

# Ephesians 5 Maclaren

## EPHESIANS 5

SERMONS BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN

### GOD'S IMITATORS

**'Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.'**... — Ephesians 5:1.

THE Revised Version gives a more literal and more energetic rendering of this verse by reading, 'Be ye, therefore, imitators of God, as beloved children.' It is the only place in the Bible where that bold word 'imitate' is applied to the Christian relation to God. But, though the expression is unique, the idea underlies the whole teaching of the New Testament on the subject of Christian character and conduct. To be like God, and to set ourselves to resemble Him, is the sum of all duty; and in the measure in which we approximate thereto; we come to perfection. So, then, there are here just two points that I would briefly touch upon now — the one is the sublime precept of the text, and the other the all-sufficient motive enforcing it. 'Be ye imitators of God as' — because you are, and know yourselves to be — 'beloved children,' and it therefore behoves you to be like your Father.

#### **I. First, then, this sublime precept.**

Now notice that, broad as this precept is, and all-inclusive of every kind of excellence and duty as it may be, the Apostle has a very definite and specific meaning in it. There is one feature, and only one, in which, accurately speaking, a man may be like God. Our limited knowledge can never be like the unending perfect wisdom of God. Our holiness cannot be like His, for there are many points in our nature and character which have no relation or correspondence to anything in the divine nature. But what is left? Love is left. Our other graces are not like the God to whom they cleave. My faith is not like His faithfulness. My obedience is not like His authority. My submission is not like His autocratic power. My emptiness is not like His fulness. My aspirations are not like His gratifying of them. They correspond to God, but correspondence is not similarity; rather it presupposes unlikeness. Just as a concavity will fit into a convexity, for the very reason that it is concave and not convex, so the human unlikenesses, which, are correspondent to God, are the characteristics by which it becomes possible that we should cleave to Him and inhere in Him. But whilst there is much in which He stands alone and incomparable, and whilst we have all to say, 'Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?' or what likeness shall we compare unto Him? we yet can obey in reference to one thing, — and to one thing only, as it seems to me — the commandment of my text, 'Be ye imitators of God.' We can be like Him in nothing else, but our love not only corresponds to His, but is of the same quality and nature as His, howsoever different it may be in sweep and in fervour and in degree. The tiniest drop that hangs upon the tip of a thorn will be as perfect a sphere as the sun, and it will have its little rainbow on its round, with all the prismatic colours, the same in tint and order and loveliness, as when the bow spans the heavens. The dew-drop may imitate the sun, and we are to be imitators of God; knit to Him by the one thing in us which is kindred to Him in the deepest sense — the love that is the life of God and the perfecting of man.

Wait, then, notice how the Apostle in the context fastens upon a certain characteristic of that divine love which we are to imitate in our lives; and thereby makes the precept a very practical and a very difficult one. Godlike love will be love that gives as liberally as His does. What is the very essence of all love? Longing to be like. And the Purest and deepest love is love which desires to impart itself, and that is God's love. The Bible seems to teach us that in a very mysterious sense, about which the less we say the less likely we are to err, there is a quality of giving up, as well as of giving, in God's love; for we read of the Father that 'spared not His Son,' by which is meant, not that He did not shrink from inflicting something upon the Son, but that He did not grudgingly keep that Son for Himself. 'He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all.' And if we can say but little about that surrender on the part of the infinite Fountain of all love, we can say that Jesus Christ, who is the activity of the Father's love, spared not Himself, but, as the context puts it, 'gave Himself up for us.'

And that is the pattern for us, That thought is not a subject to be decorated with tawdry finery of eloquence, or to be dealt with as if it were a sentimental prettiness very fit to be spoken of, but impossible to be practised. It is the duty of every Christian man and woman, and they have not done their duty unless they have learned that the bond which unites them to men is, in its nature, the very same as the bond which unites men to God; and that they will not have lived righteously unless they learn to be 'imitators of God,' in the surrender of themselves for their brother's good.

Ah, friend, that grips us very tight — and if there were a little more reality and prose brought into our sentimental talk about Christian love, and that

love were more often shown in action, in all the self-suppression and taking a lift of a world's burdens, which its great Pattern demands, the world would be less likely to curl a scornful lip at the Church's talk about brotherly love.'

You say that you are a Christian — that is to say a child of God. Do you know anything, and would anybody looking at you see that you knew anything, about the love which counts no cost and no sacrifice too great to be lavished on the unworthy and the sinful?

But that brings me to another point. The Apostle here, in the context, not for the sake of saying pretty things, but for the sake of putting sharp points on Christian duty, emphasises another thought, that Godlike love will be a forgiving love. Why should we be always waiting for the other man to determine our relations to him, and consider that if he does not like us we are absolved from the duty of loving him? Why should we leave him to settle the terms upon which we are to stand? God has love, as the Sermon on the Mount puts it, 'to the unthankful and the evil,' and we shall not be imitating His example unless we carry the same temper into all our relationships with our fellows.

People sit complacently and hear all that I am now trying to enforce, and think it is the right thing for me to say, but do you think it is the right thing for you to do? When a man obviously does not like you, or perhaps tries to harm you, what then? How do you meet him? 'He maketh His sun to shine, and sendeth His rain, on the unthankful and the evil.' 'Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children.'

Now note the all-sufficient motive for this great precept, The sense of being loved will make loving, and nothing else will. The only power that will eradicate, or break without eradicating, our natural tendency to make ourselves our centres, is the recognition that there, at the heart, and on the central throne of the universe, and the divinest thing in it, there sits perfect and self-sacrificing Love, whose beams warm even us. The only flame that kindles love in a man's heart, whether it be to God or to man, is the recognition that he himself stands in the full sunshine of that blaze from above, and that God has loved him. Our hearts are like reverberating furnaces, and when the fire of the consciousness of the divine love is lit in them, then from sides and roof the genial heat is reflected back again to intensify the central flame.

Love begets love, and according to Paul, and according to John, and according to the Master of both of them, if a man loves God, then that glowing beam will glow whether it is turned to earth or turned to heaven.

The Bible does not out love into two, and keep love to God in one division of the heart and love to man in another, but regards them as one and the same; the same sentiment, the same temper, the same attitude of heart and mind, only that in the one case the love soars, and in the other it lives along the level. The two are indissolubly tied together.

It is because a man knows himself to be beloved that therefore he is stimulated and encouraged to be an 'imitator of God,' and, on the other hand, the sense of being God's child underlies all real imitation of Him. Imitation is natural to the child. It is a miserable home where a boy does not imitate his father, and it is the father's fault in nine cases out of ten if he does not. Whoever feels himself to be a beloved child is thereby necessarily drawn to model himself on the Father that he loves, because he knows that the Father loves him.

So I come to the blessed truth that Christian morality does not say to us, 'Now begin, and work, and tinker away at yourselves, and try to get up some kind of excellence of character, and then come to God, and pray Him to accept you.' That is putting the cart before the horse. The order is reversed. We are to begin with taking our personal salvation and God's love to us for granted, and to work from that. Realise that you are beloved children, and then set to work to live accordingly. If we are ever to do what is our bounden duty to do, in all the various relations of life, we must begin with recognising, with faithful and grateful hearts, the love wherewith God has loved us. We are to think much and confidently of ourselves as beloved of God, and that, and only that, will make us loving to men.

The Nile floods the fields of Egypt and brings greenness and abundance wherever its waters are carried, because thousands of miles away, close up to the Equator, the snows have melted and filled the watercourses in the far-off wilderness. And so, if we are to go out into life, living illustrations and messengers of a love that has redeemed even us, we must, in many a solitary moment, and in the depths of our quiet hearts, realise and keep fast the conviction that God hath loved us, and Christ hath died for us.

But a solemn consideration has to be pressed on all our consciences, and that is that there is something wrong with a man's Christian confidence whose assurance that he himself possesses a share in the love of God in Christ, is not ever moving him to imitation of the love in which he trusts. It is a shame that any one without Christian faith and love should be as charitable, as open to pity and to help, as earnest in any sort of philanthropic work, as Christian men -and women are. But godless and perfectly secular philanthropy treads hard on the heels of Christian charity to-day. The more shame to us if we have been eating our morsels alone, and hugging ourselves in the possession of the love which has redeemed us; and if it has not quickened us to the necessity of copying it in our relations to our fellows. There is something dreadfully wrong about such a Christian character. 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?'

Take these plain principle and honestly to fit them to your characters and lives, and you will revolutionise both.

# WHAT CHILDREN OF LIGHT SHOULD BE

**'Walk as children of light.' — Ephesians 5:3.**

IT was our Lord who coined this great name for His disciples. Paul's use of it is probably a reminiscence of the Master's, and so is a hint of the existence of the same teachings as we now find in the existing Gospels, long before their day. Jesus Christ said, 'Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light'; and Paul gives substantially the same account of the way by which a man becomes a Son of the Light when he says, in the words preceding my text, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.'

Union with Him makes light, just as the bit of carbon will glow as long as it is in contact with the electric force, and subsides again into darkness when that is switched off. To be in Christ is to be a child of light, and to believe in Christ is to be in Him.

But the intense moral earnestness of our Apostle is indicated by the fact that on both occasions in which he uses this designation he does so, not for the purpose of heightening the sense of the honour and prerogative attached to it, but for the sake of deducing from it plain and stringent moral duties, and heightening the sense of obligation to holy living.

'Walk as children of light.' Be true to your truest, deepest self. Manifest what you are. Let the sweet, sacred secrets of inward communion come out in the trivialities of ordinary conduct; make of your every thought a deed, and see to it that every deed be vitalised and purified by its contact with the great truths and thoughts that He in this name. These are various ways of putting this one all-sufficient directory of conduct.

Now, in the context, the Apostle expands this concentrated exhortation in three or four different directions, and perhaps we may best set forth its meaning if we shape our remarks by these. I venture to cast them, for the sake of emphasis, into a hortatory form.

## **I. Aim at an all-round productiveness of the natural fruits of the light.**

The true reading is, 'Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light' (not spirit, as the Authorised Version reads it) 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' Now, it is obvious that the alteration of 'light' instead of 'spirit' brings the words into connection with the preceding the following. The reference to the 'fruits of the spirit' would be entirely irrelevant in this place; a reference to the 'fruit of the light, ' as being every form of goodness and righteousness and truth, is altogether in place.

