

2 Corinthians Exposition 2 - Maclaren

2 CORINTHIANS EXPOSITION: ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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THE PATIENT WORKMAN

'Now He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.'—2 COR. v. 5.

These words penetrate deep into the secrets of God. They assume to have read the riddle of life. To Paul everything which we experience, outwardly or inwardly, is from the divine working. Life is to him no mere blind whirl, or unintelligent play of accidental forces, nor is it the unguided result of our own or of others' wills, but is the slow operation of the great Workman. Paul assumes to know the meaning of this protracted process, that it all has one design which we may know and grasp and further. And he believes that the clear perception of the divine purpose, and the habit of looking at everything as contributing thereto, will be a magic charm against all sorrow, doubt, despondency, or fear, for he adds, 'Therefore we are always confident.' So let us try to follow the course of thought which issues in such a blessed gift as that of a continual, courageous outlook, and buoyant though grave lightheartedness,

because we discern what He means 'Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will.'

I. The first thought here is, God's purpose in all His working; 'He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.'

What is that 'self-same thing'? To understand it we must look back for a moment to the previous context. The Apostle has been speaking about the instinctive reluctance which even good men feel at prospect of dying and 'putting off the earthly house of this tabernacle.' He distinguishes between three different conditions in which the human spirit may be—dwelling in the earthly body, stripped of that, and 'clothed with the house which is from Heaven,' and to this last and highest state he sees that for him and for his brethren there were two possible roads. They might reach it either through losing the present body, in the act of death, and passing through a period of what he calls nakedness; or they might attain it by being 'superinvested,' as it were, with the glorious body which was to come to saints with Christ when He came; and so slip on, as it were, the wedding garment over their old clothes, without having to denude themselves of these. And he says that deep in the Christian heart there lay reluctance to take the former road and the preference for the latter. His longing was that that which is mortal might be 'swallowed up of life,' as some sand-bank in the tide-way may be gradually covered and absorbed by the rejoicing waters. And then he says, 'Now He that hath wrought us for this very thing, is God.'

Of course it is impossible that he can mean by this 'very thing' the second of the roads by which it was possible to reach the ultimate issue, because he did not know whether his brethren and he were to die or to be changed. He speaks in the context about death as a possible contingency for himself and for them,—'*If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,*' and so on. Therefore we must suppose that 'the self-same thing' of which he is thinking as the divine purpose in all His dealings with us, is not the manner in which we may attain that ultimate condition, but the condition itself which, by one road or another, God's children shall attain. Or, in other words, the highest aim of the divine love in all its dealings with us Christian men, is not merely a blessed spiritual life, but the completion of our humanity in a perfect spirit dwelling in a glorified body. Corporeity—the dwelling in a body by which the pure spirit moves amidst pure universes—is the highest end of God's will concerning us.

That glorified body is described in our context in wonderful words, which it would take me far too long to do more than just touch upon. Here we dwell in a tent, there we shall dwell in a building. Here in a house made with hands, a corporeal frame derived from parents by material transmission and intervention; there we shall dwell in a building of which God is the maker. Here we dwell in a crumbling clay tenement, which rains dissolve, which lightning strikes, and winds overthrow, and which finally lies on the ground a heap of tumbled ruin. There we dwell in a building, God's direct work, eternal, and knowing no corruption nor change. Here we dwell in a body congruous with, and part of, the perishable earthly world in which it abides, and with which it stands in relation; there we dwell in a house partaking of the nature of the heavens in which it moves, a body that is the fit organ of a perfect spirit.

And so, says Paul, the end of what God means with us is not stated in all its wonderfulness, when we speak of spirits imbued with His wisdom and surcharged with His light and perfectness, but when we add to that the thought of a fitting organ in which these spirits dwell, whereby they can come into contact with an external universe, incorruptible, and so reach the summit of their destined completeness. 'The house not made with hands,' eternal, the building of God in the Heavens, is the end that God has in view for all His children.

II. So, then, secondly, note the slow process of the Divine Workman.

The Apostle employs here a very emphatic compound term for 'hath wrought.' It conveys not only the idea of operation, but the idea of continuous and somewhat toilsome and effortful work, as if against the resistance of something that did not yield itself naturally to the impulse that He would bestow. Like some sculptor with a hard bit of marble, or some metallurgist who has to work the rough ore till it becomes tractable, so the loving, patient, Divine Artificer is here represented as labouring long and earnestly with a somewhat obstinate material which can and does resist His loving touch, and yet going on with imperturbable and patient hope, by manifold touches, here a little and there a little, all through life preparing a man for His purpose. The great Artificer toils at His task, 'rising early' and working long, and not discouraged when He comes upon a black vein in the white marble, nor when the hard stone turns the edge of His chisels.

Now I would have you notice that there lies in this conception a very important thought, viz. God cannot make you fit for heaven all at a jump, or by a simple act of will. That is not His way of working. He can make a world so, He cannot make a saint so. He can speak and it is done when it is only a universe that has to be brought into being; or He can say, 'Let there be light,' and light springs at His word. But He cannot say, and He does not say, Let there be holiness, and it comes. Not so can God make man meet for the 'inheritance of the saints in light.' And it takes Him all His energies, for all a lifetime, to prepare His child for what He wants to make of him.

There is another thought here, which I can only touch, and that is that God cannot give a man that glorified body of which I have been speaking, unless the man's spirit is Christlike. He cannot raise a bad man at the resurrection with the body of His glory. By the necessities of the case it is confined to the purified, because it corresponds to their inward spiritual being. It is only a perfect spirit

that can dwell in a perfect body. You could not put a bad man, Godless and Christless, into the body which will be fit for them whom Christ has changed first of all in heart and spirit into His own likeness. He would be like those hermit crabs that you see on the beach who run into any kind of a shell, whether it fits them or not, in order to get a house.

There are two principles at work in the resurrection of the dead. The glorified body is not the physical outcome of the material body here, but is the issue and manifestation, in visible form, of the perfect and Christlike spirit. Some shall rise to glory and immortality, some to shame and everlasting contempt. If we are to stand at the last with the body of our humiliation changed into a body of glory, we must begin by being changed in the spirit of our mind. As the mind is, so will the body be one day. But, passing from such thoughts as these, and remembering that the Apostle here is speaking only about Christian people, and the divine operations upon them, we may still extend the meaning of this significant word 'wrought' somewhat further, and ask you just to consider, and that very briefly, the three-fold processes which, in the divine working, terminate in, and contemplate, this great issue.

God has wrought us for it in the very act of making us what we are. Human nature is an insoluble enigma, if this world is its only field. Amidst all the waste, the mysterious waste, of creation, there is no more profligate expenditure of powers than that which is involved in giving a man such faculties and capacities, if this be the only field on which they are to be exercised. If you think of what most of us do in this world, and of what it is in us to be, and to do, it is almost ludicrous to consider the disproportion. All other creatures fit their circumstances; nothing in them is bigger than their environment. They find in life a field for every power. You and I do not. 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have roosting-places.' They all correspond to their circumstances, but we have an infinitude of faculty lying half dormant in each of us, which finds no work at all in this present world. And so, looking at men as they are with eternity in their hearts, with natures that go reaching out towards infinity, the question comes up: 'Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain? What is the use of us, and why should we be what we are, if there is nothing for us except this poor present?' God, or whoever made us, has made a mistake; and strangely enough, if we were not made, but evolved, evolution has worked out faculties which have no correspondence with the things around them.

Life and man are an insoluble enigma except on one hypothesis, and that is that this is a nursery-ground, and that the plants will be pricked out some day, and planted where they are meant to grow. The hearts that feel after absolute and perfect love, the spirits that can conceive the idea of an infinite goodness, the dumb desires, the blank misgivings that wander homeless amidst the narrowness of this poor earth, all these things proclaim that there is a region where they will find their nutriment and expatiate, and when we look at a man we can only say, He that hath wrought him for an infinite world, and an endless communion with a perfect good, is God.

Still further, another field of the divine operation to this end is in what we roughly call 'providences.' What is the meaning of all this discipline through which we are passed, if there is nothing to be disciplined for? What is the good of an apprenticeship if there is no journeyman's life to come after it, where the powers that have been slowly acquired shall be nobly exercised upon broader fields? Why should men be taken, as it were, and, like the rough iron from the ground,

'Be heated hot with hopes and fears, And plunged in baths of hissing tears, And battered with the shocks of doom,'

if, after all the process, the polished shaft is to be broken in two, and tossed away as rubbish? If death ends faculty, it is a pity that the faculty was so patiently developed. If God is educating us all in His school, and then means that, like some wastrel boys, we should lose all our education as soon as we leave its benches, there is little use in the rod, and little meaning in the training. Brethren! life is an insoluble riddle unless the purpose of it lie yonder, and unless all this patient training of our sorrows and our gladnesses, the warmth that expands and the cold that contracts the heart, the light that gladdens and the darkness that saddens the eye and the spirit, are equally meant for training us for the perfect life of a perfect soul moving a perfect body in a perfect universe. Here is a pillar in some ancient hall that has fallen into poor hands, and has had a low roof thrown across the centre of the chamber at half its height. In the lower half there is part of a pillar that means nothing; ugly, bare, evidently climbing, and passing through the aperture, and away above yonder is the carved capital and the great entablature that it carries. Who could understand the shaft unless he could look up through the aperture, and see the summit? And who can think of life as anything but a wretched fragment unless he knows that all which begins here runs upwards into the room above, and there finds its explanation and its completion?

But there is the third sphere of the divine operation. As in creation and in providence, so in all the work and mystery of our redemption, this is the goal that God has in view. It was not worth Christ's while to come and die, if nothing more was to come of it than the imperfect reception of His blessings and gifts which the noblest Christian life in this world presents. The meaning and purpose of the Cross, the meaning and purpose of all the patient dealings of His whispering Spirit, are that we shall be like our Divine Lord in spirit first, and in body afterwards.

And everything about the experiences of a true Christian spirit is charged with a prophecy of immortality. I have not time to dwell upon one point gathered from the context, that I intended to have insisted upon, viz. that the very desires which God's good Spirit works in a believing soul are themselves confirmations of their own fulfilment. But if you notice at your leisure the verses that precede my text, you will find that the Apostle adduces the groanings of 'earnest desire to be clothed with our house which is from

Heaven,' as a proof that we *have* 'a building of God, a house not made with hands.' That is to say, every longing in a Christian heart when it is most filled with that Spirit, and most in contact with God, and which is the answer of that heart to a promise of Christ—every such longing carries with it the assurance of its own fulfilment. He that hath wrought it has wrought it in order that the desire may fit us for its answer, and that the open mouth may be ready for the abundant filling which His grace designs. He works upon us, therefore, by making us desire a gift, and then He gives that which He desires. So let us cherish these longings, not for the accident of escaping death, nor as choosing the path by which we shall reach the blessed issue, but longing for that great issue itself; and try to keep more distinct and clear before all our minds this thought, 'God means for me the participation in Christ's glorified Manhood, and my attaining of that Manhood is the end that He has in view in all that He does with me.'

