

# 1 Timothy Exposition 1 - Maclaren

## 1 TIMOTHY RESOURCES

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

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### THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT

**1 Timothy 1:5 — ‘Now, the end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.’**

THE Apostle has just said that he left Timothy in Ephesus, in order to check some tendencies there which were giving anxiety. Certain teachers had appeared, the effect of whose activity was to create parties, to foster useless speculations, and to turn the minds of the Ephesian Christians away from the practical and moral side of Christianity. In opposition to these, the Apostle here lays down the broad principle that God has spoken, not in order to make acute theologians, or to provide materials for controversy, but in order to help us to love. The whole of these latest letters of the Apostle breathe the mellow wisdom of old age, which has learned to rate brilliant intellectualism, agility, inconspicuousness and the like, far lower than homely goodness. And so, says Paul, ‘the end of the commandment is love.’

Now he here states, not only the purpose of the divine revelation, but gives us a summary, but yet sufficient, outline of the method by which God works towards that purpose. The commandment is the beginning, love is the end or aim. And between these two there are inserted three things, a ‘pure heart,’ a ‘good conscience,’ ‘faith unfeigned.’ Now of these three the two former are closely connected, and the third is the cause, or condition, of both of them. It is, therefore, properly named last as being first in order, and therefore last reached in analysis. When you track a stream from its mouth to its source, the fountain-head is the last thing that you come to. And here we have, as in these great lakes in Central Africa — out of which finally the Nile issues — the stages of the flow. There are the twin lakes, a ‘good conscience’ and a ‘pure heart.’ These come from ‘unfeigned faith,’ which lies higher up in the hills of God; and they run down into the love which is the ‘end of the commandment.’ The faith lays hold on the commandment, and so the process is complete. Or, if you begin at the top, instead of at the bottom, God gives the word; faith grasps the word, and thereby nourishes a ‘pure heart’ and a ‘good conscience,’ and thereby produces a universal love. So, then, we have three steps to look at here.

**I. First of all, what God speaks to us for.**

'The end of the commandment is love.'

Now, I take it that the word 'commandment' here means, not this or that specific precept, but the whole body of Christian revelation, considered as containing laws for life. And to begin with, and only to mention, it is something to get that point of view, that all which God says, be it promise, be it self-manifestation, be it threatening, or be it anything else, has a preceptive bearing, and is meant to influence life and conduct. I shall have a word or two more to say about that presently, but note, just as we go on, how remarkable it is, and how full of lessons, if we will ponder it, that one name for the Gospel on the lips of the man who had most to say about the contrast between Gospel and Law is 'commandment.' Try to feel the stringency of that aspect of evangelical truth and of Christian revelation.

Then I need not remind you how here the indefinite expression 'love' must be taken, as I think is generally the ease in the New Testament, when the object on which the love rests is not defined, as including both of the twin commandments, of which the second, our Master says, is like unto the first, love to God and love to man. In the Christian idea these two are one. They are shoots from the one root. The only difference is that the one climbs and the other grows along the levels of earth. There is no gulf set in the New Testament teaching, and there ought to be none in the practice and life of a Christian man, between the love of God and the love of man. They are two aspects of one thing.

Then, if so, mark how, according to the Apostle's teaching here, in this one thought of a dual-sided love, one turned upwards, one turned earthwards, there lies the whole perfection of a human soul. You want nothing more if you are 'rooted and grounded in love.' That will secure all goodness, all morality, all religion, everything that is beautiful, and everything that is noble. And all this is meant to be the result of God's speech to us.

So, then, two very plain practical principles may be deduced and enforced from this first thought. First, the purpose of all revelation and the test of all religion is — character and conduct.

It is all very well to know about God, to have our minds filled with true thoughts about Him, His nature, and dealings with us. Orthodoxy is good, but orthodoxy is a means to an end. There should be nothing in a man's creed which does not act upon his life. Or, if I may put it into technical words, all a man's credenda should be his agenda; and whatsoever he believes should come straight into his life to influence it, and to shape character. Here, then, is the warning against a mere notional orthodoxy, and against regarding Christian truth as being intended mainly to illuminate the understanding, or to be a subject of speculation and discussion. There are people in all generations, and there are plenty of them to-day, who seem to think that the great verities of the Gospel are mainly meant to provide material for controversy —

***'As if religion were intended  
For nothing else but to be mended'***

and that they have done all that can be expected when they have tried to apprehend the true bearing of this revelation, and so contend against misinterpretations. This is the curse of religious controversy, that it blinds men to the practical importance of the truths for which they are fighting. It is as if one were to take some fertile wheat-land, and sand it all over, and roll it down, and make it smooth for a gymnasium, where nothing would grow. So the temper which finds in Christian truth simply a 'ministration of questions,' as my text says, mars its purpose, and robs itself of all the power and nourishment that it might find there.

No less to be guarded against is the other misconception which the clear grasp of our text would dismiss at once, that the great purpose for which God speaks to us men, in the revelation of Jesus Christ, is that we may, as we say, be 'forgiven,' and escape any of the temporal or eternal consequences of our wrongdoing. That is a purpose, no doubt, and men will never rise to the apprehension of the loftiest purposes, nor penetrate to a sympathetic perception of the inmost sweetness of the Gospel, unless they begin with its redemptive aspect, even in the narrowest sense of that word. But there are a miserable number of so-called and of real Christians in this world, and in our churches to-day, who have little conception that God has spoken to them for anything else than to deliver them from the fear of death, and from the incidence on them of future condemnation. He has spoken for this purpose, but the ultimate end of all is that we may be helped to love Him, and so to be like Him. The aim of the commandment is love, and if you ever are tempted to rest in intellectual apprehensions, or to pervert the truth of God into a mere arena on which you can display your skill of fence and your intellectual agility, or if ever you are tempted to think that all is done when the sweet message of forgiveness is sealed upon a man's heart, remember the solemn and plain words of my text — the final purpose of all is that we may love God and man.

But then, on the other side, note that no less distinctly is the sole foundation of this love laid in God's speech. My text, in its elevation of sentiment and character and conduct above doctrine, falls in with the prevailing tendencies of this day; but it provides the safeguards which these tendencies neglect. Notice that this favourite saying of the most advanced school of broad thinkers, who are always talking about the decay of dogma, and the unimportance of doctrine as compared with love, is here uttered by a man who was no sentimentalist, but to whom the Christian system was a most distinct and definite thing, bristling all over with the

obnoxious doctrines which are by some of us so summarily dismissed as of no importance. My very text protests against the modern attempt wrench away the sentiments and emotions produced in men, by the reception of Christian truth, from the truth which it recognises as the only basis on which they can be produced. It declares that the 'commandment' must come first, before love can follow; and the rest of the letter, although, as I say, it decisively places the end of revelation as being the moral and religious perfecting of men into assimilation with the divine love, no less decisively demands that for such a perfecting there shall be laid the foundation of the truth as it is revealed in Jesus Christ.

And that is what we want to-day in order to make breadth wholesome, and if only we will carry with us the two thoughts, the commandment and love, we shall not go far wrong. But what would you think of a man that said, 'I do not want any foundations. I want a house to live in'? And pray how are you going to get your house without the foundations? Or would he be a wise man who said, 'Oh, never mind about putting grapes into the vine vat, and producing fermentation; give me the wine!' Yes! But you must have the fermentation first. The process is not the result, of course, but there is no result without the process. And according to New Testament teaching, which, I am bold to say, is verified by experience, there is no deep, all-swaying, sovereign, heart-uniting love to God which is not drawn from the acceptance of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

## **II. And so I come, secondly, to note the purifying which is needed prior to such love.**

Our text, as I said, divides the process into stages; or, if I may go back to a former illustration, into levels. And on the level immediately above the

love, down into which the waters of the twin lakes glide, are a pure heart and a good conscience. These are the requisites for all real and operative love. Now they are closely connected, as it seems to me, more closely so than with either the stage which precedes or that which follows. They are, in fact, two twin thoughts, very closely identified, though not quite identical.

A pure heart is one that has been defecated and cleansed from the impurities which naturally attach to human affections. A 'good conscience' is one which is void of offence towards God and man, and registers the emotions of a pure heart. It is like a sheet of sensitive paper that, with a broken line, indicates how many hours of sunshine in the day there have been. We need not discuss the question as to which of these two great gifts and blessings which sweeten a whole life come first. In the initial stages of the Christian life I suppose the good conscience precedes the pure heart. For forgiveness which calms the conscience and purges it of the perilous stuff which has been injected into it by our corruptions — forgiveness comes before cleansing, and the conscience is calm before the heart is purified. But in the later stages of the Christian life the order seems to be reversed, and there cannot be in a man a conscience that is good unless there is a heart that is pure.

