

1 Corinthians Exposition 4 - Maclaren

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

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THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

'I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; 4. And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.'—1 COR. xv. 3, 4.

Christmas day is probably not the true anniversary of the Nativity, but Easter is certainly that of the Resurrection. The season is appropriate. In the climate of Palestine the first fruits of the harvest were ready at the Passover for presentation in the Temple. It was an agricultural as well as a historical festival; and the connection between that aspect of the feast and the Resurrection of our Lord is in the Apostle's mind when he says, in a subsequent part of this chapter, that Christ is 'risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.'

In our colder climate the season is no less appropriate. The 'life re-orient out of dust' which shows itself to-day in every bursting leaf-bud and springing flower is Nature's parable of the spring that awaits man after the winter of death. No doubt, apart from the Resurrection of Jesus, the yearly miracle kindles sad thoughts in mourning hearts, and suggests bitter contrasts to those who sorrow, having no hope, but the grave in the garden has turned every blossom into a smiling prophet of the Resurrection.

And so the season, illuminated by the event, teaches us lessons of hope that 'we shall not all die.' Let us turn, then, to the thoughts naturally suggested by the day, and the great fact which it brings to each mind, and confirmed thereafter by the miracle that is being wrought round about us.

I. First, then, in my text, I would have you note the facts of Paul's gospel.

'First of all ... I delivered' these things. And the 'first' not only points to the order of time in the proclamation, but to the order of importance as well. For these initial facts are the fundamental facts, on which all that may follow thereafter is certainly built. Now the first thing that strikes me here is that, whatever else the system unfolded in the New Testament is, it is to begin with a simple record of historical fact. It becomes a philosophy, it becomes a religious system; it is a revelation of God; it is an unveiling of man; it is a body of ethical precepts. It is morals and philosophy and religion all in one; but it is first of all a story of something that took place in the world.

If that be so, there is a lesson for men whose work it is to preach it. Let them never forget that their business is to insist upon the truth of these great, supernatural, all-important, and fundamental facts, the death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They must evolve all the deep meanings that lie in them; and the deeper they dig for their meanings the better. They must open out the endless treasures of consolation and enforce the omnipotent motives of action which are wrapped up in the facts; but howsoever far they may carry their evolving and their application of them, they will neither be faithful to their Lord nor true stewards of their message unless, clear above all other aspects of their work, and underlying all other forms of their ministry, there be the unfaltering proclamation—'first of all,' midst of all, last of all—'how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and 'that He was raised again according to the Scriptures.'

Note, too, how this fundamental and original character of the gospel which Paul preached, as a record of facts, makes short work of a great deal that calls itself 'liberal Christianity' in these days. We are told that it is quite possible to be a very good Christian man, and reject the supernatural, and turn away with incredulity from the story of the Resurrection. It may be so, but I confess that it puzzles me to understand how, if the fundamental character of Christian teaching be the proclamation of certain facts, a man who does not believe those facts has the right to call himself a Christian.

Note, further, how there is an element of explanation involved in the proclamation of the facts which turns them into a gospel. Mark how 'that *Christ* died,' not *Jesus*. It is a great truth, that the man, our Brother, Jesus, passed through the common lot, but that is not what Paul says here, though he often says it. What he says is that '*Christ* died.' Christ is the name of an office, into which is condensed a whole system of truth, declaring that it is He who is the Apex, the Seal, and ultimate Word of all divine revelation. It was the *Christ* who died; unless it was so, the death of Jesus is no gospel.

'He died for our sins.' Now, if the Apostle had only said 'He died for us,' that might conceivably have meant that, in a multitude of different ways of example, appeal to our pity and compassion and the like, His death was of use to mankind. But when he says 'He died *for our sins*,' I take leave to think that that expression has no meaning, unless it means that He died as the expiation and sacrifice for men's sins. I ask you, in what intelligible sense could Christ 'die for our sins' unless He died as bearing their punishment and as bearing it for us? And then, finally, 'He died and rose ... according to the Scriptures,' and so fulfilled the divine purposes revealed from of old.

To the fact that a man was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem, 'and rose again the third day,' which is the narrative, there are added these three things—the dignity of the Person, the purpose of His death, the fulfilment of the divine intention manifested from of old. And these three things, as I said, turn the narrative into a Gospel.

So, brethren, let us remember that, without all three of them, the death of Jesus Christ is nothing to us, any more than the death of

thousands of sweet and saintly men in the past has been, who may have seen a little more of the supreme goodness and greatness than their fellows, and tried in vain to make purblind eyes participate in their vision. Do you think that these twelve fishermen would ever have shaken the world if they had gone out with the story of the Cross, unless they had carried along with it the commentary which is included in the words which I have emphasised? And do you suppose that the type of Christianity which slurs over the explanation, and so does not know what to do with the facts, will ever do much in the world, or will ever touch men? Let us liberalise our Christianity by all means, but do not let us evaporate it; and evaporate it we surely shall if we falter in saying with Paul, 'I declare, first of all, that which received,' how that the death and resurrection were the death and resurrection of the Christ, 'for our sins, according to the Scriptures.' These are the facts which make Paul's gospel.

II. Now I ask you to look, in the second place, at what establishes the facts.

We have here, in this chapter, a statement very much older than our existing written gospels. This epistle is one of the four letters of Paul which nobody that I know of—with some quite insignificant exceptions in modern times—has ever ventured to dispute. It is admittedly the writing of the Apostle, written before the gospels, and in all probability within five-and-twenty years of the date of the Crucifixion. And what do we find alleged by it as the state of things at its date? That the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the subject of universal Christian teaching, and was accepted by all the Christian communities. Its evidence to that fact is undeniable; because there was in the early Christian Church a very formidable and large body of bitter antagonists of Paul's, who would have been only too glad to have convicted him, if they could, of any misrepresentation of the usual notions, or divergence from the usual type of teaching. So we may take it as undeniable that the representation of this chapter is historically true; and that within five-and-twenty years of the death of Jesus Christ every Christian community and every Christian teacher believed in and proclaimed the fact of the Resurrection.

But if that be so, we necessarily are carried a great deal nearer the Cross than five-and-twenty years; and, in fact, there is not, between the moment when Paul penned these words and the day of Pentecost, a single chink in the history where you can insert such a tremendous innovation as the full-fledged belief in a resurrection coming in as something new.

I do not need to dwell at all upon this other thought, that, unless the belief that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead originated at the time of His death, there would never have been a Church at all. Why was it that they did not tumble to pieces? Take the nave out of the wheel and what becomes of the spokes? A dead Christ could never have been the basis of a living Church. If He had not risen from the dead, the story of His disciples would have been the same as that which Gamaliel told the Sanhedrim was the story of all former pseudo-Messiahs such as that man Theudas. 'He was slain, and as many as followed him were dispersed and came to naught.' Of course! The existence of the Church demands, as a pre-requisite, the initial belief in the Resurrection. I think, then, that the contemporaneousness of the evidence is sufficiently established.

What about its good faith? I suppose that nobody, nowadays, doubts the veracity of these witnesses. Anybody that knows an honest man when he sees him, anybody that has the least ear for the tone of sincerity and the accent of conviction, must say that they may have been fanatics, they may have been mistaken, but one thing is clear as sunlight, they were not false witnesses for God.

What, then, about their competency? Their simplicity, their ignorance, their slowness to believe, their stupor of surprise when the fact first dawned upon them, which they tell not with any idea of manufacturing evidence in their own favour, but simply as a piece of history, all tend to make us certain that there was no play of a morbid imagination, no hysterical turning of a wish into a fact, on the part of these men. The sort of things which they say that they saw and experienced are such as to make any such supposition altogether absurd. There are long conversations, appearances appealing to more than one sense, appearances followed by withdrawals, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, sometimes at a distance, as on the mountain, sometimes close by, as in the chamber, to single souls and to multitudes. Fancy five hundred people all at once smitten with the same mistake, imagining that they saw what they did not see! Miracles may be difficult to believe, they are not half so difficult to believe as absurdities. And this modern explanation of the faith in the Resurrection I venture respectfully to designate as absurd.

But there is one other point to which I would like to turn for a moment; and that is that little clause in my text that 'He was buried.' Why does Paul introduce that amongst his facts? Possibly in order to affirm the reality of Christ's death; but I think for another reason. If it be true that Jesus Christ was laid in that sepulchre, a stone's throw outside the city gate, do you not see what a difficulty that fact puts in the way of disbelief or denial of His Resurrection? If the grave—and it was not a grave, remember, like ours, but a cave, with a stone at the door of it, that anybody could roll away for entrance—if the grave was there, why, in the name of common-sense, did not the rulers put an end to the pestilent heresy by saying, 'Let us go and see if the body is there'?

Modern deniers of the Resurrection may fairly be asked to front this thought—If Jesus Christ's body was in the sepulchre, how was it possible for belief in the Resurrection to have been originated, or maintained? If His body was not in the grave, what had become of it? If His friends stole it away then they were deceivers of the worst type in preaching a resurrection; and we have already seen that that hypothesis is ridiculous. If His enemies took it away, for which they had no motive, why did they not produce it and say, 'There is an answer to your nonsense. There is the dead man. Let us hear no more of this absurdity of His having risen from the dead'?

'He died ... according to the Scriptures, and He was buried.' And the angels' word carries the only explanation of the fact which it proclaims, 'He is not here—He is risen.'

I take leave to say that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is established by evidence which nobody would ever have thought of doubting unless for the theory that miracles were impossible. The reason for disbelief is not the deficiency of the evidence, but the bias of the judge.

III. And now I have no time to do more than touch the last thought. I have tried to show what establishes the facts. Let me remind you, in a sentence or two, what the facts establish.

I by no means desire to suspend the whole of the evidence for Christianity on the testimony of the eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. There are a great many other ways of establishing the truth of the Gospel besides that, upon which I do not need to dwell now. But, taking this one specific ground which my text suggests, what do the facts thus established prove?

Well, the first point to which I would refer, and on which I should like to enlarge, if I had time, is the bearing of Christ's Resurrection on the acceptance of the miraculous. We hear a great deal about the impossibility of miracle and the like. It upsets the certainty and fixedness of the order of things, and so forth, and so forth. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead; and that opens a door wide enough to admit all the rest of the Gospel miracles. It is of no use paring down the supernatural in Christianity, in order to meet the prejudices of a quasi-scientific scepticism, unless you are prepared to go the whole length, and give up the Resurrection. There is the turning point. The question is, Do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or do you not? If your objections to the supernatural are valid, then Christ is not risen from the dead; and you must face the consequences of that. If He is risen from the dead, then you must cease all your talk about the impossibility of miracle, and be willing to accept a supernatural revelation as God's way of making Himself known to man.

But, further, let me remind you of the bearing of the Resurrection upon Christ's work and claims. If He be lying in some forgotten grave, and if all that fair thought of His having burst the bands of death is a blunder, then there was nothing in His death that had the least bearing upon men's sin, and it is no more to me than the deaths of thousands in the past. But if He is risen from the dead, then the Resurrection casts back a light upon the Cross, and we understand that His death is the life of the world, and that 'by His stripes we are healed.'

But, further, remember what He said about Himself when He was in the world—how He claimed to be the Son of God; how He demanded absolute obedience, implicit trust, supreme love, how He identified faith in Himself with faith in God—and consider the Resurrection as bearing on the reception or rejection of these tremendous claims. It seems to me that we are brought sharp up to this alternative—Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and was declared by the Resurrection to be the Son of God with power; or Jesus Christ has *not* risen from the dead—and what then? Then He was either deceiver or deceived, and in either case has no right to my reverence and my love. We may be thankful that men are illogical, and that many who reject the Resurrection retain reverence, genuine and deep, for Jesus Christ. But whether they have any right to do so is another matter. I confess for myself that, if I did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, I should find it very hard to accept, as an example of conduct, or as religious teacher, a man who had made such great claims as He did, and had asked from me what He asked. It seems to me that He is either a great deal more, or a great deal less, than a beautiful saintly soul. If He rose from the dead He is much more; if He did not, I am afraid to say how much less He is.

