

# Colossians Sermons - Maclaren

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## ALEXANDER MACLAREN SERMONS ON COLOSSIANS

### Colossians 1:2 - Saints, Believers, Brethren

‘The saints and faithful brethren in Christ.’—Col. 1:2.

‘THE disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,’ says the Acts of the Apostles. It was a name given by outsiders, and like most of the instances where a sect, or school, or party is labelled with the name of its founder, it was given in scorn. It hit and yet missed its mark. The early believers were Christians, that is, Christ’s men, but they were not merely a group of followers of a man, like many other groups of whom the Empire at that time was full. So they never used that name themselves. It occurs twice only in Scripture, once when King Agrippa was immensely amused at the audacity of Paul in thinking that he would easily make ‘a Christian’ of him; and once when Peter speaks of ‘suffering as a Christian,’ where he is evidently quoting, as it were, the indictment on which the early believers were tried and punished. What did they call themselves then?

I have chosen this text not for the purpose of speaking about it only, but because it gathers together in brief compass the three principal designations by which the early believers knew themselves. ‘Saints’ —that tells their relation to God, as well as their character, for it means ‘consecrated,’ set apart for Him, and therefore pure; ‘faithful,’ that means ‘full of faith’ and is substantially equivalent to the usual ‘believers,’ which defines their relation to Jesus Christ as the Revealer of God; ‘brethren’—that defines their relation and sentiment towards their fellows. These terms go a great deal deeper than the nickname which the wits of Antioch invented. The members of the Church were not content with the vague ‘Christian,’ but they called themselves ‘saints,’ ‘believers,’ ‘brethren.’ One designation does not appear here, which we must take into account for completeness: the earliest of all —disciples. Now, I purpose to bring together these four names, by which the early believers thought and spoke of themselves, in order to point the lessons as to our position and our duty, which are wrapped up in them. And I may just say that, perhaps, it is no sign of advance that the Church, as years rolled on, accepted the world’s name for itself, and that people found it easier to call themselves ‘Christians’—which did not mean very much—than to call themselves ‘saints’ or ‘believers.’

Now then, to begin with,

#### I. They Were ‘Disciples’ First Of All.

The facts as to the use of that name are very plain, and as instructive as they are plain. It is a standing designation in the Gospels, both in the mouths of friends and of outsiders; it is sometimes, though very sparingly, employed by Jesus Christ Himself. It persists on through the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and then it stops dead, and we never hear it again.

Now its existence at first, and its entire abandonment afterwards, both seem to me to carry very valuable lessons. Let me try to work them out. Of course, ‘disciple’ or ‘scholar’ has for its correlative—as the logicians call it—‘teacher.’ And so we find that as the original adherents of Jesus called themselves ‘disciples,’ they addressed Him as ‘Master,’ which is the equivalent of ‘Rabbi.’ That at once suggests the thought that to themselves, and to the people who saw the origination of the little Christian community, the Lord and His handful of followers seemed just to be like John and his disciples, the Pharisees and their disciples, and many another Rabbi and his knot of admiring adherents. Therefore whilst the name was in one view fitting, it was conspicuously inadequate, and as time went on, and the Church became more conscious of the uniqueness of the bond that knit it to Jesus Christ, it instinctively dropped the name ‘disciple,’ and substituted others more intimate and worthy.

But yet it remains permanently true, that Christ's followers are Christ's scholars, and that He is their Rabbi and Teacher. Only the peculiarity, the absolute uniqueness, of His attitude and action as a Teacher lies in two things: one, that His main subject was Himself, as He said, 'I am the Truth,' and consequently His characteristic demand from His scholars was not, as with other teachers, 'Accept this, that, or the other doctrine which I propound,' but 'Believe in Me'; and the other, that He seldom if ever argues, or draws conclusions from previous premises, that He never speaks as if He Himself had learnt and fought His way to what He is saying, or betrays uncertainty, limitation, or growth in His opinions, and that for all confirmation of His declarations, He appeals only to the light within and to His own authority: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you.' No wonder that the common people were astonished at His teaching, and felt that here was an authority in which the wearisome citations of what Rabbi So-and-So had said, altogether lacked.

That teaching abides still, and, as I believe, opens out into, and is our source of, all that we know—in distinction and contrast from, 'imagine,' 'hope,' 'fear'—of God, and of ourselves, and of the future. It casts the clearest light on morals for the individual and on politics for the community. Whatever men may say about Christianity being effete, it will not be effete till the world has learnt and absorbed the teaching of Jesus Christ; and we are a good long way from that yet!

If He is thus the Teacher, the perpetual Teacher, and the only Teacher, of mankind in regard to all these high things about God and man and the relation between them, about life and death and the world, and about the practice and conduct of the individual and of the community, then we, if we are His disciples, build houses on the rock, in the degree in which we not only hear but do the things that He commands. For this Teacher is no theoretical handler of abstract propositions, but the authoritative imposer of the law of life, and all His words have a direct bearing upon conduct. Therefore it is vain for us to say: 'Lord, Lord, Thou hast taught in our streets and we have accepted Thy teaching.' He looks down upon us from the Throne, as He looked upon the disciples in that upper room, and He says to each of us: 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

But the complete disappearance of the name as the development of the Church advanced, brings with it another lesson, and that is, that precious and great as are the gifts which Jesus Christ bestows as a Teacher, and unique as His act and attitude in that respect are, the name either of teacher or of disciple fails altogether to penetrate to the essence of the relation which knits us together. It is not enough for our needs that we shall be taught. The worst man in the world knows a far nobler morality than the best man practises. And if it were true, as some people superficially say is the case, that evil-doing is the result of ignorance, there would be far less evil-doing in the world than, alas! there is. It is not for the want of knowing, that we go wrong, as our consciences tell us; but it is for want of something that can conquer the evil tendencies within, and lift off the burden of a sinful past which weighs on us. As in the carboniferous strata what was pliant vegetation has become heavy mineral, our evil deeds lie heavy on our souls. What we need is not to be told what we ought to be, but to be enabled to be it. Electricity can light the road, and it can drive the car along it; and that is what we want, a dynamic as well as an illuminant, something that will make us able to do and to be what conscience has told us we ought to be and do.

Teacher? Yes. But if only teacher, then He is nothing more than one of a multitude who in all generations have vainly witnessed to sinful men of the better path. There is no reformation for the individual, and little hope for humanity, in a Christ whom you degrade to the level of a Rabbi, or in a Church which has not pressed nearer to Him than to feel itself His disciples.

There was a man who came to Jesus by night, and was in the dark about the Jesus to whom he came, and he said, 'We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God.' But Jesus did not accept the witness, though a young teacher fighting for recognition might have been glad to get it from an authoritative member of the Sanhedrim. But He answered, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' If we need to be born again before we see it, it is not teachers of it that will serve our turn, but One who takes us by the hand, and translates us out of the tyranny of the darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. So much, then, for the first of these names and lessons.

Now turn to the second—

## **II. The Disciples Must Be Believers.**

That name begins to appear almost immediately after Pentecost, and continues throughout. It comes in two forms, one which is in my text, 'the faithful,' meaning thereby not the reliable, but the people that are full of faith; the other, meaning the same thing, they who believe, the 'believers.' The Church found that 'disciple' was not enough. It went deeper; and, with a true instinct, laid hold of the unique bond which knits men to their Lord and Saviour. That name indicates that Jesus Christ appears to the man who has faith in a new character. He is not any longer the Teacher who is to be listened to, but He is the Object of trust. And that implies the recognition, first, of His Divinity, which alone is strong enough to bear up the weight of millions of souls leaning hard upon it; and, second, of what He has done and not merely of what He has said. We accept the Teacher's word; we trust the Saviour's Cross. And in the measure in which men learned that the centre of the work of the Rabbi Jesus was the death of the Incarnate Son of God, their docility was sublimed into faith.

That faith is the real bond that knits men to Jesus Christ. We are united to Him, and become recipient of the gifts that He has to bestow, by no sacraments, by no externals, by no reverential admiration of His supreme wisdom and perfect beauty of character, not by assuming the attitude of the disciple, but by flinging our whole selves upon Him, because He is our Saviour.

That unites us to Jesus Christ; nothing else does. Faith is the opening of the heart, by which all His power can be poured into us. It is the grasping of His hand, by which, even though the cold waters be above our knees and be rising to our hearts, we are lifted above them and they are made a solid pavement for our feet. Faith is the door opened by ourselves, and through which will come all the Glory that dwelt between the cherubim, and will fill the secret place in our hearts. To be the disciple of a Rabbi is something; to be the 'faithful' dependent on the Saviour is to be His indeed.

And then there is to be remembered, further, that this bond, which is the only vital link between a man and Christ, is therefore the basis of all virtue, of all nobility, of all beauty of conduct, and that 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report' are its natural efflorescence and fruit. And so that leads us to the third point—

### **III. The Believing Disciple Is A 'Saint.'**

That name does not appear in the Gospels, but it begins to show in the Acts of the Apostles, and it becomes extremely common throughout the Epistles of Paul. He had no hesitation in calling the very imperfect disciples in Corinth by this great name. He was going to rebuke them for some very great offences, not only against Christian elevation of conduct, but against common pagan morality; but he began by calling them 'saints.'

What is a saint? First and foremost, a man who has given himself to God, and is consecrated thereby. Whoever has cast himself on Christ, and has taken Christ for his, therein and in the same degree as he is exercising faith, has thus yielded himself to God. If your faith has not led you to such a consecration of will and heart and self, you had better look out and see whether it is faith at all. But then, because faith involves the consecration of a man to God, and consecration necessarily implies purity, since nothing can be laid on God's altar which is not sanctified thereby, the name of saint comes to imply purity of character. Sanctity is the Christian word which means the very flower and fragrant aroma of what the world calls virtue.

But sanctity is not emotion, A man may luxuriate in devout feeling, and sing and praise and pray, and be very far from being a saint; and there is a great deal of the emotional Christianity of this day which has a strange affinity for the opposite of saintship. Sanctity is not aloofness. 'There were saints in Caesar's household'—a very unlikely place; they were flowers on a dunghill, and perhaps their blossoms were all the brighter because of what they grew on, and which they could transmute from corruption into beauty. So sanctity is no blue ribbon of the Christian profession, to be given to a few select (and mostly ascetic) specimens of consecration, but it is the designation of each of us, if we are disciples who are more than disciples, that is, 'believers.' And thus, brethren, we have to see to it that, in our own cases, our faith leads to surrender, and our self-surrender to purity of life and conduct. Faith, if real, brings sanctity; sanctity, if real, is progressive. Sanctity, though imperfect, may be real.

### **IV. The Believing Saints Are 'Brethren.'**

That is the name that predominates over all others in the latter portions of the New Testament, and it is very natural that it should do so. It reposes upon and implies the three preceding. Its rapid adoption and universal use express touchingly the wonder of the early Church at its own unity. The then world was rent asunder by deep clefts of misunderstanding, alienation, animosity, racial divisions of Jew and Greek, Parthian, Scythian; by sexual divisions which flung men and women, who ought to have been linked hand in hand, and united heart to heart, to opposite sides of a great gulf; by divisions of culture which made wise men look down on the unlearned, and the unlearned hate the wise men; by clefts of social position, and mainly that diabolical one of slave and free. All these divisive and disintegrating forces were in active operation. The only thing except Christianity, which produced even a semblance of union, was the iron ring of the Roman power which compressed them all into one indeed, but crushed the life out of them in the process. Into that disintegrating world, full of mutual repulsion, came One who drew men to Himself and said, 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.' And to their own astonishment, male and female, Greek and Jew, bond and free, philosopher and fool, found themselves sitting at the same table as members of one family; and they looked in each other's eyes and said, 'Brother!' There had never been anything like it in the world. The name is a memorial of the unifying power of the Christian faith.

And it is a reminder to us of our own shortcomings. Of course, in the early days, the little band were driven together, as sheep that stray over a pasture in the sunshine will huddle into a corner in a storm, or when the wolves are threatening. There are many reasons today which make less criminal the alienation from one another of Christian communities and Christian individuals. I am not going to dwell on the evident signs in this day, for which God be thanked, that Christian men are beginning, more than they once did, to realise their unity in Jesus Christ, and to be content to think less of the things that separate than of the far greater things that unite. But I would lay upon your hearts, as individual parts of that great whole, this, that whatever may be the differences in culture, outlook, social position, or the like, between two Christian men, they each, the rich man and the poor, the educated man and the

unlettered one, the master and the servant, ought to feel that deep down in their true selves they are nearer one another than they are to the men who, differing from them in regard to their faith in Jesus Christ, are like them in all these superficial respects. Regulate your conduct by that thought.