But however that may be — and it does not affect the general question before us — mark how distinctly Paul lays down here the principle that you will get no real love of God or man out of men whose hearts are foul, and whose consciences are either torpid or stinging them. I need not dwell upon that, for it is plain to anybody that will think for a moment that all sin separates between a man and God; and that from a heart all seething and bubbling, like the crater of a volcano, with foul liquids, and giving forth foul odours, there can come no love worth calling so to God, nor any benevolence worth calling so to man. Wherever there is sin, unrecognised, unconfessed, unpardoned, there is a black barrier built up between a man's heart and the yearning heart of God on the other side. And until that barrier is swept away, until the whole nature receives a new set, until it is delivered from the love of evil, and from its self-centred absorption, and until conscience has taken into grateful hands, if I might so say, the greatest of all gifts, the assurance of the divine forgiveness, I, for one, do not believe that deep, vital, and life-transforming love to God is possible. I know that it is very unfashionable, I know it is exceedingly narrow teaching, but it seems to me that it is Scriptural teaching; and it seems to me that if we will strip it of the exaggerations with which it has often been surrounded, and recognise that there may be a kind of instinctive and occasional recognition of a divine love, there may be a yearning after a clear light, and fuller knowledge of it, and yet all the while no real love to God, rooted in and lording over and moulding the life, we shall not find much in the history of the world, or in the experience of ourselves or of others, to contradict the affirmation that you need the cleansing of forgiveness, and the recognition of God's love in Jesus Christ, before you can get love worth calling so in return to Him in men's hearts.

Brethren, there is much to-day to shame Christian men in the singular fact which is becoming more obvious daily, of a divorce between human benevolence and godliness. It is a scandal that there should be so many men in the world who make no pretensions to any sympathy with your Christianity, and who set you an example of benevolence, self-sacrifice, enthusiasm for humanity, as it is called. I believe that the one Basis upon which there can be solidly built benevolence to men is devotion to God, because of God's great love to us in Jesus Christ. But I want to stir, if I might not say sting, you and myself into a recognition of our obligations to mankind, more stringent and compelling than we have ever felt it, by this phenomenon of modern life, that a divorce has been proclaimed between philanthropy and religion. The end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience.

III. Lastly, notice the condition of such purifying. To recur to my former illustration, we have to go up country to a still higher level. What feeds the two reservoirs that feed the love? What makes the heart pure and the conscience good? Paul answers, 'faith

unfeigned'; not mere intellectual apprehension, not mere superficial or professed, but deep, genuine, and complete faith which has in it the element of reliance as well as the element of credence. Belief is not all that goes to make faith. Trust is not all that goes to make faith. Belief and trust are indissolubly wedded in the conception of it. Such a faith, which knows what it lays hold of — for it lays hold upon definite truth, and lays hold on what it knows, for it trusts in Him whom the truth reveals — such a faith makes the heart pure and the conscience good.

And how does it do so? By nothing in itself. There is no power in my faith to make me one bit better than I am. There is no power in it to still one accusation of conscience. It is only the condition on which the one power that purges and that calms enters into my heart and works there. The power of faith is the power of that which faith admits to operate in my life. If we open our hearts the fire will come in, and it will thaw the ice, and melt out the foulness from my heart. It is important for practice that we should clearly understand that the great things which the Bible says of faith it says of it only because it is the channel, the medium, the condition, by and on which the real power, which is Jesus Christ Himself, acts upon us. It is not the window, but the sunshine, that floods this building with light. It is not the opened hand, but the gift laid in it, that enriches the pauper. It is not the poor leaden pipe, but the water that flows through it, that fills the cistern, and cleanses it, whilst it fills. It is not your faith, but the Christ whom your faith brings into your heart and conscience, that purges the one, and makes the other void of offence towards God and man.

So, brethren, let us learn the secret of all nobility, of all power, of all righteousness of character and conduct. Put your foot on the lowest round of the ladder, and then aspire and climb, and you will reach the summit. Take the first step, and be true to it after you have taken it, and the last will surely come. He that can say, 'We have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' will also be able to say, 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'And this commandment have we of God, that he who loves God loves his brother also'

## **THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF THE HAPPY GOD**

### **1 Timothy 1:11 - 'The glorious gospel of the blessed God.'**

TWO remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for our consideration of this text. The first is, that the proper rendering is that which is given in the Revised Version — 'the gospel of the glory,' not the 'glorious gospel.' The Apostle is not telling us what kind of thing the Gospel is, but what it is about. He is dealing not with its quality, but with its contents. It is a Gospel which reveals, has to do with, is the manifestation of, the glory of God.

Then the other remark is with reference to the meaning of the word 'blessed.' There are two Greek words which are both translated 'blessed' in the New Testament. One of them, the more common, literally means 'well spoken of,' and points to the action of praise or benediction; describes what a man is when men speak well of him, or what God is when men praise and magnify His name. But the other word, which is used here, and is only applied to God once more in Scripture, has no reference to the human attribution of blessing and praise to Him, but describes Him altogether apart from what men say of Him, as what He is in Himself, the 'blessed,' or, as we might almost say, the 'happy' God. If the word happy seems too trivial, suggesting ideas of levity, at turbulence, of possible change, then I do not know that we can find any better word than that which is already employed in my text, if only we remember that it means the solemn, calm, restful, perpetual gladness that fills the heart of God.

So much, then, being premised, there are three points that seem to me to come out of this remarkable expression of my text. First, the revelation of God in Christ, of which the Gospel is the record, is the glory of God. Second, that revelation is, in a very profound sense, an element in the blessedness of God. And, lastly, that revelation is the good news for men. Let us look at these three points, then, in succession.

### **I. Take, first, that striking thought that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the glory of God.**

The theme, or contents, or purpose of the whole Gospel, is to set forth and make manifest to men the glory of God.

Now what do we mean by 'the glory'? I think, perhaps, that question may be most simply answered by remembering the definite meaning of the word in the Old Testament. There it designates, usually, that supernatural and lustrous light which dwelt between the Cherubim, the symbol of the presence and of the self-manifestation of God. So that we may say, in brief, that the glory of God is the sum-total of the light that streams from His self-revelation, considered as being the object of adoration and praise by a world that gazes upon Him.

And if this be the notion of the glory of God, is it not a startling contrast which is suggested between the apparent contents and the real substance of that Gospel? Suppose a man, for instance, who had no previous knowledge of Christianity, being told that in it he would find the highest revelation of the glory of God. He comes to the book, and finds that the very heart of it is not about God, but

about a man; that this revelation of the glory of God is the biography of a man; and more than that, that the larger portion of that biography is the story of the humiliations, and the sufferings, and the death of the man. Would it not strike him as a strange paradox .that the history of a man's life was the shining apex Of all revelations of the glory of God? And yet so it's, and the Apostle, just because to him the Gospel was the story of the Christ who lived and died, declares that in this story of a human life, patient, meek, limited, despised, rejected, and at last crucified, lies, brighter than all other flashings of the divine light, the very heart of the lustre and palpitating centre and fontal source of all the radiance with which God has flooded the world. The history of Jesus Christ is the glory of God. And that involves two or three considerations on which I dwell briefly.

One of them is this: Christ, then, is the self-revelation of God. If, when we deal with the story of His life and death, we are dealing simply with the biography of a man, however pure, lofty, inspired he may be, then I ask what sort of connection there is between that biography which the four Gospels gives us, and what my text says is the substance of the Gospel? What force of logic is there in the Apostle's words: 'God commendeth His love toward us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us,' unless there is some altogether different connection between the God who commends His love and the Christ who dies to commend it, than exists between a mere man and God? Brethren! to deliver my text, and a hundred other passages of Scripture, from the charge of being extravagant nonsense, and clear, illogical non sequiturs, you must believe that in that man Christ Jesus 'we behold His glory — the glory of the only begotten of the Father'; and that when we look — haply not without some touch of tenderness and awed admiration in our hearts — upon His gentleness, we have to say, 'the patient God'; when we look upon His tears we have to say, 'the pitying God'; when we look upon His Cross we have to say, the 'redeeming God'; and gazing upon the Man, to see in Him the manifest divinity. Oh! listen to that voice,' He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' and bow before the story of the human life as being the revelation of the indwelling God.

And then, still further, my text suggests that this self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the very climax and highest point of all God's revelations to men. I believe that the loftiest exhibition and conception of the divine character which is possible to us must be made to us in the form of a man. I believe that the law of humanity, for ever, in heaven as on earth, is this, that the Son is the revealer of God; and that no loftier — yea, at bottom, no other — communication of the divine nature can be made to man than is made in Jesus Christ.

But be that as it may, let me urge upon you this thought, that in that wondrous story of the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ the very high-water mark of divine self-communication has been touched and reached. All the energies of the divine nature are embodied there. The 'riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God,' are in the Cross and Passion of our Saviour. 'To declare at this time His righteousness' Jesus Christ came to die. The Cross is 'the power of God unto salvation.' Or, to put it into other words, and avail oneself of an illustration, we know the old story of the queen who, for the love of an unworthy human heart, dissolved pearls in the cup and gave them to him to drink. We may say that God comes to us, and for the love of us, reprobate and unworthy, has melted all the jewels of His nature into that cup of blessing which He offers to us, saying: 'Drink ye all of it.' The whole Godhead, so to speak, is smelted down to make that rushing river of molten love which flows from the Cross of Christ into the hearts of men—Here is the highest point of God's revelation of Himself.