And, finally, the bearing of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon our own hopes of the future may be suggested. It teaches us that life has nothing to do with organisation, but persists apart from the body. It teaches us that a man may pass from death and be unaltered in the substance of his being; and it teaches us that the earthly house of our tabernacle may be fashioned like unto the glorious house in which He dwells now at the right hand of God. There is no other absolute proof of immortality than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we accept with all our hearts and minds Paul's Gospel in its fundamental facts, we need not fear to die, because He has died, and by dying has been the death of death. We need not doubt that we shall live again, because He was dead and is alive for ever more. This Samson has carried away the gates on His strong shoulders, and death is no more a dungeon but a passage. If we rest ourselves upon Him, then we can take up, for ourselves and for all that are dear to us and have gone before us, the triumphant song, 'O Death, where is thy sting?' 'Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

REMAINING AND FALLING ASLEEP

'After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this

present, but some are fallen asleep.'—1 COR. xv. 6.

There were, then, some five-and-twenty years after the Resurrection, several hundred disciples who were known amongst the churches as having been eyewitnesses of the risen Saviour. The greater part survived; some, evidently a very few, had died. The proportion of the living to the dead, after five-and-twenty years, is generally the opposite. The greater part have 'fallen asleep'; some, a comparatively few, remain 'unto this present.' Possibly there was some divine intervention which supernaturally prolonged the lives of these witnesses, in order that their testimony might be the more lasting. But, be that as it may, they evidently were men of mark, and some kind of honour and observance surrounded them, as was very natural, and as appears from the fact that Paul here knows so accurately (and can appeal to His fellow-Christians' accurate knowledge) the proportion between the survivors and the departed. We read of one of them in the Acts of the Apostles at a later date than this, one Mnason, an 'original disciple.'

So we get a glimpse into the conditions of life in the early Church, interesting and of value in an evidential point of view. But my purpose at present is to draw your attention to the remarkable language in which the Apostle here speaks of the living and the dead amongst these witnesses. In neither case does he use the simple, common words 'living' or 'dead'; but in the one clause he speaks of their 'remaining,' and in the other of their 'falling asleep'; both phrases being significant, and, as I take it, both being traced up to the fact of their having seen the risen Lord as the cause why their life could be described as a 'remaining,' and their death as a 'falling asleep.' In other words, we have here brought before us, by these two striking expressions, the transforming effect upon life and upon death of the faith in a risen Lord, whether grounded on sight or not. And it is simply to these two points that I desire to turn now.

I. First, then, we have to consider what life may become to those who see the risen Christ.

'The greater part remain until this present.' Now the word *remain* is no mere synonym for living or surviving. It not only tells us the fact that the survivors were living, but the kind of life that they did live. It is very significant that it is the same expression as our Lord used in the profound prophetic words, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' Now we are told in John's Gospel that 'that saying went abroad amongst the brethren,' and inasmuch as it was a matter of common notoriety in the early Church, it is by no means a violent supposition that it may be floating in Paul's memory here, and may determine his selection of this remarkable expression 'they remain,' or 'they tarry,' and they were tarrying till the Master came. So, then, I think if we give due weight to the significance of the phrase, we get two or three thoughts worth pondering.

One of them is that the sight of a risen Christ will make life calm and tranquil. Fancy one of these 500 brethren, after that vision, going back to his quiet rural home in some little village amongst the hills of Galilee. How small and remote from Him, and unworthy to ruffle or disturb the heart in which the memory of that vision was burning, would seem the things that otherwise would have been important and distracting! The faith which we have in the risen Christ ought to do the same thing for us, and will do it in the measure in which there shines clearly before that inward eye, which is our true means of apprehending Him, the vision which shone before the outward gaze of that company of wondering witnesses. If we build our nests amidst the tossing branches of the world's trees, they will sway with every wind, and perhaps be blown from their hold altogether by such a storm as we all have sometimes to meet. But we may build our nests in the clefts of the rock, like the doves, and be quiet, as they are. Distractions will cease to distract, and troubles will cease to agitate, and across the heaving surface of the great ocean there will come a Form beneath whose feet the waves smooth themselves, and at whose voice the winds are still. They who see Christ need not be troubled. The ship that is empty is tossed upon the ocean, that which is well laden is steady. The heart that has Christ for a passenger need not fear being rocked by any storm. Calmness will come with the vision of the Lord, and we shall abide or 'remain,' for there will be no need for us to flee from this Refuge to that, nor shall we be driven from our secure abode by any contingencies. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

It is a good thing to cultivate the disposition that says about most of the trifles of this life, 'It does not much matter'; but the only way to prevent wholesome contempt of the world's trivialities from degenerating into supercilious indifference is, to base it upon Christ, discerned as near us and bestowing upon us the calmness of His risen life. Make Him your scale of importance, and nothing will be too small to demand and be worthy of the best efforts of your work, but nothing will be too great to sweep you away from the serenity of your faith.

Again, the vision of the risen Christ will also lead to patient persistence in duty. If we have Him before us, the distasteful duty which He sets us will not be distasteful, and the small tasks, in which great faithfulness may be manifested, will cease to be small. If we have Him before us we have in that risen Christ the great and lasting Example of how patient continuance in well-doing triumphs over the sorrows that it bears, by and in patiently bearing them, and is crowned at last with glory and honour. The risen Christ is the Pattern for the men who will not be turned aside from the path of duty by any obstacles, dangers, or threats. The risen Christ is the signal Example of glory following upon faithfulness, and of the crown being the result of the Cross. The risen Christ is the manifest Helper of them that put their trust in Him; and one of the plainest lessons and of the most imperative commands which come from the believing gaze upon that Lord who died because He would do the will of the Father, and is throned and crowned in the heavens because He died, is—By patient continuance in well-doing let us commit the keeping of our souls to Him: and abide in the calling wherewith we are called.

And, again, the sight of the risen Christ leads to a life of calm expectancy. 'If I will that He tarry till I come' conveys that shade of meaning. The Apostle was to wait for the Lord from Heaven, and that vision which was given to these 500 men sent them home to their abodes to make all the rest of their lives one calm aspiration for, and patient expectation of, the return of the Lord. These primitive Christians expected that Jesus Christ would come speedily. That expectation was disappointed in so far as the date was concerned, but after nineteen centuries it still remains true that all vigorous and vital Christian life must have in it, as a very important element of its vitality, the onward look which ever is anticipating, which often is desiring, and which constantly is confident of, the coming of the Lord from Heaven. The Resurrection has for its consequences, its sequel and corollary, first the Ascension; then the long tract of time during which Jesus Christ is absent, but still in divine presence rules the world; and, finally, His coming again in that same body in which the disciples saw Him depart from them. And no Christian life is up to the level of its privileges, nor has any Christian faith grasped the whole articles of its creed, except that which sets in the very centre of all its visions of the future that great thought—He shall come again.

Questions of chronology have nothing to do with that. It stands there before us, the certain fact, made certain and inevitable by the past facts of the Cross and the Grave and Olivet. He has come, He will come; He has gone, He will come back. And for us the life that we live in the flesh ought to be a life of waiting for God's Son from Heaven, and of patient, confident expectancy that when He shall be manifested we also shall be manifested with Him in glory.

So much, then, for life—calm, persistent in every duty, and animated by that blessed and far-off, but certain, hope, and all of these founded upon the vision and the faith of a risen Lord. What have fears and cares and distractions and faint-heartedness and gloomy sorrow to do with the eyes that have beheld the Christ, and with the lives that are based on faith in the risen Lord?

II. So, secondly, consider what death becomes to those who have seen Christ risen from the dead.

'Some are fallen asleep.' Now that most natural and obvious metaphor for death is not only a Christian idea, but is found, as would be expected, in many tongues, but yet with a great and significant difference. The Christian reason for calling death a sleep embraces a great deal more than the heathen reason for doing so, and in some respects is precisely the opposite of that, inasmuch as to most others who have used the word, death has been a sleep that knew no waking, whereas the very pith and centre of the Christian reason for employing the symbol are that it makes our waking sure. We have here what the act of dying and the condition of the dead become by virtue of faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

They have 'fallen asleep.' The act of dying is but a laying one's self down to rest, and a dropping out of consciousness of the surrounding world. It is very remarkable and very beautiful that the new Testament scarcely ever employs the words *dying* and *death* for the act of separating body and spirit, or for the condition either of the spirit parted from the body, or of the body parted from the spirit. It keeps those grim words for the reality, the separation of the soul from God; and it only exceptionally uses them for the shadow and the symbol, the physical fact of the parting of the man from the house which here he has dwelt in. But the reason why Christianity uses these periphrases or metaphors, these euphemisms for death, is the opposite of the reason why the world uses them. The world is so afraid of dying that it durst not name the grim, ugly thing. The Christian, or at least the Christian faith, is so little afraid of death that it does not think such a trivial matter worth calling by the name, but only names it 'falling asleep.'

Even when the circumstances of that dropping off to slumber are painful and violent, the Bible still employs the term. Is it not striking that the first martyr, kneeling outside the city, bruised by stones and dying a bloody death, should have been said to fall asleep? If ever there was an instance in which the gentle metaphor seemed all inappropriate it was that cruel death, amidst a howling crowd, and with fatal bruises, and bleeding limbs mangled by the heavy rocks that lay upon them. But yet, 'when he had said this he fell asleep.' If that be true of such a death, no physical pains of any kind make the sweet word inappropriate for any.

We have here not only the designation of the act of dying, but that of the condition of the dead. They are fallen asleep, and they continue asleep. How many great thoughts gather round that metaphor on which it is needless for me to try to dilate! They will suggest themselves without many words to you all.

There lies in it the idea of repose. 'They rest from their labours.' Sleep restores strength, and withdraws a man at once from effort on the outer world, and from communication from it. We may carry the analogy into that unseen world. We know nothing about the relations to an external universe of the departed who sleep in Jesus. It may be that, if they sleep in Him, since He knows all, they, through Him, may know, too, something—so much as He pleases to impart to them—of what is happening here. And it may even be that, if they sleep in Him, and He wields the energies of Omnipotence, they, through Him, may have some service to do, even while they wait for their house which is from heaven. But there is no need for, nor profit in, such speculations. It is enough that the sweet emblem suggests repose, and that in that sleep there are folded around the sleepers the arms of the Christ on whose bosom they rest, as an infant does on its first and happiest home—its mother's breast.

But then, besides that, the emblem suggests the idea of continuous and conscious existence. A man asleep does not cease to be a

man; a dead man does not cease to live. It has often been argued from this metaphor that we are to conceive of the space between death and the resurrection as being a period of unconsciousness, but the analogies seem to me to be in the opposite direction. A sleeping man does not cease to know himself to be, and he does not cease to know himself to be himself. That mysterious consciousness of personal identity survives the passage from waking to sleep, as dreams sufficiently show us. And, therefore, they that sleep know themselves to be.

And, finally, the emblem suggests the idea of waking. Sleep is a parenthesis. If the night comes, the morning comes. 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?' They that sleep will awake, and be satisfied when they 'awake with Thy likeness.' And so these three things—repose, conscious, continuous existence, and the certainty of awaking—all lie in that metaphor.