III. So I must say one word about the last thought that is here, and that is the certainty and the confidence. 'Therefore we are always confident,' says the Apostle.

'He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.' Then we may be sure that as far as He is concerned, the work will not be suspended nor vain. *This* man does not begin to build and is unable to finish. This workman has infinite resources, an unchanging purpose, and infinite long-suffering. He will complete His task.

In the quarries of Egypt you will find gigantic stones, half-dressed, and intended to have been transported to some great temple. But there they lie, the work incomplete, and they never carried to their place. There are no half-polished stones in God's quarries. They are all finished where they lie, and then borne across the sea, like Hiram's from Lebanon, to the Temple on the hill. It is a certainty that God will finish His work; and since 'He that hath wrought us is God,' we may be sure that He will not stop till He has done.

But it is a certainty that you can thwart. It is an operation that you can counterwork. The potter in Jeremiah's parable was making a vessel upon his wheel, and the vessel was marred in his hand, and did not turn out what he wanted it. The meaning of the metaphor, which has often been twisted to express the very opposite, is that the potter's work may fail, that the artificer may be balked, that you can counterwork the divine dealing, and that all His purpose in your creation, in His providence and in His gift of His Son for your redemption, may come to nought as far as you are concerned. 'I beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.' 'In vain have I smitten your children,' wailed the Divine Love; 'they have received no correction.' In vain God lavishes upon some of us His mercies, in vain for some of us has Christ toiled and suffered and died. Oh, brother! do not let all God's work on you come to nought, but yield yourselves to it. Rejoice in the confidence that He is moulding your character, cheerfully welcome and accept the providences, painful as they may be, by which He prepares you for heaven. The chisel is sharp that strikes off the superfluous pieces of marble, and when the chisel cuts, not into marble, but into a heart, there is a pang. Bear it, bear it! and understand the meaning of the blow of the sculptor's mallet, and see in all life the divine hand working towards the accomplishment of His own loving purpose. Then if we turn to Him, amid the pains of His discipline and the joys of His gifts of grace, with recognition and acceptance of His meaning in them all, and cry to Him, 'Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever, forsake not the work of Thine own hands,' we may be always confident, as knowing that 'the Lord will perfect that which concerneth us.'

THE OLD HOUSE AND THE NEW

'We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.'—2
COR. v. 8.

There lie in the words of my text simply these two things; the Christian view of what death is, and the Christian temper in which to anticipate it.

I. First, the Christian view of what death is.

Now it is to be observed that, properly speaking, the Apostle is not here referring to the state of the dead, but to the act of dying. The language would more literally and accurately be rendered 'willing to *go from* home, from the body, and to *go* home, to the Lord.' The moment of transition of course leads to a permanent state, but it is the moment of transition which is in view in the words. I need not remind you, I suppose, that the metaphor of the home is one which has already been dwelt upon in the early part of the chapter, where the contrast is drawn between the transitory house of 'this tent,' and the 'building of God,' the body of incorruption and glory which the saints at the Resurrection day shall receive. So, then, the Christian view of the act of death is that it is simply a change of abode.

Very clearly and firmly does Paul draw the line between the man and his dwelling-place. Life is more than a result of organisation. Consciousness, thought, feeling, are more than functions of matter. No materialist philosopher has ever been, or ever will be, able to explain within the limits of his system the strange difference between the cause and the effect; how it comes to pass that at the one end of the chain there is an impression upon a nerve, and at the other there is pain; how at the one end there is the throb of an inch of matter in a man's skull, and at the other end there are thoughts that breathe and words that burn, and that live for ever. That brings us up to the edge of a gulf over which no materialist philosopher has ever been able to cast a bridge. The scalpel cannot cut

deep enough to solve this mystery. Conscience as well as instinct cry out against the theory that the worker and the tools are inseparable. For such a theory reduces human actions to mechanical results, and shatters all responsibility. Man is more than his dwelling-place. You crush a shell on the beach with your heel, and you slay its tiny inhabitant. But you can pull down the tent, and pluck up its pegs, and roll up its canvas, and put it away in a dark corner, and the tenant is untouched. The foolish senses crown Death as last, and lord of all. But wisdom says, 'Life and thought have gone away side by side, leaving doors and windows wide,' and that is all that has happened.

Still further, my text suggests that to the Christian soul the departure from the one house is the entrance into the other. The home has been the body; the home is now to be Jesus Christ. And very beautiful and significant with meanings, which only experience will fully unfold, is the representation that the Lord Christ Himself assumes the place which the bodily environment has hitherto held.

That teaches us, at all events, that there is a new depth and closeness of union with Jesus waiting the Christian soul, when it lays aside the separating film of flesh. Here the bodily organisation, with its limitations, necessarily shuts us off from the closeness of intercourse which is possible for a naked soul. We know not how much separation may depend upon the immersing of the spirit in the fleshly tabernacle, but this we know, that, though here and now, by faith which dominates sense, souls can live in Christ even whilst they live in the body; yet there shall come a form of union so much more close, intimate, all-pervading, and all-encircling, as that the present union with Him by faith, precious as it is, shall be, as the Apostle calls it in our context, 'absence from the Lord.' 'We have to be discharged,' says an old thinker, 'of a great deal of what we call body, and then we shall be more truly ourselves,' and more truly united to Him who, if we are Christian people at all, is the self of ourselves and the life of our lives. No man knows how close he can nestle to the bosom of Christ when the film of flesh is rent away. Just as when in some crowded street of a great city some grimy building is pulled down, a sudden daylight fills the vacant space, and all the site that had been shut out from the sky for many years is drenched in sunshine, so when 'the earthly house of this tabernacle' is ruined and falls, the light will flood the place where it stood, and to be 'absent from the body' shall be to be 'present with the Lord.'

May we go a step further and suggest that, perhaps, in the bold metaphor of my text, there is an answer to the questions which so often rack loving and parted hearts? 'Do the dead know aught of what affects us here? and can they do aught but gaze on Him, and love, and rest?' If it be that there is any such analogy as seems to be dimly shadowed in my text, between the relation of the body on earth to the spirit that inhabits it, and that of Jesus Christ to him who dwells in Him, and is clothed by Him, then it may be that, as the flesh, so the Christ transmits to the spirit that has Him for its home impressions from the outside world, and affords a means of action upon that world. Christ may be, if I might so say, the sensorium of the disembodied spirit; and Christ may be the hand of the man who hath no other instrument by which to express himself. But all that is fancy perhaps, speculation certainly; and yet there seems to be a shadow of a foundation for at least entertaining the possibility of such a thought as that Jesus is the means of knowing and the means of acting to those who rest from their labours in Him, and dwell in peace in His arms. But be that as it may, the reality of a close communion and encircling by the felt presence of Jesus Christ, which, in its blessed closeness, will make the closest communion here seem to be obscure, is certainly declared in the words before us.

Then this transition is regarded in my text as being the work of a moment. It is not a long journey of which the beginning is 'to go *from* home, from the body,' and the end is 'to *go* home, to the Lord.' But it is one and the same motion which, looked at from the one side, is departure, and looked at from the other is arrival. The old saying has it, 'there is but a step between me and death.' The truth is, there is but a step between me and *life*. The mighty angel in the Apocalypse, that stood with one foot on the firm land and the other on the boundless ocean, is but the type of the spirit in the brief moment of transition, when the consciousness of two worlds blends, and it is clothed upon with the house which is from heaven, in the very act of stripping off the earthly house of this tabernacle.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, in more than a sentence, that this transition obviously leads into a state of conscious communion with Jesus Christ. The dreary figment of an unconscious interval for the disembodied spirit has no foundation, either in what we know of spirit, or in what is revealed to us in Scripture. For the one thing that seems to make it probable—the use of that metaphor of 'sleeping in Jesus'—is quite sufficiently accounted for by the notions of repose, and cessation of outward activity, and withdrawal of capacity of being influenced by the so-called realities of this lower world, without dragging in the unfounded notion of unconsciousness. My text is incompatible with it, for it is absurd to say of an unconscious spirit, clear of a bodily environment, that it is anywhere; and there is no intelligible sense in which the condition of such a spirit can be called being 'with the Lord.'

So, then, I think a momentary transition, with uninterrupted consciousness, which leads to a far deeper and more wonderful and blessed sense of unity with Jesus Christ than is possible here on earth, is the true shape in which the act of death presents itself to the Christian thinker.

And remember, dear brethren, that is all we know. Nothing else is certain—nothing but this, 'with the Lord,' and the resulting certainty that therefore it is well with them. It is enough for our faith, for our comfort, for our patient waiting. They live in Christ, 'and there we find them worthier to be loved,' and certainly lapped in a deeper rest. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'

II. In the next place, note the Christian temper in which to anticipate the transition.

'We are always courageous, and willing rather to leave our home in the body, and to go home to the Lord.' Now I must briefly remind you of how the Apostle comes to this state of feeling. He has been speaking about the natural shrinking, which belongs to all humanity, from the act of dissolution, considered as being the stripping off of the garment of the flesh. And he has declared, on behalf of himself and the early Christian Church, his own and their personal desire that they might escape from that trial by the path which seemed possible to the early Christians—viz. that of surviving until the return of Jesus Christ from Heaven, when they would be 'clothed upon with the house which is from Heaven,' without the necessity of stripping off that with which at present they are invested. Then he says—and this is a very remarkable thought—that just because this instinctive shrinking from death and yearning for the glorified body is so strong in the Christian heart, that is a sign that there is such a glorified body waiting for us. He says, 'we know that if our house ... were dissolved, we have a building of God.' And his reason for knowing it is this, 'for in this we groan.' That is a bold position to say that a yearning in the Christian consciousness prophesies its own fulfilment. Our desires are the prophecies of His gifts. Then, on this certainty—which he deduces from the fact of the longing for it—on this certainty of the glorious, ultimate body of the Resurrection he bases his willingness expressed in the text, to go through the unwelcome process of leaving the old house, although he shrinks from it.

So, then, Christian faith does not destroy the natural reluctance to put aside the old companion of our lives. The old house, though it be smoky, dimly lighted, and, by our own careless keeping, sluttish and grimy in many a corner, yet is the only house we have ever known, and to be absent from it is untried and strange. There is nothing wrong in saying 'we would not be unclothed but clothed upon.' Nature speaks there. We may reverently entertain the same feelings which our Pattern acknowledged, when He said, 'I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.' And there would be nothing sinful in repeating His prayer with His conditions, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.'

