

# Maclaren on 1 John-Pt1

## SERMONS & EXPOSITION ON 1JOHN

by

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### 1 John 1:5-2:6 The Message and Its Practical Results

'This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. 6. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. 8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.'

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2. And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, hut also for the sins of the whole world. 3. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. 6. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.' — 1 John 1:5-2:6.

JOHN is the mystic among the New Testament writers He dwells much on the immediate union of the soul with God, and he has little to say about institutions and rites His method is not to argue, but to utter deep, simple propositions which convince by their own light. But he is also intensely eager for plain, practical morality, and in that respect sets the example which, unfortunately too many of the more mystical types of Christian teaching have failed to follow. To him the outcome and test of all deep hidden union with God is righteousness in life.

The blending of these two elements, which is the very keynote of this letter, is wonderfully set forth in this passage. They would require much more space than we command for their treatment, for every clause is weighty as gold. We can but skim the surface, and try to bring out the salient points.

#### **I. We have, first, a wonderful gathering up of the whole gospel message into one utterance as to the essential nature of God.**

Light is in all languages the symbol of knowledge, of joy, of purity. It is the source of life. Its very nature is to ray itself out into and conquer darkness. Its splendor dazzles every eye; all things rejoice in its beams. Darkness is the type of ignorance, of sorrow, of sin. But, whilst the symbol is thus rich in manifold revelations, probably purity and self-communication are the predominating ideas here.

John has been honoured to give the world the three great revelations that God is spirit, is light, is love. And this profound saying in some sense includes both the others, inasmuch as light, which to the popular mind is most widely apart from matter, may well stand for the emblem of spirit, and, since to radiate is its inseparable quality, does represent in symbol the delight in imparting Himself, which is the very heart of the declaration that God is love. If, then, we grasp these two thoughts of absolute purity and of self-impartation as the very nature and property of God, John tells us that we grasp the kernel of the Gospel.

And he thinks that men never will grasp them certainly unless a 'message' from God, a definite revelation in historical fact, certifies them. We may hope or doubt, or desire, but we cannot be sure that God is light unless he tells us so by unmistakable act. John knew what act that was — the sending of His only-begotten Son. To the positive statement John, in his usual manner, appends an emphatic negative one: 'Darkness is not in him, no, not in any way.' He is light, all light, only light.

#### **II. With characteristic moral earnestness, John passes at once to the practical effects which the message is meant to have.**

We are not told what God is simply that we may know, but that, knowing, we may do and be. If He is light, two things will follow in those who are in union with Him — they will walk in light, and they will in His light see their own evil. John deals with these two

consequences in verses 6-10 — the former in verses 6 and 7; the latter in verses 8-10. The parallelism in the construction of these two sets of verses is striking:

#### **VERSES 6, 7.**

**If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.**

#### **VERSES 8, 9.**

**If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

As to the former of these two paragraphs, the underlying thought is that fellowship with God necessarily involves moral likeness to Him. Worship is always aspiration after, and conformity to, the character of the god worshipped, and there can be no true communion with a God who is light unless the worshipper walks in light. In plain language, all high-flying pretensions to communion with God must verify themselves by practical righteousness. That cuts deep into an emotional religion, which has much to say about raptures and the like, but produces little purifying effect on the humble details of daily life.

There are always professing Christians who talk of their blessed experiences, and woefully fail in prosaic virtues. It is a pity that a man should hold his head so high that he does not look to keep his feet out of the mud. Such a profession is for the most part tainted with more or less conscious falsehood, and is always a proof that the truth — the sum of God's revelation — is not operative in the man; that he is not turning his belief into act, as all belief should be. On the other hand, the true relation resulting from the message is that we should walk in the light, as He is in it. Verse 10 seems to be simply a reiteration of the preceding idea, with some intensifying, and that chiefly in the description of the true character of the denial of sin. To make God a liar is worse than to lie or to deceive ourselves; and all ignoring of sin does that, because not only has God declared its universality by the words of revelation, but all His dealings with men are based upon the fact that they are all sinners, and we fly in the face of all His words and works if we deny that which we ourselves are. Therefore the Apostle further varies his expression, and says 'His word' instead of 'the truth,' thus bringing into prominence the thought that 'the truth' is made accessible to us because God has spoken.

### **III. 1 John 2:1-6 is in structure analogous to the preceding section.**

As there, so here, the 'message' is summed up in one great fact, — Christ's work as advocate for believers and as propitiation for the world. As there, so here, two practical consequences follow, which are drawn out on corresponding lines. Observe the repetition, in verses 3 and 5 b, of 'hereby know we,' and in verses 4 and 6 of 'He that saith.'

Note, too, the reappearance of 'is a liar' and of 'the truth is not in him' in verse 4. The drift of the section may be briefly put as follows. John's heart melts as he thinks of the possibilities of holiness open to believers, and of the sad actualities of their imperfect lives, and he addresses them by the tender name, 'my little children.' The impelling and guiding motive of his letter is that they may not sin. Practical righteousness is the end of revelation, and its complete attainment should be the aim of every believer. But the sad experience of 'saints' is that they are not yet wholly delivered from its power. Therefore 'the message' is not only 'God is light without blending of darkness,' but, 'we Christians have an Advocate with the Father.' Jesus is to-day carrying on His mighty work of prevalent intercession for all His servants, and that intercession secures forgiveness for their inconsistencies and lapses, because it rests upon Christ's finished work of 'propitiation,' which is for the whole world, even though it actually avails only for believers.

Such being the power of Christ's work in its twofold aspect of propitiation and of intercession, the same practical issues as in the preceding section were shown to flow from the revealed nature of God are here, in somewhat different form, linked with that work. First, keeping his commandments (which is equivalent to 'walking in the light') is the test to ourselves, as well as to others, of our really knowing Him with a knowledge which is not mere head work, but the acquaintance of sympathy and friendship, or, in the words of the previous paragraph, having fellowship with Him.

Clearly, the scope of this section requires that 'His commandments' should here mean Christ's, not the Father's. All professions of knowing Jesus which are not verified by obedience to Him are false. If we do keep His word — not merely the individual 'commandments,' but the word as one great whole — our love to God reaches its perfection, for it is no mere emotion of the heart, but the force which is to mould and actuate all our acts.

Verse 5b should be separated from the preceding words, for it is really the beginning of the second issue from the work of Christ, and is parallel with 'hereby know we,' etc., in verse 3. Observe the progress in thought from the assurance that we know (ver. 3) to the assurance that we are in Him.

The Christian's relation to Jesus is not only that of acquaintance, however intimate, loving, and transforming, but that of actual dwelling in Him. That great truth shines on every page of the New Testament, and is not to be weakened down into metaphor or

rhetoric. It is the very heart of the Christian life, and the test that we have attained to it, and that not merely as an occasional, but as a permanent, condition (note that 'are in Him' is strengthened to 'abideth in Him') is that our outward life, in its manifold activities, shall be conformed to the pattern of all holiness in the life of Jesus. To walk as He walked is to walk in the light. Profession is nothing, conduct is everything, and we shall only be clear of sin in the measure in which we have Him who is the light of men for the very life of our lives.

## 1 John 1:7 Walking in the Light

**If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' —1 John 1:7.**

JOHN was the Apostle of love, but he was also a 'son of thunder.' His intense moral earnestness and his very love made him hate evil, and sternly condemn it; and his words flash and roll as no other words in Scripture, except the words of the Lord of love. In the immediate context he has been laying down what is to him the very heart of his message, that 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' There are spots in the sun, great tracts of blackness on its radiant disc; but in God is unmingled, perfect purity. That being so, it is clear that no man can be in sympathy or hold communion with Him, unless he, too, in his measure, is light.

So, with fiery indignation, John turns to the people, of whom there were some, even in the primitive Church, who made claims to a lofty spirituality and communion with God, and all the while were manifestly living in the darkness of sin. He will not mince matters with them. He roundly says that they are lying, and the worst sort of lie — an acted lie: 'They do not the truth.' Then, with a quick turn, he opposes to these pretenders the men who really are in fellowship with God, and in my text lays down the principle that walking in the light is essential to fellowship with God. Only, in his usual fashion, he turns the antithesis into a somewhat different form, so as to suggest another aspect of the truth, and instead of saying, as we might expect for the verbal accuracy of the contrast, 'If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God,' he says, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Then he adds a still further result of that walk, 'the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.'

Now there are three things: walking in the light, which is the only Christian walk; the companions of those who walk in the light; and the progressive cleansing which is given.

### **I. Note this 'Walking in the light,' which is the only Christian walk.**

In all languages, light is the natural symbol for three things: knowledge, joy, purity. The one ray is broken into its three constituent parts. But just as there are some surfaces which are sensitive to the violet rays, say, of the spectrum, and not to the others, so John's intense moral earnestness makes him mainly sensitive to the symbolism which makes light the expression, not so much of knowledge or of joy, as of moral purity. And although that is not exclusively his use of the emblem, it is predominately so, and it is so here. To 'walk in the light' then, is, speaking generally, to have purity, righteousness, goodness, as the very element and atmosphere in which our progressive and changeful life is carried on.

Note, too, before I go further, that very significant antithesis: we 'walk'; He is — God is in the light essentially, changelessly, undisturbedly, eternally; and the light in which He is, His 'own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' is light which has flowed out from Himself as a halo round the midnight moon. It is all one in substance to say God is in light, or, as the Psalmist has it, 'He covered Himself with light as with a garment,' and to say, 'God is light.'

But, side by side with that changeless abiding in the perfect purity, which is inaccessible, the Apostle ventures to put, not in contrast only, but in parallel (as He is), our changing, effortful, active, progressive life in the light (God is); we walk.

So, then, the essential of a Christian character is that the light of purity and moral goodness shall be as the very orb, in the midst of which it stands and advances. That implies effort, and it implies activity, and it implies progress. And we are only Christians in the measure in which the conscious activities of our daily lives, and the deepest energies of our inward being, are bathed and saturated with this love of, and effort after, righteousness. It is vain, says John, to talk about fellowship with God, unless the fellowship is rooted in sympathy with Him in that which is the very heart of His Being, the perfect light of perfect holiness. Test your Christianity by that. Then, still further, there is implied in this great requirement of walking in the light, not only activity and effort, and progress in purity, but also that the whole of the life shall be brought into relation with, and shall be moulded after, the pattern of the God in whom we profess to believe. Religion, in its deepest meaning, is the aspiration after likeness to the god. You see it in heathenism. Men make their gods after their own image, and then the god makes the worshippers after his image. Mars is the god of the soldier, and Venus goddess of the profligate, and Apollo god of the musical and the wise, etc., and in Christianity the deepest thing in it is aspiration and effort after likeness to God. Love is imitation; admiration, especially when it is raised to the highest degree and becomes adoration, is imitation. And the man that lies before God, like a mirror in the sunshine, receives on the still surface of his soul — but not, like the mirror, on the surface only, but down into its deepest depths — the reflected image of Him on Whom he gazes. 'We all with unveiled face, mirroring glow, are changed into the same image.' So to walk in the light is only possible when we

are drawn into it, and our feeble feet made fit to tread upon the radiant glow, by the thought that He is in the light. To imitate Him is to be righteous. So do not let us forget that a correct creed, and devout emotions, ay! and a morality which has no connection with Him, are all imperfect, and that the end of all our religion, our orthodox creed and our sweet emotions and inward feelings of acceptance and favour and fellowship, are meant to converge on, and to produce this — a life and a character which lives and moves and has its being in a great orb of light and purity.

But another thing is included in this grand metaphor of my text. Not only does it enjoin upon us effort and activity and progress in the light and the linking of all our purity with God, but also, it bids us shroud no part of our conduct or our character either from ourselves or from Him. Bring it all out into the light. And although with a penitent heart, and a face suffused with blushes, we have sometimes to say, 'See, Father, what I have done!' it is far better that the revealing light should shine down upon us, and like the sunshine on wet linen, melt away the foulness which it touches, than that we should huddle the ugly thing up in a corner, to be one day revealed and transfixed by the flash of the light turned into lightning. 'He that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest.'

## **II. So much, then, for my first point; the second is: The companions of the men that walk in the light.**

I have already pointed out that the accurate, perhaps pedantically accurate, form of the antithesis would have been: 'If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God.' But John says, first, 'we have fellowship one with another.' Underlying that, as I shall have to say in a moment, there is the other thought: 'We have fellowship with God.' But he deals with the other side of the truth first. That just comes to this, that the only cement that perfectly knits men to each other is their common possession of that light, and the consequent fellowship with God. There are plenty of other bonds that draw us to one another; but these, if they are not strengthened by this deepest of all bonds, the affinity of souls, that are moving together in the realm of light and purity, are precarious, and apt to snap. Sin separates men quite as much as it separates each man from God. It is the wedge driven into the tree that rends it apart. Human society with its various bonds is like the iron hoop that may be put around the barrel staves, giving them a quasi-unity. The one thing that builds men together into a whole is that each shall be, as it were, embedded in the rock which is the foundation, and the building will rise into a holy temple in the Lord. Sin separates; as the prophet confessed, 'All we like sheep have gone astray, every one to his own way,' and the flock is broken up into a multitude of scattered sheep. Social enthusiasts may learn the lesson that the only way by which brotherhood among men can become anything else than a name, and probably end, as it did in the great French Revolution, in 'brothers' making hecatombs of their brethren under the guillotine, is that it shall be the corollary from the Fatherhood of God. If we walk in light, not otherwise, we have 'fellowship one with another.'

