

# 1 Corinthians Exposition 2 - Maclaren

## 1 CORINTHIANS EXPOSITION: PART 2 of 4 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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## SERVANTS AND LORDS

'All things are yours; 22. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23. And ye are Christ's.'—1 COR. iii. 21-23.

The Corinthian Christians seem to have carried into the Church some of the worst vices of Greek—and English—political life. They were split up into wrangling factions, each swearing by the name of some person. Paul was the battle-cry of one set; Apollos of another. Paul and Apollos were very good friends, their admirers bitter foes—according to a very common experience. The springs lie close together up in the hills, the rivers may be parted by half a continent.

These feuds were all the more detestable to the Apostle because his name was dragged into them; and so he sets himself, in the first part of this letter, with all his might, to shame and to argue the Corinthian Christians out of their wrangling. This great text is one of the considerations which he adduces with that purpose. In effect he says, 'To pin your faith to any one teacher is a wilful narrowing of the sources of your blessing and your wisdom. You say you are Paul's men. Has Apollos got nothing that he could teach you? and may you not get any good out of brave brother Cephas? Take them all; they were all meant for your good. Let no man glory in individuals.'

That is all that his argument required him to say. But in his impetuous way he goes on into regions far beyond. His thought, like some swiftly revolving wheel, catches fire of its own rapid motion; and he blazes up into this triumphant enumeration of all the things that serve the soul which serves Jesus Christ. 'You are lords of men, of the world of time, of death, of eternity; but you are not lords of yourselves. You belong to Jesus, and in the measure in which you belong to Him do all things belong to you.'

I. I think, then, that I shall best bring out the fulness of these words by simply following them as they lie before us, and asking you to consider, first, how Christ's servants are men's lords.

'All things are yours, Paul, Apollos, Cephas.' These three teachers were all lights kindled at the central Light, and therefore shining. They were fragments of His wisdom, of Him that spoke; varying, but yet harmonious, and mutually complementary aspects of the one infinite Truth had been committed to them. Each was but a part of the mighty whole, a little segment of the circle

'They are but broken lights of Thee, And Thou, O Lord! art more than they.'

And in the measure, therefore, in which men adhere to Christ, and have taken Him for theirs; in that measure are they delivered from all undue dependence on, still more from all slavish submission to, any single individual teacher or aspect of truth. To have Christ for ours, and to be His, which are only the opposite sides of the same thing, mean, in brief, to take Jesus Christ for the source of all knowledge of moral and religious truth. His Word is the Christian's creed, His Person and the truths that lie in Him, are the fountains of all our knowledge of God and man. To be Christ's is to take Him as the master who has absolute authority over conduct and practice. His commandment is the Christian's duty; His pattern the Christian's all-sufficient example; His smile the Christian's reward. To be Christ's is to take Him for the home of our hearts, in whose gracious and sweet love we find all sufficiency and a rest for our seeking affections. And so, if ye are His, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, all men are yours; in the sense that you are delivered from all undue dependence upon them; and in the sense that they subserve your highest good.

So the true democracy of Christianity, which abjures swearing by the words of any teacher, is simply the result of loyal adherence to the teaching of Jesus Christ. And that proud independence which some of you seek to cultivate, and on the strength of which you declare that no man is your master upon earth, is an unwholesome and dangerous independence, unless it be conjoined with the bowing down of the whole nature, in loyal submission, to the absolute authority of the only lips that ever spoke truth, truth only, and truth always. If Christ be our Master, if we take our creed from Him, if we accept His words and His revelation of the Father as our faith and our objective religion, then all the slavery to favourite names, all the taking of truth second-hand from the lips that we honour, all the partisanship for one against another which has been the shame and the ruin of the Christian Church, and is working untold mischiefs in it to-day, are ended at once. 'One is your Master, even Christ.' 'Call no man Rabbi! upon earth; but bow before Him, the Incarnate and the Personal Truth.'

And in like manner they who are Christ's are delivered from all temptations to make men's maxims and practices and approbation the law of their conduct. Society presses upon each of us; what we call public opinion, which is generally the clatter of the half-dozen people that happen to stand nearest us, rules us; and it needs to be said very emphatically to all Christian men and women—Take your law of conduct from His lips, and from nobody else's.

'They say. What say they? Let them say.' If we take Christ's commandment for our absolute law, and Christ's approbation for our highest aim and all-sufficient reward, we shall then be able to brush aside other maxims and other people's opinions of us, safely and humbly, and to say, 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.'

The envoy of some foreign power cares very little what the inhabitants of the land to which he is ambassador may think of him and his doings; it is his sovereign's good opinion that he seeks to secure. The soldier's reward is his commander's praise, the slave's joy is the master's smile, and for us it ought to be the law of our lives, and in the measure in which we really belong to Christ it will be

the law of our lives, that 'we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be pleasing to Him.'

So, brethren, as teachers, as patterns, as objects of love which is only too apt to be exclusive and to master us, we can only take one another in subordination to our supreme submission to Christ, and if we are His, our duty, as our joy, is to count no man necessary to our wellbeing, but to hang only on the one Man, whom it is safe and blessed to believe utterly, to obey abjectly, and to love with all our strength, because He is more than man, even God manifest in the flesh.

II. And now let us pass to the next idea here, secondly, Christ's servants are the lords of 'the world.'

That phrase is used here, no doubt, as meaning the external material universe. These creatures around us, they belong to us, if we belong to Jesus Christ. That man owns the world who despises it. There are plenty of rich men in Manchester who say they possess so many thousand pounds. Turn the sentence about and it would be a great deal truer—the thousands of pounds possess them. They are the slaves of their own possessions, and every man who counts any material thing as indispensable to his wellbeing, and regards it as the chiefest good, is the slave-servant of that thing. He owns the world who turns it to the highest use of growing his soul by it. All material things are given, and, I was going to say, were created, for the growth of men, or at all events their highest purpose is that men should, by them, grow. And therefore, as the scaffolding is swept away when the building is finished, so God will sweep away this material universe with all its wonders of beauty and of contrivance, when men have been grown by means of it. The material is less than the soul, and he is master of the world, and owns it, who has got thoughts out of it, truth out of it, impulses out of it, visions of God out of it, who has by it been led nearer to his divine Master. If I look out upon a fair landscape, and the man who draws the rents of it is standing by my side, and I suck more sweetness, and deeper impulses, and larger and loftier thoughts out of it than he does, it belongs to me far more than it does to him. The world is his who from it has learned to despise it, to know himself and to know God. He owns the world who uses it as the arena, or wrestling ground, on which, by labour, he may gain strength, and in which he may do service. Antagonism helps to develop muscle, and the best use of the outward frame of things is that we shall take it as the field upon which we can serve God.

And now all these three things—the contempt of earth, the use of earth for growing souls, and the use of earth as the field of service—all these things belong most truly to the man who belongs to Christ. The world is His, and if we live near Him and cultivate fellowship with Him, and see His face gleaming through all the Material, and are led up nearer to Him by everything around us, then we own the world and wring the sweetness to the last drop out of it, though we may have but little of that outward relation to its goods which short-sighted men call possessing them. We may solve the paradox of those who, 'having nothing, yet have all,' if we belong to Christ the Lord of all things, and so have co-possession with Him of all His riches.

III. Further, my text tells us, in the third place, that Christian men, who belong to Jesus Christ, are the lords and masters of 'life and death.'

Both of these words are here used, as it seems to me, in their simple, physical sense, natural life and natural death. You may say, 'Well, everybody is lord of life in that sense.' Yes, of course, in a fashion we all possess it, seeing that we are all alive. But that mysterious gift of personality, that awful gift of conscious existence, only belongs, in the deepest sense, to the men who belong to Jesus Christ. I do not call that man the owner of his own life who is not the lord of his own spirit. I do not see in what, except in the mere animal sense in which a fly, or a spider, or a toad may be called the master of its life, that man owns himself who has not given up himself to Jesus Christ. The only way to get a real hold of yourselves is to yield yourselves to Him who gives you back Himself, and yourself along with Him. The true ownership of life depends upon self-control, and self-control depends upon letting Jesus Christ govern us wholly. So the measure in which it is true of me that 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' is the measure in which the lower life of sense really belongs to us, and ministers to our highest good.

And then turn to the other member of this wonderful antithesis, 'whether life or *death*.' Surely if there is anything over which no man can become lord, except by sinfully taking his fate into his own hands, it is death. And yet even death, in which we seem to be abjectly passive, and by which so many of us are dragged away reluctantly from everything that we care to possess, may become a matter of consent and therefore a moral act. Animals expire; a Christian man may yield his soul to his Saviour, who is the Lord both of the dead and of the living. If thus we feel our dependence upon Him, and yield up our lives to Him, and can say, 'Living or dying we are the Lord's,' then we may be quite sure that death, too, will be our servant, and that our wills will be concerned even in passing out of life.

Still more, if you and I, dear brethren, belong to Jesus Christ, then death is our fellow-servant who comes to call us out of this ill-lighted workshop into the presence of the King. And at His magic cold touch, cares and toils and sorrows are stiffened into silence, like noisy streams bound in white frost; and we are lifted clean up out of all the hubbub and the toil into eternal calm. Death is ours because it fulfils our deepest desires, and comes as a messenger to paupers to tell them they have a great estate. Death is ours if we be Christ's.

IV. And lastly, Christ's servants are the lords of time and eternity, 'things present or things to come.'

Our Apostle's division, in this catalogue of his, is rhetorical rather than logical; and we need not seek to separate the first of this final pair from others which we have already encountered in our study of the words, but still we may draw a distinction. The whole mass of 'things present,' including not only that material universe which we call the world, but all the events and circumstances of our lives, over these we may exercise supreme control. If we are bowing in humble submission to Jesus Christ, they will all subserve our highest good. Every weather will be right; night and day equally desirable; the darkness will be good for eyes that have been tired of brightness and that need repose, the light will be good. The howling tempests of winter and its white snows, the sharp winds of spring and its bursting sunshine; the calm steady heat of June and the mellowing days of August, all serve to ripen the grain. And so all 'things present,' the light and the dark, the hopes fulfilled and the hopes disappointed, the gains and the losses, the prayers answered and the prayers unanswered, they will all be recognised, if we have the wisdom that comes from submission to Jesus Christ's will, as being ours and ministering to our highest blessing.

We shall be their lords too inasmuch as we shall be able to control them. We need not be 'anvils but hammers.' We need not let outward circumstances dominate and tyrannise over us. We need not be like the mosses in the stream, that lie whichever way the current sets, nor like some poor little sailing boat that is at the mercy of the winds and the waves, but may carry an inward impulse like some great ocean-going steamer, the throb of whose power shall drive us straight forward on our course, whatever beats against us. That we may have this inward power and mastery over things present, and not be shaped and moulded and made by them, let us yield ourselves to Christ, and He will help us to rule them.