And my text implies, still further, that the true living, flashing centre of the glory of God is the love of God. Christendom is more than half heathen yet, and it betrays its heathenism not least in its vulgar conceptions of the divine nature and its glory. The majestic attributes which separate God from man, and make Him unlike His creatures, are the ones which people too often fancy belong to the glorious side of His character. They draw distinctions between 'grace' and 'glory,' and think that the latter applies mainly to what I might call the physical and the metaphysical, and less to the moral, attributes of the divine nature. We adore power, and when it is expanded to inanity we think that it is the glory of God. But my text delivers us from all such misconceptions. If we rightly understand it, then we learn this, that the true heart of the glory is tenderness and love. Of power that weak man hanging on the Cross is a strange embodiment; hut if we learn that there is something more godlike in God than power, then we can say, as we look upon Jesus Christ: 'Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.' Not in the wisdom that knows no growth, not in the knowledge which has no border-land of ignorance ringing it round about, not in the unwearied might of His arm, not in the exhaustless energy of His being, not in the unslumbering watchfulness of His all-seeing eye, not in that awful presence wheresoever creatures are; not in any or in all of these lies the glory of God, but in His love. These are the fringes of the .brightness; this is the central blaze. The Gospel is the Gospel of the glory of God, because it is all summed up in the one word — 'God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son.'

## **II. Now, in the next place, the revelation of God in Christ is an element in the blessedness of God.**

We are come here into places where we see but very dimly, and it becomes us to speak very cautiously. Only as we are led by the divine teaching may we affirm at all. But it cannot be unwise to accept in simple literality utterances of Scripture, however they may seem to strike us as strange. And so I would say — the philosopher's God may Be all-sufficient and unemotional the Bible's God 'delighteth in mercy; rejoiceth in His gifts, and is glad when men accept them. It is something, surely, amid all the griefs and sorrows of this sorrow-haunted and devil-hunted world, to rise to this lofty region and to feel that there is a living personal joy at the heart of

the universe. If we went no further, to me there is infinite beauty and mighty consolation and strength in that one thought — the happy God. He is not, as some ways of representing Him figure Him to be, what the older astronomers thought the sun was, a great cold orb, black and frigid at the heart, though the source and centre of light and warmth to the system. But He Himself is joy, or if we dare not venture on that word, which brings with it earthly associations, and suggests the possibility of alteration — He is the blessed God. And the Psalmist saw deeply into the divine nature, who, not contented with hymning His praise as the possessor of the fountain of life, and the light whereby we see light, exclaimed in an ecstasy of anticipation, 'Thou makest us to drink of the rivers of Thy pleasures.'

But there is a great deal more than that here, if not in the word itself, at least in its connection, which connection seems to suggest that, howsoever the divine nature must be supposed to be blessed in its own absolute and boundless perfectness, an element in the blessedness of God Himself arises from His self-communication through the Gospel to the world. All love delights in imparting. Why should not God's? On the lower level of human affection we know that it is so, and on the highest level we may with all reverence venture to say, The quality of that mercy... 'is twice blest,' and that divine love 'blesseth Him that gives and them that take.'

He created a universe because He delights in His works, and in having creatures on whom He can lavish Himself. He 'rests in His love, and rejoices over us with singing' when we open our hearts to the reception of His light, and learn to know Him as He has declared Himself in His Christ. The blessed God is blessed because He is God. But He is blessed too because He is the loving and, therefore, the giving God.

What a rock-firmness such a thought as this gives to the mercy and the love that He pours out upon us! If they were evoked by our worthiness we might well tremble, but when we know, according to the grand words familiar to many of us, that it is His nature and property to be merciful, and that He is far gladder in giving than we can be in receiving, then we may be sure that His mercy endureth for ever, and that it is the very necessity of His being — and He cannot turn His back upon Himself — to love, to pity, to succour, and to bless.

### **III. And so, lastly, the revelation of God in Christ is good news for us all.**

'The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God.' How that word 'Gospel' has got tarnished and enfeebled by constant use and unreflective use, so that it slips glibly off my tongue and falls without producing any effect upon your hearts! It needs to be freshened up by considering what really it means. It means this: here are we like men shut up in a beleaguered city, hopeless, helpless, with no power to Break out or to raise the siege; provisions failing, death certain. Some of you older men and women remember how that was the case in that awful siege of Paris, in the Franco-German War, and what expedients were adopted in order to get some communication from without, And here to us, prisoned, comes, as it did to them, a despatch borne under a dove's wing, and the message is this: — God is love; and that you may know that He is, He has sent you His Son who died on the Cross, the sacrifice for a world's sin. Believe it, and trust it, and all your transgressions will pass away.

My brother, is not that good news? Is it not the good news that you need — the news of a Father, of pardon, of hope, of love, of strength, of purity, of heaven? Does it not meet our fears, our forebodings, our wants at every point? It comes to you. What do you do with it? Do you welcome it eagerly, do you clutch it to your hearts, do you say, 'This is my Gospel'? Oh! let me Beseech you, welcome the message; do not turn away from the word from heaven, which will bring life and blessedness to all your hearts! Some of you have turned away long enough, some of you, perhaps, are fighting with the temptation to do so again even now. Let me press that ancient Gospel upon your acceptance, that Christ the Son of God has died for you, and lives to bless and help you. Take it and live! So shall you find that, 'as cold water to a thirsty soul,' so is this best of all news from the far country.

## **THE GOSPEL IN SMALL**

**'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' — 1 Timothy 1:15.**

CONDENSATION is a difficult art. There are few things drier and more unsatisfactory than small books on great subjects, abbreviated statements of large systems. Error lurks in summaries, and yet here the whole fulness of God's communication to men is gathered into a sentence; tiny as a diamond, and flashing like it. My text is the one precious drop of essence, distilled from gardens full of fragrant flowers. There is an old legend of a magic tent, which could be expanded to shelter an army, and contracted to cover a single man. That great Gospel which fills the Bible and overflows on the shelves of crowded libraries is here, without harm to its power, folded up into one saying, which the simplest can understand sufficiently to partake of the salvation which it offers.

There are five of these 'faithful sayings' in the letters of Paul, usually called 'the pastoral epistles.' It seems to have been a manner with him, at that time of his life, to underscore anything which he felt to be especially important by attaching to it this label. They are all, with one exception, references to the largest truths of the Gospel. I turn to this one, the first of them now, for the sake of

gathering some lessons from it.

## I. Note, then, first, here the Gospel in a nutshell.

'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Now, every word there is weighty, and might be, not beaten out, but opened out into volumes. Mark who it is that comes — the solemn double name of that great Lord, 'Christ Jesus.' The former tells of His divine appointment and preparation, inasmuch as the Spirit of the Lord God is upon Him, anointing Him to proclaim good tidings to the poor, and to open the prison doors to all the captives, and asserts that it is He to whom prophets and ritual witnessed, and for whose coming prophets and kings looked wearily through the ages, and died rejoicing even to see afar off the glimmer of His day. The name of Jesus tells of the child born in Bethlehem, who knows the experience of our lives by His own, and not only bends over our griefs with the pity and omniscience of a God, but with the experience and sympathy of a man.

'Christ Jesus came.' Then He was before He came. His own will impelled His feet, and brought Him to earth.

'Christ Jesus came to save.' Then there is disease, for saving is healing; and there is danger, for saving is making secure.

'Christ Jesus came to save sinners' — the universal condition, coextensive with the 'world' into which, and for which, He came. And so the essence of the Gospel, as it lay in Paul's mind, and had been verified in his experience, was this — that a divine person had left a life of glory, and in wonderful fashion had taken upon Himself manhood in order to deliver men from the universal danger and disease. That is the Gospel which Paul believed, and Which he commends to us as 'a faithful saying.'

Well, then, if that be so, there are two or three things very important for us to lay to heart. The first is the universality-of sin. That is the thing in which we are all alike, dear friends. That is the one thing about which any man is safe in his estimate of another. We differ profoundly. The members of this congregation, gathered accidentally together, and perhaps never to be all together again, may be at the antipodes of culture, of condition, of circumstances, of modes of life; but, just as really below all the diversities there lies the common possession of the one human heart, so really and universally below all diversities there lies the black drop in the heart, and 'we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' It is that truth which I want to lay on your hearts as the first condition to understanding anything about the power, the meaning, the blessedness of the Gospel which we say we believe.