Now, then, the risen Christ is the only ground of such hope, and faith in Him is the only state of mind which is entitled to cherish it. Nothing proves immortality except that open grave. Every other foundation is too weak to bear the weight of such a superstructure. The current of present opinion shows, I think, that neither metaphysical nor ethical arguments for the future life will stand the force of the disintegrating criticism which is brought to bear upon that hope by the fashionable materialism of this generation. There is one barrier that will resist that force, and only one, and that is the historical facts that Jesus Christ died, and that Jesus Christ has risen again. He rose; therefore death is not the end of individual existence. He rose; therefore life beyond the grave is possible for humanity. He rose; therefore His sacrifice for the world's sin is accepted, and I may be delivered from my guilt and my burden. He rose; therefore He is declared to be the Son of God with power. He rose; therefore we, if we trust Him, may partake in His Resurrection and in some reflection of His glory. The old Greek architects were often careless of the solidity of the soil on which they built their temples, and so, many of them have fallen in ruins. The Temple of Immortality can be built only upon the rock of that proclamation—Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. And we, dear brethren, should have all our hopes founded upon that one fact.

So then, for us, the calm, peaceful passage from life into what else is the great darkness is possible on condition of our having beheld the risen Lord. These witnesses of whom my text speaks, Paul would suggest to us, laid themselves quietly down to sleep, because before them there still hovered the memory of the vision which they had beheld. Faith in the risen Christ is the anchor of the soul in death, and there is nothing else by which we can hold then.

As the same Apostle, in one of his other letters, puts it, the belief that Christ is risen is not only the irrefragable ground of our hope that we, too, shall rise, but has the power to change the whole aspect of our death. Did you ever observe the emphasis with which He says, 'If we believe that Jesus *died* and rose again, even so them also which *sleep* in Jesus will God bring with Him?' His death was death indeed, and faith in it softens ours to sleep. He bore the reality that we might never need to know it, and if our poor hearts are resting upon that dear Lord, then the flames are but painted ones and will not burn, and we shall pass through them, and no smell of fire will be upon us, and all that will be consumed will be the bonds which bind us. He has abolished death. The physical fact remains, but all which to men makes the idea of death is gone if we trust the risen Lord. So that, between two men dying under precisely the same circumstances, of the same disease, in adjacent beds in the same hospital, there may be such a difference as that the same word cannot be applied to the experiences of both.

My dear friends, we have each of us to pass through that last struggle; but we may make it either a quiet going to sleep with a loved Face bending over our closing eyes, like a mother's over her child's cradle, and the same Face meeting us when we open them in the morning of heaven; or we may make it a reluctant departure from all that we care for, and a trembling advance into all from which conscience and heart shrink.

Which is it going to be to you? The answer depends upon that to another question. Are you looking to that Christ that died and is alive for evermore as your life and your salvation? Do you hold fast that Gospel which Paul preached, 'how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures'? If you do, life will be a calm, persevering, expectant waiting upon Him, and death will be nothing more terrible than falling asleep.

PAUL'S ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF

'By the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain.'—1 COR.
xv. 10.

The Apostle was, all his life, under the hateful necessity of vindicating his character and Apostleship. Thus here, though his main purpose in the context is simply to declare the Gospel which he preached, he is obliged to turn aside in order to assert, and to back up his assertion, that there was no sort of difference between him and the other recognised teachers of Christian truth. He was forced to do this by persistent endeavours in the Corinthian Church to deny his Apostleship, and the faithfulness of his representation of the Christian verities. The way in which he does it is eminently beautiful and remarkable. He fires up in vindication

of himself; and then he checks himself. 'By the grace of God I am'—and he is going to say what he is, but he bethinks himself, as if he had reflected; 'No! I will leave other people to say what that is. By the grace of God I am—what I am, whatever that be. And all that I have to say is that God made me, and that I helped Him. For the grace of God which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. You Corinthians may judge what the product is. I tell you how it has come about.' So there are thoughts here, I think, well worth our pondering and taking into our hearts and lives.

I. First, as to the one power that makes men.

'By the grace of God I am what I am.' Now that word 'grace' has got to be worn threadbare, and to mean next door to nothing, in the ears and minds of a great many continual hearers of the Gospel. But Paul had a very definite idea of what he meant by it; and what he meant by it was a very large thing, which we may well ponder for a moment as being the only thing which will transform and ennoble character and will produce fruit that a man need not be ashamed of. The grace of God, in Paul's use of the words, which is the scriptural use of them generally, implies these two things which are connected as root and product—the active love of God, in exercise towards us low and sinful creatures, and the gifts with which that love comes full charged to men. These two things, which at bottom are one, love and its gifts, are all, in the Apostle's judgment, gathered up and stored, as in a great storehouse, in Jesus Christ Himself, and through Him are made accessible to us, and brought to bear upon us for the ennobling of our natures, and the investing of us with graces and beauties of character, all strange to us apart from these.

Now it seems to me that these two things, which come from one root, are the precise things which you and I need in order to make us nobler and purer and more Godlike men than otherwise we could ever become. For what is it that men need most for noble and pure living? These two things precisely—motive and power to carry out the dictates of conscience.

Every man in the world knows enough of duty and of right to be a far nobler man than any man in the world is. And it is not for want of clear convictions of duty, it is not for want of recognised models and patterns of life, that men go wrong; but it is because there are these two things lacking, motives for nobler service, and power to do and be what they know they ought to be. And precisely here Paul's gospel comes in, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' That grace, considered in its two sides of love and of giving, supplies all that we want.

It supplies motives. There is nothing that will bend a man's will like the recognition of divine love which it is blessedness to come in contact with, and to obey. You may try to sway him by motives of advantage and self-interest, and to thunder into his ears the pealing words of duty and right and 'ought,' and there is no adequate response. You cannot soften a heart by the hammers of the law. You cannot force a man to do right by brandishing before him the whip that punishes doing wrong. You cannot sway the will by anything but the heart; and when you can touch the deepest spring it moves the whole mass.

You have seen some ponderous piece of machinery, which resists all attempts of a puny hand laid upon it to make it revolve. But down in one corner is a little hidden spring. Touch that and with majestic slowness and certainty the mighty mass turns. You know those rocking-stones down in the south of England; tons of weight poised upon a pin point, and so exquisitely balanced that a child's finger rightly applied may move the mass. So the whole man is made mobile only by the touch of love; and the grace that comes to us, and says, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments'—is, as I believe, the sole motive which will continuously and adequately sway the rebellious, self-centred wills of men, to obedience resulting in nobility of life.

The other aspect of this same great word is, in like manner, that which we need. What men want is, first of all, the will to be noble and good; and, second, the power to carry out the will. It is God that worketh in us both the willing and the doing. I venture to affirm that there is no power known, either to thinkers, or philanthropists, or doctrinaires, or strivers after excellence in the world—no power known and available which will lift a life to such heights of beauty and self-sacrificing nobility, as will the power that comes to us by communication of the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

I am perpetually trying to insist, dear brethren, upon this one thought, that the communication of actual new life is the central gift of the Gospel; and this new life it is, this nature endowed with new desires, hopes, aims, capacities, which alone will lift the whole man into unwonted heights of beauty and serenity. It is the grace of God, the gift of His Divine Spirit who will dwell with all of us, if we will, which alone can be trusted to make men good.

And now, if that be true, what follows? Surely this, that for all you who have, in any measure, caught a glimpse of what you ought to be, and have been more or less vainly trying to realise your ideal, and reach your goal, there is a better way than the way of self-centred and self-derived and self-dependent effort. There is the way of opening your hearts and spirits to the entrance and access of that great power, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which will do in us and for us all that we know we ought to do, and yet feel hampered and hindered in performing.

Oh, dear friends! there are many of you, I believe, who have more or less spasmodically and interruptedly, but with a continual recurrence to the effort, sought to plant your feet firmly in the paths of righteousness, and have more or less failed. Listen to this Gospel, and accept it, and put it to the proof. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and the life which that love brings in its

hands, for all of us who will trust it, will dwell in you if you will, and mould you into His own likeness, and the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus will make us free from the law of sin and death.

All noble living is a battle. Can you and I, with our ten thousand, meet him that cometh against us with his twenty, the temptations of the world and of its Prince? Send for the reinforcements, and Jesus Christ will come and teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight. All noble life is self-denial, coercion, restraint; and can my poor, feeble hands apply muscular force enough to the brake to keep the wheels clogged, and prevent them from whirling me downhill into ruin? Let Him come and put His great gentle hand on the top of yours, and that will enable you to scotch the wheels, and make self-denial possible. All noble life is a building up by slow degrees from the foundation. And can you and I complete the task with our own limited resources, and our own feeble strengths? Will not 'all that pass by begin to mock' us and say, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? That is the epitaph written over all moralities and over all lives which, catching some glimpse of the good and the true and the noble, have tried, apart from Christ, to reproduce them in themselves. Frightful gaps, and an unfinished, however fair structure end them all. Go to Him. 'His hand hath laid the foundation of the house, His hand shall also finish it.' He who is Himself the foundation-stone is also the headstone of the corner, which is brought forth with shouting of 'Grace! Grace unto it!'

I need not, I suppose, linger to remind you what important and large lessons these thoughts carry, not only for men who are trying to work at the task of mending and making their own characters, but on the larger scale, for all who seek to benefit and elevate their fellows. Brethren, it is not for me to depreciate any workers who, in any department, and by any methods, seek, and partially effect, the elevation of humanity. But I should be untrue to my own deepest convictions, and unfaithful to the message which God's providence has given it to me as my life's task to proclaim, if I did not declare that nothing will truly *re-form* humanity, society, the nation, the city, except that which re-creates the individual: 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' entering into their midst.

II. And so, secondly, and very briefly, notice the lesson we get here as to how we should think of our own attainments.

I have already pointed out that there are two beautiful touches in my text. The Apostle traces everything that he is, in his character and in his Christian standing and in his Apostolic work and success, to that grace that has come down upon him, and clothed his nakedness with so glorious a garment. And then, in addition to that, he modestly, and with a fine sense of dignity, refrains from parading his attainments or his achievements, and says, 'It is not for me to estimate what I am; it is for you to do it.' True, indeed, in the next verse he does set forth, in very lofty language, his claims to be in nothing behind the very chiefest of the Apostles, and 'to have laboured more abundantly than they all.' But still the spirit of that humble and yet dignified silence runs through the whole context. 'By the grace of God I am—what I am.'

Well, then, it is not necessary for a man to be ignorant, or to pretend that he is ignorant, of what he can do. We hear a great deal about the unconsciousness of genius. There is a partial truth in it; and possibly the highest examples of power and success, in any department of mental or intellectual effort, are unaware of their achievements and stature. But if a man can do a certain kind of service there is no harm whatever in his recognising the fact that he can do it. The only harm is in his thinking that because he can, he is a very fine fellow, and that the work itself is a great work; and so setting himself up above his brethren. There is a vast deal of hypocrisy in what is called unconsciousness of power. Most men who have been chosen and empowered to do a great work for God or for men, in any department, have been aware that they could do it. But the less we think about ourselves, in any way, the better. The more entire our recognition of the influx of grace on which we depend for keeping our reservoir full, the less likelihood there will be of touchy self-assertion, the less likelihood of the misuse of the powers that we have. If we are to do much for God, if we are to keep what we have already attained, if we are to make our own lives sweet and beautiful, if we are to be invested with any increase of capacity, or led to any higher heights of nobleness and Christlikeness, we must copy, and make a conscious effort to copy, these two things, which marked the Apostle's estimate of himself—a distinct recognition that we are only reservoirs and nothing more—'What hast thou that thou hast not received? Why then dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?'—and a humble waiving aside of the attempt to determine what it is that we are. For however clearly a man may know his own powers and achievements, it is hard for him to estimate the relations of these to his whole character.

