

Galatians Maclaren 2

GALATIANS EXPOSITION: PART 2 of 2 ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt.D.

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'WALK IN THE SPIRIT'

'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.' — Galatians 5:16.

WE are not to suppose that the Apostle here uses the familiar contrast of spirit and flesh to express simply different elements of human nature. Without entering here on questions for which a sermon is scarcely a suitable vehicle of discussion, it may be sufficient for our present purpose to say that, as usually, when employing this antithesis the Apostle means by Spirit the divine, the Spirit of God, which he triumphed in proclaiming to be the gift of every believing soul. The other member of the contrast, 'flesh,' is similarly not to be taken as equivalent to body, but rather as meaning the whole human nature considered as apart from God and kindred with earth and earthly things. The flesh, in its narrower sense, is no doubt a predominant part of this whole, but there is much in it besides the material organisation. The ethics of Christianity suffered much harm and were degraded into a false and slavish asceticism for long centuries, by monastic misunderstandings of what Paul meant by the flesh, but he himself was too clear-sighted and too high-toned to give his adhesion to the superficial notion that the body is the seat and source of sin. We need look no further than the catalogue of the 'works of the flesh' which immediately follows our text, for, although it begins with gross sins of a purely fleshly kind, it passes on to such as hatred, emulations, wrath, envyings and suchlike. Many of these works of the flesh are such as an angel with an evil heart could do, whether he had a body or not. It seems therefore right to say that the one member of the contrast is the divine Spirit of holiness, and the other is man as he is, without the life-giving influence of the Spirit of God. In Paul's thought the idea of the flesh always included the idea of sin, and the desires of the flesh were to him not merely rebellious, sensuous passion, but the sinful desires of godless human nature, however refined, and as some would say, 'spiritual' these might be. We do not need to inquire more minutely as to the meaning of the Apostle's terms, but may safely take them as, on the one hand, referring to the divine Spirit which imparts life and holiness, and on the other hand, to human nature severed from God, and distracted by evil desires because wrenched away from Him.

The text is Paul's Battle-cry, which he opposed to the Judaizing disturbers in Galatia. They said 'Do this and that; labour at a round of observances; live by rule.' Paul said, 'No! That is of no use; you will make nothing of such an attempt nor will ever conquer evil so. Live by the spirit and you will not need a hard outward law, nor will you be in bondage to the works of the flesh.' That feud in the Galatian churches was the earliest battle which Christianity had to fight between two eternal tendencies of thought—the conception of religion as consisting in outward obedience to a law, and consequently as made up of a series of painful efforts to keep it, and the conception of religion as being first the implanting of a new, divine life, and needing only to be nourished and cared for in order to

drive forth evils from the heart, and so to show itself living. The difference goes very far and very deep, and these two views of what religion is have each their adherents to-day. The Apostle throws the whole weight of his authority into the one scale, and emphatically declares this as the one secret of victory, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

I. What it is to walk in the Spirit.

The thought which is but touched upon here is set forth more largely, and if we may so say, profoundly, in the Epistle to the Romans (chap. viii.). There, to walk after the flesh, is substantially the same as to be carnally minded, and that 'mind of the flesh' is regarded as being by fatal necessity not 'subject to the law of God,' and consequently as in itself, with regard to future consequences, to be death. The fleshly mind which is thus in rebellion against the law of God is sure to issue in 'desires of the flesh,' just as when the pressure is taken off, some ebullient liquid will bubble. They that are after the flesh of course will 'mind the things of the flesh.' The vehement desires which we cherish when we are separated from God and which we call sins, are graver as a symptom than even they are in themselves, for they show which way the wind blows, and are tell-tales that betray the true direction of our nature, If we were not after the flesh we should not mind the things of the flesh. The one expression points to the deep-seated nature, the other to the superficial actions to which it gives rise.

And the same duality belongs to the life of those who are 'after the Spirit.' 'To walk,' of course, means to carry on the practical life, and the Spirit is here thought of not so much perhaps as the path on which we are to travel, but rather as the norm and direction by which we are to travel on life's common way. Just as the desires of the flesh were certain to be done by those who in their deepest selves belonged to the flesh, so every soul which has received the unspeakable gift of newness of life through the Spirit of God will have the impulses to mind and do the things of the Spirit. If we live in the Spirit we shall also — and let us also — walk in the Spirit.

But let us make no mistakes, or think that our text in its great commandment and radiant hope has any word of cheer to those who have not received into their hearts, in however feeble a manner and minute a measure, the Spirit of the Son. The first question for us all is, have we received the Holy Ghost? — and the answer to that question is the answer to the other, 'have we accepted Christ? It is through Him and through faith in Him that that supreme gift of a living spirit is bestowed. And only when our spirits bear witness with that Spirit that we are the children of God, have we a right to look upon the text as pointing our duty and stimulating our hope. If our practical life is to be directed by the Spirit of God, He must enter into our spirits, and we shall not be in Him but in the measure that He is in us. Nor will our spirits be life because of righteousness unless He dwells in us and casts forth the works of the flesh. There will be no practical direction of our lives by the Spirit of God unless we make conscience of cultivating the reception of His life-giving and cleansing influences, and unless we have inward communion with our inward guide, intimate and frank, prolonged and submissive. If we are for ever allowing the light of our inward godliness to be blown about by gusts, or to show in our inmost hearts but a faint and flickering spark, how can we expect that it will shine safe direction on our outward path?

II. Such walking in the Spirit conquers the flesh.

We all know it as a familiar experience that the surest way to conquer any strong desire or emotion is to bring some other into operation. To concentrate attention on any overmastering thought or purpose, even if our object is to destroy it, is but too apt to strengthen it. And so to fix our minds on our own desires of the flesh, even though we may be honestly wishing to suppress them, is a sure way to invest them with new force; therefore the wise counsels of sages and moralists are, for the most part, destined to lead those who listen to them astray. Many a man has, in good faith, set himself to conquer his own evil lusts and has found that the net result of his struggles has been to make the lusts more conspicuous and correspondingly more powerful.

The Apostle knows a better way, which he has proved to his own experience, and now, with full confidence and triumph, presses upon his hearers. He would have them give up the monotonous and hopeless fight against the flesh and bring another ally into the field. His chief exhortation is a positive, not a negative one. It is vain to try to tie up men with restrictions and prohibitions, which when their desires are stirred will be burst like Samson's bonds. But if once the positive exhortation here is obeyed, then it will surely make short work of the desires and passions which otherwise men, for the most part, do not wish to get rid of, and never do throw off by any other method.

We have pointed out that in our text to walk in the Spirit means to regulate the practical life by the Spirit of God, and that the 'desires of the flesh' mean the desires of the whole human nature apart from God. But even if we take the contrasted terms in their lower and commonly adopted sense, the text is true and useful.

