by another word in Scripture, which we have Anglicised as 'diadem.' The 'crown' in all these passages is a garland twisted out of some growth of the field. In ancient usage roses were twined for revellers; pine-shoots or olive branches for the victors in the games; while the laurel was 'the meed of mighty conquerors'; and plaited oak leaves were laid upon the brows of citizens who had deserved well of their country, and myrtle sprays crowned the fair locks of the bride.

And thus in these directions, and not towards the wrestling ground or the throne of the monarch, must we look for the ideas suggested by the emblem.

Now, if we gather together all these various uses of the word, there emerge two broad ideas, that the 'crown' which is the Christian's aim symbolises a state of triumphant repose and of festal enjoyment. There are other aspects of that great and dim future which correspond to other necessities of our nature, and I suppose some harm has been done and some misconceptions have been induced, and some unreality imported into the idea of the Christian future, by the too exclusive prominence given to these two ideas—victorious rest after the struggle, and abundant satisfaction of all desires. That future is other and more than a festival; it is other and more than repose. There are larger fields there for the operation of powers that have been trained and evolved here. The faithfulness of the steward is exchanged, according to Christ's great words, for the authority of the ruler over many cities. But still, do we not all know enough of the worry and turbulence and strained effort of the conflict here below, to feel that to some of our deepest and not ignoble needs and desires that image appeals? The helmet that pressed upon the brow even whilst it protected the brain, and wore away the hair even whilst it was a defence, is lifted off, and on unruffled locks the garland is intertwined that speaks victory and befits a festival. One of the old prophets puts the same metaphor in words imperfectly represented by the English translation, when he promises 'a crown' or a garland 'for ashes'—instead of the symbol of mourning, strewed grey and gritty upon the dishevelled hair of the weepers, flowers twined into a wreath—'the oil of joy for mourning,' and the festival 'garment of praise' to dress the once heavy spirit. So the satisfaction of all desires, the accompaniments of a feast, in abundance, rejoicing and companionship, and conclusive conquest over all foes, are promised us in this great symbol.

But let us look at the passages separately, and we shall find that they present the one thought with differences, and that if we combine these, as in a stereoscope, the picture gains solidity.

The crown is described in three ways. It is the crown of 'life,' of 'glory' and of 'righteousness.' And I venture to think that these three epithets describe the material, so to speak, of which the wreath is composed. The everlasting flower of life, the radiant blossoms of glory, the white flower of righteousness; these are its components.

I need not enlarge upon them, nor will your time allow that I should. Here we have the promise of life, that fuller life which men want, 'the life of which our veins are scant,' even in the fullest tide and heyday of earthly existence. The promise sets that future over against the present, as if then first should men know what it means to live: so buoyant, elastic, unwearied shall be their energies, so manifold the new outlets for activity, and the new inlets for the surrounding glory and beauty; so incorruptible and glorious shall be their new being. Here we live a living death; there we shall live indeed; and that will be the crown, not only in regard to physical, but in regard to spiritual, powers and consciousness.

But remember that all this full tide of life is Christ's gift. There is no such thing as natural immortality; there is no such thing as independent life. All Being, from the lowest creature up to the loftiest created spirit, exists by one law, the continual impartation to it of life from the fountain of life, according to its capacities. And unless Jesus Christ, all through the eternal ages of the future, imparted to the happy souls that sit garlanded at His board the life by which they live, the wreaths would wither on their brows, and the brows would melt away, and dissolve from beneath the wreaths. 'I will give him a crown of life.'

It is a crown of 'glory,' and that means a lustrousness of character imparted by radiation and reflection from the central light of the glory of God. 'Then shall the righteous blaze out like the sun in the Kingdom of My Father.' Our eyes are dim, but we can at least divine the far-off flashing of that great light, and may ponder upon what hidden depths and miracles of transformed perfectness and unimagined lustre wait for us, dark and limited as we are here, in the assurance that we all shall be changed into the 'likeness of the body of His glory.'

It is a crown of 'righteousness.' Though that phrase may mean the wreath that rewards righteousness, it seems more in accordance with the other similar expressions to which I have referred to regard it, too, as the material of which the crown is composed. It is not enough that there should be festal gladness, not enough that there should be calm repose, not enough that there should be flashing glory, not enough that there should be fulness of life. To accord with the intense moral earnestness of the Christian system there must be, emphatically, in the Christian hope, cessation of all sin and investiture with all purity. The word means the same thing as the ancient promise, 'Thy people shall be all righteous.' It means the same thing as the latest promise of the ascended Christ, 'They shall walk with Me in white.' And it sets, I was going to say, the very climax and culmination on the other hopes, declaring that absolute, stainless, infallible righteousness which one day shall belong to our weak and sinful spirits.

These, then, are the elements, and on them all is stamped the signature of perpetuity. The victor's wreath is tossed on the ashen heap, the reveller's flowers droop as he sits in the heat of the banqueting-hall; the bride's myrtle blossom fades though she lay it away in a safe place. The crown of life is incorruptible. It is twined of amaranth, ever blossoming into new beauty and never fading.

II. Now look, secondly, at the discipline by which the crown is won.

Observe, first of all, that in more than one of the passages to which we have already referred great emphasis is laid upon Christ as *giving* the crown. That is to say, that blessed future is not won by effort, but is bestowed as a free gift. It is given from the hands which have procured it, and, as I may say, twined it for us. Unless His brows had been pierced with the crown of thorns, ours would never have worn the garland of victory. Jesus provides the sole means, by His work, by which any man can enter into that inheritance; and Jesus, as the righteous Judge who bestows the rewards, which are likewise the results, of our life here, gives the crown. It remains for ever the gift of His love. 'The wages of sin is death,' but we rise above the region of retribution and desert when we pass to the next clause—"the gift of God is eternal life," and that 'through Jesus Christ.'

Whilst, then, this must be laid as the basis of all, there must also, with equal earnestness and clearness, be set forth the other thought that Christ's gift has conditions, which conditions these passages plainly set forth. In the one, which I have read as a text, we have these conditions declared as being twofold—protracted discipline and continuous effort. The same metaphor employed by the same Apostle, in his last dying utterance, associates his consciousness that he had fought the good fight and run his race, like the pugilists and runners of the arena, with the hope that he shall receive the crown of righteousness. James declares that it is given to the man who *endures* temptation, not only in the sense of bearing, but of so bearing as not thereby to be injured in Christian character and growth in Christian life. Peter asserts that it is the reward of self-denying discharge of duty. And the Lord from heaven lays down the condition of faithfulness unto death as the necessary pre-requisite of His gift of the crown of life. In two of the passages there is included, though not precisely on the level of these other requirements, the love of Him and the love of 'His appearing,' as the necessary qualifications for the gift of the crown.