So, dear brethren, although it is a very homely piece of advice, and may seem to be beneath the so-called dignity of the pulpit, let me venture just to remind you that self-conceit is no disease peculiar to the ten-talented people, but is quite as rife, if not a good deal rifer, among those with one talent. They are very humble when it comes to work, and are quite contented to wrap the one talent up in a napkin then; but when it comes to self-assertion, or what they expect to receive of recognition from others, they need to be reminded quite as much as their betters in endowment—'By the grace of God I am what I am.'

III. And so, lastly, one word about the responsibility for our co-operation with the grace, in order to the accomplishment of its results.

'The grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain,' says Paul. 'Not I, but the grace of God which was with me, and so I laboured more abundantly than they all.' That is to say, God in His giving love; Christ with His ever out-flowing Spirit, move round our hearts, and desire to enter. But the grace, the love, the gifts of the love may all be put away by our unfaithfulness, by our non-receptivity, by our misuse, and by our negligence. Paul yielded himself to the grace that was brought to work upon him. Have you

yielded yourselves?

Paul said, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' He could not have said that, could he, if he had known that the most part of what he was was dead against God's will and purpose? Has God anything to do with making you what you are, or has it been the devil that has had the greater share in it? This man, because he knew that he had submitted himself to the often painful, searching, crucifying, self-restraining and stimulating influences of the Gospel and Spirit of Christ, could say, 'God's grace has made me what I am, and I helped Him to make me.' And can you say anything like that?

Take your life. In how many of its deeds has there been present the consciousness of God and His love? Take your character. How much of it has been shot through and through, so to speak, by the fiery darts of that cleansing, warming, consuming grace of God? Are you daily being baptized in that Spirit, searched by that Spirit, condemned by that grace? Is it the grace of God, or nature and self and the world and the flesh that have made you what you are?

Oh, brethren I let us cultivate the sense of our need of this divine help, for it does not come where men do not know how weak they are, and how much they want it. The mountain tops are high,—yes! and they are dry; there is no water there. The rivers run in the green valleys deep down. 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' Let us see that we open our hearts to the reception of these quickening and cleansing influences, for it is possible for us to cover ourselves over with such an impenetrable covering that that grace cannot pass through it. Let us see to it that we keep ourselves in close contact with the foundation of all this grace, even Jesus Christ Himself, by desire, by faith, by love, by communion, by meditation, by approximation, by sympathy, by service. And let us see that we use the grace that we possess. 'For to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not'—not possessing in any real sense because not utilising for its appointed purpose—'shall be taken away even that he hath.' Wherefore, brethren, I 'beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.'

THE UNITY OF APOSTOLIC TEACHING

'Whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.'—1 COR. xv. 11.

Party spirit and faction were the curses of Greek civic life, and they had crept into at least one of the Greek churches—that in the luxurious and powerful city of Corinth. We know that there was a very considerable body of antagonists to Paul, who ranked themselves under the banner of Apollos or of Cephas *i.e.* Peter. Therefore, Paul, keenly conscious that he was speaking to some unfriendly critics, hastens in the context to remove the possible objection which might be made, that the Gospel which he preached was peculiar to himself, and proceeds to assert that the whole substance of what he had to say to men, was held with unbroken unanimity by the other apostles. 'They' means all of *them*; and 'so' means the summary of the Gospel teaching in the preceding verses.

Now, Paul would not have ventured to make that assertion, in the face of men whom he knew to be eager to pick holes in anything that he said, unless he had been perfectly sure of his ground. There were broad differences between him and the others. But their partisans might squabble, as is often the case, and the men, whose partisans they were, be unanimous. There were differences of individual character, of temper, and of views about certain points of Christian truth. But there was an unbroken front of unanimity in regard to all that lies within the compass of that little word which covers so much ground—'So we preach.'

Now, I wish to turn to that outstanding fact—which does not always attract the attention which it deserves—of the absolute identity of the message which all the apostles and primitive teachers delivered, and to seek to enforce some of the considerations and lessons which seem to me naturally to flow from it.

I. First, then, I ask you to think of the fact itself—the unbroken unanimity of the whole body of Apostolic teachers.

As I have said, there were wide differences of characteristics between them, but there was a broad tract of teaching wherein they all agreed. Let me briefly gather up the points of unanimity, the contents of the one Gospel, which every man of them felt was his message to the world. I may take it all from the two clauses in the preceding context, 'how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.' These are the things about which, as Paul declares, there was not the whisper of a dissentient voice. There is the vital centre which he declares every Christian teacher grasped as being the essential of his message, and in various tones and manners, but in substantial identity of content, declared to the world.

Now, what lies in it? The Person spoken of—the Christ, and all that that word involves of reference to the ancient and incomplete Revelation in the past, its shadows and types, its prophecies and ceremonies, its priesthood and its sacrifices; with all that it involves of reference to the ancient hopes on which a thousand generations had lived, and which either are baseless delusions, or are

realised in Jesus—the Person whom all the Apostles proclaimed was One anointed from God as Prophet, Priest, and King; who had come into the world to fulfil all that the ancient system had shadowed by sacrifice, temple, and priest, and was the Monarch of Israel and of the world.

And not only were they absolutely unanimous in regard to the Person, but they were unbrokenly consentient in regard to the facts of His life, His death, and His Resurrection. But the proclamation of the external fact is no gospel. You must add the clause ‘for our sins,’ and then the record, which is a mere piece of history, with no more good news in it than the record of the death of any other martyr, hero, or saint, starts into being truly the good news for the world. The least part of a historical fact is the fact; the greatest part of it is the explanation of the fact, and the setting it in its place in regard to other facts, the exhibition of the principles which it expresses, and of the conclusions to which it leads. So the bare historical declaration of a death and a resurrection is transmuted into a gospel, by that which is the most important part of the Gospel, the explanation of the meaning of the fact—‘He died for our sins.’

If redemption from sin through the death of a Person is the fundamental conception of the Gospel for the world, then it is clear that, for such a purpose, a divine nature in the Person is wanted. Your notion of what Christ came to do will determine your notion of who He is. If you only recognise that His work is to teach, or to show in exercise a fair human character, then you may rest content with the lower notion of His nature which sees in Him but the foremost of the sons of men. But if we grasp ‘died for our sins,’ then for such a task the incarnation of the Eternal Son of God is the absolute pre-requisite.

Still further, our text brings out the contents of this gospel as being the declaration of the Resurrection. On that I need not here and now dwell at any length. But these are the points, the Person, the two facts, death and resurrection, and the great meaning of the death—viz. the expiation for the world's sins: these are the things on which the whole of the primitive teachers of the Apostolic Church had one voice and one message.

Now, I do not suppose that I need spend any time in showing to you how the extant records bear out, absolutely, this contention of the Apostle's. I need only remind you how the opposition that was waged against him—and it was a very vigorous and a very bitter opposition—from a section of the Church, had no bearing at all upon the question of what he taught, but only upon the question of to whom it was to be taught. The only objection that the so-called Judaising party in the early Church had against Paul and his preaching, was not the Gospel that he declared, but his assertion that the Gentile nations might enter into the Church through faith in Jesus Christ, without passing through the gate of circumcision. Depend upon it, if there had been any, even the most microscopic, divergence on his part from the general, broad stream of Christian teaching, the sleepless, keen-eyed, unscrupulous enemies that dogged him all his days would have pounced upon it eagerly, and would never have ceased talking about it. But not one of them ever said a word of the sort, but allowed his teaching to pass, because it was the teaching of every one of the apostles.

If I had time, or if it were necessary, it would be easy to point you to the records that we have left of the Apostolic teaching, in order to confirm this unbroken unanimity. I do not need to spend time on that. Proof-texts are not worth so much as the fact that these doctrines are interwoven into the whole structure of the New Testament as a whole—just as they are into Paul's letters. But I may gather one or two sayings, in which the substance of each writer's teaching has been concentrated by himself. For instance, Peter speaks about being ‘redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot,’ and declares that ‘He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.’ John comes in with his doxology: ‘Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins in His own blood’; and it is his pen that records how in the heavens there echoed ‘glory and honour and thanks and blessing, for ever and ever, to the Lamb that was slain, and has redeemed us unto God by His blood.’ The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, steeped as he is in ceremonial and sacrificial ideas, and having for his one purpose to work out the thought that Jesus Christ is all that the ancient ritual, sacerdotal and sacrificial system shadows and foretells, sums up his teaching in the statement that Christ having come, a high priest of good things to come, ‘through His own blood, entered in, once for all, into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.’

There were limits to the unanimity, as I have already said. Paul and Peter had a great quarrel about circumcision and related subjects. The Apostolic writings are wondrously diverse from one another. Peter is far less constructive and profound than Paul. Paul and Peter are both untouched with the mystic wisdom of the Apostle John. But, in regard to the facts that I have signalled, the divinity, the person of Jesus Christ, His death and Resurrection, and the significance to be attached to that death, they are absolutely one. The instruments in the orchestra are various, the tender flute, the ringing trumpet, and many another, but the note they strike is the same. ‘Whether it were I or they, so we preach.’

II. Now, let me ask you to consider the only explanation of this unanimity.

Time was when the people, who did not believe in Christ's divinity and sacrificial death, tortured themselves to try and make out meanings for these epistles, which should not include the obnoxious doctrines. That is nearly antiquated. I suppose that there is nobody now, or next to nobody, who does not admit that, right or wrong, Paul, Peter, John—all of them—teach these two things, that Christ is the Eternal Son of the Father, and that His death is the Sacrifice for the world's sin. But they say that that is not the

primitive, simple teaching of the Man of Nazareth; and that the unanimity is a unanimity of misapprehension of, and addition to, His words and to the drift of His teaching.

Now, just think what a huge—I was going to say—inconceivability that supposition is. For there is no point, say from the time at which the Apostle who wrote the words of my text, which was somewhere about the year 56 or 57 A.D.,—there is no point between that period, working backwards through the history of the Church to the Crucifixion, where you can insert such a tremendous revolution of teaching as this. There is no trace of such a change. Peter's earliest speeches, as recorded in Acts, are in some important respects less developed doctrinally than are the epistles, but Christ's Messiahship, death, and Resurrection, with which is connected the remission of sins, are as clearly and emphatically proclaimed as at any later time. So these points of the Apostolic testimony were preached from the first, and, if in preaching them, the witnesses perverted the simple teaching of the Carpenter of Nazareth, and ascribed to Him a character which He had not claimed, and to His death a power of which He had not dreamed, they did so at the very time when the impressions of His personality and teaching were most recent and strong. It seems to me, apart altogether from other considerations, that such a right-about-face movement on the part of the early teachers of Christianity, is an absolute impossibility, regard being had to the facts of the case, even if you make much allowance for possible errors in the record.

But I would make another remark. If misapprehension came in, if these men, in their unanimous declaration of Christ's death as the Sacrifice for sin, were not fairly representing the conclusions inevitable from the facts of Christ's life and death, and from His own words, is it not an odd thing that the same misapprehension affected them all? When people misconceive a teacher's doctrine, they generally differ in the nature of their misconceptions, and split into sections and parties. But here you have to account for the fact that every man of them, with all their diversity of idiosyncrasy and character, tumbled into the same pit of error, and that there was not one of them left sane enough to protest. Does that seem to be a likely thing?

And what about the worth of the teacher's teaching, that did not guard its receivers from such absolute misapprehension as that? If the whole Church unanimously mistook everything that Jesus Christ had said to them, and unwarrantably made out of Him what they did, on this hypothesis, I do not think that there is much left to honour or admire in a teacher, whose teaching was so ambiguous, as that it led all that received it into such an error as that into which, by the supposition, they fell.