But then the text suggests to us the large Christian possessions and hope which counterwork this reluctance, in the measure in which we live lives of faith. There is the assurance of that ultimate home in which all the transiency of the present material organisation is exchanged for the enduring permanence which knows no corruption. The 'tent' is swept away to make room for the 'building.' The earthly house is dissolved in order that there may be reared round the homeless tenant the house eternal, 'not made with hands,' God's own work, which is waiting in the heavens; because the power that shall frame it is there. Not only that great hope of the 'body of His glory,' with which at the last all true souls shall be invested, but furthermore, 'the earnest of the spirit,' and the blessed experiences therefrom, resulting even here, ought to make the unwelcome necessity less unwelcome. If the firstfruits be righteousness and peace and joy of the Holy Ghost, what shall the harvest be? If the 'earnest,' the shilling given in advance, be so precious, what will the whole wealth of the inheritance which it heralds be when it is received?

For such reasons the transitory passage becomes less painful and unwelcome. Who is there that would hesitate to dip his foot into the ice-cold brook if he knew that it would not reach above his ankles, and that a step would land him in blessedness unimagined till experienced?

Therefore the Christian temper is that of quiet willingness and constant courage. There is nothing hysterical here, nothing morbid, nothing overstrained, nothing artificial. The Apostle says: 'I would rather not. I should like if I could escape it. It is an unwelcome necessity; but when I see what I do see beyond,' I am ready. Since so it must be, I will go, not reluctantly, nor dragged away from life, nor clinging desperately to it as it slips from my hands, nor dreading anything that may happen beyond; but always courageous, and prepared to go whithersoever the path may take me, since I am sure that it ends in His bosom. He is willing to go from the home of the body, because to do that is to go home to Christ.

There are other references of our Apostle's, substantially of the same tone as that of my text, but with very beautiful and encouraging differences. When he was nearer his end, when it seemed to him as if the headsman's block was not very far off, his *willingness* had intensified into 'having a *desire* to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.' And when the end was all but reached, and he knew that death was waiting just round the next turn in the road, he said, with the confidence that in the midst of the struggle would have been vainglory, but at the end of it was a foretaste of the calm of Heaven, 'I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' That is our model, dear brethren,—'always courageous,' afraid of nothing in life, in death, or beyond, and therefore willing to go from home from the body and to go home to the Lord.

Think of this man thus fronting the inevitable, with no excitement and with no delusions. Remember what Paul believed about death, about sin, about his own sin, about judgment, about hell. And then think of how to him death had made its darkness beautiful with the light of Christ's face, and all the terror was gone out of it. Do you think so about death? Do you shrink from it? Why? Why do you not take Paul's cure for the shrinking? If you can say, 'To me to live is Christ,' you will have no difficulty in saying, 'and to die is gain.' That is the only way by which you can come to such a temper, and then you will be willing to move from the cottage to the palace, and to wait in peace till you are shifted again into 'the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

PLEASEING CHRIST

'We labour that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him.'—2 COR. v. 2.

We do not usually care very much for, or very much trust, a man's own statement of the motives of his life, especially if in the statement he takes credit for lofty and noble ones. And it would be rather a dangerous experiment for the ordinary run of so-called Christian people to stand up and say what Paul says here, that the supreme design and aim towards which all their lives are directed is to please Jesus Christ. In his case the tree was known by its fruits. Certainly there never was a life of more noble self-abnegation, of more continuous heroism, of loftier aspiration and lowlier service than the life of which we see the very pulse in these words.

But Paul is not only professing his own faith, he is speaking in the name of all his brethren. 'We,' ought to include every man and woman who calls himself or herself a Christian. It is this setting of the will of Jesus Christ high up above all other commandments, and proposing to one's self as the aim that swallows up all other aims, that I may please Him—it is this, and not creeds, forms, opinions, professions, or even a faith that simply trusts in Him for salvation, that makes a true Christian. You are a Christian in the precise measure in which Christ's will is uppermost and exclusive in your life, and for all your professions and your orthodoxy and your worship and your faith, not one hair's-breadth further. Here is the signature and the common characteristic of all real Christians, 'We labour that whether present or absent we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

So then in looking together at these words now, I take three points, the supreme aim of the Christian life; the concentration of effort which that aim demands; and the insignificance to which it reduces all external things.

I. First, then, let me deal with that supreme aim of the Christian life.

The word which is, correctly enough, rendered 'accepted,' may more literally, and perhaps with a closer correspondence to the Apostle's meaning, be translated 'well-pleasing,' and the aim is this, not merely that we may be accepted, but that we may bring a smile into His face, and some joy and complacent delight in us into His heart, when He looks upon our doings. That pleasure of Jesus Christ in them that 'fear Him, and in them that hope in His mercy' and do His will is a present emotion that fills His heart in looking upon His followers, and it will be especially declared in the solemn, final judgment. We must keep in view both of these periods, if we would rightly understand the sweep of the aim which ought to be uppermost in all Christian people. Here and now in our present acts, we should so live as to occasion a present sentiment of complacent delight in us, in the heart of the Christ who sees us here and now and always. We should so live as that at that far-off future day when we shall 'all be manifested before the Judgment-seat of Christ,' the Judge may bend from His tribunal, and welcome us into His presence with a word of congratulation and an outstretched hand of loving reception. Set that two-fold aim before you, Christian men and women, else you will fail to experience the full stimulus of this thought.

Now such an aim as this implies a very wonderful conception of Jesus Christ's present relations to us. It is a truth that we may minister to His joy. It is a truth that just as really as you mothers are glad when you hear from a far-off land that your boy is doing well, and getting on, so Jesus Christ's heart fills with gladness when He sees you and me walking in the paths in which He would have us go. We often think about our dear dead that they cannot know of us and our doings here, because the sorrow that would sometimes come from the contemplation of our evil, or of our misfortunes, would trouble them in their serene rest. We know not how that may be, but this at least we do know, that the Man Jesus Christ, who, like those dear ones, 'was dead, and is alive for evermore,' in His human nature has knowledge of all His children's failures, as well as successes, and is affected with some shadow of regret, or with some reality of delight, according as they follow or stray from the paths in which He would have them walk. If it be so with Him it may be so with them; and though it be not so with them it must be so with Him. So this strange, sweet, tender, and powerful thought is a piece of plain prose, that Christ is glad when you and I are good.

Does it need any word to emphasise the force of that motive to a Christian heart that loves the Master? Surely this is the great and blessed peculiarity of all the morality of Christianity that it has all a personal bearing and aspect, and that just as the sum of all our duty is gathered up in the one command, 'Imitate Christ,' so the motive for all our duty lies in 'If you love Me, keep My commandments,' and the reward which ought to stimulate more than anything besides is the one thought, not, of what I shall get because I am good, but of what I shall give Him by my obedience, a joy in the heart that was stabbed through and through by sorrow for my sake. That we may please Him 'who pleased not Himself,' is surely the grandest motive on which the pursuit of holiness, and the imitation of Jesus Christ can ever be made to rest. Oh! how different, and how much more blessed such a motive and aim is than all the lower reasons for which men are sometimes exhorted and encouraged to be good! What a difference it is when we say, 'Do that thing because it is right,' and when we say, 'Do that thing because you will be happier if you do,' or when we say, 'Do it because He would like you to do it.' The one is all cold and abstract. To stand before a man and simply say: 'Now go and do your duty,' is a poor way of setting his feet upon a rock and establishing his goings. Duty is not a word that stirs men's hearts, however it may awe their consciences. It rises up before us like some goddess statuesque and serene, with purity, indeed, in her deep and solemn eyes, but with nothing appealing to our affections in her stern lineaments. But when the thought of 'You ought' melts into 'For my sake,' and

through the dissolving face of the cold marble goddess there shine the beloved lineaments of Him who 'wears the Godhead's most benignant grace,' the smile upon His face becomes a motive that touches all hearts. Transmute obligation into gratitude, and in front of duty and appeals to self put Christ, and all the harshness and difficulty and burden and self-sacrifice of obedience becomes easy and a joy.

Then let me remind you that this one supreme aim of pleasing Jesus Christ can be carried on through all life in every varying form, great or small. A blessed unity is given to our whole being when the little things and the big things, the easy things and the hard things, deeds which are conspicuous and deeds which no eye sees, are all brought under the influence of the one motive and made co-operant to the one end. Drive that one steadfast aim through your lives like a bar of iron, and it will give the lives strength and consistency—not rigidity, because they may still be flexible. Nothing will be too small to be consecrated by that motive; nothing too great to own its power. You can please Him everywhere and always. The only thing that is inconsistent with pleasing Him is the thing which, alas! we do at all times and should do at no time, and that is to sin against Him. If we bear with us this as a conscious motive in every part of our day's work it will give us a quick discernment as to what is evil, which I believe nothing else will so surely give. If you desire life to be noble, uniform, dignified, great in its minutest acts and solemn in its very trifles, and if you would have some continual test and standard by which you can detect all spurious, apparent virtues, and discover lurking and masked temptations, carry this one aim clear and high above all else, and make it the purpose of the whole life, to be well-pleasing unto Him.

II. Now, in the next place, notice the concentrated effort which this aim requires.

The word rendered in my text 'labour' is a peculiar one, very seldom employed in Scripture. It means, in its most literal signification, to be fond of honour, or to be actuated by a love of honour; and hence it comes, by a very natural transition, to mean to strive to gain something for the sake of the honour connected with it. That is to say, it not only expresses the notion of diligent, strenuous effort, but it reveals the reason for that diligence and strenuousness in what I may call (for the word might almost be so rendered) the *ambition* of being honoured by pleasing Christ. So that the 'labour' of my text covers the whole ground, not only of the act but of its motive. The concentration of effort which such an aim requires may be enforced by one or two simple exhortations.

First, let me say that we ought, as Christian people, to cultivate this noble ambition of pleasing Jesus Christ. Men have all got the love of approbation deep in them. God put it there for a good purpose, not that we might shape our lives so as to get others to pat us on the back, and say, 'Well done!' but that, in addition to the other solemn and sovereign motives for following the paths of righteousness, we might have this highest ambition to impel us on the road. And it is the duty of all Christians to see to it that they discipline themselves so as, in their own feelings, to put high above all the approbation or censure of their fellows the approbation or censure of Jesus Christ. That will take some cultivation. It is a great deal easier to shape our courses so as to get one another's praise. I remember a quaint saying in a German book. 'An old schoolmaster tried to please this one and that one, and it failed. "Well, then," said he, "I will try to please Christ." And that succeeded.'