Then, still further, in this fellowship one with another, John presupposes the fellowship with God for each, which makes the possibility and the certainty of all being drawn into one family. He does not think it necessary to state, what is so plain and obvious, viz., that unless we are in sympathy with God, in our aspiration and effort after the light which is His home and ours, we have no real communion with Him. I said that sin separated man from man, and disrupted all the sweet bends of amity, so that if men come into contact, being themselves in the darkness, they come into collision rather than into communion. A company of travellers in the night are isolated individuals. When the sun rises on their paths they are a company again. And in like manner, sin separates us from God, and if our hearts are turned towards, and denizens of, the darkness of impurity, then we have no communion with Him.

He cannot come to us if we love the darkness. He

**'Can but listen at the gate,  
And hear the household jar within.'**

The tide of the Atlantic feels along the base of ironbound cliffs on our western shores, and there is not a crevice into which it can come. So God moves about us, but is without us, so long as we walk in darkness. So let us remember that no union with Him is possible, except there be this common dwelling in the light. Two grains of quicksilver laid upon a polished surface will never unite if their surfaces be dusted over with minute impurities, or if the surface of one of them be. Clean away the motes, and they will coalesce and be one. A film of sin separates men from God. And if the film be removed the man dwells in God, and God in him.

## **III. That brings me to my last point: The progressive cleansing of those who dwell in the light.**

'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Now if you will notice the whole context, and eminently the words a couple of verses after my text, you will see that the cleansing here meant is not the cleansing of forgiveness, but the cleansing of purifying. For the two things are articulately distinguished in the ninth verse: 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' So, to use theological terms, it is not justification, but sanctification that is meant here.

Then there is another thing to be noticed, and that is that when the Apostle speaks here about the blood of Christ, he is not thinking of that blood as shed on the Cross, the atoning sacrifice, but of that blood as transfused into the veins, the source there of our new life. The Old Testament says that 'the blood is the life.' Never mind about the statement being scientifically correct; it conveys the

idea of the time, which underlies a great deal of Old and New Testament teaching. And when John says the blood of Jesus cleanses from 'all sin,' he says just the same thing as his brother Paul said, 'the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ makes me free from the law of sin and death.' That is to say, a growing cleansing from the dominion and the power of sin is granted to us, if we have the life of Jesus Christ · breathed into our lives. The metaphor is a very strong one. They tell us — I know nothing about the truth of it — that sometimes it has been possible to revive a moribund man by transfusing into his veins blood from another. That is a picture of the only way by which you and I can become free from the tyranny that dominates us. We must have the life of Christ as the animating principle of our lives, the spirit of Jesus emancipating us from the power of sin and death.

So you see, there are two aspects of Christ's great work set before us under that one metaphor of the blood in its two-fold form, first, as shed for us sinners on the Cross; second, as poured into our veins day by day. That works progressive cleansing. It covers the whole ground of all possible iniquity. Pardon is much, purifying is more. The sacrifice on the Cross is the basis of everything, but that sacrifice does not exhaust what Christ does for us. He died for our sins, and lives for our sanctifying. He died for us, He lives in us. Because He died, we are forgiven; because He lives, we are made pure.. Only remember John's 'if.' The 'blood of Jesus will progressively cleanse us until it has cleansed us from all sin, on condition that we 'walk in the light,' not otherwise. If the main direction of our lives is towards the light; if we seek, by aspiration and by effort, and by deliberate choice, to live in holiness, then, and not else, will the power of the life of Jesus Christ deliver us from the power of sin and death.

Now, my text presupposes that the people to whom it is addressed, and whom it concerns, have already passed from darkness into light, if not wholly, yet in germ. But for those who have not so passed, there is something to be said before my text. And John says it immediately; here it is, 'If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but for the whole world.' So we have to begin with the blood shed for us, the means of our pardon, and then we have the advance of the blood sprinkled on us, the means of our cleansing. If by humble faith we take the dying Lord for our Saviour, and the channel of our forgiveness, we shall have the pardon of our sins. If we listen to the voice that says, 'Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light,' we shall have fellowship with the living Lord, and daily know more and more of the power of His cleansing blood, making us 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

## 1 John 2:7, 8 The Commandment, Old Yet New

**'I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning ... Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you.'** — 1 John 2:7, 8.

THE simplest words may carry the deepest thoughts. Perhaps angels and little children speak very much alike. This letter, like all of John's writing, is pellucid in speech, profound in thought, clear and deep, like the abysses of mid-ocean. His terms are such as a child can understand; his sentences short and inartificial: he does not reason, he declares; he has neither argument nor rhetoric, but he teaches us the deepest truths, and shows us that we get nearer the centre by insight than by logic.

Now the words that I have taken for my text are very characteristic of this Apostle's manner. He has a great, wide-reaching truth to proclaim, and he puts it in the simplest, most inartificial manner, laying side by side two artless sentences, and stimulates us by the juxtaposition, leading us to feel after, and so to make our own. the large lessons that are in them. Let me, then, try to bring these out.

### **I. And the first one that strikes me is — 'the word' is 'a commandment.'**

Now, by 'the word' here the Apostle obviously means, since he speaks about it as that which these Asiatic Christians 'heard from the beginning, 'the initial truth which was presented for their acceptance in the story of the life and death of Jesus Christ. That was 'the word,' and, says he, just because it was a history it is a commandment; just because it was the Revelation of God it is a law. God never tells us anything merely that we may be wise. The purpose of all divine speech, whether in His great works in nature, or in the voices of our own consciences, or in the syllables that we have to piece together from out of the complicated noises of the world's history, or in this book, or in the Incarnate Word, where all the wandering syllables are gathered together into one word — the purpose of all that God says to men is primarily that they may know, but in order that, knowing, they may do; and still more that they may be. And so, inasmuch as every piece of religious knowledge has in it the capacity of directing conduct, all God's word is a commandment.

And, if that is true in regard to other revelations and manifestations that he has made of Himself, it is especially true in regard to the summing-up of all in the Incarnate Word, and in His words, and in the words that tell us of His life and of His death. So whatever truths there may be, and there are many, which, of course, have only the remotest, if any, bearing upon life and conduct, every bit of Christian truth has a direct grip upon a man's life, and brings with it a stringent obligation.

Now, the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, 'the Word which ye heard from the beginning,' which, I suppose, would roughly

correspond with what is told us in our four Gospels; the word which these Asiatic Christians heard at first, the good news that was brought to them in the midst of their gropings and peradventures, commanded, in the first place, absolute trust, the submission of the will as well as the assent of the understanding. But also it commanded imitation, for Jesus Christ was revealed to them, as He is revealed to us, as being the Incarnate realisation of the ideal of humanity; and what He is, the knowledge that He is that, binds us to try to be in our turn.

And more than that, brethren, the Cross of Christ is a commandment. For we miserably mutilate it, and sinfully as well as foolishly limit its application and its power, if we recognise it only — I was going to say mainly — as being the ground of our hope and of what we call our salvation, and do not recognise it as being the obligatory example of our lives, which we are bound to translate into our daily practice. Jesus Christ Himself has told us that in many a fashion, never more touchingly and wondrously than when in response to the request of a handful of Greeks to see Him, He answered with the word which not only declared what was obligatory upon Him, but what was obligatory upon us all, and for the want of which all the great endowments of the Greek mind at last rotted down into sensuousness, when He said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit,' and then went on to say, 'he that loveth his life shall lose it.'

So, then, brethren, 'the word which ye heard at the beginning,' the story of Christ, His life and His death, is a stringent commandment. Now, this is one of the blessings of Christianity, that all which was hard and hopeless, ministering to despair sometimes, as well as stirring to fierce effort at others, in the conception of law or duty as it stands outside us, is changed into the tender word, 'if ye love Me, keep My commandments.' If any man serve Me, let him... 'follow Me.' It is a law; it is 'the law of liberty.' So you have not done all that is needful when you have accepted the teaching of Christ in the Scriptures and the teaching of the Scriptures concerning Christ. Nor have you done all that is needful when clasping Him, and clinging simply to His Cross, you recognise in it the means and the pledge of your acceptance with God, and the ground and anchor of all your hope. There is something more to be done. The Gospel is a commandment, and commandments require not only assent, not only trust, but practical obedience. The 'old commandment' is the 'word which ye heard from the beginning.'

## **II. The old Christ is perpetually new.**

The Apostle goes on, in the last words of my text, to say, 'Which thing'(viz., this combination of the old and the new) 'is true in Him and in you.'

'True in Him' — that is to say, Christ, the old Christ that was declared to these Asiatic Christians as they were groping amidst the illusions of their heathenism, is perpetually becoming new as new circumstances emerge, and new duties are called for, and new days come with new burdens, hopes, possibilities, or dangers. The perpetual newness of the old Christ is what is taught here.

Suppose one of these men in Ephesus heard for the first time the story that away in Judea there had lived the manifestation of God in the flesh, and that He, in His wonderful love, had died for men, that they might be saved from the grip of their sins. And suppose that man barely able to see, had yet seen that much, and clutched at it. He was a Christian, but the Christ that he discerned when he first discerned Him through the mists, and the Christ that he had in his life and in his heart, after, say, twenty years of Christian living, are very different. The old Christ remained, but the old Christ was becoming new day by day, according to the new necessities and positions. And that is what will be our experience if we have any real Christianity in us. The old Christ that we trusted at first was able to do for us all that we asked Him to do, but we did not ask Him at first for half enough, and we did not learn at first a tithe of what was in Him. Suppose, for instance, some great ship comes alongside a raft with ship-wrecked sailors upon it, and in the darkness of the night transfers them to the security of its deck. They know how safe they are, they know what has saved them, but what do they know compared with what they will know before the voyage ends of all the reservoirs of power and stores of supplies that are in her? Christ comes to us in the darkness, and delivers us. We know Him for our Deliverer from the first moment, if we truly have grasped Him. But it will take summering and wintering with Him, through many a long day and year, before we can ever have a partially adequate apprehension of all that lies in Him.

And what will teach us the depths of Christ, and how does He become new to us? Well — by trusting Him, by following Him, and by the ministry of life. Some of us, I have no doubt, can look back upon past days when sorrow fell upon us, blighting and all but crushing; and then things that we had read a thousand times in the Bible, and thought we had believed, blazed up into a new meaning, and we felt as if we had never understood anything about them before. The Christ that is with us in the darkness, and whom we find able to turn even it, if not into light, at least into a solemn twilight not unvisited by hopes, that Christ is more to us than the Christ that we first of all learnt so little to know. And life's new circumstances, its emerging duties, are like the strokes of the spade which clears away the soil, and discloses the treasure in all its extent which we purchased when we bought that field. We buy the treasure at once, but it takes a long time to count it. The old Christ is perpetually the new Christ.

So, brethren, Christian progress consists not in getting away from the original facts, the elements of the Gospel, but it consists in penetrating more deeply into these, and feeling more of their power and their grasp. All Euclid is in the definitions and axioms and postulates at the beginning. All our books are the letters of the alphabet. And progress consists, not in advancing beyond, but in

sinking into, that initial truth, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.'

I might say a word here as to another phase of this perpetual newness of the old Christ — viz., in His adaptation to deal with all the complications and perplexities and problems of each successive age. It has taken the Church a long, long time to find out and to formulate, rightly or wrongly, what it has discovered in Jesus. The conclusions to be drawn from the simple Gospel truth, the presuppositions on which it rests, require all the efforts of all the Church through all the ages, and transcend them all. And I venture to say, though it may sound like unsupported dogma, that for this generation's questionings, social, moral, and political, the answer is to be found in Him. He, and He only, will interpret each generation to itself, and will meet its clamant needs. There is none other for the world to-day but the old Christ with the new aspect which the new conditions require.

Did it ever strike you how remarkable it is, and, as it seems to me, of how great worth as an argument for the truth of Christianity it is, that Jesus Christ comes to this, as to every generation, with the air of belonging to it? Think of the difference between the aspect which a Plato or a Socrates presents to the world to-day, and the aspect which that Lord presents. You do not need to strip anything off Him. He committed Himself to no statements which the progress of thought or knowledge has exploded. He stands before the world to-day fitting its needs as closely as He did those of the men of His own generation. The old Christ is the new Christ.

### **III. Lastly, in the Christian life the old commandment is perpetually new.**

'Which thing is true... in you.' That is to say, 'the commandment which ye received at the beginning,' when ye received Christ as Saviour, has in itself a power of adapting itself to all new conditions as they may emerge, and will be felt increasingly to grow stringent, and increasingly to demand more entire conformity, and increasingly to sweep its circle round the whole of human life. For this is the result of all obedience, that the conception of duty becomes more clear and more stringent. 'If any man will do His will' the reward shall be that he will see more and more the altitude of that will, the length and breadth and depth and height of the possible conformity of the human spirit to the will of God. And so as we advance in obedience we shall see un-reached advances before us, and each new step of progress will declare more fully how much still remains to be accomplished. In us the 'old commandment' will become ever new.