That name, too, speaks to us of the source from which Christian brotherhood has come. We are brethren of each other because we have one Father, even God, and the Fatherhood which makes us brethren is not that which communicates the common life of humanity, but that which imparts the new life of sonship through Jesus Christ. So the name points to the only way by which the world's dream of a universal brotherhood can ever be fulfilled. If there is to be fraternity there must be fatherhood, and the life which, possessed by each, makes a family of all, is the life which He gives, who is 'the first-born among many brethren,' and who, to them who believe on Him, gives power to become the sons of God, and the brethren of all the other sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

So, dear friends, take these names, ponder their significance and the duties they impose. Let us make sure that they are true of us. Do not be content with the vague, often unmeaning name of Christian, but fill it with meaning by being a believer on Christ, a saint devoted to God, and a brother of all who, 'by like precious faith,' have become Sons of God.

## Colossians 1:5 - The Gospel-Hope

'The hope of the Gospel.'—Col. 1:5.

'GOD never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them,' says the old proverb. And yet it seems as if that were scarcely true in regard to that strange faculty called Hope. It may well be a question whether on the whole it has given us more pleasure than pain. How seldom it has been a true prophet! How perpetually its pictures have been too highly coloured? It has cast illusions over the future, colouring the far-off hills with glorious purple which, reached, are barren rocks and cold snow. It has held out prizes never won. It has made us toil and struggle and aspire and fed us on empty husks. Either we have not got what we expected or have found it to be less good than it appeared from afar.

If we think of all the lies that hope has told us, of all the vain expenditure of effort to which it has tempted us, of the little that any of us have of what we began by thinking we should surely attain, hope seems a questionable good, and yet how obstinate it is, living on after all disappointments and drawing the oldest amongst us onwards. Surely somewhere there must be a reason for this great and in some respects awful faculty, a vindication of its existence in an adequate object for its grasp.

The New Testament has much to say about hope.

Christianity lays hold of it and professes to supply it with its true nourishment and support. Let us look at the characteristics of Christian hope, or, as our text calls it, the hope of the Gospel, that is, the hope which the Gospel creates and feeds in our souls.

### I. What Does It Hope For?

The weakness of our earthly hopes is that they are fixed on things which are contingent and are inadequate to make us blessed. Even when tinted with the rainbow hues, which it lends them, they are poor and small. How much more so when seen in the plain colourless light of common day. In contrast with these the objects of the Christian hope are certain and sufficient for all blessedness. In the most general terms they may be stated as 'That blessed hope, even the appearing of the Great God and our Saviour.' That is the specific Christian hope, precise and definite, a real historical event, filling the future with a certain steadfast light. Much is lost in the daily experience of all believers by the failure to set that great and precise hope in its true place of prominence. It is often discredited by millenarian dreams, but altogether apart from these it has solidity and substance enough to bear the whole weight of a world rested upon it.

That appearance of God brings with it the fulfilment of our highest hopes in the 'grace that is to be brought to us at His appearing.' All our blessedness of every kind is to be the result of the manifestation of God in His unobscured glory. The mirrors that are set round the fountain of light flash into hitherto undreamed-of brightness. It is but a variation in terms when we describe the blessedness which is to be the result of God's appearing as being the Hope of Salvation in its fullest sense, or, in still other words, as being the Hope of Eternal Life. Nothing short of the great word of the Apostle John, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, exhausts the greatness of the hope which the humblest and weakest Christian is not only allowed but commanded to cherish. And that great future is certainly capable of, and in Scripture receives, a still more detailed specification. We hear, for example, of the hope of Resurrection, and it is most natural that the bodily redemption which Paul calls the adoption of the body should first emerge into distinct consciousness as the principal object of hope in the earliest Christian experience, and that the mighty working whereby Jesus is able to subdue all things unto Himself, should first of all be discerned to operate in changing the body of our humiliation into the body of His glory.

But equally natural was it that no merely corporeal transformation should suffice to meet the deep longings of Christian souls which

had learned to entertain the wondrous thought of likeness to God as the certain result of the vision of Him, and so believers' wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.' The moral likeness to God, the perfecting of our nature into His image, will not always be the issue of struggle and restraint, but in its highest form will follow on sight, even as here and now it is to be won by faith, and is more surely attained by waiting than by effort.

The highest form which the object of our hope takes is, the Hope of the Glory of God. This goes furthest; there is nothing beyond this. The eyes that have been wearied by looking at many fading gleams and seen them die away, may look undazzled into the central brightness, and we may be sure that even we shall walk there like the men in the furnace, unconsumed, purging our sight at the fountain of radiance, and being ourselves glorious with the image of God. This is the crown of glory which He has promised to them that love Him. Nothing less than this is what our hope has to entertain, and that not as a possibility, but as a certainty. The language of Christian hope is not perhaps this may be, but verily it shall be. To embrace its transcendent certainties with a tremulous faith broken by much unbelief, is sin.

## **II. The Grounds On Which The Hope Of The Gospel Rests.**

The grounds of our earthly hopes are for the most part possibilities, or, at the best, probabilities turned by our wishes into certainties. We moor our ships to floating islands which we resolve to think continents. So our earthly hopes vary indefinitely in firmness and substance. They are sometimes but wishes turned confident, and can never rise higher than their source, or be more certain than it is. At the best they are building on sand. At the surest there is an element of risk in them. One singer indeed may take for his theme 'The pleasures of Hope,' but another answers by singing of 'The fallacies of Hope.' Earth-born hopes carry no anchor and have always a latent dread looking out of their blue eyes.

But it is possible for us to dig down to and build on rock, to have a future as certain as our past, to escape in our anticipations from the region of the Contingent, and this we assuredly do when we take the hope of the Gospel for ours, and listen to Paul proclaiming to us 'Christ which is our Hope,' or 'Christ in you the Hope of glory.' If our faith grasps Jesus Christ risen from the dead and for us entered into the heavenly state as our forerunner, our hope will see in Him the pattern and the pledge of our manhood, and will begin to experience even here and now the first real though faint accomplishments of itself. The Gospel sets forth the facts concerning Christ which fully warrant and imperatively require our regarding Him as the perfect realised ideal of manhood as God meant it to be, and as bearing in Himself the power to make all men even as He is. He has entered into the fellowship of our humiliation and become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh that we might become life of His Life and spirit of His Spirit. As certain as it is that 'we have borne the image of the earthy,' so certain is it that 'we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.'

What cruel waste of a divine faculty it is, then, of which we are all guilty when we allow our hopes to be frittered away and dissipated on uncertain and transient goods which they may never secure, and which, even if secured, would be ludicrously or rather tragically insufficient to make us blessed, instead of withdrawing them from all these and fixing them on Him who alone is able to satisfy our hungry souls in all their faculties for ever!

The hope of the Gospel is firm enough to rest our all upon because in it, by 'two immutable things in which it is impossible that God should lie,' His counsel and His oath, He has given strong encouragement to them who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them. Well may the hope for which God's own eternal character is the guarantee be called 'sure and steadfast.' The hope of the Gospel rests at last on the Being and Heart of God. It is that which God 'who cannot lie hath promised before the world was' is working towards whilst the world lasts, and will accomplish when the world is no more. He has made known His purpose and has pledged all the energies and tendernesses of His Being to its realisation. Surely on this rock-foundation we may rest secure. The hopes that grow on other soils creep along the surface. The hope of the Gospel strikes its roots deep into the heart of God.

## **III. What The Hope Of The Gospel Is And Does For Us.**

We cannot do better than to lay hold of some of the New Testament descriptions of it. We recall first that great designation 'A good hope through grace.' This hope is no illusion; it does not come from fumes of fancy or the play of imagination. The wish is not father to the thought. We do not make bricks without straw nor spin ropes of sand on the shore of the great waste sea that waits to swallow us up. The cup of Tantalus has had its leaks stopped; the sieve carries the treasure unspilled. The rock can be rolled to the hill-top, All the disappointments, fallacies, and torments of hope pass away. It never makes ashamed. We have a solid certainty as solid as memory. The hope which is through grace is the full assurance of hope, and that full assurance is just what every other hope lacks. In that region and in that region only we can either say I hope or I know.

Another designation is 'A lively hope.' It is no poor pale ghost brightening and fading, fading and brightening, through which one can see the stars shine, and of little power in practical life, but strong and vigorous and not the least active amongst the many forces that make up the sum of our lives.

It is most significantly designated as 'The blessed hope.' All others quickly pass into sorrows. This alone gives lasting joys, for this

alone is blessed whilst it is only anticipation, and still more blessed when its blossoms ripen into full fruition. In all earthly hopes there is an element of unrest, but the hope of the Gospel is so remote, so certain, and so satisfying, that it works stillness, and they who most firmly grasp it 'do with patience wait for it.' Earthly hopes have little moral effect and often loosen the sinews of the soul, and are distinctly unfavourable to all strenuous effort. But 'every man that hath this hope in Jesus purifieth himself even as He is pure,' and the Apostle, whose keen insight most surely discerns the character-building value of the fundamental facts of Christian experience, was not wrong when he bid us find in the hope of the Gospel deeply rooted within us the driving force of the most strenuous efforts after purity like His whom it is our deepest desire and humble hope to become like.

Let us remember the double account which Scripture gives of the discipline by which the hope of the Gospel is won for our very own. On the one hand, we have 'joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope.' Our faith breeds hope because it grasps the divine facts concerning Jesus from which hope springs. And faith further breeds hope because it kindles joy and peace, which are the foretastes and earnestings of the future blessedness. On the other hand, the very opposite experiences work to the same end, for 'tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.' Sorrow rightly borne tests for us the power of the Gospel and the reality of our faith, and so gives us a firmer grip of hope and of Him on whom in the last result it all depends. Out of this collision of flint and steel the spark springs. The water churned into foam and tortured in the cataract has the fair bow bending above it.

But this discipline will not achieve its result, therefore comes the exhortation to us all, 'Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.' The hope of the Gospel is the one thing that we need. Without it all else is futile and frail. God alone is worthy to have the whole weight and burden of a creature's hope fixed on Him, and it is an everlasting truth that they who are 'without God in the world' also 'have no hope.' Saints of old held fast by an assurance, which they must often have felt left many questions still to be asked, and because they were sure that they were continually with Him, were also sure of His guidance through life and of His afterwards receiving them to glory. But for us the twilight has broadened into day, and we shall be wise if, knowing our defencelessness, and forsaking all the lies and illusions of this vain present, we flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel

## Colossians 1:11 'All Power'

'Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy.'—Col. 1:11 (R.V.).

THERE is a wonderful rush and fervour in the prayers of Paul. No parts of his letters are so lofty, so impassioned, so full of his soul, as when he rises from speaking of God to men to speaking to God for men. We have him here setting forth his loving desires for the Colossian Christians in a prayer of remarkable fulness and sweep. Broadly taken, it is for their perfecting in religious and moral excellence, and it is very instructive to note the idea of what a good man is which is put forth here.

The main petition is for wisdom and spiritual understanding applied chiefly, as is to be carefully noted, to the knowledge of God's will. The thought is that what it most imports us to know is the Will of God, a knowledge not of merely speculative points in the mysteries of the divine nature, but of that Will which it concerns us to know because it is our life to do it. The next element in Paul's desires, as set forth in the ideal here, is a worthy walk, a practical life, or course of conduct which is worthy of Jesus Christ, and in every respect pleases Him. The highest purpose of knowledge is a good life. The surest foundation for a good life is a full and clear knowledge of the Will of God.

Then follow a series of clauses which seem to expand the idea of the worthy walk and to be co-ordinate or perhaps slightly causal, and to express the continuous condition of the soul which is walking worthily. Let us endeavour to gather from these words some hints as to what it is God's purpose that we should become.