A cultivated mind habituated to lofty ideas, and quick to feel the nobility of 'spiritual' pursuits and possessions, will have no taste for the gross delights of sense, and will recoil with disgust from the indulgences in which more animal natures wallow. But while this is true, it by no means exhausts the great principle laid down here. We must take the contrasted terms in their fullest meaning if we would arrive at it. The spiritual life derived from Jesus Christ and lodged in the human spirit has to be guarded, cherished and made dominant, and then it will drive out the old. If the Spirit which is life because of righteousness is allowed free course in a human spirit, it will send forth its powers into the body which is 'dead because of sin,' will regulate its desires, and if needful will suppress

them. And it is wiser and more blessed to rely on this overflowing influence than to attempt the hopeless task of coercing these desires by our own efforts.

If we walk in the Spirit, we shall thereby acquire new tastes and desires of a higher kind which will destroy the lower. They to whom manna is sweet as angel's food find that they have lost their relish for the strong-smelling and rank-flavoured Egyptian leeks and garlic. A guest at a king's table will not care to enter a smoky hovel and will not be hungry for the food to be found there. If we are still dependent on the desires of the flesh we are still but children, and if we are walking in the Spirit we have outgrown our childish toys. The enjoyment of the gifts which the Spirit gives deadens temptation and robs many things that were very precious of their lustre.

We may also illustrate the great principle of our text by considering that when we have found our supreme object there is no inducement to wander further in the search after delights. Desires are confessions of discontent, and though the absolute satisfaction of all our nature is not granted to us here, there is so much of blessedness given and so many of our most clamant desires fully met in the gift of life in Christ, that we may well be free from the prickings of desires which sting men into earnest seeking after often unreal good. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,' and surely if we have these we may well leave the world its troubled delights and felicities. Christ's joy remains in us and our joy is full. The world desires because it does not possess. When a deeper well is sunk, a shallower one is pretty sure to give out. If we walk in the Spirit we go down to the deepest water. holding stratum, and all the surface wells will run dry.

Further, we may note, that this walking in the Spirit brings into our lives the mightiest motives of holy living and so puts a bridle on the necks and a bit in the mouths of our untamed desires. Holding fellowship with the divine Indweller and giving the reins into His strong hand, we receive from Him the spirit of adoption and learn that if we are children then are we heirs. Is there any motive that will so surely still the desires of the flesh and of the mind as the blessed thought that God is ours and we His? Surely their feet should never stumble or stray, who are aware of the Spirit of the Son bearing witness with their spirit that they are the children of God. Surely the measure in which we realise this will be the measure in which the desires of the flesh will be whipped back to their kennels, and cease to disturb us with their barks.

The whole question here as between Paul and his opponents just comes to this; if a field is covered with filth, whether is it better to set to work on it with wheelbarrows and shovels, or to turn a river on it which will bear away all the foulness? The true way to change the fauna and flora of a country is to change the level, and as the height increases they change themselves. If we desire to have the noxious creatures expelled from ourselves, we must not so much labour at their expulsion as see to the elevation of our own personal being and then we shall succeed. That is what Paul says, 'Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

III. Such a life is not freed from the necessity of struggle.

The highest condition, of course, would be that we had only to grow, not to fight. It will come some day that all evil shall drop away, and that to walk in the Spirit will need no effort, but that time has not come yet. So in addition to all that we have been saying in this sermon, we must further say that Paul's exhortation has always to be coupled with the other to fight the good fight. The highest word for our earthly lives is not 'victory' but 'contest.' We shall not walk in the Spirit without many a struggle to keep ourselves within that charmed atmosphere. The promise of our text is not that we shall not feel, but that we shall not fulfil, the desires of the flesh.

Now this is very commonplace and threadbare teaching, but it is none the less important, and is especially needful to be strongly emphasised when we have been speaking as we have just been doing. It is a historical fact, illustrated over and over again since Paul wrote, and not without illustration to-day, that there is constant danger of lax morality infecting Christian life under pretence of lofty spirituality. So it must ever be insisted upon that the test of a true walking in the Spirit is that we are thereby fitted to fight against the desires of the flesh. When we have the life of the Spirit within us, it will show itself as Paul has said in another place by the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us, and by our 'mortifying the deeds of the body.' The gift of the Spirit does not take us out of the ranks of the combatants, but teaches us to fight, and arms us with its own sword for the conflict. There will be abundant opportunities of courage in attacking the sin that doth so easily beset us, and in resisting temptations which come to us by reason of our own imperfect sanctification. But there is all the difference between fighting at our own hand and fighting with the help of God's Spirit, and there is all the difference between fighting with the help of an unseen ally in heaven and fighting with a Spirit within us who helpeth our infirmities and Himself makes us able to contend, and sure, if we keep true to Him, to be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.

Such a conflict is a gift and a joy. It is hard but it is blessed, because it is an expression of our truest love; it comes from our deepest will; it is full of hope and of assured victory. How different is the painful, often defeated and monotonous attempt to suppress our nature by main force, and to tread a mill-horse round! The joyous freedom and buoyant hope taught us in the gospel way of salvation have been cramped and confined and all their glories veiled as by a mass of cobwebs spun beneath a golden roof, but our text sweeps away the foul obstruction. Let us learn the one condition of victorious conflict, the one means of subduing our natural humanity and its distracting desires, and let nothing rob us of the conviction that this is God's way of making men like angels. 'Walk

in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.'

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23. Meekness, temperance' — Galatians 5:22-23.

'THE fruit of the Spirit,' says Paul, not the fruits, as we might more naturally have expected, and as the phrase is most often quoted; all this rich variety of graces, of conduct and character, is thought of as one. The individual members are not isolated graces, but all connected, springing from one root and constituting an organic whole. There is further to be noted that the Apostle designates the results of the Spirit as fruit, in strong and intentional contrast with the results of the flesh, the grim catalogue of which precedes the radiant list in our text. The works of the flesh have no such unity, and are not worthy of being called fruit. They are not what a man ought to bring forth, and when the great Husbandman comes, He finds no fruit there, however full of activity the life has been. We have then here an ideal of the noblest Christian character, and a distinct and profound teaching as to how to attain it. I venture to take the whole of this list for my text, because the very beauty of each element in it depends on its being but part of a whole, and because there are important lessons to be gathered from the grouping.

I. The threefold elements of character here.

It is perhaps not too artificial to point out that we have here three triads of which the first describes the life of the Spirit in its deepest secret; the second, the same life in its manifestations to men; and the third, that life in relation to the difficulties of the world, and of ourselves.

The first of these three triads includes love, joy, and peace, and it is not putting too great a strain on the words to point out that the source of all three lies in the Christian relation to God. They regard nothing but God and our relation to Him; they would be all the same if there were no other men in the world, or if there were no world. We cannot call them duties or virtues; they are simply the results of communion with God — the certain manifestations of the better life of the Spirit. Love, of course, heads the list, as the foundation and moving principle of all the rest. It is the instinctive act of the higher life and is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. It is the life sap which rises through the tree and gives form to all the clusters. The remaining two members of this triad are plainly consequences of the first. Joy is not so much an act or a grace of character as an emotion poured into men's lives, because in their hearts abides love to God. Jesus Christ pledged Himself to impart His Joy to remain in us, with the issue that our joy should be full. There is only one source of permanent joy which takes possession of and fills all the corners and crannies of the heart, and that is a love towards God equally abiding and all-pervasive. We have all known joys so perturbed, fragmentary and fleeting, that it is hard to distinguish them from sorrows, but there is no need that joys should be like green fruit, hard and savourless and ready to drop from the tree. If God is 'the gladness of our joy,' and all our delights, come from communion with Him, our joy will never pass and will fill the whole round of our spirits as the sea laves every shore.