No, brethren; they were one, because their Gospel was the only possible statement of the principles that underlay, and the conclusions that flowed from, the plain facts of the life and the teaching of Jesus Christ. I am not going to spend time in quoting His own words. I can only refer to one or two of them very succinctly. 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.' 'My flesh is the bread which I will give for the life of the world.' 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' 'This is My body broken for you; take, eat, in remembrance of Me.' 'This is My blood, shed for many for the remission of sins; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.' What possible explanation, doing justice to these words, is there, except 'Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures'? And how could men who had heard them with their own ears, and with their own eyes had seen Him risen from the dead and ascending into heaven, do otherwise than eagerly, enthusiastically, at the cost of all, and with unhesitating voice of unbroken unanimity, 'so preach'?

I quite admit that in Christ's teaching in the gospels you will not find the articulate drawing out into doctrinal statement of the principles that underlay, and the conclusions that flow from, the historical fact of Christ's propitiatory death. I do not wonder at that, nor do I admit that it is any argument against the truth of the divine revelation which is made in these doctrinal statements, to allege that we find nothing corresponding to them in Jesus Christ's own words. The silence is not as absolute as is alleged, as the quotations which I have made, and which might have been multiplied, do distinctly enough show. Even if it were more absolute than it is, the silence is by no means unintelligible. Christ had to offer the Sacrifice before the Sacrifice could be preached. He Himself warned His disciples against accepting His own words prior to the Cross, as the conclusive and ultimate revelation. 'I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot carry them now.' There was need that the Cross should be a fact before it was evolved into a doctrine. And so I venture to say that the unanimity of the preaching is only explicable on the ground of that preaching in both its parts—its assertion of Jesus' Messiahship and of His propitiatory death—being the repetition on the housetop of the lessons which they had heard in the ear from Him.

III. Note, briefly, the lesson from this unanimity.

Let us distinctly apprehend where is the living heart of the Gospel—that it is the message of redemption by the incarnation and sacrifice of the Son of God. There follows from that incarnation and sacrifice all the great teaching about the work of the Divine Spirit in men, dwelling in them for evermore. But the beginning of all is, 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' And, brethren, that message meets, as nothing else meets, the deepest needs of every human soul. It is able, as nothing else is able, to open out into a whole encyclopædia and universe of wisdom and truth and power. If we strike it out of our conception of Christianity, or if we obscure it as being the very palpitating centre of the whole, then feebleness will creep over the Christianity that is *minus* a Cross, or does not see in it the Sacrifice for the world's sin. You may cast overboard the sails to lighten the ship. If you do, she lies a log on

the waters. And if, for the sake of meeting new phases of thought, Christian churches tamper with this central truth, they have flung away their means of progress and of power.

Let me say again, and in a word only, that the considerations that I have been trying to submit to you in this sermon, show us the limits within which the modern cry of 'Back to the Christ of the Gospels,' is right, and where it may be wrong. I believe that in former days, and to some extent in the present day, we evangelical teachers have too much sometimes talked rather about the doctrines than about the Person who is the doctrines. And if the cry of 'Back to the Christ' means, 'Do not talk so much about the Atonement and Propitiation; talk about the Christ who atones,' then, with all my heart, I say, 'Amen!' But put the Person in the foreground, the living-loving, the dying-loving, the risen-loving Christ, put Him in the foreground. But if it is implied, as I am afraid it is often implied, that the Christ of the Gospels is one and the Christ of the epistles is another, and that to go back to the Christ of the gospels means to drop 'died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' and to retain only the non-miraculous, moral and religious teachings that are recorded in the three first gospels, then I say that it is fatal for the Church, and it is false to the facts, for the Christ of the epistles is the Christ of the gospels: the difference only being that in the one you have the facts, and in the other you have their meaning and their power.

So, lastly, let this text teach us what we ourselves have to do with this unanimous testimony. 'So we preach, and so ye believed.' Brother! Do you believe *so*? That is to say, is your conception of the Gospel the mighty redemptive agency which is wrought by the Incarnate Son of God, who was crucified for our offences, and rose that we might live, and is glorified that we, too, may share His glory? Is that your Gospel? But do not be content with an intellectual grasp of the thing. 'So ye believed' means a great deal more than 'I believe that Christ died for our sins.' It means 'I believe in the Christ who did die for my sins.' You must cast yourself as a sinful man on Him; and, so casting, you will find that it is no vain story which is commended to us by all these august voices from the past, but you will have in your own experience the verification of the fact that He died for our sins, in your own consciousness of sins forgiven, and new love bestowed; and so may turn round to Paul, the leader of the chorus, and to all the apostolic band, and say to them, 'Now I believe, not because of thy saying, but because I have seen Him, and myself heard Him.'

THE CERTAINTY AND JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

'But now is Christ risen from the dead ... the first fruits of them that slept.'—1 COR. xv. 20.

The Apostle has been contemplating the long train of dismal consequences which he sees would arise if we only had a dead Christ. He thinks that he, the Apostle, would have nothing to preach, and we, nothing to believe. He thinks that all hope of deliverance from sin would fade away. He thinks that the one fact which gives assurance of immortality having vanished, the dead who had nurtured the assurance have perished. And he thinks that if things were so, then Christian men, who had believed a false gospel, and nourished an empty faith, and died clinging to a baseless hope, were far more to be pitied than men who had had less splendid dreams and less utter illusions.

Then, with a swift revulsion of feeling, he turns away from that dreary picture, and with a change of key, which the dullest ear can appreciate, from the wailing minors of the preceding verses, he breaks into this burst of triumph. 'Now'—things being as they are, for it is the logical 'now,' and not the temporal one—things being as they are, 'Christ is risen from the dead, and that as the first fruits of them that slept.'

Part of the ceremonial of the Passover was the presentation in the Temple of a barley sheaf, the first of the harvest, waved before the Lord in dedication to Him, and in sign of thankful confidence that all the fields would be reaped and their blessing gathered. There may be some allusion to that ceremony, which coincided in time with the Resurrection of our Lord, in the words here, which regard that one solitary Resurrection as the early ripe and early reaped sheaf, the pledge and the prophecy of the whole ingathering.

Now there seem to me, in these words, to ring out mainly two things—an expression of absolute certainty in the fact, and an expression of unbounded triumph in the certainty of the fact.

And if we look at these two things, I think we shall get the main thoughts that the Apostle would impress upon our minds.

I. The certainty of Christ's Resurrection.

'Now *is* Christ risen,' says he, defying, as it were, doubt and negation, and basing himself upon the firm assurance which he possesses of that historical fact. 'Ah!' you say, 'seeing is believing; and he had evidence such as we can never have.' Well! let us see. Is it possible for us, nineteen centuries nearly after that day, to catch some echo of this assured confidence, and in the face of modern doubts and disbeliefs, to reiterate with as unflinching assurance as that with which they came from his glowing lips, the great words of my text? Can we, logically and reasonably, as men who are guided by evidence and not by feeling, stand up before the

world, and take for ours the ancient confession: 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. The third day He rose again from the dead'? I think we can.

The way to prove a fact is by the evidence of witnesses. You cannot argue that it would be very convenient, if such and such a thing should be true; that great moral effects would follow if we believed it was true, and so on. The way to do is to put people who have seen it into the witness-box, and to make sure that their evidence is worth accepting.

And at the beginning of my remarks I wish to protest, in a sentence, against confusing the issues about this question of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in that fashion which is popular nowadays, when we are told that miracle is impossible, and *therefore* there has been no Resurrection, or that death is the end of human existence, and that *therefore* there has been no Resurrection. That is not the way to go about ascertaining the truth as to asserted facts. Let us hear the evidence. The men who brush aside the testimony of the New Testament writers, in obedience to a theory, either about the impossibility of the supernatural, or about the fatal and final issues of human death, are victims of prejudice, in the strictest meaning of the word; and are no more logical than the well-known and proverbial reasoner who, when told that facts were against him, with sublime confidence in his own infallibility, is reported to have said, 'So much the worse for the facts.' Let us deal with evidence, and not with theory, when we are talking about alleged facts of history.

So then, let me remind you that, in this chapter from which my text is taken, we have a record of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, older than, and altogether independent of, the records contained in the gospels, which are all subsequent in date to it; that this Epistle to the Corinthians is one of the four undisputed Epistles of the Apostle, which not the most advanced school of modern criticism has a word to say against; that, therefore, this chapter, written, at the latest, some seven and twenty years after the date of the Crucifixion, carries us up very close to that event; that it shows that the Resurrection was *universally* believed all over the Church, and therefore must have then been long believed; that it enables us to trace the same belief as universal, and in undisputed possession of the field among the churches, at the time of Paul's conversion, which cannot be put down at much more than five or six years after the Crucifixion, and that so we are standing in the presence of absolutely contemporaneous testimony. This is not a case in which a belief slowly and gradually grew up. Whether we accept the evidence or not, we are bound to admit that it is strictly contemporaneous testimony to the fact of Christ's Resurrection.

And the witnesses are reliable and competent, as well as contemporaneous. The old belief that their testimony was imposture is dead long ago; as, indeed, how could it live? It would be an anomaly, far greater than the Resurrection, to believe that these people, Mary, Peter, John, Paul, and all the rest of them, were conspirators in a lie, and that the fairest system of morality and the noblest consecration that the world has ever seen, grew up out of a fraud, like flowers upon a dunghill. That theory will not hold water; and even those who will not accept the testimony have long since confessed that it will not. But the Apostle, in my context, seems to think that that is the only tenable alternative to the other theory that the witnesses were veracious, and I am disposed to believe that he is right. He says, 'If Christ be not risen, then, are we' the utterly impossible thing of 'false witnesses to God,' devout perjurers, as the phrase might be paraphrased: men who are lying to please God. If Christ be not risen, they have sworn to a thing that they know to be untrue, in order to advance His cause and His kingdom. If that theory be not accepted, there is no other about these men and their message that will hold water for a minute, except the admission of its truth.

The fashionable modern one, that it was hallucination, is preposterous. Hallucinations that five hundred people at once shared! Hallucinations that lasted all through long talks, spread at intervals over more than a month! Hallucinations that included eating and drinking, speech and answer; the clasp of the hand and the feeling of the breath! Hallucinations that brought instruction! Hallucinations that culminated in the fancy that a gathered multitude of them saw Him going up into heaven! The hallucination is on the other side, I think. They have got the saddle on the wrong horse when they talk about the Apostolic witnesses being the victims of hallucination. It is the people who believe it possible that they should be who are so. The old argument against miracles used to say that it is more consonant with experience that testimony should be false, than that a miracle should be true. I venture to say it is a much greater strain on a man's credulity, to believe that *such* evidence is false than that *such* a miracle, *so* attested, is true. And I, for my part, venture to think that the reasonable men are the men who listen to these eye-witnesses when they say, 'We saw Him rise'; and echo back in answer the triumphant certitude, 'Christ is risen indeed!'

There is another consideration that I might put briefly. A very valuable way of establishing facts is to point to the existence of other facts, which indispensably require the previous ones for their explanation. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, amongst other reasons, because I do not understand how it was possible for the Church to exist for a week after the Crucifixion, unless Jesus Christ rose again. Why was it that they did not all scatter? Why was it that the spirit of despondency and the tendency to separation, which were beginning to creep over them when they were saying: 'Ah! it is all up! We *trusted* that this had been He,' did not go on to their natural issue? How came it that these people, with their Master taken away from the midst of them, and the bond of union between them removed, and all their hopes crushed did not say: 'We have made a mistake, let us go back to Gennesareth and take to our fishing again, and try and forget our bright illusions'? That is what John the Baptist's followers did when he died. Why did not Christ's do the same? Because Christ rose again and re-knit them together. When

the Shepherd was smitten, the flock would have been scattered, and never drawn together any more, unless there had been just such a thing as the Resurrection asserts there was, to reunite the dispersed and to encourage the depressed. And so I say, Christianity with a *dead* Christ, and a Church gathered round a grave from which the stone has *not* been rolled away, is more unbelievable than the miracle, for it is an absurdity.