### I. The Many-Sided Strength Which May Be Ours.

The form of the word 'strengthened' here would be more fully represented by 'being strengthened,' and suggests an unintermitted process of bestowal and reception of God's might rendered necessary by our continuous human weakness, and by the tear and wear of life. As in the physical life there must be constant renewal because there is constant waste, and as every bodily action involves destruction of tissue so that living is a continual dying, so is it in the mental and still more in the spiritual life. Just as there must be a perpetual oxygenation of blood in the lungs, so there must be an uninterrupted renewal of spiritual strength for the highest life. It is demanded by the conditions of our human weakness. It is no less rendered necessary by the nature of the divine strength imparted, which is ever communicating itself, and like the ocean cannot but pour so much of its fulness as can be received into every creek and crack on its shore.

The Apostle not merely emphasises the continuousness of this communicated strength, but its many-sided variety, by designating it 'all power.' In this whole context that word 'all' seems to have a charm for him. We read in this prayer of 'all spiritual wisdom,' of 'walking worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing,' of 'fruit in every good work,' and now of 'all power,' and lastly of 'all patience and

longsuffering.' These are not instances of being obsessed with a word, but each of them has its own appropriate force, and here the comprehensive completeness of the strength available for our many-sided weakness is marvellously revealed. There is 'infinite riches in a narrow room.' All power means every kind of power, be it bodily or mental, for all variety of circumstances, and, Protean, to take the shape of all exigencies. Most of us are strong only at points, and weak in others. In all human experience there is a vulnerable spot on the heel. The most glorious image, though it has a head of gold, ends in feet, 'part of iron and part of clay.'

And if this ideal of many-sided power stands in contrast with the limitations of human strength, how does it rebuke and condemn the very partial manifestations of a very narrow and one-sided power which we who profess to have received it set forth! We have access to a source which can fill our whole nature, can flower into all gracious forms, can cope with all our exigencies, and make us all-round men, complete in Jesus Christ, and, having this, what do we make of it, what do we show for it? Does not God say to us, 'Ye are not straitened in me, ye are straitened in yourselves; I beseech you be ye enlarged.'

The conditions on our part requisite for possessing 'all might' are plain enough. The earlier portion of the prayer plainly points to them. The knowledge of God's Will and the 'walk worthy of the Lord' are the means whereby the power which is ever eager to make its dwelling in us, can reach its end. If we keep the channel unchoked, no doubt 'the river of the water of life which proceedeth from the throne of God and the Lamb' will rejoice to fill it to the brim with its flashing waters. If we do not wrench away ourselves from contact with Him, He will 'strengthen us with all might.' If we keep near Him we may have calm confidence that power will be ours that shall equal our need and outstrip our desires.

## **II. The Measure Of The Strength.**

It is 'according to the power of His glory.' The Authorised Version but poorly represents the fulness of the Apostle's thought, which is more adequately and accurately expressed in the Revised Version. 'His glory' is the flashing brightness of the divine self-manifestation, and in that Light resides the strength which is the standard or measure of the gift to us. The tremendous force of the sunbeam which still falls so gently on a sleeper's face as not to disturb the closed eyes is but a parable of the strength which characterises the divine glory. And wonderful and condemnatory as the thought is, that power is the unlimited limit of the possibilities of our possession. His gifts are proportioned to His resources. While He is rich, can I be poor? The only real limit to His bestowal is His own fulness. Of course, at each moment, our capacity of receiving is for the time being the practical limit of our possession, but that capacity varies indefinitely, and may be, and should be, indefinitely and continuously increasing. It is an elastic boundary, and hence we may go on making our own as much as we will, and progressively more and more, of God's strength. He gives it all, but there is a tragical difference between the full cup put into our hands and the few drops carried to our lips. The key of the treasure-chamber is in our possession, and on each of us His gracious face smiles the permission which His gracious lips utter in words, 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' If we are conscious of defect, if our weakness is beaten by the assaults of temptation, or crushed by sorrows that ride it down in a fierce attack, the fault is our own. We have, if we choose to make it our own and to use it as ours, more than enough to make us 'more than conquerors' over all sins and all sorrows.

But when we contrast what we have by God's gift and what we have in our personal experience and use in our daily life, the contrast may well bring shame, even though the contrast brings to us hope to lighten the shame. The average experience of present-day Christians reminds one of the great tanks that may be seen in India, that have been suffered to go to ruin, and so an elaborate system of irrigation comes to nothing, and the great river that should have been drawn off into them runs past them, all but unused. Repair them and keep the sluices open, and all will blossom again.

## **III. The Great Purpose Of This Strength.**

'Patience and longsuffering with joyfulness' seems at first but a poor result of such a force, but it comes from a heart that was under no illusions as to the facts of human life, and it finds a response in us all. It may be difficult to discriminate 'patience' from 'longsuffering,' but the general notion here is that one of the highest uses for which divine strength is given to us, is to make us able to meet the antagonism of evil without its shaking our souls. He who patiently endures without despondency or the desire to 'recompense evil for evil,' and to whom by faith even 'the night is light about him,' is far on the way to perfection. God is always near us, but never nearer than when our hearts are heavy and our way rough and dark. Our sorrows make rents through which His strength flows. We can see more of heaven when the leaves are off the trees. It is a law of the Divine dealings that His strength is 'made perfect in weakness.' God leads us in to a darkened room to show us His wonders.

That strength is to be manifested by us in 'patience and longsuffering,' both of which are to have blended with them a real though apparently antagonistic joy. True and profound grief is not opposed to such patience, but the excess of it, the hopeless and hysterical outbursts certainly are. We are all like the figures in some old Greek temples which stand upright with their burdens on their heads. God's strength is given that we may bear ours calmly, and upright like these fair forms that hold up the heavy architecture as if it were a feather, or like women with water-jars on their heads, which only make their carriage more graceful and their step more firm.

How different the patience which God gives by His own imparted strength, from the sullen submission or hysterical abandonment to sorrow, or the angry rebellion characterising Godless grief! Many of us think that we can get on very well in prosperity and fine weather without Him. We had better ask ourselves what we are going to do when the storm comes, which comes to all some time or other.

The word here rendered 'patience' is more properly 'perseverance.' It is not merely a passive but an active virtue. We do not receive that great gift of divine strength to bear only, but also to work, and such work is one of the best ways of bearing and one of the best helps to doing so. So in our sorrows and trials let us feel that God's strength is not all given us to be expended in our own consolation, but also to be used in our plain duties. These remain as imperative though our hearts are beating like hammers, and there is no more unwise and cowardly surrender to trouble than to fling away our tools and fold our hands idly on our laps.

But Paul lays a harder duty on us even in promising a great gift to us, when he puts before us an ideal of joy mingling with patience and longsuffering. The command would be an impossible one if there were not the assurance that we should be 'strengthened with all might.' We plainly need an infusion of diviner strength than our own, if that strange marriage of joy and sorrow should take place, and they should at once occupy our hearts. Yet if His strength be ours we shall be strong to submit and acquiesce, strong to look deep enough to see His will as the foundation of all and as ever busy for our good, strong to hope, strong to discern the love at work, strong to trust the Father even when He chastens. And all this will make it possible to have the paradox practically realised in our own experience, 'As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.' One has seen potassium burning underwater. Our joy may burn under waves of sorrow. Let us bring our weakness to Jesus Christ and grasp Him as did the sinking Peter. He will breathe His own grace into us, and speak to our feeble and perchance sorrowful hearts, as He had done long before Paul's words to the Colossians, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

## Colossians 1:12 - Thankful For Inheritance

'Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'—Col. 1:12 (R.V.)

IT is interesting to notice how much the thought of inheritance seems to have been filling the Apostle's mind during his writing of Ephesians and Colossians. Its recurrence is one of the points of contact between them. For example, in Ephesians, we read, 'In whom also were made a heritage' (Col. 1:11); 'An earnest of our inheritance' (Col. 1:14); 'His inheritance in the saints' (Col. 1:18); 'Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ' (Eph. 5:5). We notice too that in the address to the Elders of the Church at Ephesus, we read of 'the inheritance among all them that are sanctified' (Acts 20:32).

In the text the climax of the Apostle's prayer is presented as thankfulness, the perpetual recognition of the Divine hand in all that befalls us, the perpetual confidence that all which befalls us is good, and the perpetual gushing out towards Him of love and praise. The highest diligence, the most strenuous fruit-bearing, and the most submissive patience and longsuffering would be incomplete without the consecration of a grateful heart, and the noblest beauty of a Christian character would lack its rarest lustre. This crown of Christian perfectness the Apostle regards as being called into action mainly by the contemplation of that great act and continuous work of God's Fatherly love by which he makes us fit for our portion of the inheritance which the same love has prepared for us. That inheritance is the great cause for Christian thankfulness; the more immediate cause is His preparation of us for it. So we have three points here to consider; the inheritance; God's Fatherly preparation of His children for it; the continual temper of thankfulness which these should evoke.

### I. The Inheritance.

The frequent recurrence of this idea in the Old Testament supplies Paul with a thought which he uses to set forth the most characteristic blessings of the New. The promised land belonged to Israel, and each member of each tribe had his own little holding in the tribal territory. Christians have in common the higher spiritual blessings which Christ brings, "and Himself is, and each individual has his own portion of, the general good.

We must begin by dismissing from our minds the common idea, which a shallow experience tends to find confirmed by the associations ordinarily attached to the word 'inheritance,' that it is entered upon by death. No doubt, that great change does effect an unspeakable change in our fitness for, and consequently in our possession of, the gifts which we receive from Christ's pierced hands, and, as the Apostle has told us, the highest of these possessed on earth is but the 'earnest of the inheritance'; but we must ever bear in mind that the distinction between a Christian life on earth and one in heaven is by no means so sharply drawn in Scripture as it generally is by us, and that death has by no means so great importance as we faithlessly attribute to it. The life here and hereafter is like a road which passes the frontiers of two kingdoms divided by a bridged river, but runs on in the same direction on both sides of the stream. The flood had to be forded until Jesus bridged it. The elements of the future and the present are the same, as the apostolic metaphor of the 'earnest of the inheritance' teaches us. The handful of soil which constitutes the 'arles' is part of the broad acres made over by it.



We should be saved from many unworthy conceptions of the future life, if we held more steadfastly to the great truth that God Himself is the portion of the inheritance. The human spirit is too great and too exacting to be satisfied with anything less than Him, and the possession of Him opens out into every blessedness, and includes all the minor joys and privileges that can gladden and enrich the soul. We degrade the future if we think of it only, or even chiefly, as a state in which faculties are enlarged, and sorrows and sins are for ever ended. Neither such negatives as 'no night there,' 'neither sorrow nor crime,' 'no more pain,' nor such metaphors as 'white robes' and 'golden crowns and 'seats on thrones' are enough. We are 'heirs of God,' and only as we possess Him, and know that we are His, and He is ours, are we 'rich to all intents of bliss.' That inheritance is here set forth as being 'in light' and as belonging to saints. Light is the element and atmosphere of God. He is in light. He is the fountain of all light. He is light; perfect in wisdom, perfect in purity. The sun has its spots, but in Him is no darkness at all, Moons wax and wane, shadows of eclipse fall, stars have their time to set, but 'He is the Father of lights with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.' All that light is focussed in Jesus the Light of the world. That Light fills the earth, but here it shineth in darkness that obstructs its rays. But there must be a place and a time where the manifestation of God corresponds with the reality of God, where His beams pour out and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof, nothing which they do not bless, nothing which does not flash them back rejoicing. There is a land whereof the Lord God is the Light. In it is the inheritance of the 'saints,' and in its light live the nations of the saved, and have God for their companion. All darkness of ignorance, of sorrow, and of sin will fade away as the night flees and ceases to be, before the rising sun.

The phrase 'to be partakers' is accurately rendered 'for the portion,' and carries a distinct allusion to the partition of the promised land to Israel by which each man had his lot or share in the common inheritance. So the one word inheritance brings with it blessed thoughts of a common possession of a happy society in which no man's gain is another's loss, and all envyings, rivalries, and jealousies have ceased to be, and the other word, 'the portion,' suggests the individual possession by each of his own vision and experience. Each man's 'portion' is capable of growth; each has as much of God as he can hold. The measure of his desire is the measure of his capacity. There are infinite differences in the 'portions' of the saints on earth, and heaven is robbed of one of its chief charms unless we recognise that there are infinite differences among the saints there. For both states the charter by which the portion is held is 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' and in both the law holds 'To him that hath shall be given.'