There is, then, a natural tendency in the light to blossom out into all forms and types of goodness. 'Fruit' suggests the idea of natural, silent, spontaneous effortless growth. And, although that is by no means a sufficient account of the process by which bad men become good men, it is an inseparable element, in all true moral renovation, that it be the natural outcome and manifestation of an inward principle; otherwise it is mere hypocritical adornment, or superficial appearance. If we are to do good we must first of all be good. If from us there are to come righteousness and truth, and all other graces of character, there must, first of all, be the radical change which is involved in passing from separateness in the darkness to union with Jesus Christ in the light. The Apostle's theory of moral renovation is that you must begin with the implantation in the spirit of the source of all moral goodness - viz. Jesus Christ - brought into the heart by the uniting power of humble faith. And then there will be lodged in our being a vital power, of which the natural outcome will be all manner of fair and pure things. Effort is needed, as I shall have to say; but prior to effort there must be union with Jesus Christ.

This wide, general commandment of our text is sufficiently definite, thinks Paul; for if the light be in you it will naturally effloresce into all forms of beauty. Light is the condition of fruitfulness. Everywhere the vital germ is only acted upon by the light. No sunshine, no flowers; darkness produces thin, etiolated, whitened, and feeble shoots at the best. Let the light blaze in, and the blanched feebleness becomes vigorous and unfolds itself. How much more will light be the condition of fruitfulness when the very light itself is the seed from which all fruit is developed.

But, still further, mark how there must be an all-round completeness in order that we shall fairly set forth the glory and power of the light of which our faith makes us children and partakers. The fruit 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' These three aspects - the good, the right, the true - may not be a scientific, ethical classification, but they give a sufficiently plain and practical distinction. Goodness, in which the prevailing idea is beneficence and the kindlier virtues; righteousness, which refers to the sterner graces of justice; truth, in which the prevalent idea is conformity in action with facts and the conditions of man's life and entire sincerity - these three do cover, with sufficient completeness, the whole ground of possible human excellence. But the Apostle widens them still further by that little word all.

We all tend to cultivate those virtues which are in accordance with our natural dispositions, or are made most easy to us by our circumstances. And there is nothing in which we more need to seek comprehensiveness than in the effort to educate ourselves into, and to educe from ourselves, kinds of goodness and forms of excellence which are not naturally in accord-ante with our dispositions, or facilitated by our circumstances. The tree planted in the shrubbery will grow all lopsided; the bushes on the edge of

the cliff will be shorn away on the windward side by the teeth of the south-western gale, and will lean over northwards, on the side of least resistance. And so we all are apt to content ourselves with doing the good things that are easiest for us, or that fit into our temperament and character. Jesus Christ would have us to be all-round men, and would that we should seek to aim after and possess, the kinds of excellence that are least cognate to our characters. Are you strong, and do you pride yourself upon your firmness? Cultivate gentleness. Are you amiable, and pride yourself, perhaps, upon your sympathetic tenderness? Try to get a little iron and quinine into your constitution. Seek to be the man that you are least likely to be, and aim at a comprehensive development of 'all righteousness and goodness and truth.'

Further, remember that this all-round completeness is not attained as the result of an effortless growth. True, these things are the fruits of the light, but also true, they are the prizes of struggle and the trophies of warfare. No man will ever attain to the comprehensive moral excellence which it is in his own power to win; no Christian will ever be as all-round a good man as he has the opportunities of being, unless he makes it his business, day by day, to aim after the conscious increase of gifts that he possesses, and the conscious appropriation and possession of those of which he is still lacking. 'Nothing of itself will come,' or very little. True, the light will shine out in variously tinted ray if it be in a man, as surely as from the seed come the blade and the ear and the full corn in the ear, but you will not have nor keep the light which thus will unfold itself unless you put forth appropriate effort. Christ comes into our hearts, but we have to bring Him there. Christ dwells in our hearts, but we have to work into our nature, and work out in action, the gifts that He bestows. They will advance but little in the divine life who trust to the natural unfolding of the supernatural life within them, and do not help its unfolding by their own resolute activity. 'Walk as children of the light,' There is your duty, for 'the fruit of the light is all righteousness.' One might have supposed that the commandments would be, 'Be passive as children of the light, for the light will grow.' But the Apostle binds together, as always, the two things, the divine working and the human effort at reception, retention, and application of that divine work, just as he does in the great classical passage, 'Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.'

## **II. Secondly, the general exhortation of my text widens out itself into this - test all things by Christ's approval of them.**

'Proving what is well pleasing unto the Lord.' That, according to the natural construction of the Greek, is the main way by which the Apostle conceives that his general commandment of 'walking as children of the light' is to be carried out. You do it if, step by step, and moment by moment, and to every action of life, you apply this standard - Does Christ like it? Does it please Him? When that test is rigidly applied, then, and only then, will you walk as becomes the children of the light.

So, then, there is a standard - not what men approve, not what my conscience, partially illuminated, may say is permissible, not what is recognised as allowable by the common maxims of the world round about us, but Christ's approval. How different the hard, stern, and often unwelcome prescriptions of law and rigidity of some standards of right become when they are changed into that which pleases the Divine Lord and Lover! Surely it is something blessed that the hard, cold, and to such a large extent powerless conceptions of duty or obligation shall be changed into pleasing Jesus Christ; and that so our hearts shall be enlisted in the service of our consciences, and love shall be glad to do the Beloved's will. There are many ways by which the burden of life's obligations is lightened to the Christian. I do not know that any of them is more precious than the fact that law is changed into His will, and that we seek to do what is right because it pleases the Master. There is the standard.

It will be easy for us to come to the right appreciation of individual actions when we are living in the light. Union with Jesus Christ will make us quick to discern His will. We have a conscience; - well, that needs educating and enlightening, and very often correcting. We have the Word of God; - well, that needs explanation, and needs to be brought close to our hearts. If we have Christ dwelling in us, in the measure in which we are in sympathy with Him, we shall be gifted with clear eyes, not indeed to discern the expedient - that belongs to another region altogether but we shall be gifted with very clear eyes to discern right from wrong, and there will be an instinctive recoil from the evil, and an instinctive attachment of ourselves to the good. If we are in the Lord we shall easily be able to prove what is acceptable and well-pleasing to Him.

We shall never walk as the children of the light, unless we have the habit of referring everything, trifles and great things, to His arbitrament, and seeking in them all to do what is pleasing in His sight. The smallest deed may be brought under the operation of the largest principles. Gravitation influences the microscopic grain of sand as well as planets and sun. There is nothing so small but you can bring it into this category - it either pleases or displeases Jesus Christ. And the faults into which Christian men fall and in which they continue are very largely owing to their carelessness in applying this standard to the small things of their daily lives. The sleepy Custom House officers let the contraband article in because it seems to be of small bulk. There are old stories about how strong castles were taken by armed men hidden in an innocent-looking cart of forage. Do you keep up a rigid inspection at the frontier, and see to it that everything vindicates its right to enter because it is pleasing to Jesus Christ.

## **III. Thirdly, we have here another expansion of the general command, and that is - keep well separate from the darkness.**

Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. Now, your time will not allow me to dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the considerations to be suggested here. The very briefest possible mention of them is all that I can afford.

'The unfruitful works of darkness'; - well, then, the darkness has its works, but though they be works they are not worth calling fruit. That is to say, nothing except the conduct which flows from union with Jesus Christ so corresponds to the man's nature and relations, or has any such permanence about it as to entitle it to be called fruit. Other acts may be 'works,' but Paul will not dishonour the great word 'fruit' by applying it to such rubbish as these, and so he brands them as 'unfruitful works of darkness.'

Keep well clear of them, says the Apostle. He is not talking here about the relations between Christians and others, but about the relations between Christian men and the works of darkness. Only, of course, in order to avoid fellowship with the works you will sometimes have to keep yourselves well separate from their doers. Much association with such men is forced upon us by circumstances, and much is the imperative duty of Christian beneficence and charity. But I venture to express the strong and growing conviction that there are few exhortations that the secularised Church of this generation needs more than this commandment of my text: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' 'What communion hath light with darkness?' Ah! we see plenty of it, unnatural as it is, in the so-called Church of to-day. 'What concord hath Christ with Belial? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.'

And, brethren, remember, a part of the separation is that your light shall be a constant condemnation Of the darkness. 'But rather reprove them,' says my text; that is a work that devolves upon all Christians. It is to be done, no doubt, by the silent condemnation of evil which ever comes from the quiet doing of good. As an old preacher has it, 'The presence of a saint hinders the devil of elbow-room for doing his tricks.' The old legend told us that the fire-darting Apollo shot his radiant arrows against the pythons and 'dragons of the slime.' The sons of light have the same office - by their light of life to make the darkness aware of itself, and ashamed of itself; and to change it into light.

But silent reproving is not all our duty. The Christian Church has wofully fallen beneath its duty, not only in regard to its complicity with the social crimes of each generation, but in regard to its cowardly silence towards them; especially when they flaunt and boast themselves in high places. What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to war? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to impurity? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to drunkenness? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to the social vices that are honeycombing society and this city to-day? If you are the sons of light, walk as the sons of light, and have 'no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness'; but set the trumpet to your lips, and 'declare unto My people their transgressions, and to the house of Israel their sin.'

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## THE FRUIT OF THE LIGHT

**'The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' - Ephesians 5:9.**

THIS is one of the cases in which the Revised Version has done service by giving currency to an unmistakably accurate and improved reading. That which stands in our Authorised Version, 'the fruit of the Spirit,' seems to have been a correction made by some one who took offence at the violent metaphor, as he conceived it, that 'light' should bear 'fruit,' and desired to tinker the text so as to bring it into verbal correspondence with another passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, where 'the fruits of the Spirit' are enumerated. But the reading, 'the fruit of the light,' has not only the preponderance of manuscript authority in its favour, but is preferable because it preserves a striking image, and is in harmony with the whole context.

The Apostle has just been exhorting his Ephesian friends to walk as 'children of the light,' and before he goes on to expand and explain that injunction he interjects this parenthetical remark, as if he would say, To be true to the light that is in you is the sum of duty, and the condition of perfectness, 'for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' That connection is entirely destroyed by the substitution of 'spirit.' The whole context, both before and after my text, is full of references to the light working in the life; and a couple of verses after it we read about 'the unfruitful works of darkness, an expression which evidently looks back to my text.

So please to understand that our text in this sermon is - 'The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.'

### **I. Now, first of all, I have just a word to say about this light which is fruitful.**

Note - for it is, I think, not without significance - a minute variation in the Apostle's language in this verse and in the context. He has been speaking of 'light,' now he speaks of 'the light'; and that, I think, is not accidental. The expression, 'walk as children of light,' is more general and vague. The expression, 'the fruit of the light,' points to some specific source from which all light flows. And observe, also, that we have in the previous context, 'Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord,' which evidently implies that the light of which my text speaks is not natural to men, but, is the result of the entrance into their darkness of a new element.