And what does Paul mean by this universal indictment? If you take the vivid autobiographical sketch in the midst of which it is embedded, you will understand. He goes on to say, 'of whom I am chief.' It was the same man that said, without supposing that he was contradicting this utterance at all, 'touching the righteousness which is in the law' I was 'blameless.' And yet, 'I am chief.' So all true men who have ever shown us their heart, in telling their Christian faith, have repeated Paul's statement; from Augustine in his wonderful Confessions, to John Bunyan in his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners. And then prosaic men have said, 'What profligates they must have been, or what exaggerators they are now!' No. Sewer gas of the Worst sort has no smell; and the most poisonous exhalations are only perceptible by their effects. What made Paul think himself the chief of sinners was not that he had broken the commandments, for he might have said, and in effect did say, 'All these have I kept from my youth up,' but that, through all the respectability and morality of his early life there ran this streak — an alienation of heart, in the pride of self-confidence, from God, and an ignorance of his own wretchedness and need. Ah! brethren, I do not need to exaggerate, nor to talk about 'splendid vices,' in the untrue language of one of the old saints, but this I seek to press on you: that the deep, universal sin does not lie in the indulgence of passions, or the breach of moralities, but it lies here — 'thou hast left Me, the fountain of living water.' That is what I charge on myself, and on every one of you, and I beseech you to recognise the existence of this sinfulness beneath all the surface of reputable and pure lives. Beautiful they may be; God forbid that I should deny it: beautiful with many a strenuous effort after goodness, and charming in many respects, but yet vitiated by this, 'The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.' That is enough to make a man brush away all the respectabilities and proprieties and graces, and look at the black reality beneath, and wail out 'of whom I am chief.'

But, further, Paul's condensed summary of the Gospel implies the fatal character of this universal sin. 'He comes to save,' says he. Now what answers to 'save' is either disease or danger. The word is employed in the original in antithesis to both conditions. To save is to heal and to make safe.

And I need not remind you, I suppose, of how truly the alienation from God, and the substitution for Him of self or of creature, is the sickness of the whole man. But the end of sickness uncured is death. We 'have no healing medicine,' and the 'wound is incurable' by the skill of any earthly surgeon. The notion of sickness passes, therefore, at once into that of danger: for unhealed sickness can only end in death. Oh! that my words could have the waking power that would startle some of my complacent hearers into the recognition of the bare facts of their lives and character, and of the position in which they stand on a slippery inclined plane that goes straight down into darkness!

You do not hear much about the danger of sin from some modern pulpits. God forbid that it should be the staple of any; but God forbid that it should be excluded from any! Whilst fear is a low motive, self-preservation is not a low one; and it is to that that I now

appeal. Brethren, the danger of every sin is, first, its rapid growth; second, its power of separating from God; third, the certainty of a future — ay! and present — retribution.

To me, the proof of the fatal effect of sin is what God had to do in order to stop it. Do you think that it would be a small, superficial cut which could be stanchd by nothing else but the pierced hand of Jesus Christ? Measure the intensity of danger by the cost of deliverance, and judge how grave are the wounds for the healing of which stripes had to be laid on Him- Ah! if you and I had not been in danger of death, Jesus Christ would not have died. And if it be true that the Son of God laid aside His glory, and came into the world and died on the Cross for men, out of the very greatness of the gift, and the marvellousness of the mercy, there comes solemn teaching as to the intensity of the misery and the reality and awfulness of the retribution from which we were delivered by such a death. Sin, the universal condition, brings with it no slight disease and no small danger.

Further, we may gather from this condensed summary where the true heart and essence of the Christian-revelation is. You will never Understand it until you are contented to take the point of view which the New Testament takes, and give all weight and gravity to the fact of man's transgression and the consequences thereof. We shall never know what the power and the glory of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is until we recognise that, first and foremost, it is the mighty means by which man's ruin is repaired, man's downrush is stopped, sin is forgiven and capable of being cleansed. Only when we think of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as being, first and foremost, the redemption of the world by the great act of incarnation and sacrifice, do we come to be in a position in any measure to estimate its superlative worth. And, for my part, I believe that almost all the mistakes and errors and evaporations of Christianity into a mere dead nothing which have characterised the various ages of the Church come mainly from this, that men fall to see how deep and how fatal are the wounds of sin, and so fall to apprehend the Gospel as being mainly and primarily a system of redemption. There are many other most beautiful aspects about it, much else in it, that is lovely and of good report, and fitted to draw men's hearts and admiration; but all is rooted in this, the life and death of Jesus Christ, the sacrifice by whom we are forgiven, and in whom we are healed.

And if you strike that out, you have a dead nothing left — an eviscerated Gospel.

I believe that we all need to be reminded of that to-day, as we always do, but mainly to-day, when we hear from so many lips estimates, favourable or unfavourable to Christianity and its mission in the world, which leave out of sight, or minimise into undue insignificance, or shove into a backward place, its essential characteristic, that it is the power of God through Christ, His Son Incarnate, dying and rising again for the salvation of individual souls from the penalty, the guilt, the habit, and the love of their sins, and only secondarily is it a morality, a philosophy, a social lever. I take for mine the quaint saying of one ,of the old Puritans, 'When so many brethren are preaching to the times, it may be allowed one poor brother to preach for eternity.'

'This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'

## **II. Now, secondly, note the reliableness of this condensed Gospel.**

When a man in the middle of some slight plank, thrown across a stream, tests it with a stamp of his foot, and calls to his comrades, 'It is quite firm,' there is reason for their venturing upon it too. That is exactly what Paul is doing here. How does he know that it is 'a faithful saying'? Because he has proved it in his own experience, and found that in his case the salvation which Jesus Christ was said to effect has been effected. Now there are many other grounds of certitude besides this, but, after all, it is worth men's while to consider how many millions there have been from the beginning who would be ready to join chorus with the Apostle here, and to say, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.' My experience cannot be your certitude; but if you and I are suffering from precisely the same disease, and I have tested a cure, my experiences should have some weight with you. And so, brethren, I point you to all the thousands who are ready to say, 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him.' Are there any who give counter-evidence; that say, 'We have tried it. It is all a sham and imagination. We have asked this Christ of yours to forgive us, and He has not. We have asked Him to cleanse us, and He has not. We have tried Him, and He is an impostor, and we will have no more to do with Him.' There are people, alas who have gone back to their wallowing in the mire, but it was not Because Christ had failed in His promises, hut because they did not care to have them fulfilled any more. Jesus Christ does not promise that His salvation shall work against the will of men who submit themselves to it.

But it is not only Because of that consentient chorus of many voices — the testimony of which wise men will not reject — that the word is 'a faithful saying.' This is no place or time to enter upon anything like a condensation of the Christian evidence; but, in lieu of everything else, I point to one proof. There is no fact in the history of the world Better attested, and the unbelief of which is more unreasonable, than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And if Christ rose from the dead — and you cannot understand the history of the world unless He did, nor the existence of the Church either — if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, it seems to me that almost all the rest follows of necessity r the influx of the supernatural, the unique character of His career, the correspondence of the end with the beginning, the broad seal of the divine confirmation stamped upon His claims to be the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world. All these things seem to me to come necessarily from that fact. And I say, given the consentient witness of nineteen centuries, given the existence of the Church, given the effects of Christianity in the world, given that upon which they repose — the



Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead — the conclusion is sound, 'This is a faithful saying... that He came into the world to save sinners.'

Men talk, nowadays, very often as if the progress of science and new views as to the evolution of creatures or of mankind had effected the certitude of the Gospel. It does not seem to me that they have in the smallest degree. 'The foundation of God standeth sure,' whatever may become of some of the superstructures which men have built upon it. They may very probably be blown away. So much the better if we get the rock to build upon once more. A great deal is going, but not the Gospel. Do not let us be afraid, or suppose that it will suffer. Do not let us dread every new speculation as if it was going to finish Christianity, but recognise this — that the fact of man's sin and, blessed be God! the fact of man's redemption stands untouched by them all; and to-day, as of old, Jesus Christ is, and is firmly manifested to be, the world's Saviour. Whatsoever refuge may be swept away by any storms, 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried corner-stone, a sure foundation: He that believeth shall not be confounded.'

### **III. Lastly, notice the consequent wisdom and duty of acceptance.**

'Worthy of all acceptance,' says Paul. Yes, of course, if it is reliable. That word of the Lord which is 'sure, making wise the simple,' deserves to be received. Now this phrase, 'all acceptance,' may mean either of two things: it may either mean worthy of being welcomed by all men, or by the whole of each man.

This Gospel deserves to be welcomed by every man, for it is fitted for every man, since it deals with the primary human characteristic of transgression. Brethren! we need different kinds of intellectual nutriment, according to education and culture. We need different kinds of treatment, according to condition and circumstance. The morality of one age is not the morality of another. Much, even of right and wrong, is local and temporary; but black man and white, savage and civilised, philosopher and fool, king and clown, all need the same air to breathe, the same water to drink, the same sun for light and warmth, and all need the same Christ for redemption from the same sin, for safety from the same danger, for snatching from the same death. This Gospel is a Gospel for the world, and for every man in it. Have you taken it for yours? If it is 'worthy of all acceptance,' it is worthy of your acceptance. If you have not, you are treating Him and it with indignity, as if it was a worthless letter left in the post-office for you, which you knew was there, but which you did not think valuable enough to take the trouble to go for. The gift lies at your side. It is less than truth to say that it is 'worthy of being accepted.' Oh! it is infinitely more than that.