Then there is another thing that I would say in a word. Let me put an illustration to explain what I mean. Suppose, after the execution of King Charles I., in some corner of the country a Pretender had sprung up and said, 'I am the King!' the way to end that would have been for the Puritan leaders to have taken people to St. George's Chapel, and said, 'Look! there is the coffin, there is the body, is that the king, or is it not?' Jesus Christ was said to have risen again, within a week of the time of His death. The rulers of the nation had the grave, the watch, the stone, the seal. They could have put an end to the pestilent nonsense in two minutes, if it had been nonsense, by the simple process of saying, 'Go and look at the tomb, and you will see Him there.' But this question has never been answered, and never will be—What became of that sacred corpse if Jesus Christ did not rise again from the dead? The clumsy lie that the rulers told, that the disciples had stolen away the body, was only their acknowledgment that the grave was empty. If the grave were empty, either His servants were impostors, which we have seen it is incredible that they were, or the Christ was risen again.

And so, dear brethren, for many other reasons besides this handful that I have ventured to gather and put before you, and in spite of the prejudices of modern theories, I lift up here once more, with unfaltering certitude, the glad message which I beseech you to accept: 'Christ is risen, the first fruits of them that slept.'

II. So much, then, for the first point in this passage. A word or two about the second—the triumph in the certitude of that Resurrection.

As I remarked at a previous point of this discourse, the Apostle has been speaking about the consequences which would follow from the fact that Christ was not raised. If we take all these consequences and reverse them, we get the glad issues of His Resurrection, and understand why it was that this great burst of triumph comes from the Apostle's lips. And though I must necessarily treat this part of my subject very inadequately, let me try to gather together the various points on which, as I think, our Easter gladness ought to be built.

First, then, I say, the risen Christ gives us a complete Gospel. A dead Christ annihilates the Gospel. 'If Christ be not risen,' says the Apostle, 'our preaching,' by which he means not the act but the substance of his preaching, 'is vain.' Or, as the word might be more accurately rendered, 'empty.' There is nothing in it; no contents. It is a blown bladder; nothing in it but wind.

What was Paul's 'preaching'? It all turned upon these points—that Jesus Christ was the Son of God; that He was Incarnate in the flesh for us men; that He died on the Cross for our offences; that He was raised again, and had ascended into Heaven, ruling the world and breathing His presence into believing hearts; and that He would come again to be our Judge. These were the elements of what Paul called 'his Gospel.' He faces the supposition of a dead Christ, and he says, 'It is all gone! It is all vanished into thin air. I have nothing to preach if I have not a Cross to preach which is man's deliverance from sin, because on it the Son of God hath died, and I only know that Jesus Christ's sacrifice is accepted and sufficient, because I have it attested to me in His rising again from the dead.'

Dear brethren, on the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is suspended everything which makes the Gospel a gospel. Strike that out, and what have you left? Some beautiful bits of moral teaching, a lovely life, marred by tremendous mistakes about Himself and His own importance and His relation to men and to God; but you have got nothing left that is worth calling a gospel. You have the cross rising there, gaunt, black, solitary; but, unless on the other side of the river you have the Resurrection, no bridge will ever be thrown across the black gulf, and the Cross remains 'dead, being alone.' You must have a Resurrection to explain the Cross, and then the Life and the Death tower up into the manifestation of God in the flesh and the propitiation for our sins. Without it we have nothing to preach which is worth calling a gospel.

Again, a living Christ gives faith something to lay hold of. The Apostle here in the context twice says, according to the Authorised Version, that a dead Christ makes our faith 'vain.' But he really uses two different words, the former of which is applied to 'preaching,' and means literally 'empty,' while the latter means 'of none effect' or 'powerless.' So there are two ideas suggested here which I can only touch with the lightest hand.

The risen Christ puts some contents, so to speak, into my faith; He gives me something for it to lay hold of.

Who can trust a *dead* Christ, or who can trust a *human* Christ? That would be as much a blasphemy as trusting any other man. It is only when we recognise Him as declared to be the Son of God, and that by the Resurrection from the dead, that our faith has anything round which it can twine, and to which it can cleave. That living Saviour will stretch out His hand to us if we look to Him, and if I put my poor, trembling little hand up towards Him, He will bend to me and clasp it. You cannot exercise faith unless you have a risen Saviour, and unless you exercise faith in Him your lives are marred and sad.

Again, if Christ be dead, our faith, if it could exist, would be as devoid of effect as it would be empty of substance. For such a faith would be like an infant seeking nourishment at a dead mother's breast, or men trying to kindle their torches at an extinguished lamp. And chiefly would it fail to bring the first blessing which the believing soul receives through and from a risen Christ, namely, deliverance from sin. If He whom we believed to be our sacrifice by His death and our sanctification by His life has not risen, then, as we have seen, all which makes His death other than a martyr's vanishes, and with it vanish forgiveness and purifying. Only when we recognise that in His Cross explained by His Resurrection, we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, and by the communication of the risen life from the risen Lord possess that new nature which sets us free from the dominion of our evil, is faith operative in setting us free from our sins.

So, dear friends, the risen Christ gives us something for faith to lay hold of, and will make it the hand by which we grasp His strong hand, which lifts us 'out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and sets our feet upon a rock.' But if He lie dead in the grave your faith is vain, because it grasps nothing but a shadow; and it is vain as being purposeless; you are yet in your sins.

The last thought is that the risen Christ gives us the certitude of our Resurrection. I do not for a moment mean to say that, apart from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the thought, be it a wish or a dread, of immortality, has not been found in men, but there is all the difference in the world between forebodings, aspirations, wishes it were so, fears that it might be so, and the calm certitude that it is so. Many men talked about a western continent, but Columbus went there and came back again, and that ended doubt. Many men before, and apart from Jesus, have cherished thoughts of an immortal life beyond the grave, but He has been there and returned. And that, and, as I believe, that only puts the doctrine of immortality upon an irrefragable foundation; and we can say, 'Now, I know that there is that land beyond.' They tell us that death ends everything. Modern materialism, in all its forms, asserts that it is the extinction of the personality. Jesus Christ died, and went through it, and came out of it the same, and I will trust Him. Brethren, the set of opinion amongst the educated and cultured classes in England, and all over Europe, at this moment, proves to anybody who has eyes to see, that for this generation, rejection of immortality will follow certainly on the rejection of Jesus Christ. And for England to-day, as for Greece when Paul sent his letter to Corinth, the one light of certitude in the great darkness is the fact that Jesus Christ hath died, and is risen again.

If you will let Him, He will make you partakers of His own immortal life. 'The first fruits of them that slept' is the pledge and the prophecy of all the waving abundance of golden grain that shall be gathered into the great husbandman's barns. The Apostle goes on to represent the resurrection of 'them that are Christ's' as a consequence of their union to Jesus. He has conquered for us all. He has entered the prison-house and come forth bearing its iron gates on His shoulders, and henceforth it is not possible that we should be holden of it. There are two resurrections—one, that of Christ's servants, one that of others. They are not the same in principle—and, alas, they are awfully different in issue. 'Some shall wake to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.'

Let me beseech you to make Jesus Christ the life of your dead souls, by humble, penitent trust in Him. And then, in due time, He will be the life of your transformed bodies, changing these into the likeness of the body of His glory, 'according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

THE DEATH OF DEATH

'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. 21. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead... 50. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, (for the trumpet shall sound;) and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 55. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 56. The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 57. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.'—1 COR. xv. 20, 21; 50-58.

This passage begins with the triumphant ringing out of the great fact which changes all the darkness of an earthly life without a heavenly hope into a blaze of light. All the dreariness for humanity, and all the vanity for Christian faith and preaching, vanish, like ghosts at cock-crow, when the Resurrection of Jesus rises sun-like on the world's night. It is a historical fact, established by the evidence proper for such,—namely, the credible testimony of eye-witnesses. They could attest His rising, but the knowledge of the

worldwide significance of it comes, not from testimony, but from revelation. Those who saw Him risen join to declare: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead,' but it is a higher Voice that goes on to say, 'and become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

That one Man risen from the grave was like the solitary sheaf of paschal first-fruits, prophesying of many more, a gathered harvest that will fill the great Husbandman's barns. The Resurrection of Jesus is not only a prophecy, showing, as it and it alone does, that death is not the end of man, but that life persists through death and emerges from it, like a buried river coming again flashing into the light of day, but it is the source or cause of the Christian's resurrection. The oneness of the race necessitated the diffusion through all its members of sin and of its consequence—physical death. If the fountain is poisoned, all the stream will be tainted. If men are to be redeemed from the power of the grave, there must be a new personal centre of life; and union with Him, which can only be effected by faith, is the condition of receiving life from Him, which gradually conquers the death of sin now, and will triumph over bodily death in the final resurrection. It is the resurrection of Christians that Paul is dealing with. Others are to be raised, but on a different principle, and to sadly different issues. Since Christ's Resurrection assures us of the future waking, it changes death into 'sleep,' and that sleep does not mean unconsciousness any more than natural sleep does, but only rest from toil, and cessation of intercourse with the external world.

In the part of the passage, verses 50 to 58, the Apostle becomes, not the witness or the reasoner, as in the earlier parts of the chapter, but the revealer of a 'mystery.' That word, so tragically misunderstood, has here its uniform scriptural sense of truth, otherwise unknown, made known by revelation. But before he unveils the mystery, Paul states with the utmost force a difficulty which might seem to crush all hope,—namely, that corporeity, as we know it, is clearly incapable of living in such a world as that future one must be. To use modern terms, organism and environment must be adapted to each other. A fish must have the water, the creatures that flourish at the poles would not survive at the equator. A man with his gross earthly body, so thoroughly adapted to his earthly abode, would be all out of harmony with his surroundings in that higher world, and its rarified air would be too thin and pure for his lungs. Can there be any possibility of making him fit to live in a spiritual world? Apart from revelation, the dreary answer must be 'No.' But the 'mystery' answers with 'Yes.' The change from physical to spiritual is clearly necessary, if there is to be a blessed life hereafter.

That necessary change is assured to all Christians, whether they die or 'remain till the coming of the Lord.' Paul varies in his anticipations as to whether he and his contemporaries will belong to the one class or the other; but he is quite sure that in either case the indwelling Spirit of Jesus will effect on living and dead the needful change. The grand description in verse 52, like the parallel in 1 Thessalonians iv. 16, is modelled on the account of the theophany on Sinai. The trumpet was the signal of the Divine Presence. That last manifestation will be sudden, and its startling breaking in on daily commonplace is intensified by the reduplication: 'In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' With sudden crash that awful blare of 'loud, uplifted angel trumpet' will silence all other sounds, and hush the world. The stages of what follows are distinctly marked. First, the rising of the dead changed in passing through death, so as to rise in incorruptible bodies, and then the change of the bodies of the living into like incorruption. The former will not be found naked, but will be clothed with their white garments; the latter will, as it were, put on the glorious robes above the 'muddy vesture of decay,' or, more truly, will see the miracle of these being transfigured till they shine 'so as no fuller on earth could white them.' The living will witness the resurrection of the dead; the risen dead will witness the transformation of the living. Then both hosts will be united, and, through all eternity, 'live together,' and that 'with Him.' Paul evidently expects that he and the Corinthians will be in the latter class, as appears by the 'we' in verse 52. He, as it were, points to his own body when he says, recurring to his former thought of the necessity of harmony between organism and environment, '*this* corruptible must put on incorruption.' Here 'corruption' is used in its physical application, though the ethical meaning may be in the background.