'Now I do not suppose that we should be entitled to say that Paul here is formally anticipating the deep teaching of the Apostle John that Jesus Christ is 'the Light of men,' and especially of Christian men. But he is distinctly asserting, I think, that the light which blesses and hallows humanity is no diffused glow, but is all gathered and concentrated into one blazing centre, from which it floods the hearts of men. Or, to put away the metaphor, he is here asserting that the only way by which any man can cease to be, in the' doleful depths of his nature, darkness in its saddest sense is by opening his heart through faith, that into it there may rush, as the light ever does where an opening - be it only a single tiny cranny - is made, the light which is Christ, and without whom is darkness.

I know, of course, that, apart altogether from the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ, there do shine in men's hearts rays of the light of knowledge and of purity; but if we believe the teaching of Scripture, these, too, are from Christ, in His universally diffused work, by which, apart altogether from individual faith, or from a knowledge of revelation, He is 'the light that lighteth every man coming into the world.' And I hold that, wheresoever there is conscience, wheresoever there is judgment and reason, wheresoever there are sensitive desires after excellence and nobleness, there is a flickering of a light which I believe to be from Christ Himself. But that light, as widely diffused as humanity, fights with, and is immersed in, darkness. In the physical world, light and darkness are mutually exclusive: where the one is the other comes not; but in the spiritual world the paradox is true that the two co-exist. Apart from revelation and the acceptance of Jesus Christ's person and work by our humble faith, the light struggles with the darkness, and the darkness obstinately refuses to admit its entrance, and 'comprehendeth it not.' And so, ineffectual but to make restless and to urge to vain efforts and to lay up material for righteous judgment, is the light that shines in men whose hearts are shut against Christ. Thin fruitful light is Christ within us, and, unless we know and possess it by the opening of heart and mind and will, the solemn words preceding my text are true of us: 'Ye were sometime darkness.' Oh, brother! do you see to it that the subsequent words are true of you: 'Now are ye light in the Lord.' Only if you are in Christ are you truly light.

## **II. Now, secondly, notice the fruitfulness of this indwelling light.**

Of course the metaphor that light, like a tree, grows and blossoms and puts forth fruit, is a very strong one. And its very violence and incongruity help its force. Fruit is generally used in Scripture in a good sense. It conveys the notion of something which is the natural outcome of a vital power, and so, when we talk about the light being fruitful, we are setting, in a striking image, the great Christian thought that, if you want to get right conduct, you must have renewed character; and that if you have renewed character you will get right conduct. This is the principle of my text. The light has in it a productive power; and the true way to adorn a life with all things beautiful, solemn, lovely, is to open the heart to the entrance of Jesus Christ.

God's way is - first, new life, then better conduct. Men's way is, 'cultivate morality, seek after purity, try to be good.' And surely conscience and experience alike tell us that that is a hopeless effort. To begin with what should be second is an anachronism in morals, and will be sure to result in failure in practice. He is not a wise man that tries to build a house from the chimneys downwards. And to talk about making a man's doings good before you have secured a radical change in the doer, by the infusion into him of the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, is to begin at the top story, instead of at the foundation. Many of us are trying to put the cart before the horse in that fashion. Many of us have made the attempt over and over again, and the attempt always has failed and always will fail. You may do much for the mending of your characters and for the incorporation in your lives of virtues and graces which do not grow there naturally and without effort. I do not want to cut the nerves of any man's strugglings, I do not want to darken the brightness of any man's aspirations, but I do say that the people who, apart from Jesus Christ, and the entrance into their souls by faith of His quickening power, are seeking, some of them nobly, some of them sadly, and all of them vainly, to cure their faults of character, will never attain anything but a superficial and fragmentary goodness, because they have begun at the wrong end.

But 'make the tree good,' and its fruit will be good. Get Christ into your heart, and all fair things will grow as the natural outcome of His indwelling. The fruitfulness of the light is not put upon its right basis until we come to understand that the light is Christ Himself, who, dwelling in our hearts by faith, is made in us as well as 'unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation, and redemption.' The beam that is reflected from the mirror is the very beam that falls on the mirror, and the fair things in life and conduct which Christian people bring forth are in very deed the outcome of the vital power of Jesus Christ which has entered into them. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' is the Apostle's declaration in the midst of his struggles; and the perfected saints before the throne cast their crowns at His feet, and say, 'Not unto us! not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory; The talent is the Lord's, only the spending of it is the servant's. And so the order of the Divine appointment is, first, the entrance of the light, and then the conduct that flows from it.

Note, too, how this same principle of the fruitfulness of the light gives instruction as to the true place of effort in the Christian life. The main effort ought to be to get more of the light into ourselves. 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' And so, and only so, will fruit come.

And such an effort has to take in hand all the circumference of our being, and to fix thoughts that wander, and to still wishes that clamour, and to empty hearts that are full of earthly loves, and to clear a space in minds that are crammed with thoughts about the

transient and the near, in order that the mind may keep in steadfast contemplation of Jesus, and the heart may be bound to Him by cords of love that are not capable of being snapped, and scarcely of being stretched, and the will may in patience stand saying, 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth'; and the whole tremulous nature may be rooted and built up in and on Him. Ah, brother! if we understand all that goes to the fulfilment of that one sweet and merciful injunction, 'Abide in Me,' we shall recognise that there is the field on which Christian effort is mainly to be occupied.

But that is not all For there must be likewise the effort to appropriate, and still more to manifest in conduct, the fruit-bringing properties of that indwelling light. 'Giving all diligence add to your faith,' 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' We are often told that just as we trust Christ for our forgiveness and acceptance, so we are to trust Him for our sanctifying and perfecting. It is true, and yet it is not true. We are to trust Him for our sanctifying and our perfecting. But the faith which trusts Him for these is not a substitute for effort, but it is the foundation of effort. And the more we rely on His power to cleanse us from all evil, the more are we bound to make the effort in His power and in dependence on Him, to cleanse ourselves from all evil, and to secure as our own the natural outcomes of His dwelling within us, which are 'the fruits of the light.'

### **III. And so, lastly, notice the specific fruits which the Apostle here dwells upon.**

They consist, says he, in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Now 'goodness' here seems to me to be used in its narrower sense, just as the same Apostle uses it in the Epistle to the Romans, in contrast with 'righteousness,' where he says, 'for no good man some would even dare to die.' There he means by 'good,' as he does here by 'goodness,' not the general expression for all forms of virtue and gracious conduct, but the specific excellence of kindness, amiability, or the like. 'Righteousness,' again, is that which rigidly adheres to the strict law of duty, and carefully desires to give to every man what belongs to him, and to every relation of life what it requires. And 'truth' is rather the truth of sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and lies and shame, than the intellectual truth as opposed to error.

Now, all these three types of excellence - kindness, righteousness, truthfulness are apt to be separated. For the first of them - amiability, kindness, gentleness - is apt to become too soft, to lose its grip of righteousness, and it needs the tonic of the addition of those other graces, just as you need lime in water if it is to make bone. Righteousness, on the other hand, is apt to become stern, and needs the softening of goodness to make it human and attractive. The rock is grim when it is bare; it wants verdure to drape it if it is to be lovely. Truth needs kindness and righteousness, and they need truth. For there are men who pride themselves on 'speaking out,' and take rudeness and want of regard for other people's sensitive feelings to be sincerity. And, on the other hand, it is possible that amiability may be sweeter than truth is, and that righteousness may be hypocritical and insincere. So Paul says, 'Let this white light be resolved in the prism of your characters into the threefold rays of kindness, righteousness, truthfulness.'

And then, again, he desires that each of us should try to make our own a fully developed, all-round perfection - all goodness and righteousness and truth; of every sort, that is, and in every degree. We are all apt to cultivate graces of character which correspond to our natural disposition and make. We are all apt to become torsos, fragmentary, one-sided, like the trees that grow against a brick wall, or those which stand exposed to the prevailing blasts from one quarter of the sky. But we should seek to appropriate types of excellence to which we are least inclined, as well as those which are most in harmony with our natural dispositions. If you incline to kindness, try to brace yourselves with righteousness; if you incline to righteousness, to take the stern, strict view of duty, and to give to every man what he deserves, remember that you do not give men their dues unless you give them a great deal more than their deserts, and that righteousness does not perfectly allot to our fellows what they ought to receive from us, unless we give them pity and indulgence and forbearance and forgiveness when it is needed. The one light breaks into all colours - green in the grass, purple and red in the flowers, flame-coloured in the morning sky, blue in the deep sea. The light that is in us ought, in like manner, to be analysed into, and manifested in, 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.'

And so, dear friends, here is a test for us all Devout emotion, orthodox creed, practical diligence in certain forms of benevolence and philanthropic work, are all very well; but Jesus Christ came to make us like Himself, and to turn our darkness into light that betrays its source by its resemblance, though it be a weakened one, to the sun from which it came. We have no right to call ourselves Christ's followers unless we are, in some measure, Christ's pictures.

Here is a message of cheer and hope for us all We have all tried, and tried, and tried, over and over again, to purge and mend these poor character, of, ours. How long the toil, how miserable and poor, the results! A million candles will not light the night; but when God's mercy of sunrise comes above the hills, beasts of prey slink to their dens mad birds begin to sing, and flowers open, and growth resumes again. We cannot mend ourselves except partially and superficially; but we can open will, heart, and mind, by faith, for His entrance; and where He comes, there He slays the evil creatures that live in and love the dark, and all gracious things will blossom into beauty. If we are in the Lord we shall be light; and if the Lord, who is the Light, is in us, we, too, shall bear fruits of 'all righteousness and goodness and truth.'

## PLEASING CHRIST

**'Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.' — Ephesians 5:10.**

THESE words are closely connected with those which precede them in the 8th verse — 'Walk as children of light.' They further explain the mode by which that commandment is to be fulfilled. They who, as children of light, mindful of their obligations and penetrated by its brightness, seek to conform their active life to the light to which they belong, are to do so by making experiment of, or investigating and determining, what is 'acceptable to the Lord.' It is the sum of all Christian duty, a brief compendium of conduct, an all-sufficient directory of life.

There need only be two remarks made by way of explanation of my text. One is that the expression rendered 'acceptable' is more accurately and forcibly given, as in the Revised Version, by the plainer word 'well-pleasing.' And the other is that 'the Lord' here, as always in the New Testament — unless the context distinctly forbids it — means Jesus Christ. Here the context distinctly demands it. For only a sentence or two before, the Apostle has been speaking about 'those who were sometime darkness having been read. light in the Lord' — which is obviously in Jesus Christ.

And here, therefore, what pleases Christ is the Christian's highest duty, and the one prescription which is required to be obeyed in order to walk in the light is, to do that which pleases Him.