Peace will be built upon love and joy, if our hearts are ever turning to God and ever blessed with the inter-communion of love between Him and us. What can be strong enough to disturb the tranquillity that fills the soul independent of all externals? However long and close may be the siege, the well in the castle courtyard will be full. True peace comes not from the absence of trouble but from the presence of God, and will be deep and passing all understanding in the exact measure in which we live in, and partake of, the love of God.

The second triad is long-suffering, kindness, goodness. All these three obviously refer to the spiritual life in its manifestations to men. The first of them — long-suffering — describes the attitude of patient endurance towards inflictors of injury, or enemies, if we come forth from the blessed fellowship with God, where love, joy, and peace reign unbroken, and are met with a cold gust of indifference or with an icy wind of hate. The reality of our happy communion and the depth of our love will be tested by the patience of our long-suffering. Love suffereth long, is not easily provoked, is not soon angry. He has little reason to suppose that the love of God is shed abroad in his heart, or that the Spirit of God is bringing forth fruit in him, who has not got beyond the stage of repaying hate with hate, and scorn with scorn. Any fool can answer a fool according to his folly, but it takes a wise and a good man to overcome evil with good, and to love them that hate; and yet how certainly the fires of mutual antagonism would go out if there were only one to pile on the fuel! It takes two to make a quarrel, and no man living under the influence of the Spirit of God can be one of such a pair.

The second and third members of this triad — kindness, goodness, slide very naturally into one another. They do not only require the negative virtue of not retaliating, but express the Christian attitude towards all of meeting them, whatever their attitude, with good. It is possible that kindness here expresses the inward disposition and goodness, the habitual actions in which that disposition

shows itself. If that be the distinction between them, the former would answer to benevolence and the latter to beneficence. These three graces include all that Paul presents as Christian duty to our fellows. The results of the life of the Spirit are to pass beyond ourselves and to influence our whole conduct. We are not to live only as mainly for the spiritual enjoyments of fellowship with God. The true field of religion is in moving amongst men, and the true basis of all service of men is love and fellowship with God.

The third triad — faithfulness, meekness, temperance — seems to point to the world in which the Christian life is to be lived as a scene of difficulties and oppositions. The rendering of the Revised Version is to be preferred to that of the Authorised in the first of the three, for it is not faith in its theological sense to which the Apostle is here referring. Possibly, however, the meaning may be trustfulness just as in 1 Corinthians 13. it is given as a characteristic of love that it 'believeth all things.' More probably, however, the meaning is faithfulness, and Paul's thought is that the Christian life is to manifest itself in the faithful discharge of all duties and the honest handling of all things committed to it. Meekness even more distinctly contemplates a condition of things which is contrary to the Christian life, and points to a submissiveness of spirit which does not lift itself up against oppositions, but bends like a reed before the storm. Paul preached meekness and practised it, but Paul could flash into strong opposition and with a resonant ring in his voice could say 'To whom we gave place by subjection, No.' not for an hour. The last member of the triad — temperance — points to the difficulties which the spiritual life is apt to meet with in the natural passions and desires, and insists upon the fact that conflict and rigid and habitual self-control are sure to be marks of that life.

II. The unity of the fruit.

We have already pointed out the Apostles remarkable use of the word 'fruit' here, by which he indicates that all the results of the life of the Spirit in the human spirit are to be regarded as a whole that has a natural growth. The foundation of all is of course that love which is the fulfilling of the law. It scarcely needs to be pointed out how love brings forth both the other elements of the first triad, but it is no less important to note that it and its two companions naturally lead on to the relations to men which make up the second triad. It is, however, worth while to dwell on that fact because there are many temptations for Christian people to separate between them. The two tables of the law are not seldom written so far apart that their unity ceases to be noted. There are many good people whose notions of religious duties are shut up in churches or chapels and limited to singing and praying, reading the Bible and, listening to sermons, and who, even while they are doing good service in common life, do not feel that it is as much a religious duty to suppress the wish to retaliate as it is to sit in the sunshine of God's love and to feel Christ's joy and peace filling the heart. On the other hand many loud voices, some of them with great force of words and influence on the popular mind, are never wearied of preaching that Christianity is worn out as a social impulse, and that the service of man has nothing to do with the love of God. As plainly Paul's first triad naturally leads to his third. When the spiritual life has realised its deepest secret it will be strong to manifest itself as vigorous in reference to the difficulties of life. When that heart is blessed in its own settled love, abounding joy and untroubled peace, faithfulness and submission will both be possible and self-control will not be hard.

III. The culture of the tree which secures the fruit.

Can we suppose that the Apostle here is going back in thought to our Lord's profound teaching that every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit? The obvious felicity of that metaphor often conceals for us the drastic force of its teaching, it regards all a man's conduct as but the outcome of his character, and brushes aside as trifling all attempts at altering products, whilst the producer remains unaltered. Whether Paul was here alluding to a known saying of Jesus or no, he was insisting upon the very centre of Christian ethics, that a man must first be good in order to do good. Our Lord's words seemed to make an impossible demand — 'Make the tree good' — as the only way of securing good fruit, and it was in accordance with the whole cast of the Sermon on the Mount that the means of realising that demand was left unexpressed. But Paul stood on this side of Pentecost, and what was necessarily veiled in Christ's earlier utterances stood forth a revealed and blessed certainty to him. He had not to say 'Make the tree good' and be silent as to how that process was to be effected; to him the message had been committed, 'The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity.' There is but one way by which a corrupt tree can be made good, and that is by grafting into the wild briar stock a 'layer' from the rose. The Apostle had a double message to proclaim, and the one part was built upon the other. He had first to preach — and this day has first to believe that God has sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin — and then he had to proclaim that, through that mission, it became possible that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who 'walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.' The: beginning, then, of all true goodness is to be sought in receiving into our corrupt natures the uncorrupted' germs of the higher life, and it is only in the measure in which that Spirit of God moves in Our spirits and, like the sap in the vine, permeates every branch and tendril, that fruit to eternal life will grow. Christian graces are the products of the indwelling divine life, and nothing else will succeed in producing them. All the preachings of moralists and all the struggles after self-improvement are reduced to impotence and vanity by the stern, curt sentence — a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit. Surely it should come to us all as a true gospel when we feel ourselves foiled by our own evil nature in our attempts to be better, that the first thing we have to do is not to labour at either of the two impossible tasks of the making our bad selves good, or of the getting good fruits from bad selves, but to open our spirits through faith in Jesus for the entrance into us of His Spirit which will change our corruption into incorruption, and cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Shall we not seek to become recipient of that new

life, and having received it, should we not give diligence that it may in us produce all its natural effects?