And then, all 'things to come,' the dim, vague future, shall be for each of us like some sunlit ocean stretching shoreless to the horizon; every little ripple flashing with its own bright sunshine, and all bearing us onwards to the great Throne that stands on the sea of glass mingled with fire.

Then, my brother, ask yourselves what your future is if you have not Christ for your Friend.

'I backward cast mine eye On prospects drear; And forward though I cannot see, I guess and fear.'

So I beseech you, yield yourselves to Jesus Christ, He died to win us. He bears our sins that they may be all forgiven. If we give ourselves to Him who has given Himself to us, then we shall be lords of men, of the world, of life and death, of time and eternity.

In the old days conquerors used to bestow upon their followers lands and broad dominions on condition of their doing suit and service, and bringing homage to them. Christ, the King of the universe, makes His subjects kings, and will give us to share in His dominion, so that to each of us may be fulfilled that boundless and almost unbelievable promise: 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things.' 'All are yours if ye are Christ's.'

## THE THREE TRIBUNALS

'But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. 4. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.'—1 COR. iv. 3, 4.

The Church at Corinth was honeycombed by the characteristic Greek vice of party spirit. The three great teachers, Paul, Peter, Apollos, were pitted against each other, and each was unduly exalted by those who swore by him, and unduly depreciated by the other two factions. But the men whose names were the war-cries of these sections were themselves knit in closest friendship, and felt themselves to be servants in common of one Master, and fellow-workers in one task.

So Paul, in the immediate context, associating Peter and Apollos with himself, bids the Corinthians think of 'us' as being servants of Christ, and not therefore responsible to men; and as stewards of the mysteries of God, that is, dispensers of truths long hidden but now revealed, and as therefore accountable for correct accounts and faithful dispensation only to the Lord of the household. Being responsible to Him, they heeded very little what others thought about them. Being responsible to Him, they could not accept vindication by their own consciences as being final. There was a judgment beyond these.

So here we have three tribunals—that of man's estimates, that of our own consciences, that of Jesus Christ. An appeal lies from the first to the second, and from the second to the third. It is base to depend on men's judgments; it is well to attend to the decisions of conscience, but it is not well to take it for granted that, if conscience approve, we are absolved. The court of final appeal is Jesus Christ, and what He thinks about each of us. So let us look briefly at these three tribunals.

I. First, the lowest—men's judgment.

'With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you,' enlightened Christians that you are, or by the outside world. Now, Paul's letters give ample evidence that he was keenly alive to the hostile and malevolent criticisms and slanders of his untiring opponents. Many a flash of sarcasm out of the cloud like a lightning bolt, many a burst of wounded affection like rain from summer skies, tell us this. But I need not quote these. Such a character as his could not but be quick to feel the surrounding atmosphere, whether it was of love or of suspicion. So, he had to harden himself against what naturally had a great effect upon him, the estimate which he felt that people round him were making of him. There was nothing brusque, rough, contemptuous in his brushing aside these popular judgments. He gave them all due weight, and yet he felt, 'From all that this lowest tribunal may decide, there are two appeals, one to my own conscience, and one to my Master in heaven.'

Now, I suppose I need not say a word about the power which that terrible court which is always sitting, and which passes judgment upon every one of us, though we do not always hear the sentences read, has upon us all. There is a power which it is meant to have. It is not good for a man to stand constantly in the attitude of defying whatever anybody else chooses to say or to think about him. But the danger to which we are all exposed, far more than that other extreme, is of deferring too completely and slavishly to, and being far too subtly influenced in all that we do by, the thought of what A, B, or C, may have to say or to think about it. 'The last infirmity of noble minds,' says Milton about the love of fame. It is an infirmity to love it, and long for it, and live by it. It is a weakening of humanity, even where men are spurred to great efforts by the thought of the reverberation of these in the ear of the world, and of the honour and glory that may come therefrom.

But not only in these higher forms of seeking after reputation, but in lower forms, this trembling before, and seeking to conciliate, the tribunal of what we call 'general opinion,' which means the voices of the half-dozen people that are beside us and know about us, besets us all, and weakens us all in a thousand ways. How many men would lose all the motive that they have for living reputable lives, if nobody knew anything about it? How many of you, when you go to London, and are strangers, frequent places that you would not be seen in in Manchester? How many of us are hindered, in courses which we know that we ought to pursue, because we are afraid of this or that man or woman, and of what they may look or speak? There is a regard to man's judgment, which is separated by the very thinnest partition from hypocrisy. There is a very shadowy distinction between the man who, consciously or unconsciously, does a thing with an eye to what people may say about it, and the man who pretends to be what he is not for the sake of the reputation that he may thereby win.

Now, the direct tendency of Christian faith and principle is to dwindle into wholesome insignificance the multitudinous voice of men's judgments. For, if I understand at all what Christianity means, it means centrally and essentially this, that I am brought into loving personal relation with Jesus Christ, and draw from Him the power of my life, and from Him the law of my life, and from Him the stimulus of my life, and from Him the reward of my life. If there is a direct communication between me and Him, and if I am deriving from Him the life that He gives, which is 'free from the law of sin and death,' I shall have little need or desire to heed the judgment that men, who see only the surface, may pass upon me, and upon my doings, and I shall refer myself to Him instead of to them. Those who can go straight to Christ, whose lives are steeped in Him, who feel that they draw all from Him, and that their actions and character are moulded by His touch and His Spirit, are responsible to no other tribunal. And the less they think about what men have to say of them the stronger, the nobler, the more Christ-like they will be.

There is no need for any contempt or roughness to blend with such a putting aside of men's judgments. The velvet glove may be worn upon the iron hand. All meekness and lowliness may go with this wholesome independence, and must go with it unless that independence is false and distorted. 'With me it is a very small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment,' need not be said in such a tone as to mean 'I do not care a rush what you think about me'; but it must be said in such a tone as to mean 'I care supremely for one approbation, and if I have that I can bear anything besides.'

Let me appeal to you to cultivate more distinctly, as a plain Christian duty, this wholesome independence of men's judgment. I suppose there never was a day when it was more needed that men should be themselves, seeing with their own eyes what God may reveal to them and they are capable of receiving, and walking with their own feet on the path that fits them, whatsoever other people may say about it. For the multiplication of daily literature, the way in which we are all living in glass houses nowadays—everybody knowing everything about everybody else, and delighting in the gossip which takes the place of literature in so many quarters—and the tendency of society to a more democratic form give the many-headed monster and its many tongues far more power than is wholesome, in the shaping of the lives and character and conduct of most men. The evil of democracy is that it levels down all to one plane, and that it tends to turn out millions of people, as like each other as if they had been made in a machine. And so we need, I believe, even more than our fathers did, to lay to heart this lesson, that the direct result of a deep and strong Christian faith is the production of intensely individual character. And if there are plenty of angles in it, perhaps so much the better. We are apt to be rounded by being rubbed against each other, like the stones on the beach, till there is not a sharp corner or a point that can prick anywhere. So society becomes utterly monotonous, and is insipid and profitless because of that. You Christian people, be yourselves, after your own pattern. And whilst you accept all help from surrounding suggestions and hints, make it 'a very small thing that you be judged of men.' And you, young men, in warehouses and shops, and you, students, and you, boys and girls, that are

budding into life, never mind what other people say. 'Let thine eyes look right onwards,' and let all the clatter on either side of you go on as it will. The voices are very loud, but if we go up high enough on the hill-top, to the secret place of the Most High, we shall look down and see, but not hear, the bustle and the buzz; and in the great silence Christ will whisper to us, 'Well done! good and faithful servant.' That praise is worth getting, and one way to get it is to put aside the hindrance of anxious seeking to conciliate the good opinion of men.

II. Note the higher court of conscience.

Our Apostle is not to be taken here as contradicting what he says in other places. 'I judge not mine own self;'—yet in one of these same letters to the Corinthians he says, 'If we judged ourselves we should not be judged.' So that he does not mean here that he is entirely without any estimate of his own character or actions. That he did in some sense judge himself is evident from the next clause, because he goes on to say, 'I know nothing against myself.' If he acquitted himself, he must previously have been judging himself. But his acquittal of himself is not to be understood as if it covered the whole ground of his life and character, but it is to be confined to the subject in hand—viz. his faithfulness as a steward of the mysteries of God. But though there is nothing in that region of his life which he can charge against himself as unfaithfulness, he goes on to say, 'Yet am I not hereby justified?'

Our absolution by conscience is not infallible. I suppose that conscience is more reliable when it condemns than when it acquits. It is never safe for a man to neglect it when it says, 'You are wrong!' It is just as unsafe for a man to accept it, without further investigation, when it says, 'You are right!' For the only thing that is infallible about what we call conscience is its sentence, 'It is right to do right.' But when it proceeds to say 'This, that, and the other thing is right; and therefore it is right for you to do it,' there may be errors in the judgment, as everybody's own experience tells them. The inward judge needs to be stimulated, to be enlightened, to be corrected often. I suppose that the growth of Christian character is very largely the discovery that things that we thought innocent are not, for us, so innocent as we thought them.

You only need to go back to history, or to go down into your own histories, to see how, as light has increased, dark corners have been revealed that were invisible in the less brilliant illumination. How long it has taken the Christian Church to find out what Christ's Gospel teaches about slavery, about the relations of sex, about drunkenness, about war, about a hundred other things that you and I do not yet know, but which our successors will wonder that we failed to see! Inquisitor and martyr have equally said, 'We are serving God.' Surely, too, nothing is more clearly witnessed by individual experience, than that we may do a wrong thing, and think that it is right. 'They that kill you will think that they do God service.'

So, Christian people, accept the inward monition when it is stern and prohibitive. Do not be too sure about it when it is placable and permissive. 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the thing which he alloweth.' There may be secret faults, lying all unseen beneath the undergrowth in the forest, which yet do prick and sting. The upper floors of the house where we receive company, and where we, the tenants, generally live, may be luxurious, and sweet, and clean. What about the cellars, where ugly things crawl and swarm, and breed, and sting?

Ah, dear brethren! when my conscience says to me, 'You may do it,' it is always well to go to Jesus Christ, and say to Him 'May I?' 'Search me, O God, and ... see if there be any wicked way in me,' and show it to me, and help me to cast it out. 'I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified.'

III. Lastly, note the supreme court of final appeal.

'He that judgeth me is the Lord.' Now it is obvious that 'the Lord' here is Christ, both because of the preceding context and because of the next verse, which speaks of His coming. And it is equally obvious, though it is often unnoticed, that the judgment of which the Apostle is here speaking is a present and preliminary judgment. 'He that *judgeth* me'—not, 'will judge,' but *now*, at this very moment. That is to say, whilst people round us are passing their superficial estimates upon me, and whilst my conscience is excusing, or else accusing me—and in neither case with absolute infallibility—there is another judgment, running concurrently with them, and going on in silence. That calm eye is fixed upon me, and sifting me, and knowing me. *That* judgment is not fallible, because before Him 'the hidden things' that the darkness shelters, those creeping things in the cellars that I was speaking about, are all manifest; and to Him the 'counsels of the heart,' that is, the motives from which the actions flow, are all transparent and legible. So His judgment, the continual estimate of me which Jesus Christ, in His supreme knowledge of me, has, at every moment of my life—*that* is uttering the final word about me and my character.