**I. So, then, in these brief words, so comprehensive, and going so deep into the secrets of holy and noble living, I want you to notice that we have, first, the only attitude which corresponds to our relations to Christ.**

How remarkable it is that this Apostle should go on the presumption that our conduct affects Him, that it is possible for us to please, or to displease Jesus Christ now. We often wonder whether the beloved dead are cognizant of what we do; and whether any emotions of something like either our earthly complacency or displeasure, can pass across the undisturbed calm of their hearts, if they are aware of what their loved ones here are doing. That question has to be left very much in the dark, however our hearts may sometimes seek to enforce answers. But this we know, that that loving Lord, not merely by the omniscience of His divinity, but by the perpetual knowledge and sympathy of His perfect manhood, is not only cognizant of, but is affected by, the conduct of His professed followers here on earth. And since it is true that He now is not swept away into some oblivious region where the dead are, but is close beside us all, cognizant of every act, watching every thought, and capable of having something like a shadow of a pang passing across the Divine depth of His eternal joy and repose at the right hand of God, then, surely, the only thing that corresponds to such a relationship as at present subsists between the Christian soul and the Lord is that we should take as our supreme and continual aim that, 'whether present or absent, we should be well-pleasing to Him.' Nor does that demand rest only upon the realities of our present relation to that Lord, but it goes back to the past facts on which our present relation rests. And the only fitting response to what He has been and done for us is that we should, each of us, in the depth of our hearts, and in the widest circumference of the surface of our lives, enthrone Him as absolute Lord, and take His pleasure as our supreme law. Jesus Christ is King because He is Redeemer. The only adequate response to what He has done for me is that I should absolutely submit myself to Him, and say to Him, 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant! Thou hast loosed my bonds.' The one fitting return to make for that Cross and Passion is to enthrone His will upon my will, and to set Him as absolute Monarch over the whole of my nature. Thoughts, affections, purposes, efforts, and all should crown Him King, because He has died for me. The conduct which corresponds to the relations which we bear to Christ as the present Judge of our work, and the Redeemer of our souls by His mighty deed in the past, is this of my text, to make my one law His will, and to please Him that hath called me to be His soldier.

The meaning of being a Christian is that, in return for the gift of a whole Christ, I give my whole self to Him. 'Why call ye me Lord! Lord! and do not the things which I say?' If He is what He assuredly is to every one of us, nothing can be plainer than that we are thereby bound by obligations which are not iron, but are more binding than if they were, because they were woven out of the cords of love and the bands of a man, bound to serve Him supremely, Him only, Him always, Him by the suppression of self, and the making His pleasure our law.

**II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to notice that we have here the all-sufficient guide for practical life.**

It sounds very mystical, and a trifle vague, to say, Do everything to please Jesus Christ. It is all-comprehensive; it is mystical in the sense that it goes down below the mere surface of prescriptions about conduct. But it is not vague, and it is capable of immediate application to every part, and to every act, of every man's life.

For what is it that pleases Jesus Christ? His own likeness; as, according to the old figure which is, I suppose, true to spiritual facts, whether to external facts or not — the refiner knows that the metal is ready to flow when he can see his own face in it. Jesus Christ — desires most that we should all be like Him. That we are to bear His image is as comprehensive, and at the same time as specific, a way of setting forth the sum of Christian duty, as are the words of my text. The two phrases mean the same thing.

And what is the likeness to Jesus Christ which it is thus our supreme obligation and our truest wisdom and perfection to bear? Well! we can put it all into two words — self-suppression and continual consciousness of obedience to the Divine will. The life of Jesus in its brief records in Scripture, is felt by every adequate direction for, and to set forth the ideal of, human life. That is not because He went through all varieties of earthly experience, for He did not. The life of a Jewish peasant nineteen centuries ago was extremely unlike the life of a Manchester merchant, of a college professor, of a successful barrister, of a struggling mother, in this present day. But in the narrow compass of that life there are set forth these two things, which are the basis of all human perfection — the absolute annihilation of self-regard, and the perpetual recognition of a Divine will. These are the things which every Christian man and woman is bound by the power of Christ's Cross to translate into the actions correspondent with their particular circumstances. And so the student at his desk and the sailor on his deck, the miner in his pit, the merchant on 'Change, the worker in various handicrafts, may each be sure that they are doing what is pleasing to Christ if, in their widely different ways, they seek to do what they can do in all the varieties of life — crucify self, and commune with God.

That is not easy. Whatever may be the objections to be brought against this summary of Christian duty, the objection that it is vague is the last that can be sustained. Try it, and you will find out that it is anything but vague. It will grip tight enough, depend upon it. It will go deep enough down into all the complexities of our varying circumstances. If it has a fault (which it has not) it is in the direction of too great stringency for unaided human nature.

But the stringency is not too great when we depend upon Him to help us, and an impossible ideal is a certain prophet of its own fulfilment some day.

So, brethren, here is the sufficient guide, not because it cumbers us with a mass of wretched little prescriptions such as a martinet might give, about all sorts of details of conduct. That is left to profitless casuists like the ancient rabbis. But the broad principles will effloresce into all manner of perfectnesses and all fruits. He that has in his heart these thoughts, that the definition of virtue is pleasing Jesus Christ, that the concrete form of goodness is likeness to Him, and that the elements of likeness to Him are these two, that I should never think about myself, and always think about God, needs no other guide or instructor to fill his life with 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' and to make his own all that the world calls virtue, and all which the consciences of good men have conspired to praise.

But not only does this guide prove its sufficiency by reason of its comprehensiveness, but also because there is no difficulty in ascertaining what at each moment it prescribes. Of course, I know that such a precept as this cannot contain in itself guidance in matters of mere practical expediency. But, apart from these — which are to be determined by the ordinary exercise of prudence and common sense — in regard to the right and the wrong of our actions, I believe that if a man wants to know Christ's will, and takes the way of knowing it which Christ has appointed, he shall not be left in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

For love has a strange power of divining love's wishes, as we all know, and as many a sweetness in the hearts and lives of many of us has shown us. If we cherish sympathy with Jesus Christ we shall look on things as He looks on them, and we shall not be left without the knowledge of what His pleasure is. If we keep near enough to Him the glance of His eye will do for guidance, as the old psalm has it. They are rough animal natures that do not understand how to go, unless their instructors be the crack of the whip or the tug of the bridle. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye' A glance is enough where there are mutual understanding and love. Two musical instruments in adjoining rooms, tuned to the same pitch, have a singular affinity, and if a note be struck on the one the other will vibrate to the sound. And so hearts here that love Jesus Christ and keep in unison with Him, and are sympathetic with His desires, will learn to know His will, and will re-echo the music that comes from Him. And if our supreme desire is to know what pleases Jesus Christ, depend upon it the desire will not be in vain. 'If any man wills to do His will he shall know of the doctrine' Ninety per cent. of all our perplexities as to conduct come from our not having a pure and simple wish to do what is right in His sight, clearly supreme above all others. When we have that wish it is never left unsatisfied.

And even if sometimes we do make a mistake as to what is Christ's pleasure, if our supreme wish and honest aim in the mistake have been to do His pleasure, we may be sure that He will be pleased with the deed. Even though its body is not that which He willed us to do, its spirit is that which He does desire. And if we do a wrong thing, a thing in itself displeasing to Him, whilst all the while we desired to please Him, we shall please Him in the deed which would otherwise have displeased Him. And so two Christian men, for instance, who take opposite sides in a controversy, may both of them be doing what is well-pleasing in His sight, whilst they are contradicting one another, if they are doing it for His sake. And it is possible that the inquisitor and his victim may both have been serving Christ. At all events, let us be sure of this, that whensoever we desire to please Him, He will help us to do it, and ordinarily will help us by making clear to us the path on which HIS smile rests.

### **III. Again, notice that we have here an all-powerful motive for Christian life.**

The one thing which all other summaries of duty lack is motive power to get themselves carried into practice. But we all know, from our own happy human experience, that no motive which can be brought to bear upon men is stronger, when there are loving hearts

concerned, than this simple one, 'Do it to please me.' And that is what Jesus Christ really says. That is no piece of mere sentiment, brethren, nor of mere pulpit rhetoric. That is the deepest thought of Christian morality, and is the distinctive peculiarity which gives the morality of the New Testament its dicer supremacy over all other. There are precepts in it far nobler and loftier than can be found elsewhere. The perspective of virtues and graces in it is different from that which ordinarily prevails amongst men. But I do not think that it is in the details of its precepts so much as in the communication of power to obey them, and in the suggestion of the motive which makes them all easy, that the difference of Christ's ethics from all the teaching of the world beside is most truly to be found.

And here lies the excellence thereof. It is a poor, cold thing to say to a man, 'Do this because it is right.' It is a still more powerless thing to say to him, 'Do this because it is expedients' 'Do this because, in the long run, it leads to happiness.' It is all different when you say, 'Do this to please Jesus Christ, to please that Christ who pleased not Himself but gave Himself for you.' That is the fire that melts the ore. That is the heat that makes flexible the hard, stiff material. That is the motive which makes duty delight, which makes 'the rough places plain' and 'the crooked things straight.' It does not abolish natural tastes, it does not supersede natural disinclinations, but it does smooth and-soften unwelcome and hard tasks, and it invests service with a halo of glory, and changes the coldness of duty into rosy light; as when the sunrise strikes on the peaks of the frozen mountains. The one motive which impels men, and can be trusted to secure in them whatsoever things are noble, is to please Him.

So we have the secret of blessedness in these words. For self-submission and suppression are blessedness. Our miseries come from our unbridled wills, far more than from our sensitive organisations. It is because we do not accept providences that providences hurt. It is because we do not accept the commandments that the commandments are burdensome. Those who have no will, except as it is vitalised by God's will, have found the secret of blessedness, and have entered into rest. In the measure in which we approximate to that condition, our wills will be strengthened as well as our hearts set at ease.

And blessedness comes, too, because the approbation of the Master, which is the aim of the servant, is reflected in the satisfaction of an approving conscience, which points onwards to the time when the Master's approval shall be revealed in the servant's glory.

I was reading the other day about a religious reformer who arose in Eastern lands a few years since, and gathered many disciples. He and his principal follower were seized and about to be martyred. They were suspended by cords from a gibbet, to be fired at by a platoon of soldiers. And as they hung there, the disciple turned to his teacher, and as his last word on earth said, 'Master! are you satisfied with me?' HIS answer was a silent smile; and the next minute a bullet was in his heart. Dear brethren, do you turn to Jesus Christ with the same question, 'Master! art Thou satisfied with me?' and you will get His smile here; and hereafter, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

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## UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

**And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.' — Ephesians 5:11.**

WE have seen in a former sermon that 'the fruit,' or outcome, 'Of the Light' is a comprehensive perfection, consisting in all sorts and degrees of goodness and righteousness and truth. Therefore, the commandment, 'Walk as children of the light,' sums up all Christian morality. Is there need, then, for any additional precept? Yes; for Christian people do not live in an empty world. If there were no evil round them, and no proclivity to evil within them, it would be amply sufficient to say to them, 'Be true to the light which you behold.' But since both these things are, the commandment of my text is further necessary. We do not work in vacuo, and therefore friction and atmosphere have to be taken account of; and an essential part of 'walking as children of the light' is to know how to behave ourselves when confronted with 'the works of darkness.'

