

# Ephesians 2 Maclaren

## THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SOULS

Ephesians 2:4, 5

by Alexander Maclaren

**‘God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.’ — Ephesians 2:4, 5.**

SCRIPTURE paints man as he is, in darker tints, and man as he may become, in brighter ones, than are elsewhere found. The range of this portrait painter’s palette is from pitchiest black to most dazzling white, as of snow smitten by sunlight. Nowhere else are there such sad, stern words about the actualities of human nature; nowhere else such glowing and wonderful ones about its possibilities. This Physician knows that He can cure the worst cases, if they will take His medicine, and is under no temptation to minimise the severity of the symptoms or the fatality of the disease. We have got both sides in my text; man’s actual condition, ‘dead in trespasses’; man’s possible condition, and the actual condition of thousands of men — made to live again in Jesus Christ, and with Him raised from the dead, and with Him gone up on high, and with Him sitting at God’s right hand. That is what you and I may be if we will; if we will not, then we must be the other.

So there are three things here to look at for a few moments — the dead souls; the pitying love that looks down upon them; and the resurrection of the dead.

**I. First, here is a picture, a dogmatic statement if you like, about the actual condition of human nature apart from Jesus Christ — ‘Dead in trespasses.’**

The Apostle looks upon the world — many-coloured, full of activity, full of intellectual stir, full of human emotions, affections, joys, sorrows, fluctuations — as if it were one great cemetery, and on every gravestone there were written the same inscription. They all died of the same disease — ‘dead through sin,’ as the original more properly means.

Now, I dare say many who are listening to me are saying in their hearts, ‘Oh! Exaggeration! The old gloomy, narrow view of human nature cropping up again.’ Well, I am not at all unwilling to acknowledge that truths like this have very often been preached both with a tone and in a manner that repels, and which is rightly chargeable with exaggeration and undue gloom and narrowness. But let me remind you that it is not the

Evangelical preacher nor the Apostle only who have to bear the condemnation of exaggeration, if this representation of my text be not true to facts, but it is Jesus Christ too; for He says, ‘Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.’ And I think that be He divine or not divine, His words about the religious condition of men go so surely to the mark that a man must be tolerably impregnable in his self-conceit who charges Him with narrowness and exaggeration. At all events, I am content to say after Him, and I pray that you and I, when we accept Him as our Teacher, may take not only His gracious, but His stern, words, assured that a deep graciousness lies in these, too, if we rightly understand them.

Let me remind you that the phrase of my text is by no means confined to Christian teachers, but that, in common speech, we hear from all high thinkers about the lower type of humanity being dead to the loftier thoughts in which they live and move and have their being. It has passed into a commonplace of language to speak of men being ‘dead to honour,’ ‘dead to shame,’ ‘dead’ to this, that, and the other good and noble and gracious thing. And the same metaphor, if you like, lies here in my text — that men who have given their wills and inmost natures over to the dominion of self — and that is the definition of sin — that such men are, ipso facto, by reason of that very surrender of themselves to their worst selves, dead on what I may call the top side of their nature, and that all that is there is atrophied and dwindling away.

Unconsciousness is one characteristic of death. And oh! as I look round I know that there are tens, and perhaps hundreds, of men and women who are all but utterly unconscious of a whole universe in which are the only realities, and to which it becomes them to have access. You live, in the physical sense, and move and have your being in God, and yet your inmost life would not be altered one hair’s-breadth if there were no God at all. You pass the most resplendent instances and illustrations of His presence, His work, and you see nothing. You are blind on that side of your natures; or, as my text says, dead to the whole spiritual realm. Just as if there were a brick wall run against some man’s windows so that he could see nothing out of them; so you, by your persistent adherence to the paltry present, the material, the visible, the selfish, have reared up a wall against the windows of your souls that look heavenwards; and of God, and all the lofty starry realities that cluster round Him, you are as unconscious as the corpse upon its bier is of the sunshine that plays upon its pallid features, or of the dew that falls on its stiffened limbs. Dead, because of sin — is that

exaggeration? Is it exaggeration which charges all but absolute unconsciousness of spiritual realities upon worldly men like some of you?

And, then, take another illustration. Another of the signatures of death is inactivity. And oh! what faculties in some of my friends listening to me now are shrivelled and all but extinct! They are dormant, at any rate, to use another word, for the death of my text is not so absolute a death but that a resurrection is possible, and so dormant comes to express pretty nearly the same thing. Faculties of service, of enthusiasm, of life for God, of noble obedience to Him — what have you done with them? Left them there until they have stiffened like an unused lock, or rusted like the hinges of an unopened door; and you are as little active in all the noblest activities of spirit, which are activities in submission to and dependence upon Him, as if you were laid in your coffin with your idle hands crossed for evermore upon an unheaving breast.

There is another illustration that I may suggest for a moment. Decay is another characteristic and signature of death. And your best self, in some of you, is rotting to corruption by sin.

Ay! Dear brethren, when we think of these tragedies of suicide that are going on in thousands of men round about us to-day, it seems to me as if the metaphor and the reality were reversed; and instead of saying that my text is a violent metaphor, transferring the facts of material death and corruption to the spiritual realm, I am almost disposed to say it is the other way about, and the real death is the death of the spirit; and the outer dissolution and unconsciousness and inactivity of the material body is only a kind of parable to preach to men what are the awful invisible facts ever associated with the fact of transgression.

There are three lives possible for each of us; two of them involuntary, the third requiring our consent and effort, but all of them sustained by the same cause. The first of them is that which we call life, the activity and the consciousness of the bodily frame; and that continues as long as the power of God keeps the body in life. When He withdraws His hand there comes what the senses call death. Then there is the natural life of thinking, loving, willing, enjoying, sorrowing, and the like, and that continues as long as He who is the life and light of men breathes into them the breath of that life. And these two are lived or died largely without the man's own consent or choice.

But there is a third life, when all that lower is lifted to God, and thinking and willing and loving and enjoying and aspiring and trusting and obeying, and all these natural faculties find their home and their consecration and their immortality in Him. That life is only lived by our own will and it is the true life, and the others are, as I said, but parables, and envelopes, and vehicles, as it were, in which this life is carried, that is more precious than they. In the physical realm, separate the body from God, and it dies. In the natural conscious life, separate the soul, as we call it, from God, and it dies. And in the higher region, separate the spirit, which is the man grasping God, from God, and he dies; and that is the real death. Both the others are nothing in comparison with it.

It may co-exist with a large amount of intellectual and other forms of activity, as we see all round about us, and that makes it only the more ghastly and the sadder. You are full of energy in regard to all other subjects, but smitten into torpor about the highest; ready to live, to work, to enjoy, to think, to will, in all other directions, and utterly unconscious and unconcerned, or all but utterly unconscious and unconcerned, in regard to God.

Oh! a death which is co-existent with such feverish intensity of life as the most of you are expending all the week at your business and your daily pursuits is among the saddest of all the tragedies that angels are called upon to weep over, and that men are fools enough to enact. Brother! If the representation is a gloomy one, do not you think that it is better to ask the question — Is it a true one? than, Is it a cheerful one? I lay it upon your hearts that he that lives to God and with God is alive to the centre as well as out to the finger tips and circumference of his visible being. He that is dead to God is dead indeed whilst he lives.