## **II. The Fatherly Preparation For The Inheritance.**

It is obvious from all which we have been saying that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The inheritance being what it is, the possession, the enjoyment of communion with a Holy God, it is absolutely incapable of being entered upon by any who are unholy. That is true about both the partial possession of the earnest of it here and of its fulness hereafter. In the present life all tolerated sin bars us out from enjoying God, and in the future nothing can enter that defileth nor whatsoever worketh or maketh a lie. There are many people who think that they would like 'to go to heaven,' but who would find it difficult to answer such questions as these: Do you like to think of God? Do you find any joy in holy thoughts? What do you feel about prayer? Does the name of Christ make your heart leap? Is righteousness your passion? If you have to answer these questions with a silence which is the saddest negative, what do you think you would do in heaven? I remember that the Greenlanders told the Moravian missionaries who were trying to move them by conventional pictures of its delights, that the heaven which these pious souls had painted would not do for them, for there were no seals there. There are thousands of us who, if we spoke the truth, would say the same thing, with the necessary variations arising from our environment. There is not a spinning-mill in it all. How would some of us like that? There is not a ledger, nor a theatre, no novels, no amusements. Would it not be intolerable ennui to be put down in such an order of things? You would be like the Israelites, loathing 'this tight bread' and hungering for the strong-smelling and savoury-tasting leeks and garlic, even if in order to taste them you had to be slaves again.

Heaven would be no heaven to you if you could go there and be thus minded. But you could not. God Himself cannot carry men thither but by fitting them for it. It is not a place so much as a state, and the mighty hand that works on one side of the thick curtain preparing the inheritance in light for the saints, is equally busy on this side making the saints meet for the inheritance.

I do not wish to enter here on grammatical niceties, but I must point out that the form of the word which the Apostle employs to express it points to an act in the past which still runs on.

The Revised Version's rendering, 'made us meet,' is preferable to the Authorised Version's, because of its omission of the 'hath' which relegates the whole process of preparation to the past. And it is of importance to recognise that the difference between these two representations of the divine preparation is not a piece of pedantry, for that preparation has indeed its beginnings in the past of every Christian soul, but is continuous throughout its whole earthly experience. There is the great act of forgiveness and justifying which is contemporaneous with the earliest and most imperfect faith, and there is the being born again, the implanting of a new life which is the life of Christ Himself, and has no spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing. That new life is infantile, but it is there, the real man, and it will grow and conquer. Take an extreme case and suppose a man who has just received forgiveness for his past and the endowment of a new nature. Though he were to die at that moment he would still in the basis of his being and real self be meet for the inheritance. He who truly trusts in Jesus is passed from death unto life, though the habits of sins which are forgiven still

cling to him, and his new life has not yet exercised a controlling power or begun to build up character. So Christians ought not to think that, because they are conscious of much unholiness, they are not ready for the inheritance. The wild brigand through whose glazing eyeballs faith looked out to his fellow-sufferer on the central cross was adjudged meet to be with him in Paradise, and if all his deeds of violence and wild outrages on the laws of God and man did not make him unmeet, who amongst us need write bitter things against himself? The preparation is further effected through all the future earthly life. The only true way to regard everything that befalls us here is to see in it the Fatherly discipline preparing us for a fuller possession of a richer inheritance. Gains and losses, joys and sorrows, and all the endless variety of experiences through which we all have to pass, are an unintelligible mystery unless we apply to them this solution, 'He for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.' It is not a blind Fate or a still blinder Chance that hurtles sorrows and changes at us, but a loving Father; and we do not grasp the meaning of our lives unless we feel, even about their darkest moments, that the end of them all is to make us more capable of possessing more of Himself.

### **III. The Thankfulness Which These Thoughts Should Evoke.**

Thankfulness ought to be a sweet duty. It is a joy to cherish gratitude. Generous hearts do not need to be told to be thankful, and they who are only thankful to order are not thankful at all. In nothing is the ordinary experience of the ordinary Christian more defective, and significant of the deficiencies of their faith, than in the tepidness and interruptedness of their gratitude. The blessings bestowed are continuous and unspeakable. The thanks returned are grudging and scanty. The river that flows from God is 'full of water' and pours out unceasingly, and all that we return is a tiny trickle, often choked and sometimes lost in the sands:

Our thankfulness ought to be constant. The fire on the altar should never be quenched. The odour of the sweet-smelling incense should ever ascend. Why is it that we have so little of this grace which the Apostle in our text regards as the precious stone that binds all Christian graces together, the sparkling crest of the wave of a Christian life? Mainly because we have so little of the habit of regarding all things as God's Fatherly discipline and meditating on that for which they are making us meet. We need a far more habitual contemplation of our inheritance, of our experience as lovingly given by God to fit us for it and of the darkest hours which would otherwise try our faith and silence our praise as necessary parts of that preparation. If this be our habitual attitude of mind, and these be ever present to us, our song will be always of His mercy and our whole lives a thank-offering.

The text is a prophecy describing the inheritance in its perfect form. Earthly life must be ended before it is fully understood. Down in the valleys we praised God, but tears and mysteries sometimes saddened our songs; but now on the summit surveying all behind, and knowing by a blessed eternity of experience to what it has led, even an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, we shall praise Him with a new song for ever.

Thankfulness is the one element of worship common to earth and heaven, to angels and to us. Whilst they sing, 'Bless the Lord all ye His hosts,' redeemed men have still better reason to join in the chorus and answer, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul.'

## **Colossians 1:29 Christian Endeavour**

'I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily.'—Col. 1:29.

I HAVE chosen this text principally because it brings together the two subjects which are naturally before us to-day. All 'Western Christendom,' as it is called, is to-day commemorating the Pentecostal gift. My text speaks about that power that 'worketh in us mightily.' True, the Apostle is speaking in reference to the fiery energy and persistent toil which characterised him in proclaiming Christ, that he might present men perfect before Him. But the same energy which he expended on his apostolic office he expended on his individual personality. And he would not have discharged the one unless he had first laboured on the other. And although in a letter contemporary with this one from which my text is taken he speaks of himself as no longer young, but 'such an one as Paul the aged, and likewise, also a prisoner of Jesus Christ,' the young spirit was in him, and the continual pressing forward to unattained heights. And that is the spirit, not only of a section of the Church divided from the rest by youth and by special effort, but of the whole Church if it is worth calling a Church, and unless it is thus instinct, it is a mere dead organisation.

So I hope that what few things I have to say may apply to, and be felt to be suitable by all of us, whether we are nominally Christian Endeavourers or not. If we are Christian people, we are such. If we are not endeavouring, shall I venture to say we are not Christians? At any rate, we are very poor ones.

Now here, then, are two plain things, a great universal Christian duty and a sufficient universal Christian endowment. 'I work striving'; that is the description of every true Christian. 'I work striving, according to His working, who worketh in me mightily': there is the great gift which makes the work and the striving possible. Let me briefly deal, then, with these two.

### **I. The Solemn Universal Christian Obligation.**

Now the two words which the Apostle employs here are both of them very emphatic. 'His words were half battles,' was said about Luther. It may be as truly said about Paul. And that word 'work' which he employs, means, not work with one hand, or with a

delicate forefinger, but it means toil up to the verge of weariness. The notion of fatigue is almost, I might say, uppermost in the word as it is used in the New Testament. Some people like to 'labour' so as never to turn a hair, or bring a sweat-drop on to their foreheads. That is not Christian Endeavour. Work that does not 'take it out of you' is not worth doing. The other word 'striving' brings up the picture of the arena with the combatants' strain of muscle, their set teeth, their quick, short breathing, their deadly struggle. That is Paul's notion of Endeavour. Now 'Endeavour,' like a great many other words, has a baser and a nobler side to it. Some people, when they say, 'I will endeavour,' mean that they are going to try in a halfhearted way, with no prospect of succeeding. That is not Christian Endeavour. The meaning of the word—for the expression in my text might just as well be rendered 'endeavouring' as 'striving'—is that of a buoyant confident effort of all the concentrated powers, with the certainty of success. That is the endeavour that we have to cultivate as Christian men. And there is only one field of human effort in which that absolute confidence that it shall not be in vain is anything but presumptuous arrogance; namely, in the effort after making ourselves what God means us to be, what Jesus Christ longs for us to be, what the Spirit of God is given to us in order that we should be. 'We shall not fail,' ought to be the word of every man and woman when they set themselves to the great task of working out, in their own characters and personalities, the Divine intention which is made a Divine possibility by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Divine Spirit.

So then what we come to is just this, dear brethren, if we are Christians at all, we have to make a business of our religion; to go about it as if we meant work. Ah! what a contrast there is between the languid way in which Christian men pursue what the Bible designates their 'calling' and that in which men with far paltrier aims pursue theirs! And what a still sadder contrast there is between the way in which we Christians go about our daily business, and the way in which we go about our Christian life! Why, a man will take more pains to learn some ornamental art, or some game, than he will ever take to make himself a better Christian. The one is work. What is the other? To a very large extent dawdling and make-believe.

You remember the old story,—it may raise a smile, but there should be a deep thought below the smile,—of the little child that said as to his father that 'he was a Christian, but he had not been working much at it lately.' Do not laugh. It is a great deal too true of— I will not venture to say what percentage of—the professing Christians of this day. Work at your religion. That is the great lesson of my text. Endeavour with confidence of success. The Book of Proverbs says: 'He that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster,' and that is true. A man that does 'the work of the Lord negligently' is scarcely to be credited with doing it at all. Dear friends, young or old, if you name the name of Christ, be in earnest, and make earnest work of your Christian character.

And now may I venture two or three very plain exhortations? First, I would say—if you mean to make your Christian life a piece of genuine work and striving, the first thing that you have to do is to endeavour in the direction of keeping its aim very clear before you. There are many ways in which we may state the goal of the Christian life, but let us put it now into the all-comprehensive form of likeness to Jesus Christ, by entire conformity to His Example and full interpretation of His life. I do not say 'Heaven'; I say 'Christ.'

That is our aim, the loftiest idea of development that any human spirit can grasp, and rising high above a great many others which are noble but incomplete. The Christian ideal is the greatest in the universe. There is no other system of thought that paints man as he is, so darkly; there is none that paints man as he is meant to be, in such radiant colours. The blacks upon the palette of Christianity are blacker, and the whites are whiter, and the golden is more radiant, than any other painter has ever mixed. And so just because the aim which lies before the least and lowest of us, possessing the most imperfect and rudimentary Christianity, is so transcendent and lofty, it is hard to keep it clear before our eyes, especially when all the shabby little necessities of daily life come in to clutter up the foreground, and hide the great distance. Men may live up at Darjeeling there on the heights for weeks, and never see the Himalayas towering opposite. The lower hills are clear; the peaks are wreathed in cloud. So the little aims, the nearer purposes, stand out distinct and obtrusive, and force themselves, as it were, upon our eyeballs, and the solemn white Throne of the Eternal away across the marshy levels, is often hid, and it needs an effort for us to keep it clear before us. One of the main reasons for much that is unsatisfactory in the spiritual condition of the average Christian of this day is precisely that he has not burning ever before him there, the great aim to which he ought to be tending. So he gets loose and diffused, and vague and uncertain. That is what Paul tells you when he proposes himself as an example: 'So run I, not as uncertainly.' The man who knows where he is running makes a bee-line for the goal. If he is not sure of his destination, of course he zigzags. 'So fight I, not as one that beateth the air'—if I see my antagonist I can hit him. If I do not see him clearly I strike like a swordsman in the dark, at random, and my sword comes back unstained. If you want to make the harbour, keep the harbour lights always clear before you, or you will go yawning about, and washing here and there, in the trough of the wave, and the tempest will be your master. If you do not know where you are going you will have to say, like the men in the old story in the Old Book, 'Thy servant went no whither.' If you are going to endeavour, endeavour first to keep the goal clear before you.