These Ephesian Christians lived in a state of society honeycombed with hideous immorality, the centre of which was the temple, which was their city's glory and shame. It was all but impossible for them to have nothing to do with the works of evil, unless, indeed, they went out of the world. But the difficulty of obedience does not affect the duty of obedience, nor slacken in the smallest degree the stringency of a command. This obligation lies upon us as fully as it did upon them, and the discharge of it by professing Christians would bring new life to moribund churches.

**I. Let me ask you to note with me, first, the fruitless-ness inherent in all the works of darkness.**

You may remember that I pointed out, in a former discourse on the context, that the Apostle, here and elsewhere, draws a very significant distinction between 'works' and 'fruit,' and that distinction is put very strikingly in the words of my text. There are works which are barren. It is a grim thought that there may be abundant activity which, in the eyes of God, comes to just nothing; and that pages and pages of laborious calculations, when all summed up, have for result a great round O. Men are busy, and hosts of them are doing what the old fairy stories tell us that evil spirits-were condemned to do — spinning ropes out of sea-sand; and their life-

work is nought when they come to reckon it up.

I have no time to dwell upon this thought, but I wish, just for a moment or two, to illustrate it. All godless life is fruitless, inasmuch as it has no permanent results. Permanent results of a sort, indeed, follow everything that men do, for all our actions tend to make character, and they all have a share in fixing that which depends upon character — viz. destiny, both here and yonder. And thus the most fleeting of our deeds, which in one aspect is as transitory as the snow upon the great plains when the sun rises, leaves everlasting traces upon ourselves and upon our condition. But yet acts concerned with transitory things may have permanent fruit, or may be as transient as the things with which they are concerned. And the difference depends on the spirit in which they are done. If the roots are only in the surface-skin of soil, when that is pared off the plant goes. A life that is to be eternal must strike its roots through all the superficial humus down to the very heart of things. When its roots twine themselves round God then the deeds which blossom from them will blossom unfading for ever.

Think of men going empty-handed into another world, and saying, 'O Lord! I made a big fortune in Manchester when I lived there, and I left it all behind me'; or, 'I mastered a science, and one gleam of the light of eternity has antiquated it'; or, 'I gained prizes, won my aims, and they have all dropped from my hands, and here I stand, having to say in the most tragic sense: Nothing in my hands I bring; And another man dies in the Lord, and his 'works do follow' him. It is not every vintage that bears exportation. Some wines are mellowed by crossing the ocean; some are turned into vinegar. The works of darkness are unfruitful because they are transient.

And they are unfruitful because, whilst they last, they yield no real satisfaction. The Apostle could say to another Church with a certainty as to what the answer would be, 'What fruit had ye then' — when ye were doing them — 'in the things whereof ye are now ashamed?' And the answer is 'None!' Of course, it is true that men do bad things because they like them better than good. Of course, it is true that the misery of mankind is that they have no appetite in the general for the only real satisfaction. But it is also true that no man who feeds his heart and mind on anything short of God is really at rest in anything that he does or possesses. Occasional twinges of conscience, dim perceptions that after all they are walking in a vain show; glimpses of nobler possibilities, a vague unrest, an unwillingness to reflect and look the facts of their condition in the face, like men that will not take stock because they half suspect that they are insolvent — these are the conditions that attach to all godless men's lives. There is no real fruit for their thirsty lips to feed upon. The smallest man is too large to be satisfied with anything short of Infinity. The human heart is like some narrow opening on a hillside, so narrow that it looks as if a glassful of water would fill it. But it goes away down, down, down into the depths of the mountain, and you may pour in hogsheads and no effect is visible. God, and God alone, brings to the thirsty heart the fruit that it needs.

Another solemn thought illustrates the unfruitful-ness of a godless life. There is no correspondence between what such a man does and what he is intended to do. Think of what the most degraded and sensuous wretch that shambles about the slums of a city, sodden with beer and rotten with profligacy, could be. Think of the raptures of devout contemplation and the energies of holy work which are possible for that soul, and then say — though it is an extreme case, the principle holds in less extreme cases — Are these things that men do apart from God, however shining, noble, illustrious they may be in the eyes of the world, and trumpeted forth by the mouthpieces of popular opinion, are these things worth calling fruits fit to be borne by such a tree? No more than the cankers on a rose-hush or the galls on an oak-tree are worthy of being called fruit are these works that some of you have as the only products of a life's activity. 'Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'

## **II. And now, secondly, notice the plain Christian duty of abstinence.**

'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' Now, the text, as it stands in our version, seems to suggest that these dark works are personified as companions whom a good man ought to avoid; and that, therefore, the bearing of the exhortation is, 'Have nothing to do, in your own individual lives, with evil things that one man can commit.' But I take it that, important as that injunction and prohibition is, the Apostle's meaning is somewhat different, and that my text would perhaps be more accurately translated if another word were substituted for 'have no fellowship with.' The original expression seems rather to mean, 'Do not go partners with other people in works of darkness, which it takes more than one to commit.' Or, to put it into another language, the Apostle is regarding Christian people here as members of society, and exhorting them to a certain course of conduct in reference to plain and palpable existing evils around them. And such an exhortation to the duty of plain abstinence from things that the opinion of the world around us has no objection to, but which are contrary to the light, is addressed to all Christian people.

The need of it I do not require to illustrate at any length- But let me remind you that the devil has no more cunning way of securing a long lease of life for any evil than getting Christian people and Christian Churches to give it their sanction. What was it that kept slavery alive for centuries? Largely, that Christian men solemnly declared that it was a divine institution. What is it that has kept war alive for all these centuries? Largely, that bishops and preachers have always been ready to bless colours, and to read a Christening service over a man-of-war — and, I suppose, to ask God that an eighty-ton gun might be blessed to smash our enemies to pieces, and not to blow our sailors to bits. And what is it that preserves the crying evils of our community, the immoralities, the drunkenness, the trade dishonesty, and all the other things that I do not need to remind you of in the pulpit?

Largely this, that professing Christians are mixed up with them. If only the whole body of those who profess and call themselves Christians would shake their hands clear of all complicity with such things, they could not last. Individual responsibility for collective action needs to be far more solemnly laid to heart by professing Christians than ever it has been.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, with what fatal effects on the Gospel and the Church itself all such complicity is attended. Even the companions of wrongdoers despise, whilst they fraternise with, the professing Christian who has no higher standard than their own. What was it that made the Church victorious over the combined forces of imperial persecution, pagan superstition, and philosophic speculation? I believe that among all the causes that a well-known historian has laid down for the triumph of Christianity, what was as powerful as — I was going to say even more than — the Gospel of peace and love which the Church proclaimed was the standard of austere morality which it held up to a world rotting in its own filth. And sure I am that wherever the Church says, 'So do not I, because of the fear of the Lord,' it will gain a power, and will be regarded with a possibly reluctant, but a very real, respect which no easy-going coming down to the level of popular moralities will ever secure for a silverslippered Christianity. And so, brethren, I would say to you, Do not be afraid of the old name Puritan. Ignorant people use it as a scoff. It should be a crown of glory. 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.'

But how is this to be done? Well, of course, there is only one way of abstaining, and that is, to abstain. But there are a great many different ways of abstaining. Light is not fire. And the more that Christian people feel themselves bound to stand aloof from common evils, the more are they hound to see that they do it in the spirit of the Master, which is meekness. It is always an invidious position to take up. And if we take it up with any heat and temper, with any lack of moderation, with any look of ostentation of superior righteousness, or with any trace of the Boanerges spirit which says, 'Let us call down fire from heaven and consume them,' our testimony will be weakened, and the world will have a right to say to us, 'Jesus we know, and Paul we know; said Who are ye?' 'Who made this man a judge and a divider over us?' 'In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves.'

### **III. Lastly, note the still harder Christian duty of vigorous protest.**

The further duty, beyond abstinence which the text enjoins is inadequately represented by our version, 'but rather reprove them.' For the word rendered in our version 'reprove' is the same which our Lord employed when He spoke of the mission of the Comforter as being to 'convince (or convict) the world of sin.' And it does not merely mean 'reprove,' but so to reprove as to produce the conviction which is the object of the reproof.

This task is laid on the shoulders of all professing Christians. A silent abstinence is not enough. No doubt, the best way, in some circumstances, to convict the darkness is to shine. Our holiness will convict sin of its ugliness. Our light will reveal the gloom. The presentation of a Christian life is the Christian man's mightiest weapon in his conflict with the world's evil. But that is not all. And if Christian people think that they have done all their duty, in regard to clamant and common iniquities by abstaining them and presenting a nobler example, they have yet to learn one very important chapter of their duty. A dumb Church is a dying Church, and it ought to be; for Christ has sent us here in order, amongst other things, that we may bring Christian principles to bear upon the actions of the community; and not be afraid to speak when we are called upon by conscience to do so.

Now I am not going to dwell upon this matter, but I want just to point out to you how, in the context here, there are two or three very important principles glanced at which bear upon it. And one of them is this, that one reason for speaking out is the very fact that the evils are so evil that a man is ashamed to speak about them. Did you ever notice this context, in which the Apostle, in the next verse to my text, gives the reason for his commandment to 'reprove' thus — 'For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret'? Did you ever hear of a fantastic tenderness for morality so very sensitive that it is not at all shocked when the immoral things are done, but glows with virtuous indignation when a Christian man speaks out about them? There are plenty of people nowadays who tell us that it is 'indelicate' and 'indecent' and 'improper,' and I do not know how much else, for a Christian teacher or minister to say a word about certain moral scandals. But they do not say anything about the immorality and the indelicacy and the indecency of doing them. Let us have done with that hypocrisy, brethren. I am arguing for no disregard not proprieties; I want all fitting reticence observed, and I do not wish indiscriminate rebukes to be flung at foul things; but it is too much to require that, by reason of the very inky cloud of filth that they fling up like cuttlefish, they should escape censure. Let us remember Paul's exhortation, and reprove because the things are too bad to be spoken about.

Further, note in the context the thought that the conviction of the darkness comes from the flashing upon it of the light. 'All things when they are reproved are made manifest by the light.' Which, being translated into other words, is this: — Be strong in your brave protest, because it only needs that the thing should be seen as it is, and called by its right name, in order to be condemned.