So, to begin with, unless a man has such a love to Jesus Christ as that he is happy in His presence, and longs to have Him near, as parted loving souls do; and, especially, is looking forward to that great judicial coming, and feeling that there is no tremor in his heart at the prospect of meeting the Judge, but an outgoing of desire and love at the hope of seeing his Saviour and his Friend, what right has he to expect the crown? None. And he will never get it. There is a test for us which may well make some of us ask ourselves, Are we Christians, then, at all?

And then, beyond that, there are all these other conditions which I have pointed out, which may be gathered into one—strenuous discharge of daily duty and continual effort after following in Christ's footsteps.

This needs to be as fully and emphatically preached as the other doctrine that eternal life is the gift of God. All manner of mischiefs may come, and have come, from either of these twin thoughts, wrenched apart. But let us weave them as closely together as the stems of the flowers that make the garlands are twined, and feel that there is a perfect consistency of both in theory, and that there must be a continual union of both, in our belief and in our practice. Eternal life is the gift of God, on condition of our diligence and earnestness. It is not all the same whether you are a lazy Christian or not. It does make an eternal difference in our condition whether here we 'run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.' We have to receive the crown as a gift; we have to wrestle and run, as contending for a prize.

III. And now, lastly, note the power of the reward as motive for life.

Paul says roundly in our text that the desire to obtain the incorruptible crown is a legitimate spring of Christian action. Now, I do not need to waste your time and my own in defending Christian morality from the fantastic objection that it is low and selfish, because it encourages itself to efforts by the prospect of the crown. If there are any men who are Christians—if such a contradiction can be even stated in words—only because of what they hope to gain thereby in another world, they will not get what they hope for; and they would not like it if they did. I do not believe that there are any such; and sure I am, if there are, that it is not Christianity that has made them so. But a thought that we must not take as a supreme motive, we may rightly accept as a subsidiary encouragement. We are not Christians unless the dominant motive of our lives be the love of the Lord Jesus Christ; and unless we feel a necessity, because of loving Him, to aim to be like Him. But, that being so, who shall hinder me from quickening my flagging energies, and stimulating my torpid faith, and encouraging my cowardice, by the thought that yonder there remain rest, victory, the fulness of life, the flashing of glory, and the purity of perfect righteousness? If such hopes are low and selfish as motives, would God that more of us were obedient to such low and selfish motives!

Now it seems to me, that this spring of action is not as strong in the Christians of this day as it used to be, and as it should be. You do not hear much about heaven in ordinary preaching. I do not think it occupies a very large place in the average Christian man's mind. We have all got such a notion nowadays of the great good that the Gospel does in society and in the present, and some of us have been so frightened by the nonsense that has been talked about the 'other-worldliness' of Christianity—as if that was a disgrace

to it—that it seems to me that the future of glory and blessedness has very largely faded away, as a motive for Christian men's energies, like the fresco off a neglected convent wall.

And I want to say, dear brethren, that I believe, for my part, that we suffer terribly by the comparative neglect into which this side of Christian truth has fallen. Do you not think that it would make a difference to you if you really believed, and carried always with you in your thoughts, the thrilling consciousness that every act of the present was registered, and would tell on the far side yonder?

We do not know much of that future, and these days are intolerant of mere unverifiable hypotheses. But accuracy of knowledge and definiteness of impression do not always go together, nor is there the fulness of the one wanted for the clearness and force of the other. Though the thread which we throw across the abyss is very slender, it is strong enough, like the string of a boy's kite, to bear the messengers of hope and desire that we may send up by it, and strong enough to bear the gifts of grace that will surely come down along it.

We cannot understand to-day unless we look at it with eternity for a background. The landscape lacks its explanation, until the mists lift and we see the white summits of the Himalayas lying behind and glorifying the low sandy plain. Would your life not be different; would not the things in it that look great be wholesomely dwindled and yet be magnified; would not sorrow be calmed, and life become 'a solemn scorn of ills,' and energies be stimulated, and all be different, if you really 'did it to obtain an incorruptible crown?'

Brethren, let us try to keep more clearly before us, as solemn and blessed encouragement in our lives, these great thoughts. The garland hangs on the goal, but 'a man is not crowned unless he strive according to the laws' of the arena. The laws are two—No man can enter for the conflict but by faith in Christ; no man can win in the struggle but by faithful effort. So the first law is, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,' and the second is, 'Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

## THE LIMITS OF LIBERTY

'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 24. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. 25. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake. 26. For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. 27. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you eat, asking no question for conscience sake. 28. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof: 29. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? 30. For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? 31. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 32. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: 33. Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.'—1 COR. x. 23-33.

This passage strikingly illustrates Paul's constant habit of solving questions as to conduct by the largest principles. He did not keep his 'theology' and his ethics in separate water-tight compartments, having no communication with each other. The greatest truths were used to regulate the smallest duties. Like the star that guided the Magi, they burned high in the heavens, but yet directed to the house in Bethlehem.

The question here in hand was one that pressed on the Corinthian Christians, and is very far away from our experience. Idolatry had so inextricably intertwined itself with daily life that it was hard to keep up any intercourse with non-Christians without falling into constructive idolatry; and one very constantly obtruding difficulty was that much of the animal food served on private tables had been slaughtered as sacrifices or with certain sacrificial rites. What was a Christian to do in such a case? To eat or not to eat? Both views had their vehement supporters in the Corinthian church, and the importance of the question is manifest from the large space devoted to it in this letter.

In chapter viii. we have a weighty paragraph, in which one phase of the difficulty is dealt with—the question whether a Christian ought to attend a feast in an idol temple, where, of course, the viands had been offered as sacrifices. But in chapter x. Paul deals with the case in which the meat had been bought in the flesh-market, and so was not necessarily sacrificial. Paul's manner of handling the point is very instructive. He envelops, as it were, the practical solution in a wrapping of large principles; verses 23, 24 precede the specific answer, and are general principles; verses 25-30 contain the practical answer; verses 31-33 and verse 1 of the next chapter are again general principles, wide and imperative enough to mould all conduct, as well as to settle the matter immediately in hand, which, important as it was at Corinth, has become entirely uninteresting to us.