And endeavour next to keep up communion with Jesus Christ, which is the secret of all peaceful and of all noble living. And endeavour next after concentration. And what does that mean? It means that you have to detach yourself from hindrances. It means that you have to prosecute the Christian aim all through the common things of Christian life. If it were not possible to be pursuing the great aim of likeness to Jesus Christ, in the veriest secularities of the most insignificant and trivial occupations, then it

would be no use talking about that being our aim. If we are not making ourselves more like Jesus Christ by the way in which we handle our books, or our pen, or our loom, or our scalpel, or our kitchen utensils, then there is little chance of our ever making ourselves like Jesus Christ. For it is these trifles that make life, and to concentrate ourselves on the pursuit of the Christian aim is, in other words, to carry that Christian aim into every triviality of our daily lives.

There are three Scripture passages which set forth various aspects of the aim that we have before us, and from each of these aspects deduce the one same lesson. The Apostle says 'giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue,' etc., 'for if ye do these things ye shall never fail.' He also exhorts: 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' And finally he says: 'Be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, blameless.' There are three aspects of the Christian course, and the Christian aim, the addition to our faith of all the clustering graces and virtues and powers that can be hung upon it, like jewels on the neck of a queen; the making our calling and election sure, and the being found at last tranquil, spotless, stainless, and being found so by Him. These great aims are incumbent on all Christians, they require diligence, and ennoble the diligence which they require.

So, brethren, we have all to be Endeavourers if we are Christians, and that to the very end of our lives. For our path is the only path on which men tread that has for its goal an object so far off that it never can be attained, so near that it can ever be approached. This infinite goal of the Christian Endeavour means inspiration for youth, and freshness for old age, and that man is happy who can say: 'Not as though I had already attained' at the end of a long life, and can say it, not because he has failed, but because in a measure he has succeeded. Other courses of life are like the voyages of the old mariners which were confined within the narrow limits of the Mediterranean, and steered from headland to headland. But the Christian passes through the jaws of the straits, and comes out on a boundless sunlit ocean where, though he sees no land ahead, he knows there is a peaceful shore, beyond the western waves. 'I work striving.'

Now one word as to the other thought that is here, and that is,

## **II. The All-Sufficient Christian Gift.**

'According to His working, which worketh in me mightily.' I need not discuss whether 'His' in my text refers to God or to Christ. The thing meant is the operation upon the Christian spirit, of that Divine Spirit whose descent the Church to-day commemorates. At this stage of my sermon I can only remind you in a word, first of all, that the Apostle here is arrogating to himself no special or peculiar gift, is not egotistically setting forth something which he possessed and other Christian people did not—that power which, 'working in him mightily,' worked in all his brethren as well. It was his conviction and his teaching—would that it were more operatively and vitally the conviction of all professing Christians to-day, and would that it were more conspicuously, and in due proportion to the rest of Christian truth, the teaching of all Christian teachers to-day!—that that Divine power is in the very act of faith received and implanted in every believing soul. 'Know ye not,' the Apostle could say to his hearers, 'that ye have the Spirit of God, except ye be reprobates.' I doubt whether the affirmative response would spring to the lips of all professing or real Christians to-day as swiftly as it would have done then. And I cannot help feeling, and feeling with increasing gravity of pressure as the days go on, that the thing that our churches, and we as individuals, perhaps need most to-day, is the replacing of that great truth—I do not call it a 'doctrine,' that is cold, it is experience—in its proper place. They who believe on Him do receive a new life, a supernatural communication of the new Spirit, to be the very power that rules in their lives.

It is an inward gift. It is not like the help that men can render us, given from without and apprehended and incorporated with ourselves through the medium of the understanding or of the heart. There is an old story in the history of Israel about a young king that was bid by the prophet to bend his bow against the enemies of Israel, as a symbol; and the old prophet put his withered, skinny brown hand on the young man's fleshy one, and then said to him, 'Shoot.' But this Divine Spirit comes to strengthen us in a more intimate and blessed fashion than that, for it glides into our hearts and dwells in our spirits, and our work, as my text says, is His working. This 'working within' is stated in the original of my text most emphatically, for it is literally 'the inworking which inworketh in me mightily.'

So, dear brethren, the first direct aim of all our endeavour ought to be to receive and to keep and to increase our gift of that Divine Spirit. The work and the striving of which my text speaks would be sheer slavery unless we had that help. It would be impossible of accomplishment unless we had it.

'If any power we have, it is to ill,

And all the power is Thine, to do and eke to will.'

Let us, then, begin our endeavour, not by working but by receiving. Is not that the very meaning of the doctrine that we are always talking about, that men are saved, not by works but by faith? Does not that mean that the first step is reception, and the first requisite is receptiveness, and that then, and after that, second and not first, come working and striving? To keep our hearts open by desire, to keep them open by purity, are the essentials. The dove will not come into a fouled nest. It is said that they forsake

polluted places. But also we have to use the power which is inwrought. Use is the way to increase all gifts, from the muscle in your arm to the Christian life in your spirit. Use it, and it grows. Neglect it, and it vanishes, and like the old Jewish heroes, a man may go forth to exercise himself as of old time, and know not that the Spirit of God hath departed from him. Dear friends, do not bind yourselves to the slavery of Endeavour, until you come into the liberty and wealth of receiving. He gives first, and then says to you, 'Now go to work and keep that good thing which is committed unto thee' There is but one thought more in this last part of my text, which I must not leave untouched, and that is that this sufficient and universal gift is not only the means by which the great universal duty can be discharged, but it ought to be the measure in which it is discharged. 'I work according to the working in me.' That is, all the force that came into Paul by that Divine Spirit, came out of Paul in his Christian conduct, and the gift was not only the source, but also the measure, of this man's Christian Endeavour. Is that true about us? They say that the steam-engine is a most wasteful application of power, that a great deal of the energy which is generated goes without ever doing any work. They tell us that one of the great difficulties in the way of economic application of electricity is the loss which comes through using accumulators. Is not that like a great many of us? So much power poured into us; so little coming out from us and translated into actual work! Such a 'rushing mighty wind,' and the air about us so heavy and stagnant and corrupt! Such a blaze of fire, and we so cold! Such a cataract of the river of the water of life, and our lips parched and our crops seared and worthless! Ah, brethren! when we look at ourselves, and when we think of the condition of so many of the churches to which we belong, the old rebuke of the prophet comes back to us in this generation, 'Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?' We have an all-sufficient power. May our working and striving be according to it, and may we work mightily, being 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!'

## Colossians 2:6, 7 - Christian Progress

'As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and builded up in Him.'—Col. 2:6, 7 (R.V.).

IT is characteristic of Paul that he should here use three figures incongruous with each other to express the same idea, the figures of walking, being rooted, and built up. They, however, have in common that they all suggest an initial act by which we are brought into connection with Christ, and a subsequent process flowing from and following on it. Receiving Christ, being rooted in Him, being founded on Him, stand for the first; walking in Him, growing up from the root in Him, being built up on Him as foundation, stand for the second. Fully expressed then, the text would run, 'As ye have received Christ, so walk in Him; as ye have been rooted in Him, so grow up in Him; as ye have been founded on Him, so be built up.' These three clauses present the one idea in slightly different forms. The first expresses Christian progress as the manifestation before the world of an inward possession, the exhibition in the outward life of a treasure hid in the heart. The second expresses the same progress as the development by its own vital energy of the life of Christ in the soul. The third expresses the progress as the addition, by conscious efforts, of portion after portion to the character, which is manifestly incomplete until the headstone crowns the structure. We may then take the passage before us as exhibiting the principles of Christian progress.

### I. The Origin Of All, Or How Christian Progress Begins.

These three figures, receiving, rooted, founded, all express a great deal more than merely accepting certain truths about Him. The acceptance of truths is the means by which we come to what is more than any belief of truths. We possess Christ when we believe with a true faith in Him. We are rooted in Him. His life flows into us. We draw nourishment from that soil. We are built on Him, and in our compact union find a real support to a life which is otherwise baseless and blown about like thistle-down by every breath. The union which all these metaphors presupposes is a vital connection; the possession which is the first step in the Christian life is a real possession.

There is no progress without that initial step. Our own experience tells us but too plainly and loudly that we need the impartation of a new life, and to be set on a new foundation, if we are ever to be anything else than failures and blots.

There is sure to be progress if the initial step has been taken. If Christ has been received, the life possessed will certainly manifest itself. It will go on to perfection. The union effected will work on through the whole character and nature. It is the beginning of all; it is only the beginning.

### II. The Manner Of Christian Progress Or In What It Consists.

It consists in a more complete possession of Him, in a more constant approximation to Him, and a more entire appropriation of Him. Christian progress is not a growing up from Christ as starting-point, but into Christ as goal. All is contained in the first act by which He is first received; the remainder is but the working out of that. All our growth in knowledge and wisdom consists in our knowing what we have when we receive Christ. We grow in proportion as we learn to see in Him the centre of all truth, as the Revealer of God, as the Teacher of man, as the Interpreter of nature, as the meaning and end of history, as the Lord of life and death. Morals, politics, and philosophy flow from Him. His lips and His life and death proclaim all truth, human and divine.

As in wisdom so in character, all progress consists in coming closer to Jesus and receiving more and more of His many-sided grace. He is the pattern of all excellence, the living ideal of whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, virtue incarnate, praise embodied. He is the power by which we become gradually and growingly moulded into His likeness. Every part of our nature finds its best stimulus in Jesus for individuals and for societies. Christ and growth into Him is progress, and the only way by which men can be presented perfect, is that they shall be presented 'perfect in Christ,' whereunto every man must labour who would that his labour should not be in vain. That progress must follow the threefold direction in the text. There must first be the progressive manifestation in act and life of the Christ already possessed, 'As ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.' There must also be the completer growth in the soul of the new life already received. As the leaf grows green and broad, so a Christlike character must grow not altogether by effort. And there must be a continual being builded up in Him by constant additions to the fabric of graces set on that foundation.

### **III. The Means, Or How It Is Accomplished.**

The first words of our text tell us that 'Ye have received Christ Jesus as Lord,' and all depends on keeping the channels of communication open so that the reception may be continuous and progressive. We must live near and ever nearer to the Lord, and seek that our communion with Him may be strengthened. On the other hand, it is not only by the spontaneous development of the implanted life, but by conscious and continuous efforts which sometimes involve vigorous repression of the old self that progress is realised. The two metaphors of our text have to be united in our experience. Neither the effortless growth of the tree nor the toilsome work of the builder suffice to represent the whole truth. The two sides of deep and still communion, and of strenuous effort based on that communion, must be found in the experience of every Christian who has received Christ, and is advancing through the imperfect manifestations of earth to the perfect union with, and perfect assimilation to, the Lord.

To all men who are ready to despair of themselves, here is the way to realise the grandest hopes. Nothing is too great to be attained by one who, having received Christ Jesus as Lord, walks in Him, rooted and builded up in Him, 'a holy temple to the Lord.'

## **Colossians 3:1-15 Risen With Christ**

THE resurrection is regarded in Scripture in three aspects—as a fact establishing our Lord's Messiahship, as a prophecy of our rising from the dead, and as a symbol of the Christian life even now. The last is the aspect under which Paul deals with it here.

### **I. Col. 3:1–4 Set Forth The Wonderful But Most Real Union Of The Believer With The Risen Christ.**

We have said that the Lord's resurrection is regarded as a symbol, but that is an incomplete representation of the truth here taught, for Paul believed that the Christian is so joined to Jesus as that he has, not in symbol only, but in truth, risen with him. Mark the emphasis and depth of the expressions setting forth the believer's unity with his Lord: 'Ye were raised together with Christ'; 'Ye died, and your life is hid with Christ.' And these wonderful statements do not go to the bottom of the fact, for Paul goes beyond even them, and does not scruple to say that Christ 'is our life.'

The ground of these great declarations is found in the fact that faith joins us in most real and close union to Jesus Christ, so that in His death we die to sin and the world, and that, even while we live the bodily life of men here, we have in us another life, derived from Jesus. Unless our Christianity has grasped that great truth, it has not risen to the height of New Testament teaching and Christian privilege. We cannot make too much of 'Christ our sacrifice,' but some of us make too little of 'Christ our life,' and thereby fail to understand in all its fulness that other truth on which they fasten so exclusively. Union with Christ in the possession of His life in us, and the consequent rooting of our lives in Him, is a truth which much of the evangelical Christianity of this day needs to see more clearly.