The Assyrians had a belief that if ever, by any chance, a demon saw himself in a mirror, he was frightened at his own ugliness and incontinently fled. And if Christian people would only hold up the mirror of Christian principle to the hosts of evil things that afflict our city and our country, they would vanish like ghosts at sunrise. They cannot stand the light, therefore let us cast the light upon them.

And do not forget the other final principle here, which is imperfectly represented by our translation. We ought to read, 'Whatever is

made manifest is light.' Yes. In the physical world when light falls upon a thing, you see it because there is on it a surface of light. And in the moral world the intention of all this conviction is that the thing disclosed to be darkness should, in the very disclosure, cease to be dark, should forsake its nature and be transformed into light. Such transformation is not always the case. Alas! There are evil deeds on which the light falls, and it does nothing. But the purpose in all cases should be, and the issue in many will be, that the merciful conviction by the light will be followed by the conversion of darkness into light.

And so, dear brethren, I bring this text to your hearts, and lay it upon your consciences. We may not all be called upon to speak; we are all called upon to be. You can shine, and by shining show how dark the darkness is. The obligation is laid upon us all; the commandment still comes to every Christian which was given to the old prophet, 'Declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin.' A quaint old writer says that the presence of a saint 'hinders the devil of elbow room to do his tricks. We can all rebuke sin by our righteousness, and by our shining reveal the darkness to itself. We do not walk as children of the light unless we keep ourselves from all connivance with works of darkness and by all means at our disposal reprove and convict them 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing, saith the Lord.'

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## PAUL'S REASONS FOR TEMPERANCE

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. 15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not so fools, but as wise, 16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but under standing what the will of the Lord is. 18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.' — Ephesians 5:11-31.

THERE are three groups of practical exhortations in this passage, of which the first deals with the Christian as a reprov'ing light in darkness; the second, with the Christian life as wisdom in the midst of folly; and the third with Christian sobriety and inspiration as the true exhilaration in contrast with riotous drunkenness. Probably such intoxication was prevalent in Ephesus in connection with the worship of 'Diana of the Ephesians,' for Paul was not the man to preach vague warnings against vices to which his hearers wore not tempted. An under-current of allusion to such orgies accompanying the popular cult may be discerned in his words.

These two preceding sets of precepts can only be briefly touched on now. They lead up to the third, and the second is built on the first by a 'therefore' (ver. 15). The Apostle has just been saying that Christians were 'darkness, but are now light in the Lord,' and thence drawing the law for their life, to walk as 'children of light' A very important part of such walk is recoiling from all share in 'the unfruitful works of darkness,' — a significant expression branding such deeds as being both bad in their source and in their results. Dark doings have consequences tragic enough and certain enough, but they are barren of all such issues as correspond to men's obligations and capacities. Their outcome is like the growths on a tree, which are not .fruit, but products of disease. There is no fruit grown in the dark; there is no worthy product from us unless Christ is our light. If He is, and we are therefore 'light in the Lord,' we shall 'reprove' or 'convict' the Christless life. Its sinfulness will be shown by the contrast with the Christ-life. A thunder-cloud never looks so lividly black as when smitten by sunshine.

Our lives ought to make evil things ashamed to show their ugly faces. Christians should be, as it were, the incarnate conscience of a community. The Apostle is not thinking so much of words as of deeds, though words are not to be withheld when needful The agent of reproof is 'the light,' which here is the designation of character as transformed by Jesus, and the process of reproof or conviction is simply the manifestation of the evil in its true nature, which comes from getting it in the beams of the light. To show sin as it is, is to condemn it; 'for everything that is made manifest is light.' Observe that Paul here speaks of 'light,' not 'the light,' — that is, he is speaking now not of Christian character, which he had likened to light, but of physical light to which he had likened it, and is backing up his figurative statement as to the reprov'ing and manifesting effects of the former, by the plain fact as to the latter, that, when daylight shines on anything, it is revealed, and, as it were, becomes light. He clenches his exhortation by quoting probably an early Christian hymn, which regards Christ as the great illuminator, ready to shine on all drowsy, dark souls as soon as they stir and reuse themselves from drugged and fatal sleep.

The second set of exhortations here is connected with the former by a 'therefore,' which refers to the whole preceding precept. Because the Christian is to shake himself free from complicity with works of darkness, and to be their living condemnation, he must take heed to his goings. A climber on a glacier has to look to his feet, or he will slip and fall down a crevasse, perhaps, from which

he will never be drawn up. Heedlessness is folly in such a world as this. "Don't care" comes to the gallows.' The temptation to 'go as you please' is strong in youth, and it is easy to scoff at 'sold-blooded folks who live by rule,' but they are the wise people, after all. A great element in that heed-fulness is a quick insight into the special duty and opportunity of the moment, for life is not merely made up of hours, but each has its own particular errand for us, and has some possibility in it which, neglected, may be lost for ever.

The mystic solemnity of time is that it is made up of 'seasons.' We shall walk heedfully in the degree in which we are awake to the moment's meaning, and grasp opportunity by the forelock, or, as Paul says, 'buy up the opportunity.' But wise heed to our walk is not enough, unless we have a sure standard by which to regulate it. A man may take great care of his watch, but unless he can compare it with a chronometer, or, as they do in Edinburgh, pull out their watches when the one o'clock gun is fired on a signal from Greenwich, he may be far out and not know it. So the Apostle adds the one way to keep our lives right, and the one source of true, practical wisdom — the 'understanding what the will of the Lord is.' He will not go far wrong whose instinctive question, as each new moment, with its solemn, animating possibilities meets him, is, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' He will not be nearly right who does not first of all ask that.

Then Paul comes to his precept of temperance. It naturally flows from the preceding, inasmuch as a drunken man is as sure to be incapable of taking heed to his conduct as of walking straight. He reels in both. He is stone-blind to the meaning of the moments. He hears no call, though the 'voice of the trumpet' may be 'exceeding loud,' and as for understanding what the will of the Lord is, that is far beyond him. The intoxication of an hour or the habit of drinking makes obedience to the foregoing precepts impossible. This master vice carries all other vices in its pocket.

Paul makes a daring, and, as some would think, an irreverent, comparison, when he proposes being 'filled with the Spirit' as the Christian alternative or substitute to being 'drunken with wine.' But the daring comparison suggests deep truth. The spurious exhilaration, the loosening of the bonds of care, the elevation above the pettiness and monotony of daily life, which the drunkard seeks, and is degraded and deceived in proportion as he momentarily finds, are all ours, genuinely, nobly, and to our infinite profit, if we have our empty spirits filled with that Divine Life. That exhilaration does not froth away, leaving bitter dregs in the cup. That loosening of the bonds of care, and elevation above life's sorrows, does not flow from foolish oblivion of facts, nor end in their being again roughly forced on us. 'Riot' bellows itself hoarse, and is succeeded by corresponding depression; but the calm joys of the Spirit-filled spirit last, grow, and become calmer and more joyful every day.

The boisterous songs of boon companions are set in contrast with the Christian 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,' which were already in use, and a snatch from one of which Paul has just quoted, Good-fellowship tempts men to drink together, and a song is a shoeing-horn for a glass; but the camaraderie is apt to end in blows, and is a poor caricature of the bond knitting all who are filled with the Spirit to one another, and making them willing to serve one another. The roystering or maudlin geniality cemented by drink generally ends in quarrels, as everybody knows that the truculent stage of intoxication succeeds the effusively affectionate one. But they who have the Spirit in them, and not only 'live in the Spirit,' but 'walk in the Spirit,' esteem each the other better than themselves. In a word, to be filled with the Spirit is the way to possess all the highest forms of the good which men are tempted to intoxication to secure, and which in it they find only for a moment, and which is coarse and unreal.

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## SLEEPERS AT NOONDAY

**'Wherefore He saith, Awake then that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' — Ephesians 5:14.**

THIS is the close of a short digression about 'light.' The 'wherefore' at the beginning of my text seems to refer to the whole of the verses that deal with that subject. It is as if the Apostle had said, 'I have been telling you about light and its blessed effects. Now I tell you how you may win it for yours. The condition on which it is to be received by men is that they awake and arise from the dead.'

'He saith.' Who? The speaker whose words are quoted is not named, but this is the common formula of quotation from the Old Testament. It is, therefore, probable that the word 'Creator' or 'God' is to be supplied. But there is no Old Testament passage which exactly corresponds to the words before us; the nearest approach to such being the ringing exhortation of the prophet to the Messianic Church, 'Arise! Shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' And it is probable that the Apostle is here quoting, without much regard either to the original connection or the primary purpose of the word, a well-known old saying which seemed to him appropriately to fall in with the trend of his thoughts. Like other writers he often adorns his own words with the citation of those of others without being very careful as to whether he, in some measure, diverts these from their original intention. But the words of my text fairly represent the prophetic utterance, in so far as they echo the call to the sleepers to wake, and share the prophet's confidence that light is streaming out for all those whose eyes are opened.

The want of precise correspondence between our text and the prophetic passage has led some to suppose that we have here the earliest recorded fragment of a Christian hymn. It would be interesting if that were so, but the formula of citation seems to oblige us to look to Scripture for the source from which my text is taken. However, let us leave these thoughts, and come to the text itself. It is an earnest call from God. It describes a condition, peals forth a summons, and gives a promise. Let us listen to what 'He saith' in all these regards.

### **I. First of all, then, the condition of the persons addressed.**

The two sad metaphors, slumberers and dead are applied to the same persons. There must, therefore, be some latitude in the application of the figures and they must be confined in their interpretation to some one or more points in which sleep and death are alike.

Now we all know that, as the proverb says, 'sleep is the image of death,' And what is the point of comparison? Mainly this, that the sleeper and the corpse are alike unconscious of an external world, unable to receive impressions from it, or to put forth action on it; and there, as I take it, is especially the point which is in the Apostle's view.

The sleeper and the dead man alike are in the midst of an order of things of which they are all unaware. And you and I live in two worlds, one, this low, fleeting, referral one; and the other the white, snowy peaks that girdle it as do the Alps the Lombard plains; and men live all unconscious of that which lies on their horizon. But the metaphor of a level ground encircled by mountains does not fully represent the closeness of the connection between these two worlds, of both of which every one of us is a denizen. For on all sides, pressing in upon us, enfolding us like an atmosphere, penetrating into all the material, underlying all which is visible, all of which has its roots in the unseen, is that world which the mass of men are in a conspiracy to ignore and forget. And just as the sleeper is unconscious of all around him in his chamber, and of all the stir and beauty of the world in which he lives, so the bulk of us go blind and darkling through life, absorbed in the things seen, and never lift even a momentary and lack-lustre glance to the august realities which lie behind these, and give them all their significance and beauty.