These fruits, though they are the direct results of the indwelling Spirit and will never be produced without its presence, are none the less truly dependent upon our manner of receiving that Spirit and on our faithfulness and diligence in the use of its gifts. It is, alas! sadly too true, and matter of tragically common experience that instead of 'trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord' heavy with ruddy clusters, there are but dwarfed and scrubby bushes which have scarcely life enough to keep up a little show of green leaves and 'bring no fruit to perfection. Would that so-called Christian people would more earnestly and searchingly ask themselves why it is that, with such possibilities offered to them, their actual attainments should be so small. They have a power which is able to do for them exceeding abundantly above all that they can ask or 'think, and its actual effects on them are well on this side of both their petitions and their conceptions. There need be no difficulty in answering the question why our Christian lives do not correspond more closely to the Spirit that inspires them. The plain answer is that we have not cultivated, used, and obeyed Him. The Lord of the vineyard would less often have to ask 'Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?' if we listened more obediently to the pathetic command which surely should touch a grateful heart — 'Grieve not the holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

IV. How this is the only worthy fruit.

We have already pointed out that the Apostle in the preceding context varies his terms, and catalogues the actions that come from the godless self as works, whilst those which are the outcome of the Spirit are fruit. The distinction thus drawn is twofold. Multiplicity is contrasted with unity and fruit with works. The deeds of the flesh have no consistency except that of evil; they are at variance with themselves — a huddled mob without regularity or order; and they are works indeed, but so disproportionate to the nature of the doer and his obligations that they do not deserve to be called fruit. It is not to attach too much importance to an accidental form of speech to insist upon this distinction as intended to be drawn, and as suggesting to us very solemn thoughts about many apparently very active lives. The man who lives to God truly lives; the busiest life which is not rooted in Him and directed towards Him has so far missed its aim as to have brought forth no good fruit, and therefore to have incurred the sentence that it is cut down and cast into the fire. There is a very remarkable expression in Scripture, 'The unfruitful works of darkness,' which admits the busy occupation and energy of the doers and denies that all that struggling and striving comes to anything. Done in the dark, they seemed to have some significance, when the light comes in they vanish. It is for us to determine whether our lives shall be works of the flesh, full, perhaps, of a time of 'sound and fury,' but 'signifying nothing,' or whether they shall be fruits of the Spirit, which we 'who have gathered shall eat in the courts of His holiness.' They will be so if, living in the Spirit, we walk in the Spirit, but if we 'sow to the flesh' we shall have a harder husbandry and a bitterer harvest when 'of the flesh we reap corruption,' and hoar the awful and unanswerable question, 'What fruit had ye then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?'

BURDEN-BEARING

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ... For every man shall bear his own burden.' — Galatians 6:2-5.

The injunction in the former of these verses appears, at first sight, to be inconsistent with the statement in the latter. But Paul has a way of setting side by side two superficially contradictory clauses, in order that attention may be awakened, and that we may make an effort to apprehend the point of reconciliation between them. So, for instance, you remember he puts in one sentence, and couples together by a 'for,' these two sayings: 'Work out your own salvation'; 'It is God that worketh in you.' So here he has been exhorting the Galatian Christians to restore a fallen brother. That is one case to which the general commandment, 'Bear ye one another's burdens,' is applicable.

I cannot here enter on the intervening verses by which he glides from the one to the other of these two thoughts which I have coupled together, but I may just point out in a word the outline of his course of thought. 'Bear ye one another's burden,' says he; and then he thinks, 'What is it that keeps men from bearing each other's burdens?' Being swallowed up with themselves, and especially being conceited about their own strength and goodness. And so he goes on: 'If a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.' And what is the best cure for all these fancies inside us of how strong and good we are? To look at our work with an impartial and rigid judgment. It is easy for a man to plume himself on being good, and strong, and great; but let him look at what he has done, and try that by a high standard, and that will knock the conceit out of him. Or, if his work stands the test, then 'he shall have rejoicing in himself, and not' by comparing himself with other people. Two blacks do not make a white, and we are not to heighten the lustre of our own whiteness by comparing it with our neighbour's blackness. Take your act for what it is worth, apart altogether from what other people are. Do not say, 'God! I thank thee that I am not as other men are... or even as this publican'; but look to yourself. There is an occupation with self which is good, and is a help to brotherly sympathy, And so the Apostle has worked round, you see, to almost an opposite thought from the one with which he started. 'Bear ye one another's

burdens.' Yes, but a man's work is his own and nobody else's, and man's character is his own and nobody else's, so 'every man shall bear his own burden.' The statements are not contradictory. They complete each other. They are the north and the south poles, and between them is the rounded orb of the whole truth. So then, let me point out that:

I. There are burdens which can be shared, and there are burdens which cannot.

Let us take the case from which the whole context has arisen. Paul was exhorting the Galatians, as I explained, in reference to their duty to a fallen brother; and he speaks of him — according to our version — as 'overtaken in a fault.' Now, that is scarcely his idea, I think. The phrase, as it stands in our Bibles, suggests that Paul is trying to minimise the gravity of the man's offence; but just in proportion as he minimised its gravity would he weaken his exhortation to restore him. But what he is really doing is not to make as little as possible of the sin, but to make as much of it as is consistent with the truth. The word 'overtaken' suggests that some sin, like a tiger in a jungle, springs upon a man and overpowers him by the suddenness of the assault. The word so rendered may perhaps be represented by some such phrase as 'discovered'; or, if I may use a 'colloquialism,' if a man be caught 'red-handed.' That is the idea. And Paul does not use the weak word 'fault,' but a very much stronger one, which means stark staring sin. He is supposing a bad case of inconsistency, and is not palliating it at all. Here is a brother who has had an unblemished reputation; and all at once the curtain is thrown aside behind which he is working some wicked thing; and there the culprit stands, with the bull's-eye light flashed upon him, ashamed and trembling. Paul says, 'If you are a spiritual man' — there is irony there of the graver sort — 'show your spirituality by going and lifting him up, and trying to help him.' When he says, 'Restore such an one,' he uses an expression which is employed in other connections in the New Testament, such as for mending the broken meshes of a net, for repairing any kind of damage, for setting the fractured bones of a limb. And that is what the 'spiritual' man has to do. He is to show the validity of his claim to live on high by stooping down to the man bemired and broken-legged in the dirt. We have come across people who chiefly show their own purity by their harsh condemnation of others' sins. One has heard of women so very virtuous that they would rather hound a fallen sister to death than try to restore her; and there are saints so extremely saintly that they will not touch the leper to heal him, for fear of their own hands being ceremonially defiled. Paul says, 'Bear ye one another's burdens'; and especially take a lift of each other's sin.

I need not remind you how the same command applies in relation to pecuniary distress, narrow circumstances, heavy duties, sorrows, and all the 'ills that flesh is heir to.' These can be borne by sympathy, by true loving outgoing of the heart, and by the rendering of such practical help as the circumstances require.