And let me remind you that a second part of the concentration of effort which this aim requires is to strive with the utmost energy in the accomplishment of it. Paul did not believe that anybody could please Jesus Christ without a fight for it. His notion of acceptable service was service which a man suppressed much to render, and overcame much to bring. And I urge upon you this, dear brethren, that with all the mob of faces round about us which shut out Christ's face, and with all the temptations to follow other aims, and with the weaknesses of our own characters, it never was, is not, nor ever will be, an easy thing, or a thing to be done without a struggle and a dead lift, to live so as to be well-pleasing to Him.

Look at Paul's metaphors with which he sets forth the Christian life—a warfare, a race, a struggle, a building up of some great temple structure, and the like—all suggesting at the least the idea of patient, persistent, continuous toil, and most of them suggesting also the idea of struggle with antagonistic forces and difficulties, either within or without. So we must set our shoulders to the wheel, put our backs into our work. Do not think that you are going to be carried into the condition of conformity with Jesus Christ in a dream, or that the road to heaven is a primrose path, to be trodden in silver slippers. 'I will not offer unto the Lord that which doth cost me nothing,' and if you do, it will be worth exactly what it costs. There must be concentration of effort if we are to be well-pleasing to Him.

But then do not forget, on the other hand, that deeper than all effort, and the very spring and life of it, there must be the opening of our hearts for the entrance of His life and spirit, by the presence of which only are we well-pleasing to Christ. That which pleases Him in you and me is our likeness to Him. According to the old Puritan illustration, the refiner sat by the furnace until he could see in the molten metal his own face mirrored, and then he knew it was pure. So what pleases Christ in us is the reflection of Himself. And how can we get that likeness to Himself except by receiving into our hearts the Spirit that was in Christ Jesus, and will dwell in us, and will produce in us in our measure the same image that it formed in Him? 'Work *out* your own salvation,' because 'it is God that worketh *in* you.' Labour, concentrate effort, and above all open the heart to the entrance of that transforming power.

III. Lastly, let me suggest the utter insignificance to which this aim reduces all externals.

'We labour,' says Paul, 'that whether present or absent, we may be accepted.' What differences of condition are covered by that parenthetical phrase—'present or absent!' He talks about it as if it was a very small matter, does he not? And what is included in it? Whether a man shall be in the body or out of it; that is to say, whether he be alive or dead. Here is an aim then, so great, so lofty, so all-comprehensive that it reduces the difference between living in the world and being out of it, to a trifle. And if we stand so high up that these two varieties of condition dwindle into insignificance and seem to have melted into one, do you think that there is anything else that will be very big? If the difference between life and death is dwindled and dwarfed, what else do you suppose will remain? Nothing, I should think.

So if we only, by God's help, which will be given to us if we want it, keep this clear before us as the motive of all our life, then all the possible alternatives of human condition and circumstance will sink into insignificance, and from that lofty summit will 'show scarce so gross as beetles' in the air beneath our lofty station.

Whether we be rich or poor, solitary or beset by friends, happy or sad, hopeful or despairing, young or old, wearied or buoyant, learned or foolish, it matters not. The one aim lifts itself before us, and they in whose eyes shine the light of that great issue are careless of the road along which they pass. Do you enlist yourselves in the company that fires at the long range, and all those that take aim at the shorter ones will seem to be very pitifully limiting their powers.

Then remember that this same aim, and this same result may be equally pursued and attained whether here or yonder. It is something to have a course of life which runs straight along, unbent aside, and not cut short off, by the change from earth to Heaven. And this felicity he only has who, amidst things temporal and insignificant, sees and seeks the eternal smile on the face of his unchanging Saviour. On earth, in death, through eternity, such a life will be homogeneous and of a piece; and when all other aims are hull down below the horizon, forgotten and out of sight, then still this will be the purpose, and yonder it will be the accomplished purpose, of each, to please the Lord Jesus Christ.

My dear friend, remember that in its full meaning this aim regards the future, and points onward to that great judgment-seat where you and I will certainly each of us give account of himself. Do you think that you will please Christ then? Do you think that when that day dawns, a smile of welcome will come into His eyes, and a glow of gladness at the meeting into yours? Or have you cause to fear that you will 'call on the rocks and the hills to cover you from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne?'

We are all close by one another; our voices are very audible to each other. Do you learn, Christian people, that the first,—or at least a prime—condition of all Christian and Christ-pleasing life, is a wholesome disregard of what anybody says but Himself. The old Lacedæmonians used to stir themselves to heroism by the thought: 'What will they say of us in Sparta?' The governor of some outlying English colony minds very little what the people that he is set to rule think about him. He reports to Downing Street, and it is the opinion of the Home Government that influences him. You report to headquarters. Never mind what anybody else thinks of you. Your business is to please Christ, and the less you trouble yourselves about pleasing men the more you will succeed in doing it. Be deaf to the tittle tattle of your fellow soldiers in the ranks. It is your Commander's smile that will be your highest reward.

'Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed.'

THE LOVE THAT CONSTRAINS

'The love of Christ constraineth us.'—2 COR. v. 14.

It is a dangerous thing to be unlike other people. It is still more dangerous to be better than other people. The world has a little heap of depreciatory terms which it flings, age after age, at all men who have a higher standard and nobler aims than their fellows. A favourite term is 'mad.' So, long ago they said, 'The prophet is a fool; the spiritual man is mad,' and, in His turn, Jesus was said to be 'beside Himself,' and Festus shouted from the judgment-seat to Paul that he was mad. A great many people had said the same thing about him before, as the context shows. For the verse before my text is: 'Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.' Now the former clause can only refer to other people's estimate of the Apostle. No doubt there were many things about him that gave colour to it. He said that a dead Man had appeared to him and spoken with him. He said that he had been carried up into the third heaven. He had a very strange creed in the judgment of the times. He had abandoned a brilliant career for a very poor one. He was obviously utterly indifferent to the ordinary aims of men. He had a consuming enthusiasm. And so the world explained him satisfactorily to itself by the short and easy method of saying, 'Insane.' And Paul explained himself by the great word of my text, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.' Wherever there is a life adequately under the influence of Christ's love the results will be such as an unsympathising world may call madness, but which are the perfection of sober-mindedness. Would there were more such madmen! I wish to try to make one or two of them now, by getting some of you to take for your motto, 'The love of Christ constraineth us.'

I. Now the first thing to notice is this constraining love.

I need not spend time in showing that when Paul says here 'The love of Christ,' he means Christ's love to him, not his to Christ. That is in accordance with his continual usage of the expression; and it is in accordance with facts. For it is not my love to Jesus, but His love to me, that brings the real moulding power into my life, and my love to Him is only the condition on which the true power acts upon me. To get the fulcrum and the lever which will heave a life up to the heights you have to get out of yourselves.

Now Paul never saw Jesus Christ in this earthly life. Timothy, who is associated with him in this letter, and perhaps is one of the 'us,' never saw Him either. The Corinthian believers whom he is addressing had, of course, never seen Him. And yet the Apostle has not the slightest hesitation in taking that great benediction of Christ's love and spreading it over them all. That love is independent of time and of space; it includes humanity, and is co-extensive with it. Unturned away by unworthiness, unrepelled by non-responsiveness, undisgusted by any sin, unwearied by any, however numerous, foiling of its attempts, the love of Christ, like the great heavens that bend above us, wraps us all in its sweetness, and showers upon us all its light and its dew.

And yet, brethren, I would have you remember that whilst we thus try to paint, in poor, poor words, the universality of that love, we have to remember that it does not partake of the weakness that infects all human affections, which are only strong when they are narrow, and as the river expands it becomes shallow, and loses the force in its flow which it had when it was gathered between straiter banks, so as that a universal charity is almost akin to a universal indifference. But this love that grasps us all, this river that 'proceedeth from the Throne of God and of the Lamb,' flows in its widest reaches as deep and as impetuous in its career as if it were held within the narrowest of gorges. For Christ's universal love is universal only because it is individualising and particular. We love our nation by generalising and losing sight of the individuals. Christ loves the world because He loves every man and woman in it, and His grace enwraps all because His grace hovers over each.

'The sun whose beams most glorious are Despiseth no beholder,'

but the rays come straight to each eyeball. Be sure of this: that He who, when the multitude thronged Him and pressed Him, felt the tremulous, timid, scarcely perceptible touch of one woman's wasted finger on the hem of His garment, holds each of us in the grasp of His love, which is universal, because it applies to each. You and I have each the whole radiance of it pouring down on our heads, and none intercepts the beams from any other. So, brethren, let us each feel not only the love that grasps the world, but the love that empties itself on me.

But there is one more remark that I wish to make in reference to this constraining love of Jesus Christ, and that is, that in order to see and feel it we must take the point of view that this Apostle takes in my text. For hearken how he goes on. 'The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died, and that He died for all,' etc. That is to say, the death of Christ for all, which is equivalent to the death of Christ for each, is the great solvent by which the love of God melts men's hearts, and is the great proof that Jesus Christ loves me, and thee, and all of us. If you strike out that conception you have struck out from your Christianity the vindication of the belief that Christ loves the world. What possible meaning is there in the expression, 'He died for all?' How can the fact of His death on a 'green hill' outside the gates of a little city in Syria have world-wide issues, unless in that death He bore, and bore away, the sins of the whole world? I know that there have been many—and there are many to-day—who not accepting what seems to me to be the very vital heart of Christianity—viz. the death of Christ for the world's sin, do yet cherish—as I think illogically—yet do cherish a regard for Him, which puts some of us who call ourselves 'orthodox,' and are tepid, to the blush. Thank God! men are often better than their creeds, as well as worse than them. But that fact does not affect what I am saying now, and what I beg you to take for what you find it to be worth, that unless we believe that Jesus Christ died for all, I do not know what claim He has on the love of the world. We shall admire Him, we shall bow before Him, as the very realised ideal of humanity, though how this one Man has managed to escape the taint of the all-pervading evil remains, upon that hypothesis, very obscure. But love Him? No! Why should I? But if I feel that His death had world-wide issues, and that He went down into the darkness in order that He might bring the world into the light, then—and I am sure, on the wide scale and in the long-run only then—will men turn to Him and say, 'Thou hast died for me, help me to live for Thee.' Brethren, I beseech you, take care of emptying the death of Christ of its deepest meaning, lest you should thereby rob His character of its chiefest charm, and His name of its mightiest soul-melting power. The love that constraineth is the love that died, and died for all, because it died for each.

II. Now let me ask you to consider the echo of this constraining love.

I said a moment or two ago that Christ's love to us is the constraining power, and that ours to Him is but the condition on which that power works. But between the two there comes something which brings that constraining love to bear upon our hearts. And so notice what my text goes on to adduce as needful for Christ's love to have its effect—namely, 'because we thus judge,' etc. Then my estimate, my apprehension of the love of Christ must come in between its manifestation and its power to grip, to restrain, to impel me. If I may use such a figure, He stands, as it were, bugle in hand, and blows the sweet strains that are meant to set the echoes flying. But the rock must receive the impact of the vibrations ere it can throw back the thinned echo of the music. Love must be

believed and known ere it can be responded to.