Yes; and just as in a dream men are busy with baseless phantoms that vanish and are forgotten, and seem to themselves to be occupied, whilst all the while they are lying prone and passive, so the mass of us are sleep-walkers. What are many men who will be hurrying on to the Manchester Exchange on Tuesday? What are they but men who are dreaming that they are at work, but are only at work on dreams which will vanish when the eyes are opened? Practical men, who are busy and absorbed with affairs and with the things of this present, curl their lips about 'idealists' of all sorts, be they idealists of thought, or of art, or of benevolence, or of religion, and call them dreamers.

The boot is on the other leg. It is the idealists that are awake, and it is you people that live for to-day, and have not learned that to-day is a little fragment and sliver of eternity — it is you who are dreamers, and all these things round about us — the solid-seeming realities — are illusions, and

**'Like the bubbles on a river,**

**Sparkling, bursting, borne away,'**

they will disappear. There is only one reality, and that is God, and the only lives that lay hold of the substance are these which grasp Him. The rest of you are shadows hunting for shadows.

The two metaphors of my text coincide in suggesting another thing, and that is the awful contrast in the average life between what is in a man and what comes out of him. 'Dormant power,' we talk about. Ah, how tragically the true man is dormant in all the work of worldly hearts! God has made a great mistake in making you what you are, if there is no place for you to exercise your powers in but this present world, and nothing to exercise them on except the things that pass and perish. Travellers in lands where civilisation used to be, and barbarism now is, find sculptured stones from temples turned into fences for cattle-sheds and walls round pigstyes. And that is something like what men do with the faculties that God has given them. Why, the best part of you, brother, if you are not a Christian, and living a Christian life — the best part of you is asleep, and it is only the lower nature of you that is awake! Sometimes the sleepers stir uneasily. It used to be said that earthquakes were caused by a giant rolling himself from side to side in his troubled slumber. And there are earthquakes in your heart and spirit caused by the half-waking of the dormant self, the true man, who is immersed and embruted in sense and the things of time, some of you by earthly lusts, some of you by over-indulgence in fleshly appetites, eating and drinking and the like; some of you by absorption in the mere externals of trade and profession and occupation to the entire neglect of the inward thing which would glorify and exalt these — but all of us somehow, unless we are living for God, have lulled our best, true, central self into slumber, and He as if dead.

Now, brethren, do not forget that this exhortation of my text, and therefore this description, is addressed to a community of professing Christians. I hope you will not misunderstand me as if I thought that such a picture as I have been trying to draw applies

only to men that have no religion in them at all. It applies in varying degrees to men that have, as — I was going to say the bulk, but perhaps that is exaggeration, let me say a tragically large number — of professing Christians, and a proportionate number of the professing Christians in this audience have, a little life and a great circumference of death. Dear brethren, you may call yourselves, and may be Christian people, and have somewhat shaken off the torpor, and roused yourself from the slumbering death of Which I have been speaking. Remember that it still hangs to you, and that it was of Christians that the Master said: 'Whilst the Lord was away they all slumbered and slept'; and that it was of a Christian Church, and not of a pagan world, that the same voice from heaven said: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' And so I beseech you, bear with me, and do not think I am molding, or flinging about wild words at random, when I make a very earnest appeal to each individual professing, and real, Christian in this congregation, and ask them to consider, each for themselves, how much of sleep is still in their drowsy eyes, and how far it is true that the quickening life of Jesus Christ has penetrated, as the sunbeams into the darkness, into the heavy mass of their natural death.

## **II. Secondly, let me ask you to look at the summons to awake.**

It comes like the morning bugle to an army, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' Now, I am not going to waste your time by talking about the old, well-worn, interminable, and unprofitable controversy as to God's part and man's in this awaking, but I do wish to insist upon this plain fact, that the command here presupposes upon our parts, whether we be Christian people or not, the ability to obey. God would not mock a man by telling him to do what he cannot do. And it is perfectly clear that the one attitude in which we may be sure of God's help to keep any of His commandments, and this amongst the rest, is when we are trying to keep them. 'Stretch out thy hand,' said Christ to the man whose disease was that he could not stretch it out. 'Arise and walk,' said Christ to the man whose lifelong sadness it was that his limbs had no power. 'Lazarus, come forth,' said Christ unto the dull, cold ear of death. And Lazarus heard, wherever he was, and, though his feet were tangled with the graveclothes, he came stumbling out, because the power to do what he was bid had come wrapped in the command to do it. And if these other two men had turned to Jesus and said, 'What is the use of tolling me to stretch out my hand, or me to move my limbs? Thou knowest that I can not,' they would have lain there paralyzed till they died. But when they heard the command there came a tingling sense of new ability, into the withered limb. 'And he stretched forth his hand, and it was restored whole as the other.' Ay, but the process of restoration began when he willed to stretch it out in obedience to the command, which was a promise as much as a command. So we need not trouble ourselves with the question how the dead man can arise, or how the sleeper can wake himself.

This, at all events, is clear, that if what I have been saying is true as to the main point in view in both the metaphors, viz. the unconsciousness of the unseen world, and the slumbering powers that we have with, in us, then the remedy for that is in our own hands. There are scarcely any limits to be put to a man's capacity of determining for himself what shall be the object of his thought, his interest, his affection, or his pursuits. You can withdraw your desires and contemplations from the intrusive and absorbing present. You can coerce yourselves to concentrate more thought than you do, more interest, affection, and effort than you have ever done, upon the things that are unseen. You can turn your gaze thither. You cannot directly and immediately regulate your feelings, but you can settle the thoughts which shall guide the feelings, and you can, and you do, fix for yourselves, though not consciously, the things which shall be uppermost in your regard, and supreme in the ordering of your life.

And so the commandment of my text is but this, 'Wake from the illusions; rouse yourselves to the contemplation of the things unseen and eternal. Let the Lord always be before your face.' And you will be awake and alive.

## **III. And so my last point is the promise of the morning light which gladdens the wakeful eye. 'Christ shall give thee light.'**

Now, if the words of my text are an allusion to the prophecy to which I have already referred, it is striking to observe, though I cannot dwell upon the thought, that Paul here unhesitatingly ascribes to Jesus Christ an action which, in the source of his quotation, is ascribed to Jehovah. 'Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of Jehovah is risen upon thee,' says the prophet. 'Arise! thou that sleepest,' says Paul, 'and Christ shall give thee light.' As always, he regards his Lord as possessed of fully divine attributes; and he has learned the depth of the Master's own saying, 'Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.' But I turn from that to the main point to be insisted upon here, that the Apostle is setting forth this as a certainty, that if a man will open his eyes he will have light enough. The sunshine is flooding the world. It falls upon the dosed eyelids of the sleepers, and would fain gently hit them, that it might enter. A man needs nothing more than to shake off the slumber, and bring himself into the conscious presence of the unseen glories that surround us, in order to get light enough and to spare — whether you mean by light knowledge for guidance on the path of life, or whether you mean by it purity that shall scatter the darkness of evil from the heart, or whether you mean by it the joy that comes in the morning, radiant and fresh as the sunrise over the Eastern hills. 'Awake, and Christ shall give thee light.'

The miracle of Goshen is reversed, in the case of many of us, the land is flashing in the sunshine, but within our houses there is midnight darkness, not because there is not light around, but because the shutters are shut. Oh, brethren, it is a solemn thing to choose the darkness rather than the light. And you do that — though not consciously, and in so many words, making your election

— by indifference, by neglect, by the direction of the main current of your thoughts and desires and aims to perishable things, and by the deeds that follow from such a disposition. These choose for you, and you, in effect,, choose by them.

I beseech you, do not let Christ's own trumpet-call fall upon your ears, as if faint and far away, like the unwelcome summons that comes to a drowsy man in the morning. You know that if, having been called, he makes up his mind to lie a little longer, he is almost sure to fall more dead asleep than he was before. And if you hear, however dim; distantly, and through my poor words, Christ's voice saying to you, 'Awake! thou that sleepest,' do not neglect it. The only safe course is to spring up at once. If thou doer, 'Christ shall give thee light,' never fear. The light is all about you. You only need to open your eyes, and it will pour in. If you do not, you surround yourself with darkness that may be felt here, and ensures for yourself a horror of great darkness in the death hereafter.

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## REDEEMING THE TIME

**See then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' — Ephesians 5:15, 16.**

SOME of us have, in all probability, very little more 'time' to 'redeem.' Some of us have, in all probability, the prospect of many years yet to live. For both classes my text presents the best motto for another year. The most frivolous among us, I suppose, have some thoughts when we step across the conventional boundary that seems to separate the unbroken sequence of moments into periods; and as you in your business take stock and see how your accounts stand, so I would fain, for you end myself, make this a moment in which we may see where we are going, what we are doing, and how we are using this great gift of life.

My text gives us the true Christian view of time. It tells us what to do with it, and urges by implication certain motives for the conduct.

I. 'We have, first, what we ought to think about 'the time.' There are two words in the New Testament, both of which are translated time, but they mean very different things. One of them, the more common, simply implies the succession of moments or periods; the other, which is employed here, means rather a definite portion of time to which some definite work or occurrence belongs. It is translated sometimes season, sometimes opportunity. Both these renderings occur in immediate proximity in the Epistle to the Galatians, where the Apostle says: 'As we have therefore opportunity let us do good to all men, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not...' And, again, it is employed side by side with the other word to which I have referred, in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons' — the former word simply indicating the succession of moments, the latter word indicating epochs or crises to which special work or events belong.

And so here 'redeeming the time' does not merely mean making the most of moments, but means laying hold of, and understanding the special significance of, life as a whole, and of each succeeding instant of it as the season for some specific duty. It is not merely 'time,' it is 'the time'; not merely the empty succession of beats of the pendulum, but these moralized, as it were, heightened, and having significance, because each is apprehended as having a special mission, and affording an opportunity for a special work.

Now, there are two aspects of that general thought, on each of which I would touch. The Apostle here uses the singular number, and speaks not of the times, but of 'the time'; as if the whole of life were an opportunity, a season for some one clear duty which manifestly belongs to it, and is meant to be done in it.

What is that? There are a great many ways of answering that question, but even more important perhaps than the way of answering is the mood of mind which asks it, It we could only get into this, as our habitual temper and disposition, asking ourselves what life is for, then we should have conquered nine-tenths of our temptations, and all but secured that we shall aim at the purpose which thus clearly and constantly shines before us. Oh! if I could get some of my friends here this morning, who have never really looked this solemn question in the face, to rise above the mere accidents of their daily occupations, and to take their orders, not from circumstances, or from the people whom they admire and imitate, but at first hand from considering what they really are here for, and why their days in their whole sweep are given them, I should not have spoken in vain. The sensualist answers the question in one way, the busy Manchester man in another, the careful, burdened mother in another, the student in another, the moralist in another. But all that is good in each answer is included in the wider one, that the end of life, the purpose for which 'the season' is granted us, is that 'we should glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.'