It is, also, 'worthy of all acceptance' in the sense of worthy of being accepted into all a man's nature, because it will fit it all and bless it all. Some of us give it a half welcome. We take it into our heads, and then we put a partition between them and our hearts, and keep our religion on the other side, so that it does not influence us at all. It is worthy of being received by the understanding, to which it will bring truth absolute; of being received by the will, to which it will bring the freedom of submission; of being received by the conscience, to which it will bring quickening; of being received by the affections, to which it will bring pure and perfect love. For hope, it will bring a certainty to gaze upon; for passions, a curb; for effort, a spur and a power; for desires, satisfaction; for the whole man, healing and light.

Brother! take it. And, if you do, begin where it begins, with your sins; and be contented to be saved as a sinner in danger and sickness, who can neither defend nor heal yourself. And thus coming, you will test the rope and find it hold; you will take the medicine and know that it cures; and, by your own experience, you will be able to say, 'This is a faithful saying, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.'

## **THE CHIEF OF SINNERS**

**'Of whom I am chief.' — 1 Timothy 1:15.**

THE less teachers of religion talk about themselves the better; and yet there is a kind of personal reference, far removed from egotism and offensiveness. Few such men have ever spoken more of themselves than Paul did, and yet none have been truer to his motto: 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus.' For the scope of almost all his personal references is the depreciation of self, and the magnifying of the wonderful mercy which drew him to Jesus Christ. Whenever he speaks of his conversion it is with deep emotion and with burning cheeks. Here, for instance, he adduces himself as the typical example of God's long-suffering. If he were saved none need despair.

I take it that this saying of the Apostle's, 'Of whom I am chief,' paradoxical and exaggerated as it seems to many men, is in spirit that which all who know themselves ought to re-echo; and without which there is little strength in Christian life.

### **I. And so I ask you to note, first, what this man thinks of himself.**

'Of whom I am chief.' Now, if we set what we know of the character of Saul of Tarsus before he was a Christian by the side of that of

many who have won a bad supremacy in wickedness, the words seem entirely strange and exaggerated. But, as I have often had to say, the principle of the Apostle's estimate is to be found in his belief that, not the outward manifestation of evil in specific acts of immorality, or flagrant breaches of commandment, but the inward principle from which the deeds flowed, is the measure of a man's criminality, and that, according to the uniform teaching of Scripture, the very root of sin, and that which is common to all the things that the world's conscience and ordinary morality designate as wrong, is to be found here, that self has become the centre, the aim, and the law instead of God. 'This is the condemnation, said Paul's Master — not that men have done so-and-so and so-and-so, but — 'that light is come into the world, and men love darkness.' That is the root of evil.

'When the Comforter is come,' said Paul's Master, 'He will convince the world of sin.' Because they have broken the commandments? Because they have been lustful, ambitious, passionate, murderous, profligate, and so on? No! Because they believe not in Me.'

The common root of all sin is alienation of heart and will from God. And it is by the root, and not by the black clusters of poisonous berries that have come from it, that men are to be judged. Here is the mother-tincture. You may colour it in different ways, and you may flavour it with different essences, and you will get a whole pharmacopoeia of poisons out of it. But the mother-poison of them all is this, that men turn away from the light, which is God; and for you and me is God in Christ.

So this man, looking back from the to-day of his present devotion and love to the yesterdays of his hostility, avails himself indeed of the palliation, 'I did it ignorantly, in unbelief,' but yet is smitten with the consciousness that whilst as touching the righteousness that is of the law he was blameless, his attitude to that incarnate love was such as now, he thinks, stamps him as the worst of men.

Brethren, there is the standard by which we have to try ourselves. If we get down below the mere surface of acts, and think, not of what we do, but of what we are, we shall then, at any rate, have in our hands the means by which we can truly estimate ourselves. But what have we. to say about that word 'chief'? Is not that exaggeration? Well, yes and no. For every man ought to know the weak and evil places of his own heart better than he does those of any besides. And if he does so know them, he will understand that the ordinary classification of sin, according to the apparent blackness of the deed, is very superficial and misleading. Obviously, the worst of acts need not be done by the worst of men, and it does not at all follow that the man who does the awful deed stands out from his fellows in the same bad preeminence in which his deed stands out from theirs.

Take a concrete case. Go into the slums of Manchester, and take some of the people there, battered almost out of the semblance of humanity, and all crusted over and leprous with foul-smelling evils that you and I never come within a thousand miles of thinking it possible that we should do. Did you ever think that it is quite possible that the worst harlot, thief, drunkard, profligate in your back streets may be more innocent in their profligacy than you are in your respectability; and that we may even come to this paradox, that the worse the act, as a rule, the less guilty the doer? It is not such a paradox as it looks, because, on the one hand, the presence of temptation, and, on the other hand, the absence of light, make all the difference. And these people, who could not have been anything else, are innocent in degradation as compared with you, with all your education and culture, and opportunities of going straight, and knowledge of Christ and His love. The little transgressions that you do are far greater than the gross ones that they do. 'But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford,' said the old preacher, when he saw a man going to the scaffold. And you and I, if we know ourselves, will not think that we have an instance of exaggeration, but only of the object nearest seeming the largest, when Paul said 'Of whom I am chief.'

Only go and look for your sin in the way they look for Guy Fawkes at the House of Commons before the session. Take a dark lantern, and go down into the cellars, and if you do not find something there that will take all the conceit out of you, it must be because you are very short-sighted, or phenomenally self-complacent.

What does it matter though there be vineyards on the slopes of Vesuvius, and bright houses nestling at its base, and beauty lying all around like the dream of a god, if, when a man cranes his neck over the top of the crater, he sees that that cone, so graceful on the outside, is seething with fire and sulphur? Let us look down into the crater of our own hearts, and what we see there may well make us feel as Paul did when he said, 'Of whom I am chief.'

Now, such an estimate is perfectly consistent with a clear recognition of any good that may be in the character and manifest in life. For the same Paul who says, 'Of whom I am chief,' says, in the almost contemporaneous letter sent to the same person, 'I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith'; and he is the same man who asserted, 'In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.' The true Christian estimate of one's own evil and sin does not in the least interfere with the recognition of what God strengthens one to do, or of the progress which, by God's grace, may have been made in holiness and righteousness. The two things may lie side by side with perfect harmony, and ought to do so, in every Christian heart.

But notice one more point. The Apostle does not say 'I was,' but 'I am chief.' What! A man who could say, in another connection, 'If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away' — the man who could say, in another connection, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God' — does he also

say, 'I am chief'? Is he speaking about his present? Are old sins bound round a man's neck for evermore? If they be, what is the meaning of the Gospel that Jesus Christ redeems us from our sins? Well, he means this. No lapse of time, nor any gift of divine pardon, nor any subsequent advancement in holiness and righteousness, can alter the fact that I, the very same I that am now rejoicing in God's salvation, am the man that did all these things; and, in a very profound sense, they remain mine through all eternity. I may be a forgiven sinner, and a cleansed sinner, and a sanctified sinner, but I am a sinner — not I was. The imperishable connection between a man and his past, which may be so tragical, and, thank God, may be so blessed, even in the case of remembered and confessed sin, is solemnly hinted at in the words before us. We carry with us ever the fact of past transgression, and no forgiveness, nor any future 'perfecting of holiness in the fear' and by the grace 'of the Lord' can alter that fact. Therefore, let us beware lest we bring upon our souls any more of the stains which, though they be in a blessed and sufficient sense blotted out, do yet leave the marks where they have fallen for ever.

## **II. Note how this man comes to such an estimate of himself.**

He did not think so deeply and penitently of his past at the beginning of his career, true and deep as his repentance, and valid and genuine as his conversion were. But as he advanced in the love of Jesus Christ, his former active hostility became more monstrous to him, and the higher he rose, the clearer was his vision of the depth from which he had struggled; for growth in Christian holiness deepens the conviction of prior imperfection.

If God has forgiven my sin the more need for me to remember it. 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy transgressions, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.' If you, my brother, have any real and genuine hold of God's pardoning mercy, it will bow you down the more completely on your knees in the recognition of your own sin. The man who, as soon as the pressure of guilt and danger which is laid upon him seems to him to be lifted off, springs up like some elastic figure of indiarubber, and goes on his way in jaunty forgetfulness of his past evil, needs to ask himself whether he has ever passed from death unto life. Not to remember the old sin is to be

blind. The surest sign that we are pardoned is the depth of our habitual penitence. Try yourselves, you Christian people who are so sure of your forgiveness, try yourselves by that test, and if you find that you are thinking less of your past evil, be doubtful whether you have ever entered into the genuine possession of the forgiving mercy of your God.