But there are burdens that cannot be borne by any but the man himself. There is the awful burden of personal existence. It is a solemn thing to be able to say 'I.' And that carries with it this, that after all sympathy, after all nestling closeness of affection, after the tenderest exhibition of identity of feeling, and of swift godlike readiness to help, each of us lives alone. Like the inhabitants of the islands of the Greek Archipelago, we are able to wave signals to the next island, and sometimes to send a boat with provisions and succour, but we are parted, 'with echoing straits between us thrown.' Every man, after all, lives alone, and society is like the material things round about us, which are all compressible, because the atoms that compose them are not in actual contact, but separated by slenderer or more substantial films of isolating air. Thus there is even in the sorrows which we can share with our brethren, and in all the burdens which we can help to bear, an element which cannot be imparted. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness', and neither 'stranger' nor other 'intermeddleth' with the deepest fountains of 'its joy.'

Then again, there is the burden of responsibility which can be shared by none. A dozen soldiers may be turned out to make a firing party to shoot the mutineer, and no man knows who fired the shot, but one man did fire it. And however there may have been companions, it was his rifle that carried the bullet, and his finger that pulled the trigger. We say, 'The woman that Thou gavest me tempted me, and I did eat.' Or we say, 'My natural appetites, for which I am not responsible, but Thou-who madest me art, drew me aside, and I fell', or we may say, 'It was not I; it was the other boy. And then there rises up in our hearts a veiled form, and from its majestic lips comes 'Thou art the man'; and our whole being echoes assent — Men culpa; men maxima culpa — 'My fault, my exceeding great fault.' No man can bear that burden.

And then, closely connected with responsibility there is another — the burden of the inevitable consequences of transgression, not only away yonder in the future, when all human bonds of companionship shall be broken, and each man shall 'give account of himself to God,' but here and now; as in the immediate context the Apostle tells us, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' The effects of our evil deeds come back to roost; and they never make a mistake as to where they should alight. If I have sown, I, and no one else, will gather. No sympathy will prevent tomorrow's headache after to-night's debauch, and nothing that anybody can do will turn the sleuth-hounds off the scent. Though they may be slow-footed, they have sure noses and deep-mouthed fangs. 'If thou be wise thou shalt be wise for thyself, and if thou scornest thou alone shalt bear it.' So there are burdens which can, and burdens which cannot, be borne.

II. Jesus Christ is the Burden-bearer for both sorts of burdens.

'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ,' not only as spoken by His lips, but as set forth in the pattern of His life. We have, then, to turn to Him, and think of Him as Burden-bearer in even a deeper sense than the psalmist had discerned, who magnified God as 'He who daily beareth our burdens.'

Christ is the Burden-bearer of our sin. 'The Lord hath laid' — or made to meet — 'upon Him the iniquity of us all.' The Baptist pointed his lean, ascetic finger at the young Jesus, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God which beareth — and beareth away — the sin of the world.' How heavy the load, how real its pressure, let Gethsemane witness, when He clung to human companionship with the unutterably solemn and plaintive words, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch with Me.' He bore the burden of the world's sin.

Jesus Christ is the bearer of the burden of the consequences of sin, not only inasmuch as, in His sinless humanity, He knew by sympathy the weight of the world's sin, but because in that same humanity, by identification of Himself with us, deeper and more wonderful than our plummets have any line long enough to sound the abysses of, He took the cup of bitterness which our sins have mixed, and drank it all when He said, 'My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Consequences still remain: thank God that they do! 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and Thou didst inflict retribution on their inventions.' So the outward, the present, the temporal consequences of transgression are left standing in all their power, in order that transgressors may thereby be scourged from their evil, and led to forsake the thing that has wrought them such havoc. But the ultimate consequence, the deepest of all, separation from God, has been borne by Christ, and need never be borne by us.

I suppose I need not dwell on the other aspects of this burden-bearing of our Lord, how that He, in a very deep and real sense, takes upon Himself the sorrows which we bear in union with, and faith on, Him. For then the griefs that still come to us, when so borne, are transmitted into 'light affliction which is but for moment.' 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted.' Oh, brethren! you with sad hearts, you with lonely lives, you with carking cares, you with pressing, heavy duties, cast your burden on the Christ, and He 'will sustain you,' and sorrows borne in union with Him will change their character, and the very cross shall be wreathed in flowers.

Jesus bears the burden of that solemn solitude which our personal being lays upon us all. The rest of us stand round, and, as I said, hoist signals of sympathy, and sometimes can stretch a brotherly hand out and grasp the sufferer's hand. But their help comes from without; Christ comes in, and dwells in our hearts, and makes us no longer alone in the depths of our being, which He fills with the effulgence and peace of His companionship. And so for sin, for guilt, for responsibility, for sorrow, for holiness, Christ bears our burdens.

Yes! And when He takes ours on His shoulders, He puts His on ours. 'My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.' As the old mystics used to say, Christ's burden carries him that carries it. It may add a little weight, But it gives power to soar, and it gives power to progress. It is like the wings of a bird, it is like the sails of a ship.

III. Lastly, Christ's carrying our burdens binds us to carry our brother's.

'So fulfil the law of Christ.' There is a very biting sarcasm, and, as I said about another matter, a grave irony in Paul's use of that word 'law' here. For the whole of this Epistle has been directed against the Judaizing teachers who were desirous of cramming Jewish law down Galatian throats, and is addressed to their victims in the Galatian churches who had fallen into the trap. Paul turns round on them here, and says, 'You want law, do you? Well, if you will have it. here it is — the law of Christ.' Christ's life is our law. Practical Christianity is doing what Christ did. The Cross is not only the ground of our hope, but the pattern of our conduct.

And, says Paul in effect, the example of Jesus Christ, in all its sweep, and in all the depth of it, is the only motive by which this injunction that I am giving you ever be fulfilled. 'Bear ye one another's burdens.' You will never do that unless you have Christ as the ground of your hope, and His great sacrifice as the example for your conduct. For the hindrance that prevents sympathy is self-absorption; and that natural selfishness which is in us all will never be exorcised and banished from us thoroughly, so as that we shall be awake to all the obligations to bear our brother's burdens, unless Christ has dethroned self, and is the Lord of our inmost spirits.

I rejoice as much as any man in the largely increased sense of mutual responsibility and obligation of mutual aid. which is sweetening society by degrees amongst us to-day, hut ! believe that no Socialistic or other schemes for the regeneration of society which are not based on the Incarnation and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ will live and grow. There is hut one power that will cast out natural selfishness, and that is love to Christ, apprehending His Cross as the great example to which our lives are to be conformed. I believe that the growing sense of brotherhood amongst us, even where it is not consciously connected with any faith in Christianity, is, to a very large extent, the result of the diffusion through society of the spirit of Christianity, even where its body is rejected. Thank God, the river of the water of life can percolate through many a mile of soil. and reach the roots of trees far away, in the pastures of the wilderness, that know not whence the refreshing moisture has come. But on the wide scale be sure of this: it is the law of Christ that will fight and conquer the natural selfishness which makes bearing our brother's burdens an impossibility for men. Only,

Christian people! let us take care that we are not, robbed of our prerogative of being foremost in all such things, by men whose zeal has a less heavenly source ours ought to have. Depend upon it, heresy has less power to arrest the progress of the Church than the selfish lives of Christian professors.