The Apostle closes his long argument and revelation with a burst, almost a shout, of triumph. Glowing words of old prophets rush into his mind, and he breathes a new, grander meaning into them. Isaiah had sung of a time when the veil over all nations should be destroyed 'in this mountain,' and when death should be swallowed up for ever; and Paul grasps the words and says that the prophet's loftiest anticipations will be fulfilled when that monster, whose insatiable maw swallows down youth, beauty, strength, wisdom, will himself be swallowed up. Hosea had prophesied of Israel's restoration under figure of a resurrection, and Paul grasps *his* words and fills them with a larger meaning. He modifies them, in a manner on which we need not enlarge, to express the great Christian thought that death has conquered man but that man in Christ will conquer the conqueror. With swift change of metaphor he represents death as a serpent, armed with a poisoned sting, and that suggests to him the thought, never far away in his view of man, that death's power to slay is derived from—or, so to say, concentrated in—sin; and that at once raises the other equally characteristic and familiar thought that law stimulates sin, since to know a thing to be forbidden creates in perverse humanity an itching to do it, and law reveals sin by setting up the ideal from which sin is the departure. But just as the tracks in Paul's mind were well worn, by which the thought of death brought in that of sin, and that of sin drew after it that of law, so with equal closeness of established association, that of law condemnatory and slaying, brought up that of Christ the all-sufficient refuge from that gloomy triad—Death Sin, Law. Through union with Him each of us may possess His immortal risen life, in which Death, the engulfer, is himself engulfed; Death, the conqueror, is conquered utterly and for ever; Death, the serpent, has his sting drawn, and is harmless. That participation in Christ's life is begun even here, and God 'giveth us the victory' now, even while we live outward lives that must

end in death, and will give it perfectly in the resurrection, when 'they cannot die any more,' and death itself is dead.

The loftiest Christian hopes have close relation to the lowliest Christian duties, and Paul's triumphant song ends with plain, practical, prose exhortations to steadfastness, unmovable tenacity, and abundant fruitfulness, the motive and power of which will be found in the assurance that, since there is a life beyond, all labour here, however it may fail in the eyes of men, will not be in vain, but will tell on character and therefore on condition through eternity. If our peace does not rest where we would fain see it settle, it will not be wasted, but will return to us again, like the dove to the ark, and we shall 'self-enfold the large results of' labour that seemed to have been thrown away.

STRONG AND LOVING

'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. 14. Let all your things be done with charity.'—1 COR. xvi. 13, 14.

There is a singular contrast between the first four of these exhortations and the last. The former ring sharp and short like pistol-shots; the last is of gentler mould. The former sound like the word of command shouted from an officer along the ranks; and there is a military metaphor running all through them. The foe threatens to advance; let the guards keep their eyes open. He comes nearer; prepare for the charge, stand firm in your ranks. The battle is joined; 'quit you like men'—strike a man's stroke—'be strong.'

And then all the apparatus of warfare is put away out of sight, and the captain's word of command is softened into the Christian teacher's exhortation: 'Let all your deeds be done in charity.' For love is better than fighting, and is stronger than swords. And yet, although there is a contrast here, there is also a sequence and connection. No doubt these exhortations, which are Paul's last word to that Corinthian Church on whom he had lavished in turn the treasures of his manifold eloquence, indignation, argumentation, and tenderness, reflected the deficiencies of the people to whom he was speaking. They were schismatic and factious to the very core, and so they needed the exhortation to be left last in their ears, as it were, that everything should be done in love. They were ill-grounded in regard to the very fundamental doctrines of the faith, as all Paul's argumentation about the resurrection proves, and so they needed to be bidden to 'stand fast in the faith.' Their slothful carelessness as to the discipline of the Christian life, and their consequent feebleness of grasp of the Christian verities, made them loose-braced and weak in all respects, and incapacitated them for vigorous warfare. Thus, we see a picture in these injunctions of the sort of community that Paul had to deal with in Corinth, which yet he called a Church of saints, and for which he loved and laboured. Let me then run over and try to bring out the importance and mutual connection of what I may call this drill-book for the Christian warfare, which is the Christian life.

'Watch ye.' That means one of two things certainly, probably both—Keep awake, and keep your eyes open. Our Lord used the same metaphor, you remember, very frequently, but with a special significance. On His lips it generally referred to the attitude of expectation of His coming in judgment. Paul uses sometimes the figure with the same application, but here, distinctly, it has another. As I said, there is the military idea underlying it. What will become of an army if the sentries go to sleep? And what chance will a Christian man have of doing his *devoir* against his enemy, unless he keeps himself awake, and keeps himself alert? Watchfulness, in the sense of always having eyes open for the possible rush down upon us of temptation and evil, is no small part of the discipline and the duty of the Christian life. One part of that watchfulness consists in exercising a very rigid and a very constant and comprehensive scrutiny of our motives. For there is no way by which evil creeps upon us so unobserved, as when it slips in at the back door of a specious motive. Many a man contents himself with the avoidance of actual evil actions, and lets any kind of motives come in and out of his mind unexamined. It is all right to look after our *doings*, but 'as a man *thinketh* in his heart, so is he.' The good or the evil of anything that I do is determined wholly by the motive with which I do it. And we are a great deal too apt to palm off deceptions on ourselves to make sure that our motives are right, unless we give them a very careful and minute scrutiny. One side of this watchfulness, then, is a habitual inspection of our motives and reasons for action. 'What am I doing this for?' is a question that would stop dead an enormous proportion of our activity, as if you had turned the steam off from an engine. If you will use a very fine sieve through which to strain your motives, you will go a long way to keeping your actions right. We should establish a rigid examination for applicants for entrance, and make quite sure that each that presents itself is not a wolf in sheep's clothing. Make them all bring out their passports. Let every vessel that comes into your harbour remain isolated from all communication with the shore, until the health officer has been on board and given a clean bill. 'Watch ye,' for yonder, away in the dark, in the shadow of the trees, the black masses of the enemy are gathered, and a midnight attack is but too likely to bring a bloody awakening to a camp full of sleepers.

My text goes on to bring the enemy nearer and nearer and nearer. 'Watch ye'—and if, not unnoticed, they come down on you, 'stand fast in the faith.' There will be no keeping our ranks, or keeping our feet—or at least, it is not nearly so likely that there will be—unless there has been the preceding watchfulness. If the first command has not been obeyed, there is small chance of the second's

being so. If there has not been any watchfulness, it is not at all likely that there will be much steadfastness. Just as with a man going along a crowded pavement, a little touch from a passer-by will throw him off his balance, whereas if he had known it was coming, and had adjusted his poise rightly, he would have stood against thrice as violent a shock, so, in order that we may stand fast, we must watch. A sudden assault will be a great deal less formidable when it is a foreseen assault.

‘Stand fast *in the faith*.’ I take it that this does not mean ‘the thing that we believe,’ which use of the word ‘faith’ is the ecclesiastical, but not the New Testament meaning. In Scripture, faith means not the body of truths that we believe, but the act of believing them. This further command tells us that, in addition to our watchfulness, and as the basis of our steadfastness, confidence in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ will enable us to keep our feet whatever comes against us, and to hold our ground, whoever may assault us.

But remember that it is not because I have faith that I stand fast, but because of that in which I have faith. My feet may be well shod—and it used to be said that a soldier’s shoes were of as much importance in the battle as his musket—my feet may be well shod, but if they are not well planted upon firm ground I never shall be able to stand the collision of the foe. So then, it is not my grasp of the blessed truth, God in Christ my Friend and Helper, but it is that truth which I grasp at, that makes me strong. Or, to put it into other words, it is the foothold, and not the foot that holds it, that ensures our standing firm. Only there is no steadfastness communicated to us from the source of all stability, except by way of our faith, which brings Christ into us. ‘Watch ye; stand fast in the faith.’

The next two words of command are very closely connected, though not quite identical. ‘Quit you like men.’ Play a man’s part in the battle; strike with all the force of your muscles. But the Apostle adds, ‘be strong.’ You cannot play a man’s part unless you are. ‘Be strong’—the original would rather bear ‘become strong.’ What is the use of telling men to ‘be strong’? It is a waste of words, in nine cases out of ten, to say to a weak man, ‘Pluck up your courage, and show strength.’ But the Apostle uses a very uncommon word here, at least uncommon in the New Testament, and another place where he uses it will throw light upon what he means: ‘Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.’ Then is it so vain a mockery to tell a poor, weak creature like me to become strong, when you can point me to the source of all strength, in that ‘Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind’? We have only to take our weakness there to have it stiffened into strength; as people put bits of wood into what are called ‘petrifying wells’ which infiltrate into them mineral particles, that do not turn the wood into stone, but make the wood as strong as stone. So my manhood, with all its weakness, may have filtered into it divine strength, which will brace me for all needful duty, and make me ‘more than conqueror through Him that loved us.’ Then, it is not mockery and cruelty, vanity and surplusage to preach ‘Quit you like men; be strong, and be a man’; because if we will observe the plain and not hard conditions, strength will come to us according to our day, in fulfilment of the great promises: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee; and My strength is made perfect in weakness.’

And now we have done with the fighting words of command, and come to the gentler exhortation: ‘Let all your things be done in charity.’

That was a hard lesson for these Corinthians who were splitting themselves into factions and sects, and tearing each other’s eyes out in their partisanship for various Christian teachers. But the advice has a much wider application than to the suppression of squabbles in Christian communities. It is the sum of all commandments of the Christian life, if you will take love in its widest sense, in the sense, that is, in which it is always used in Paul’s writings. We cut it into two halves, and think of it as sometimes meaning love to God, and sometimes love to man. The two are inseparably inter-penetrated in the New Testament writings; and so we have to interpret this supreme commandment in the whole breadth and meaning of that great word *Love*. And then it just comes to this, that love is the victor in all the Christian warfare. If we love God, at any given moment, consciously having our affection engaged with Him, and our heart going out to Him, do you think that any evil or temptation would have power over us? Should we not see them as they are, to be devils in disguise? In the proportion in which I love God I conquer all sin. And at the moment in which that great, sweet, all-satisfying light floods into my soul, I see through the hollowness and the shams, and detect the ugliness and the filth of the things that otherwise would be temptations. If you desire to be conquerors in the Christian fight, remember that the true way of conquest is, as another Apostle says, ‘Keep yourselves in the love of God.’ ‘Let all your things be done in charity.’

And, further, how beautifully the Apostle here puts the great truth that we are all apt to forget, that the strongest type of human character is the gentlest and most loving, and that the mighty man is not the man of intellectual or material force, such as the world idolises, but the man who is much because he loves much. If we would come to supreme beauty of Christian character, there must be inseparably manifested in our lives, and lived in our hearts, strength and love, might and gentleness. That is the perfect man, and that was the union which was set before us, in the highest form, in the ‘Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,’ whom we call our Saviour, and whom we are bound to follow. His soldiers conquer as the Captain of their salvation has conquered, when watchfulness and steadfastness and courage and strength are all baptized in love and perfected thereby.

ANATHEMA AND GRACE

'The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. 22. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. 23. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 24. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.'—1 COR. xvi. 21-24.