We need not spend time in elucidating the specific directions given as to the particular question in hand further than to note the immense gift of saving common-sense which Paul had, and how sanely and moderately he dealt with his problem. His advice was —‘Don't ask where the joint set before you came from. If you do not know that it was offered, your eating of it does not commit you to idol worship.’ No doubt there were Corinthian Christians with inflamed consciences who did ask such questions, and rather prided themselves on their strictness and rigidity; but Paul would have them let sleeping dogs lie. If, however, the meat is known to have been offered to an idol, then Paul is as rigid and strict as they are. That combination of willingness to go as far as possible, and inflexible determination not to go one step farther, of yieldingness wherever principle does not come in, and of iron fixedness wherever it does, is rare indeed, but should be aimed at by all Christians. The morality of the Gospel would make more way in the world if its advocates always copied the ‘sweet reasonableness’ of Paul, which, as he tells us in this passage, he learned from Jesus.

As to the wrapping of general principles, they may all be reduced to one—the duty of limiting Christian liberty by consideration for others. In the two verses preceding the practical precepts, that duty is stated with reference entirely to the obligations flowing from our relationship to others. We are all bound together by a mystical chain of solidarity. Since every man is my neighbour, I am bound to think of him and not only of myself in deciding what I may do or refrain from doing. I must abstain from lawful things if, by doing them, I should be likely to harm my neighbour's building up of a strong character. I can, or I believe that I can, pursue some course of conduct, engage in some enterprise, follow some line of life, without damage to myself, either in regard to worldly position, or in regard to my religious life. Be it so, but I have to take some one else into account. Will my example call out imitation in others, to whom it may be harmful or fatal to do as I can do with real or supposed impunity? If so, I am guilty of something very like murder if I do not abstain.

‘What harm is there in betting a shilling? I can well afford to lose it, and I can keep myself from the feverish wish to risk more.’ Yes, and you are thereby helping to hold up that gambling habit which is ruining thousands.

‘I can take alcohol in moderation, and it does me no harm, and I can go to a prayer-meeting after my dinner and temperate glass, and I am within my Christian liberty in doing so.’ Yes, and you take part thereby in the greatest curse that besets our country, and are, by countenancing the drink habit, guilty of the blood of souls. How any Christian man can read these two verses and not abstain from all intoxicants is a mystery. They cut clean through all the pleas for moderate drinking, and bring into play another set of principles which limit liberty by regard to others’ good. Surely, if there was ever a subject to which these words apply, it is the use of alcohol, the proved cause of almost all the crime and poverty on both sides of the Atlantic. To the Christians who plead their ‘liberty’ we can only say, ‘Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.’

The same general considerations reappear in the verses following the specific precept, but with a difference. The neighbour's profit is still put forth as the limiting consideration, but it is elevated to a higher sacredness of obligation by being set in connection with the ‘glory of God’ and the example of Christ. ‘Do all to the glory of God.’ To put the thought here into modern English—Could you ask a blessing over a glass of spirits when you think that, though it should do you no harm, your taking it may, as it were, tip some weak brother over the precipice? Can you drink to God's glory when you know that drink is slaying thousands body and soul, and that hopeless drunkards are made by wholesale out of moderate drinkers? ‘Give no occasion of stumbling’; do not by your example tempt others into risky courses. And remember that ‘neighbour’ (verse 24) resolves itself into ‘Jews’ and ‘Greeks’ and the ‘Church of God’—that is, substantially to your own race and other races—to men with whom you have affinities, and to men with whom you have none.

A Christian man is bound to shape his life so that no man shall be able to say of him that he was the occasion of that one's fall. He is so bound because every man is his neighbour. He is so bound because he is bound to live to the glory of God, which can never be advanced by laying stumbling-blocks in the way for feeble feet. He is so bound because, unless Christ had limited Himself within the bound of manhood, and had sought not His own profit or pleasure, we should have had neither life nor hope. For all these reasons, the duty of thinking of others, and of abstaining, for their sakes, from what one might do, is laid on all Christians. How do they discharge that duty who will not forswear alcohol for their neighbour's sake?

### **‘IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME’**

‘This do in remembrance of Me.’—1 COR. xi. 24.

The account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, contained in this context, is very much the oldest extant narrative of that event. It dates long before any of the Gospels, and goes up, probably, to somewhere about five and twenty years after the Crucifixion. It presupposes a previous narrative which had been orally delivered to the Corinthians, and, as the Apostle alleges, was derived by

him from Christ Himself. It is intended to correct corruptions in the administration of the rite which must have taken some time to develop themselves. And so we are carried back to a period very close indeed to the first institution of the rite, by the words before us.

No reasonable doubt can exist, then, that within a very few years of our Lord's death, the whole body of Christian people believed that Jesus Christ Himself appointed the Lord's Supper. I do not stay to dwell upon the value of a rite contemporaneous with the fact which it commemorates, and continuously lasting throughout the ages, as a witness of the historical veracity of the alleged fact; but I want to fix upon this thought, that Jesus Christ, who cared very little for rites, who came to establish a religion singularly independent of any outward form, did establish two rites, one of them to be done once in a Christian lifetime, one of them to be repeated with indefinite frequency, and, as it appears, at first repeated daily by the early believers. The reason why these two, and only these two, external ordinances were appointed by Jesus Christ was, that, taken together, they cover the whole ground of revealed fact, and they also cover the whole ground of Christian experience. There is no room for any other rites, because these two, the rite of initiation, which is baptism, and the rite of commemoration, which is the Lord's Supper, say everything about Christianity as a revelation, and about Christianity as a living experience.

Not only so, but in the simple primitive form of the Lord's Supper there is contained a reference to the past, the present and the future. It covers all time as well as all revelation and all Christian experience. For the past, as the text shows us, it is a memorial of one Person, and one fact in that Person's life. For the present, it is the symbol of the Christian life, as that great sixth chapter in John's gospel sets forth; and for the future, it is a prophecy, as our Lord Himself said on that night in the upper chamber, 'Till I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom,' and as the Apostle in this context says, 'Till He come.' It is to these three aspects of this ordinance, as the embodiment of all essential Christian truth, and as the embodiment of all deep Christian experience, covering the past, the present, and the future, that I wish to turn now. I do not deal so much with the mere words of my text as with this threefold significance of the rite which it appoints.

I. So then, first, we have to think of it as a memorial of the past.

'Do this,' is the true meaning of the words, not 'in remembrance of Me,' but something far more sweet and pathetic—'do this for the *remembering* of Me.' The former expression is equal to 'Do this because you remember.' The real meaning of the words is, 'Do this in case you forget'; do this in order that you may recall to memory what the slippery memory is so apt to lose—the impression of even the sweetest sweetness, of the most loving love, and the most self-abnegating sacrifice, which He offered for us.