Now the only answer and echo that hearts desire is the love of the beloved heart. We all know that in our earthly life. Love is as much a hunger to be loved as the outgoing of my own affection. The two things are inseparable, and there is nothing that repays love but love. Jesus Christ wishes each of us to love Him. If it is true that He loves me, then, intertwined with the outgoing of His heart towards me is the yearning that my heart may go out towards Him. Dear brethren, this is no pulpit rhetoric, it is a plain, simple fact, inseparable from the belief in Christ's love—that He wishes you and every soul of man to love Him, and that, whatever else you bring, lip reverence, orthodox belief, apparent surrender, in the assay shop of His great mint all these are rejected, and the only metal that passes the fire is the pure gold of an answering love. Brethren! is that what you bring to Jesus Christ?

Love seeks for love, and our love can only be an echo of His. He takes the beginning in everything. If I am to love Him back again, I must have faith in His love to me. And if that be so, then the true way by which you, imperfect Christian people, can deepen and strengthen your love to Jesus Christ is not so much by efforts to work up a certain warmth of sentiment and glow of affection, as by gazing, with believing eyes of the heart, upon that which kindles your love to Him. If you want ice to melt, put it out into the sunshine, if you want the mirror to gleam, do not spend all your time in polishing it. Carry it where it can catch the ray, and it will flash it back in glory. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' Our love is an echo; be sure that you listen for the parent note, and link yourselves by faith with that great love which has come down from Heaven for us all.

But how can I speak about echoes and responses when I know that there are scores of men and women whom a preacher's words reach who would be ashamed of themselves, and rightly, if they exhibited the same callousness of heart and selfishness of ingratitude to some human, partial benefactor as they are not ashamed to have exhibited all their lives to Jesus Christ. Echo? Yes! your heartstrings are set vibrating fast enough whenever, in the adjoining apartment, an instrument is touched which is tuned to the same key as your heart. Pleasures, earthly aims, worldly gifts, the sweetnesses of human life, all these things set them thrilling, and you can hear the music, but your hearts are not tuned to answer to the note that is struck in 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' The bugle is blown, and there is silence, and no echo, faint and far, comes whispering back. Brethren, we use no one else, in whose love we have any belief, a thousandth part so ill as we use Jesus Christ.

III. Now, lastly, let me say a word about the constraining influence of this echoed love.

Its first effect, if it has any real power in our hearts and lives, will be to change their centre, to decentralise. Look what the Apostle goes on to say: 'We thus judge that He ... died for all, that they which live should not live henceforth unto themselves.' That is the great transformation. Secure that, and all nobleness will follow, and 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' will come, like doves to their windows, flocking into the soul that has ceased to find its centre in its poor rebellious self. All love derives its power to elevate, refine, beautify, ennoble, conquer, from the fact that, in lower degree, all love makes the beloved the centre, and not the self. Hence the mother's self-sacrifice, hence the sweet reciprocity of wedded life, hence everything in humanity that is noble and good. Love is the antagonist of selfishness, and the highest type of love should be, and in the measure in which we are under the influence of Christ's love will be, the self-surrendering life of a Christian man. I know that in saying so I am condemning myself and my brethren. All the same, it is true. The one power that rescues a man from the tyranny of living for self, which is the mother of all sin and ignobleness, is when a man can say 'Christ is my aim,' 'Christ is my object.' 'The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' There is no secret of self-annihilation, which is self-transfiguration, and, I was going to say, deification, like that of loving Christ with all my heart because He has loved me so.

Again, let me remind you that, on its lower reaches and levels, we find that all true affection has in it a strange power of assimilating its objects to one another. Just as a man and woman who have lived together for half a century in wedded life come to have the same notions, the same prejudices, the same tastes, and sometimes you can see their very faces being moulded into likeness, so, if I love Jesus Christ, I shall by degrees grow liker and liker to Him, and be 'changed into the same image, from glory to glory.'

Again, the love constrains, and not only constrains but impels, because it becomes a joy to divine and to do the will of the beloved Christ. 'My yoke is easy.' Is it? It is very hard to be a Christian. His requirements are a great deal sterner than others. His yoke is easy, not because it is a lighter yoke, but because it is padded with love. And that makes all service a sacrament, and the surrender of my own will, which is the essence of obedience, a joy.

So, dear friends, we come here in sight of the unique and blessed characteristic of all Christian morality, and of all its practical exhortations, and the Gospel stands alone as the mightiest moulding power in the world, just because its word is 'love, and do as thou wilt.' For in the measure of thy love will thy will coincide with the will of Christ. There is nothing else that has anything like that power. We do not want to be told what is right. We know it a great deal better than we practise it. A revelation from heaven that simply told me my duty would be surplusage. 'If there had been a law that could have given life, righteousness had been by the law.' We want a life, not a law, and the love of Christ brings the life to us.

And so, dear friends, that life, restrained and impelled by the love to which it is being assimilated, is a life of liberty and a life of

blessedness. In the measure in which the love of Christ constrains any man, it makes for him difficulties easy, the impossible possible, the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain. The duty becomes a delight, and self ceases to disturb. If the love of God is shed abroad in a heart, and in the measure in which it is, that heart will be at rest, and a great peace will brood over it. Then the will bows in glad submission, and all the powers arise to joyous service. We are lords of the world and ourselves when we are Christ's servants for love's sake; and earth and its good are never so good as when the power of His echoed love rules our lives. Do you know and believe that Christ loves you? Do you know and believe that you had a place in His heart when He hung on the Cross for the salvation of the world? Have you answered that love with yours, kindled by your faith in, and experience of, His? Is His love the overmastering impulse which urges you to all good, the mighty constraint that keeps you back from all evil, the magnet that draws, the anchor that steadies, the fortress that defends, the light that illumines, the treasure that enriches? Is it the law that commands, and the power that enables? Then you are blessed, though people will perhaps say that you are mad, whilst here; and you will be blessed for ever and ever.

THE ENTREATIES OF GOD

'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech ... by us: we pray ... in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'—2 COR. v. 20.

These are wonderful and bold words, not so much because of what they claim for the servants as because of what they reveal of the Lord. That thought, 'as though God did beseech,' seems to me to be the one deserving of our attention now, far rather than any inferences which may be drawn from the words as to the relation of preachers of the Gospel to man and to God. I wish, therefore, to try to set forth the wonderfulness of this mystery of a beseeching God, and to put by the side of it the other wonder and mystery of men refusing the divine beseechings.

Before doing so, however, I remark that the supplement which stands in our Authorised Version in this text is a misleading and unfortunate one. 'As though God did beseech *you*' and 'we pray *you*' unduly narrow the scope of the Apostolic message, and confuse the whole course of the Apostolic reasoning here. For he has been speaking of a world which is reconciled to God, and he finds a consequence of that reconciliation of the world in the fact that he and his fellow-preachers are entrusted with the word of reconciliation. The scope of their message, then, can be no narrower than the scope of the reconciliation; and inasmuch as that is world-wide the beseeching must be co-extensive therewith, and must cover the whole ground of humanity. It is a universal message that is set forth here. The Corinthians, to whom Paul was speaking, are, by his hypothesis, already reconciled to God, and the message which he has in trust for them is given in the subsequent words: 'We then, as workers together with God, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.' But the message, the pleading of the divine heart, 'be ye reconciled to God,' is a pleading that reaches over the whole range of a reconciled world. I take then, just these two thoughts, God beseeching man, and man refusing God.

I. God beseeching man.

Now notice how, in my text, there alternates, as if substantially the same idea, the thoughts that Christ and that God pray men to be reconciled. 'We are ambassadors on *Christ's* behalf, as though *God* did beseech you by us, we pray on *Christ's* behalf.' So you see, first, Christ the Pleader, then God beseeching, then Christ again entreating and praying. Could any man have so spoken, passing instinctively from the one thought to the other, unless he had believed that whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise; and that Jesus Christ is the Representative of the whole Deity for mankind, so as that when He pleads God pleads, and God pleads through Him. I do not dwell upon this, but I simply wish to mark it in passing as one of the innumerable strong and irrefragable testimonies to the familiarity and firmness with which that thought of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the full revelation of the Father by Him, was grasped by the Apostle, and was believed by the people to whom he spoke. God pleads, therefore Christ pleads, Christ pleads, therefore God pleads; and these Two are One in their beseechings, and the voice of the Father echoes to us in the tenderness of the Son.

So, then, let us think of that pleading. To sue for love, to beg that an enemy will put away his enmity is the part of the inferior rather than of the superior; is the part of the offender rather than of the offended; is the part of the vanquished rather than of the victor; is the part surely not of the king but of the rebel. And yet here, in the sublime transcending of all human precedent and pattern which characterises the divine dealing, we have the place of the suppliant and of the supplicated inverted, and Love upon the Throne bends down to ask of the rebel that lies powerless and sullen at His feet, and yet is not conquered until his heart be won, though his limbs be manacled, that he would put away all the bitterness out of his heart, and come back to the love and the grace which are ready to pour over him. 'He that might the vengeance best have taken, finds out the remedy.' He against whom we have transgressed prays us to be reconciled; and the Infinite Love lowers Himself in that lowering which is, in another aspect, the climax of His exaltation, to pray the rebels to accept His amnesty.

Oh, dear brethren! this is no mere piece of rhetoric. What facts in the divine heart does it represent? What facts in the divine conduct

does it represent? It represents these facts in the divine heart, that there is in it an infinite longing for the creature's love, an infinite desire for unity between Him and us.

There are wonderful significance and beauty in the language of my text which are lost in the Authorised Version; but are preserved in the Revised. 'We are ambassadors' not only '*for Christ,*' but '*on Christ's behalf.*' And the same proposition is repeated in the subsequent clause. 'We pray you,' not merely 'in Christ's stead,' though that is much, but '*on His account,*' which is more—as if it lay very near His heart that we should put away our enmity; and as if in some transcendent and wonderful manner the all-perfect, self-sufficing God was made glad, and the Master, who is His image for us, 'saw of the travail of His soul, and,' in regard to one man, 'was satisfied,' when the man lets the warmth of God's love in Christ thaw away the coldness out of his heart, and kindle there an answering flame. An old divine says, 'We cannot do God a greater pleasure or more oblige His very heart, than to trust in Him as a God of love.' He is ready to stoop to any humiliation to effect that purpose. So intense is the divine desire to win the world to His love, that He will stoop to sue for it rather than lose it. Such is at least part of the fact in the divine heart, which is shadowed forth for us by that wonderful thought of the beseeching God.