So, dear friends, let us see to it that we first of all cast our own burdens on the Christ who is able to bear them all, whatever they are. And then let us, with lightened hearts and shoulders, make our own the heavy burdens of sin, of sorrow, of care, of guilt, of consequences, of responsibility, which are crushing down many that are weary and heavy laden. For be sure of this, if we do not bear our brother's burdens, the load that we thought we had east on Christ will roll back upon ourselves. He is able to bear both us and our burdens, if we will let Him, and if we will fulfil that law of Christ which was illustrated in all His life, 'Who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,' and was written large in letters of blood upon that Cross where there was 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all.'

DOING GOOD TO ALL

'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all...' — Galatians 6:10

'As we have therefore' — that points a finger backwards to what has gone before. The Apostle has been exhorting to unwearied well-doing, on the ground of the certain coming of the harvest season. Now, there is a double link of connection between the preceding words and our text; for 'do good' looks back to 'well-doings' and the word rendered 'opportunity' is the same as that rendered 'season.' So, then, two thoughts arise — 'well-doing' includes doing good to others, and is not complete unless it does. The future, on the whole, is the season of reaping; the present life on the whole is the season of sowing; and while life as a whole is the seed-time, in detail it is full of opportunities, Openings which make certain good deeds possible, and which therefore impose upon us the obligation to do them. If we were in the habit of looking on life mainly as a series of opportunities for well-doing, how different it would be; and how different we should be!

Now, this injunction is seen to be reasonable by every man, whether he obeys it or not. It is a commonplace of morality, which finds assent in all consciences, however little it may mould lives. But I wish to give it a particular application, and to try to enforce its hearing upon Christian missionary work. And the thought that I would suggest is just this, that no Christian man discharges that elementary obligation of plain morality, if he is indifferent to this great enterprise. 'As we have an opportunity, let us do good to all.' That is the broad principle, and one application is the duty of Christian men to diffuse the Gospel throughout the world.

I. Let me ask you to look at the obligation that is thus suggested.

As I have said, well-doing is the wider, and doing good to others the narrower, expression. The one covers the whole ground of virtue, the other declares that virtue which is self-regarding, the culture which is mainly occupied with self, is lame and 'imperfect, and there is a great gap in it, as if some cantle had been cut out of the silver disc of the moon. It is only full-orbed when in well-doing, and as a very large constituent element of it, there is included the doing good to others. That is too plain to need to be stated. We hear a great deal to-day about altruism. Well, Christianity preaches that more emphatically than any other system of thought, morals, or religion does. And Christianity brings the mightiest motives for it, and imparts the power by which obedience to that great law that every man's conscience responds to is made possible.

But whilst thus we recognise as a dictate of elementary morality that well-doing must necessarily include doing good to others, and feel, as I suppose we all do feel, when we are true to our deepest convictions, that possessions of all sorts, material, mental, and all others, are given to us in stewardship, and not in absolute ownership, in order that God's grace in its various forms may fructify through us to all, my present point is that, if that is recognised as being what it is, an elementary dictate of morality enforced by men's relationships to one another, and sealed by their own consciences, there is no getting away from the obligation upon all Christian men which it draws after it, of each taking his share in the great work of imparting the gospel to the whole world.

For that gospel is our highest good, the best thing that we can carry to anybody. We many of us recognise the obligation that is devolved upon us by the possession of wealth, to use it for others as well as for ourselves. We recognise, many of us, the obligation that is devolved upon us by the possession of knowledge, to impart it to others as well as ourselves. We are willing to give of our substance, of our time, of our effort, to impart much that we have. But some of us seem to draw a line at the highest good that we have, and whilst responding to all sorts of charitable and beneficent appeals made to us, and using our faculties often for the good of other people, we take no share and no interest in communicating the highest of all goods, the good which comes to the man in whose heart Christ rests. It is our highest good, because it deals with our deepest needs, and lifts us to the loftiest position. The gospel brings our highest good, because it brings eternal good, whilst all other benefits fade and pass, and are left behind with life and the dead flesh. It is our highest good, because if that great message of salvation is received into a heart, or moulds the life of a

nation, it will bring after it, as it's ministers and results, all manner of material and lesser benefit. And so, giving Christ we give our best, and giving Christ we give the highest gift that a weary world can receive.

Remember, too, that the impartation of this highest good is one of the main reasons why we ourselves possess it. Jesus Christ can redeem the world alone, but it cannot become a redeemed world without the help of His servants. He needs us in order to carry into all humanity the energies that He brought into the midst of mankind by His Incarnation and Sacrifice; and the cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Cavalry are not sufficient for the accomplishment of the purpose for which they respectively came to pass, without the intervention and ministry of Christian people. It was for this end amongst others, that each of us who have received that great gift into our hearts have been enriched by it. The river is fed from the fountains of the hills, in order that it may carry verdure and life whithersoever it goes. And you and I have been brought to the Cross of Christ, and made His disciples, not only in order that we ourselves might be blessed and quickened by the gift unspeakable, but in order that through us it may be communicated, just as each particle when leavened in the mass of the dough communicates its energy to its adjacent particle until the whole is leavened.

I am afraid that indifference to the communication of the highest good, which marks sadly too many Christian professors in all ages, and in this age, is a suspicious indication of a very slight realisation of the good for themselves. Luther said that justification was the article of a standing or a falling church. That may be true in the region of theology, but in the region of practical life I do not know that you will find a test more reliable and more easy of application than this, Does a man care for spreading amongst his fellows the gospel that he himself has received? If he does not, let him ask himself whether, in any real sense, he has it. 'Well-doing' includes doing good to others, and the possession of Christ will make it certain that we shall impart Him.

II. Notice the bearing of this elementary injunction upon the scope of the obligation.

'Let us do good to all men.' It was Christianity that invented the word 'humanity'; either in its meaning of the aggregate of men or its meaning of a gracious attitude towards them. And it invented the word because it revealed the thing on which it rests. 'Brotherhood' is the sequel of 'Fatherhood,' and the conception of mankind, beneath all diversities of race and culture and the like, as being an organic whole, knit together by a thousand mystical bands, and each atom of which has connection with, and obligations to, every other — that is a product of Christianity, how-over it may have been in subsequent ages divorced from a recognition of its source. So, then, the gospel rises above all the narrow distinctions which call themselves patriotism and are parochial, and it says that there is 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free,' but all are one. Get high enough up upon the hill, and the hedges between the fields are barely perceptible. Live on the elevation to which the Gospel of Jesus Christ lifts men, and you look down upon a great prairie, without a fence or a ditch or a division. So my text comes with profound significance, 'Let us do good to all,' because all are included in the sweep of that great purpose of love, and in the redeeming possibilities of that great death on the Cross. Christ has swept the compass, if I may say so, of His love and work all round humanity; and are we to extend our sympathies or our efforts less widely? The circle includes the world; our sympathies should be as wide as the circle that Christ has drawn.

Let me remind you, too, that only such a world-wide communication of the highest good that has blessed ourselves will correspond to the proved power of that Gospel which treats as of no moment diversities that are superficial, and can grapple with and overcome, and bind to itself as a crown of glory, every variety of character, of culture, of circumstance, claiming for its own all races, and proving itself able to lift them all. 'The Bread of God which came down from heaven' is an exotic everywhere, because it came down from heaven, but it can grow in all soils, and it can bring forth fruit unto eternal life everywhere amongst mankind. So 'let us do good to all.'