There is something to me infinitely pathetic and beautiful in looking at the words not only as the commandment of the Lord, but as the appeal of the Friend, who wished, as we all do, not to be utterly forgotten by those whom He cared for and loved; and who, not only because their remembrance was their salvation, but because their forgetfulness pained His human heart, brings to their hearts the plaintive appeal: 'Do not forget Me when I am gone away from you; and even if you have no better way of remembering Me, take these poor symbols, to which I am not too proud to entrust the care of My memory, and do this, lest you forget Me.'

But, dear brethren, there are deeper thoughts than this, on which I must dwell briefly. 'In remembrance of Me'—Jesus Christ, then, takes up an altogether unique and solitary position here, and into the sacredest hours of devotion and the loftiest moments of communion with God, intrudes His personality, and says, 'When you are most religious, remember Me; and let the highest act of your devout life be a thought turned to Myself.'

Now, I want you to ask, is that thought diverted from God? And if it is not, how comes it not to be? I want you honestly to ask yourselves this question—what did *He* think about Himself who, at that moment, when all illusions were vanishing, and life was almost at its last ebb, took the most solemn rite of His nation and laid it solemnly aside and said: 'A greater than Moses is here; a greater deliverance is being wrought': 'Remember Me.' Is that insisting on His own personality, and making the remembrance of it the very apex and shining summit of all religious aspiration—is that the work of one about whom all that we have to say is, He was the noblest of men? If so, then I want to know how Jesus Christ, in that upper chamber, founding the sole continuous rite of the religion which He established, and making its heart and centre the remembrance of His own personality, can be cleared from the charge of diverting to Himself what belongs to God only, and how you and I, if we obey His commands, escape the crime of idolatry and man-worship? 'Do this in remembrance,'—not of God—'in remembrance of Me,' 'and let memory, with all its tendrils, clasp and cleave to My person.' What an extraordinary demand! It is obscuring God, unless the 'Me' *is* God manifest in the flesh.

Then, still further, let me remind you that in the appointment of this solitary rite as His memorial to all generations, Jesus Christ Himself designates one part of His whole manifestation as the part into which all its pathos, significance, and power are concentrated. We who believe that the death of Christ is the life of the world, are told that one formidable objection to our belief is that Jesus Christ Himself said so little during His life about His death. I believe His reticence upon that question is much exaggerated, but apart altogether from that, I believe also that there was a necessity in the order of the evolution of divine truth, for the reticence, such as it is, because, whatsoever might be possible to Moses and Elias, on the Mount of Transfiguration, 'His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem,' could not be much spoken about in the plain till it had been accomplished. But,

apart from both of these considerations, reflect, that whether He said much about His death or not, He said something very much to the purpose about it when He said 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'

It is not His personality only that we are to remember. The whole of the language of the institution of the ritual, as well as the form of the rite, and its connection with the ancient passover, and its connection with the new covenant into connection with which Christ Himself brings it, all point to the significance in His eyes of His death as the Sacrifice for the world's sin. Wherefore 'the body' and 'the blood' separately remembered, except to indicate death by violence? Wherefore the language 'the body *broken* for you'; 'the blood *shed* for many for the remission of sins?' Wherefore the association with the Passover sacrifice? Wherefore the declaration that 'this is the blood of the Covenant,' unless all tended to the one thought—His death is the foundation of all loving relationships possible to us with God; and the condition of the remission of sins—the Sacrifice for the whole world?

This is the point that He desires us to remember; this is that which He would have live for ever in our grateful hearts.

I say nothing about the absolute exclusion of any other purpose of this memorial rite. If it was the mysterious thing that the superstition of later ages has made of it, how, in the name of common-sense, does it come that not one syllable, looking in that direction, dropped from His lips when He established it? Surely He, in that upper chamber, knew best what He meant, and what He was doing when He established the rite; and I, for my part, am contented to be told that I believe in a poor, bald Zwinglianism, when I say with my Master, that the purpose of the Lord's Supper is simply the commemoration, and therein the proclamation, of His death. There is no magic, no mystery, no 'sacrament' about it. It blesses us when it makes us remember Him. It does the same thing for us which any other means of bringing Him to mind does. It does that through a different vehicle. A sermon does it by words, the Communion does it by symbols. That is the difference to be found between them. And away goes the whole fabric of superstitious Christianity, and all its mischiefs and evils, when once you accept the simple 'Remember.' Christ told us what He meant by the rite when He said 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'

II. And now one word or two more about the other particulars which I have suggested. The past, however sweet and precious, is not enough for any soul to live upon. And so this memorial rite, just because it is memorial, is a symbol for the present.

That is taught us in the great chapter—the sixth of John's Gospel—which was spoken long before the institution of the Lord's Supper, but expresses in words the same ideas which it expresses by material forms. The Christ who died is the Christ who lives, and must be lived upon by the Christian. If our relation to Jesus Christ were only that 'Once in the end of the ages He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself'; and if we had to look back through lengthening vistas of distance and thickening folds of oblivion, simply to a historical past, in which He was once offered, the retrospect would not have the sweetness in it which it now has. But when we come to this thought that the Christ who was for us is also the Christ in us, and that He is not the Christ for us unless He is the Christ in us; and His death will never wash away our sins unless we feed upon Him, here and now, by faith and meditation, then the retrospect becomes blessedness. The Christian life is not merely the remembrance of a historical Christ in the past, but it is the present participation in a living Christ, with us now.

He is near each of us that we may make Him the very food of our spirits. We are to live upon Him. He is to be incorporated within us by our own act. This is no mysticism, it is a piece of simple reality. There is no Christian life without it. The true life of the believer is just the feeding of our souls upon Him,—our minds accepting, meditating upon, digesting the truths which are incarnated in Jesus; our hearts feeding upon the love which is so tender, warm, stooping, and close; our wills feeding upon and nourished by the utterance of His will in commandments which to know is joy and to keep is liberty; our hopes feeding upon Him who is our Hope, and in whom they find no chaff and husks of peradventures, but the pure wheat of 'Verily! verily I say unto you'; the whole nature thus finding its nourishment in Jesus Christ. You are Christians in the measure in which the very strength of your spirits, and sustenance of all your faculties, are found in loving communion with the living Lord.

Remember, too, that all this communion, intimate, sweet, sacred, is possible only, or at all events is in its highest forms and most blessed reality, possible only, to those who approach Him through the gate of His death. The feeding upon the living Christ which will be the strength of our hearts and our portion for ever, must be a feeding upon the whole Christ. We must not only nourish our spirits on the fact that He was incarnated for our salvation, but also on the truth that He was crucified for our acceptance with God. 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me,' has for its deepest explanation, 'He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life.'