His estimate will dwindle the sentences of the other two tribunals into nothingness. What matter what his fellow-servants say about the steward's accounts, and distribution of provisions, and management of the household? He has to render his books, and to give account of his stewardship, only to his lord.

The governor of a Crown Colony may attach some importance to colonial opinion, but he reports home; and it is what the people in Downing Street will say that he thinks about. We have to report home; and it is the King whom we serve, to whom we have to give an account. The gladiator, down in the arena, did not much mind whether the thumbs of the populace were up or down, though the

one was the signal for his life and the other for his death. He looked to the place where, between the purple curtains and the flashing axes of the lictors, the emperor sate. Our Emperor once was down on the sand Himself, and although we are 'compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,' we look to the Christ, the supreme Arbiter, and take acquittal or condemnation, life or death, from Him.

That judgment, persistent all through each of our lives, is preliminary to the future tribunal and sentence. The Apostle employs in this context two distinct words, both of which are translated in our version 'judge.' The one which is used in these three clauses, on which I have been commenting, means a preliminary examination, and the one which is used in the next verse means a final decisive trial and sentence. So, dear brethren, Christ is gathering materials for His final sentence; and you and I are writing the depositions which will be adduced in evidence. Oh! how little all that the world may have said about a man will matter then! Think of a man standing before that great white throne, and saying, 'I held a very high place in the estimation of my neighbours. The newspapers and the reviews blew my trumpet assiduously. My name was carved upon the plinth of a marble statue, that my fellow-citizens set up in honour of my many virtues,'—and the name was illegible centuries before the statue was burned in the last fire!

Brother! seek for the praise from Him, which is praise indeed. If He says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' it matters little what censures men may pass on us. If He says, 'I never knew you,' all their praises will not avail. 'Wherefore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

## THE FESTAL LIFE

'Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven ... but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.'—1 COR. v. 8.

There had been hideous immorality in the Corinthian Church. Paul had struck at it with heat and force, sternly commanding the exclusion of the sinner. He did so on the ground of the diabolical power of infection possessed by evil, and illustrated that by the very obvious metaphor of leaven, a morsel of which, as he says, 'will leaven the whole lump,' or, as we say, 'batch.' But the word 'leaven' drew up from the depths of his memory a host of sacred associations connected with the Jewish Passover. He remembered the sedulous hunting in every Jewish house for every scrap of leavened matter; the slaying of the Paschal Lamb, and the following feast. Carried away by these associations, he forgets the sin in the Corinthian Church for a moment, and turns to set forth, in the words of the text, a very deep and penetrating view of what the Christian life is, how it is sustained, and what it demands. 'Wherefore,' says he, 'let us keep the feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' That 'wherefore' takes us back to the words before it, And what are these? 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us'; therefore—because of that sacrifice, to us is granted the power, and on us is laid imperatively the obligation, to make life a festival and to purge ourselves. Now, in the notion of a feast, there are two things included—joy and plentiful sustenance. So there are three points here, which I have already indicated—what the Christian life is, a festival; on what it is sustained, the Paschal Sacrifice; what it demands, scrupulous purging out of the old leaven.

I. The Christian life ought to be a continual festival.

The Christian life a feast? It is more usually represented as a fight, a wrestle, a race; and such metaphors correspond, as it would appear, far more closely to the facts of our environment, and to the experiences of our hearts, than does such a metaphor as this. But the metaphor of the festival goes deeper than that of the fight or race, and it does not ignore the strenuous and militant side of the Christian life. No man ever lived a more strenuous life than Paul; no man had heavier tasks, and did them more cheerily; no man had a sterner fight and fought it more bravely. There is nothing soft, Epicurean, or oblivious of the patent sad facts of humanity in the declaration that after all, beneath all, above all, central to all, the Christian life is a glad festival, when it is the life that it ought to be.

But you say, 'Ah! it is all very well to call it so; but in the first place, continual joy is impossible in the presence of the difficulties, and often sadnesses, that meet us on our life's path; and, in the second place, it is folly to tell us to pump up emotions, or to ignore the occasions for much heaviness and sorrow of heart.' True; but, still, it is possible to cultivate such a temper as makes life habitually joyful. We can choose the aspect under which we by preference and habitually regard our lives. All emotion follows upon a preceding thought, or sensible experience, and we can pick the objects of our thoughts, and determine what aspect of our lives to look at most.

The sky is often piled with stormy, heaped-up masses of blackness, but between them are lakes of calm blue. We can choose whether we look at the clouds or at the blue. *These* are in the lower ranges; *that* fills infinite spaces, upwards and out to the horizon. These are transient, eating themselves away even whilst we look, and black and thunderous as they may be, they are there but for a moment—that is perennial. If we are wise, we shall fix our gaze much rather on the blue than on the ugly cloud-rack that hides it, and thus shall minister to ourselves occasions for the noble kind of joy which is not noisy and boisterous, 'like the crackling of thorns under a pot,' and does not foam itself away by its very ebullience, but is calm like the grounds of it; still, like the heaven to which it

looks; eternal, like the God on whom it is fastened. If we would only steadfastly remember that the one source of worthy and enduring joy is God Himself, and listen to the command, 'Rejoice in the Lord,' we should find it possible to 'rejoice always.' For that thought of Him, His sufficiency, His nearness, His encompassing presence, His prospering eye, His aiding hand, His gentle consolation, His enabling help will take the sting out of even the bitterest of our sorrows, and will brace us to sustain the heaviest, otherwise crushing burdens, and greatly to 'rejoice, though now for a season we are in heaviness through manifold temptations.' The Gulf Stream rushes into the northern hemisphere, melts the icebergs and warms the Polar seas, and so the joy of the Lord, if we set it before us as we can and should do, will minister to us a gladness which will make our lives a perpetual feast.

But there is another thing that we can do; that is, we can clearly recognise the occasions for sorrow in our experience, and yet interpret them by the truths of the Christian faith. That is to say, we can think of them, not so much as they tend to make us sad or glad, but as they tend to make us more assured of our possession of, more ardent in our love towards, and more submissive in our attitude to, the all-ordering Love which is God. Brethren, if we thought of life, and all its incidents, even when these are darkest and most threatening, as being what it and they indeed are, His training of us into capacity for fuller blessedness, because fuller possession of Himself, we should be less startled at the commandment, 'Rejoice in the Lord always,' and should feel that it was possible, though the figtree did not blossom, and there was no fruit in the vine, though the flocks were cut off from the pastures, and the herds from the stall, yet to rejoice in the God of our salvation. Rightly understood and pondered on, all the darkest passages of life are but like the cloud whose blackness determines the brightness of the rainbow on its front. Rightly understood and reflected on, these will teach us that the paradoxical commandment, 'Count it all joy that ye fall into divers temptations,' is, after all, the voice of true wisdom speaking at the dictation of a clear-eyed faith.

This text, since it is a commandment, implies that obedience to it, and therefore the realisation of this continual festal aspect of life, is very largely in our own power. Dispositions differ, some of us are constitutionally inclined to look at the blacker, and some at the brighter, side of our experiences. But our Christianity is worth little unless it can modify, and to some extent change, our natural tendencies. The joy of the Lord being our strength, the cultivation of joy in the Lord is largely our duty. Christian people do not sufficiently recognise that it is as incumbent on them to seek after this continual fountain of calm and heavenly joy flowing through their lives, as it is to cultivate some of the more recognised virtues and graces of Christian conduct and character.

Secondly, we have here—

II. The Christian life is a continual feeding on a sacrifice.

'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Wherefore let us keep the feast.' It is very remarkable that this is the only place in Paul's writings where he articulately pronounces that the Paschal Lamb is a type of Jesus Christ. There is only one other instance in the New Testament where that is stated with equal clearness and emphasis, and that is in John's account of the Crucifixion, where he recognises the fact that Christ died with limbs unbroken, as being a fulfilment, in the New Testament sense of that word, of what was enjoined in regard to the antitype, 'a bone of him shall not be broken.'

But whilst the definite statement which precedes my text that Christ is 'our Passover,' and 'sacrificed for us' as such, is unique in Paul's writings, the thought to which it gives clear and crystallised expression runs through the whole of the New Testament. It underlies the Lord's Supper. Did you ever think of how great was the self-assertion of Jesus Christ when He laid His hand on that sacredest of Jewish rites, which had been established, as the words of the institution of it say, to be 'a perpetual memorial through all generations,' brushed it on one side, and in effect, said: 'You do not need to remember the Passover any more. I am the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood sprinkled on the doorposts averts the sword of the destroying Angel, whose flesh, partaken of, gives immortal life. Remember Me, and this do in remembrance of Me.' The Lord's Supper witnesses that Jesus thought Himself to be what Paul tells the Corinthians that He is, even our Passover, sacrificed for us. But the point to be observed is this, that just as in that ancient ritual, the lamb slain became the food of the Israelites, so with us the Christ who has died is to be the sustenance of our souls, and of our Christian life. 'Therefore let us keep the feast.'

Feed upon Him; that is the essential central requirement for all Christian life, and what does feeding on Him mean? 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' said the Jews, and the answer is plain now, though so obscure then. The flesh which He gave for the life of the world in His death, must by us be taken for the very nourishment of our souls, by the simple act of faith in Him. That is the feeding which brings not only sustenance but life. Christ's death for us is the basis, but it is only the basis, of Christ's living in us, and His death for me is of no use at all to me unless He that died for me lives in me. We feed on Him by faith, which not only trusts to the Sacrifice as atoning for sin, but feeds on it as communicating and sustaining eternal life—'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, wherefore let us keep the Feast.'

Again, we keep the feast when our minds feed upon Christ by contemplation of what He is, what He has done, what He is doing, what He will do; when we take Him as 'the Master-light of all our seeing,' and in Him, His words and works, His Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Session as Sovereign at the right hand of God, find the perfect revelation of what God is, the perfect discovery of what man is, the perfect disclosure of what sin is, the perfect prophecy of what man may become, the Light of light, the



answer to every question that our spirits can put about the loftiest verities of God and man, the universe and the future. We feed on Christ when, with lowly submission, we habitually subject thoughts, purposes, desires, to His authority, and when we let His will flow into, and make plastic and supple, our wills. We nourish our wills by submitting them to Jesus, and we feed on Him when we not only say 'Lord! Lord!' but when we do the things that He says. We feed on Christ, when we let His great, sacred, all-wise, all-giving, all satisfying love flow into our restless hearts and make them still, enter into our vagrant affections and fix them on Himself. Thus when mind and conscience and will and heart all turn to Jesus, and in Him find their sustenance, we shall be filled with the feast of fat things which He has prepared for all people. With that bread we shall be satisfied, and with it only, for the husks of the swine are no food for the Father's son, and we 'spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not,' if we look anywhere else than to the Paschal Lamb slain for us for the food of our souls.