## **II. Now, notice, in the second place, the pitying love that looks down on the cemetery.**

'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.' Thus the great truth that is taught us here, first of all, is that that divine love of the Divine Father bends down over His dead children and cherishes them still. Oh! you can do much in separating yourselves from God through selfishness, selfwill, sensuality, or other forms of sin, but there is one thing you cannot do, you cannot prevent His loving you. If I might venture without seeming irreverent, I would point to that pathetic page in the Old Testament history where the king hears of the death, red-handed in treason, of his darling son, and careless of victory and forgetful of everything else, and oblivious that Absalom was a rebel, and only remembering that he was his boy, burst into that monotonous wail that has come down over all the centuries as the deepest expression of undying fatherly love. 'Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Oh! Absalom, my son, my son!' The name and the relationship will well up out of the Father's heart, whatever the child's crime. We are all His Absaloms, and though we are dead in trespasses and in sins, God, who is rich in mercy, bends over us and loves us with His great love.

The Apostle might well expatiate in these two varying forms of speech, both of them intended to express same thing — 'rich in mercy' and 'great in love.' For surely a love which takes account of the sin that cannot repel it, and so shapes itself into mercy,

sparing, and departing from the strict line of retribution and justice, is great. And surely a mercy which refuses to be provoked by seventy times seven transgressions in an hour, not to say a day, is rich. That mercy is wider than all humanity, deeper than all sin, was before all rebellion, and will last for ever. And it is open for every soul of man to receive if he will.

But there is another point to be noticed in reference to this wonderful manifestation of the divine love looking down upon the myriads of men dead in sin, and that is that this love shapes the divine aerie — Mark the language of our text, in which the Apostle attributes a certain line of conduct in the divine dealings with us to the fact of His great love. Because 'He loved us' therefore He did so and so. Now about that I have only two remarks to make, and I will make them very briefly. The one is, here is a demonstration, for some of you people who do not believe in the Evangelical doctrine of an Atonement by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the true scriptural representation of that doctrine is not that which caricaturists have represented it — viz, that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ changed in any manner the divine heart and disposition. It is not as unfriendly critics (who, perhaps, are not to be so much blamed for their unfriendliness as for their superficiality) would have us to believe, that the doctrine of Atonement says that God loves because Christ died. But the Apostle who preached that doctrine and looked upon it as the very heart and centre of his message to the world here puts as the true sequence — Christ died because God loves. Jesus Christ said the same thing, 'God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should be saved.'

And that brings me to the second of the remarks which I wish briefly to make — viz, this, that the Divine Love, great, patient, wonderful, unrepelled by men's sin, as it is, has to adopt a process to reach its end. God by His love does not, because He cannot, raise these dead souls into a life of righteousness without Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ comes to be the channel and the medium through which the love of God may attain its end. God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' is not turned away by man's sin; and God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' quickens men not by a bare will, but by the mission and work of His dear Son.

### **III. And so that is the last thing on which I speak a word — viz, the resurrection of the dead souls.**

They died of sin. That was the disease that killed them. They cannot be quickened unless the disease be conquered. Dear brethren, I have to preach — not to argue, but to preach — and to press upon each soul the individual acceptance of the Death of Jesus Christ as being for each of us, if we will trust Him, the death of our death, and the death of our sin. By His great sacrifice and sufficient oblation He has borne the sins of the world and has taken away their guilt. And in Him the inmost reality of the spiritual death, and its outermost parable of corporeal dissolution, are equally and simultaneously overcome. If you will take Him for your Lord you will rise from the death of guilt, condemnation, selfishness, and sin into a new life of liberty, sonship, consecration, and righteousness, and will never see death.

And, on the other hand, the life of Jesus Christ is available for all of us. If we will put our trust in Him, His life will pass into our deadness; He Himself will vitalize our being, dormant capacities will be quickened and brought into blessed activity, a new direction will be given to the old faculties, desires, aspirations, emotions of our nature. The will will tower into new power because it obeys. The heart will throb with a better life because it has grasped a love that cannot change and will never die. And the thinking power will be brought into living, personal contact with the personal Truth, so that whatsoever darknesses and problems may still be left, at the centre there will be light and satisfaction and peace. You will live if you trust Christ and let Him be your Life.

And if thus, by simple faith in Him, knowing that the power of His atoning death has destroyed the burden of our guilt and condemnation, and knowing the quickening influences of His constraining love as drawing us to love new things and make us new creatures, we receive into our inmost spirits 'the law of the spirit of life' which was in Christ Jesus, and are thereby made 'free from the law of sin and death,' then it is only a question of time, when the vitalising force shall flow into all the cracks and crannies of our being and deliver us wholly from the bondage of corruption in the outer as well as in the inner life; for they who have learned that Christ is the life of their lives upon earth can never cease their appropriation of the fulness of His quickening power until He has 'changed the body of their humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue even all things unto Himself.'

Brethren! He Himself has said, and His words beseech you to remember though you forget all mine, 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' 'Believest thou this?'

## **THE RICHES OF GRACE**

### **Sermon by Alexander Maclaren**

'That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.' — Ephesians 2:7.

ONE very striking characteristic of this epistle is its frequent reference to God's purposes, and what, for want of a Better word, we

must call His motives, in giving us Jesus Christ. The Apostle seems to rise even higher than his ordinary height, while he gazes up to the inaccessible light, and with calm certainty proclaims not only what God has done, but why He has done it. Through all the earlier portions of this letter, the things on earth are contemplated in the light of the things in heaven. The great work of redemption is illuminated by the thought of the will and meaning of God therein; for example, we read in Chapter 1. that He 'hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him,' and immediately after we read that He 'has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will.' Soon after, we hear that 'He hath revealed to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself'; and that our predestination to an inheritance in Christ is 'according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.'

Not only so, but the motive or reason for the divine action in the gift of Christ is brought out in a rich variety of expression as being 'the praise of the glory of His grace' (1-6), or 'that He might gather together in one all things in Christ' (1-10), or that 'we should be to the praise of His glory' (1-12), or that 'unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.'

In like manner our text follows a sublime statement of what has been bestowed upon men in Jesus, with an equally sublime insight into the divine purpose of thereby showing 'the exceeding riches of His grace.' Such heights are not for our unaided traversing; it is neither reverent nor safe to speculate, and still less to dogmatise, concerning the meaning of the divine acts, but here, at all events, we have, as I believe, not a man making unwarranted assertions about God's purposes, but God Himself by a man, letting us see so far into the depths of Deity as to know the very deepest meaning of His very greatest acts, and when God speaks, it is neither reverent nor safe to refuse to listen.

### **I. The purpose of God in Christ is the display of His grace.**

Of course we cannot speak of motives in the divine mind as in ours; they imply a previous state of indecision and an act of choice, from which

comes the slow emerging of a resolve like that of the moon from the sea. A given end being considered by us desirable, we then cast about for means to secure it, which again implies limitation of power. Still we can speak of God's motives, if only we understand, as this epistle puts it so profoundly, that His 'is an eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself,' which never began to be formed, and was not formed by reason of anything external.