My friends, what about the hunger of your souls? Where is it satisfied? With the swine's husks, or with the 'Bread of God which came down from Heaven?'

III. Now, lastly, that rite which is a memorial and a symbol is also a prophecy.

In the original words of the institution our Lord Himself makes reference to the future; 'till I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' And in the context here, the Apostle provides for the perpetual continuance, and emphasises the prophetic aspect, of the rite, by that word, 'till He come.' His death necessarily implies His coming again. The Cross and the Throne are linked together by an

indissoluble bond. Being what it is, the death cannot be the end. Being what He is, if He has once been offered to bear the sins of many, so He must come the second time without sin unto salvation. The rite, just because it is a rite, is the prophecy of a time when the need for it, arising from weak flesh and an intrusive world, shall cease. 'They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; at that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord.' There shall be no temple in that great city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple thereof. So all external worship is a prophecy of the coming of the perfect time, when that which is perfect being come, the external helps and ladders to climb to the loftiest shall be done away.

But more than that, the memorial and symbol is a prophecy. That upper chamber, with its troubled thoughts, its unbidden tears, starting to the eyes of the half-understanding listeners, who only felt that He was going away and the sweet companionship was dissolved, may seem to be but a blurred and a poor image of the better communion of heaven. But though on that sad night the Master bore a burdened heart, and the servants had but partial apprehension and a more partial love; though He went forth to agonise and to die, and they went forth to deny and to betray, and to leave Him alone, still it was a prophecy of Christ's table in His kingdom. Heaven is to be a feast. That representation promises society to the solitary, rest to the toilers, the oil of joy for mourning, and the full satisfaction of all desires. That heavenly feast surpasses indeed the antitype in the upper chamber, in that there the Master Himself partook not, and yonder we shall sup with Him and He with us, but is prophetic in that, as there He took a towel and girded Himself and washed the disciples' feet, so yonder He will come forth Himself and serve them. The future is unlike the prophetic past in that 'we shall go no more out'; there shall be no sequences of sorrow, and struggle, and distance and ignorance; but like it in that we shall feast on Christ, for through eternity the glorified Jesus will be the Bread of our spirits, and the fact of His past sacrifice the foundation of our hopes.

So, dear brethren, though our external celebration of this rite be dashed, as it always is, with much ignorance and with feeble faith; and though we gather round this table as the first generation of Israelites did round the passover, of which it is the successor, with staff in hand and loins girded, and have to eat it often with bitter herbs mingled, and though there be at our sides empty places, yet even in our clouded and partial apprehension, and in the imperfections of this outward type, we may see a gracious shadow of what is waiting for us when we shall go no more out, and all empty places shall be filled, and the bitter herbs shall be changed for the asphodel of Heaven and the sweet flowerage round the throne of God, and we shall feast upon the Christ, and in the loftiest experience of the utmost glories of the Heavens, shall remember the bitter Cross and agony as that which has bought it all. 'This do in remembrance of Me.' May it be a symbol of our inmost life, and the prophecy of the Heaven to which we each shall come!

## THE UNIVERSAL GIFT

'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.'—1 COR. xii. 7.

The great fact which to-day<sup>[1]</sup> commemorates is too often regarded as if it were a transient gift, limited to those on whom it was first bestowed. We sometimes hear it said that the great need of the Christian world is a second Pentecost, a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God and the like. Such a way of thinking and speaking misconceives the nature and significance of the first Pentecost, which had a transient element in it, but in essence was permanent. The rushing mighty wind and the cloven tongues of fire, and the strange speech in many languages, were all equally transient. The rushing wind swept on, and the house was no more filled with it. The tongues flickered into invisibility and disappeared from the heads. The hubbub of many languages was quickly silent. But that which these things but symbolised is permanent; and we are not to think of Pentecost as if it were a sudden gush from a great reservoir, and the sluice was let down again after it, but as if it were the entrance into a dry bed, of a rushing stream, whose first outgush was attended with noise, but which thereafter flows continuous and unbroken. If churches or individuals are scant of that gift, it is not because it has not been bestowed, but because it has not been accepted.

My text tells us two things: it unconditionally and broadly asserts that every Christian possesses this great gift—the manifestation is given to every man; and then it asserts that the gift of each is meant to be utilised for the good of all. 'The manifestation is given to every man to profit withal.'

I. Let me, then, say a word or two, to begin with, about the universality of this gift.

Now, that is implied in our Lord's own language, as commented upon by the Evangelist. For Jesus Christ declared that this was the standing law of His kingdom, to be universally applied to all its members, that 'He that believeth on Him, out of him shall flow rivers of living water'; and the Evangelist's comment goes on to say, 'This spake He of the Spirit which they that believe on Him should receive.' *There* is the condition and the qualification. Wherever there is faith, there the Spirit of God is bestowed, and bestowed in the measure in which faith is exercised. So, then, in full accordance with such fundamental principles in reference to the gift of the Spirit of God, comes the language of my text, and of many another text to which I cannot do more than refer. But let me just quote one or two of them, in order that I may make more emphatic what I believe a great many Christian people do not realise as they ought—viz.

that the gift of God's Holy Spirit is not a thing to be desired, as if it were not possessed or confined to select individuals, or manifested by exceptional and lofty attainments, but is the universal heritage of the whole Christian Church. 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost?' 'We have all been made to drink into one Spirit,' says Paul again, in the immediate context. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His,' says he, unconditionally. And in many other places the same principle is laid down, a principle which I believe the Christian Church to-day needs to have recalled to its consciousness, that it may be quickened to realise it in its experience far more than is the case at present.

Let me remind you, too, that that universality of the gifts of the Divine Spirit is implied in the very conception of what Christ's work, in its deepest and most precious aspects to us, is. For we are not to limit, as a great many so-called earnest evangelical teachers and believers do—we are not to limit His work to that which is effected when a man first becomes a Christian—viz. pardon and acceptance with God. God forbid that I should ever seem to underrate that great initial gift on which everything else must be built. But I am not underrating it when I say, 'Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith,' and the 'proportion of faith' has been violated, and the perspective and completeness of Christian truth, and of Christ's gifts, have been, alas! to a very large extent distorted because Christian people, trained in what we call the evangelical school, have laid far too little emphasis on the fact that the essential gift of Christ to His people is not pardon, nor acceptance, nor justification, but *life*; and that forgiveness, and altered relationship to God, and assurance of acceptance with Him, are all preliminaries. They are, if I may recur to a figure that I have already employed, the preparing of the channel, and the taking away of the obstacles that block its mouth, in order to the inrush of the flood of the river of the water of life.