The life is 'hid,' as being united with Jesus, and consequently withdrawn from the world, which neither comprehends nor sustains it. A Christian man is bound to manifest to the utmost of his power what is the motive and aim of his life; but the devout life is, like the divine life, a mystery, unrevealed after all revelation.

The practical conclusion from this blessed union with Jesus is that we are, as Christians, bound to be true in our conduct to the facts of our spiritual life, and to turn away from the world, which is now not our home, and set our mind (not only our 'affections') on things above. Surely the Christ, 'seated on the right hand of God,' will be as a magnet to draw our conscious being upwards to Himself. Surely union with Him in His death will lead us to die to the world which is alien to us, and to live in aspiration, thought, desire, love, and obedience with Him in His calm abode, whence He rules and blesses the souls whom, through their faith, He has made to live the new life of heaven on earth.

### **II. The First Consequence Of The Risen Life Is Negative, The Death Or 'Putting Off' Of The Old Nature, The Life Which Belongs To And Is Ruled By Earth.**

Col. 3:5–9 solemnly lay on the Christian the obligation to put this to death. The ‘therefore’ in Col. 3:5 teaches a great lesson, for it implies that the union with Jesus by faith must precede all self-denial which is true to the spirit of the Gospel. Asceticism of any sort which is not built on the evangelical foundation is thereby condemned, whether it is practised by Buddhist, or monk, or Protestant. First be partaker of the new life, and then put off the old man with his deeds. The withered fronds of last year are pushed off the fern by the new ones as they uncurl. That doctrine of life in Christ is set down as mystical; but it is mysticism of the wholesome sort, which is intensely practical, and comes down to the level of the lowest duties,—for observe what homely virtues are enjoined, and how the things prohibited are no fantastic classifications of vices, but the things which all the world owns to be ugly and wrong.

We cannot here enlarge on Paul’s grim catalogue, but only point out that it is in two parts, the former (Col. 3:5–6) being principally sins of impurity and unregulated passion, to which is added ‘covetousness,’ as the other great vice to which the old nature is exposed. Lust and greed between them are the occasions of most of the sins of men. Stop these fountains, and the streams of evil would shrink to very small trickles. These twin vices attract the lightning of God’s wrath, which ‘cometh’ on their perpetrators, not only in some final future judgment, but here and now. If we were not blind, we should see that thundercloud steadily drawing nearer, and ready to launch its terrors on impure and greedy men. They have set it in motion, and they are right in the path of the avalanche which they have loosened.

The possessors of the risen life are exhorted to put off these things, not only because of the coming wrath, but because continuance in them is inconsistent with their present standing and life (Col. 3:7). They do not now ‘live in them,’ but in the heavenly places with the risen Lord, therefore to walk in them is a contradiction. Our conduct should correspond to our real affinities, and the surface of our lives should be true to their depths and roots.

The second class of vices are those which mar our intercourse with our fellows,—the more passionate anger and wrath and the more cold-blooded and deadly malice, with the many sins of speech.

### **III. In Col. 3:9 Paul Appends The Great Reason For All The Preceding Injunctions;**

Namely, the fact, already enlarged on in Col. 3:1–4, of the Christian’s death and new life by union with Jesus. He need only have stated the one-half of the fact here, but he never can touch one member of the antithesis without catching fire, as it were, and so he goes on to dwell on the new life in Christ, and thus to prepare for the transition to the exhortation to ‘put on’ its characteristic excellences. We note how true to fact, though apparently illogical, his representation is. He bases the command to put off the old man on the fact that Christians have put it off. They are to be what they are, to work out in daily acts what they did in its full ideal completeness when by faith they died to self and were made alive in and to Christ. A strong motive for a continuous Christian life is the recollection of the initial Christian act.

But Paul’s fervent spirit blazes up as he thinks of that new nature which union with Jesus has brought, and he turns aside from his exhortations to gaze on that great sight. He condenses volumes into a sentence. That new man is not only new, but is perpetually being renewed with a renovation penetrating more and more deeply, and extending more and more widely, in the Christian’s nature. It is continually advancing in knowledge, and tending towards perfect knowledge of Christ. It is being fashioned, by a better creation than that of Adam, into a more perfect likeness of God than our first father bore in his sinless freshness. The possession of it gathers all Christians into a unity in which all distinctions of nationality, religious privilege, culture, or social condition, are lost. Paul the Pharisee and the Colossian brethren, Onesimus the slave and Philemon his master, are one in Jesus. The new life is one in all its recipients, and makes them one. The phenomena of the lowest forms of life are almost repeated in the highest, and, just as in a coral reef the myriads of workers are not individuals so much as parts of one living whole, ‘so also is Christ.’ The union is the closest possible without destruction of our individuality.

### **IV. The Final, Positive Consequence Of The Risen Life Follows In Col. 3:12–15.**

Again the Apostle reminds Christians of what they are, as the great motive for putting on the new man. The contemplation of privileges may tend to proud isolation and neglect of duty to our fellows, but the true effect of knowing that we are ‘God’s elect, holy and beloved,’ is to soften our hearts, and to lead us to walk among men as mirrors and embodiments of God’s mercy to us. The only virtues touched on here are the various manifestations of love, such as quick susceptibility to others’ sorrows; readiness to help by act as well as to pity in word; lowliness in estimating one’s own claims, which will lead to bearing evils without resentment or recompensing the like; and patient forgiveness, after the pattern and measure of the forgiveness we have received. All these graces, which would make earth an Eden, and our hearts temples, and our lives calm, are outcomes of love, and must never be divorced from it. Paul uses a striking image to express this thought of their dependence on it. He likens them to the various articles of dress, and bids us hold them all in place with love as a girdle, which keeps together all the various graces that make up ‘perfectness.’

Thus living in love, we shall be free from the tumult of spirit which ever attends a selfish life; for nothing is more certain to stuff a man’s pillow with thorns, and to wreck his tranquillity, than to live in hate and suspicion, or self-absorbed. ‘The peace of Christ’ is

ours in the measure in which we live the risen life and put on the new man, and that peace in our hearts will rule, that is, will sit there as umpire; for it will instinctively draw itself into itself, as it were, like the leaves of a sensitive plant, at the approach of evil, and, if we will give heed to its warnings, and have nothing to do with what disturbs it, we shall be saved from falling into many a sin. That peace gathers all the possessors of the new life into blessed harmony. It is peace with God, with ourselves, and with all our brethren; and the fact that all Christians are, by their common life, members of the one body, lays on them all the obligation to keep the unity in the bond of peace. And for all these great blessings, especially for that union with Jesus which gives us a share in his risen life, thankfulness should ever fill our hearts and make all our days and deeds the sacrifice of praise unto him continually.

## Colossians 3:1-2 Risen With Christ

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.'—Col. 3:1–2.

THERE are three aspects in which the New Testament treats the Resurrection, and these three seem to have successively come into the consciousness of the Church. First, as is natural, it was considered mainly in its bearing on the person and work of our Lord. We may point for illustration to the way in which the Resurrection is treated in the earliest of the apostolic discourses, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Then it came, with further reflection and experience, to be discerned that it had a bearing on the hope of the immortality of man. And last of all, as the Christian life deepened, it came to be discerned that the Resurrection was the pattern of the life of the Christian disciples. It was regarded first as a witness, then as a prophecy, then as a symbol. Three fragments of Scripture express these three phases: for the first, 'Declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead'; for the second, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'; for the third, 'God hath raised us up together with Him, and made us sit together in the heavenly places.' I have considered incidentally the two former aspects in the course of previous sermons; I wish to turn at present to that final third one.

One more observation I must make by way of introduction, and that is, that the way in which the Apostle here glides from 'being risen with Christ' to where 'Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,' confirms what I have pointed out in former discourses, that the Ascension of Jesus Christ is always considered in Scripture as being nothing more than the necessary outcome and issue of the process which began in the Resurrection. They are not separate facts, but they are two ends of one process. And so with these thoughts, that Resurrection develops into Ascension, and that in both Jesus Christ is the pattern for His followers, let us turn to the words before us.

Then we have here,

### I. The Christian Life Considered As A Risen Life.

Now, we are all familiar with the great evangelical point of view from which the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are usually contemplated. To many of us Christ's sacrifice is nothing more or less than the means by which the world is reconciled to God, and Christ's Resurrection nothing more than the seal which was set by Divinity upon that work. 'Crucified for our offences, and raised again for our justification,' as Paul has it—that is the point of view from which most evangelical or orthodox Christian people are contented to regard the solemn fact of the Death and the radiant fact of the Resurrection. You cannot be too emphatic about these truths, but you may be too exclusive in your contemplation of them. You do well when you say that they are the Gospel; you do not well when you say, as some of you do, that they are the whole Gospel. For there is another stream of teaching in the New Testament, of which my text is an example, and a multitude of other passages that I cannot refer to now are equally conspicuous instances, in which that death and that Resurrection are regarded, not so much in respect to the power which they exercise in the reconciliation of the world to God, as in their aspect as the type of all noble and true Christian life. You remember how, when our Lord Himself touched upon the fruitful issues of His death, and said: 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit,' He at once went on to say that a man that loved his life would lose it; and that a man that lost his life would find it, and proceeded to point, even then, and in that connection, to His Cross as our pattern, declaring: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

Made like Him, like Him we rise;

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.'

So, then, a risen life is the type of all noble life, and before there can be a risen life there must have been a death. True, we may say that the spiritual facts in a man's experience, which are represented by these two great symbols of a death and a rising, are but like the segment of a circle which, seen from the one side is convex and from the other is concave. But however loosely we may feel that the metaphors represent the facts, this is plain, that unless a man dies to flesh, to self-will, to the world, he never will live a life that is worth calling life. The condition of all nobleness and all growth upwards is that we shall die daily, and live a life that has sprung victorious from the death of self. All lofty ethics teach that; and Christianity teaches it, with redoubled emphasis, because it



says to us, that the Cross and the Resurrection are not merely imaginative emblems of the noble and the Christian life, but are a great deal more than that. For, brethren, do not forget—if you do, you will be hopelessly at sea as to large tracts of blessed Christian truth—that by faith in Jesus Christ we are brought into such a true deep union with Him as that, in no mere metaphorical or analogous sense, but in most blessed reality, there comes into the believing heart a spark of the life that is Christ's own, so that with Him we do live, and from Him we do live a life cognate with His, who, having risen from the dead, dieth no more, and over whom death hath no dominion. So it is not a metaphor only, but a spiritual truth, when we speak of being risen with Christ, seeing that our faith, in the measure of its genuineness, its depth and its operative power upon our characters, will be the gate through which there shall pass into our deadness the life that truly is, the life that has nought to do with death or sin. And this unity with Jesus, brought about by faith, brings about that the depths of the Christian life are hid with Christ in God, and that we, risen with Him, do even now sit 'at the right hand in heavenly places,' whilst our feet, dusty and sometimes blood-stained, are journeying along the paths of life. This is the great teaching of my text, and of a multitude of other places; and this is the teaching which modern Christianity, in its exclusive, or all but exclusive, contemplation of the Cross as the sacrifice for sin, has far too much forgotten. 'Ye are risen with Christ.'

Let me remind you that this veritable death and rising again, which marks the Christian life, is set forth before us in the initial rite of the Christian Church. Some of you do not agree with me in my view, either of what is the mode or of who are the subjects of that ordinance, but if you know anything about the question, you know that everybody that has a right to give a judgment agrees with us Baptists in saying—although they may not think that it carries anything obligatory upon the practice of to-day—that the primitive Church baptized by immersion. Now, the meaning of baptism is to symbolise these two inseparable moments, dying to sin, to self, to the world, to the old past, and rising again to newness of life. Our sacramentarian friends say that, in my text, it was in baptism that these Colossian Christians rose again with Christ. I, for my part, do not believe that, but that baptism was the speaking sign of what lies at the gate of a true Christian life I have no manner of doubt.

So the first thought of our text is not only taught us in words, but it stands manifest in the ritual of the Church as it was from the beginning. We die, and we rise again, through faith and by union through faith, with Christ' that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God.'