And then, still further, this penitent retrospect is the direct result of advancement in Christian characteristics. We are drawn to begin some study or enterprise by the illusion that there is but a little way to go. 'Alps upon alps arise' when once we have climbed a short distance up the hill, and it has become as difficult to go back as to go forward.

So it is in the Christian life — the sign of growing perfection is the growing consciousness of imperfection. A spot upon a clean palm is more conspicuous than a diffuse griminess over all the hand, One stain upon a white robe spoils it which would not be noticed upon one less lustrously clean. And so the more we grow towards God in Christ, and the more we appropriate and make our own His righteousness, the more we shall be conscious of our deficiencies, and the less we shall be prepared to assert virtues for ourselves.

Thus it comes to pass that conscience is least sensitive when it is most needed, and most swift to act when it has least to do. So it comes to pass, too, that no man's acquittal of himself can be accepted as sufficient; and that he is a fool in self-knowledge who says, 'I am not conscious of guilt, therefore I am innocent.' 'I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but He that judgeth me is the Lord.' The more you become like Christ the more you will find out your unlikeness to Him.

## **III. Lastly, note what this judgment of himself did for this man.**

I said in the beginning of my remarks that it seemed to me that without the reproduction of this estimate of ourselves there would be little strong Christian life in us. It seems to me that that continual remembrance which Paul carried with him of what he had been, and of Christ's marvellous love in drawing him to Himself, was the very spring of all that was noble and conspicuously Christian in his career. And I venture to say, in two or three words, what I think you and I will never have unless we have this lowly self-estimate.

Without it there will be no intensity of cleaving to Jesus Christ. If you do not know that you are ill, you will not take the medicine. If you do not believe that the house is on fire, you will not mind the escape. The life-buoy lies unnoticed on the shelf above the berth as long as the sea is calm and everything goes well. Unless you have been down into the depths of your own heart, and seen the evil that is there, you will not care for the redeeming Christ, nor will you grasp Him as a man does who knows that there is nothing between him and ruin except that strong hand. We must be driven to the Saviour as well as draw, to Him if there is to be any reality or tightness in the clutch with which we hold Him. And if you do not hold Him with a firm clutch you do not hold Him at all.

Further, without this lowly estimate there will be no fervour of grateful love. That is the reason why so much both of orthodox and heterodox religion amongst us to-day is such a tepid thing as it is. It is because men have never felt either that they need a Redeemer, or that Jesus Christ has redeemed them. I believe that there is only one power that will strike the rock of a human heart,

and make the water of grateful devotion flow out, and that is the belief in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of mankind, and as my Saviour. Unless that be your faith, which it will not be except you have this conviction of my text in its spirit and essence, there will not be in your hearts the love which will glow there, an all-transforming power.

And is there anything in the world more obnoxious, more insipid, than lukewarm religion? If, with marks of quotation, I might use the coarse, strong expression of John Milton — ‘It gives a vomit to God Himself; Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.’

And without it there will be little pity of, and love for, our fellows. Unless we feel the common evil, and estimate by the intensity of its working in ourselves how sad are its ravages in others, our charity to men will be as tepid as our love to God. Did you ever notice that, historically, the widest benevolence to men goes along with what some people call the ‘narrowest’ theology? People tell us, for instance, to mark the contrast between the theology which is usually called evangelical and the wide benevolence usually accompanying it, and ask how the two things agree. The ‘wide’ benevolence comes directly from the ‘narrow’ theology. He that knows the plague of his own heart, and how Christ has redeemed him, will go, with the pity of Christ in his heart, to help to redeem others.

So, dear friends, ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.’ ‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’

## A TEST CASE

**‘Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.’ — 1 Timothy 1:16.**

THE smallest of God’s creatures, if it were only a gnat dancing in a sunbeam, has a right to have its well-being considered as an end of God’s dealings. But no creature is so isolated or great as that it has a right to have its well-being regarded as the sole end of God’s dealings. That is true about all His blessings and gifts; it is eminently true about His gift of salvation. He saves men because He loves them individually, and desires to make them blessed; but He also saves them because He desires that through them others shall be brought into the living knowledge of His love. It is most especially true about great religious teachers and guides.

Paul’s humility is as manifest as his self-consciousness when he says in my text, ‘This is what I was saved for. Not merely, not even principally, for the blessings that thereby accrue to myself, but that in me, as a crucial instance, there should be manifested the whole fulness of the divine love and saving power.’ So he puts his own experience as giving no kind of honour or glory to himself, but as simply showing the grace and infinite love of Jesus Christ. Paul disappears as but a passive recipient; and Christ strides into the front as the actor in his conversion and apostleship.

So we may take this point of view of my text, and look at the story of what befell the great Apostle as being in many different ways an exhibition of the great verities of the Gospel I desire to signalise, especially, three points here. We see in it the demonstration of the life of Christ; an exhibition of the love of the living Christ; and a marvellous proof of the power of that loving and living Lord.

### **I. First, then, take the experience of this Apostle as a demonstration of the exalted life, and continuous energy in the world, of Jesus Christ.**

What was it that turned the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, the rising hope of the Pharisaic party, the hammer of the heretics, into one of themselves? The appearance of Jesus Christ. Paul rode out of Jerusalem believing Him to be dead, and His Resurrection a lie. He staggered into Damascus, blind but seeing, and knowing that Jesus Christ lived and reigned. Now if you will let the man tell you himself what he saw, or thought he saw, you come to this, that it was a visible, audible manifestation of a corporeal Christ. For it is extremely noteworthy that the Apostle ranks the appearance to him self, on the road to Damascus, as in the same class with the appearances to the other apostles which he enumerates in the great chapter in the Epistle to the Corinthians. He draws no distinction, as far as evidential force goes, between the appearance to Simon and to the five hundred brethren and to the others, and that which flashed upon him and made a Christian of him. Other men that were with him saw the light. He saw the Christ within the blaze. Other men heard a noise; he heard audible and intelligible words in his own speech. This is his account of the phenomenon. What do you think of his account?

There are but three possible answers! It was imposture; it was delusion; it was truth. The theory of imposture is out of court. ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?’ Such a life as followed is altogether incongruous with the notion that the man who lived it was a deceiver. A fanatic he may have been; self-deceived he may have been; but transparently sincere he undeniably was. It is not given to impostors to move the world, as Paul did and does.

Was it delusion? Well it is a strange kind of hallucination which has such physical accompaniments and consequences as those in the story — not wanting confirmation from witnesses — which has come to us.

'At midday, O king' — in no darkness; in no shut-up chamber, 'at midday, O king — I heard ... I saw...' 'The men that were with me' partly shared in the vision. There was a lengthened conversation; two senses at least were appealed to, vision and hearing, and in both vision and hearing there were partial participators. Physical consequences that lasted for three days accompanied the hallucination; and the man 'was blind, not seeing the sun, and neither did eat nor drink.' There must be some soil beforehand in which delusions of such a sort can root themselves. But, if we take the story in the Acts of the Apostles, there is not the smallest foothold for the fashionable notion, which is entirely due to men's dislike of the supernatural, that there was any kind of misgiving in the young Pharisee, springing from the influence of Stephen's martyrdom, as he went forth breathing out threatenings and slaughter. The plain fact is that, at one moment he hated Jesus Christ as a bad man, and believed that the story of the Resurrection was a gross falsehood; and that at the next moment he knew Him to be living and reigning, and the Lord of his life and of the world. Hallucinations do not come thus, like a thunderclap on unprepared minds. Nor is there anything in the subsequent history of the man that seems to confirm, but everything that contradicts, the idea that such a revolutionary change as upset all his mental furniture, and changed the whole current of his life, and slammed in his face the door that was wide open to advancement and reputation, came from a delusion.

I think the hallucination theory is out of court, too, and there is nothing left but the old-fashioned one, that what he said he saw, he saw, and did not fancy; and that which he said he heard, he heard; and that it was not a buzzing of a diseased nerve in his own ears, but the actual speech of the glorified Christ. very well, then; if that be true, what then? The old-fashioned belief — Jesus who died on the Cross is living, Jesus who died on the Cross is glorified, Jesus who died on the Cross is exalted to the throne of the universe, puts His hand into the affairs of the world as a power amongst them. Paul's Christology is but the rationale of the vision that led to Paul's conversion. It was in part because he 'saw that Just One, and heard the words of His mouth,' that he declares, 'God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.' I do not say that the vision to Paul is a demonstration of the reality of the Resurrection, but I do say that it is a very strong confirmatory evidence, which the opponents of that truth will have much difficulty in legitimately putting aside.