This life that Christ gives is the result of the gift of the Spirit. So 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.' The life is the gift considered from our side, and the Spirit is the gift considered from the divine side. 'Every man that hath the Son hath life'; because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made him free from the law of sin and death. So you see if that is true—and I for my part am sure that it is—then all that vulgar way of looking at the influences of the Holy Spirit upon men, as if they were confined to certain exceptional people, or certain abnormal and extraordinary and elevated acts, is swept away. It is not the spasmodic, the exceptional, the rare, not the lofty or transcendently Christlike acts or characters that are alone the manifestation of the Spirit.

Nor is this gift a thing that a man can discover as distinct from his own consciousness. The point where the river of the water of life comes into the channel of our spirits lies away far up, near the sources, and long before the stream comes into sight in our own consciousness, the blended waters have been inseparably mingled, and flow on peacefully together. 'The Spirit beareth witness *with* our spirits'; and you are not to expect that you can hear two voices speaking, but it is one voice and one only.

Now, that universality of this divine gift underlies the very constitution of the Christian Church. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty,' said Paul. It is because each Christian man has access to the one Source of illumination and of truth and righteousness and holiness, that no Christian man is to become subject to the dominion of a brother. And it is because on the servants and on the handmaidens has been poured out, in these days, God's Spirit and they prophesy, that all domination of classes or individuals, and all stiffening of the free life of God's Church by man-made creeds, are contrary to the very basis of its existence, and an attack on the dignity of each individual member of the Church. 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One' is said to all Christian people—and 'ye need not that any man teach you,' still less that any man, or body of men, or document framed by men, should be set up as normal and authoritative over Christ's free people.

Still further, and only one word—Let me remind you of what I have already said, and what is only too sadly true, that this grand universality of the Spirit's gift to all Christian people does not fill, in the mind of the ordinary Christian man, the place that it ought, and it does not fill it, therefore, in his experience. I say no more upon that point.

II. And now let me say a word, secondly, about the many-sidedness of this universal gift.

One of the reasons why Christian people as a whole do not realise the universality as they ought is, as I have already suggested in a somewhat different connection, because they limit their notions far too much of what the gift of God's Spirit is to do to men. We must take a wider view of what that Spirit is meant to effect than we ordinarily take, before we understand how real and how visible its universal manifestations are. Take a leaf out of the Old Testament. The man who made the brass-work for the Tabernacle was 'full of the Spirit of God.' The poets who sung the Psalms, in more than one place, declare of themselves that they, too, were but the harps upon which the divine finger played. Samson was capable of his rude feats of physical strength, because 'the Spirit of God was upon him.' Art, song, counsel, statesmanlike adaptation of means to ends, and discernment of proper courses for a nation, such as were exemplified in Joseph and in Daniel, are, in the Old Testament, ascribed to the Spirit of God, and even the rude physical strength of the simple-natured and sensuous athlete is traced up to the same source.

But again, we see another sphere of the Spirit's working in the manifestations of it in the experience of the primitive Church. These are, as we all know, accompanied with miracles, speaking with tongues and working wonders. The signs of that Spirit in those days were visible and audible. As I said, when the river first came into its bed, it came like the tide in Morecambe Bay, breast-high, with a roar and a rush. But it was quiet after that. In the context we have a whole series of manifestations of this Divine Spirit, some of



them miraculous and some being natural faculties heightened, but all concerned with the Church as a society, and being for the benefit of the community.

But there is another class. If you turn to the Epistle to the Galatians, you will find a wonderful list there of what the Apostle calls 'the fruit of the Spirit,' beginning with 'love, joy, peace.' These are all moral and religious, bearing upon personal experience and the completeness of the individual character.

Now, let us include all these aspects in our conception of the fruit of the Spirit's working on men—the secular, if we may use that word, as exhibited in the Old Testament; the miraculous, as seen in the first days of the Church; the ecclesiastical, if we may so designate the endowments mentioned in the context, and the purely personal, moral, and religious emotions and acts. The plain fact is that everything in a Christian's life, except his sin, is the manifestation of that Divine Spirit, from whom all good thoughts, counsels, and works do proceed. He is the 'Spirit of adoption,' and whenever in my heart there rises warm and blessed the aspiration 'Abba! Father!' it is not my voice only, but the voice of that Divine Spirit. He is the Spirit of intercession; and whenever in my soul there move yearning desires after infinite good, child-like longings to be knit more closely to Him, that, too, is the voice of God's Spirit; and our prayers are then 'sweet, indeed, when He the Spirit gives by which we pray.' In like manner, all the variety of Christian emotions and experiences is to be traced to the conjoint operation of that Divine Spirit as the source, and my own spirit as influenced by, and the organ of, the Spirit of God. If I may take a very rough illustration, there is a story in the Old Testament about a king, to whom were given a bow and arrow, with the command to shoot. The prophet's hand was laid on the king's weak hand, and the weak hand was strengthened by the touch of the other; and with one common pull they drew back the string and the arrow sped. The king drew the bow, but it was the prophet's hand grasping his wrist that gave him strength to do it. And that is how the Spirit of God will work with us if we will.

III. Finally, consider the purpose of all the diverse manifestations of the one universal gift.

'To profit withal'—for his own good who possesses it, and for the good of all the rest of his brethren.

Now, that involves two plain things. There have been people in the Christian Church who have said, 'We have all the Spirit, and therefore we do not need one another.' There may be isolation, and self-sufficiency, and a host of other evils coming in, if we only grasp the thought, 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man,' but they are all corrected if we go on and say, 'to profit withal.' For every one of us has something, and no one of us has everything; so, on the one hand, we want each other, and, on the other hand, we are responsible for the use of what we have.

You get the life, not in order that you may plume yourself on its possession, nor in order that you may ostentatiously display it, still less in order that you may shut it up and do nothing with it; but you get the life in order that it may spread through you to others.

'The least flower with a brimming cup may stand, And share its dew-drop with another near.'

We each have the life that God's grace may fructify through us to all. Power is duty; endowment is obligation; capacity prescribes work. 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.'