And not only so, but perpetually with the increasing sweep and stringency of the obligation will be felt an increasing sense of our failure to fulfil it. Character is built up, for good or for evil, by slow degrees. Conscience is quickened by being listened to, and stifled by being neglected. A little speck of mud on a vestal virgin's robe, or on a swan's plumage, will be conspicuous, while a splash twenty times the size will pass unnoticed on the rags of some travel-stained wayfarer. The purer we become, the more we shall know ourselves to be impure.

Thus, my brother, there opens out before us an endless course in which all the blessedness that belongs to the entertaining and preservation of ancient convictions, lifelong friends, and familiar truths, and all the antithetical blessedness that belongs to the joy of seeing, rising upon our horizon as some new planet with lustrous light, will be united in our experience. We shall at once be conservative and progressive; holding by the old Christ and the old commandment, and finding that both have in them endless novelty. The trunk is old; every summer brings fresh leaves. And at last we may hope to come to the new Jerusalem, and drink the new wine of the Kingdom, and yet find that the old love remains, and that the new Christ, whose presence makes the new heavens and the new earth, is 'the same yesterday, today, and for ever,' the old Christ whom, amid the shadows of earth, we tried to love and copy.

## **1 John 2:14 Youthful Strength**

**"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."—1 John 2:14.**

'WHAT am I going to be?' is the question that presses upon young people stepping out of the irresponsibilities of childhood into youth. But, unfortunately, the question is generally supposed to be answered when they have fixed upon a trade or profession. It means, rightly taken, a great deal more than that. 'What am I going to make of myself?' 'What ideal have I before me, towards which I constantly press?' is a question that I would fain lay upon the hearts of all that now hear me. For the misery and the reason of the failure of so many lives is simply that people have never fairly looked that question in the face and tried to answer it, but drift and drift, and let circumstances determine them. And, of course, in a world like this, such people are sure to turn out what such an immense number of people do turn out, failures as far as all God's purposes with humanity are concerned. The absence of a clear ideal is the misery and the loss of all young people who do not possess it.

So here in my text is an old man's notion of what young men ought to be and may be. 'Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'

So said the aged John to some amongst his hearers in these corrupt Asiatic cities. It was not merely a fair ideal painted upon vacancy, but it was a portrait of actual young Christians in these little Asiatic churches. And I would fain have some of you take this realised ideal for yours and see to it that your lives be conformed to it.

There are three points here. The Apostle, first of all, lays his finger upon the strength, which is something more than mere physical strength, proper to youth. Then he lets us see the secret source of that strength: 'Ye have the word of God abiding in you.' And then he shows the field on which it should be exercised, and the victory which it secures: 'And ye have overcome the wicked one.' Now let me touch upon these three points briefly in succession.

### **I. First, Then, Note Here The Strength Which You Young People Ought To Covet And To Aim At.**

It is not merely the physical strength proper to their age, nor the mere unworn buoyancy and vigour which sorrows and care and responsibilities have not thinned and weakened. These are great and precious gifts. We never know how precious they are until they have slipped away from us. These are great and precious gifts, to be preserved as long as may be, by purity and by moderation, and to be used for high and great purposes. But the strength that is in thews and muscles is not the strength that the Apostle is speaking about here, nor anything that belongs simply to the natural stage of your development, whether it be purely physical or purely mental. Samson was a far weaker man than the poor little Jew 'whose bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible,' and who all his days carried about with him that 'thorn in the flesh.' It is not your body that is to be strong, but yourselves.

Now the foundation of all true strength lies here, in a good, strong will. In this world, unless a man has learned to say 'No!' and to say it very decidedly, and to stick to it, he will never come to any good. Two words contain the secret of noble life: 'Resist!' and 'Persist!' And the true strength of manhood lies in this mainly, that, in spite of all antagonisms, hindrances, voices, and things that array themselves against you, having greatly resolved, you do greatly do what you have resolved, and having said 'I will!' let neither men nor devils lead you to say, 'I will not.' Depend upon it, that to be weak in this direction is to be weak all through. Strong passions make weak men. And a strong will is the foundation, in this wicked and antagonistic world in which we live, of all real strength.

But then the strength that I would have you seek, and strive to cultivate, must be a strength of will founded upon strong reason. Determination unenlightened is obstinacy, and obstinacy is weakness. A mule can beat you at that: 'Be ye not as the mule, which have no understanding.' A determination which does not take into its view all the facts of the case, nor is influenced by these, has no right to call itself strength. It is only, to quote a modern saying—I know not whether true of the person to whom it was originally applied or no—is 'only a lath painted to look like iron.' Unintelligent obstinacy is folly, like the conduct of some man who sticks to his pick and his task in a quarry after the bugle has warned him of an impending explosion, which will blow him to atoms.

But that is not all. A strong will, illuminated by a strong beam of light from the understanding, must be guided and governed by a strong hand put forth by Conscience. 'I should like' is the weakling's motto. 'I will' may be an obstinate fool's motto. 'I ought, therefore, God helping me, and though the devil hinders me, I will,' is a man's. Conscience is king. To obey it is to be free; to neglect it is to be a slave.

Is not this a better ideal for life than gathering any outward possessions, however you may succeed therein? A thousand things will have to be taken into account, and may help or may hinder outward prosperity and success. But nobody can hinder you working at your character and succeeding in making it what it ought to be; and to form character is the end of life. 'To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering.' Ay! that is true, though Milton put it into the devil's mouth. And there is only one strength that will last, 'for even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail.' But the strength of a fixed and illuminated and conscience-guided will, which governs the man and is governed by God, shall never faint or grow weak. This is the strength which we should seek, and which I ask you to make the conscious aim of your lives.

### **II. Now Note, Secondly, How To Get It.**

'Ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you.'

Those young Asiatic Christians, that John had in his eye, had learned the secret and the conditions of this strength; and not only in limb and sinew, or in springy and elastic buoyancy of youthful, mental, and spiritual vigour were they strong, but they were so because 'the Word of God abode in them.' Now, there are two significations of that great expression, both of them frequent in John's Gospel, and both of them, I think, transferred to this Epistle, each of which may yield us a word of counsel. By 'the Word of God,' as I take it, is meant—perhaps I ought to say both, but, at all events, either—the revelation of God's truth in Holy Scripture, or the personal revelation of the will and nature of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Whichever of these two meanings—and at bottom they come to be one—we attach to this expression, we draw from them an exhortation. Let me put this very briefly.

Let me say to you, then, if you want to be strong, let Scripture truth occupy, and fill and be always present to your mind. There are



powers to rule and to direct all conduct, motive powers of the strongest character in these great truths of God's revelation. They are meant to influence a man in all his doings, and it is for us to bring the greatest and solemnest of them to bear on the smallest things of our daily life. Suppose, now, that you go to your work, and some little difficulty starts up in your path, or some trivial annoyance ruffles your temper, or some lurking temptation is suddenly sprung upon you. Suppose your mind and heart were saturated with God's truth, with the great thoughts of His being, of His love, of His righteousness, of Christ's death for you, of Christ's presence with you, of Christ's guardianship over you, of Christ's present will that you should walk in His ways, of the bright hopes of the future, and the solemn vision of that great White Throne and the retribution that streams thence, do you think it would be possible for you to fall into sin, to yield to temptation, to be annoyed by any irritation or bother, or over weighted by any duty? No! Whosoever lives with the thoughts that God has given us in His Word familiar to His mind and within easy reach of His hand, has therein an armlet against all possible temptation, a test that will unveil the hidden corruption in the sweetest seductions, and a calming power that will keep his heart still and collected in the midst of agitations. If the Word of God in that lower sense of the principles involved in the gospel of Jesus Christ, dwell in your hearts, the fangs are taken out of the serpent. If you drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt you, and you will 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.'

Bring the greatest truths you can find to bear on the smallest duties, and the small duties will grow great to match the principles by which they are done. Bring the laws of Jesus Christ down to the little things, for, in the name of common sense, if our religion is not meant to regulate trifles, what is it meant to regulate? Life is made up of trifles. There are half a dozen crises in the course of your life, but there are a thousand trivial things in the course of every day. It would be a poor kind of regulating principle that controlled the crises, and left us alone to manage with the trifles the best way we could.

But in order that there shall be this continual operation of the motives and principles involved in the gospel upon our daily lives, we must have them very near our hand, ready to be laid hold of. The soldier that would march through an enemy's country, having left his gun in the hands of some camp follower, would be very likely to be shot before he got his gun. I remember going through the Red Sea; at the mouth of it where the entrance is narrow, and the currents run strong, when the ship approaches the dangerous place, the men take their stations at appointed places, and the ponderous anchors are loosened and ready to be dropped in an instant if the swirl of the current sweeps the ship into dangerous proximity to the reel. It is no time to cut the lashings of the anchors when the keel is grating on the coral rocks. And it is no time to have to look about for our weapons when the sudden temptation leaps upon us like a strong man armed. You must have them familiar to you by devout meditation, by frequent reflection, prayer, study of God's Word, if they are to be of any use to you at all. And I am afraid that about the last book in the world that loads of young men and women think of sitting down to read, systematically and connectedly, is the Bible. You will read sermons and other religious books; you will read newspapers, pamphlets, novels; but the Scripture, in its entirety, is a strange book to myriads of men who call themselves Christians. And so they are weak. If you want to be strong, 'let the Word of God abide in your hearts.'

And then if we take the other view, which at bottom is not another, of the meaning of this phrase, and apply it rather to the personal word, Jesus Christ Himself, that will yield us another exhortation, and that is, let Jesus Christ into your hearts and keep Him there, and He will make you strong. I believe that it is no piece of metaphor or an exaggerated way of putting the continuance of the influence of Christ's example and Christ's teaching upon men's hearts and minds, when He tells us that 'if any man open the door He will come in and sup with him.' I want to urge the one thought on you that it is possible, in simple literal fact, for that Divine Saviour, who was 'in Heaven' whilst He walked on earth, and walks on earth to-day when He has returned to His native Heaven, to enter into my spirit and yours, and really to abide within us, the life of our lives, 'the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever.' The rest of us can render help to one another by strength ministered from without; Jesus Christ will come into your hearts, if you let Him, in His very sweetness and omnipotence of power, and will breathe His own grace into your weakness, strengthening you as from within. Others can help you from without, as you put an iron band round some over-weighted, crumbling brick pillar in order to prevent it from collapsing, but He will pass into us as you may drive an iron rod up through the centre of the column, and make it strong inside, and we shall be strong if Jesus Christ dwells within us. Open the door, dear young friends; let Christ come into your hearts, which He will do if you do not hinder Him, and if you ask Him. Trust Him with simple reliance upon Him for everything. Faith is 'the door'; the door is nothing of itself, but when it is opened it admits the guest. So do you let that Master come and abide, and you will hear Him say to you, as He said of old, 'Child! My grace is sufficient.' How modest He is. Sufficient!-an ocean enough to fill a thimble! 'My grace is sufficient for thee; and My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

### **III. Now, Lastly, Notice The Field On Which The Strength Is To Be Exercised, And The Victory Which It Secures. 'Ye Have Overcome The Wicked One.'**

There is a battle for us all, on which I need not dwell, the conflict with evil around and with evil within, and with the prince of the embattled legions of the darkness, whom the New Testament has more clearly revealed to us. You young people have many advantages in the conflict; you have some special disadvantages as well. You have strong passions, you have not much experience, you do not know how bitter the dregs are of the cup whose foaming bubbles look so attractive, and whose upper inch tastes so sweet. But on the other hand you have not yet contracted habits that it is misery to indulge in, and, as it would seem,

impossible to break, and the world is yet before you.

You cannot begin too soon to choose your side. And here is the side on which alone victory is possible for a man—the side of Jesus Christ, who will teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight.

Notice that remarkable phrase, ‘Ye have overcome the wicked one.’ He is talking to young Christians before whom the battle may seem to lie, and yet He speaks of their conquest as an accomplished fact, and as a thing behind them. What does that mean? It means this, that if you will take service in Christ’s army, and by His grace resolve to be His faithful soldier till your life’s end, that act of faith, which enrols you as His, is itself the victory which guarantees, if it be continued, the whole conquest in time.

There used to be an old superstition that—

### **‘Who sheds the foremost foeman’s life**

#### **His party conquers in the strife’**

and whosoever has exercised, however imperfectly and feebly, the faith in Jesus Christ the Lord has therein conquered the devil and all his works, and Satan is henceforth a beaten Satan, and the battle, in essence, is completed even in the act of its being begun.

‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith’; not only because our confidence in Jesus Christ is the blowing of the bugle that summons to warfare and shakes off the tyrant’s yoke, but it is also the means by which we join ourselves to Him who has overcome, and make His victory ours. He has fought our antagonist in the wilderness once, in Gethsemane twice, on the Cross thrice; and the perfect conquest in which Jesus bound the strong man and spoiled his goods may become, and will become, your conquest, if you wed yourselves to that dear Lord by simple faith in Him.

What a priceless thing it is that you may begin your independent, manhood with a conquest that will draw after it ultimate and supreme victory. You will still have to fight, but you will have only to fight detachments. If you trust yourselves to Jesus Christ you have conquered the main body of the army, and it is only the stragglers that you will have to contend with hereafter. He that loves Jesus, and has given himself to Him, has pinned the dragon to the ground by its head, and though it may ‘swinge the scaly horror of its folded tail,’ and twine its loathly coils around him, yet he has conquered, and he is conquering, and he will conquer. Only let him hold fast by the hand which brings strength into him by its touch.

Will you, dear young friends, take service in this army? Do you want to be weak or strong? Do you want your lives to be victorious whatever may happen to them in the way of outward prosperity or failure? Then give yourselves to this Lord. His voice calls you to be His soldiers. He will cover your heads in the day of battle. He will strengthen you ‘with might by His Spirit in the inner man.’ He will hide His Word in your heart that you offend not against Him. He will dwell Himself within you to make you strong in your extremest weakness and victorious over your mightiest foe; and in that sign you will conquer and ‘be more than conquerors through Him that loved you.’

Oh, I pray that you may ask yourselves the question, ‘What am I going to be?’ and may answer it, ‘I am going to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might’; and to overcome, as He also hath overcome, the world and the flesh and the devil.

## **1 John 2:17 River And Rock**

**‘The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’—1 John 2:17.**

JOHN has been solemnly giving a charge not to love the world, nor the things that are in it. That charge was addressed to ‘children,’ ‘young men,’ ‘fathers.’ Whether these designations be taken as referring to growth and maturity of Christian experience, or of natural age, they equally carry the lesson that no age and no stage is beyond the danger of being drawn away by the world’s love, or beyond the need of the solemn exhortation therefrom.

My text is the second of the reasons which the Apostle gives for his earnest charge. We all, therefore, need it, and we always need it; though on the last Sunday of another year, it may be more than usually appropriate to turn our thoughts in its direction. ‘The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.’ Let us lay the handful of snow on our fevered foreheads and cool our desires.

Now there are but two things set forth in this text, which is a great and wonderful antithesis between something which is in perpetual flux and passage and something which is permanent. If I might venture to cast the two thoughts into metaphorical form, I should say that here are a river and a rock. The one, the sad truth of sense, universally believed and as universally forgotten; the other, the glad truth of faith, so little regarded or operative in men’s lives.

I ask you, then, to look with me for a few moments at each of these thoughts.

## **I. First, Then, The River, Or The Sad Truth Of Sense.**

Now you observe that there are two things in my text of which this transiency is predicated, the one 'the world,' the other 'the lust thereof'; the one outside us, the other within us. As to the former, I need only, I suppose, remind you in a sentence that what John means by 'the world' is not the material globe on which we dwell, but the whole aggregate of things visible and material, together with the lives of the men whose lives are directed to, and bounded by, that visible and material, and all considered as wrenched apart from God. That, and not the mere external physical creation, is what he means by 'the world,' and therefore the passing away of which he speaks is not only (although, of course, it includes) the decay and dissolution of material things, but the transiency of things which are or have to do with the visible, and are separated by us from God. Over all these, he says, there is written the sentence, 'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' There is a continual flowing on of the stream. As the original implies even more strongly than in our translation, 'the world' is in the act of 'passing away.' Like the slow travelling of the scenes of some moveable panorama which glide along, even as the eye looks upon them, and are concealed behind the side flats before the gazer has taken in the whole picture, so equably, constantly, silently, and therefore unnoticed by us, all is in a state of continual motion. There is no present time. Even whilst we name the moment it dies. The drop hangs for an instant on the verge, gleaming in the sunlight, and then falls into the gloomy abyss that silently sucks up years and centuries. There is no present, but all is movement.

Brethren, that has been the commonplace of moralists and poets and preachers from the beginning of time; and it would be folly for me to suppose that I can add anything to the impressiveness of the thought. All that I want to do is to wake you up to preach it to yourselves, for that is the only thing that is of any use.

**'So passeth, in the passing of an hour**

**Of mortal life, the leaf, the bud, the flower.'**

But besides this transiency external to us, John finds a corresponding transiency within us. 'The world passeth, and the lust thereof.' Of course the word 'lust' is employed by him in a much wider sense than in our use of it. With us it means one specific and very ugly form of earthly desire. With him it includes the whole genus—all desires of every sort, more or less noble or ignoble, which have this for their characteristic, that they are directed to, stimulated by, and fed or starved on, the fleeting things of this outward life. If thus a man has anchored himself to that which has no perpetual stay, so long as the cable holds he follows the fate of the thing to which he has pinned himself. And if it perish he perishes, in a very profound sense, with it. If you trust yourselves in the leaky vessel, when the water rises in it, it will drown you, and you will go to the bottom with the craft to which you have trusted yourselves, If you embark in the little ship that carries Christ and His fortunes, you will come with Him to the haven.

But these fleeting desires, of which my text speaks, point to that sad feature of human experience, that we all outgrow and leave behind us, and think of very little value, the things that once to us were all but heaven. There was a time when toys and sweetmeats were our treasures, and since that day how many burnt-out hopes we all have had! How little we should know ourselves if we could go back to the fears and wishes and desires that used to agitate us ten, twenty, thirty years ago! They lie behind us, no longer part of ourselves; they have slipped away from us, and

**'We all are changed, by still degrees,**

**All but the basis of the soul.'**

The self-conscious same man abides, and yet how different the same man is! Our lives, then will zig-zag instead of keeping a straight course, if we let desires that are limited by anything that we can see guide and regulate us.

But, brethren, though it be a digression from my text, I cannot help touching for a moment upon a yet sadder thought than that. There are desires that remain, when the gratification of them has become impossible. Sometimes the lust outlasts the world, sometimes the world outlasts the lust; and one knows not whether is the sadder. There is a hell upon earth for many of us who, having set our affections upon some creatural object, and having had that withdrawn from us, are ready to say, 'They have taken away my gods! And what shall I do?' And there is a hell of the same Sort waiting beyond those dark gates through which we have all to pass, where men who never desired anything, except what the world that has slipped out of their reluctant fingers could give them, are shut up with impossible longings after a for-ever-vanished good. 'Father Abraham! a drop of water; for I am tormented in this flame.' That is what men come to, if the fire of their lust burn after its objects are withdrawn.

But let me remind you that this transiency of which I have been speaking receives very strange treatment from most of us. I do not know that it is altogether to be regretted that it so seldom comes to men's consciousness. Perhaps it is right that it should not be uppermost in our thoughts always; but yet there is no vindication for the entire oblivion to which we condemn it. The march of these fleeting things is like that of cavalry with their horses' feet wrapped in straw, in the night, across the snow, silent and unnoticed. We cannot realise the revolution of the earth, because everything partakes in it. We talk about standing still, and we are whirling through space with inconceivable rapidity. By a like illusion we deceive ourselves with the notion of stability, when everything about

us is hastening away. Some of you do not like to be reminded of it, and think it a killjoy. You try to get rid of the thought, and hide your head in the sand, and fancy that the rest of your body presents no mark to the archer's arrow. Now surely common sense says to all, that if there be some fact certain and plain and applying to you, which, if accepted, would profoundly modify your life, you ought to take it into account. And what I want you to do, dear friends, now, is to look in the face this fact, which you all acknowledge so utterly that some of you are ready to say, 'What was the use of coming to a chapel to hear that threadbare old thing dinned into my ears again?' and to take it into account in shaping your lives. Have you done so? Have you? Suppose a man that lived in a land habitually shaken by earthquakes were to say, 'I mean to ignore the fact; and I am going to build a house just as if there was not such a thing as an earthquake expected'; he would have it toppling about his ears very soon. Suppose a man upon the ice-slopes of the Alps was to say, 'I am going to ignore slipperiness and gravitation,' he would before long find himself, if there was any consciousness left in him, at the bottom of a precipice, bruised and bleeding. And suppose a man says, 'I am not going to take the fleetingness of the things of earth into account at all, but intend to live as if all things were to remain as they are'; what would become of him do you think? Is he a wise man or a fool? And is he you? He is some of you! 'So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.'

Then let me say to you, see that you take noble lessons out of these undeniable and all-important facts. There is one kind of lesson that I do not want you to take out of it. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' or, to put it into a more vulgar formula, 'A short life and a merry one.' The mere contemplation of the transiency of earthly things may, and often does, lend itself to very ignoble conclusions, and men draw from it the thought that, as life is short, they had better crowd into it as much of sensual enjoyment as they can.

'Gather ye roses while ye may' is a very common keynote, struck by poets of the baser sort. And it is a thought that influences some of us, I have little doubt. Or there may be another consideration, 'Make hay whilst the sun shines.' 'Hurry on your getting rich, because you have not very long to do it in'; or the like.

Now all that is supremely unworthy. The true lesson to be drawn is the plain, old one which it is never superfluous to shout into men's ears, until they have obeyed it—viz., 'Set not thine heart on that which is not; and which flieth away as an eagle towards heaven.' Do you, dear brother, see to it, that your roots go down through the gravel on the surface. Do you see to it that you dig deeper than that; and thrusting your hand, as it were, through the thin, silk-paper screen that stands between you and the Eternal, grasp the hand that you will find on the other side, waiting and ready to clasp you, and to hold you up.

When they build a new house in Rome they have to dig down through sometimes sixty or a hundred feet of rubbish that runs like water, the ruins of old temples and palaces, once occupied by men in the same flush of life in which we are now. We too have to dig down through ruins, until we get to the Rock and build there, and build secure. Withdraw your affections and your thoughts and your desires from the fleeting, and fix them on the permanent. If a captain takes anything but the pole-star for his fixed point he will lose his reckoning, and his ship will be on the reefs. If we take anything but God for our supreme delight and desire we shall perish.

Then let me say, too, let this thought stimulate us to crowd every moment, as full as it can be packed, with noble work and heavenly thoughts. These fleeting things are elastic, and you may put all but infinite treasure into them. Think of what the possibilities, for each of us, of this dying year were on the 1st of January; and of what the realisation has been by the 28th of December. So much that we could have done! so little that we have done! So many ripples of the river have passed, bearing no golden sand to pile upon the shore! 'We have been' is a sad word; but oh, the one sad word is, 'We might have been!' And, so, do you see to it that you fill time with that which is kindred to eternity, and make 'one day as a thousand years' in the elastic possibilities and realities of consecration and of service.

Further, let the thought help us to the conviction of the relative insignificance of all that can change. That will not spoil nor shade any real joy; rather it will add to it poignancy that prevents it from cloying or from becoming the enemy of our souls. But the thought will wondrously lighten the burden that we have to carry, and the tasks which we have to perform. 'But for a moment,' makes all light. There was an old rabbi, long ago, whose real name was all but lost, because everybody nick-named him 'Rabbi Thisalso.' The reason was because he had perpetually on his lips the saying about everything as it came, 'This also will pass.' He was a wise man. Let us go to his school and learn his wisdom.

## **II. Now Let Me Say A Word, 'Rock' Or The Glad Truth Of Faith.**

And it can only be a word, about the second of the thoughts here, which I designated as the Rock, or the glad truth of Faith.

We might have expected that John's antithesis to the world that passeth would have been the God that abides. But he does not so word his sentence, although the thought of the divine permanence underlies it. Rather over against the fleeting world he puts the abiding man who does the will of God.

Of course there is a very solemn sense in which all men, even they who have most exclusively lived for what they call the present, do last for ever, and in which their deeds do so too. After death is the judgment, and the issues of eternity depend upon the actions

of time; and every fleeting thought comes back to the hand that projected it, like the Australian savage's boomerang that, flung out, returns and falls at the feet of the thrower. But that is not what John means by 'abiding for ever.' He means something very much more blessed and lofty than that; and the following is the course of his thought. There is only one permanent Reality in the universe, and that is God. All else is shadow and He is the substance. All else was, is, and is not. He is the One who was, is, and is to come, the timeless and only permanent Being. The will of God is the permanent element in all changeful material things. And consequently he who does the will of God links himself with the Divine Eternity, and becomes partaker of that solemn and blessed Being which lives above mutation.

Obedience to God's will is the permanent element in human life. Whosoever humbly and trustfully seeks to mould his will after the divine will, and to bring God's will into practice in his doings, that man has pierced through the shadows and grasped the substance, and partakes of the Immortality which he adores and serves. Himself shall live for ever in the true life which is blessedness. His deeds shall live for ever when all that lifted itself in opposition to the Divine will shall be crushed and annihilated. They shall live in His own peaceful consciousness; they shall live in the blessed rewards which they shall bring to the doers. His habits will need no change.