With that caution Paul would have us think that God's chiefest purpose in all the wondrous facts which make up the Gospel is the setting forth of Himself, and that the chiefest part of Himself, which He desires that all men should come to know, is the glory of His grace. Of course very many and various reasons for these acts may be alleged, but this is the deepest of them all. It has often been misunderstood and made into a very hard and horrible doctrine, which really means little else than all-mighty selfishness, but it is really a most blessed one; it is the proclamation in tenderest, most heart-melting fashion of the truth that God is Love, and therefore delights in imparting that which is His creatures' life and blessedness; it bids us think that He, too, amidst the blessedness of His infinite Being, knows the joy of communicating which makes so large a part of the blessedness of our finite selves, and that He, too, is capable of being touched and gladdened by the joy of expression. As an artist in his noblest work paints or chisels simply for love of pouring out his soul, so, but in infinitely loftier fashion, the great Artist delights to manifest Himself, and in manifesting to communicate somewhat of Himself. Creation is divine self-revelation, and we might say, with all reverence, that God acts as birds sing, and fountains leap, and stars shine.

But our text leads us still farther into mysteries of glory, when it defines what it is in God that he most desires to set forth. It is the 'exceeding riches of Grace,' in which wonderful expression we note the Apostle's passionate accumulation of epithets which he yet feels to be altogether inadequate to his theme. It would carry us too far to attempt to bring out the whole wealth contained in these words which glide so easily over unthinking lips, but we may lovingly dwell for a few moments upon them. Grace, in Paul's language, means love lavished upon the undeserving and sinful, a love which is not drawn forth by the perception of any excellence in its objects, but wells up and out like a fountain, by reason of the impulse in its subject, and which in itself contains and bestows all good and blessing. There may be, as this very letter shows, other aspects of the divine nature which God is glad that man should know. His power and His wisdom have their noblest illustration in the work of Jesus, and are less conspicuously manifested in all His work; but His grace is shrined in Christ alone, and from Him flows forth into a thirsty world. That love, 'unmerited and free,' holds in solution power, wisdom and all the other physical or metaphysical perfections belonging to God with all their energies. It is the elixir in which they are all contained, the molten splendour into which have been dissolved gold and jewels and all precious things. When we look at Christ, we see the divinest thing in God, and that is His grace. The Christ who shows us and certifies to us the grace of God must surely be more than man. Men look at Him and see it; He shows us that grace because He was full of grace and truth.

But Paul is here not propounding theological dogmas, but pouring out a heart full of personal experience, and so adds yet other words to express what he himself has found in the Divine Grace, and speaks of its riches. He has learned fully to trust its fulness,

and in his own daily life has had the witness of its inexhaustible abundance, which remains the same after all its gifts. It 'operates unspent' That continually self-communicating love pours out in no narrower stream to its last recipient than to its first. All 'eat and are filled,' and after they are satisfied, twelve baskets full of fragments are taken up. These riches are exceeding; they surpass all human conception, all parallel, all human needs; they are properly transcendent.

This, then, is what God would have us know of Himself. So His love is at once the motive of His great message to us in Jesus Christ, and is the whole contents of the message, like some fountain, the force of whose pellucid waters cleanses the earth, and rushes into the sunshine, being at once the reason for the flow and that which flows. God reveals because He loves, and His love is that which He reveals.

## **II. The great manifestation of grace is God's kindness to us in Christ.**

All the revelation of God in Creation and Providence carries the same message, but it is often there hard to decipher, like some half-obliterated inscription in a strange tongue. In Jesus the writing is legible, continuous, and needs no elaborate commentary to make its meaning intelligible. But we may note that what the Apostle finds on here is not so much Christ in Himself, as that which men receive in Christ. As he puts it in another part of this epistle, it is 'through the Church' that 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' are made to 'know the manifold wisdom of God.' It is 'His kindness towards us' by which 'to the ages to come,' is made known the exceeding riches of grace, and that kindness can be best estimated by thinking what we were, namely, dead in trespasses and sins; what we are, namely, quickened together in Christ; raised up with Him, and with Him made to sit in heavenly places, as the immediately preceding clauses express it. All this marvellous transformation of conditions and of self is realised 'in Christ Jesus.'

These three words recur over, and over again in this profound epistle, and may be taken as its very keynote. It would carry us beyond all limits to deal with the various uses and profound meanings of this phrase in this letter, but we may at least point out how intimately and inseparably it is intertwined with the other aspect of our relations to Christ in which He is mainly regarded as dying for us, and may press upon you that these two are not, as they have sometimes been taken to be, antagonistic but complementary. We shall never understand the depths of the one Apostolic conception unless we bring it into closest connection with the other. Christ is for us only if we are in Christ; we are in Christ only because He died for us.

God's kindness is all 'in Christ Jesus'; in Him is the great channel through which His love comes to men, the river of God which is full of water. And that kindness is realised by us when we are 'in Christ.' Separated from Him we do not possess it; joined to Him as we may be by true faith in Him, it is ours, and with it all the blessings which it brings into our else empty and thirsting hearts. Now all this sets in strong light the dignity and work of Christian men; the profundity and clearness of their religious character is the great sign to the world of the love of God. The message of Christ to man lacks one chief evidence of its worth if they who profess to have received it do not, in their lives, show its value. The characters of Christian people are in every age the clearest and most effectual witnesses of the power of the Gospel God's honour is in their hands. The starry heavens are best seen by reflecting telescopes, which, in their field, mirror the brightness above.

## **III. The manifestation of God through men 'in Christ' is for all ages.**

In our text the ages to come open up into a vista of undefined duration, and, just as in another place in this epistle, Paul regards the Church as witnessing to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, so here he regards it as the perennial evidence to all generations of the ever-flowing riches of God's grace. Whatever may have been the Apostle's earlier expectations of the speedy coming of the day of the Lord, here he obviously expects the world to last through a long stretch of undefined time; and for all its changing epochs to have an unchanging light. That standing witness, borne by men in Christ, of the grace which has been so kind to them, is not to be antiquated nor superseded, but is as valid to-day as when these words gushed from the heart of Paul. Eyes which cannot look upon the sun can see it as a golden glory, tinging the clouds which lie cradled around it. And as long as the world lasts, so long will Christian men be God's witnesses to it.

There are then two questions of infinite importance to us-do we show in character and conduct the grace which we have received by reverently submitting ourselves to its transforming energy? We need to be very close to Him for ourselves if we would worthily witness to others of what we have found Him to be. We have but too sadly marred our witness, and have been like dim reflectors round a lamp which have received but little light from it, and have communicated even less than we have received. Do we see the grace that shines so brightly in Jesus Christ? God longs that we should so see; He calls us by all endearments and by loving threats to look to that Incarnation of Himself. And when we lift our eyes to behold, what is it that meets our gaze? Intolerable light? The blaze of the white throne? Power that crushes our puny might? NO! the 'exceeding riches of grace' The voice cries, 'Behold your God!' and what we see is, 'In the midst of the throne a lamb as it had been slain.'

# SALVATION: GRACE: FAITH

## Sermon by Alexander Maclaren

'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' — Ephesians 2:8 (R.V.),

HERE are three of the key-words of the New Testament, 'grace, "saved," faith.' Once these terms were strange and new; now they are old and threadbare. Once they were like lava, glowing and cast up from the central depths; but it is a long while since the eruption, and the blocks have got cold, and the corners have been rubbed off them. I am afraid that some people, when they read such a text, will shrug the shoulder of weariness, and think that they are in for a dreary sermon.