You can regulate the flow. You have the sluice; you can shut it or open it. I have said that the condition, and the only condition, of possessing the fulness of God's Spirit is faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the more you trust the more you have, and the less your faith the less the gift. You can get much or little, according to the greatness or the smallness, the fixity or the transiency, of your desires. If you hold the empty cup with a tremulous hand, the precious liquid will not be poured into it—for some of it will be spilt—in the same fulness as it would be if you held it steadily. It is the old story—the miraculous flow of the oil stopped when the widow had no more pots and vessels to bring. The reason why some of us have so little of that Divine Spirit is because we have not held out our vessels to be filled. You can diminish the flow by ignoring it, and that is what a host of so-called Christian people do nowadays. You can diminish it by neglecting to use the little that you have for the purpose for which it was given you. Does anybody profit by your spiritual life? Do you profit much by it yourselves? Has it ever been of the least good to anybody else in the world? 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to' you, if you are a Christian man or woman, more or less. And if you shut it up, and do never an atom of good with it, either to yourselves or to anybody else, of course it will slip away; and, sometime or other, to your astonishment, you will find that the vessels are empty, and that the Spirit of the Lord has departed from you. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

Footnote 1: Whitsunday.

## WHAT LASTS

‘Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three...’—1 COR. xiii. 8, 13.

We discern the run of the Apostle's thought best by thus omitting the intervening verses and connecting these two. The part omitted is but a buttress of what has been stated in the former of our two verses; and when we thus unite them there is disclosed plainly the Apostle's intention of contrasting two sets of things, three in each set. The one set is ‘prophecies, tongues, knowledge’; the other, ‘faith, hope, charity.’ There also comes out distinctly that the point mainly intended by the contrast is the transiency of the one and the permanence of the other. Now, that contrast has been obscured and weakened by two mistakes, about which I must say a word.

With regard to the former statement, ‘Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease,’ that has been misunderstood as if it amounted to a declaration that the miraculous gifts in the early Church were intended to be of brief duration. However true that may be, it is not what Paul means here. The cessation to which he refers is their cessation in the light of the perfect Future. With regard to the other statement, the abiding of faith, hope, charity, that, too, has been misapprehended as if it indicated that faith and hope belonged to this state of things only, and that love was the greatest of the three, because it was permanent. The reason for that misconception has mainly lain in the misunderstanding of the force of ‘*Now*,’ which has been taken to mean ‘for the present,’ as an implied contrast to an unspoken ‘then’; just as in the previous verse we have, ‘*Now* we see through a glass, *then* face to face.’ But the ‘now’ in this text is not, as the grammarians say, temporal, but logical. That is, it does not refer to time, but to the sequence of the Apostle's thought, and is equivalent to ‘so then.’ ‘So then abideth faith, hope, charity.’

The scope of the whole, then, is to contrast the transient with the permanent, in Christian experience. If we firmly grasped the truth involved, our estimates would be rectified and our practice revolutionised.

I. I ask this question—What will drop away?

Paul answers, ‘prophecies, tongues, knowledge.’ Now these three were all extraordinary gifts belonging to the present phase of the Christian life. But inasmuch as these gifts were the heightening of natural capacities and faculties, it is perfectly legitimate to enlarge the declaration and to use these three words in their widest signification. So understood, they come to this, that all our present modes of apprehension and of utterance are transient, and will be left behind.

‘Knowledge, it shall cease,’ and as the Apostle goes on to explain, in the verses which I have passed over for my present purpose, it shall cease because the perfect will absorb into itself the imperfect, as the inrushing tide will obliterate the little pools in the rocks on the seashore. For another reason, the knowledge, the mode of apprehension belonging to the present, will pass—because here it is indirect, and there it will be immediate. ‘We shall know face to face,’ which is what philosophers mean by intuition. Here our knowledge ‘creeps from point to point,’ painfully amassing facts, and thence, with many hesitations and errors, groping its way towards principles and laws. Here it is imperfect, with many a gap in the circumference; or like the thin red line on a map which shows the traveller's route across a prairie, or like the spider's thread in the telescope, stretched athwart the blazing disc of the sun—‘but then face to face.’ Incomplete knowledge shall be done away; and many of its objects will drop, and much of what makes the science of earth will be antiquated and effete. What would the hand-loom weaver's knowledge of how to throw his shuttle be worth in a weaving-shed with a thousand looms? Just so much will the knowledges of earth be when we get yonder.

Modes of utterance will cease. With new experiences will come new methods of communication. As a man can speak, and a beast can only growl or bark, so a man in heaven, with new experiences, will have new methods of communication. The comparison between that mode of utterance which we now have, and that which we shall then possess, will be like the difference between the old-fashioned semaphore, that used to wave about clumsy wooden arms in order to convey intelligence, and the telegraph.

Think, then, of a man going into that future life, and saying ‘I knew more about Sanscrit than anybody that ever lived in Europe’; ‘I sang sweet songs’; ‘I was a past master in philology, grammars, and lexicons’; ‘I was a great orator.’ ‘Tongues shall cease’; and the modes of utterance that belonged to earth, and all that holds of them, will drop away, and be of no more use.

If these things are true, brethren, with regard even to the highest form of these high and noble things, how much more and more solemnly true are they with regard to the aims and objects which most of us have in view? They will all drop away, and we shall be left, stripped of what, for most of us, has made the whole interest and activity of our lives.

II. What will last?

‘So then, abideth these three, faith, hope, love.’ When Paul takes three nouns and couples them with a verb in the singular, he is not making a slip of the pen, or committing a grammatical blunder which a child could correct. But there is a great truth in that piece of apparent grammatical irregularity; for the faith, the hope, and the love, for which he can only afford a singular verb, are thereby declared to be in their depth and essence one thing, and it, the triple star, abides, and continues to shine. The three primitive colours are unified in the white beam of light. Do not correct the grammar, and spoil the sense, but discern what he means when he says, ‘Now, abideth faith, hope, love.’ For this is what he means, that the two latter come out of the former, and that without it they are

nought, and that it without them is dead.

Faith breeds Hope. *There* is the difference between earthly hopes and Christian people's hopes. Our hopes, apart from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, are but the balancing of probabilities, and the scale is often dragged down by the clutch of eager desires. But all is baseless and uncertain, unless our hopes are the outcome of our faith. Which, being translated into other words, is just this, that the one basis on which men can rest—ay! even for the immediate future, and the contingencies of life, as well as for the solemnities and certainties of heaven—any legitimate and substantial hope is trust in Jesus Christ, His word, His love, His power, and for the heavenly future, in His Resurrection and present glory. A man who believes these things, and only that man, has a rock foundation on which he can build his hope.

Faith, in like manner, is the parent of Love. Paul and John, diverse as they are in the whole cast of their minds, the one being speculative and the other mystical, the one argumentative and the other simply gazing and telling what he sees, are precisely agreed in regard to this matter. For, to the Apostle of Love, the foundation of all human love towards God is, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' and 'We love Him because He first loved us,' and to Paul the first step is the trusting reception of the love of God, 'commended to us' by the fact that 'whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us,' and from that necessarily flows, if the faith be genuine, the love that answers the sacrifice and obeys the Beloved. So faith, hope, love, these three are a trinity in unity, and it abideth. That is the main point of our last text. Let me say a word or two about it.