Let me turn, secondly, to

## **II. The Consequent Aims Of The Christian Life.**

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.' 'To seek' implies the direction of the external life toward certain objects. It is not to seek as if perhaps we might not find; it is not even to seek in the sense of searching for, but it is to seek in the sense of aiming at. And now do you not think that if we had burning in our hearts, and conscious to our experiences, the sense of union with Jesus Christ the risen Saviour, that would shape the direction and dictate the aims of our earthly life? As surely as the elevation of the rocket tube determines the flight of the projectile that comes from it, so surely would the inward consciousness, if it were vivid as it ought to be in all Christian people, of that risen life throbbing within the heart, shape all the external conduct. It would give us wings and make us soar. It would make us buoyant, and lift us above the creeping aims that constitute the objects of life for so many men.

But you say, 'Things above: that is an indefinite phrase. What do you mean by it?' I will tell you what the Bible means by it. It means Jesus Christ. All the nebulous splendours of that firmament are gathered together into one blazing sun. It is a vague direction to tell a man to shoot up, into an empty heaven. It is not a vague direction to tell him to seek the 'things above'; for they are all gathered into a person. 'Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,'—that is the meaning of 'things above,' which are to be the continual aim of the man who is conscious of a risen life. And of course they will be, for if we feel, as we ought to feel habitually, though with varying clearness, that we do carry within us a spark, if I might use that phrase, of the very life of Jesus Christ, so surely as fire will spring upwards, so surely as water will rise to the height of its source, so surely will our outward lives be directed towards Him, who is the life of our inward lives, and the goal therefore of our outward actions?

Jesus Christ is the summing up of 'the things that are above'; therefore there stands out clear this one great truth, that the only aim for a Christian soul, consistent with the facts of its Christian life, is to be like Christ, to be with Christ, to please Christ.

Now, how does that aim — 'whether present or absent we labour that we may be well pleasing to Him'—how does that aim bear upon the multitude of inferior and nearer aims which men pursue, and which Christians have to pursue along with other men? How does it bear upon them?—Why thus—as the culminating peak of a mountain-chain bears on the lower hills that for miles and miles buttress it, and hold it up, and aspire towards it, and find their perfection in its calm summit that touches the skies. The more we have in view, as our aim in life, Christ who is 'at the right hand of God,' and assimilation, communion with Him, approbation from Him, the more will all immediate aims be ennobled and delivered from the evils that else cleave to them. They are more when they are second than when they are first. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,' and all your other aims—as students, as thinkers, as scientists, as men of business, as parents, as lovers, or anything else—will be greatened by being subordinated to the conscious

aim of pleasing Him. That aim should persist, like a strain of melody, one long, holden-down, diapason note, through all our lives. Perfume can be diffused into the air, and dislodge no atom of that which it makes fragrant. This supreme aim can be pursued through, and by means of, all nearer ones, and is inconsistent with nothing but sin. 'Seek the things that are above.'

Lastly, we have here,

### III. The Discipline Which Is Needed To Secure The Right Direction Of The Life.

The Apostle does not content himself with pointing out the aims. He adds practical advice as to how these aims can be made dominant in our individual cases, when he says, 'Set your affections on things above.' Now, many of you will know that 'affections' is not the full sense of the word that is here employed, and that the Revised Version gives a more adequate rendering when it says, 'Set your minds on the things that are above.' A man cannot do with his love according to his will. He cannot say: 'Resolved, that I love So-and-So'; and then set himself to do it. But though you cannot act on the emotions directly by the will, you can act directly on your understandings, on your thoughts, and your thoughts will act on your affections. If a man wants to love Jesus Christ he must think about Him. That is plain English. It is vain for a man to try to coerce his wandering affections by any other course than by concentrating his thoughts. Set your minds on the things that are above, and that will consolidate and direct the emotions; and the thoughts and the emotions together will shape the outward efforts. Seeking the things that are above will come, and will only come, when mind and heart and inward life are occupied with Him. There is no other way by which the externals can be made right than by setting a watch on the door of our hearts and minds, and this inward discipline must be put in force before there will be any continuity or sureness in the outward aim. We want, for that direction of the life of which I have been speaking, a clear perception and a concentrated purpose, and we shall not get either of these unless we fall back, by thought and meditation, upon the truths which will provide them both.

Brethren, there is another aspect of the connection between these two parts of our text, which I can only touch. Not only is the setting of our thoughts on the things above, the way by which we can make these the aim of our lives. They are not only aims to be reached at some future stage of our progress, but they are possessions to be enjoyed at the present. We may have a present Christ and a present Heaven. The Christian life is not all aspiration; it is fruition as well. We have to seek, but even whilst we seek, we should be conscious that we possess what we are seeking, even whilst we seek it. Do you know anything of that double experience of having the things that are above, here and now, as well as reaching out towards them?

I am afraid that the Christian life of this generation suffers at a thousand points, because it is more concerned with the ordering of the outward life, and the manifold activities which this busy generation has struck out for itself, than it is with the quiet setting of the mind, in silent sunken depths of contemplation, on the things that are above. Oh, if we would think more about them we should aim more at them; and if we were sure that we possessed them to-day we should be more eager for a larger possession to-morrow.

Dear brethren, we may all have the risen life for ours, if we will knit ourselves, in humble dependence and utter self-surrender, to the Christ who died for us that we might be dead to sin, and rose again that we might rise to righteousness. And if we have Him, in any deep and real sense, as the life of our lives, then we shall be blessed, amid all the divergent and sometimes conflicting nearer aims, which we have to pursue, by seeing clear above them that to which they all may tend, the one aim which corresponds to a man's nature, which meets his condition, which satisfies his needs, which can always be attained if it is followed, and which, when secured, never disappoints. God help us all to say, 'This one thing I do, and all else I count but dung, that I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I may attain unto the Resurrection from the dead!'

## Colossians 4:5 Without And Within

'Them that are without.'—Col. 4:5.

THAT is, of course, an expression for the non-Christian world; the outsiders who are beyond the pale of the Church. There was a very broad line of distinction between it and the surrounding world in the early Christian days, and the handful of Christians in a heathen country felt a great gulf between them and the society in which they lived. That distinction varies in form, and varies somewhat in apparent magnitude according as Christianity has been rooted in a country for a longer or a shorter time, but it remains, and is as real to-day as it ever was, and there is neither wisdom nor kindness in ignoring the distinction.

The phrase of our text may sound harsh, and might be used, as it was by the Jews, from whom it was borrowed, in a very narrow and bitter spirit. Close corporations of any sort are apt to generate, not only a wholesome esprit de corps, but a hostile contempt for outsiders, and Christianity has too often been misrepresented by its professors, who have looked down upon those that are without with supercilious and unchristian self-complacency.

There is nothing of that sort in the words themselves; the very opposite is in them. They sound to me like the expression of a man conscious of the security and comfort and blessedness of the home where he sat, and with his heart yearning for all the houseless wanderers that were abiding the pelting of the pitiless storm out in the darkness there. The spirit and attitude of Christianity to such is one of yearning pity and urgent entreaty to come in and share in the blessings. There is deep pathos in the words, as well as solemn earnestness, and in such a spirit I wish to dwell upon them now for a short time.

## **I. I Begin With The Question:**

### **Who are they that are outside? And what is it of which they are outside?**

As I have already remarked, the phrase was apparently borrowed from Judaism, where it meant, 'outside the Jewish congregation,' and its primary application, as used here, is no doubt to those who are outside the Christian Church. But do not let us suppose that that explanation gets to the bottom of the meaning of the words. It may stand as a partial answer, but only as partial. The evil tendency which attends all externalising of truth in the concrete form of institutions works in full force on the Church, and ever tempts us to substitute outward connection with the institution for real possession of the truth of which the institution is the outgrowth. Therefore I urge upon you very emphatically- and all the more earnestly because of the superstitious overestimate of outward connection with the outward institution of the Church which is eagerly proclaimed all around us to-day—that connection with any organised body of believing men is not 'being within,' and that isolation from all these is not necessarily being without. Many a man who is within the organisation is not 'in the truth,' and, blessed be God, a man may be outside all churches, and yet be one of God's hidden ones, and may dwell safe and instructed in the very innermost shrine of the secret place of the Most High. We hear from priestly lips, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, that there is 'no safety outside the Church.' The saying is true when rightly understood. If by the Church be meant the whole company of those who are trusting to Jesus Christ, of course there is no safety outside, because to trust in Jesus is the one condition of safety, and unless we belong to those who so trust we shall not possess the blessing. So understood, the phrase may pass, and is only objectionable as a round-about and easily misunderstood way of saying what is much better expressed by 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

But that is not the meaning of the phrase in the mouths of those who use it most frequently. To them the Church is a visible corporation, and not only so, but as one of the many organisations into which believers are moulded, it is distinguished from the others by certain offices and rites, bishops, priests, and sacraments, through whom and which certain grace is supposed to flow, no drop of which can reach a community otherwise shaped and officered!

Nor is it only Roman Catholics and Anglicans who are in danger of externalising personal Christianity into a connection with a church. The tendency has its roots deep in human nature, and may be found flourishing quite as rankly in the least sacerdotal of the 'sects' as in the Vatican itself. There is very special need at present for those who understand that Christianity is an immensely deeper thing than connection with any organised body of Christians, to speak out the truth that is in them, and to protest against the vulgar and fleshly notion which is forcing itself into prominence in this day when societies of all sorts are gaining such undue power, and religion, like much else, is being smothered under forms, as was the maiden in the old story, under the weight of her ornaments. External relationships and rites cannot determine spiritual conditions. It does not follow because you have passed through certain forms, and stand in visible connection with any visible community, that you are therefore within the pale and safe. Churches are appointed by Christ. Men who believe and love naturally draw together. The life of Christ is in them. Many spiritual blessings are received through believing association with His people. Illumination and stimulus, succour and sympathy pass from one to another, each in turn experiencing the blessedness of receiving, and the greater blessedness of giving. No wise man who has learned of Christ will undervalue the blessings which come through union with the outward body which is a consequence of union with the unseen Head. But men may be in the Church and out of Christ. Not connection with it, but connection with Him, brings us 'within.' 'Those that are without' may be either in or out of the pale of any church.

We may put the answer to this question in another form, and going deeper than the idea of being within a visible church, we may say, 'those, that are without' are they who are outside the Kingdom of Christ.

The Kingdom of Christ is not a visible external community. The Kingdom of Christ, or of God, or of Heaven, is found wherever human wills obey the Law of Christ, which is the will of God, the decrees of Heaven; as Christ himself put it, in profound words—profound in all their simplicity—when He said, 'Not every man that saith unto Me Lord! Lord! shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father, which is in Heaven.' 'Them that are without' are they whose wills are not bent in loving obedience to the Lord of their spirit.

But we must go deeper than that. In the Church? Yes! In the Kingdom? Yes! But I venture to take another Scripture phrase as being the one satisfactory fundamental answer to the question: What is it that these people are outside of? and I say Christ, Christ. If you will take your New Testament as your guide, you will find that the one question upon which all is suspended is the, Am I, or Am I not, in Jesus Christ? Am I in Him, or Am I outside of Him? And the answer to that question is the answer to this other: Who are

they that are without?

They that are outside are not the 'non-Christian world' who are not church members; they that are inside are not the 'Christian world' who make an outward profession of being in the Kingdom. It is not going down to the foundation to explain the antithesis so; but those that are within are those who have simple trust upon Jesus Christ as the sole and all-sufficient Saviour of their sinful spirits and the life of their life, and having entered into that great love, have plunged themselves, as it were, into the very heart of Jesus; have found in Him righteousness and peace, forgiveness and love, joy and salvation. Are you in Christ because you love Him and trust your soul to Him? If not, if not, you are amongst those 'that are without,' though you be ever so much joined to the visible Church of the living God.

And then there is one more remark that I must drop in here before I go on, namely, that whilst I thankfully admit, and joyfully preach, that the most imperfect, rudimentary faith knits a man to Jesus Christ, even if in this life it may be found covered over with a great deal that is contradictory and inconsistent; on the other hand there are some people who stand like the angel in the Apocalypse, with one foot on the solid land and one upon the restless sea, half in and half out, undecided, halting—that is, 'limping'—between two opinions. Some people of that sort are listening to me now, who have been like that for years. Now I want them to remember this plain piece of common-sense—half in is altogether out! So that is my answer to the first question: Who are they that are outside, and what is it that they are outside of?