But the more familiar a word is, the more likely are common ideas about it to be hazy. We substitute acquaintance with the sound for penetration into the sense. A frond of sea-weed, as long as it is in the ocean, unfolds its delicate films and glows with its subdued colours. Take it out, and it is hard and brown and ugly, and you have to plunge it into the water again before you see its beauty. So with these well-worn Christian terms; you have to put them back, by meditation and thought, especially as to their bearing on yourself, in order to understand their significance to feel their power. And, although it is very hard, I want to try and do that for a few moments with this grand thought that lies in my text.

### I. Here we have the Christian view of man's deepest need, and God's greatest gift.

'Ye have been saved.' Now, as I have said, saved; and 'salvation,' and 'Saviour,' are all threadbare words. Let us try to grasp the whole throbbing meaning that is in them. Well, to begin with, and in its original and lowest application, this whole set of expressions is applied to physical danger from which it delivers, and physical disease which it heals. So, in the Gospels, for instance, you find 'Thy faith hath made thee whole' — literally, 'saved thee.' And you hear one of the Apostles crying, in an excess of terror and collapse of faith, 'Save! Master! we perish!' The two notions that are conveyed in our familiar expression 'safe and sound,' both lie in the word — deliverance from danger, and healing of disease.

Then, when you lift it up into the loftier region, into which Christianity buoyed it up, the same double meaning attaches to it, The Christian salvation is, on its negative side, a deliverance from something impending peril-and a healing of something infecting us — the sickness of sin.

It is a deliverance; what from? Take, in the briefest possible language, three sayings of Scripture to answer that question — what am I to be saved from? 'His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins' He 'delivers' — or saves — 'us from the wrath to come.' He 'saves a soul from death.' Sin, wrath death, death spiritual as well as physical, these are the dangers which lie in wait; and the enemies which have laid their grip upon us. And from these, as the shepherd drags the kid from the claws of the lion or the bear's hug, the salvation of the Gospel wrenches and rescues men.

The same general conceptions emerge, if we notice, on the other side — what are the things which the New Testament sets forth as the opposites of its salvation? Take, again, a brief reference to Scripture words: 'The Son of Man came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' So the antithesis is between judgment or condemnation on the one hand, and salvation on the other. That suggests thoughts substantially identical with the preceding but still more solemn, as bringing in the prospect a tribunal and a judge. The Gospel then reveals the Mighty Power that lifts itself between us and judgment, the Mighty Power that intervenes to prevent absolute destruction, the Power which saves from sin, from wrath, from death.

Along with them we may take the other thought, that salvation, as the New Testament understands it, is not only the rescue and deliverance of a man from evils conceived to lie round about him, and to threaten his being from without, but that it is his healing from evils which have so wrought themselves into his very being, and infected his whole nature, as that the emblem for them is a sickness unto death for the healing from which this mighty Physician came. These are the negative sides of this great Christian thought.

But the New Testament salvation is more than a shelter, more than an escape. It not only trammels up evil possibilities, and prevents them from falling upon men's heads, but it introduces all good. It not only strips off the poisoned robe, but it invests with royal garb. It is not only negatively the withdrawal from the power, and the setting above the reach, of all evil, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, but it is the endowment with every good, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, which man is capable of receiving, or God has wealth to bestow. And this positive significance of the Christian salvation, which includes not only pardon, and favour, and purity, and blessedness here in germ, and sure and certain hope of an overwhelming glory hereafter — this is all suggested to us by the fact that in Scripture, more than once, to 'have everlasting life,' and to 'enter into the Kingdom of God,' are employed as equivalent and alternative expressions for being reaved with the salvation of God.

And that leads me to another point — my text, as those of you who have used the Revised Version will observe, is there slightly

modified in translation; and reads 'Ye have been saved,' — a past act, done once, and with abiding present consequences, which are realised progressively in the Christian life, and reach forward into infinitude. So the Scripture sometimes speaks of salvation as put, 'He saved us by His mercy': sometimes of it as present and progressive, 'The Lord added to the Church daily those that were (in process of) being saved': sometimes of it as future, 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' In that future all that is involved in the word will be evolved from it in blessed experience onwards through eternity.

I have said that we should try to make an effort to fathom the depth of meaning in this and other familiar commonplace terms of Scripture. But no effort prior to experience will ever fathom it. There was in the papers some time ago an account of some extraordinary deep-sea soundings that have been made away down in the South Pacific, 29,400 feet and no bottom, and the wire broke. The highest peak of the Himalayas might be put into that abyss, and there would be hundreds of feet between it and the surface. He 'casts all our sins,' mountainous as they are, behind His back 'into the depths of the sea'; and no plummet that man can drop will ever reach its profound abyss. 'Thy judgments are a great deep,' and deeper than the judgments is the depth of Thy salvation.

And now, brethren, before I go further, notice the — I was going to say theory, but that is a cold word — the facts of man's condition and need that underlie this great Christian term of salvation viz. we are all in deadly peril; we are all sick of a fatal disease. 'Ah!' you say, 'that is Paul.' Yes! it is Paul. But it is not Paul only; it is Paul's Master, and, I hope, your Master; for He not only spoke loving, gentle Words of and about men, and not only was grace poured into His lips, but there is another side to His utterances. No one ever spoke sadder, sterner words about the real condition of men than Jesus Christ did. Lost sheep, lost coins, prodigal sons, builders of houses on the sand that are destined to be blown down and flooded away, men in danger of an undying worm and unquenchable fire — these are parts of Christ's representations of the condition of humanity, and these are the conceptions that underlie this great thought of salvation as being man's deepest need.

It goes far deeper down than any of the superficial constructions of what humanity requires, which are found among non-Christian, social and economical, and intellectual and political reformers. It includes all that is true in the estimate of any of these people and it supplies all that they aim at. But it goes far beyond them. And as they stand pottering round the patient, and administering — what shall I say? 'pills for the earthquake,' as we once heard — it comes and brushes them aside and says, 'Physicians of no value! here is the thing that is wanted — salvation that comes from God.'

Brother! it is what you need. Do not be led away by the notion that wealth, or culture, or anything less than Christ's gift to men will meet your necessities. If once we catch a glimpse of what we really are, there will be no words wanted to enforce the priceless value of the salvation that the Gospel offers. It is sure to be an uninteresting word and thing to a man who does not feel himself to be a sinner. It is sure to be of perennial worth to a man who does. Life-belts lie unnoticed on the cabin-shelf above the berth as long as the sun is bright, and the sea calm, and everything goes well; but when the ship gets on the rocks the passengers fight to get them. If you know yourself, you will know that salvation is what you need.

## **II. Here we have the Christian unfolding of the source of salvation.**

'By grace ye have been saved.' There is another threadbare word. It is employed in the New Testament with a very considerable width of signification, which we do not need to attend to here. But, in regard of the present context, let me just point out that the main idea conveyed by the word is that of favour, or lovingkindness, or goodwill, especially when directed to inferiors, and most eminently when given to those who do not deserve it, but deserve its opposite. 'Grace' is love that stoops and that requites, not according to desert, but bestows upon those who deserve nothing of the kind; so when the Apostle declares that the source of salvation is 'grace,' he declares two things. One is that the fountain of all our deliverance from sin, and of our healing of our sicknesses, lies in the deep heart of God, from which it wells up undrawn, unmotivated, uncaused by anything except His own infinite loving-kindness. People have often presented the New Testament teaching about salvation as if it implied that God's love was brought to man because Jesus Christ died, and turned the divine affections. That is not New Testament teaching. Christ's death is not the cause of God's love, but God's love is the cause of Christ's death. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.'