What will you do when you are dead? You have to go into a world where there are no gossip and no housekeeping; no mills and no offices; no shops, no books; no colleges and no sciences to learn. What will you do there? 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' If you have done your housekeeping, and your weaving and spinning, and your book-keeping, and your buying and selling, and your studying, and your experimenting with a conscious reference to God, it is all right. That has made the act capable of eternity, and there will be no need for such a man to change. The material on which he works will change, but the inner substance of his life will be unaffected by the trivial change from earth to heaven. Whilst the endless ages roll he will be doing just what he was doing down here; only here he was playing with counters, and yonder he will be trusted with gold, and dominion over ten cities. To all other men the change that comes when earth passes from them, or they from it, is as when a trench is dug across a railway, into which the express goes with a smash, and there is an end. To the man who, in the trifles of time, has been obeying the will of God, and therefore subserving eternity and his interests there, the trench is bridged, and he will go on after he crosses it just as he did before, with the same purpose, the same desires, the same submission, and the same drinking into himself of the fulness of immortal life.

Brother, John tells us that obedience to the will of God brings permanence into our fleeting years. But how are we to obey the will of God? John tells us that the only way is by love. But how are we to love God? John tells us that the only way to love—which love is the only way to obedience—is by knowing and believing the love that God hath to us. But how are we to know that God hath love to us? John tells us that the only way to know the love of God, which is the only way of our loving Him, which in its turn is the only way to obedience, which again is the only way to permanence of life, is to believe in Jesus Christ and His propitiation for our sins. The river flows on for ever, but it sweeps round the base of the Rock of Ages. And in Him, by faith in His blood, we may find our sure refuge and eternal home.

## 1 John 3:1 The Love That Calls Us Sons

**'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God'—1 John 3:1.**

ONE or two points of an expository character will serve to introduce what else I have to say on these words.

The text is, I suppose, generally understood as if it pointed to the fact that we are called the sons of God as the great exemplification of the wonderfulness of His love. That is a perfectly possible view of the connection and meaning of the text. But if we are to translate with perfect accuracy we must render, not 'that we should be called,' but 'in order that we should be called the sons of God.' The meaning then is that the love bestowed is the means by which the design that we should be called His sons is accomplished. What John calls us to contemplate with wonder and gratitude is not only the fact of this marvellous love, but also the glorious end to which it has been given to us and works. There seems no reason for slurring over this meaning in favour of the more vague 'that' of our version. God gives His great and wonderful love in Jesus Christ, and all the gifts and powers which live in Him like fragrance in the rose. All this lavish bestowal of love, unspeakable as it is, may be regarded as having one great end, which God deems worthy of even such expenditure, namely, that men should become, in the deepest sense, His children. It is not so much to the contemplation of our blessedness in being sons, as to the devout gaze on the love which, by its wonderful process, has made it possible for us to be sons, that we are summoned here.

Again, you will find a remarkable addition to our text in the Revised Version—namely, 'and such we are.' Now these words come with a very great weight of manuscript authority, and of internal evidence. They are parenthetical, a kind of rapid 'aside' of the writer's, expressing his joyful confidence that he and his brethren are sons of God, not only in name, but in reality. They are the voice of personal assurance, the voice of the spirit 'by which we cry Abba, Father,' breaking in for a moment on the flow of the sentence, like an irrepressible, glad answer to the Father's call. With these explanations let us look at the words.

## **I. The Love That Is Given.**

We are called upon to come with our little vessels to measure the contents of the great ocean, to plumb with our short lines the infinite abyss, and not only to estimate the quantity but the quality of that love, which, in both respects, surpasses all our means of comparison and conception.

Properly speaking, we can do neither the one nor the other, for we have no line long enough to sound its depths, and no experience which will give us a standard with which to compare its quality. But all that we can do, John would have us do—that is, look and ever look at the working of that love till we form some not wholly inadequate idea of it.

We can no more 'behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us' than we can look with undimmed eyes right into the middle of the sun. But we can in some measure imagine the tremendous and beneficent forces that ride forth horsed on his beams to distances which the imagination faints in trying to grasp, and reach their journey's end unwearied and ready for their task as when it began. Here are we, ninety odd millions of miles from the centre of the system, yet warmed by its heat, lighted by its beams, and touched for good by its power in a thousand ways. All that has been going on for no one knows how many aeons. How mighty the Power which produces these effects! In like manner, who can gaze into the fiery depths of that infinite Godhead, into the ardours of that immeasurable, incomparable, inconceivable love? But we can look at and measure its activities. We can see what it does, and so can, in some degree, understand it, and feel that after all we have a measure for the Immeasurable, a comparison for the Incomparable, and can thus 'behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us.'

So we have to turn to the work of Christ, and especially to His death, if we would estimate the love of God. According to John's constant teaching, that is the great proof that God loves us. The most wonderful revelation to every heart of man of the depths of that Divine heart lies in the gift of Jesus Christ. The Apostle bids me 'behold what manner of love.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which shrinks from no sacrifice, but gives 'Him up to death for us all.' I turn to the Cross, and I see there a love which is evoked by no loveliness on my part, but comes from the depth of His own Infinite Being, who loves because He must, and who must because He is God. I turn to the Cross, and I see there manifested a love which sighs for recognition, which desires nothing of me but the repayment of my poor affection, and longs to see its own likeness in me. And I see there a love that will not be put away by sinfulness, and shortcomings, and evil, but pours its treasures on the unworthy, like sunshine on a dunghill. So, streaming through the darkness of eclipse, and speaking to me even in the awful silence in which the Son of Man died there for sin, I 'behold,' and I hear, the 'manner of love that the Father hath bestowed upon us,' stronger than death and sin, armed with all power, gentler than the fall of the dew, boundless and endless, in its measure measureless, in its quality transcendent—the love of God to me in Jesus Christ my Saviour.

In like manner we have to think, if we would estimate the 'manner of this love,' that through and in the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ there comes to us the gift of a divine life like His own. Perhaps it may be too great a refinement of interpretation; but it certainly does seem to me that that expression 'to bestow His love upon' us, is not altogether the same as 'to love us,' but that there is a greater depth in it. There may be some idea of that love itself being as it were infused into us, and not merely of its consequences or tokens being given to us; as Paul speaks of 'the love of God shed abroad in our hearts' by the spirit which is given to us. At all events this communication of divine life, which is at bottom divine love—for God's life is God's love—is His great gift to men.

Be that as it may, these two are the great tokens, consequences, and measures of God's love to us—the gift of Christ, and that which is the sequel and outcome thereof, the gift of the Spirit which is breathed into Christian spirits. These two gifts, which are one gift, embrace all that the world needs. Christ for us and Christ in us must both be taken into account if you would estimate the manner of the love that God has bestowed upon us.

We may gain another measure of the greatness of this love if we put an emphasis—which I dare say the writer did not intend—on one word of this text, and think of the love given to 'us,' such creatures as we are. Out of the depths we cry to Him. Not only by the voice of our supplications, but even when we raise no call of entreaty, our misery pleads with His merciful heart, and from the heights there comes upon our wretchedness and sin the rush of this great love, like a cataract, which sweeps away all our sins, and floods us with its own blessedness and joy. The more we know ourselves, the more wonderingly and thankfully shall we bow down our hearts before Him, as we measure His mercy by our unworthiness.

From all His works the same summons echoes. They all call us to see mirrored in them His loving care. But the Cross of Christ and the gift of a Divine Spirit cry aloud to every ear in tones of more beseeching entreaty and of more imperative command to 'behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.'

## **II. Look Next At The Sonship Which Is The Purpose Of His Given Love.**

It has often been noticed that the Apostle John uses for that expression 'the sons of God,' another word from that which his brother

Paul uses. John's phrase would perhaps be a little more accurately translated 'children of God,' whilst Paul, on the other hand, very seldom says 'children,' but almost always says 'sons.' Of course the children are sons and the sons are children, but still, the slight distinction of phrase is characteristic of the men, and of the different points of view from which they speak about the same thing. John's word lays stress on the children's kindred nature with their father and on their immature condition.

But without dwelling on that, let us consider this great gift and dignity of being children of God, which is the object that God has in view in all the lavish bestowment of His goodness upon us.

That end is not reached by God's making us men. Over and above that He has to send this great gift of His love, in order that the men whom He has made may become His sons. If you take the context here you will see very clearly that the writer draws a broad distinction between 'the sons of God' and 'the world' of men who do not comprehend them, and so far from being themselves sons, do not even know God's sons when they see them. And there is a deeper and solemn word still in the context. John thinks that men (within the range of light and revelation, at all events) are divided into two families—'the children of God and the children of the devil.' There are two families amongst men.

Thank God, the prodigal son in his rags amongst the swine, and lying by the swine-troughs in his filth and his husks, and his fever, is a son! No doubt about that! He has these three elements and marks of sonship that no man ever gets rid of: he is of a divine origin, he has a divine likeness in that he has got mind and will and spirit, and he is the object of a divine love.

The doctrine of the New Testament about the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of man does not in the slightest degree interfere with these three great truths, that all men, though the features of the common humanity may be almost battered out of recognition in them, are all children of God because He made them; that they are children of God because still there lives in them something of the likeness of the creative Father; and, blessed be His name! that they are all children of God because He loves and provides and cares for every one of them.

All that is blessedly and eternally true; but it is also true that there is a higher relation than that to which the name 'children of God' is more accurately given, and to which in the New Testament that name is confined. If you ask what that relation is, let me quote to you three passages in this Epistle which will answer the question. 'Whoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,' that is the first; 'Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God,' that is the second; 'Every one that loveth is born of God,' that is the third. Or to put them all into one expression which holds them all, in the great words of his prologue in the first chapter of John's Gospel you find this: 'To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' Believing in Christ with loving trust produces, and doing righteousness and loving the brethren, as the result of that belief, prove the fact of sonship in its highest and its truest sense.

What is implied in that great word by which the Almighty gives us a name and a place as of sons and daughters? Clearly, first, a communicated life, therefore, second, a kindred nature which shall be 'pure as He is pure,' and, third, growth to full maturity.

This sonship, which is no mere empty name, is the aim and purpose of God's dealings, of all the revelation of His love, and most especially of the great gift of His love in Christ. Has that purpose been accomplished in you? Have you ever looked at that great gift of love that God has given you on purpose to make you His child? If you have, has it made you one? Are you trusting to Jesus Christ, whom God has sent forth that we might receive the standing of sons in Him? Are you a child of God because a brother of that Saviour? Have you received the gift of a divine life through Him? My friend, remember the grim alternative! A child of God or a child of the devil! Bitter words, narrow words, uncharitable words—as people call them! And I believe, and therefore I am bound to say it, true words, which it concerns you to lay to heart.

### **III. Now, Still Further, Let Me Ask You To Look At The Glad Recognition Of This Sonship By The Child's Heart.**

I have already referred to the clause added in the Revised Version, 'and such we are.' As I said, it is a kind of 'aside,' in which John adds the Amen for himself and for his poor brothers and sisters toiling and moiling obscure among the crowds of Ephesus, to the great truth. He asserts his and their glad consciousness of the reality of the fact of their sonship, which they know to be no empty title. He asserts, too, the present possession of that sonship, realising it as a fact, amid all the commonplace vulgarities and carking cares and petty aims of life's little day. 'Such we are' is the 'Here am I, Father,' of the child answering the Father's call, 'My Son.'

He turns doctrine into experience. He is not content with merely having the thought in his creed, but his heart clasps it, and his whole nature responds to the great truth. I ask you, do you do that? Do not be content with hearing the truth, or even with assenting to it, and believing it in your understandings. The truth is nothing to you, unless you have made it your very own by faith. Do not be satisfied with the orthodox confession. Unless it has touched your heart and made your whole soul thrill with thankful gladness and quiet triumph, it is nothing to you. The mere belief of thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles is nothing; but when a man has a true heart-faith in Him, whom all articles are meant to make us know and love, then dogma becomes life, and the doctrine feeds the soul. Does it do so with you, my brother? Can you say, 'And such we are?'

Take another lesson. The Apostle was not afraid to say 'I know that I am a child of God.' There are many very good people, whose tremulous, timorous lips have never ventured to say 'I know.' They will say, 'Well, I hope,' or sometimes, as if that was not uncertain enough, they will put in an adverb or two, and say, 'I humbly hope that I am.' It is a far robuster kind of Christianity, a far truer one, ay, and a humbler one too, that throws all considerations of my own character and merits, and all the rest of that rubbish, clean behind me, and when God says, 'My son!' says 'My Father; and when God calls us His children, leaps up and gladly answers, 'And we are!' Do not be afraid of being too confident, if your confidence is built on God, and not on yourselves; but be afraid of being too diffident, and be afraid of having a great deal of self-righteousness masquerading under the guise of such a profound consciousness of your own unworthiness that you dare not call yourself a child of God. It is not a question of worthiness or unworthiness. It is a question, in the first place, and mainly, of the truth of Christ's promise and the sufficiency of Christ's Cross; and in a very subordinate degree of anything belonging to you.