III. The Christian life is a continual purging out of the old leaven.

I need not remind you how vivid and profoundly significant that emblem of leaven, as applied to all manner of evil, is. But let me remind you how, just as in the Jewish Ritual, the cleansing from all that was leavened was the essential pre-requisite to the participation in the feast, feeding on Jesus Christ, as I have tried to describe it, is absolutely impossible unless our leaven is cleansed away. Children spoil their appetites for wholesome food by eating sweetmeats. Men destroy their capacity for feeding on Christ by hungry desires, and gluttonous satisfying of those desires with the delusive sweets of this passing world. But, my brother, your experience, if you are a Christian man at all, will tell you that in the direct measure in which you have been drawn away into paltering with evil, your appetite for Christ and your capacity for gazing upon Him, contemplating Him, feeding on Him, has died out. There comes a kind of constriction in a man's throat when he is hungering after lesser good, especially when there is a tinge of evil in the supposed good that he is hungering after, which incapacitates Him from eating the bread of God, which is Jesus Christ.

But let us remember that absolute cleansing from all sin is not essential, in order to have real participation in Jesus Christ. The Jew had to take every scrap of leaven out of his house before he began the Passover. If that were the condition for us, alas! for us all; but the effort after purity, though it has not entirely attained its aim, is enough. Sin abhorred does not prevent a man from participating in the Bread that came down from heaven.

Then observe, too, that for this power to cleanse ourselves, we must have had some participation in Christ, by which there is given to us that new life that conquers evil. In the words immediately preceding my text, the Apostle bases his injunction to purge out the old leaven on the fact that 'ye are unleavened.' Ideally, in so far as the power possessed by them was concerned, these Corinthians were unleavened, even whilst they were bid to purge out the leaven. That is to say, be what you are; realise your ideal, utilise the power you possess, and since by your faith there has been given to you a new life that can conquer all corruption and sin, see that you use the life that is given. Purge out the old leaven because ye are unleavened.

One last word—this stringent exhortation, which makes Christian effort after absolute purity a Christian duty, and the condition of participation in the Paschal Lamb, is based upon that thought to which I have already referred, of the diabolical power of infection which Evil possesses. Either you must cast it out, or it will choke the better thing in you. It spreads and grows, and propagates itself, and works underground through and through the whole mass. A water-weed got into some of our canals years ago, and it has all but choked some of them. The slime on a pond spreads its green mantle over the whole surface with rapidity. If we do not eject Evil it will eject the good from us. Use the implanted power to cast out this creeping, advancing evil. Sometimes a wine-grower has gone into his cellars, and found in a cask no wine, but a monstrous fungus into which all the wine had, in the darkness, passed unnoticed. I fear some Christian people, though they do not know it, have something like that going on in them.

It is possible for us all to keep this perpetual festival. To live in, on, for, Jesus Christ will give us victory over enemies, burdens, sorrows, sins. We may, if we will, dwell in a calm zone where no tempests rage, hear a perpetual strain of sweet music persisting through thunder peals of sorrow and suffering, and find a table spread for us in the presence of our enemies, at which we shall renew our strength for conflict, and whence we shall rise to fight the good fight a little longer, till we sit with Him at His table in His Kingdom, and 'eat, and live for ever.'

## FORMS *VERSUS* CHARACTER

'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.'—1 COR. vii. 19.

'For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'—GAL. v. 6.

'For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.'—GAL. vi. 16 (R. V.).

The great controversy which embittered so much of Paul's life, and marred so much of his activity, turned upon the question whether

a heathen man could come into the Church simply by the door of faith, or whether he must also go through the gate of circumcision. We all know how Paul answered the question. Time, which settles all controversies, has settled that one so thoroughly that it is impossible to revive any kind of interest in it; and it may seem to be a pure waste of time to talk about it. But the principles that fought then are eternal, though the forms in which they manifest themselves vary with every varying age.

The Ritualist—using that word in its broadest sense—on the one hand, and the Puritan on the other, represent permanent tendencies of human nature; and we find to-day the old foes with new faces. These three passages, which I have read, are Paul's deliverance on the question of the comparative value of external rites and spiritual character. They are remarkable both for the identity in the former part of each and for the variety in the latter. In all the three cases he affirms, almost in the same language, that 'circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,' that the Ritualist's rite and the Puritan's protest are equally insignificant in comparison with higher things. And then he varies the statement of what the higher things are, in a very remarkable and instructive fashion. The 'keeping of the commandments of God,' says one of the texts, is the all-important matter. Then, as it were, he pierces deeper, and in another of the texts (I take the liberty of varying their order) pronounces that 'a new creature' is the all-important thing. And then he pierces still deeper to the bottom of all, in the third text, and says the all-important thing is 'faith which worketh by love.'

I think I shall best bring out the force of these words by dealing first with that emphatic threefold proclamation of the nullity of all externalism; and then with the singular variations in the triple statement of what is essential, viz. spiritual conduct and character.

I. First, the emphatic proclamation of the nullity of outward rites.

'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,' say two texts. 'Circumcision availeth nothing, and uncircumcision availeth nothing,' says the other. It neither is anything nor does anything. Did Paul say that because circumcision was a Jewish rite? No. As I believe, he said it because it was *a rite*; and because he had learned that the one thing needful was spiritual character, and that no external ceremonial of any sort could produce that. I think we are perfectly warranted in taking this principle of my text, and in extending it beyond the limits of the Jewish rite about which Paul was speaking. For if you remember, he speaks about baptism, in the first chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, in a precisely similar tone and for precisely the same reason, when he says, in effect, 'I baptized Crispus and Gaius and the household of Stephanas, and I think these are all. I am not quite sure. I do not keep any kind of record of such things; God did not send me to baptize, He sent me to preach the Gospel.'

The thing that produced the spiritual result was not the rite, but the truth, and therefore he felt that his function was to preach the truth and leave the rite to be administered by others. Therefore we can extend the principle here to all externalisms of worship, in all forms, in all churches, and say that in comparison with the essentials of an inward Christianity they are nothing and they do nothing.

They have their value. As long as we are here on earth, living in the flesh, we must have outward forms and symbolical rites. It is in Heaven that the seer 'saw no temple.' Our sense-bound nature requires, and thankfully avails itself of, the help of external rites and ceremonials to lift us up towards the Object of our devotion. A man prays all the better if he bow his head, shut his eyes, and bend his knees. Forms do help us to the realisation of the realities, and the truths which they express and embody. Music may waft our souls to the heavens, and pictures may stir deep thoughts. That is the simple principle on which the value of all external aids to devotion depends. They may be helps towards the appreciation of divine truth, and to the suffusing of the heart with devout emotions which may lead to building up a holy character.

There is a worth, therefore—an auxiliary and subordinate worth—in these things, and in that respect they are *not* nothing, nor do they 'avail nothing.' But then all external rites tend to usurp more than belongs to them, and in our weakness we are apt to cleave to them, and instead of using them as means to lift us higher, to stay in them, and as a great many of us do, to mistake the mere gratification of taste and the excitement of the sensibilities for worship. A bit of stained glass may be glowing with angel-forms and pictured saints, but it always keeps some of the light out, and it always hinders us from seeing through it. And all external worship and form have so strong a tendency to usurp more than belongs to them, and to drag us down to their own level, even whilst we think that we are praying, that I believe the wisest man will try to pare down the externals of his worship to the lowest possible point. If there be as much body as will keep a soul in, as much form as will embody the spirit, that is all that we want. What is more is dangerous.

All form in worship is like fire, it is a good servant but it is a bad master, and it needs to be kept very rigidly in subordination, or else the spirituality of Christian worship vanishes before men know; and they are left with their dead forms which are only evils—crutches that make people limp by the very act of using them.

Now, my dear friends, when that has happened, when men begin to say, as the people in Paul's time were saying about circumcision, and as people are saying in this day about Christian rites, that they are necessary, then it is needful to take up Paul's ground and to say, 'No! they are nothing!' They are useful in a certain place, but if you make them obligatory, if you make them essential, if you say that grace is miraculously conveyed through them, then it is needful that we should raise a strong note of

protestation, and declare their absolute nullity for the highest purpose, that of making that spiritual character which alone is essential.

And I believe that this strange recrudescence—to use a modern word—of ceremonialism and aesthetic worship which we see all round about us, not only in the ranks of the Episcopal Church, but amongst Nonconformists, who are sighing for a less bare service, and here and there are turning their chapels into concert-rooms, and instead of preaching the Gospel are having ‘Services of Song’ and the like—that all this makes it as needful to-day as ever it was to say to men: ‘Forms are not worship. Rites may crush the spirit. Men may yield to the sensuous impressions which they produce, and be lapped in an atmosphere of aesthetic emotion, without any real devotion.’

Such externals are only worth anything if they make us grasp more firmly with our understandings and feel more profoundly with our hearts, the great truths of the Gospel. If they do that, they help; if they are not doing that, they hinder, and are to be fought against. And so we have again to proclaim to-day, as Paul did, ‘Circumcision is nothing,’ ‘but the keeping of the commandments of God.’

Then notice with what remarkable fairness and boldness and breadth the Apostle here adds that other clause: ‘and uncircumcision is nothing.’ It is a very hard thing for a man whose life has been spent in fighting against an error, not to exaggerate the value of his protest. It is a very hard thing for a man who has been delivered from the dependence upon forms, not to fancy that his formlessness is what the other people think that their forms are. The Puritan who does not believe that a man can be a good man because he is a Ritualist or a Roman Catholic, is committing the very same error as the Ritualist or the Roman Catholic who does not believe that the Puritan can be a Christian unless he has been ‘christened.’ The two people are exactly the same, only the one has hold of the stick at one end, and the other at the other. There may be as much idolatry in superstitious reliance upon the bare worship as in the advocacy of the ornate; and many a Nonconformist who fancies that he has ‘never bowed the knee to Baal’ is as true an idol-worshipper in his superstitious abhorrence of the ritualism that he sees in other communities, as are the men who trust in it the most.

It is a large attainment in Christian character to be able to say with Paul, ‘Circumcision is nothing, and my own favourite point of uncircumcision is nothing either. Neither the one side nor the other touches the essentials.’

II. Now let us look at the threefold variety of the designation of these essentials here.

In our first text from the Epistle to the Corinthians we read, ‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.’ If we finished the sentence it would be, ‘but the keeping of the commandments of God is everything.’