When we hear in the Old Testament, 'I am that I am,' we may apply it to this great subject. For that declaration of the very inmost essence of the divine nature is not merely the declaration, in half metaphysical terms, of a self-substituting, self-determining Being, high above limitation and time and change, but it is a declaration that when He loves He loves freely and unmodified save by the constraint of His own Being. Just as the light, because it is light and must radiate, falls upon dunghills and diamonds, upon black rocks and white snow, upon ice-peaks and fertile fields, so the great fountain of the Divine Grace pours out upon men by reason only of its own continual tendency to communicate its own fulness and blessedness.

There follows from that the other thought, on which the Apostle mainly dwells in our context, that the salvation which we need, and may have, is not won by desert, but is given as a gift. Mark the last words of my text — 'that not of yourselves it is the gift of God.' They have often been misunderstood, as if they referred to the faith which is mentioned just before. But that is a plain

misconception of the Apostle's meaning, and is contradicted by the whole context. It is not faith that is the gift of God, but it is salvation by grace. That is plain if you will read on to the next verse. 'By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast' What is it that is 'not of works'? Faith? certainly not. Nobody would ever have thought it worth while to say, 'faith is not of works,' because nobody would have said that it was. The two clauses necessarily refer to the same thing, and if the latter of them must refer to salvation by grace, so must the former. Thus, the Apostle's meaning is that we get salvation, not because we work for it but because God gives it as a free gift, for which we have nothing to render, and which we can never deserve.

Now, I am sure that there are some of you who are saying to yourselves, 'This is that old, threadbare, commonplace preaching again!' Well! shame on us preachers if we have made a living Gospel into a dead theology. And shame no less on you hearers if by you the words that should be good news that would make the tongue of the dumb sing, and the lame man leap as a hart, have been petrified and fossilised into a mere dogma.

I know far better than you do how absolutely inadequate all my words are, but I want to bring it to you and to lay it not on your heads only but on your hearts, as the good news that we all need, that we have not to buy, that we have not to work to get salvation, but that having got it we have to work thereafter. 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' A whole series of diverse, long, protracted, painful toils? Christ swept away the question by striking out the 's' at the end of the word, and answered, 'This is the work' (not 'works') 'of God,' the one thing which will open out into all heroism and practical obedience, 'that ye believe on Him to whom He hath sent.'

### **III. That leads me to the last point — viz, the Christian requirement of the condition of salvation.**

Note the precision of the Apostle's prepositions: 'Ye have been saved by grace'; there is the source — 'He have been saved by grace, through faith' — there is the medium, the instrument, or, if I may so say, the channel; or, to put it into other words, the condition by which the salvation which has its source in the deep heart of God pours its waters into my empty heart. 'Through faith,' another threadbare word, which, withal, has been dreadfully darkened by many comments, and has unfortunately been so represented as that people fancy it is some kind of special attitude of mind and heart, which is only brought to bear in reference to Christ's Gospel. It is a thousand pities, one sometimes thinks, that the word was not translated 'trust' instead of 'faith' and then we should have understood that it was not a theological virtue at all, but just the common thing that we all know so well, which is the cement of human society and the blessedness of human affection, and which only needs to be lifted, as a plant that had boon running along the ground, and had its tendrils bruised and its fruit marred might be lifted, and twined round the pillar of God's throne, in order to grow up and bear fruit that shall be found after many days unto praise, and honour, and glory.

Trust; that is the condition. The salvation rises from the heart of God. You cannot touch the stream at its source, but you can tap it away down in its flow. What do you want machinery and pumps for? Put a yard of wooden pipe into the river, and your house will have all the water it needs.

So, dear brethren, here is the condition — it is a condition only, for there is no virtue in the act of trust, but only in that with which we are brought into living union when we do trust. When salvation comes into my heart by faith it is not my faith but God's grace that puts salvation there.

Faith is only the condition, ay! but it is the indispensable condition. How many ways are there of getting possession of a gift? One only, I should suppose, and that is, to put out a hand and take it. If salvation is by grace it must be 'through faith.' If you will not accept you cannot have. That is the plain meaning of what theologians call justification by faith; that pardon is given on condition of taking it. If you do not take it you cannot have it. And so this is the upshot of the whole — trust, and you have.

Oh, dear friends! open your eyes to see your dangers. Let your conscience tell you of your sickness. Do not try to deliver, or to heal yourselves. Self-reliance and self-help are very good things, but they leave their limitations, and they have no place here. 'Every man his own Redeemer' will not work. You can no more extricate yourself from the toils of sin than a man can release himself from the folds of a python. You can no more climb to heaven by your own effort than you can build a railway to the moon. You must sue in forma pauperis, and be content to accept as a boon an unmerited place in your Father's heart, an undeserved seat at His bountiful table, an unearned share in His wealth, from the hands of your Elder Brother, in whom is all His grace, and who gives salvation to every sinner if he will trust Him. 'By grace have ye been saved through faith.'

## **GOD'S WORKMANSHIP AND OUR WORKS**

### **Sermon by Alexander Maclaren**

'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'



THE metal is molten as it runs out of the blast furnace, but it soon cools and hardens. Paul's teaching about salvation by grace and by faith came in a hot stream from his heart, but to this generation his words are apt to sound coldly, and hardly theological. But they only need to be reflected upon in connection with our own experience, to become vivid and vital again. The belief that a man may work towards salvation is a universal heresy. And the Apostle, in the context, summons all his force to destroy that error, and to substitute the great truth that we have to begin with an act of God's, and only after that can think about our acts. To work up towards salvation is, in the strict sense of the words, preposterous; it is inverting the order of things. It is beginning at the wrong end. It is saying X Y Z before you have learnt to say A B C. We are to work downwards from salvation because we have it, not that we may get it. And whatever 'good works' may mean, they are the consequences, not the causes, of 'salvation,' whatever that may mean. But they are consequences, and they are the very purpose of it. So says Paul in the archaic language of my text — which only wants a little steadfast looking at to be turned into up-to-date gospel — 'We are His workmanship, created unto good works'; and the fact that we are is one great reason for the assertion which he brings it in to buttress, that we are saved by grace, not by works. Now, I wish, in the simplest possible way, to deal with these great words, and take them as they lie before us.

### **I. We have, first, then, this as the root of everything, the divine creation.**

Now, you will find that in this profound letter of the Apostle there are two ideas cropping up over and over again, both of them representing the facts of the Christian life and of the transition from the unchristian to the Christian; and the one is Resurrection and the other is Creation. They have this in common, that they suggest the idea that the great gift which Christianity brings to men — no, do not let me use the abstract word 'Christianity' — the great gift which Christ brings to men — is a new life. The low popular notion that salvation means mainly and primarily immunity from the ultimate, most lasting future consequences of transgression, a change of place or of condition, infects us all, and is far too dominant in our popular notions of Christianity and of salvation. And it is because people have such an unworthy, narrow, selfish idea of what 'salvation' is that they fall into the bog of misconception as to how it is to be attained. The ordinary man's way of looking at the whole matter is summed up in a sentence which I heard not long since about a recently deceased friend of the speaker's, and the like of which you have no doubt often heard and perhaps said, 'He is sure to be saved because he has lived so straight.' And at the foundation of that confident epitaph lay a tragical, profound misapprehension of what salvation was.