And what facts in the divine conduct does this great word represent? A God that beseeches. Well, think of the tears of imploring love which fell from Christ's eyes as He looked across the valley from Olivet, and saw the Temple glittering in the early sunshine. Think of 'O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! ... how often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not.' And are we not to see in the Christ who wept in the earnestness of His desire, and in the pain of its disappointment, the very revelation of the Father's heart and the very action of the Father's arm? 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' That is Christ beseeching and God beseeching in Him. Need I quote other words, gentle, winning, loving? Do we not feel, when looking upon Christ, as if the secret of His whole life was the stretching out imploring and welcoming hands to men, and praying them to grasp His hands, and be saved? But, oh, brethren! the fact that towers above all others, which explains the whole procedure of divinity, and is the keystone of the whole arch of revelation; the fact which reveals in one triple beam of light, God, man, and sin in the clearest illumination, is the Cross of Jesus Christ. And if that be not the very sublime of entreaty; and if any voice can be conceived, human or divine, that shall reach men's hearts with a more piercing note of pathetic invitation than sounds from that Cross, I know not where it is. Christ that dies, in His dying breath calls to us, and 'the blood of sprinkling speaketh better things than that of Abel'; inasmuch as its voice is, 'Come unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.'

Not only in the divine facts of the life and death of Jesus Christ, but in all the appeals of that great revelation which lies before us in Scripture; and may I say, in the poor, broken utterances of men whose harsh, thin voices try to set themselves, in some measure, to the sweetness and the fulness of His beseeching tones—does God call upon you to draw close to Him, and put away your enmity. And not only by His Word written or ministered from human lips, but also by the patient providences of His love He calls and prays you to come. A mother will sometimes, in foolish fondness, coax her sullen child by injudicious kindness, or, in wise patience, will seek to draw the little heart away from the faults that she desires not to notice, by redoubled ingenuity of tenderness and of care. And so God does with us. When you and I, who deserve—oh! so different treatment—get, as we do get, daily care and providential blessings from Him, is not that His saying to us, 'I beseech you to cherish no alienation, enmity, indifference, but to come back and live in the love'? When He draws near to us in these outward gifts of His mercy, is He not doing Himself what He has bid us to do; and what He never could have bid us to do, nor our hearts have recognised to be the highest strain of human virtue to do, unless He Himself were doing it first? 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.'

Not only by the great demonstration of His stooping and infinite desire for our love which lies in the life and death of Jesus Christ, nor only by His outward work, nor by His providence, but by many an inward touch on our spirits, by many a prick of conscience, by many a strange longing that has swept across our souls, sudden as some perfumed air in the scentless atmosphere; by many an inward voice, coming we know not whence, that has spoken to us of Him, of His love, of our duty; by many a drawing which has brought us nearer to the Cross of Jesus Christ, only, alas! in some cases that we might recoil further from it,—has He been beseeching, beseeching us all.

Brethren! God pleads with you. He pleads with you because there is nothing in His heart to any of you but love, and a desire to bless you; He pleads with you because, unless you will let Him, He cannot lavish upon you His richest gifts and His highest blessings. He pleads with you, bowing to the level, and beneath the level, of your alienation and reluctance. And the sum and substance of all His dealings with every soul is, 'My son! give Me thy heart.' 'Be ye reconciled to God.'

II. And now turn, very briefly, to the next suggestion arising from this text, the terrible obverse, so to speak, of the coin: Man refusing a beseeching God.

That is the great paradox and mystery. Nobody has ever fathomed that yet, and nobody will. How it comes, how it is possible, there is no need for us to inquire. It is an awful and a solemn power that every poor little speck of humanity has, to lift itself up in God's face, and say, in answer to all His pleadings, 'I will not!' as if the dwellers in some little island, a mere pin-point of black, barren rock,

jutting up at sea, were to declare war against a kingdom that stretched through twenty degrees of longitude on the mainland. So we, on our little bit of island, our pin-point of rock in the great waste ocean, we can separate ourselves from the great Continent; or, rather, God has, in a fashion, made us separate in order that we may either unite ourselves with Him, by our willing yielding, or wrench ourselves away from Him by our antagonism and rebellion. God beseeches because God has so settled the relations between Him and us, that that is what He has to do in order to get men to love Him. He cannot force them. He cannot prise open a man's heart with a crowbar, as it were, and force Himself inside. The door opens from within. 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock.' There is an 'if.' 'If any man open I will come in.' Hence the beseeching, hence the wail of wisdom that cries aloud and no man regards it; of love that stands at the entering in of the city, and pleads in vain, and says, 'I have called, and ye have refused... How often would I have gathered ... and ye would not.' Oh, brethren! it is an awful responsibility, a mysterious prerogative, which each one of us, whether consciously or no, has to exercise, to accept or to refuse the pleadings of an entreating Christ.

And let me remind you that the act of refusal is a very simple one. Not to accept is to reject; not to yield is to rebel. You have only to do nothing, to do it all. There are dozens of people in our churches and chapels listening with self-satisfied unconcern, who have all their lives been refusing a beseeching God. And they do not know that they ever did it! They say, 'Oh! I will be a Christian some time or other.' They cherish vague ideas that, somehow or other, they are so already. They have done nothing at all, they have simply been absolutely indifferent and passive. Some of you have heard sermons like this so often that they produce no effect. 'It is the right kind of thing to say. It is the thing we have heard a hundred times.' Perhaps you wonder why I should be so much in earnest about the matter, and then you go outside, and discuss me or the weather, and forget all about the sermon.

And thus, once more, you reject Christ. It is done without knowing it; done simply by doing nothing. My brother! do not stop your ears any more against that tender, imploring love.

Then let me remind you that this refusing the beseeching of God is the climax of all folly. For consider what it is,—a man refusing his highest good and choosing his certain ruin. I am afraid that people have been arguing and fighting so much of late years over disputable points in reference to the doctrine of future retribution that the indisputable fact of such retribution has lost much of its solemn power.

I pray you, brethren, to ask yourselves one question: Is there anything, in the present or in the future condition of a man that is not reconciled to God, which explains God's beseeching urgency? Why this energy and intensity of divine desire? Why this which, if it were human only, would be called *passionate* entreaty? Why was it needful for Jesus Christ to die? Why was it worth His while to bear the punishment of man's sin? Why should God and Christ, through all the ages, plead with unintermittent voice? There must be some explanation of it all, and here is the explanation, 'They that hate Me love *death*.' 'Be ye reconciled to God,' for enmity is ruin and destruction.

And finally, dear friends, this turning away from Him that speaketh from Heaven, of which some of you have all your lives been guilty, is not only supreme folly, but it is the climax of all guilt. For there can be nothing worse, darker, arguing a nature more averse or indifferent to the highest good, than that God should plead, and I should steel my heart and deafen mine ear against His voice. The crown of a man's sin, because it is the disclosure of the secrets of his deepest heart as loving darkness rather than light, is turning away from the divine voice that woos us to love and to God.

Oh! there are some of you that have heard that Voice too often to be much touched by it. There are some of you too busy to attend to it, who hear it not because of the clatter of the streets and the whirl of the spindles. There are some of you that are seeking to drown it in the shouts of mirth and revelry. There are some of you to whom it comes muffled in the mists of doubt; but I beseech you all, look at the Cross, *look at the Cross!* and hear Him that hangs there pleading with you.

Before the battle there comes out the captain of the twenty thousand to the King with the ten thousand, who in His loftiness is not afraid to stoop to sue for peace from the weaker power. My brother! the moment is precious; the white flag may never be waved before your eyes again. Do not; do not refuse! or the next instant the clarion of the assault may sound, and where will you be then?

It is vain for thee to rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty buckler. 'We beseech, in Christ's behalf, be ye reconciled with God.'

HOPE AND HOLINESS

Having therefore these promises..., let us cleanse ourselves from an filthiness the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' — 2 Corinthians 7:1

IT is often made a charge against professing Christians that their religion has very little to do with common morality. The taunt has sharpened multitudes of gibes and been echoed in all sorts of tones: it is very often too true and perfectly just, but if ever it is, let it be distinctly understood that it is not so because of Christian men's religion but in spite of it. Their bitterest enemy does not condemn

them half so emphatically as their own religion does: the sharpest censure of others is not so sharp as the rebukes of the New Testament. If there is one thing which it insists upon more than another, it is that religion without morality is nothing — that the one test to which, after all, every man must submit is, what sort of character has he and how has he behaved — is he pure or foul? All high-flown pretension, all fervid emotion has at last to face the question which little children ask, 'Was he a good man?'

The Apostle has been speaking about very high and mystical truths, about all Christians being the temple of God, about God dwelling in men, about men and women being His sons and daughters; these are the very truths on which so often fervid imaginations have built up a mystical piety that had little to do with the common rules of right and wrong. But Paul keeps true to the intensely practical purpose of his preaching and brings his heroes down to the prosaic earth with the homely common sense of this far-reaching exhortation, which he gives as the fitting conclusion for such celestial visions.

I. A Christian life should be a life of constant self-purifying.

This epistle is addressed to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints which are in all Achaia.

Looking out over that wide region, Paul saw scattered over godless masses a little dispersed company to each of whom the sacred name of Saint applied. They had been deeply stained with the vices of their age and place, and after a black list of criminals he had had to say to them 'such were some of you,' and he lays his finger on the miracle that had changed them

and hesitates not to say of them all, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'

The first thing, then, that every Christian has is a cleansing which accompanies forgiveness, and however his garment-may have been 'spotted by the flesh,' it is 'washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.' Strange cleansing by which black stains melt out of garments plunged in red blood! With the cleansing of forgiveness and justification comes, wherever they come, the gift of the Holy Spirit — a new life springing up within the old life, and untouched by any contact with its evils. These gifts belong universally to the initial stage of the Christian life and require for their possession only the receptiveness of faith. They admit of no co-operation of human effort, and to possess them men have only to 'take the things that are freely given to them of God.' But of the subsequent stages of the Christian life, the laborious and constant effort to develop and apply that free gift is as essential as, in the earliest stage, it is worse than useless. The gift received has to be wrought into the very substance of the soul, and to be wrought out in all the endless varieties of life and conduct. Christians are cleansed to begin with, but they have still daily to cleanse themselves: the leaven is hid in the three measures of meal, but 'tis a life-long task till the lump be leavened,' and no man, even though he has the life that was in Jesus within him, will grow up 'into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' unless, by patient and persistent effort, he is ever pressing on to 'the things that are before' and daily striving to draw nearer to the prize of his high calling. We are cleansed, but we have still to cleanse ourselves.