I have said that the words have often been misunderstood as if the 'now' referred only to the present order of things, in which faith and hope are supposed to find their only appropriate sphere. But that is clearly not the Apostle's meaning here, for many reasons with which I need not trouble you. The abiding of all three is eternal abiding, and there is a heavenly as well as an earthly form of faith and hope as well as of love. Just look at these points for a moment.

'Faith abides,' says Paul, yonder, as here. Now, there is a common saying, which I suppose ninety out of a hundred people think comes out of the Bible, about faith being lost in sight. There is no such teaching in Scripture. True, in one aspect, faith is the antithesis of sight. True, Paul does say 'We walk by faith, not by sight.' But that antithesis refers only to part of faith's significance. In so far as it is the opposite of sight, of course it will cease to be in operation when 'we shall know even as we are known' and 'see Him as He is.' But the essence of faith is not in the absence of the person trusted, but the emotion of trust which goes out to the person, present or absent. And in its deepest meaning of absolute dependence and happy confidence, faith abides through all the glories and the lustres of the heavens, as it burns amidst the dimnesses and the darknesses of earth. For ever and ever, on through the irrevoluble ages of eternity, dependence on God in Christ will be the life of the glorified, as it was the life of the militant, Church. No millenniums of possession, and no imaginable increases in beauty and perfectness and enrichment with the wealth of God, will bring us one inch nearer to casting off the state of filial dependence which is, and ever will be, the condition of our receiving them all. Faith 'abides.'

Hope 'abides.' For it is no more a Scriptural idea that hope is lost in fruition, than it is that faith is lost in sight. Rather that Future presents itself to us as the continual communication of an inexhaustible God to our progressively capacious and capable spirits. In that continual communication there is continual progress. Wherever there is progress there must be hope. And thus the fair form, which has so often danced before us elusive, and has led us into bogs and miry places and then faded away, will move before us through all the long avenues of an endless progress, and will ever and anon come back to tell us of the unseen glories that lie beyond the next turn, and to woo us further into the depths of heaven and the fulness of God. Hope 'abides.'

Love 'abides.' I need not, I suppose, enlarge upon that thought which nobody denies, that love is the eternal form of the human relation to God. It, too, like the mercy which it clasps, 'endureth for ever.'

But I may remind you of what the Apostle does not explain in our text, that it is greater than its linked sisters, because whilst faith and hope belong only to a creature, and are dependent and expectant of some good to come to themselves, and correspond to something which is in God in Christ, the love which springs from faith and hope not only corresponds to, but resembles, that from which it comes and by which it lives. The fire kindled is cognate with the fire that kindles; and the love that is in man is like the love that is in God. It is the climax of his nature; it is the fulfilling of all duty; it is the crown and jewelled clasp of all perfection. And so 'abideth faith, hope, and the greatest of these is love.'

III. Lastly, what follows from all this?

First, let us be quite sure that we understand what this abiding love is. I dare say you have heard people say 'Ah! I do not care much about Paul's theology. Give me the thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. That is beautiful; that praise of Love; *that* comes home to men.' Yes, very beautiful. Are you quite sure that you know what Paul means by 'love'? I do not use the word charity, because that lovely word, like a glistening meteor that falls upon the earth, has a rust, as it were, upon its surface that dims its brightness very quickly. Charity has come to mean an indulgent estimate of other people's faults; or, still more degradingly, the giving of money out of your pockets to other people's necessities. These are what the people who do not care much about Paul's theology

generally suppose that he means here. But these do not exhaust his meaning. Paul's notion of love is the response of the human love to the divine, which divine is received into the heart by simple faith in Jesus Christ. And his notion of love which never faileth, and endureth all things, and hopeth all things, is love to men, which is but one stream of the great river of love to God. If we rightly understand what he means by love, we shall find that his praise of love is as theological as anything that he ever wrote. We shall never get further than barren admiration of a beautiful piece of writing, unless our love to men has the source and root to which Paul points us.

Again, let us take this great thought of the permanence of faith, hope, and love as being the highest conception that we can form of our future condition. It is very easy to bewilder ourselves with speculations and theories of another life. I do not care much about them. The great gates keep their secret well. Few stray beams of light find their way through their crevices. The less we say the less likely we are to err. It is easy to let ourselves be led away, by turning rhetoric into revelation, and accepting the symbols of the New Testament as if they carried anything more than images of the realities. But far beyond golden pavements, and harps, and crowns, and white robes, lies this one great thought that the elements of the imperfect, Christlike life of earth are the essence of the perfect, Godlike life in heaven. 'Now abide these three, faith, hope, love.'

Last of all, let us shape our lives in accordance with these certainties. The dropping away of the transient things is no argument for neglecting or despising them; for our handling of them makes our characters, and our characters abide. But it is a very excellent argument for shaping our lives so as to seek first the first things, and to secure the permanent qualities, and so to use the transient as that it shall all help us towards that which does not pass.

What will a Manchester man that knows nothing except goods and office work, and knows these only in their superficial aspect, and not as related to God, what, in the name of common-sense, will he do with himself when he gets into a world where there is not a single ledger, nor a desk, nor a yard of cloth of any sort? What will some of us do when, in like manner, we are stripped of all the things that we have cared about, and worked for, and have made our aims down here? Suppose that you knew that you were under sailing orders to go somewhere or other, and that at any moment a breathless messenger might appear and say, 'Come along! we are all waiting for you'; and suppose that you never did a single thing towards getting your outfit ready, or preparing yourself in any way for that which might come at any moment, and could not but come before very long. Would you be a wise man? But that is what a great many of us are doing; doing every day, and all day long, and doing that only. 'He shall leave them in the midst of his days,' says a grim text, 'and at his latter end shall be a fool.'

What will drop? Modes of apprehension, modes of utterance, occupations, duties, relationships, loves; and we shall be left standing naked, stripped, as it were, to the very quick, and only as much left as will keep our souls alive. But if we are clothed with faith, hope, love, we shall not be found naked. Cultivate the high things, the permanent things; then death will not wrench you violently from all that you have been and cared for; but it will usher you into the perfect form of all that you have been and done upon earth. All these things will pass, but faith, hope, love, 'stay not behind nor in the grave are trod,' but will last as long as Christ, their Object, lives, and as long as we in Him live also.