For it is something done in you; it is not something that you get, but it is something that you become. The teaching of this letter, and of the whole New Testament, is that the profoundest and most precious of all the gifts which come to us in Jesus Christ, and which in their totality are summed up in the one word that has so little power over us, because we understand it so little, and know it so well — 'salvation' — is a change in a man's nature so deep, radical, vital, as that it may fairly be paralleled with a resurrection from the dead.

Now, I venture to believe that it is something more than a strong rhetorical figure when that change is described as being the creation of a new man within us. The resurrection symbol for the same fact may be treated as but a symbol. You cannot treat the teaching of a new life in Christ as being a mere figure. It is something a great deal more than that, and when once a man's eye is opened to look for it in the New Testament it is wonderful how it flashes out from every page and underlies the whole teaching. The Gospel of John, for example, is but one long symphony which has for its dominant theme 'I am come that they might have life.' And that great teaching — which has been so vulgarised, narrowed, and mishandled by sacerdotal pretensions and sacramentarian superstitions — that great teaching of Regeneration, or the new birth, rests upon this as its very basis, that what takes place when a man turns to Jesus Christ, and is saved by Him, is that there is communicated to him not in symbol but in spiritual fact and spiritual facts are far more true than external ones which are called real, a spark of Christ's own life, something of 'that spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus,' and by which, and by which alone, being transfused into us, we become 'free from the law of sin and death.' I beseech you, brethren, see that, in your perspective of Christian truth, the thought of a new life imparted to us has as prominent and as dominant a place as it obviously has in the teaching of the New Testament. It is not so dominant in the current notions of Christianity that prevail amongst average people, but it is so in all men who let themselves be guided by the plain teaching of Christ Himself and of all His servants. Salvation? Yes. And the very essence of the salvation is the breathing into me of a divine life, so that I become partaker of 'the divine nature.'

Now, there is another step to be taken, and that is that this new life is realised in Christ Jesus. Now, this letter of the Apostle is distinguished even amongst his letters by the extraordinary frequency and emphasis with which he uses that expression 'in Christ Jesus.' If you will take up the epistle, and run your eye over it at your leisure, I think you will be surprised to find how, in all connections, and linked with every sort of blessing and good as its condition, there recurs that phrase. It is 'in Christ' that we obtain the inheritance; it is 'in Christ' that we receive 'redemption, even the forgiveness of sins'; it is in Him that we are 'builded together for a habitation of God'; it is in Him that all fulness of divine gifts, and all blessedness of spiritual capacities, is communicated to us; and unless, in our perspective of the Christian life, that expression has the same prominence as it has in this latter, we have yet to learn the sweetest sweetness, and have yet to receive the most mighty power, of the Gospel that we profess. 'In Christ' — a union which

leaves the individuality of the Saviour and of the saint unimpaired, because without such individuality sweet love were slain, and there were no communion possible, but which is so close, so real, so vital, as that only the separating wall of personality and individual consciousness comes in between — that is the New Testament teaching of the relation of the Christian to Christ. Is it your experience, dear brother? Do not be frightened by talking about mysticism. If a Christianity has no mysticism it has no life. There is a wholesome mysticism and there is a morbid one, and the wholesome one is the very nerve of the Gospel as it is presented by Jesus Himself: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me, and I in you.' If our nineteenth century busy Christianity could only get hold of that truth as firmly as it grasps the representative and sacrificial character of Christ's work, I believe it would come like a breath of spring over 'the winter of our discontent,' and would change profoundly and blessedly the whole contexture of modern Christianity.

And now there is another step to take, and that is that this union with Christ, which results in the communication of a new life, or, as my text puts it, a new creation, depends upon our faith. We are not passive in the matter. There is the condition on which the entrance of the life into our spirits is made possible. You must open the door, you must fling wide the casement, and the blessed warm morning air of the can of righteousness, with healing in its beams, will rush in, scatter the darkness and raise the temperature. 'Faith,' by which we simply mean the act of the mind in accepting and of the will and heart in casting one's self upon Christ as the Saviour — that act is the condition of this new life. And so each Christian is 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.'

And now, says Paul — and here some of us will hesitate to follow him — that new creation has to go before what you call 'good works.' Now, do not let us exaggerate. There has seldom been a more disastrous and untrue thing said than what one of the Fathers dared to say, that the virtues of godless men were 'splendid vices.' That is not so, and that is not the New Testament teaching. Good is good, whoever does it. But, then, no man will say that actions, however they may meet the human conception of excellence, however bright, pure, lofty in motive and in aim they may be, reach their highest possible radiance and are as good as they ought to be, if they are done without any reference to God and His love. Dear brethren, we surely do not need to have the alphabet of morality repeated to us, that the worth of an action depends upon its motive, that no motive is correspondent to our capacities and our relation to God and our consequent responsibilities, except the motive of loving obedience to Him. Unless that be present, the brightest of human acts must be convicted of having dark shadows in it, and all the darker because of the brightness that may stream from it. And so I venture to assert that since the noblest systems of morality, apart from religion, will all coincide in saying that to be is more than to do, and that the worth of an action depends upon its motive, we are brought straight up to the 'narrow, bigoted' teaching of the New Testament, that unless a man is swayed by the love of God in what he does, you cannot, in the most searching analysis, say that his deed is as good as it ought to be, and as it might be. To be good is the first thing, to do good is the second. Make the tree good and its fruit good. And since, as we have made ourselves we are evil, there must come a re-creation before we can do the good deeds which our relation to God requires at our hands.

## **II. I ask you to look at the purpose of this new creation brought out in our text.**

'Created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' That is what life is given to you for. That is why you are saved, says Paul. Instead of working upwards from works to salvation, take your stand at the received salvation, and understand what it is for, and work downwards from it.

Now, do not let us take that phrase, 'good works,' which I have already said came hot from the Apostle's heart, and is now cold as a bar of iron, in the limited sense which it has come to bear in modern religious phraseology. It means something a great deal more than that. It covers the whole ground of what the Apostle, in another of his letters, speaks of when he says, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue' — to use for a moment the world's word, which has such power to conjure in Greek ethics — 'or if there be any praise' — to use for a moment the world's low motive, which has such power to sway men — 'think of these things,' and these things do. That is the width of the conception of 'good works'; everything that is 'lovely and of good report,' That is what you receive the new life for.

Contrast that with other notions of the purpose of revelation and redemption. Contrast it with what I have already referred to, and so need not enlarge upon now, the miserably inadequate and low notions of the essentials of salvation which one hears perpetually, and which many of us cherish. It is no mere immunity from a future hell. It is no mere entrance into a vague heaven. It is not escaping the penalty of the inexorable law, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' that is meant by 'salvation; any more than it is putting away the rod, which the child would be all the better for having administered to him, that is meant by 'forgiveness.' But just as forgiveness, in its essence, means not suspension nor abolition of penalty, but the uninterrupted flow of the Father's love, so salvation in its essence means, not the deliverance from any external evil or the alteration of anything in the external position, but the revolution and the re-creation of the man's nature. And the purpose of it is that the saved man may live in conformity with the will of God, and that on his character there may be embroidered all the fair things which God desires to see on His child's vesture.

Contrast it with the notion that an orthodox Belief, the purpose of revelation. I remember hearing once of a man that 'he was a very shady character, but sound on the Atonement.' What is the use of being 'sound on the Atonement' if the Atonement does not make

you live the Christ life?