And by that ‘keeping the commandments,’ of course, the Apostle does not mean merely external obedience. He means something far deeper than that, which I put into this plain word, that the one essential of a Christian life is the conformity of the will with God’s—not the external obedience merely, but the entire surrender and the submission of my will to the will of my Father in Heaven. That is the all-important thing; that is what God wants; that is the end of all rites and ceremonies; that is the end of all revelation and of all utterances of the divine heart. The Bible, Christ’s mission, His passion and death, the gift of His Divine Spirit, and every part of the divine dealings in providence, all converge upon this one aim and goal. For this purpose the Father worketh hitherto, and Christ works, that man’s will may yield and bow itself wholly and happily and lovingly to the great infinite will of the Father in heaven.

Brethren! that is the perfection of a man’s nature, when his will fits on to God’s like one of Euclid’s triangles superimposed upon another, and line for line coincides. When his will allows a free passage to the will of God, without resistance or deflection, as light travels through transparent glass; when his will responds to the touch of God’s finger upon the keys, like the telegraphic needle to the operator’s hand, then man has attained all that God and religion can do for him, all that his nature is capable of; and far beneath his feet may be the ladders of ceremonies and forms and outward acts, by which he climbed to that serene and blessed height, ‘Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of God’s commandments is everything.’

That submission of will is the sum and the test of your Christianity. Your Christianity does not consist only in a mere something which you call faith in Jesus Christ. It does not consist in emotions, however deep and blessed and genuine they may be. It does not consist in the acceptance of a creed. All these are means to an end. They are meant to drive the wheel of life, to build up character, to make your deepest wish to be, ‘Father! not my will, but Thine, be done.’ In the measure in which that is your heart’s desire, and not one hair’s-breadth further, have you a right to call yourself a Christian.

But, then, I can fancy a man saying: ‘It is all very well to talk about bowing the will in this fashion; how can I do that?’ Well, let us take our second text—the third in the order of their occurrence—‘For neither circumcision is anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.’ That is to say, if we are ever to keep the will of God we must be made over again. Ay! we must! Our own consciences tell us that; the history of all the efforts that ever we have made—and I suppose all of us have made some now and then, more or less earnest and more or less persistent—tells us that there needs to be a stronger hand than ours to come into the fight if it is ever to be won by us. There is nothing more heartless and more impotent than to preach, ‘Bow your wills to God, and then you will be happy; bow your wills to God, and then you will be good.’ If that is all the preacher has to say, his powerless words will but provoke the

answer, 'We cannot. Tell the leopard to change his spots, or the Ethiopian his skin, as soon as tell a man to reduce this revolted kingdom within him to obedience, and to bow his will to the will of God. We cannot do it.' But, brethren, in that word, 'a new creature,' lies a promise from God; for a creature implies a creator. 'It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.' The very heart of what Christ has to offer us is the gift of His own life to dwell in our hearts, and by its mighty energy to make us free from the law of sin and death which binds our wills. We may have our spirits moulded into His likeness, and new tastes, and new desires, and new capacities infused into us, so as that we shall not be left with our own poor powers to try and force ourselves into obedience to God's will, but that submission and holiness and love that keeps the commandments of God, will spring up in our renewed spirits as their natural product and growth. Oh! you men and women who have been honestly trying, half your lifetime, to make yourselves what you know God wants you to be, and who are obliged to confess that you have failed, hearken to the message: 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away.' The one thing needful is keeping the commandments of God, and the only way by which we can keep the commandments of God is that we should be formed again into the likeness of Him of whom alone it is true that 'He did always the things that pleased' God.

And so we come to the last of these great texts: 'In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.' That is to say, if we are to be made over again, we must have faith in Christ Jesus. We have got to the root now, so far as we are concerned. We must keep the commandments of God; if we are to keep the commandments we must be made over again, and if our hearts ask how can we receive that new creating power into our lives, the answer is, by 'faith which worketh by love.'

Paul did not believe that external rites could make men partakers of a new nature, but he believed that if a man would trust in Jesus Christ, the life of that Christ would flow into his opened heart, and a new spirit and nature would be born in him. And, therefore, his triple requirements come all down to this one, so far as we are concerned, as the beginning and the condition of the other two. 'Neither circumcision does anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love,' does everything. He that trusts Christ opens his heart to Christ, who comes with His new-creating Spirit, and makes us willing in the day of His power to keep His commandments.

But faith leads us to obedience in yet another fashion, than this opening of the door of the heart for the entrance of the new-creating Spirit. It leads to it in the manner which is expressed by the words of our text, 'worketh by love.' Faith shows itself living, because it leads us to love, and through love it produces its effects upon conduct.

Two things are implied in this designation of faith. If you trust Christ you will love Him. That is plain enough. And you will not love Him unless you trust Him. Though it lies wide of my present purpose, let us take this lesson in passing. You cannot work yourself up into a spasm or paroxysm of religious emotion and love by resolution or by effort. All that you can do is to go and look at the Master and get near Him, and that will warm you up. You can love if you trust. Your trust will make you love; unless you trust you will never love Him.

The second thing implied is, that if you love you will obey. That is plain enough. The keeping of the commandments will be easy where there is love in the heart. The will will bow where there is love in the heart. Love is the only fire that is hot enough to melt the iron obstinacy of a creature's will. The will cannot be driven. Strike it with violence and it stiffens; touch it gently and it yields. If you try to put an iron collar upon the will, like the demoniac in the Gospels, the touch of the apparent restraint drives it into fury, and it breaks the bands asunder. Fasten it with the silken leash of love, and a 'little child' can lead it. So faith works by love, because whom we trust we shall love, and whom we love we shall obey.

Therefore we have got to the root now, and nothing is needful but an operative faith, out of which will come all the blessed possession of a transforming Spirit, and all sublimities and noblenesses of an obedient and submissive will.

My brother! Paul and James shake hands here. There is a 'faith' so called, which does not work. It is dead! Let me beseech you, none of you to rely upon what you choose to call your faith in Jesus Christ, but examine it. Does it do anything? Does it help you to be like Him? Does it open your hearts for His Spirit to come in? Does it fill them with love to that Master, a love which proves itself by obedience? Plain questions, questions that any man can answer; questions that go to the root of the whole matter. If your faith does that, it is genuine; if it does not, it is not.

And do not trust either to forms, or to your freedom from forms. They will not save your souls, they will not make you more Christ-like. They will not help you to pardon, purity, holiness, blessedness. In these respects neither if we have them are we the better, nor if we have them not are we the worse. If you are trusting to Christ, and by that faith are having your hearts moulded and made over again into all holy obedience, then you have all that you need. Unless you have, though you partook of all Christian rites, though you believed all Christian truth, though you fought against superstitious reliance on forms, you have not the one thing needful, for 'in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.'

## SLAVES AND FREE

'He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's free man: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.'—1 COR. vii. 22.

This remarkable saying occurs in a remarkable connection, and is used for a remarkable purpose. The Apostle has been laying down the principle, that the effect of true Christianity is greatly to diminish the importance of outward circumstance. And on that principle he bases an advice, dead in the teeth of all the maxims recognised by worldly prudence. He says, in effect, 'Mind very little about getting on and getting up. Do God's will wherever you are, and let the rest take care of itself.' Now, the world says, 'Struggle, wriggle, fight, do anything to better yourself.' Paul says, 'You will better yourself by getting nearer God, and if you secure that—art thou a slave? care not for it; if thou mayest be free, use it rather; art thou bound to a wife? seek not to be loosed; art thou loosed? seek not to be bound; art thou circumcised? seek not to be uncircumcised; art thou a Gentile? seek not to become in outward form a Jew.' Never mind about externals: the main thing is our relation to Jesus Christ, because in that there is what will be compensation for all the disadvantages of any disadvantageous circumstances, and in that there is what will take the guilt off the gingerbread of any superficial and fleeting good, and will bring a deep-seated and permanent blessing.

Now, I am not going to deal in this sermon with that general principle, nor even to be drawn aside to speak of the tone in which the Apostle here treats the great abomination of slavery, and the singular advice that he gives to its victims; though the consideration of the tone of Christianity to that master-evil of the old world might yield a great many thoughts very relevant to pressing questions of to-day. But my one object is to fix upon the combination which he here brings out in regard to the essence of the Christian life; how that in itself it contains both members of the antithesis, servitude and freedom; so that the Christian man who is free externally is Christ's slave, and the Christian man who is outwardly in bondage is emancipated by his union with Jesus Christ.

There are two thoughts here, the application in diverse directions of the same central idea—viz. the slavery of Christ's free men, and the freedom of Christ's slaves. And I deal briefly with these two now.

I. First, then, note how, according to the one-half of the antithesis, Christ's freed men are slaves.

Now, the way in which the New Testament deals with that awful wickedness of a man held in bondage by a man is extremely remarkable. It might seem as if such a hideous piece of immorality were altogether incapable of yielding any lessons of good. But the Apostles have no hesitation whatever in taking slavery as a clear picture of the relation in which all Christian people stand to Jesus Christ their Lord. He is the owner and we are the slaves. For you must remember that the word most inadequately rendered here, 'servant' does not mean a hired man who has, of his own volition, given himself for a time to do specific work and get wages for it; but it means 'a bond-slave,' a chattel owned by another. All the ugly associations which gather round the word are transported bodily into the Christian region, and there, instead of being hideous, take on a shape of beauty, and become expressions of the deepest and most blessed truths, in reference to Christian men's dependence upon, and submission to, and place in the household and the heart of, Jesus Christ, their Owner.

And what is the centre idea that lies in this metaphor, if you like to call it so? It is this: absolute authority, which has for its correlative—for the thing in us that answers to it—unconditional submission. Jesus Christ has the perfect right to command each of us, and we are bound to bow ourselves, unreluctant, uncomplaining, unhesitating, with complete submission at His feet. His authority, and our submission, go far, far deeper than the most despotic sway of the most tyrannous master, or than the most abject submission of the most downtrodden slave. For no man can coerce another man's will, and no man can require more, or can ever get more, than that outward obedience which may be rendered with the most sullen and fixed rebellion of a hating heart and an obstinate will. But Jesus Christ demands that if we call ourselves Christians we shall bring, not our members only as instruments to Him, in outward surrender and service, but that we shall yield ourselves, with our capacities of willing and desiring, utterly, absolutely, constantly to Him.

The founder of the Jesuits laid it down as a rule for his Order that each member of it was to be at the master's disposal like a corpse, or a staff in the hand of a blind man. That was horrible. But the absolute putting of myself at the disposal of another's will, which is expressed so tyrannously in Loyola's demand, is the simple duty of every Christian, and as long as we have recalcitrating wills, which recoil at anything which Christ commands or appoints, and perk up their own inclinations in the face of His solemn commandment, or that shrink from doing and suffering whatsoever He imposes and enjoins, we have still to learn what it means to be Christ's disciples.