I cannot carry round these principles and lay them upon the conscience of each hearer, but I pray you to listen to your own inmost voice speaking, and I am mistaken if many will not hear it saying: 'Thou art the man!' Do not stop your ears to that voice!

## **II. Notice Next The Force Of This Phrase As Implying The Woeful Condition Of Those Without.**

I have said that it is full of pathos. It is the language of a man whose heart yearns as, in the midst of his own security, he thinks of the houseless wanderers in the dark and the storm. He thinks pityingly of what they lose, and of that to which they are exposed.

There are two or three ways in which I may illustrate that condition, but perhaps the most graphic and impressive may be just to recall for a moment three or four of the Scripture metaphors that fit into this representation: 'Those that are without'; and thus to gain some different pictures of what the inside and the outside means in these varying figures.

First, then, there is a figure drawn from the Old Testament which is often applied, and correctly applied, to this subject—Noah's Ark.

Think of that safe abode floating across the waters, whilst all without it was a dreary waste. Without were death and despair, but those that were within sat warm and dry and safe and fed and living. The men that were without, high as they might climb upon rocks and hills, strong as they might be—when the dreary rainstorm wept itself dry, 'they were all dead corpses.' To be in was life, to be out was death.

That is the first metaphor. Take another. That singular institution of the old Mosaic system, in which the man who inadvertently, and therefore without any guilt or crime of his own, had been the cause of death to his brother, had provided for him, half on one side Jordan and half on the other, and dotted over the land, so that it should not be too far to run to one of them, Cities of Refuge. And when the wild vendetta of those days stirred up the next of kin to pursue at his heels, if he could get inside the nearest of these he was secure. They that were within could stand at the city gates and look out upon the plain, and see the pursuer with his hate glaring from his eyes, and almost feel his hot breath on their cheeks, and know that though but a yard from him, his arm durst not touch them. To be inside was to be safe, to be outside was certain bloody death.

That is the second figure; take a third; one which our Lord Himself has given us. Here is the picture—a palace, a table abundantly spread, lights and music, delight and banqueting, gladness and fulness, society and sustenance. The guests sit close and all partake. To be within means food, shelter, warmth, festivity, society; to be without, like Lear on the moor, is to stand the pelting of the storm, weary, stumbling in the dark, starving, solitary, and sad. Within is brightness and good cheer; without is darkness, hunger, death.

That is the third figure. Take a fourth, another of our Master's. Picture a little rude, stone-built enclosure with the rough walls piled high, and a narrow aperture at one point, big enough for one creature to pass through at a time. Within, huddled together, are the innocent sheep; without, the lion and the bear. Above, the vault of night with all its stars, and watching all, the shepherd, with unslumbering eye. In the fold is rest for the weary limbs that have been plodding through valleys of the shadow of death, and dusty ways; peace for the panting hearts that are trembling at every danger, real and imaginary. Inside the fold is tranquillity, repose for the wearied frame, safety, and the companionship of the Shepherd; and without, ravaging foes and a dreary wilderness, and flinty paths and sparse herbage and muddy pools. Inside is life; without is death. That is the fourth figure.

In the Ark no Deluge can touch; in the City of Refuge no avenger can smite; in the banqueting-hall no thirst nor hunger but can be

satisfied; in the fold no enemy can come and no terror can live.

Brethren! are you amongst 'them that are without,' or are you within?

### III. Lastly—Why Is Anybody Outside?

Why? It is no one's fault but their own. It is not God's. He can appeal with clean hands and ask us to judge what more could have been done for His vineyard that He has not done for it. The great parable which represents Him as sending out His summons to the feast in His palace puts the wonderful words in the mouth of the master of the house, after his call by his servants had been refused. 'Go out into the highways and hedges,' beneath which the beggars squat, 'and compel them to come in, that my house may be full.' 'Nature abhors a vacuum,' the old natural philosophers used to say. So does grace; so does God's love. It hates to have His house empty and His provisions unconsumed. And so He has done all that He could do to bring you and me inside. He has sent His Son, He beckons us, He draws us by countless mercies day by day. He appeals to our hearts, and would have us gathered into the fold. And if we are outside it is not because He has neglected to do anything which He can do in order to bring us in.

But why is it that any of us resist such drawing, and make the wretched choice of perishing without, rather than find safety within? The deepest reason is an alienated heart, a rebellious will. But the reason for alienation and rebellion lie among the inscrutable mysteries of our awful being. All sin is irrational. The fact is plain, the temptations are obvious; excuses there are in plenty, but reasons there are none. Still we may touch for a moment on some of the causes which operate with many hearers of God's merciful call to enter in, and keep them without.

Many remain outside because they do not really believe in the danger. No doubt there was a great deal of brilliant sarcasm launched at Noah for his folly in thinking that there was anything coming that needed an ark. It seemed, no doubt, food for much laughter, and altogether impossible to think of gravely, that this flood which he talked about should ever come. So they had their laughter out as they saw him working away at his ludicrous task 'until the day when the flood came and swept them all away,' and the laughter ended in gurgling sobs of despair.

If a manslayer does not believe that the next of kin is on his track, he will not flee to the City of Refuge. If the sheep has no fear of wolves, it will choose to be outside the fold among the succulent herbage. Did you ever see how, in a Welsh slate-quarry, before a blast, a horn is blown, and at its sound all along the face of the quarry the miners run to their shelters, where they stay until the explosion is over? What do you suppose would become of one of them who stood there after the horn had blown, and said: 'Nonsense! There is nothing coming! I will take my chance where I am!' Very likely a bit of slate would end him before he had finished his speech. At any rate, do not you, dear friend, trifle with the warning that says: 'Flee for refuge to Christ and shelter yourself in Him.'

There are some people, too, who stop outside because they do not much care for the entertainment that they will get within. It does not strike them as being very desirable. They have no appetite for it. We preachers seek to draw hearts to Jesus by many motives—and among others by setting forth the blessings which he bestows. But if a man does not care about pardon, does not fear judgment, does not want to be good, has no taste for righteousness, is not attracted by the pure and calm pleasures which Christ offers, the invitation falls fiat upon his ear. Wisdom cries aloud and invites the sons of men to her feast, but the fare she provides is not coarse and high spiced enough, and her table is left unfilled, while the crowd runs to the strong-flavoured meats and foaming drinks which her rival, Folly, offers. Many of us say, like the Israelites 'Our souls loathe this light bread,' this manna, white and sweet, and Heaven-descended, and angels' food though it be, and we hanker after the reeking garlic and leeks and onions of Egypt.

Some of us again, would like well enough to be inside, if that would keep us from dangers which we believe to be real, but we do not like the doorway. You may see in some remote parts of the country strange, half-subterranean structures which are supposed to have been the houses of a vanished race. They have a long, narrow, low passage, through which a man has to creep with his face very near the ground. He has to go low and take to his knees to get through; and at the end the passage opens out into a larger, loftier space, where the dwellers could sit safe from wild weather and wilder beasts and wildest men. That is like the way into the fortress home which we have in Jesus Christ. We must stoop very low to enter there. And some of us do not like that. We do not like to fall on our knees and say, I am a sinful man, O Lord. We do not like to bow ourselves in penitence. And the passage is narrow as well as low. It is broad enough for you, but not for what some of you would fain carry in on your back. The pack which you bear, of earthly vanities and loves, and sinful habits, will be brushed off your shoulders in that narrow entrance, like the hay off a cart in a country lane bordered by high hedges. And some of us do not like that. So, because the way is narrow, and we have to stoop, our pride kicks at the idea of having to confess ourselves sinners, and of having to owe all our hope and salvation to God's undeserved mercy, therefore we stay outside. And because the way is narrow, and we have to put off some of our treasures, our earthward-looking desires shrink from laying these aside, and therefore we stop outside. There was room in the boat for the last man who stood on the deck, but he could not make up his mind to leave a bag of gold. There was no room for that. Therefore he

would not leap, and went down with the ship.

The door is open. The Master calls. The feast is spread. Dangers threaten. The flood comes. The avenger of blood makes haste. 'Why standest thou without?' Enter in, before the door is shut. And if you ask, How shall I pass within?—the answer is plain: 'They could not enter in because of unbelief. We which have believed do enter into rest.'

## Let Your Speech Always Be with Grace Colossians 4:6

- Daniel E. Parks Pastor, Sovereign Grace Baptist Church 74 Estate Cane Carlton Frederiksted, Virgin Islands, US,

Our speech is important! Like our conduct, our speech manifests the state of our heart, distinguishes good and evil men from each other, and either justifies or condemns us, for we will be judged by God for every word we speak (see Matthew 12:34-37; cp. Psalm 19:14). It therefore is with good reason that saints are exhorted to "Let your speech always be with grace ...."

The adverb **always** means "at all times"—whether in public or in private, whether in the congregation or in the world, whether with a saint or with a sinner. This does not mean that grace must always be the topic of our speech, and that we are not to converse about everyday topics such as the weather, current events, work-related issues, familial activities, and so forth. Rather, to speak always with grace means that, whatever the topic, our speech is to be characterized by grace, and never be contrary to grace, nor be graceless or ungracious or disgraceful.

Let us here consider what is included in this exhortation "Let your speech always be with grace ...."

**I. Speak of God's unmerited favor to you**—for "unmerited favor" is one of the meanings of the Greek word translated grace (charis). Do not be like those who say "I want God to give to me what I deserve." If God gave to us what we deserve, we would immediately be cast into hell and its everlasting death. This is true because "all have sinned" (Rom 3:23), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). But if we obey the exhortation "Let your speech always be with grace" we will say "I do not want God to give to me what I deserve—death and damnation! Rather, I want God to give to me what I do not deserve—life and salvation!

In speaking of God's unmerited favor to you, speak of His saving grace in all its aspects.

For example, speak of:

- God's electing grace, by which He from eternity chose you to be holy and blameless before Him in love (Eph 1:4)
- God's predestining grace, by which He from eternity foreordained the means by which you would be saved (2 Thess 2:13), and foreordained you to be His adopted child (Eph 1:5), and foreordained you to be conformed to Jesus Christ and to be called and justified and glorified (Rom 8:28-30)
- God's glorious grace, by which He from eternity highly favored you to be accepted in Jesus Christ, in whom you have redemption and forgiveness and every other blessing of salvation (Eph 1:6-7, 11; et.al.)
- God's sovereign grace, by which He will without fail do as He graciously purposed from eternity to do

**II. Speak gracefully**—for "graceful" is another meaning of the Greek word translated grace (charis).

Graceful means "full of grace" in the sense of being altogether lovely. This graceful speech applies even in our ordinary conversation, when the subject may be something other than God's saving grace to us. Paul the apostle deals with this subject in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt word [that which is rotten or worthless] proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." In our ordinary and everyday speech, our mouth should be God's fountain of grace, not the devil's open sewer. Our speech should impart edifying grace, not spew corrupting pollution.

Holy Scriptures contain other exhortations in this regard, including:

"... putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor' ..." (Eph 4:25, quoting Zechariah 8:16). Lying characterizes the graceless and disgraceful, not graced ones.

"... put off all these: ... blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Col 3:8). Blasphemy and profanity and vulgarity are for the blasphemous and profane and vulgar, not for graced ones.

"Neither filthiness nor foolish talking nor coarse jesting are fitting for saints, but rather giving of thanks" (Eph 5:4 adapted). Filthy and foolish talk belongs to filthy and foolish people, not to graced ones.

Speak "sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Titus 2:8). While this exhortation is addressed primarily to Christ's ministers, it applies also to everyone else who is graced by God with salvation.

"You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exo 20:7). This includes the use of minced oaths violating God's name, such as egad, golly, gosh, lordy, lawzy, cheese and rice, gee whiz, Judas Priest, dadgum, dagnammit, goldern, drat, omigosh and omigod,

.... We who truly love God's name should be graceful in speaking it.

**III. Speak like Christ our Exemplar**—who caused people to marvel at "the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4:16-22). They marveled at not only the content of His words, but also at the character of them. His words were gracious in the sense of being kind, warm, merciful, and compassionate. He did not issue threats and imprecations (except to pharisaical hypocrites, as in Matthew ch.23). Rather, He spoke of grace and with grace gracefully and graciously. O that we might imitate Him! For Jesus Christ perfectly manifested what it is to

"Let your speech always be with grace."