And what is the good of all your orthodoxy unless the orthodoxy of creed issues in orthopraxy of conduct? There are far too many of us who half-consciously do still hold by the notion that if a man behaves rightly then that makes him a Christian. My text shatters to pieces any such conception. You are saved that you may be good, and do good continually; and unless you are so doing you may be steeped to the eyebrows in the correctest of creeds, and it will only drown you.

Contrast this conception of the purpose of Christianity with the far too common notion that we are saved, mainly in order that we may indulge in devout emotions, and in the outgoing of affection and confidence to Jesus Christ. Emotional Christianity is necessary, but Christianity, which is mainly or exclusively emotional, lives next door to hypocrisy, and there is a door of communication between them. For there is nothing more certain and more often illustrated in experience than that there is a strange underground connection between a Christianity which is mainly fervid and a very shady life. One sees it over and over again. And the cure of that is to apprehend the great truth of my text, that we are saved, not in order that we may know aright, nor in order that we may feel aright, but in order that we may be good and do 'good works.' In the order of things, right thought touches the springs of right feeling, and right feeling sets going the wheels of right action. Do not let the steam all go roaring out of the waste-pipe in however sacred and blessed emotions. See that it is guided so as to drive the spindles and the shuttles and make the web.

### **III. And now, lastly, and only a word — here we have the field provided for the exercise of the 'good works.'**

'Created unto good works which God has before prepared' — before the re-creation — 'that we should walk in them.' That is to say, the true way to look at the life is to regard it as the exercising-ground which God has prepared for the development of the life that, through Christ, is implanted in us. He cuts the channels that the stream may flow. That is the way to look at tasks, at difficulties. Difficulty is the parent of power, and God arranges our circumstances in order that, by wrestling with obstacles, we may gain the 'thews that throw the world,' and in order that in sorrows and in joys, in the rough places and the smooth, we may find occasions for the exercise of the goodness which is lodged potentially in us, when He creates us in Christ Jesus. So be sure that the path and the power will always correspond. God does not lead us on roads that are too steep for our weakness, and too long for our strength. What He bids us do He fits us for; what He fits us for He thereby bids us do.

And so, dear brother, take heed that you are fulfilling the purpose for which you receive this new life. And let us all remember the order in which being and doing come, We must be good first, and then, and only then, shall we do good. We must have Christ for us first, our sacrifice and our means of receiving that new life, and then, Christ in us, the soul of our souls, the Life of our lives, the source of all our goodness.

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

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

## **THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE** **Sermon by Alexander Maclaren**

'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone.' — Ephesians 2:20 (R.V.).

THE Roman Empire had in Paul's time gathered into a great unity the Asiatics of Ephesus, the Greeks of Corinth, the Jews of Palestine, and men of many another race, but grand and imposing as that great unity was, it was to Paul a poor thing compared with the oneness of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Asiatics of Ephesus, Greeks of Corinth, Jews of Palestine and members of many another race could say, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' The Roman Eagle swept over wide regions in her flight, but the Dove of Peace, sent forth from Christ's hand, travelled further than she. As Paul says in the context, the Ephesians had been strangers, 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' wandering like the remnants of some 'broken clans,' but now they are gathered in. That narrow community of the Jewish nation has expanded its bounds and become the mother-country of believing souls, the true 'island of saints.' It was not Rome which really made all peoples one, but it was the weakest and most despised of her subject races. 'Of Zion it shall be said,' 'Lo! this and that man was born in her.'

To emphasise the thought of the great unity of the Church, the Apostle uses here his often-repeated metaphor of a temple, of which the Ephesian Christians are the stones, apostles and prophets the builders, and Christ Himself the chief corner-stone. Of course the representation of the foundation, as being laid by apostles and prophets, refers to them as proclaiming the Gospel. The real laying of the foundation is the work of the divine power and love which gave us Christ, and it is the Divine Voice which proclaims, 'Behold I lay in Zion a foundation!' But that divine work has to be made known among men, and it is by the making of it known that the building

risers course by course. There is no contradiction between the two statements, 'I have laid the foundation' and Paul's 'As a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation.'

A question may here rise as to the meaning of 'prophets.' Unquestionably the expression in other places of the Epistle does mean New Testament prophets, but seeing that here Jesus is designated as the foundation stone which, standing beneath two walls, has a face into each, and binds them strongly together, it is more natural to see in the prophets the representatives of the great teachers of the old dispensation as the apostles were of the new. The remarkable order in which these two classes are named, the apostles being first, and the prophets who were first in time being last in order of mention, confirms this explanation, for the two cooperating classes are named in the order in which they lie in the foundation. Digging down you come to the more recent first, to the earlier second, and deep and massive, beneath all, to the corner-stone on whom all rests, in whom all are united together. Following the Apostle's order we may note the process of building; beneath that, the foundation on which the building rests; and beneath it, the corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.

### **I. The process of building.**

In the previous clauses the Apostle has represented the condition of the Ephesian Christians before their Christianity as being that of strangers and foreigners, lacking the rights of citizenship anywhere, a mob rather than in any sense a society. They had been like a confused heap of stones flung fortuitously together; they had become fellow-citizens with the saints. The stones had been piled up into an orderly building. He is not ignoring the facts of national, political, or civic relationships which existed independent of the new unity realised in a common faith. These relationships could not be ignored by one who had had Paul's experience of their formidable character as antagonists of him and of his message, but they seemed to him, in contrast with the still deeper and far more perfect union, which was being brought about in Christ, of men of all nationalities and belonging to mutually hostile races, to be little better than the fortuitous union of a pile of stones huddled together on the roadside. Measured against the architecture of the Church, as Paul saw it in his lofty idealism, the aggregations of men in the world do not deserve the name of buildings. His point of view is the exact opposite of that which is common around us, and which, alas I finds but too much support in the present aspects of the so-called churches of this day.

It is to be observed that in our text these stones are, in accordance with the propriety of the metaphor, regarded as being built, that is, as in some sense the subjects of a force brought to bear upon them, which results in their being laid together in orderly fashion and according to a plan, but it is not to be forgotten that, according to the teaching, not of this epistle alone, but of all Paul's letters, the living stones are active in the work of building, as well as beings subject to an influence. In another place of the New Testament we read the exhortation to 'build up yourselves on your most holy faith,' and the means of discharging that duty are set forth in the words which follow it; as being 'Praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Throughout the Pauline letters we have frequent references to edifying, a phrase which has been so vulgarised by much handling that its great meaning has been all but lost, but which still, rightly understood, presents the Christian life as one continuous effort after developing Christian character. Taking into view the whole of the apostolic references to this continuous process of building, we cannot but recognise that it all begins with the act of faith which brings men into immediate contact and vital union with Jesus Christ, and which is, if anything that a man does is, the act of his very inmost self passing out of its own isolation and resting itself on Jesus. It is by the vital and individual act of faith that any soul escapes from the dreary isolation of being a stranger and a foreigner, wandering, homeless and solitary, and finds through Jesus fellowship, an elder Brother, a Father, and a home populous with many brethren. But whilst faith is the condition of beginning the Christian life, which is the only real life, that life has to be continued and developed towards perfection by continuous effort. 'Tis a life-long toll till the lump be leavened.'