I do not care whether you say that the end for which we live is the salvation of our souls, or whether you put it in other words, and say that it is the cultivation and perfecting of a Christ-like and God-pleasing character, or whether you admit still another aspect, and say that it is the intention of time to prepare us for that which lies beyond time. Time is the lackey of eternity, and the

chamberlain that opens the gates of the Kingdom of God. All these various answers are at bottom one. Life is ours mainly in order that, by faith in Jesus Christ, we should struggle, and do, and by struggles, by sorrows, and by all that befalls us, should grow like Him, and so fitter for the calm joys of that place where the throb of the pendulum has ceased, and the hours are stable and eternal. We live here in order to get ready for living yonder. And we get ready for living yonder, when here we understand that every moment of life is granted us for the one purpose, which can be pursued through all life — viz. the becoming liker our dear Lord, and the drinking in to our own hearts more of His Spirit, and moulding our characters more in conformity with His image.

That is what my life and yours are given us for. If we succeed in that, we succeed all round, If we fail in that, whatever else we succeed in, we have failed altogether.

But then, remember, still further, the other aspect in which we can look at this thought, 'That ultimate, all-embracing end is reached through a multitude of nearer and intermediate ones. Whilst life, as a whole, is the season for learning to know and for possessing God, life is broken up into smaller portions and periods each of which has some special duty appropriate to it and a lesson for the day.'

Now many of us, who entirely agree, theoretically, in saying that all life is granted for this highest purpose, go wrong here and fail to discern the significance of single moments. Today is always commonplace; it is, yesterday that is beautiful, and to-morrow that is full of possibilities, to the vulgar mind. But to-day is common and low. There are mountains ahead and mountains behind, purple with distance and radiant with sunshine, and the sky bends over them and seems to touch their crests. But here, on the spot where we stand, life seems flat and mean, and far away from the heavens. We admit the meaning of life taken altogether, but it is very hard to break up that recognition into fragments, and to feel the worth of these fleeting moments which, just because they are here, seem to be of small account. So we forget that life is only the aggregate of small present instants, and that the hour is sixty times sixty insignificant seconds, and the day twenty-four brief hours, and the year 365 commonplace days, and the life threescore years and ten. Brethren, carry your theoretical recognition of the greatness and solemnity of the purposes for which life has been given here into each of the moments of the passing day, and you will find that there is nothing so elastic as time; and that you can crowd into a day as much as a languid thousand years do sometimes hold, of sacrifice and service, of holy joys, and of likeness to Jesus Christ. He who has learned that all the moments are heavy with significance, and pregnant with immortal issues, he, too, in some measure rosy share in the prerogative of the timeless God, and to Him 'one day may be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' It is not the beat of the pendulum or the tick of the clock that measure time, but it is the deeds which we crowd into it, and the feelings and thoughts which it ministers to us. This passing life draws all its importance from the boundless eternal issues to which it leads. Every little puddle on the paving-stones this morning, a quarter of an inch broad and a film deep, will be mirroring bright sunshine, and blue with the reflected heaven. And so we may make the little drop of outlives radiant with the image of God, and bright with the certainties of immortality.

## **II. Now, note secondly, how to make the most of the season.**

'Redeeming the time,' says the Apostle. The figure is very simple and natural, and has only been felt to be difficult and obscure, because people have tried to ride the metaphor further than it was meant. The questions of who is the seller and what is the price do not enter into the Apostle's mind at all. Metaphors are not to be driven so far as that. We have to confine ourselves to the simple thought that there is a need for making the opportunity which is given truly our own; and that that can only be done by giving something in exchange for it. That is the notion of purchase, is it not? Acquisition, by, giving something else. Thus, says Paul, you have to buy the opportunity which time affords us.

That is to say, to begin with, life gives us opportunities and no more. We may, in and through it, become wise, good, pure, happy, noble, Christ-like, or we may not. The opportunity is there, swinging, as it were, in vacuo. Lay hold of it, says he, and turn it into more than an opportunity — even an actuality and a fact. And how is that to be done? We have to give something away, if we get the opportunity for our very own. What have we to give away? Well, mainly the lower ends for which the moment might serve. These have to be surrendered — sometimes abandoned altogether, always rigidly restricted and kept in utter subordination to the highest purposes. To-day is given us mainly that we may learn to know God better, and to love Him more, and to serve Him more joyfully. Our daily duties are given us for the same purpose. But if we go about them without thinking of God or the highest ends which life is meant to serve, then we shall certainly lose the highest ends, and an opportunity will go past us unimproved. But if, on the other hand, whilst we follow our daily business for the sake of legitimate temporal gain, we see, above that, the aspect of daily life as educating in all Christian nobleness and lofty thoughts and purposes, then we shall have given away the lower ends for the sake of attaining the higher. You live, suppose, to found a business, to become masters of your trade, to gain wisdom and knowledge, to establish for yourselves a position amongst your fellow-men, to cultivate your character so as to grow in wisdom and purity, apart from God. Or you live in order to win affection and move thankfully in the heaven of loving associations in your home, amongst your children. Or you live for the sake of carrying some lower but real good amongst men. Many of these ends are beautiful and noble, and necessary for the cultivation and discharge of the various duties and relationships of life; but unless they are all kept secondary, and there towers above them this other, life is wasted. If life is not to be wasted, they must be bartered for

the higher, and we must recognise that to give all things for the sake of Christ and His love is wise merchandise and good exchange. 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea! doubtless, and I count all things but loss that I may win Him and be found of Him.' You must barter the lower if you are to secure the higher ends for which life is the appointed season. And then, still more minutely, my text gives us another suggestion about this 'redeeming the time.' 'See, then,' says the Apostle, 'that ye walk circumspectly.' The word rendered circumspectly might better, perhaps, be translated in some such way as 'strictly,' 'rigidly,' 'accurately,' 'punctiliously.' As I take it, it is to be connected with the 'walk,' and not with the 'see, then,' as the Revised Version does.

So here is a practical direction, walk strictly, accurately, looking to your feet; as a man would do who was upon what they call in the Alps an arrete. Suppose a narrow ridge of snow piled on the top of a ledge of rock, with a precipice of 5000 feet on either side, and a cornice of snow hanging over empty space. The climber puts his alpenstock before his foot, he tests with his foot before he rests his weight, for a false step and down he goes!

'See that you walk circumspectly,' rigidly, accurately, punctiliously. Live by law — that is to say, live by principles which imply duties; for to live by inclination is ruin. The only safety is, look to your feet and look to your road, and restrain yourselves, 'and so redeem the time.'

There is something else to look to. Feet? Yes! Road? Yes! But also look to your guide. Tread in Christ's footsteps, 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' Make Him the pattern and example, and then you shall walk-safely; and the path will carry you right into 'His presence where there is fulness of joy.' No great, noble, right, blessed life is lived without rigid self-control, self-denial, and self-crucifixion. Do not fancy that that means the absence of joy and spontaneity, 'I will well, at liberty for I keep Thy precepts.' Hedges are blessing, when, on the other side, there are bottomless swamps of poisonous miasma, into which if a man ventures he will either drown or be plague-stricken. The narrow way that leads to life is the way of peace, just because it is a way of restrictions. Better to walk on the narrowest path that leads to the City than to be chartered libertines, wandering anywhere at our own bitter wills, and finding 'no end, in devious mazes lost.' Freedom consists in obeying from the heart the restriction of love; and walking punctiliously.

### **III. Lastly, note the motives for this course.**

The Apostle says see that ye walk strictly, not as fools but as wise.' That is to say, such limitation, which buys the opportunity, and uses it for the highest purposes, is the only true wisdom. If you take the mean, miserable, partial fleeting purposes for which some of us, alas are squandering our lives, and contrast these with the great, perfect, all-satisfying, blessed, mad eternal end for which it was given us, how can we escape being convicted of folly? One day, dear friends, it will be found out that the virgins that were not ready when the Lord came were the foolish ones. One day it will be asked of you and of me, 'What did you do with the life which I gave you, that you might know Me?' And if we have only the answer, 'O Lord! I founded a big business in Manchester — I made a fortune — I wrote a clever book, that was most favourably reviewed — I brought up a family' — the only thing fit to be said to us is, 'Thou fool!' The only wisdom is the wisdom that secures the end for which life was given.

Then there is another motive here. 'Redeeming the time because the days are evil.' That is singular. 'The days' are 'the time,' and yet they are 'evil' days, which being translated into other words is just this — we are to make a definite effort to keep in view, and to effect, the purposes for which all the days of our lives are given us, because these days have in themselves a tendency to draw us away from the true path and to blind us as to their real meaning. The world is full of possibilities of good and evil, and the same day which, in one aspect, is the 'season' for serving God is, in another aspect, an 'evil' day which may draw us away from Him. And if we do not put out manly effort, it certainly will do so. The ocean is meant to bear the sailor to his port, but from the waves rise up fair forms, siren voices, with sweet harps and bright eyes that tempt the weary mariner to his destruction. And the days which maybe occasions for our getting nearer God, if ye let them work their will upon us, will be evil days which draw us away from Him.

Let me add one last motive which is not stated in my text, but is involved in the very idea of opportunity or season — viz. that the time for the high and noble purposes of which I have been speaking is rigidly limited and bounded; and once past is irrevocable. The old, wise mythological story tells us that Occasion is bald behind, and is to be grasped by the forelock. The moment that is past had in it wonderful possibilities for us. If we did not grasp them with promptitude and decision they have gone for ever. You may as well try to bring back the water that has been sucked over Niagara, and churned into white foam at its base, as to recall the wasted opportunities. They stand all along the course of our years, solemn monuments of our unfaithfulness, and none of them can ever return again. Life is full of too-late.; that sad mound that moans through the roofless ruins of the past, like the wind through some deserted temple. 'Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.' 'The sluggard will not plough by reason, of the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing: Oh! let us see to it that we wring out of the passing moments their highest possibilities of noblest good. Let us begin to live; for only he who lives to God really lives. Life is given to us that we may know Jesus Christ — trust Him, love Him, serve Him, be like Him. That is the pearl which, if we bring up from the sea of time, we shall not have been cast in vain into its stormy waves. Do you take care that this new year which is dawning upon us go not to join the many wasted years that lie

desolate behind us, but let us all see to it that the flood which sweeps us and it away bear. us straight to God, Who is our home.  
'Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.'