Yet another paradox attaches to the Christian life, inasmuch as God cleanses us, but we have to cleanse ourselves. The great truth that the spirit of God in a man is the fountal source of all his goodness, and that Christ's righteousness is given to us, is no pillow on which to rest an idle head, but should rather be a trumpet-call to effort which is thereby made certain of success. If we were left to the task of self-purifying by our own efforts we might well fling it up as impossible. It is as easy for a man to lift himself from the ground by gripping his own shoulders as it is for us to rise to greater heights of moral conduct by our own efforts; but if we can believe that God gives the impulse after purity, and the vision of what purity is, and imparts the power of attaining it, strengthening at once our dim sight

and stirring our feeble desires and energising our crippled limbs, then we can 'run with patience the race that is set before us.'

We must note the thoroughness of the cleansing which the Apostle here enjoins. What is to be got rid of is not this or that defect or vice, but 'all filthiness of flesh and spirit;' The former, of course, refers primarily to sins of impurity which in the eyes of the Greeks of Corinth were scarcely sins at all, and the latter to a state of mind when fancy, imagination, and memory were enlisted in the service of evil. Both are rampant in our day as they were in Corinth. Much modern literature and the new gospel of 'Art for Art's sake' minister to both, and every man carries in himself inclinations to either. It is no partial cleansing with which Paul would have us to be satisfied: 'all' filthiness is to be cast out. Like careful housewives who are never content to cease their scrubbing while a speck remains upon furniture, Christian men are to regard their work as unfinished as long as the least trace of the unclean thing remains in their flesh or in their spirit. The ideal may be far from being realised at any moment, but it is at the peril of the whole sincerity and peacefulness of their lives if they, in the smallest degree, lower the perfection of their ideal in deference to the imperfection of their realisation of it.

It must be abundantly clear from our own experience that any such cleansing is a very long process. No character is made, whether it be good or bad, but by a slow building up: no man becomes most wicked all at once, and no man is sanctified by a wish or at a jump. As long as men are in a world so abounding with temptation, 'he that is washed' will need daily to 'wash his feet' that have been stained in the foul ways of life, if he is to be 'clean every white'

As long as the spirit is imprisoned in the body and has it for its instrument there will be need for much effort at purifying. We must be content to overcome one foe at a time, and however strong may be the pilgrim's spirit in us, we must be content to take one step at a time, and to advance by very slow degrees. Nor is it to be forgotten that as we get nearer what we ought to be, we should be more conscious of the things in which we are not what we ought to be. The nearer we get to Jesus Christ, the more will our consciences be enlightened as to the particulars in which we are still distant from Him. A speck on a polished shield will show plain that would never have been seen on a rusty one. The saint who is nearest God will think more of his sins than the man who is furthest from him. So new work of purifying will open before us as we grow more pure, and this will last as long as life itself.

II. The Christian life is to be not merely a continual getting rid of evil, but a continual becoming good.

Paul here draws a distinction between cleansing ourselves from filthiness and perfecting holiness, and these two, though closely connected and capable of being regarded as being but the positive and negative sides of one process, are in reality different, though in practice the former is never achieved without the latter, nor the latter accomplished without the former. Holiness is more than purity; it is consecration. That is holy which is devoted to God, and a saint is one whose daily effort is to devote his whole self, in all his faculties and nature, thoughts, heart, and will more and more, to God, and to receive into himself more and more of God.

The purifying which Paul has been enjoining will only be successful in the measure of our consecration, and the consecration will only be genuine in the measure of our purifying. Herein lies the broad and blessed distinction between the world's morality and Christian ethics. The former fails just because it lacks the attitude towards a Person who is the very foundation of Christian morality, and changes a hard and impossible law into love. There is no more futile waste of breath than that of teachers of morality who have no message but Be good ! Be good ! and no motive by which to urge it but the pleasures of virtue and the disadvantages of vice, but when the vagueness of the abstract thought of goodness solidifies into a living Person and that Person makes his appeal first to our hearts and Bids us love him, and then opens before us the unstained light of his own character and beseeches us to be like him, the repellent becomes attractive: the impossible becomes possible, and 'if ye love Me keep My commandments' becomes a constraining power and a victorious impulse in our lives.

III. The Christian life of purifying and consecration is to be animated by hope and fear.

The Apostle seems to connect hope more immediately with the cleansing, and holiness with the fear of God, but probably both hope and fear are in his mind as the double foundation on which both purity and consecration are to rest, or the double emotion which is to produce them both. These promises refer directly to the immediately preceding words, 'I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters,' in which all the

blessings which God can give or men can receive are fused together in one lustrous and all-comprehensive whole. So all the great truths of the Gospel and all the blessed emotions of sonship which can spring up in a human heart are intended to find their practical result in holy and pure living. For this end God has spoken to us out of the thick darkness; for this end Christ has come into our darkness; for this end He has lived; for this end He died; for this end He rose again; for this end He sends His Spirit and administers the providence of the world. The purpose of all the Divine activity as regards us men is not merely to make us happy, but to make us happy in order that we may be good. He whom what he calls his religion has only saved from the wrath of God and the fear of hell has not learned the alphabet of religion. Unless God's promises evoke men's goodness it will be of little avail that they seem to quicken their hope. Joyful confidence in our sonship is only warranted in the measure in which we are like our Father. Hope often deludes and makes men dreamy and unpractical. It generally paints pictures far lovelier than the realities, and without any of their shadows; it is too often the stimulus 'and ally of ignoble lives, and seldom stirs to heroism or endurance, but its many defects are not due to itself hut to its false choice of objects on which to fix. The hope which is lifted from trailing along the earth and twining round creatures and which rises to grasp these promises ought to be, and in the measure of its reality is the ally of all patient endurance and noble self-sacrifice. Its vision of coming good is all directed to the coming Christ, and 'every man that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself even as He is pure.'

In Paul's experience there was no contrariety between hope set on Jesus and fear directed towards God. It is in the fear of God that holiness is to be perfected There is a fear which has no torment. Yet more, there is no love in sons or daughters without fear. The reverential awe with which God's children draw near to God has in it nothing slavish and no terror. Their love is not only joyful but lowly. The worshipping gaze upon His Divine majesty, the reverential and adoring contemplation of His ineffable holiness, and the poignant consciousness, after all effort, of the distance between us and Him will bow the hearts that love Him most in lowliest prostration before Him. These two, hope and fear, confidence and awe, are like the poles on which the whole round world turns and are united here in one result. They who 'set their hope in God' must 'not forget the works of God but keep His commandments'; they who 'call Him Father,' 'who without respect of persons judgeth' must 'pass the time of their sojourning

here in fear,' and their hopes and their fears must drive the wheels of life, purify them from all filthiness and perfect them in all holiness.

SORROW ACCORDING TO GOD

'Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. — 2 Corinthians 7:10.

VERY near the close of his missionary career the Apostle Paul summed up his preaching as being all directed to enforcing two points, 'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' These two, repentance and faith, ought never to be separated in thought, as they are inseparable in fact. True repentance is impossible without faith, true faith cannot exist without repentance.

Yet the two are separated very often, even by earnest Christian teachers. The tendency of this day is to say a great deal about faith, and not nearly enough in proportion about repentance; and the effect is to obscure the very idea of faith, and not seldom to preach 'Peace! peace! when there is no peace.' A gospel which is always talking about faith, and scarcely ever talking about sin and repentance, is denuded, indeed, of some of its most unwelcome characteristics, but is also deprived of most of its power, and it may very easily become an ally of unrighteousness, and an indulgence to sin. The reproach that the Christian doctrine of salvation through faith is immoral in its substance derives most of its force from forgetting that 'repentance towards God' is as real a condition of salvation as is 'faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' We have here the Apostle's deliverance about one of these twin thoughts. We have three stages- the root, the stem, the fruit; sorrow, repentance, salvation. But there is a right and a wrong kind of sorrow for sin. The right kind breeds repentance; and thence reaches salvation; the wrong kind breeds nothing, and so ends in death.

Let us then trace these stages, not forgetting that this is not a complete statement of the case, and needs to be supplemented in the spirit of the words which I have already quoted, by the other part of the inseparable whole, 'faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.'

I. First, then, consider the true and the false sorrow for sin.

The Apostle takes it for granted that a recognition of our own evil, and a - consequent penitent regretfulness, lie at the foundation of all true Christianity. Now I do not insist upon any uniformity of experience in people, any more than I should insist that all their bodies should be of one

shape or of one proportion. Human lives are infinitely different, human dispositions are subtly varied, and because neither the one nor the other are ever reproduced exactly in any two people, therefore the religious experience of no two souls can ever be precisely alike.

We have no right to ask — and much harm has been done by asking — for an impossible uniformity of religious experience, any more than we have a right to expect that all voices shall be pitched in one key, or all plants flower in the same month, or after the same fashion. You can print off as many copies as you like, for instance, of a drawing of a flower on a printing-press, and they shall all be alike, petal for petal, leaf for leaf, shade for shade; but no two hand-drawn copies will be so precisely alike, still less will any two of the real buds that blow on the bush. Life produces resemblance with differences; it is machinery that makes facsimiles.

So we insist on no pedantic or unreal uniformity; and yet, whilst leaving the widest scope for divergencies of individual character and experience, and not asking that a man all diseased and blotched with the leprosy of sin for half a lifetime, and a little child that has grown up at its mother's knee, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and so has been kept 'innocent of much transgression,' shall have the same experience; yet Scripture, as it seems to me, and the nature of the case do unite in asserting that there are certain elements which, in varying proportions indeed, will be found in all true Christian experience, and of these an indispensable one — and in a very large number, if not in the majority of cases, a fundamental one — is this which my text calls 'godly sorrow.'

Dear brethren, surely a reasonable consideration of the facts of our conduct and character point to that as the attitude that becomes us. Does it not? I do not charge you with crimes in the eye of the law. I do not suppose that many of you are living in flagrant disregard of the elementary principles of common every-day morality. Some are, no doubt. There are, no doubt, unclean men here; there are some who eat and drink more than is good for them, habitually; there are, no doubt, men and women who are living in avarice and worldliness, and doing things which the ordinary conscience of the populace points to as faults and blemishes. But I come to you respectable people that can say: 'I am not as other men are, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican'; and pray you, dear friends, to look at your character all round, in the light of the righteousness and love of God, and to plead to the indictment which charges you with neglect of many a duty and with sin against Him. How do you plead, 'guilty or not guilty, sinful or not sinful?' Be honest with yourselves, and the answer will not be far to seek.