And then we are met by the old objection, 'The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. Keep your work for home, that wants it.' Well! I am perfectly ready to admit that in Christian work, as in all others, there must be division of labour, and that one man's tastes and inclinations will lead him to one sphere and one form of it; and another man's to another; and I am quite ready, not to admit, but strongly to insist, that, whatever happens, home is not to be neglected. 'All men' includes the slums in England as well as the savages in Africa, and it is no excuse for neglecting either of these departments that we are trying to do something in the other. But it is not uncharitable to say that the objection to which I am referring is most often made by one or other of two classes, either by people who do not care about the Gospel, nor recognise the 'good' of it at all, or by people who are ingenious in finding excuses for not doing the duty to which they are at the moment summoned. The people that do the one are the people that do the other. Where do you get your money from for home work? Mainly from the Christian Churches. Who is it that keeps up missionary work abroad? Mainly the Christian Churches. There is a vast deal of unreality in that objection. Just think of the disproportion between the embarrassment of riches in our Christian appliances here in England and the destitution in these distant lands. Here the ships are crammed into a dock, close up against one another, rubbing their yards upon each other; and away out yonder on the waters there are leagues of loneliness, where never a sail is seen. Here, at home, we are drenched with Christian teaching, and the Churches are competing with each other, often like rival tradespeople for their customers; and away out yonder a man to half a million is considered a fair allowance. 'Let us do good to all.'

III. Lastly, note the bearing of this elementary precept on the occasions that rise for the discharge of the duty.

'As we have opportunity.' As I have already said, the Christian way to look at our circumstances is to regard them as openings for the exercise of Christian virtue, and therefore summonses to its discharge. And if we regarded our own position individually, so we should find that there were many, many doors that had long been opened, into which we had been too blind or too lazy, or too selfishly absorbed in our own concerns, to enter. The neglected opportunities, the beckoning doors whose thresholds we have never crossed, the good that we might have done and have not done — these are as weighty to sink us as the positive sins, the opportunities for which have appealed to our worse selves.

But I desire to say a word, not only about the opportunities offered to us individually, but about those offered to England for this great enterprise. The prophet of old represented the proud Assyrian conqueror 'as boasting,' My hand hath gathered as a nest the riches of the peoples.. 'and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.' It might be the motto of England to-day. It is not for nothing that we and our brethren across the Atlantic, the inheritors of the same faith and morals and literature, and speaking the same tongue, have had given to us the wide dominion that we possess. I know that England has not climbed to her place without many a crime, and that in her 'skirts is found the blood of poor Innocents,' but yet we have that connection, for good or for evil, with subject races all over the earth. And I ask whether or not that is an opportunity that the Christian Church is bound to make use of. What have we been entrusted with it for? Commerce, dominion, the impartation of Western knowledge, literature, laws? Yes! Is that all? Are you to send shirting and not the Gospel? Are you to send muskets that will burst, and gin that is poison, and not Christianity? Are you to send Shakespeare, and Milton, and modern science, and Herbert Spencer, and not Evangelists and the Gospels? Are you to send the code of English law and not Christ's law of love? Are you to send godless Englishmen, 'through whom the name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles,' and are you not to send missionaries of the Cross? A Brahmin once said to a missionary, 'Look here! Your Book is a good Book. If you were as good as your Book you would make India Christian in ten years.'

Brethren! the European world to-day is fighting and scrambling over what it calls the unclaimed corners of the world; looking upon all lands that are uncivilized by Western civilization either as markets, or as parts of their empire. Is there no other way of looking at the heathen world than that? How did Christ look at it? He was moved when He saw the multitudes as 'sheep having no shepherd.' Oh! if Christian men, as members of this nation, would rise to the height of Christ's place of vision, and would look at the world with His eyes, what a difference it would make! I appeal to you, Christian men and women, as members of this nation, and therefore responsible, though it may be infinitesimally, for what this nation is doing in the distant corners of the world, and urge on you that you are bound, so far as your influence goes, to protest against the way of looking at these heathen lands as existing to be exploited for the material benefit of these Western Powers. You are bound to lend your voice, however weak it may be, to the protests against the savage treatment of native races — against the drenching of China with narcotics, and Africa with rum; to try to look at the world as Christ looked at it, to rise to the height of that great vision which regards all men as having been in His heart when He died on the Cross, and refuses to recognise in this great work 'Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free.' We have awful responsibilities; the world is open to us. We have the highest good. How shall we obey this elementary principle of our text, unless we help as we can in spreading Christ's reign? Blessed shall we be if, and only if, we fill the seed-time with delightful work, and remember that well-doing is imperfect unless it includes doing good to others, and that the best good we can do is to impart the Unspeakable Gift to the men that need it.

THE OWNER'S BRAND

'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' — Galatians 6:17.

THE reference in these words is probably to the cruel custom of branding slaves as we do cattle, with initials or signs, to show their ownership. It is true that in old times criminals, and certain classes of Temple servants, and sometimes soldiers, were also so marked, but it is most in accordance with the Apostles way of thinking that he here has reference to the first class, and would represent himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, designated as His by the scars and weaknesses which were the consequences of his apostolic zeal Imprisonment, beating by the Jewish rod, shipwrecks, lastings, weariness, perils, persecutions, all these he sums up in another place as being the tokens by which he was approved as an apostle of Jesus Christ. And here he, no doubt, has the same thought in his mind, that his bodily weakness, which was the direct issue of his apostolic work, showed that he was Christ's. The painful infirmity under which, as we learn, he was more especially suffering, about the time of writing this letter, may also have been in his mind.

All through this Epistle he has been thundering and lightning against the disputers of this apostolic authority. And now at last he

softens, and as it were, bares his thin arm, his scarred bosom, and bids these contumacious Galatians look upon them, and learn that he has a right to speak as the representative and messenger of the Lord Jesus.

So we have here two or three points, I think, worth considering. First, think for a moment of the slave of Christ; then of the brands which mark the ownership; then of the glory in the servitude and the sign; and then of the immunity from human disturbances which that service gives. 'From henceforth let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

I. First, then, a word or two about that conception of the slave of Christ.

It is a pity that our Bible has not rendered the title which Paul ever gives himself at the beginning of his letters, by that simple word 'slave,' instead of the feeble one, 'servant.' For what he means when he calls himself the 'servant of Jesus Christ' is not that he bore to Christ the kind of relation which servants among us bear to those who have hired and paid them, and to whom they have come under obligations of their own will which they can terminate at any moment by their own caprice; but that he was in the roughest and simplest sense of the word, Christ's slave.

What lies in that metaphor? Well, it is the most uncompromising assertion of the most absolute authority on the one hand, and claim of unconditional submission and subjection on the other.

The slave belonged to his master; the master could do exactly as he liked with him. If he killed him nobody had anything to say. He could set him to any task; he could do what he liked with any little possession or property that the slave seemed to have. He could break all his relationships, and separate him from wife and kindred.