#### **IV. We Have Here, Finally, The Loving And Devout Gaze Upon This Wonderful Love.**

'Behold,' at the beginning of my text, is not the mere exclamation which you often find both in the Old and in the New Testaments, which is simply intended to emphasise the importance of what follows, but it is a distinct command to do the thing, to look, and ever to look, and to look again, and live in the habitual and devout contemplation of that infinite and wondrous love of God.

I have but two remarks to make about that, and the one is this, that such a habit of devout and thankful meditation upon the love of God, as manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of the Divine Spirit, joined with the humble, thankful conviction that I am a child of God thereby, lies at the foundation of all vigorous and happy Christian life. How can a thing which you do not touch with your hands and see with your eyes produce any effect upon you, unless you think about it? How can a religion which can only influence through thought and emotion do anything in you, or for you, unless you occupy your thoughts and your feelings with it? It is sheer nonsense to suppose it possible. Things which do not appeal to sense are real to us, and indeed we may say, are at all for us, only as we think about them. If you had a dear friend in Australia, and never thought about him, he would even cease to be dear, and it would be all one to you as if he were dead. If he were really dear to you, you would think about him. We may say (though, of course, there are other ways of looking at the matter) that, in a very intelligible sense, the degree in which we think about Christ, and in Him behold the love of God, is a fairly accurate measure of our Christianity.

Now will you apply that sharp test to yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that, and decide how much of your life was pagan, and how much of it was Christian? You will never make anything of your professed Christianity, you will never get a drop of happiness or any kind of good out of it; it will neither be a strength nor a joy nor a defence to you unless you make it your habitual occupation to 'behold the manner of love'; and look and look and look until it warms and fills your heart.

The second remark is that we cannot keep that great sight before the eye of our minds without effort. You will have very resolutely to look away from something else if, amid all the dazzling gauds of earth, you are to see the far-off lustre of that heavenly love. Just as timorous people in a thunder-storm will light a candle that they may not see the lightning, so many Christians have their hearts filled with the twinkling light of some miserable tapers of earthly care and pursuits, which, though they be dim and smoky, are bright enough to make it hard to see the silent depths of Heaven, though it blaze with a myriad stars. If you hold a sixpence close enough up to the pupil of your eye, it will keep you from seeing the sun. And if you hold the world close to mind and heart, as many of you do, you will only see, round the rim of it, the least tiny ring of the overlapping love of God. What the world lets you see you will see, and the world will take care that it will let you see very little—not enough to do you any good, not enough to deliver you from its chains. Wrench yourselves away, my brethren, from the absorbing contemplation of Birmingham jewellery and paste, and look at the true riches. If you have ever had some glimpses of that wondrous love, and have ever been drawn by it to cry, 'Abba, Father,' do not let the trifles which belong not to your true inheritance fill your thoughts, but renew the vision, and by determined turning away of your eyes from beholding vanity, look off from the things that are seen, that you may gaze upon the things that are not seen, and chiefest among them, upon the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have never looked on that love, I beseech you now to turn aside and see this great sight. Do not let that brightness burn unnoticed while your eyes are fixed on the ground, like the gaze of men absorbed in gold digging, while a glorious sunshine is flushing the eastern sky. Look to the unspeakable, incomparable, immeasurable love of God, in giving up His Son to death for us all. Look and be saved. Look and live. 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on you,' and, beholding, you will become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

## **1 John 3:2 The Unrevealed Future Of The Sons Of God**

**Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.'—1 John 3:2.**

I HAVE hesitated, as you may well believe, whether I should take these words for a text. They seem so far to surpass anything that



can be said concerning them, and they cover such immense fields of dim thought, that one may well be afraid lest one should spoil them by even attempting to dilate on them. And yet they are so closely connected with the words of the previous verse, which formed the subject of my last sermon, that I felt as if my work were only half done unless I followed that sermon with this.

The present is the prophet of the future, says my text: 'Now we are the sons of God, and' (not 'but') 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Some men say, 'Ah! now are we, but we shall be—nothing!' John does not think so. John thinks that if a man is a son of God he will always be so. There are three things in this verse, how, if we are God's children, our sonship makes us quite sure of the future; how our sonship leaves us largely in ignorance of the future, but how our sonship flings one bright, all-penetrating beam of light on the only important thing about the future, the dear vision of and the perfect likeness to Him who is our life. 'Now are we the sons of God,' therefore we shall be. We are the sons; we do not know what we shall be. We are the sons, and therefore, though there be a great circumference of blank ignorance as to our future, yet, blessed be His name, there is a great light burning in the middle of it! 'We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

### **I. The Fact Of Sonship Makes Us Quite Sure Of The Future.**

I am not concerned to appraise the relative value of the various arguments and proofs, or, it may be, presumptions, which may recommend the doctrine of a future life to men, but it seems to me that the strongest reasons for believing in another world are these two:—first, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and has gone up there; and, second, that a man here can pray, and trust, and love God, and feel that he is His child. As was noticed in the preceding sermon, the word rendered 'sons' might more accurately be translated 'children.' If so, we may fairly say, 'We are the children of God now—and if we are children now, we shall be grown up some time.' Childhood leads to maturity. The infant becomes a man.

That is to say, he that here, in an infantile way, is stammering with his poor, unskilled lips the name 'Abba! Father! will one day come to speak it fully. He that dimly trusts, he that partially loves, he that can lift up his heart in some more or less unworthy prayer and aspiration after God, in all these emotions and exercises, has the great proof in himself that such emotions, such relationship, can never be put an end to. The roots have gone down through the temporal, and have laid hold of the Eternal. Anything seems to me to be more credible than that a man who can look up and say, 'My Father,' shall be crushed by what befalls the mere outside of him; anything seems to me to be more believable than to suppose that the nature which is capable of these elevating emotions and aspirations of confidence and hope, which can know God and yearn after Him, and can love Him, is to be wiped out like a gnat by the finger of Death. The material has nothing to do with these feelings, and if I know myself, in however feeble and imperfect a degree, to be the son of God, I carry in the conviction the very pledge and seal of eternal life. That is a thought 'whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that it was born for immortality.' 'We are the sons of God,' therefore we shall always be so, in all worlds, and whatsoever may become of this poor wrappage in which the soul is shrouded.

We may notice, also, that not only the fact of our sonship avails to assure us of immortal life, but that also the very form which our religious experience takes points in the same direction.

As I said, infancy is the prophecy of maturity. 'The child is father of the man'; the bud foretells the flower. In the same way, the very imperfections of the Christian life, as it is seen here, argue the existence of another state, where all that is here in the germ shall be fully matured, and all that is here incomplete shall attain the perfection which alone will correspond to the power that works in us. Think of the ordinary Christian character. The beginning is there, and evidently no more than the beginning. As one looks at the crudity, the inconsistencies, the failings, the feebleness of the Christian life of others, or of oneself, and then thinks that such a poor, imperfect exhibition is all that so divine a principle has been able to achieve in this world, one feels that there must be a region and a time where we shall be all which the transforming power of God's spirit can make us. The very inconsistencies of Christians are as strong reasons for believing in the perfect life of Heaven as their purities and virtues are. We have a right to say mighty principles are at work upon Christian souls—the power of the Cross, the power of love issuing in obedience, the power of an indwelling Spirit; and is this all that these great forces are going to effect on human character? Surely a seed so precious and divine is somewhere, and at some time, to bring forth something better than these few poor, half-developed flowers, something with more lustrous petals and richer fragrance. The plant is clearly an exotic; does not its obviously struggling growth here tell of warmer suns and richer soil, where it will be at home?

There is a great deal in every man, and most of all in. Christian men and women, which does not fit this present. All other creatures correspond in their capacities to the place where they are set down; and the world in which the plant or the animal lives, the world of their surroundings, stimulates to activity all their powers. But that is not so with a man. 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests.' They fit exactly, and correspond to their 'environment.' But a man!—there is an enormous amount of waste faculty about him if he is only to live in this world. There are large capacities in every nature, and most of all in a Christian nature, which are like the packages that emigrants take with them, marked 'Not wanted on the voyage.' These go down into the hold, and they are only of use after landing in the new world. If I am a son of God I have much in me that is 'not wanted on the voyage,' and the more I grow into His likeness, the more I am thrown out of harmony with the things round about me, in proportion as I am brought into harmony with

the things beyond.

That consciousness of belonging to another order of things, because I am God's child, will make me sure that when I have done with earth, the tie that binds me to my Father will not be broken, but that I shall go home, where I shall be fully and for ever all that I so imperfectly began to be here, where all gaps in my character shall be filled up, and the half-completed circle of my heavenly perfectness shall grow like the crescent moon, into full-orbed beauty. 'Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature' shall be able to break that tie, and banish the child from the conscious grasp of a Father's hand. Dear brother and sister, can you say, 'Now am I a child of God!' Then you may patiently and peacefully front that dim future.

## **II. Now I Come To The Second Point, Namely, That We Remain Ignorant Of Much In That Future.**

That happy assurance of the love of God resting upon me, and making me His child through Jesus Christ, does not dissipate all the darkness which lies on that beyond. 'We are the sons of God, and,' just because we are, 'it does not yet appear what we shall be.' Or, as the words are rendered in the Revised Version, 'it is not yet made manifest what we shall be.'

The meaning of that expression, 'It doth not yet appear,' or, 'It is not made manifest,' may be put into very plain words. John would simply say to us, 'There has never been set forth before men's eyes in this earthly life of ours an example, or an instance, of what the sons of God are to be in another state of being.' And so, because men have never had the instance before them, they do not know much about that state.

In some sense there has been a manifestation through the life of Jesus Christ. Christ has died; Christ is risen again. Christ has gone about amongst men upon earth after Resurrection. Christ has been raised to the right hand of God, and sits there in the glory of the Father. So far it has been manifested what we shall be. But the risen Christ is not the glorified Christ, and although He has set forth before man's senses irrefragably the fact of another life, and to some extent given glimpses and gleams of knowledge with regard to certain portions of it, I suppose that the 'glorious body' of Jesus Christ was not assumed by Him till the cloud 'received Him out of their sight,' nor, indeed, could it be assumed while He moved among the material realities of this world, and did eat and drink before them. So that, while we thankfully recognise that Christ's Resurrection and Ascension have 'brought life and immortality to light,' we must remember that it is the fact, and not the manner of the fact, which they make plain; and that, even after His example, it has not been manifested what is the body of glory which He now wears, and therefore it has not yet been manifested what we shall be when we are fashioned after its likeness.

There has been no manifestation, then, to sense, or to human experience, of that future, and, therefore, there is next to no knowledge about it. You can only know facts when the facts are communicated. You may speculate and argue and guess as much as you like, but that does not thin the darkness one bit. The unborn child has no more faculty or opportunity for knowing what the life upon earth is like than man here, in the world, has for knowing that life beyond. The chrysalis' dreams about what it would be when it was a butterfly would be as reliable as a man's imagination of what a future life will be.

So let us feel two things:—Let us be thankful that we do not know, for the ignorance is the sign of the greatness; and then, let us be sure that just the very mixture of knowledge and ignorance which we have about another world is precisely the food which is most fitted to nourish imagination and hope. If we had more knowledge, supposing it could be given, of the conditions of that future life, it would lose some of its power to attract. Ignorance does not always prevent the occupation of the mind with a subject. Blank ignorance does; but ignorance, shot with knowledge like a tissue which, when you hold it one way seems all black, and when you tilt it another, seems golden, stimulates desire, hope, and imagination. So let us thankfully acquiesce in the limited knowledge.

Fools can ask questions which wise men cannot answer, and will not ask. There are questions which, sometimes, when we are thinking about our own future, and sometimes when we see dear ones go away into the mist, become to us almost torture. It is easy to put them; it is not so easy to say: 'Thank God, we cannot answer them yet!' If we could it would only be because the experience of earth was adequate to measure the experience of Heaven; and that would be to bring the future down to the low levels of this present. Let us be thankful then that so long as we can only speak in language derived from the experiences of earth, we have yet to learn the vocabulary of Heaven. Let us be thankful that our best help to know what we shall be is to reverse much of what we are, and that the loftiest and most positive declarations concerning the future lie in negatives like these:—'I saw no temple therein.' 'There shall be no night there.' 'There shall be no curse there.' 'There shall be no more sighing nor weeping, for the former things are passed away.'

The white mountains keep their secret well; not until we have passed through the black rocks that make the throat of the pass on the summit, shall we see the broad and shining plains beyond the hills. Let us be thankful for, and own the attractions of, the knowledge that is wrapt in ignorance, and thankfully say, 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not appear what we shall be!'

## **III. Now I Must Be Very Brief With The Last Thought That Is Here.**

Now I must be very brief with the last thought that is here, and I am the less unwilling to be so because we cannot travel one inch beyond the revelations of the Book in reference to the matter. The thought is this, that our sonship flings one all-penetrating beam of light on that future, in the knowledge of our perfect vision and perfect likeness. 'we know that when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

'When He shall be manifested'—to what period does that refer? It seems most natural to take the manifestation here as being the same as that spoken of only a verse or two before. 'And now, little children, abide in Him, and when He shall be manifested, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28). That 'coming' then, is the 'manifestation' of Christ; and it is at the period of His coming in His glory that His servants 'shall be like Him, and see Him as He is.' Clearly then it is Christ whom we shall see and become like, and not the Father invisible.