Notice how my text draws a broad distinction between the right and the wrong kind of sorrow for sin. 'Godly sorrow' is, literally rendered, 'sorrow according to God,' which may either mean sorrow which has reference to God, or sorrow which is in accordance with His will; that is to say, which is pleasing to Him. If it is the former, it will be the latter. I prefer to suppose that it is the former — that is, sorrow which has reference to God. And then, there is another kind of sorrow, which the Apostle calls the 'sorrow of the world,' which is devoid of that reference to God. Here we have the characteristic difference between the Christian way of looking at our own faults and shortcomings, and the sorrow of the world, which has got no blessing in it, and will never lead to anything like

righteousness and peace. It is just this — one has reference to God, puts its sin by His side, sees its blackness relieved against the 'fierce light' of the Great White Throne, and the other has not that reference.

To expand that for a moment, — there are plenty of us who, when our sin is behind us, and its bitter fruits are in our hands, are sorry enough for our faults. A man that is lying in the hospital a wreck, with the sins of his youth gnawing the flesh off his bones, is often enough sorry that he did not live more soberly and chastely and temperately in the past days. That fraudulent bankrupt who has not got his discharge and has lost his reputation, and can get nobody to lend him money enough to start him in business again, as he hangs about the streets, slouching in his rags, is sorry enough that he did not keep the straight road. The 'sorrow of the world' has no thought about God in it at all. The consequences of sin set many a man's teeth on edge who does not feel any compunction for the wrong that he did. My brethren, is that the position of any that are listening to me now?

Again, men are often sorry for their conduct without thinking of it as sin against God. Crime means the transgression of man's law, wrong means the transgression of conscience's law, sin is the transgression of God's law. Some of us would perhaps have to say — 'I have done crime.' We are all of us quite ready to say: 'I have done wrong many a time'; but there are some of us who hesitate to take the other step, and say: 'I have done sin.' Sin has, for its correlative, God. If there is no God there is no sin. There

may be faults, there may be failures, there may be transgressions, breaches of the moral law, things done inconsistent with man's nature and constitution, and so on; but if there be a God, then we have personal relations to that Person and His law; and when we break His law it is more than crime; it is more than fault: it is more than transgression; it is more than wrong; it is sin. It is when you lift the shutter off conscience, and let the light of God rush in upon your hearts and consciences, that you have the wholesome sorrow that worketh repentance and salvation and life.

Oh, dear friends, I do beseech you to lay these simple thoughts to heart. Remember, I urge no rigid uniformity of experience or character, but I do say that unless a man has learned to see his sin in the light of God, and in the light of God to weep over it, he has yet to know 'the strait gate that leadeth unto life.'

I believe that a very large amount of the superficiality and easy-goingness of the Christianity of today comes just from this, that so many who call themselves Christians have never once got a glimpse of themselves as they really are. I remember once peering over the edge of the crater of Vesuvius, and looking down into the pit, all swirling with sulphurous fumes. Have you ever looked into your hearts, in that fashion, and seen the wreathing smoke and the flashing fire there? If you have, you will cleave to that Christ, who is your sole deliverance from sin.

But, remember, there is no prescription about depth or amount or length of time during which this sorrow shall be felt. If, on the one hand, it is essential, on the other hand there are a great many people who ought to be walking in the light and the liberty of God's Gospel who bring darkness and clouds over themselves by the anxious scrutinising question: 'Is my sorrow deep enough?' Deep enough! What for? What is the use of sorrow for sin? To lead a man to repentance and to faith. If you have as much sorrow as leads you to penitence and trust you have enough. It is not your sorrow that is going to wash away your sin, it is Christ's blood. So let no man trouble himself about the question, Have I sorrow enough? The one question is: 'Has my sorrow led me to cast myself on Christ?'

II. Still further, look now for a moment at the next stage here. 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance.'

What is repentance? No doubt many of you would answer that it is 'sorrow for sin,' but clearly this text of ours draws a distinction between the two.

There are very few of the great key-words of Christianity that have suffered more violent and unkind treatment, and have been more obscured by misunderstandings, than this great word. It has been weakened down into penitence, which in the ordinary acceptation, means simply the emotion that I have already been speaking about, viz., a regretful sense of my own evil. And it has been still further docked and degraded, both in its syllables and in its substance, into penance. But the 'repentance' of the New Testament and of the Old Testament — one of the twin conditions of salvation — is neither sorrow for sin nor works of restitution and satisfaction, but it is, as the word distinctly expresses, a change of purpose in regard to the sin for which a man mourns. I cannot now expand and elaborate this idea as I should like, but let me remind you of one or two passages in Scripture which may show that the right notion of the word is not sorrow but changed attitude and purpose in regard to my sin.

We find passages, some of which ascribe and some deny repentance to the Divine nature. But if there be a repentance which is possible for the Divine nature, it obviously cannot mean sorrow for sin, but must signify a change of purpose. In the Epistle to the Romans we read, 'The gifts and calling of God are without repentance,' which clearly means without change of purpose on His part. And I read in the story of the mission of the Prophet Jonah, that 'the Lord repented of the evil which He had said He would do unto them, and He did it not.' Here, again, the idea of repentance is clearly and distinctly that of a change of purpose. So fix this on your minds, and lay it on your hearts, dear friends, that the repentance of the New Testament is not idle tears nor the twitchings of a vain

regret, but the resolute turning away of the sinful heart from its sins. It is 'repentance toward God,' the turning from the sin to the Father, and that is what leads to salvation. The sorrow is separated from the repentance in idea, however closely they may be intertwined in fact. The sorrow is one thing, and the repentance which it works is another.

Then notice that this change of purpose and breaking off from sin is produced by the sorrow for sin, of which I have been speaking; and that the production of this repentance is the main characteristic difference between the godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. A man may have his paroxysms of regret, but the question is: Does it make any difference in his attitude? Is he standing, after the tempest of sorrow has swept over him, with his face in the same direction as before; or has it whirled him clean round, and set him in the other direction? The one kind of sorrow,

which measures my sin by the side of the brightness and purity of God, vindicates itself as true, because it makes me hate my evil and turn away from it. The other, which is of the world, passes over me like the empty wind through an archway, it whistles for a moment and is gone, and there is nothing left to show that it was ever there. The one comes like one of those brooks in tropical countries, dry and white for half the year, and then there is a rush of muddy waters, fierce but transient, and leaving no results behind. My brother! when your conscience pricks, which of these two things does it do? After the prick, is the word of command that your Will issues 'Right about face!' or is it 'As you were'? Godly sorrow worketh a change of attitude, purpose, mind; the sorrow of the world leaves a man standing where he was. Ask yourselves the question: Which of the two are you familiar with?

Again, the true means of evoking true repentance is the contemplation of the Cross. Law and the fear of hell may startle into sorrow, and even lead to some kind of repentance. But it is the great power of Christ's love and sacrifice which will really melt the heart into true repentance. You may hammer ice to pieces, but it is ice still. You may bray a fool in a mortar, and his folly will not depart from him. Dread of punishment may pulverise the heart, but not change it; and each fragment, like the smallest bits of a magnet, will have the same characteristics as the whole mass. But 'the goodness of God leads to repentance,' as the prodigal is conquered and sees the true hideousness of the swine's trough, when he bethinks himself of his father's love. I beseech you to put yourselves under the influence of that great love, and look on that Cross till your hearts melt.

III. We come to the last stage here. Salvation is the issue of repentance. 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.'

What is the connection between repentance and salvation? Two sentences will answer the question. You cannot get salvation without repentance. You do not get salvation by repentance.

You cannot get the salvation of God unless you shake off your sin. It is no use preaching to a man, 'Faith, Faith, Faith!' unless you preach along with it, 'Break off your iniquities.' 'Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord.' The nature of the case forbids it. It is a clear contradiction in terms, and an absolute impossibility in fact, that God should save a man with the salvation which consists in the deliverance from sin, whilst that man is holding to his sin.

Unless, therefore, you have not merely sorrow, but repentance, which is turning away from sin with resolute purpose, as a man would turn from a serpent, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But you do not get salvation for your repentance. It is no case of barter, it is no case of salvation by works, that work being repentance:

***'Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone?'***

Not my penitence, but Christ's death, is the ground of the salvation of every one that is saved at all. Yet repentance is an indispensable condition of salvation.

What is the connection between repentance and faith? There can be no true repentance without trust in Christ. There can be no true trust in Christ without the forsaking of my sin. Repentance without faith, in so far as it is possible, is one long misery; like the pains of those poor Hindoo devotees that will go all the way from Cape Comorin to the shrine of Juggernaut, and measure every foot of the road with the length of their own bodies in the dust. Men will do anything, and willingly make any sacrifice, rather than open their eyes to see this, — that repentance, clasped hand in hand with Faith, leads the guiltiest soul into the forgiving presence of the crucified Christ, from whom peace flows into the darkest heart.

On the other hand, faith without repentance is not possible, in any deep sense. But in so far as it is possible, it produces a superficial Christianity which vaguely trusts to Christ without knowing exactly what it is trusting Him for, or why it needs Him; and which has a great deal to say about what I may call the less important parts of the Christian system, and nothing to say about its vital centre;

which preaches a morality which is not a living power to create; which practises a religion which is neither a joy nor a security. The old word of the Master has a deep truth in it: 'These are they which heard the word, and anon with joy received it.' Having no sorrow, no penitence, no deep consciousness of sin, 'they have no root in themselves, and in time of temptation they fall away.' If there is to be a profound, an all-pervading, life-transforming-sin, and devil-conquering faith, it must be a faith rooted deep in penitence and sorrow for sin.

Dear brethren, if, by God's grace, my poor words have touched your consciences at all, I beseech you, do not trifle with the budding conviction! Do not seek to have the wound skinned over, Take care that you do not let it all pass in idle sorrow or impotent regret. If you do, you will be hardened, and the worse for it, and come nearer to that condition which the sorrow of the world worketh, the awful death of the soul. Do not wince from the knife before the roots of the cancer are cut out. The pain is merciful. Better the wound than the malignant growth. Yield yourselves to the Spirit that would convince you of sin, and listen to the voice that calls to you to forsake your unrighteous ways and thoughts. But do not trust to any tears, do not trust to any resolves, do not trust to any reformation. Trust only to the Lord who died on the Cross for you, whose death for you, whose life in you, will be deliverance from your sin. Then you will have a salvation which, in the striking language of my text,' is not to be repented of,' which will leave no regrets in your hearts in the day when all else shall have faded, and the sinful sweets of this world shall have turned to ashes and bitterness on the lips of the men that feed on them.

'The sorrow of the world works death.' There are men and women listening to me now who are half conscious of their sin, and are resisting the pleading voice that comes to them, who at the last will open their eyes upon the realities of their lives, and in a wild passion of remorse, exclaim: 'I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.' Better to make thorough work of the sorrow, and by it to be led to repentance toward God and faith in Christ, and so secure for our own that salvation for which no man will ever regret having given even the whole world, since he gains his own soul,