Dear brethren, absolute submission is not all that makes a disciple, but, depend upon it, there is no discipleship worth calling by the name without it. So I come to each of you with His message to you:—Down on your faces before Him! Bow your obstinate will, surrender yourselves and accept Him as absolute, dominant Lord over your whole being! Are you Christians after that pattern? Being freemen, are you Christ's slaves?

It does not matter what sort of work the owner sets his household of slaves to do. One man is picked out to be his pipe-bearer, or his shoe-cleaner; and, if the master is a sovereign, another one is sent off, perhaps, to be governor of a province, or one of his council. They are all slaves; and the service that each does is equally important.

'All service ranks the same with God: There is no last nor first.'

What does it matter what you and I are set to do? Nothing. And, so, why need we struggle and wear our hearts out to get into conspicuous places, or to do work that shall bring some revenue of praise said glory to ourselves? 'Play well thy part; there all the honour lies,' the world can say. Serve Christ in anything, and all His servants are alike in His sight.

The slave-owner had absolute power of life and death over his dependants. He could split up families; he could sell away dear ones; he could part husband and wife, parent and child. The slave was his, and he could do what he liked with his own, according to the cruel logic of ancient law. And Jesus Christ, the Lord of the household, the Lord of providence, can say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes into the mists and the shadows of death. And He can say to those who are most closely united, 'Loose your hands! I have need of one of you yonder. I have need of the other one here.' And if we are wise, if we are His servants in any real deep sense, we shall not kick against the appointments of His supreme, autocratic, and yet most loving Providence, but be content to leave the arbitrament of life and death, of love united or of love parted, in His hands, and say, 'Whether we live we are the Lord's, or whether we die we are the Lord's; living or dying we are His.'

The slave-owner owned all that the slave owned. He gave him a little cottage, with some humble sticks of furniture in it; and a bit of ground on which to grow his vegetables for his family. But he to whom the owner of the vegetables and the stools belonged owned them too. And if we are Christ's servants, our banker's book is Christ's, and our purse is Christ's, and our investments are Christ's; and our mills, and our warehouses, and our shops and our businesses are His. We are not His slaves, if we arrogate to ourselves the right of doing what we like with His possessions.

And, then, still further, there comes into our Apostle's picture here yet another point of resemblance between slaves and the disciples of Jesus. For the hideous abominations of the slave-market are transferred to the Christian relation, and defecated and cleansed of all their abominations and cruelty thereby. For what immediately follows my text is, 'Ye are bought with a price.' Jesus Christ has won us for Himself. There is only one price that can buy a heart, and that is a heart. There is only one way of getting a man to be mine, and that is by giving myself to be his. So we come to the very vital, palpitating centre of all Christianity when we say, 'He gave Himself for us, that He might acquire to Himself a people for His possession.' Thus His purchase of His slave, when we remember that it is the buying of a man in his inmost personality, changes all that might seem harsh in the requirement of absolute submission into the most gracious and blessed privilege. For when I am won by another, because that other has given him or her whole self to me, then the language of love is submission, and the conformity of the two wills is the delight of each loving will. Whoever has truly been wooed into relationship with Jesus, by reflection upon the love with which Jesus grapples him to His heart, finds that there is nothing so blessed as to yield one's self utterly and for ever to His service.

The one bright point in the hideous institution of slavery was, that it bound the master to provide for the slave, and though that was degrading to the inferior, it made his life a careless, child-like, merry life, even amidst the many cruelties and abominations of the system. But what was a good, dashed with a great deal of evil, in that relation of man to man, comes to be a pure blessing and good in our relation to Him. If I am Christ's slave, it is His business to take care of His own property, and I do not need to trouble myself much about it. If I am His slave, He will be quite sure to find me in food and necessaries enough to get His tale of work out of me; and I may cast all my care upon Him, for He careth for me. So, brethren, absolute submission and the devolution of all anxiety on the Master are what is laid upon us, if we are Christ's slaves.

II. Then there is the other side, about which I must say, secondly, a word or two; and that is, the freedom of Christ's slaves.

As the text puts it, 'He that is called, being a servant, is the Lord's freedman.' A freedman was one who was emancipated, and who therefore stood in a relation of gratitude to his emancipator and patron. So in the very word 'freedman' there is contained the idea of submission to Him who has struck off the fetters.

But, apart from that, let me just remind you, in a sentence or two, that whilst there are many other ways by which men have sought, and have partially attained, deliverance from the many fetters and bondages that attach to our earthly life, the one perfect way by which a man can be truly, in the deepest sense of the word and in his inmost being, a free man is by faith in Jesus Christ.

I do not for a moment forget how wisdom and truth, and noble aims and high purposes, and culture of various kinds have, in lower degrees and partially, emancipated men from self and flesh and sin and the world, and all the other fetters that bind us. But sure I am that the process is never so completely and so assuredly effected as by the simple way of absolute submission to Jesus Christ, taking Him for the supreme and unconditional Arbiter and Sovereign of a life.

If we do that, brethren, if we really yield ourselves to Him, in heart and will, in life and conduct, submitting our understanding to His

infallible Word, and our wills to His authority, regulating our conduct by His perfect pattern, and in all things seeking to serve Him and to realise His presence, then be sure of this, that we shall be set free from the one real bondage, and that is the bondage of our own wicked selves. There is no such tyranny as mob tyranny; and there is no such slavery as to be ruled by the mob of our own passions and lusts and inclinations and other meannesses that yelp and clamour within us, and seek to get hold of us and to sway. There is only one way by which the brute domination of the lower part of our nature can be surely and thoroughly put down, and that is by turning to Jesus Christ and saying to Him, 'Lord! do Thou rule this anarchic kingdom within me, for I cannot govern it myself. Do Thou guide and direct and subdue.' You can only govern yourself and be free from the compulsion of your own evil nature when you surrender the control to the Master, and say ever, 'Speak, Lord! for Thy slave hears. Here am I, send me.'

And that is the only way by which a man can be delivered from the bondage of dependence upon outward things. I said at the beginning of these remarks that my text occurred in the course of a discussion in which the Apostle was illustrating the tendency of true Christian faith to set man free from, and to make him largely independent of, the varieties in external circumstances. Christian faith does so, because it brings into a life a sufficient compensation for all losses, limitations, and sorrows, and a good which is the reality of which all earthly goods are but shadows. So the slave may be free in Christ, and the poor man may be rich in Him, and the sad man may be joyful, and the joyful man may be delivered from excess of gladness, and the rich man be kept from the temptations and sins of wealth, and the free man be taught to surrender his liberty to the Lord who makes him free. Thus, if we have the all-sufficient compensation which there is in Jesus Christ, the satisfaction for all our needs and desires, we do not need to trouble ourselves so much as we sometimes do about these changing things round about us. Let them come, let them go; let the darkness veil the light, and the light illuminate the darkness; let summer and winter alternate; let tribulation and prosperity succeed each other; we have a source of blessedness unaffected by these. Ice may skin the surface of the lake, but deep beneath, the water is at the same temperature in winter and in summer. Storms may sweep the face of the deep, but in the abyss there is calm which is not stagnation. So he that cleaves to Christ is delivered from the slavery that binds men to the details and accidents of outward life.

And if we are the servants of Christ, we shall be set free, in the measure in which we are His, from the slavery which daily becomes more oppressive as the means of communication become more complete, the slavery to popular opinion and to men round us. Dare to be singular; take your beliefs at first hand from the Master. Never mind what fellow-slaves say. It is His smile or frown that is of importance. 'Ye are bought with a price; be not servants of men.'

And so, brethren, 'choose you this day whom ye will serve.' You are not made to be independent. You must serve some thing or person. Recognise the narrow limitations within which your choice lies, and the issues which depend upon it. It is not whether you will serve Christ or whether you will be free. It is whether you will serve Christ or your own worst self, the world, men, and I was going to add, the flesh and the devil. Make your choice. He has bought you. You belong to Him by His death. Yield yourselves to Him, it is the only way of breaking your chains. He that doeth sin is the servant of sin. 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed,' and not only free; for the King's slaves are princes and nobles, and 'all things are yours, and ye are Christ's.' They who say to Him 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant,' receive from Him the rank of kings and priests to God, and shall reign with Him for ever.

## THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

'Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.'—1 COR. vii. 24.

You find that three times within the compass of a very few verses this injunction is repeated. 'As God hath distributed to every man,' says the Apostle in the seventeenth verse, 'as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all the churches.' Then again in the twentieth verse, 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called.' And then finally in our text.

The reason for this emphatic reiteration is not difficult to ascertain. There were strong temptations to restlessness besetting the early Christians. The great change from heathenism to Christianity would seem to loosen the joints of all life, and having been swept from their anchorage in religion, all external things would appear to be adrift. It was most natural that a man should seek to alter even the circumstances of his outward life, when such a revolution had separated him from his ancient self. Hence would tend to come the rupture of family ties, the separation of husband and wife, the Jewish convert seeking to become like a Gentile, the Gentile seeking to become like a Jew; the slave trying to be free, the freeman, in some paroxysm of disgust at his former condition, trying to become a slave. These three cases are all referred to in the context—marriage, circumcision, slavery. And for all three the Apostle has the same advice to give—'Stop where you are.' In whatever condition you were when God's invitation drew you to Himself—for that, and not being set to a 'vocation' in life, is the meaning of the word 'called' here—remain in it.

And then, on the other hand, there was every reason why the Apostle and his co-workers should set themselves, by all means in their power, to oppose this restlessness. For, if Christianity in those early days had once degenerated into the mere instrument of social revolution, its development would have been thrown back for centuries, and the whole worth and power of it, for those who

first apprehended it, would have been lost. So you know Paul never said a word to encourage any precipitate attempts to change externals. He let slavery—he let war alone; he let the tyranny of the Roman Empire alone—not because he was a coward, not because he thought that these things were not worth meddling with, but because he, like all wise men, believed in making the tree good and then its fruit good. He believed in the diffusion of the principles which he proclaimed, and the mighty Name which he served, as able to girdle the poison-tree, and to take the bark off it, and the rest, the slow dying, might be left to the work of time. And the same general idea underlies the words of my text. ‘Do not try to change,’ he says, ‘do not trouble about external conditions; keep to your Christian profession; let those alone, they will right themselves. Art thou a slave? Seek not to be freed. Art thou circumcised? Seek not to be uncircumcised. Get hold of the central, vivifying, transmuting influence, and all the rest is a question of time.’