To behold Christ will be the condition and the means of growing like Him. That way of transformation by beholding, or of assimilation by the power of loving contemplation, is the blessed way of ennobling character, which even here, and in human relationships, has often made it easy to put off old vices and to clothe the soul with unwonted grace. Men have learned to love and gaze upon some fair character, till some image of its beauty has passed into their ruder natures. To love such and to look on them has been an education. The same process is exemplified in more sacred regions, when men here learn to love and look upon Christ by faith, and so become like Him, as the sun stamps a tiny copy of its blazing sphere on the eye that looks at it. But all these are but poor, far-off hints and low preludes of the energy with which that blessed vision of the glorified Christ shall work on the happy hearts that behold Him, and of the completeness of the likeness to Him which will be printed in light upon their faces.

It matters not, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, if to all the questionings of our own hearts we have this for our all-sufficient answer, 'We shall be like Him.' As good old Richard Baxter has it:—

**'My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But, 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be like Him!'**

'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.' There is no need to go into the dark and difficult questions about the manner of that vision. He Himself prayed, in that great intercessory prayer, 'Father, I will that these whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory.' That vision of the glorified manhood of Jesus Christ—certain, direct, clear, and worthy, whether it comes through sense or through thought—to behold that vision is all the sight of God that men in Heaven ever will have. And through the millenniums of a growing glory, Christ as He is will be the manifested Deity. Likeness will clear sight, and clearer sight will increase likeness. So in blessed interchange these two will be cause and effect, and secure the endless progress of the redeemed spirit towards the vision of Christ which never can behold all His Infinite Fulness, and the likeness' to Christ which can never reproduce all his Infinite Beauty.

As a bit of glass when the light strikes it flashes into sunny glory, or as every poor little muddy pool on the pavement, when the sunbeams fall upon it, has the sun mirrored even in its shallow mud, so into your poor heart and mine the vision of Christ's glory will come, moulding and transforming us to its own beauty. With unveiled face reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, we 'shall be changed into the same image.' 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

Dear brethren, all begins with this, love Christ and trust Him and you are a child of God! 'And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

## **1 John 3:3 The Purifying Influence Of Hope**

**“And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”—1 John 3:3.**

THAT is a very remarkable 'and' with which this verse begins. The Apostle has just been touching the very heights of devout contemplation, soaring away up into dim regions where it is very hard to follow,—'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

And now, without a pause, and linking his thoughts together by a simple 'and,' he passes from the unimaginable splendours of the Beatific Vision to the plainest practical talk. Mysticism has often soared so high above the earth that it has forgotten to preach righteousness, and therein has been its weak point. But here is the most mystical teacher of the New Testament insisting on plain morality as vehemently as his friend James could have done.

The combination is very remarkable. Like the eagle he rises, and like the eagle, with the impetus gained from his height, he drops

right down on the earth beneath!

And that is not only a characteristic of St. John's teaching, but it is a characteristic of all the New Testament morality—its highest revelations are intensely practical. Its light is at once set to work, like the sunshine that comes ninety millions of miles in order to make the little daisies open their crimson-tipped petals; so the profoundest things that the Bible has to say are said to you and me, not that we may know only, but that knowing we may do, and do because we are.

So John, here: 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' 'And'—a simple coupling-iron for two such thoughts—'every man that hath this hope in Him'—that is, in Christ, not in himself, as we sometimes read it—'every man that hath this hope,' founded on Christ, 'purifies himself even as He is pure.'

The thought is a very simple one, though sometimes it is somewhat mistakenly apprehended. Put into its general form it is just this:—If you expect, and expecting, hope to be like Jesus Christ yonder, you will be trying your best to be like Him here. It is not the mere purifying influence of hope that is talked about, but it is the specific influence of this one hope, the hope of ultimate assimilation to Christ leading to strenuous efforts, each a partial resemblance of Him, here and now. And that is the subject I want to say a word or two about now.

### **I. First, Then, Notice The Principle That Is Here, Which Is The Main Thing To Be Insisted Upon, Namely, If We Are To Be Pure, We Must Purify Ourselves.**

There are two ways of getting like Christ, spoken about in the context. One is the blessed way, that is more appropriate for the higher Heaven, the way of assimilation and transformation by beholding—'If we see Him' we shall be 'like Him.' That is the blessed method of the Heavens. Yes, but even here on earth it may to some extent be realised! Love always breeds likeness. And there is such a thing, here on earth and now, as gazing upon Christ with an intensity of affection, and simplicity of trust, and rapture of aspiration, and ardour of desire which shall transform us in some measure into His own likeness. John is an example of that for us. It was a true instinct that made the old painters always represent him as like the Master that he sat beside, even in face. Where did John get his style from? He got it by much meditating upon Christ's words. The disciple caught the method of the Master's speech, and to some extent the manner of the Master's vision.

And so he himself stands before us as an instance of the possibility, even on earth, of this calm, almost passive process, and most blessed and holiest method of getting like the Master, by simple gazing, which is the gaze of love and longing.

But, dear brethren, the law of our lives forbids that that should be the only way in which we grow like Christ. 'First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' was never meant to be the exhaustive, all-comprehensive statement of the method of Christian progress. You and I are not vegetables; and the Parable of the Seed is only one side of the truth about the method of Christian growth. The very word 'purify' speaks to us of another condition; it implies impurity, it implies a process which is more than contemplation, it implies the reversal of existing conditions, and not merely the growth upwards to unattained conditions.

And so growth is not all that Christian men need; they need excision, they need casting out of what is in them; they need change as well as growth. 'Purifying' they need because they are impure, and growth is only half the secret of Christian progress.

Then there is the other consideration, viz., if there is to be this purifying it must be done by myself. 'Ah!' you say, 'done by yourself? That is not evangelical teaching.' Well, let us see. Take two or three verses out of this Epistle which at first sight seem to be contradictory of this. Take the very first that bears on the subject:—'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 4:9). 'He that abideth in Him sinneth not' (1 John 3:6). 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith' (1 John 5:4).

Now if you put all these passages together, and think about the general effect of them, it comes to this: that our best way of cleansing ourselves is by keeping firm hold of Jesus Christ and of the cleansing powers that lie in Him. To take a very homely illustration—soap and water wash your hands clean, and what you have to do is simply to rub the soap and water on to the hand, and bring them into contact with the foulness. You cleanse yourselves. Yes! because without the friction there would not be the cleansing. But is it you, or is it the soap, that does the work? Is it you or the water that makes your hands clean? And so when God comes and says, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings, your hands are full of blood,' He says in effect, 'Take the cleansing that I give you and rub it in, and apply it: and your flesh will become as the flesh of a little child, and you shall be clean.'

That is to say, the very deepest word about Christian effort of self-purifying is this—keep close to Jesus Christ. You cannot sin as long as you hold His hand. To have Him with you;—I mean by that to have the thoughts directed to Him, the love turning to Him, the will submitted to Him, Him consciously with us in the day's work. To have communion with Jesus Christ is like bringing an atmosphere round about us in which all evil will die. If you take a fish out of water and bring it up into the upper air, it writhes and gasps, and is dead presently; and our evil tendencies and sins, drawn up out of the muddy depths in which they live, and brought

up into that pure atmosphere of communion with Jesus Christ, are sure to shrivel and to die, and to disappear. We kill all evil by fellowship with the Master. His presence in our lives, by our communion with Him, is like the watchfire that the traveller lights at night—it keeps all the wild beasts of prey away from the fold.

Christ's fellowship is our cleansing, and the first and main thing that we have to do in order to make ourselves pure is to keep ourselves in union with Him, in whom inhere and abide all the energies that cleanse men's souls. Take the unbleached calico and spread it out on the green grass, and let the blessed sunshine come down upon it, and sprinkle it with fair water; and the grass and the moisture and the sunshine will do all the cleansing, and it will glitter in the light, 'so as no fuller on earth can white it.'

So cleansing is keeping near Jesus Christ. But it is no use getting the mill-race from the stream into your works unless you put wheels in its way to drive. And our holding ourselves in fellowship with the Master in that fashion is not all that we have to do. There have to be distinct and specific efforts, constantly repeated, to subdue and suppress individual acts of transgression. We have to fight against evil, sin by sin. We have not the thing to do all at once; we have to do it in detail. It is a war of outposts, like the last agonies of that Franco-Prussian war, when the Emperor had abdicated, and the country was really conquered, and Paris had yielded, but yet all over the face of the land combats had to be carried on.

So it is with us. Holiness is not feeling; it is character. You do not get rid of your sins by the act of divine amnesty only. You are not perfect because you say you are, and feel as if you were, and think you are. God does not make any man pure in his sleep. His cleansing does not dispense with fighting, but makes victory possible.

Then, dear brethren, lay to heart this, as the upshot of the whole matter: First of all, let us turn to Him from whom all the cleansing comes; and then, moment by moment, remember that it is our work to purify ourselves by the strength and the power that is given to us by the Master.

## **II. The Second Thought Here Is This:**

This purifying of ourselves is the link or bridge between the present and the future.—'Now are we the sons of God,' says John in the context. That is the pier upon the one side of the gulf. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He is made manifest we shall be like Him.' That is the pier on the other. How are the two to be connected? There is only one way by which the present sonship will blossom and fruit into the future perfect likeness, and that is,—if we throw across the gulf, by God's help day by day here, that bridge of our effort after growing likeness to Himself, and purity therefrom.

That is plain enough, I suppose. To speak in somewhat technical terms, the 'law of continuity' that we hear so much about, runs on between earth and Heaven; which, being translated into plain English, is but this—that the act of passing from the limitations and conditions of this transitory life into the solemnities and grandeurs of that future does not alter a man's character, though it may intensify it. It does not make him different from what he was, though it may make him more of what he was, whether its direction be good or bad.

You take a stick and thrust it into water; and because the rays of light pass from one medium to another of a different density, they are refracted and the stick seems bent; but take the human life out of the thick, coarse medium of earth and lift it up into the pure rarefied air of Heaven, and there is no refraction; it runs straight on. Straight on! The given direction continues; and in whatever direction my face is turned when I die, thither my face will be turned when I live again.

Do not you fancy that there is any magic in coffins and graves and shrouds to make men different from their former selves. The continuity runs clean on, the rail goes without a break, though it goes through the Mont Cenis tunnel; and on the one side is the cold of the North, and on the other the sunny South. The man is the same man through death and beyond.

So the one link between sonship here and likeness to Christ hereafter is this link of present, strenuous effort to become like Him day by day in personal purity. For there is another reason, on which I need not dwell, viz., unless there be this daily effort on our part to become like Jesus Christ by personal purity, we shall not be able to 'see Him as He is.' Death will take a great many veils off men's hearts. It will reveal to them a great deal that they do not know, but it will not give the faculty of beholding the glorified Christ in such fashion as that the beholding will mean transformation. 'Every eye shall see Him,' but it is conceivable that a spirit shall be so immersed in self-love and in godlessness that the vision of Christ shall be repellent and not attractive; shall have no transforming and no gladdening power. And I beseech you to remember that about that vision, as about the vision of God Himself, the principle stands true; it is 'the pure in heart that shall see God' in Christ. And the change from life to the life beyond will not necessarily transform into the image of His dear Son. You make a link between the present and the future by cleansing your hands and your hearts, through faith in the cleansing power of Christ, and direct effort at holiness.

## **III. Now I Must Briefly Add Finally:**

That this self-cleansing of which I have been speaking is the offspring and outcome of that 'hope' in my text. It is the child of hope.

Hope is by no means an active faculty generally. As the poets have it, she may 'smile and wave her golden hair'; but she is not in the way of doing much work in the world. And it is not the mere fact of hope that generates this effort; it is, as I have been trying to show you, a certain kind of hope—the hope of being like Jesus Christ when 'we see Him as He is.'

I have only two things to say about this matter, and one of them is this: of course, such strenuous effort of purity will only be the result of such a hope as that, because such a hope will fight against one of the greatest of all the enemies of our efforts after purity. There is nothing that makes a man so down-hearted in his work of self-improvement as the constant and bitter experience that it seems to be all of no use; that he is making so little progress; that with immense pains, like a snail creeping up a wall, he gets up, perhaps, an inch or two, and then all at once he drops down, and further down than he was before he started.

Slowly we manage some little, patient self-improvement; gradually, inch by inch and bit by bit, we may be growing better, and then there comes some gust and outburst of temptation; and the whole painfully reclaimed soil gets covered up by an avalanche of mud and stones, that we have to remove slowly, barrow-load by barrow-load. And then we feel that it is all of no use to strive, and we let circumstances shape us, and give up all thoughts of reformation.

To such moods then there comes, like an angel from Heaven, that holy, blessed message, 'Cheer up, man! "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." 'Every inch that you make now will tell then, and it is not all of no use. Set your heart to the work, it is a work that will be blessed and will prosper.

Again, here is a test for all you Christian people, who say that you look to Heaven with hope as to your home and rest.