## **II. Secondly, let me ask you to consider how this man's experience is an exhibition of the love of the living Lord.**

That is the main point on which the Apostle dwells in my text, in which he says that in him Jesus Christ 'shows forth all long-suffering.' The whole fulness of His patient, pitying grace was lavished upon him. He says this because he puts side by side his hostility and Christ's love, what he had believed of Jesus, and how Jesus had borne with him and loved him through all, and had drawn him to Himself and received him. So he established by his own experience this great truth, that the love of Jesus Christ is never darkened by one single speck of anger, that He 'suffereth long, and is kind'; that He meets hostility with patient love, hatred with a larger outpouring of His affection, and that His only answer to men's departures from Him in heart and feeling is more mightily to seek to draw them to Himself. 'Long-suffering' means, in its true and proper sense, the patient acceptance, without the smallest movement of indignation, of unworthy treatment. And just as Christ on earth 'gave His back to the smiter, and His cheeks to them that pulled off the hair'; and let the lips of Judas touch His, nor withdrew His face from 'shame and spitting'; and was never stirred to one impatient or angry word by any opposition, so now, and to us all, with equal boundlessness of endurance, He lets men hate Him, and revile Him, and forget Him, and turn their hacks upon Him; and for only answer has, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

Oh, dear brethren, we can weary out all loves except one. By carelessness, rebelliousness, the opposition of indifference, we can chill the affection of those to whom we are dearest. 'Can a mother forget? Yea, she may forget,' but you cannot provoke Jesus Christ to cease His love. Some of you have been trying it all your days, but you have not done it yet. There does come a time when' the wrath of the Lamb' — which is a very terrible paradox — is kindled, and will fall, I fear, on some men and women who are listening now. But not yet. You cannot make Christ angry. 'For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern' — for the same long-suffering is extended to us all

And then, in like manner, I may remind you that out of Paul's experience, as a cardinal instance and standing example of Christ's heart and dealings, comes the thought that that long-suffering is always wooing men to itself, and making efforts to draw them away from their own evil. In Paul's case there was a miracle. That difference is of small consequence. As truly as ever Christ spoke to Paul from the heavens, so truly, and so tenderly, does He speak to every one of us. He is drawing us all — you that yield and you that do not yield to His attractions, by the kindest gifts of His love, by the revelations of His grace, by the movements of His Spirit, by the providences of our days, by even my poor lips addressing you now — for, if I be speaking His truth, it is not I that speak, but He that speaks in me. I beseech you, dear friends, recognise in this old story of the persecutor turned apostle nothing exceptional, though there be something miraculous, but only an exceptional form of manifestation of the normal activity of the love of Christ

towards every soul. He loves, He draws, He welcomes all that come to Him. His servant, who stood over the blind, penitent persecutor, and said to him, 'Brother Saul!' was only faintly echoing the glad reception which the elder Brother of the family gives to this and to every prodigal who comes back; because He Himself has drawn Him.

If we will only recognise the undying truth for all of us that lies beneath the individual experience of this apostle, we, too, may share in the attraction of His love, in the constraining and blessed influences of that love received, and in the welcome with which He hails us when we turn. If this man were thus dealt with, no man need despair.

### **III. Lastly, we may notice how this experience is a manifestation of the power of the living, loving Lord.**

The first and plainest thing that it teaches us about that power is that Jesus Christ is able in one moment to revolutionise a life. There is nothing more striking than the suddenness and completeness of the change which passed. 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years'; and there come moments in every life into which there is crammed and condensed a whole world of experience, so as that a man looks back from this instant to that before, and feels that a gulf, deep as infinity, separates him from his old self.

Now, it is very unfashionable in these days to talk about conversion at all. It is even more unfashionable to talk about sudden conversions. I venture to say that there are types of character and experience which will never be turned to good, unless they are turned suddenly; while there are others, no doubt, to whom the course is a gradual one, and you cannot tell where the dawn broadens into perfect day. But, in the case of men who have grown up to some degree of maturity of life, either in sensuous sin or crusted over with selfish worldliness, or in any other way, by reason of intellectual pursuits, or others have become forgetful of God and careless of religion — unless such men are in a moment arrested and wheeled round at once, there is very little chance of their ever being so at all.

I am sure I am speaking to some now who, unless the truth of Christ comes into their minds with arresting flash, and unless they are in one moment, into which an eternity is condensed, changed in their purposes, will never be changed.

Do not, my friend, listen to the talk that sudden conversion is impossible or unlikely. It is the only kind of conversion that some of you are capable of. I remember a man, one of the best Christian men in a humble station in life that I ever knew — he did not live in Manchester — he had been a drunkard up to his fortieth or fiftieth year. One day he was walking across an open field, and a voice, as he thought, spoke to him and said, naming him, 'If you don't sign the pledge to-day you will be damned!' He turned on his heel, and walked straight down the street to the house of a temperance friend, and said, 'I have come to sign the pledge.' He signed it, and from that day to the day of his death 'adorned the doctrine of Jesus Christ' his Saviour. If that man had not been suddenly converted he would never have been converted. So I say that this story of the text is a crucial instance of Christ's power to lay hold upon a man, and wheel him right round all in a moment, and send him on a new path. He wants to do that with all of you to whom He has not already done it. I beseech you, do not stick your heels into the ground in resistance, nor when He puts His hand on your shoulder stiffen your back that He may not do what He desires with you.

May we not see here, too, a demonstration of Christ's power to make a life nobly and blessedly new, different from all its past, and adorned with strange and unexpected fruits of beauty and wisdom and holiness? This man's account of his future, from the moment of that incident on the Damascus road to the headman's block outside the walls of Rome, is this: 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature'; 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Christ will do that for us all; for long-suffering was shown on the Apostle for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe.

So, you Christian people, it is as much your business as it was Paul's, to be visible rhetoric, manifest demonstrations in your lives of the truth of the Gospel. Men ought to say about us, 'There must be something in the religion that has done that for these people.' We ought to be such that our characters shall induce the thought that the Christ who has made men like us cannot be a figment. Do you show, Christian men, that you are grafted upon the true Vine by the abundance of the fruit that you bring forth? Can you venture to say, as Paul said, 'If you want to know what Jesus Christ's love and power are, look at me?' Do not venture adducing yourself as a specimen of His power unless you have a life like Paul's to look back upon.

For us all the fountain to which Paul had recourse is open. Why do we draw so little from it? The fire which burned, refining and illuminating, in him may be kindled in all our hearts. Why are we so icy? His convictions are of some value, as subsidiary evidence to Gospel facts; his experience is of still more value as an attestation and an instance of Gospel blessings. Believe like Paul and you will be saved like Paul. Jesus Christ will show to you all long-suffering. For though Paul received it all he did not exhaust it, and the same long-suffering which was lavished on him is available for each of us. Only you too must say like him, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision'

**'Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen,' — 1 Timothy 1:17.**

With this burst of irrepressible praise the Apostle ends his reference to his own conversion as a transcendent, standing instance of the infinite love and transforming power of God. Similar doxologies accompany almost all his references to the same fact. This one comes from the lips of 'Paul the aged,' looking back from almost the close of a life which owed many sorrows and troubles to that day on the road to Damascus. His heart fills with thankfulness that overflows into the great words of my text. He had little to be thankful for, judged according to the rules of sense; but, though weighed down with care, having made but a poor thing of the world because of that vision which he saw that day, and now near martyrdom, he turns with a full heart to God, and breaks into this song of thanksgiving. There are lives which bear to be looked back upon. Are ours of that kind?

But my object is mainly to draw your attention to what seems to me a remarkable feature in this burst of thanksgiving. And perhaps I shall best impress the thought which it has given to me if I ask you to look, first, at the character of the God who is glorified by Paul's salvation; second, at the facts which glorify such a God; and, last, at the praise which should fill the lives of those who know the facts.

### **I. First, then, notice the God who is glorified by Paul's salvation.**

Now what strikes me as singular about this great doxology is the characteristics, or, to use a technical word, the attributes, of the divine nature which the Apostle selects. They are all those which separate God from man; all those which present Him as arrayed in majesty, apart from human weaknesses, unapproachable by human sense, and filling a solitary throne. These are the characteristics which the Apostle thinks receive added lustre, and are lifted to a loftier height of 'honour and glory,' by the small fact that he, Paul, was saved from sins as he journeyed to Damascus.

It would be easy to roll out oratorical platitudes about these specific characteristics of the divine nature, but that would be as unprofitable as it would be easy. All that I want to do now is just to note the force of the epithets; and, if I can, to deepen the impression of the remarkableness of their selection.

With regard, then, to the first of them, we at once feel that the designation of 'the King' is unfamiliar to the New Testament. It brings with it lofty ideas, no doubt; but it is not a name which the writers of the New Testament, who had been taught in the school of love, and led by a Son to the knowledge of God, are most fond of using. 'The King' has melted into 'the Father.' But here Paul selects that more remote and less tender name for a specific purpose. He is 'the King' — not 'eternal,' as our Bible renders it, but more correctly 'the King of the Ages.' The idea intended is not so much that of unending existence as that He moulds the epochs of the world's history, and directs the evolution of its progress. It is the thought of an overruling Providence, with the additional thought that all the moments are a linked chain, through 'which He flashes the electric force of His will He is 'King of the Ages.'