But, besides this more especial application of the words of my text to the primitive times, it carries with it, dear brethren, a large general principle that applies to all times—a principle, I may say, dead in the teeth of the maxims upon which life is being ordered by the most of us. *Our* maxim is, ‘Get on!’ Paul’s is, ‘Never mind about getting on, get up!’ Our notion is—‘Try to make the circumstances what I would like to have them.’ Paul’s is—‘Leave circumstances to take care of themselves, or rather leave God to take care of the circumstances. You get close to Him, and hold His hand, and everything else will right itself.’ Only he is not preaching stolid acquiescence. His previous injunctions were—‘Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.’ He sees that that may be misconceived and abused, and so, in his third reiteration of the precept, he puts in a word which throws a flood of light upon the whole thing—‘Let every man wherein he is called therein abide.’ Yes, but that is not all—‘therein abide *with God!*’ Ay, that is it! not an impossible stoicism; not hypocritical, fanatical contempt of the external. But whilst that gets its due force and weight, whilst a man yields himself in a measure to the natural tastes and inclinations which God has given him, and with the intention that he should find there subordinate guidance and impulse for his life, still let him abide where he is called with God, and seek to increase his fellowship with Him, as the main thing that he has to do.

I. Thus we are led from the words before us first to the thought that our chief effort in life ought to be union with God.

‘Abide with God,’ which, being put into other words, means, I think, mainly two things—constant communion, the occupation of all our nature with Him, and, consequently, the recognition of His will in all circumstances.

As to the former, we have the mind and heart and will of God revealed to us for the light, the love, the obedience of our will and heart and mind; and our Apostle’s precept is, first, that we should try, moment by moment, in all the bustle and stir of our daily life, to have our whole being consciously directed to and engaged with, fertilised and calmed by contact with, the perfect and infinite nature of our Father in heaven.

As we go to our work again to-morrow morning, what difference would obedience to this precept make upon my life and yours? Before all else, and in the midst of all else, we should think of that Divine Mind that in the heavens is waiting to illumine our darkness; we should feel the glow of that uncreated and perfect Love, which, in the midst of change and treachery, of coldness and of ‘greetings where no kindness is,’ in the midst of masterful authority and unloving command, is ready to fill our hearts with tenderness and tranquillity: we should bow before that Will which is absolute and supreme indeed, but neither arbitrary nor harsh, which is ‘the eternal purpose that He hath purposed in Himself’ indeed, but is also ‘the good pleasure of His goodness and the counsel of His grace.’

And with such a God near to us ever in our faithful thoughts, in our thankful love, in our lowly obedience, with such a mind revealing itself to us, and such a heart opening its hidden storehouses for us as we approach, like some star that, as one gets nearer to it, expands its disc and glows into rich colour, which at a distance was but pallid silver, and such a will sovereign above all, energising, even through opposition, and making obedience a delight, what room, brethren, would there be in our lives for agitations, and distractions, and regrets, and cares, and fears—what room for earthly hopes or for sad remembrances? They die in the fruition of a present God all-sufficient for mind, and heart, and will—even as the sun when it is risen with a burning heat may scorch and wither the weeds that grow about the base of the fruitful tree, whose deeper roots are but warmed by the rays that ripen the rich clusters which it bears. ‘Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide *with God.*’

And then, as a consequence of such an occupation of the whole being with God, there will follow that second element which is included in the precept, namely, the recognition of God’s will as operating in and determining all circumstances. When our whole soul is occupied with Him, we shall see Him everywhere. And this ought to be our honest effort—to connect everything which befalls ourselves and the world with Him. We should see that Omnipotent Will, the silent energy which flows through all being, asserting itself through all secondary causes, marching on towards its destined and certain goal, amidst all the whirl and perturbation of events, bending even the antagonism of rebels and the unconsciousness of godless men, as well as the play of material instruments, to its own purposes, and swinging and swaying the whole set and motion of things according to its own impulse and by the touch of its own fingers.

Such a faith does not require us to overlook the visible occasions for the things which befall us, nor to deny the stable laws



according to which that mighty will operates in men's lives. Secondary causes? Yes. Men's opposition and crime? Yes. Our own follies and sins? No doubt. Blessings and sorrows falling indiscriminately on a whole community or a whole world? Certainly. And yet the visible agents are not the sources, but only the vehicles of the power, the belting and shafting which transmit a mighty impulse which they had nothing to do in creating. And the antagonism subserves the purposes of the rule which it opposes, as the blow of the surf may consolidate the sea-wall that it breaks against. And our own follies and sins may indeed sorrowfully shadow our lives, and bring on us pains of body and disasters in fortune, and stings in spirit for which we alone are responsible, and which we have no right to regard as inscrutable judgments—yet even these bitter plants of which our own hands have sowed the seed, spring by His merciful will, and *are* to be regarded as His loving, fatherly chastisements—sent before to warn us by a premonitory experience that 'the wages of sin is death.' As a rule, God does not interpose to pick a man out of the mud into which he has been plunged by his own faults and follies, until he has learned the lessons which he can find in plenty down in the slough, if he will only look for them! And the fact that some great calamity or some great joy affects a wide circle of people, does not make its having a special lesson and meaning for each of them at all doubtful. *There* is one of the great depths of all-moving wisdom and providence, that in the very self-same act it is in one aspect universal, and in another special and individual. The ordinary notion of a special providence goes perilously near the belief that God's will is less concerned in some parts of a man's life than in others. It is very much like desecrating and secularising a whole land by the very act of focussing the sanctity in some single consecrated shrine. But the true belief is that the whole sweep of a life is under the will of God, and that when, for instance, war ravages a nation, though the sufferers be involved in a common ruin occasioned by murderous ambition and measureless pride, yet for each of the sufferers the common disaster has a special message. Let us believe in a divine will which regards each individual caught up in the skirts of the horrible storm, even as it regards each individual on whom the equal rays of His universal sunshine fall. Let us believe that every single soul has a place in the heart, and is taken into account in the purposes of Him who moves the tempest, and makes His sun to shine upon the unthankful and on the good. Let us, in accordance with the counsel of the Apostle here, first of all try to anchor and rest our own souls fast and firm in God all the day long, that, grasping His hand, we may look out upon all the confused dance of fleeting circumstances and say, 'Thy will is done on earth'—if not yet 'as it is done in heaven,' still done in the issues and events of all—and done with my cheerful obedience and thankful acceptance of its commands and allotments in my own life.

II. The second idea which comes out of these words is this—Such union with God will lead to contented continuance in our place, whatever it be.

Our text is as if Paul had said, 'You have been "called" in such and such worldly circumstances. The fact proves that these circumstances do not obstruct the highest and richest blessings. The light of God can shine on your souls through them. Since then you have such sacred memorials associated with them, and know by experience that fellowship with God is possible in them, do you remain where you are, and keep hold of the God who has visited you in them.'

If once, in accordance with the thoughts already suggested, our minds have, by God's help, been brought into something like real, living fellowship with Him, and we have attained the wisdom that pierces through the external to the Almighty will that underlies all its mazy whirl, then why should we care about shifting our place? Why should we trouble ourselves about altering these varying events, since each in its turn is a manifestation of His mind and will; each in its turn is a means of discipline for us; and through all their variety a single purpose works, which tends to a single end—'that we should be partakers of His holiness'?

And that is the one point of view from which we can bear to look upon the world and not be utterly bewildered and over-mastered by it. Calmness and central peace are ours; a true appreciation of all outward good and a charm against the bitterest sting of outward evils are ours; a patient continuance in the place where He has set us is ours—when by fellowship with Him we have learned to look upon our work as primarily doing His will, and upon all our possessions and conditions primarily as means for making us like Himself. Most men seem to think that they have gone to the very bottom of the thing when they have classified the gifts of fortune as good or evil, according as they produce pleasure or pain. But that is a poor, superficial classification. It is like taking and arranging books by their bindings and flowers by their colours. Instead of saying, 'We divide life into two halves, and we put there all the joyful, and here all the sad, for that is the ruling distinction'—let us rather say, 'The whole is one, because it all comes from one purpose, and it all tends towards one end. The only question worth asking in regard to the externals of our life is—How far does each thing help me to be a good man? how far does it open my understanding to apprehend Him? how far does it make my spirit pliable and plastic under His touch? how far does it make me capable of larger reception of greater gifts from Himself? what is its effect in preparing me for that world beyond?' Is there any other greater, more satisfying, more majestic thought of life than this—the scaffolding by which souls are built up into the temple of God? And to care whether a thing is painful or pleasant is as absurd as to care whether the bricklayer's trowel is knocking the sharp corner off a brick, or plastering mortar on the one below it before he lays it carefully on its course. Is the *building* getting on? That is the one question that is worth thinking about.

You and I write our lives as if on one of those manifold writers which you use. A thin filmy sheet *here*, a bit of black paper below it; but the writing goes through upon the next page, and when the blackness that divides two worlds is swept away *there*, the history of each life written by ourselves remains legible in eternity. And the question is—What sort of autobiography are we writing for the revelation of that day, and how far do our circumstances help us to transcribe fair in our lives the will of our God and the image of

our Redeemer?

If, then, we have once got hold of that principle that all which is—summer and winter, storm and sunshine, possession and loss, memory and hope, work and rest, and all the other antitheses of life—is equally the product of His will, equally the manifestation of His mind, equally His means for our discipline, then we have the amulet and talisman which will preserve us from the fever of desire and the shivering fits of anxiety as to things which perish. And, as they tell of a Christian father who, riding by one of the great lakes of Switzerland all day long, on his journey to the Church Council that was absorbing his thoughts, said towards evening to the deacon who was pacing beside him, 'Where is the lake?' so you and I, journeying along by the margin of this great flood of things when wild storms sweep across it, or when the sunbeams glint upon its blue waters, 'and birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave,' will be careless of the changeful sea, if the eye looks beyond the visible and beholds the unseen, the unchanging real presences that make glory in the darkest lives, and 'sunshine in the shady place.' 'Let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.'

III. Still further, another thought may be suggested from these words, or rather from the connection in which they occur, and that is—Such contented continuance in our place is the dictate of the truest wisdom.

There are two or three collateral topics, partly suggested by the various connections in which this commandment occurs in the chapter, from which I draw the few remarks I have to make now.

And the first point I would suggest is that very old commonplace one, so often forgotten, that after all, though you may change about as much as you like, there is a pretty substantial equipoise and identity in the amount of pain and pleasure in all external conditions. The total length of day and night all the year round is the same at the North Pole and at the Equator—half and half. Only, in the one place, it is half and half for four-and-twenty hours at a time, and in the other, the night lasts through gloomy months of winter, and the day is bright for unbroken weeks of summer. But, when you come to add them up at the year's end, the man who shivers in the ice, and the man who pants beneath the beams from the zenith, have had the same length of sunshine and of darkness. It does not matter much at what degrees between the Equator and the Pole you and I live; when the thing comes to be made up we shall be all pretty much upon an equality. You do not get the happiness of the rich man over the poor one by multiplying twenty shillings a week by as many figures as will suffice to make it up to £10,000 a year. What is the use of such eager desires to change our condition, when every condition has disadvantages attending its advantages as certainly as a shadow; and when all have pretty nearly the same quantity of the raw material of pain and pleasure, and when the amount of either actually experienced by us depends not on where we are, but on *what* we are?