A great deal of the religious contemplation of a future state is pure sentimentality, and like all pure sentimentality is either immoral or non-moral. But here the two things are brought into clear juxtaposition, the bright hope of Heaven and the hard work done here below. Now is that what the gleam and expectation of a future life does for you?

This is the-only time in John's Epistle that he speaks about hope. The good man, living so near Christ, finds that the present, with its 'abiding in Him,' is enough for his heart. And though he was the Seer of the Apocalypse, he has scarcely a word to say about the future in this letter of his, and when he does it is for a simple and intensely practical purpose, in order that he may enforce on us the teaching of labouring earnestly in purifying ourselves.

My brother, is that your type of Christianity? Is that the kind of inspiration that comes to you from the hope that steals in upon you in your weary hours, when sorrows, and cares, and changes, and loss, and disappointments, and hard work weigh you down, and you say, 'It would be blessed to pass hence'? Does it set you harder at work than anything else can do? Is it all utilised? Or if I might use such an illustration, is it like the electricity of the Aurora Borealis, that paints your winter sky with vanishing, useless splendours of crimson and blue? or have you got it harnessed to your tramcars, lighting your houses, driving sewing-machines, doing practical work in your daily life? Is the hope of Heaven, and of being like Christ, a thing that stimulates and stirs us every moment to heroisms of self-surrender and to strenuous martyrdom of self-cleansing?

All is gathered up into the one lesson. First, let us go to that dear Lord whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and let us say to Him, 'Purge me and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' And then, receiving into our hearts the powers that purify, in His love and His sacrifice and His life, 'having these promises' and these possessions, 'Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

## 1 John 3:7 Practical Righteousness

**'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous.'**—1 John 3:7.

THE popular idea of the Apostle John is strangely unlike the real man. He is supposed to be the gentle Apostle of Love, the mystic amongst the Twelve. He is that, but he was the 'son of thunder' before he was the Apostle of Love, and he did not drop the first character when he attained the second. No doubt his central thought was, 'God is Love'; no doubt that thought had refined and assimilated his character, but the love which he believed and the love which he exercised were neither of them facile feebleness, but strong and radiant with an awful purity. None of the New Testament writers proclaims a more austere morality than does John. And just because he loved the Love and the Light, he hated and loathed the darkness. He can thunder and lighten when needful, and he shows us that the true divine love in a man recoils from its opposite as passionately as it cleaves to God and good.

Again, John is, par excellence, the mystic of the New Testament, always insisting on the direct communion which every soul may have with God, which is the essence of wholesome mysticism. Now that type of thinking has often in its raptures forgotten plain, pedestrian morality; but John never commits that error. He never soars so high as to lose sight of the flat earth below; and whilst he is always inviting us and enjoining us to dwell in God and abide in Christ, with equal persistence and force he is preaching to us the plainest duties of elementary morality.

He illustrates this moral earnestness in my text. The 'little children' for whom he was so affectionately solicitous were in danger, either from teachers or from the tendencies native in us all, to substitute something else for plain, righteous conduct; and the Apostle lovingly appeals to them with his urgent declaration, that the only thing which shows a man to be righteous—that is to say, a disciple of Christ—is his daily life, in conformity with Christ's commands. The errors of these ancient Asiatics live to-day in new forms, but still substantially the same. And they are as hard to kill amongst English Nonconformists like us as they were amongst Asiatic Christians nineteen centuries ago.

### **I. So Let Me Try Just To Insist, First Of All, On That Thought That Doing Righteousness Is The One Test Of Being A Christian.**

Now that word 'righteousness' is a theological word, and by much usage the lettering has got to be all but obliterated upon it; and it is worn smooth like sixpences that go from pocket to pocket. Therefore I want, before I go further, to make this one distinct point, that the New Testament righteousness is no theological, cloistered, peculiar kind of excellence, but embraces within its scope 'whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are fair, whatsoever things are of good report'; all that the world calls virtue, all which the world has combined to praise. There are countries on the earth which are known by different names to their inhabitants and to foreigners. The 'righteousness' of the New Testament, though it embraces a great deal more, includes within its map all the territories which belong to morality or to virtue. The three words cover the same ground, though one of them covers more than the other two. The New Testament 'righteousness' differs from the moralist's morality, or the world's virtue, in its scope, inasmuch as it includes our relations to God as well as to men; it differs in its perspective, inasmuch as it exalts some types of excellence that the world pooh-poohs, and pulls down some that the world hallelujahs and adulates; it strips the fine feathers of approving words off some vices which masquerade as virtues. It casts round the notion of duty, of morality, of virtue, a halo, and it touches it with emotion. Christianity does with the dictates of the natural conscience what we might figure as being the leading out of some captive virgin in white, from the darkness into the sunshine, and the turning of her face up to heaven, which illuminates it with a new splendour, and invests her with a new attractiveness. But all that any man rightly includes in his notion of the things that are 'of good report' is included in this theological word, righteousness, which to some of you seems so wrapped in mists, and so far away from daily life.

I freely confess that in very many instances the morality of the moralist has outshone the righteousness of the Christian. Yes! and I have seen canoe-paddles carved by South Sea Islanders with no better tools than an oyster-shell and a sharp fish-bone, which in the minuteness and delicacy of their work, as well as in the truth and taste of their pattern, might put to shame the work of carvers with better tools. But that is not the fault of the tools; it is the fault of the carvers. And so, whilst we acknowledge that Christian people have but poorly represented to the world what Christ and Christ's apostles meant by righteousness, I reiterate that the righteousness of the gospel is the morality of the world plus a great deal more.

That being understood, let me remind you of two or three ways in which this great truth of the text is obscured to us, and in some respects contradicted, in the practice of many professing Christians. First, let me say my text insists upon this, that the conduct, not the creed, makes the Christian. There is a continual tendency on our part, as there was with these believers in Asia Minor long ago, to substitute the mere acceptance, especially the orthodox acceptance, of certain great fundamental Christian truths for Christianity. A man may believe thirty-nine or thirty-nine thousand Articles without the smallest intellectual drawback, and not be one whit nearer being a Christian than if he did not believe one of them. For faith, which is the thing that makes a man a Christian to begin with, is not assent, but trust. And there is a whole gulf, wide enough to drown a world in, between the two attitudes of mind. On the one side of the gulf is salvation, on the other side of the gulf there may be loss. Of course, I know that it is hard, though I do not believe it is impossible, to erect the structure of a saving faith on a very, very imperfect intellectual apprehension of Scripture truth. That has nothing to do with my present point. What I am saying is that, unless you erect that structure of a faith which is an act of your will and of your whole nature, and not the mere assent of your understanding, upon your belief, your belief is impotent, and is of no use at all, and you might as well not have it.

What is the office of our creed in regard to our conduct? To give us principles, to give us motives, to give us guidance, to give us weapons. If it does these things then it does its work. If it lies in our heads a mere acceptance of certain propositions, it is just as useless and as dead as the withered seeds that rattle inside a dried poppy-head in the autumn winds. You are meant to begin with accepting truth, and then you are meant to take that truth as being a power in your lives that shall shape your conduct. To know, and there an end, is enough in matters of mere science, but in matters of religion and in matters of morality or righteousness knowing is only the first step in the process, and we are made to know in order that, knowing, we may do.

But some professing Christians seem to have their natures built, like ocean-going steamers, with water-tight compartments, on the one side of which they keep their creed, and there is no kind of communication between that and the other side where their conduct is originated. 'Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Again, my text suggests conduct and not emotion. Now there is a type of Christian life which is more attractive in appearance than

that of the hard, fossilised, orthodox believer—viz., the warmly emotional and fervent Christian. But that type, all experience shows, has a pit dug close beside it into which it is apt to fall. For there is a strange connection between emotional Christianity and a want of straightforwardness in daily business life, and of self-control and government of the appetites and the senses. That has been sadly shown, over and over again, and if we had time one could easily point to the reasons in human nature, and its strange contexture, why it should be so. Now I am not disparaging emotion—God forbid—for I believe that to a very large extent the peculiarity of Christian teaching is just this, that it does bring emotion to bear upon the hard grind of daily duty. But for all that, I am bound to say that this is a danger which, in this day, by reason of certain tendencies in our popular Christianity, is a very real one, and that you will find people gushing in religious enthusiasm, and then going away to live very questionable, and sometimes very mean, and sometimes even very gross and sensual lives. The emotion is meant to spring from the creed, and it is meant to be the middle term between the creed and the conduct. Why, we have learnt to harness electricity to our tramcars, and to make it run our messages, and light our homes, and that is like what we have to do with the emotion without which a man's Christianity will be a poor, scraggy thing. It is a good servant; it is a bad master. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you gush. You do not show yourselves to be Christians because you can talk fervidly and feel deeply. Raptures are all very well, but what we want is the grind of daily righteousness, and doing little things because of the fear and the love of the Lord.

May I say again, my text suggests conduct, and not verbal worship. You and I, in our adherence to a simpler, less ornate and aesthetic form of devotion than prevails in the great Episcopal churches, are by no means free from the danger which, in a more acute form, besets them, of substituting participation in external acts of worship for daily righteousness of life *Laborare est orare*—to work is to pray. That is true with explanations, commentaries, and limitations. But I wonder how many people there are who sing hymns which breathe aspirations and wishes that their whole daily life contradicts. And I wonder how many of us there are who seem to be joining in prayers that we never expect to have answered, and would be very much astonished if the answers came, and should not know what to do with if they did come. We live in one line, and worship in exactly the opposite. Brethren, creed is necessary; emotion is necessary; worship is necessary! But that on which these three all converge, and for which they are, is daily life, plain, practical righteousness.

## **II. Now Let Me Say, Secondly, That Being Righteous Is The Way To Do Righteousness.**

One of the great characteristics of New Testament teaching of morality, or rather let me say of Christ's teaching of morality, is that it shifts, if I may so put it, the centre of gravity from acts to being, that instead of repeating the parrot-cry, 'Do, do, do, 'or 'Do not, do not, do not,' it says, 'Be, and the doing will take care of it. self. Be; do not trouble so much about outward acts, look after the inward nature.' Character makes conduct, though, of course, conduct reacts upon character. 'As a man thinketh in his heart so is he,' and the way to set actions right is to set the heart right.

Some of us are trying to purify the stream by putting in disinfectants half-way down, instead of going up to the source and dealing with the fountain. And the weakness of all the ordinary, commonplace morality of the world is that it puts its stress upon the deeds, and leaves comparatively uncared for the condition of the person, the inward self, from whom the deeds come. And so it is all superficial, and of small account.

If that be so, then we are met by this experience: that when we honestly try to make the tree good that its fruit may be good we come full front up to this, that there is a streak in us, a stain, a twist—call it anything you like—like a black vein through a piece of Parian marble, or a scratch upon a mirror, which streak or twist baffles our effort to make ourselves righteous. I am not going, if I can help it, to exaggerate the facts of the case. The Christian teaching of what is unfortunately called total depravity is not that there is no good in anybody, but that there is a diffused evil in everybody which affects in different degrees and in different ways all a man's nature. And that is no mere doctrine of the New Testament, but it is a transcript from the experience of every one of us.

What then? If I must be righteous in order that I may do righteousness, and if, as I have found out by experience (for the only way to know myself is to reflect upon what I have done)—if I have found out that I am not righteous, what then? You may say to me, 'Have you led me into a blind alley, out of which I cannot get? Here you are, insisting on an imperative necessity, and in the same breath saying that it is impossible. What is left for me?' I go on to tell you what is left.

## **III. Union With Jesus Christ By Faith Makes Us 'Righteous Even As He Is Righteous.'**

There is the pledge, there is the prophecy, there is the pattern; and there is the power to redeem the pledge, to fulfil the prophecy, to make the pattern copyable and copied by every one of us. Brethren, this is the very heart of John's teaching, that if we will, not by the mere assent of our intellect, but by the casting of ourselves on Jesus Christ, trust in Him, there comes about a union between us and Him so real, so deep, so vital, so energetic, that by the touch of His life we live, and by His righteousness breathed into us, we, too, may become righteous. The great vessel and the tiny pot by its side may have a connecting pipe, and from the great one there shall flow over into the little one as much as will fill it brim full. In Him we too may be righteous.

My friend, there are men and women who are ready to set to their seals that that is true, and who can say, 'I have found it so. By



union with Jesus Christ in faith, I have received new tastes, new inclinations, a new set to my whole life, and I have been able to overcome unrighteousnesses which were too many and too mighty for myself.' It is so; and some of us to our own consciences and consciousness are witnesses to it, however imperfectly. God forgive us! We may have manifested the renewing power of union with Christ in our daily lives.

'Even as He is righteous'—the water in the great vessel and the little one are the same, but the vase is not the cistern. The beam comes from the sun, but the beam is not the sun. 'Even as' does not mean equality, but it does mean similarity. Christ is righteous, eternally, essentially, completely; we may be 'even as He is' derivatively, partially, and if we put our trust in Him we shall be so, and that growingly through our daily lives. And then, after earth is done with, 'we know that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

May we each, dear brethren, 'be found in Him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.'