The other epithets are more appropriately to be connected with the word 'God' which follows than with the word 'King' which precedes. The Apostle's meaning is this: 'The King of the ages, even the God who is,' etc. And the epithets thus selected all tend in the same direction. 'Incorruptible.' That at once parts that mystic and majestic Being from all of which the law is decay, There may be in it some hint of moral purity, but more probably it is simply what I may call a physical attribute, that that immortal nature not only does not, but cannot, pass into any less noble forms. Corruption has no share in His immortal being.

As to 'invisible,' no word need be said to illustrate that. It too points solely to the separation of God from all approach by human sense.

And then the last of the epithets, which, according to the more accurate reading of the text, should be, not as our Bible has it, 'the only wise God,' but 'the only God,' lifts Him still further above all comparison and contact with other beings.

So the whole set forth the remote attributes which make a man feel, The gulf between Him and me is so great that thought cannot pass across it, and I doubt whether love can live half-way across that flight, or will not rather, like some poor land bird with tiny wings, drop exhausted, and be drowned in the abyss before it reaches the other side.' We expect to find a hymn to the infinite love. Instead of that we get praise, which might be upon the lips of many a thinker of Paul's day and of ours, who would laugh the idea of revelation, and especially of a revelation such as Paul believed in, to absolute scorn. And yet he knew what he was saying when he did not lift up his praise to the God of tenderness, of pity, of forgiveness, of pardoning love, but to 'the King of the ages; the incorruptible, invisible, only God'; the God whose honour and glory were magnified by the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ.

### **II. And so that brings me, in the second place, to ask you to look at the facts which glorify even such a God.**

Paul was primarily thinking of his own individual experience; of what passed when the voice spoke to him, 'Why persecutest thou

Me?’ and of the transforming power which had changed him, the wolf, with teeth red with the blood of the saints, into a lamb. But, as he is careful to point out, the personal allusion is lost in his contemplation of his own history, as being a specimen and test-case for the blessing and encouragement of all who ‘should hereafter believe upon Him unto life everlasting.’ So what we come to is this — that the work of Jesus Christ is that which paints the lily and gilds the refined gold of the divine loftinesses and magnificence, and which brings honour and glory even to that remote and inaccessible majesty. For, in that revelation of God in Jesus Christ, there is added to all these magnificent and all but inconceivable attributes and excellences, something that is far diviner and nobler than themselves.

There be two great conceptions smelted together in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, of which neither attains its supremest beauty except by the juxtaposition of the other. Power is harsh, and scarcely worthy to be called divine, unless it be linked with love. Love is not glorious unless it be braced and energised by power. And, says Paul, these two are brought together in Jesus; and therefore each is heightened by the other. It is the love of God that lifts His power to its highest height; it is the revelation of Him as stooping that teaches us His loftiness. It is because He has come within the grasp of our humanity in Jesus Christ that we can hymn our highest and noblest praises to ‘the King eternal, the invisible God.’

The sunshine falls upon the snow-clad peaks of the great mountains and flushes them with a tender pink that makes them nobler and fairer by far than when they were veiled in clouds. And so all the divine majesty towers higher when we believe in the divine condescension, and there is no god that men have ever dreamed of so great as the God who stoops to sinners and is manifest in the flesh and Cross of the Man of Sorrows.

Take these characteristics of the divine nature as set forth in the text one by one, and consider how the Revelation in Jesus Christ, and its power on sinful men, raises our conceptions of them. ‘The King of the ages’ — and do we ever penetrate so deeply into the purpose which has guided His hand, as it moulded and moved the ages, as when we can say with Paul that His ‘good pleasure’ is that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ.’ The intention of the epochs as they emerge, the purpose of all their linked intricacies and apparently diverse movements, is this one thing, that God in Christ may be manifest to men. and that humanity may be gathered, like sheep round the Shepherd, into the one fold of the one Lord. For that the world stands; for that the ages roll, and He who is the King of the epochs hath put into the hands of the Lamb that was slain the Book that contains all their events; and only His hand, pierced upon Calvary, is able to open the seals, to read the Book. The King of the ages is the Father of Christ.

And in like manner, that incorruptible God, far away from us because He is so, and to whom we look up here doubtingly and despairingly and often complainingly and ask, ‘Why hast Thou made us thus, to be weighed upon with the decay of all things and of ourselves?’ comes near to us all in the Christ who knows the mystery of death, and thereby makes us partakers of an inheritance incorruptible. Brethren, we shall never adore, or even dimly understand, the blessedness of believing in a God who cannot decay nor change unless from the midst of graves and griefs we lift our beam to Him as revealed in the face of the dying Christ. He, though He died, did not see corruption, and we through Him shall pass into the same blessed immunity.

‘The King... the God invisible.’ No man hath seen God ‘at any time, nor can see Him.’ Who will honour and glorify that attribute which parts Him wholly from our sense, and so largely from our apprehension, as will he who can go on to say, ‘the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.’ We look up into a waste Heaven; thought and fear, and sometimes desire, travel into its tenantless spaces. We say the blue is an illusion; there is nothing there but blackness. But ‘he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.’ And we can lift thankful praise to Him, the King invisible, when we hear Jesus saying, ‘thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.’

‘The only God.’ How that repels men from His throne! And yet, if we apprehend the meaning of Christ’s Cross and work, we understand that the solitary God welcomes my solitary soul into such mysteries and sacred sweetnesses of fellowship with Himself that, the humanity remaining undisturbed, and the divinity remaining unintruded upon, we yet are one in Him, and partakers of a divine nature. Unless we come to God through Jesus Christ, the awful attributes in the text spurn a man from His throne, and make all true fellowship impossible.

So let me remind you that the religion which does not blend together in indissoluble union these two, the majesty and the lowliness, the power and the love, the God inaccessible and the God who has tabernacled with us in Jesus Christ, is sure to be almost an impotent religion. Deism in all its forms, the religion which admits a God and denies a revelation; the religion which, in some vague sense, admits a revelation and denies an incarnation; the religion which admits an incarnation and denies a sacrifice; all these have little to say to man as a sinner; little to say to man as a mourner; little power to move his heart, little power to infuse strength into his weakness. If once you strike out the thought of a redeeming Christ from your

religion, the temperature will go down alarmingly, and all will soon be frost bound.

Brethren, there is no real adoration of the loftiness of the King of the ages, no true apprehension of the majesty of the God



incorruptible, invisible, eternal, until we see Him in the face and in the Cross of Jesus Christ. The truths of this gospel of our salvation do not in the smallest degree impinge upon or weaken, but rather heighten, the glory of God. The brightest glory streams from the Cross. It was when He was standing within a few hours of it, and had it full in view, that Jesus Christ broke out into that strange strain of triumph, 'Now is God glorified.' 'The King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God,' is more honoured and glorified in the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, and in the transforming power which He puts forth in the Gospel, than in all besides.

### **III. Lastly, let me draw your attention to the praise which should fill the lives of those who know these facts.**

I said that this Apostle seems always, when he refers to his own individual conversion, to have been melted into fresh outpourings of thankfulness and of praise. And that is what ought to be the life of all of you who call yourselves Christians; a continual warmth of thankfulness welling up in the

heart, and not seldom finding utterance in the words, but always filling the life.

Not seldom, I say, finding utterance in the words. It is a delicate thing for a man to speak about himself, and his own religious experience. Our English reticence, our social habits, and many other even less worthy hindrances rise in the way; and I should be the last man to urge Christian people to cast their pearls before swine, or too fully to 'Open wide the bridal chamber of the heart,' to let in the day. There is a wholesome fear of men who are always talking about their own religious experiences. But there are times and people to whom it is treason to the Master for us not to be frank in the confession of what we have found in Him. And I think there would be less complaining of the want of power in the public preaching of the Word if more professing Christians more frequently and more simply said to those to whom their words are weighty, 'Come and hear and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul.' 'Ye are my witnesses,' saith the Lord. It is a strange way that Christian people in this generation have of discharging their obligations that they should go, as so many of them do, from the cradle of their Christian lives to their graves, never having opened their lips for the Master who has done all for them.

Only remember, if you venture to speak you will have to live your preaching. 'There is no speech nor language, their voice is not heard, their sound is gone out through all the earth.' 'The silent witness of life must always accompany the audible proclamation, and in many cases is far more eloquent than it. Your consistent thankfulness manifested in your daffy obedience, and in the transformation of your character, will do far more than all my preaching, or the preaching of thousands like me, to commend the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One last word, brethren. This revelation is made to us all. What is God to you, friend? Is He a remote, majestic, unsympathising, terrible Deity? Is He dim, shadowy, unwelcome; or is He God whose love softens His power; Whose power magnifies his love? Oh! I beseech you, open your eyes and your hearts to see that that remote Deity is of no use to you, will do nothing for you, cannot help you, may probably judge you, but will never heal you. And open your hearts to see that 'the only God' whom men can love is God in Christ. If here we lift up grateful praise 'unto Him that loveth us and hath loosed us from our sins in His blood,' we, too, shall one day join in that great chorus which at last will be heard saying, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.'