Then, still further, there is another consideration to be kept in mind upon which I do not enlarge, as what I have already said involves it—namely, that whilst the portion of external pain and pleasure summed up comes pretty much to the same in everybody's life, any condition may yield the fruit of devout fellowship with God.

Another very remarkable idea suggested by a part of the context is—What is the need for my troubling myself about outward changes when *in Christ* I can get all the peculiarities which make any given position desirable to me? For instance, hear how Paul talks to slaves eager to be set free: 'For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant.' If you generalise that principle it comes to this, that in union with Jesus Christ we possess, by our fellowship with Him, the peculiar excellences and blessings that are derivable from external relations of every sort. To take concrete examples—if a man is a slave, he may be free in Christ. If free, he may have the joy of utter submission to an absolute master in Christ. If you and I are lonely, we may feel all the delights of society by union with Him. If surrounded and distracted by companionship, and seeking for seclusion, we may get all the peace of perfect privacy in fellowship with Him. If we are rich, and sometimes think that we were in a position of less temptation if we were poorer, we may find all the blessings for which we sometimes covet poverty in communion with Him. If we are poor, and fancy that, if we had a little more just to lift us above the grinding, carking care of to-day and the anxiety of to-morrow, we should be happier, we may find all tranquillity in Him. And so you may run through all the variety of human conditions, and say to yourself—What is the use of looking for blessings flowing from these from without? Enough for us if we grasp that Lord who is all in all, and will give us in peace the joy of conflict, in conflict the calm of peace, in health the refinement of sickness, in sickness the vigour and glow of health, in memory the brightness of undying hope, in hope the calming of holy memory, in wealth the lowliness of poverty, in poverty the ease of wealth; in life and in death being all and more than all that dazzles us by the false gleam of created brightness!

And so, finally—a remark which has no connection with the text itself, but which I cannot avoid inserting here—I want you to think, and think seriously, of the antagonism and diametrical opposition between these principles of my text and the maxims current in the world, and nowhere more so than in this city. Our text is a revolutionary one. It is dead against the watchwords that you fathers give your children—'push,' 'energy,' 'advancement,' 'get on, whatever you do.' You have made a philosophy of it, and you say that this restless discontent with a man's present position and eager desire to get a little farther ahead in the scramble, underlies much modern civilisation and progress, and leads to the diffusion of wealth and to employment for the working classes, and to mechanical

inventions, and domestic comforts, and I don't know what besides. You have made a religion of it; and it is thought to be blasphemy for a man to stand up and say—'It is idolatry!' My dear brethren, I declare I solemnly believe that, if I were to go on to the Manchester Exchange next Tuesday, and stand up and say—'There is no God,' I should not be thought half such a fool as if I were to go and say—'Poverty is not an evil *per se*, and men do not come into this world to get *on* but to get *up*—nearer and liker to God.' If you, by God's grace, lay hold of this principle of my text, and honestly resolve to work it out, trusting in that dear Lord who 'though He was rich yet for our sakes became poor,' in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred you will have to make up your minds to let the big prizes of your trade go into other people's hands, and be contented to say—'I live by peaceful, high, pure, Christ-like thoughts.' 'He that needs least,' said an old heathen, 'is nearest the gods'; but I would rather modify the statement into, 'He that needs most, and knows it, is nearest the gods.' For surely Christ is more than mammon; and a spirit nourished by calm desires and holy thoughts into growing virtues and increasing Christlikeness is better than circumstances ordered to our will, in the whirl of which we have lost our God. 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God and the God of peace shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'

### **'LOVE BUILDETH UP'**

'Now, as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth... —1 COR. viii. 1-13.

It is difficult for us to realise the close connection which existed between idol-worship and daily life. Something of the same sort is found in all mission fields. It was almost impossible for Christians to take any part in society and not seem to sanction idolatry. Would that Christianity were as completely interwoven with our lives as heathen religions are into those of their devotees! Paul seems to have had referred to him a pressing case of conscience, which divided the Corinthian Church, as to whether a Christian could join in the usual feasts or sacrifices. His answer is in this passage.

The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home. The Apostle begins far away from the subject in hand by running a contrast between knowledge and love, and setting the latter first. But his contrast is very relevant to his purpose. Small questions should be solved on great principles.

The first principle laid down by Paul is the superiority of love over knowledge, the bearing of which on the question in hand will appear presently. We note that there is first a distinct admission of the Corinthians' intelligence, though there is probably a tinge of irony in the language 'We know that we all have knowledge.' 'You Corinthians are fully aware that you are very superior people. Whatever else you know, you know that, and I fully recognise it.'

The admission is followed by a sudden, sharp comment, to which the Corinthians' knowledge that they knew laid them open. Swift as the thrust of a spear comes flashing 'Knowledge puffeth up.' Puffed-up things are swollen by wind only, and the more they are inflated the hollower and emptier they are; and such a sharp point as Paul's saying shrivels them. The statement is not meant as the assertion of a necessary or uniform result of knowledge, but it does put plainly a very usual result of it, if it is unaccompanied by love. It is a strange, sad result of superior intelligence or acquirements, that it so often leads to conceit, to a false estimate of the worth and power of knowing, to a ridiculous over-valuing of certain acquirements, and to an insolent contempt and cruel disregard of those who have them not. Paul's dictum has been only too well confirmed by experience.

'Love builds up,' or 'edifies.' Probably the main direction in which that building up is conceived of as taking effect, is in aiding the progress of our neighbours, especially in the religious life. But the tendency of love to rear a fair fabric of personal character is not to be overlooked. In regard to effect on character, the palm must be given to love, which produces solid excellence far beyond what mere knowledge can effect. Further, that pluming one's self on knowledge is a sure proof of ignorance. The more real our acquirements, the more they disclose our deficiencies. All self-conceit hinders us from growing intellectually or morally, and intellectual conceit is the worst kind of it.

Very significantly, love to God, and not the simple emotion of love without reference to its object, is opposed to knowledge; for love so directed is the foundation of all excellence, and of all real love to men. Love to God is not the antithesis of true knowledge, but it is the only victorious antagonist of the conceit of knowing. Very significantly, too, does Paul vary his conclusion in verse 3 by saying that the man who loves God 'is known of Him,' instead of, as we might have expected, 'knows Him.' The latter is true, but the statement in the verse puts more strongly the thought of the man's being an object of God's care. In regard, then, to their effects on character, in producing consideration and helpfulness to others, and in securing God's protection, love stands first, and knowledge second.

What has all this to do with the question in hand? This, that if looked at from the standpoint of knowledge, it may be solved in one

way, but if from that of love, it will be answered in another. So, in verses 4-6, Paul treats the matter on the ground of knowledge. The fundamental truth of Christianity, that there is one God, who is revealed and works through Jesus Christ, was accepted by all the Corinthians. Paul states it here broadly, denying that there were any objective realities answering to the popular conceptions or poetic fancies or fair artistic presentments of the many gods and lords of the Greek pantheon, and asserting that all Christians recognise one God, the Father, from whom the universe of worlds and living things has origin, and to whom we as Christians specially belong, and one Lord, the channel through whom all divine operations of creation, providence, and grace flow, and by whose redeeming work we Christians are endowed with our best life. If a believer was fully convinced of these truths, he could partake of sacrificial feasts without danger to himself, and without either sanctioning idolatry or being tempted to return to it.

No doubt it was on this ground that an idol was nothing that the laxer party defended their action in eating meat offered to idols; and Paul fully recognises that they had a strong case, and that, if there were no other considerations to come in, the answer to the question of conscience submitted to him would be wholly in favour of the less scrupulous section. But there is something better than knowledge; namely, love. And its decision must be taken before the whole material for a judgment is in evidence.

Therefore, in the remainder of the chapter, Paul dwells on loving regard for brethren. In verse 7, he reminds the 'knowing' Corinthians that new convictions do not obliterate the power of old associations. The awful fascination of early belief still exercises influence. The chains are not wholly broken off. Every mission field shows examples of this. Every man knows that habits are not so suddenly overcome, that there is no hankering after them or liability to relapse. It would be a dangerous thing for a weak believer to risk sharing in an idol feast; for he would be very likely to slide down to his old level of belief, and Zeus or Pallas to seem to him real powers once more.

The considerations in verse 7 would naturally be followed by the further thoughts in verse 9, etc. But, before dealing with these, Paul interposes another thought in verse 8, to the effect that partaking of or abstinence from any kind of food will not, in itself, either help or hinder the religious life. The bearing of that principle on his argument seems to be to reduce the importance of the whole question, and to suggest that, since eating of idol sacrifices could not be called a duty or a means of spiritual progress, the way was open to take account of others' weakness as determining our action in regard to it. A modern application may illustrate the point. Suppose that a Christian does not see total abstinence from intoxicants to be obligatory on him. Well, he cannot say that drinking is so, or that it is a religious duty, and so the way is clear for urging regard to others' weakness as an element in the case.

That being premised, Paul comes to his final point; namely, that Christian men are bound to restrict their liberty so that they shall not tempt weaker brethren on to a path on which they cannot walk without stumbling. He has just shown the danger to such of partaking of the sacrificial feasts. He now completes his position by showing, in verse 10, that the stronger man's example may lead the weaker to do what he cannot do innocently. What is harmless to us may be fatal to others, and, if we have led them to it, their blood is on our heads.

The terrible discordance of such conduct with our Lord's example, which should be our law, is forcibly set forth in verse 11, which has three strongly emphasised thoughts—the man's fate—he perishes; his relation to his slayer—a brother; what Christ did for the man whom a Christian has sent to destruction—died for him. These solemn thoughts are deepened in verse 12, which reminds us of the intimate union between the weakest and Christ, by which He so identifies Himself with them that any blow struck on them touches Him.

There is no greater sin than to tempt weak or ignorant Christians to thoughts or acts which their ignorance or weakness cannot entertain or do without damage to their religion. There is much need for laying that truth to heart in these days. Both in the field of speculation and of conduct, Christians, who think that they know so much better than ignorant believers, need to be reminded of it.

So Paul, in verse 13, at last answers the question. His sudden turning to his own conduct is beautiful. He will not so much command others, as proclaim his own determination. He does so with characteristic vehemence and hyperbole. No doubt the liberal party in Corinth were ready to complain against the proposal to restrict their freedom because of others' weakness; and they would be disarmed, or at least silenced, and might be stimulated to like noble resolution, by Paul's example.

The principle plainly laid down here is as distinctly applicable to the modern question of abstinence from intoxicants. No one can doubt that 'moderation' in their use by some tempts others to use which soon becomes fatally immoderate. The Church has been robbed of promising members thereby, over and over again. How can a Christian man cling to a 'moderate' use of these things, and run the risk of destroying by his example a brother for whom Christ died?