One of the passages already referred to varies the metaphor of building, in so far as it seems to represent 'your most holy faith' as the foundation, and may be an instance of the doubtful New Testament usage of 'faith,' as meaning the believed Gospel, rather than the personal act of believing. But however that may be, the context of the words clearly suggests the practical duties by which the Christian life is preserved and strengthened. They who build up themselves do so, mainly, by-keeping themselves in the love of God with watchful oversight and continual preparedness for struggle against all foes who would drag them from that safe fortress, and subsidiarily, by like continuity in prayer, and in fixing their meek hope on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. If Christian character is ever to be made more Christian, it must be by a firmer grasp and a more vivid realisation of Christ and His truth. The more we feel ourselves to be lapped in the love of God, the more shall we be builded up on our most holy faith. There is no mystery about the means of Christian progress. That which, at the beginning, made a man a Christian shapes his whole future course; the measure of our faith is the measure of our advance.

But the Apostle, in the immediately following words, goes on to pass beyond the bounds of his metaphor, and with complete indifference to the charge of mixing figures, speaks of the building as growing. That thought leads us into a higher region than that of effort. The process by which a great forest tree thickens its boles, expands the sweep of its branches and lifts them nearer the

heavens, is very different from that by which a building rises slowly and toilsomely and with manifest incompleteness all the time, until the flag flies on the roof-tree. And if we had not this nobler thought of a possible advance by the increasing circulation within us of a mysterious life, there would be little gospel in a word which only enjoined effort as the condition of moral progress, and there would be little to choose between Paul and Plato. He goes on immediately to bring out more fully what he means by the growth of the building, when he says that if Christians are in Christ, they are 'built up for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' Union with Christ, and a consequent life in the Spirit, are sure to result in the growth of the individual soul and of the collective community. That divine Spirit dwells in and works through every believing soul, and while it is possible to grieve and to quench It, to resist and even to neutralise Its workings, these are the true sources of all our growth in grace and knowledge. The process of building may be and will be slow. Sometimes lurking enemies will pull down in a night what we have laboured at for many days. Often our hands will be slack and our hearts will droop. We shall often be tempted to think that our progress is so slow that it is doubtful if we have ever been on the foundation at all or have been building at all. But 'the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' and the task is not ours alone but His in us. We have to recognise that effort is inseparable from building, but we have also to remember that growth depends on the free circulation of life, and that if we are, and abide in, Jesus, we cannot but be built 'for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' We may be sure that whatever may be the gaps and shortcomings in the structures that we rear here, none will be able to say of us at the last, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

## **II. The foundation on which the building rests.**

In the Greek, as in our version, there is no definite article before 'prophets,' and its absence indicates that both sets of persons here mentioned come under the common vinculum of the one definite article preceding the first named. So that apostles and prophets belong to one class. It may be a question whether the foundation is theirs in the sense that they constitute it, an explanation in favour of which can be quoted the vision in the Apocalypse of the new Jerusalem, in the twelve foundations of which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, or whether, as is more probable, the foundation is conceived of as laid by them. In like manner the Apostle speaks to the Corinthians of having 'as a wise master-builder laid the foundation,' and to the Romans of making it his aim to preach especially where Christ was not already named, that he might 'not build upon another man's foundation.' Following these indications, it seems best to understand the preaching of the Gospel as being laying of the foundation.

Further, the question may be raised whether the prophets here mentioned belong to the Old Testament or to the New. The latter alternative has been preferred on the ground that the apostles are named first, but, as we have already noticed, the order here begins at the top and goes downwards, what was last in order of time being first in order of mention. We need only recall Peter's bold words that 'all the prophets, as many as have spoken, have told of the days' of Christ, or Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch in which he passionately insisted on the Jewish crime of condemning Christ as being the fulfilment of the voices of the prophets, and of the Resurrection of Jesus as being God's fulfilment of the promise made unto the fathers to understand how here, as it were, beneath the foundation laid by the present preaching of the apostles, Paul rejoices to discern the ancient stones firmly laid by long dead hands.

The Apostle's strongest conviction was that he himself had become more and not less of a Jew by becoming a Christian, and that the Gospel which he preached was nothing more than the perfecting of that Gospel before the Gospel, which had come from the lips of the prophets. We know a great deal more than he did as to the ways in which the progressive divine revelation was presented to Israel through the ages, and some of us are tempted to think that we know more than we do, but the true bearing of modern criticism, as applied to the Old Testament, is to confirm, even whilst it may to some extent modify, the conviction common to all the New Testament writers, and formulated by the last of the New Testament prophets, that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Whatever new light may shine on the questions of the origin and composition of the books of the Old Testament, it will never obscure the radiance of the majestic figure of the Messiah which shines from the prophetic page. The inner relation between the foundation of the apostles and that of the prophets is best set forth in the solemn colloquy on the Mount of Transfiguration between Moses and Elias and Jesus. They 'were with Him' as witnessing to Him to whom law and ritual and prophecy had pointed, and they 'spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem' as being the vital centre of all His work which the lambs slain according to ritual had foreshadowed, and the prophetic figure of the Servant of the Lord 'wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities' had more distinctly foretold.

## **III. The corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.**

Of course the corner-stone here is the foundation-stone and not 'the head-stone of the corner.' Jesus Christ is both. He is the first and the last; the Alpha and Omega. In accordance with the whole context, in which the prevailing idea is that which always fired Paul's imagination, viz. that of reconciling Jew and Gentile in one new man, it is best to suppose a reference here to the union of Jew and Gentile. The stone laid beneath the two walls which diverge at right angles from each other binds both together and gives strength and cohesion to the whole. In the previous context the same idea is set forth that Christ 'preached peace to them that were afar off (Gentiles) and to them that were nigh (Jews).' By His death He broke down another wall, the middle wall of partition between them, and did so by abolishing 'the law of commandments contained in ordinances.' The old distinction between Jew and Gentile,

which was accentuated by the Jew's rigid observance of ordinances and which often led to bitter hatred on both sides, was swept away in that strange new thing, a community of believers drawn together in Jesus Christ. The former antagonistic 'twain' had become one in a third order of man, the Christian man. The Jew Christian and the Gentile Christian became brethren because they had received one new life, and they who had common feelings of faith and love to the same Saviour, a common character drawn from Him, and a common destiny open to them by their common relation to Jesus, could never cherish the old emotions of racial hate.

When we, in this day, try to picture to ourselves that strange new thing, the love which bound the early Christians together and buried as beneath a rushing flood the formidable walls of separation between them, we may well penitently ask ourselves how it comes that Jesus seems to have so much less power to triumph over the divisive forces that part us from those who should be our hearts' brothers. In our modern life there are no such gulfs of separation from one another as were filled up unconsciously in the experience of the first believers, but the narrower chinks seem to remain in their ugliness between those who profess a common faith in one Lord, and who are all ready to assert that they are built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, and that Jesus Christ is from them the chief corner-stone.

If in reality He is so to us, and He is so if we have been builded upon Him through our faith, the metaphor of corner-stone and building will fail to express the reality of our relation to Him, for our corner-stone has in it an infinite vitality which rises up through all the courses of the living stones, and moulds each 'into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection' So it shall be for each individual, though here the appropriation of the perfect gift is imperfect. So it shall be reference to the history of the world. Christ is its centre and foundation-stone, and as His coming makes the date from which the nations reckon, and all before it was in the deepest sense preparatory to His incarnation, all which is after it is in the deepest sense the appropriating of Him and the developing of His work. The multitudes which went before and that followed cried, saying, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'