Terror and tenderness are strangely mingled in this parting salutation, which was added in the great characters shaped by Paul's own hand, to the letter written by an amanuensis. He has been obliged, throughout the whole epistle, to assume a tone of remonstrance abundantly mingled with irony and sarcasm and indignation. He has had to rebuke the Corinthians for many faults, party spirit, lax morality, toleration of foul sins, grave abuses in their worship even at the Lord's Supper, gross errors in opinion in the denial of the Resurrection. And in this last solemn warning he traces all these vices to their fountainhead—the defect of love to Jesus Christ—and warns of their fatal issue. 'Let him be Anathema.'

But he will not leave these terrible words for his last. The thunder is followed by gentle rain, and the sun glistens on the drops; 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' Nor for himself will he let the last impression be one of rebuke or even of warning. He desires to show that his heart yearns over them all; so he gathers them all—the partisans; the poor brother that has fallen into sin; the lax ones who, in their misplaced tenderness, had left him in his sin; the misguided reasoners who had struck the Resurrection out of the articles of the Christian creed—he gathers them all into his final salutation, and he says, 'Take and share my love—though I have had to rebuke—amongst the whole of you.'

Is not that beautiful? And does not the juxtaposition of such messages in this farewell go deeper than the revelation of Paul's character? May we not see, in these terrible and tender thoughts thus inextricably intertwined and braided together, a revelation of the true nature both of the terror and the tenderness of the Gospel which Paul preached? It is from that point of view that I wish to look at them now.

I. I take first that thought—the terror of the fate of the unloving.

Now, I must ask you for a moment's attention in regard to these two untranslated words *Anathema Maran-atha*. The first thing to be noticed is that the latter of them stands independently of the former, and forms a sentence by itself, as I shall have to show you presently. 'Anathema' means an offering, or a thing devoted; and its use in the New Testament arises from its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it is employed for persons and things that, in a peculiar sense, were set apart and devoted to God. In the story of the conquest of Canaan, for instance, we read of Jericho and other places, persons, or things that were, as our version somewhat unfortunately renders it, 'accursed,' or as it ought rather to be rendered, 'devoted,' or 'put under a ban.' And this 'devotion' was of such a sort as that the things or persons devoted were doomed to destruction. All the dreadful things that were done in the Conquest were the consequences of the persons that endured them being thus 'consecrated,' in a very dreadful sense, or set apart for God. The underlying idea was that evil things brought into contact with Him were necessarily destroyed with a swift destruction. That being the meaning of the word, it is clear that its use in my text is distinctly metaphorical, and that it suggests to us that the unloving, like those cities full of uncleanness, when they are brought into contact with the infinite love of the coming Judge, shrivel up and are destroyed.

The other word 'Maran-atha,' as I said, is to be taken as a separate sentence. It belongs to the dialect, which was probably the vernacular of Palestine in the time of Paul, and to which belong, for the most part, the other untranslated words that are scattered up and down the Gospels, such as 'Aceldama,' 'Ephphatha,' and the like. It means 'our Lord comes.' Why Paul chose to use that untranslated scrap of another tongue in a letter to a Gentile Church we cannot tell. Perhaps it had come to be a kind of watchword amongst the early Jewish Christians, which came naturally to his lips. But, at any rate, the use of it here is distinctly to confirm the warning of the previous clause, by pointing to the time at which that warning shall be fulfilled. 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be devoted and destroyed. Our Lord comes.' The only other thing to be noticed by way of introduction is that this first clause is not an imprecation, nor any wish on the part of the Apostle, but is a solemn prophetic warning (acquiesced in by every righteous heart) of that which will certainly come. The significance of the whole may be gathered into one simple sentence—The coming of the Lord of Love is the destruction of the unloving.

'Our Lord comes.' Paul's Christianity gathered round two facts and moments—one in the past, Christ has come; one in the future, Christ will come. For memory, the coming by the cradle and the Cross; for hope, the coming on His throne in glory; and between these two moments, like the solid piers of a suspension bridge, the frail structure of the Present hangs swinging. In this day men have lost their expectation of the one, and to a large extent their faith in the other. But we shall not understand Scripture unless we seek to make as prominent in our thoughts as on its pages that second coming as the complement and necessary issue of the first. It stands stamped on every line. It colours all the New Testament views of life. It is used as a motive for every duty, and as a magnet to draw men to Jesus Christ by salutary dread. There is no hint in my text about the time of the Lord's coming, no disturbing of the solemnity of the thought by non-essential details of chronology, so we may dismiss these from our minds. The fact is the same, and

has the same force as a motive for life, whether it is to be fulfilled in the next moment or thousands of years hence, provided only that you and I are to be there when He comes.

There have been many comings in the past, besides the comings in the flesh. The days of the Lord that have already appeared in the history of the world are not few. One characteristic is stamped upon them all, and that is the swift annihilation of what is opposed to Him. The Bible has a set of standing metaphors by which to illustrate this thought of the Coming of the Lord—a flood, a harvest when the ears are ripe for the sickle, the waking of God from slumber, and the like; all suggesting similar thoughts. *The* day of the Lord, *the* coming of the Lord, will include and surpass all the characteristics which these lesser and premonitory judgment days presented in miniature. I do not enlarge on this theme. I would not play the orator about it if I could; but I appeal to your consciences, which, in the case of most of us, not only testify of right and wrong, but of responsibility, and suggest a judge to whom we are responsible. And I urge on each, and on myself, this simple question: Have I allowed its due weight on my life and character to that watchword of the ancient church—*Maran-atha*, 'our Lord cometh'?

Now, the coming of the Lord of Love is the annihilation of the unloving. The destruction implied in Anathema does not mean the cessation of Being, but a death which is worse than death, because it is a death in life. Suppose a man with all his past annihilated, with all its effort foiled and crushed, with all its possessions evaporated and disappeared, and with his memory and his conscience stung into clear-sighted activity, so that he looks back upon his former self and into his present self, and feels that it is all waste and chaos, would not that fulfil the word of my text—'Let him be Anathema'? And suppose that such a man, in addition to these thoughts, and as the root and the source of them, had ever the quivering consciousness that he was and must be in the presence of an unloved Judge; have you not there the naked bones of a very dreadful thing, which does not need any tawdry eloquence of man to make it more solemn and more real? The unloving heart is always ill at ease in the presence of Him whom it does not love. The unloving heart does not love, because it does not trust, nor see the love. Therefore, the unloving heart is a heart that is only capable of apprehending the wrathful side of Christ's character. It is a heart devoid of the fruits of love which are likeness and righteousness, 'without which no man shall see the Lord,' nor stand the flash of the brightness of His coming. So there is no cruelty nor arbitrariness in the decree that the heart that loves not, when brought into contact with the infinite Lord of Love, must find in the touch death and not life, darkness and not light, terror and not hope. Notice that Paul's negation *is* a negation and not an affirmation. He does not say 'he that hateth,' but 'he that doth not love.' The absence of the active emotion of love, which is the child of faith, the parent of righteousness, the condition of joy in His presence, is sufficient to ensure that this fate shall fall upon a man. I durst not enlarge. I leave the truth on your hearts.

II. Secondly, notice the present grace of the coming Lord. 'Our Lord cometh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.' These two things are not contradictory, but we often deal with them as if they were. And some men lay hold of the one side of the antithesis, and some men lay hold of the other, and rend them apart, and make antagonistic theories of Christianity out of them. But the real doctrine puts the two together and says there is no terror without tenderness, and there is no tenderness without terror. If we sacrifice the aspects of the divine nature, as revealed to us in the gentle Christ, which kindle a wholesome dread, we have, all unwittingly, robbed the aspects of the divine nature, which warm in us a gracious love, of their power to inflame and to illuminate. You cannot have love which is anything nobler than facile good nature and unrighteous indifference, unless you have along with it aspects of God's character and government which ought to make some men afraid. And you cannot keep these latter aspects from being exaggerated and darkened into a Moloch of cruelty, unless you remember that, side by side with them, or rather underlying them and determining them, are aspects of the divine nature to which only child-like confidence and calm beatific returns of love do rightly respond. The terror of the Lord is a garb which our sins force upon the love of the Lord, and when the one is presented it brings with it the other. Never should they be parted in our thoughts or in our teaching.

Note what that present grace is. It is a tenderness which gathers into its embrace all these imperfect, immoral, lax, heretical people in Corinth, as well as everywhere else—'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with *you all*.' There were men in that church that said, 'I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ.' There were men in that church that had defiled their souls and their flesh, and corrupted the community, and blasphemed the name of Christ by such foul, sensual sin as was 'not even named among the Gentiles.' There were men in that church so dead to all the sanctities even of the communion-table as that, with the bread between their teeth and the wine-cup in their hands, one was hungry and another drunken. There were men in that church, whose Christianity was so anomalous and singularly fragmentary that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. And yet Paul flings the great rainbow, as it were, of Christ's enclosing love over them all. And surely the love which gathers in such people leaves none outside its sweep; and the tenderness which stoops from heaven to pity, to pardon, to cleanse such is a tenderness to which the weakest, saddest, sinfullest, foulest of the sons of men may confidently resort. Let nothing rob you of this assurance, that Christ, the coming Lord, is present with us all, and with all our weak and wicked brethren, in the full condescension of His all-embracing, all-hoping, all-forgetting, and all-restoring love. All that we need, in order to get its full sunshine into our hearts, is that we trust Him utterly, and, so trusting, love Him back again with that love which is the fulfilling of the Law and the crown of the Gospel.

III. And now, lastly, note the tenderness, caught from the Master Himself, of the servant who rebukes.

This last message of love from the Apostle himself, in verse 24, is quite anomalous. There is no other instance in his letters where he introduces himself and his own love at the end, after he has pronounced solemn benediction commending to Christ's grace. But here, as if he had felt that he must leave an impression of himself on their minds, which corresponded to the impression of his Master that he desired to leave, he deviates from his ordinary habit, and makes his last word a personal word—'My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.' Rebuke is the sign of love. Sharp condemnation may be the language of love. Plain warning of possible evils is the simple duty of love. So Paul folds all whom he has been rebuking in the warm embrace of his proffered love, which was the very cause of his rebuke. The healing balm of this closing message was to be applied to the wounds which his keen edged words had made, and to show that they were wounds by a surgeon, not by a foe. In effect, this parting smile of love says, 'I am not become your enemy because I tell you the truth; I show my love to you by the plainness and roughness of my words.' Generalise that, free it from its personal reference, and it just comes to this: There never was a shallower sneer than the sneer which is cast at Christianity, as if it were harsh, 'ferocious,' or unloving, when it preaches the terror of the Lord. No! rather, because the Gospel *is* a Gospel, it must speak plainly about death and destruction to the unloving. The danger signal is not to be blamed for a collision, which it is hoisted to avert; and it is a strange sign of an unfeeling and unsympathetic, or of a harsh and gloomy system, that it should tell men where they are driving, in order that they may never reach the miserable goal. 'Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.' And when people say to us preachers, 'Is that your Gospel, a Gospel that talks about everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord at the glory of His coming—is that your Gospel?' We can only answer, 'Yes, it is! Because, so to talk, may by God's mercy, secure that some who hear shall never know anything of the wrath, save the hearing of it with the ear, and may, by the warning of it, be drawn to the Rock of Ages for safety and shelter from the storm.'

Therefore, dear friends, the upshot of all that I have been feebly trying to say is just this; let us lay hold with all our hearts, and by simple faith, of the present grace of the coming, loving Lord and Judge. You can do it. It is your only hope to do it. *Have* you done it? If so, then you may lift up your heads to the throne, and be glad, as those who know that their Friend and Deliverer will come at last, to help, to bless, to save. If not, dear friend, take the warning, that not to love is to be shrivelled like a leaf in the flame, at that coming which is life to them that love, and destruction to all besides. 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.'