All that is atrocious and blasphemous when it is applied to the relations between man and man, but it is a blessed and magnificent truth when it is applied to the relations between a man and Christ. For this Lord has absolute authority over us, and He can do what He likes with everything that belongs to us; and we, and our duties, and our circumstances, and our relationships, are all in His hands, and the one thing that we have to render to Him is utter, absolute, unquestioning, unhesitating, unintermittent and unreserved obedience and submission. That which is abject degradation when it is rendered to a man, that which is blasphemous presumption when it is required by a man, that which is impossible, in its deepest reality, as between man and man, is possible, is blessed, is joyful and strong when it is required by, and rendered to, Jesus Christ. We are His slaves if we have any, living relationship to Him at all. Where, then, in the Christian life, is there a place for self-will; where a place for self-indulgence; where for murmuring or reluctance; where for the assertion of any rights of my own as against that Master? We owe absolute obedience and submission to Jesus Christ.

And what does the metaphor carry as to the basis on which this authority rests? How did men acquire slaves? Chiefly by purchase. The abominations of the slave market are a blessed metaphor for the deep realities of the Christian life. Christ has bought you for His own. The only thing that gives a human soul the right to have any true authority over another human soul is that it shall have yielded itself to the soul whom it would control. We must first of all give ourselves away before we have the right to possess, and the measure in which we give ourselves to another is the measure in which we possess another. And so Christ our Lord, according to the deep words of one of Paul's letters, 'gives Himself for us, that He might purchase unto Himself a people for His possession.' Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.

Therefore the absolute authority, and unconditional surrender and submission which are the very essence of the Christian life, at bottom are but the corresponding and twofold effects of one thing, and that is love. For there is no possession of man by man except that which is based on love. And there is no submission of man to man worth calling so except that which is also based therein.

Thou hearts alone wouldst move;

Thou only hearts dost love.'

The relation in both its parts, on the side of the Master and on the side of the captive bondsman, is the direct result and manifestation of that love which knits them together.

Therefore the Christian slavery, with its abject submission, with its utter surrender and suppression of mine own will, with its complete yielding up of self to the control of Jesus, who died for me; because it is based upon His surrender of Himself to me, and in its inmost essence it is the operation of love, is therefore co-existent with the noblest freedom.

This great Epistle to the Galatians is the trumpet call and clarion proclamation of Christian liberty. The breath of freedom blows inspiringly through it all. The very spirit of the letter is gathered up in one of its verses, 'I have been called unto liberty,' and in its great exhortation, 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.' It is then sufficiently remarkable and profoundly significant that in this very letter, which thus is the protest of the free Christian consciousness against all limitations and outward restrictions, there should be this most emphatic declaration that the liberty of the Christian is slavery and the slavery of the Christian is freedom. He is free whose will coincides with his outward law. He is free who delights to do what he must do. He is free whose

rule is love, and whose Master is Incarnate Love. 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, Thou hast loosed my bands.' 'I bear in my body' the charter of my liberty, for I bear in my body the 'brand of the Lord Jesus.'

As I have said, the Apostle evidently means thereby distinctly the bodily weaknesses, and possibly diseases, which were the direct consequences of his own apostolic faithfulness and zeal. He considered that he proved himself to be a minister of God by his stripes, imprisonments, fastings, by all the pains and sufferings and their permanent consequences in an enfeebled constitution, which he bore because he had preached the Cross of Christ. He knew that these things were the result of his faithful ministry. He believed that they had been sent by no blundering, blind fate; by no mere secondary causes; but by his Master Himself, whose hand had held the iron that branded into the hissing flesh the marks of His ownership. He felt that by means of these he had been drawn nearer to his Master, and the ownership had been made more perfect. And so in a rapture of contempt of pain, this heroic soul looks upon even bodily weakness and suffering as being the signs that he belonged to Christ, and the means of that possession being made more perfect.

Now, what is all that to us Christian people who have no persecutions to endure, and none of whom I am afraid have ever worked hard enough for Christ to have damaged our health by it? Is there anything in this text that may be of general application to us all? Yes! I think so. Every Christian man or woman ought to bear, in his or her body, in a plain, literal sense, the tokens that he or she belongs to Jesus Christ. You ask me how? 'If thy foot or thine hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.'

There are things in your physical nature that you have to suppress; that you have always to regulate and coerce; that you have sometimes entirely to cast away and to do Without, if you mean to be Jesus Christ's at all. The old law of self-denial, Of subduing the animal nature, its passions, appetites, desires, is as true and as needful to-day as it ever was; and for us all it is essential to the loftiness and purity of our Christian life that our animal nature and our fleshly constitution should be well kept down under heel and subdued. As Paul himself said in another place, 'I bring under my body, and I keep it in subjection, lest by any means I should myself, having proclaimed to others the laws of the contest, be rejected from the prize.' Oh, you Christian men and women! if you are not living a life of self-denial, if you are not crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts, if you are not bearing 'about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Christ may be manifested in your mortal body,' what tokens are there that you are Christ's slaves at all?

Then, besides this, we may expand the thought even further, and say that, in a very real sense, all the pains and sorrows and disappointments and afflictions that mainly touch our mortal part should be taken by us as, and made by us to be, the tokens that we belong to the Master.

But it is not only in limitations and restrictions and self-denials and pains that Christ's ownership of us ought to be manifested in our daily lives, and so by means of our mortal bodies, but if there be in our hearts a deep indwelling possession of the grace and sweetness of Christ, it will make itself visible, ay! even in our faces, and 'beauty born of' our communion with Him 'shall pass into' and glorify even rugged and care-lined countenances. There may be, and there ought to be, in all Christian people, manifestly visible the tokens of the indwelling serenity of the indwelling Christ, And it should not be left to some moment of rapture at the end of life, for men to look upon us, to behold our faces, 'as it had been the face of an angel,' but by our daily walk, by our countenances full of a removed tranquillity, and a joy that rises from within, men ought to take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and it should be the truth — I bear in my body the tokens of His possession.

III. Now, once more notice the glorying in the slavery and its signs.

'I bear,' says Paul; and he uses, as many of you may know, a somewhat remarkable word, which does not express mere bearing in the sense of toleration and patient endurance, although that is much; nor mere bearing in the sense of carrying, but implies bearing with a certain triumph as men would do who, coming back victorious from conflict, and being received into the city, were proud to show their scars, the honour-able signs of their courage and constancy. So, with a triumph that is legitimate, the Apostle solemnly and proudly bears before men the marks of the Lord Jesus. Just as he says in another place: — 'Thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us about in triumph in Jesus Christ.' He was proud of being dragged at the conqueror's chariot wheels, chained to them by the cords of love; and so he was proud of being the slave of Christ.

It is a degradation to a man to yield abject submission, unconditional service to another man. It is the highest honour of our natures so to bow before that dear Lord. To prostrate ourselves to Him is to lift ourselves high in the scale of being. The King's servant is every other person's master. And he that feels that he is Christ's, may well be, not proud but conscious, of the dignity of belonging to such a Lord. The monarch's livery is a sign of honour. In our old Saxon kingdom the king's menials were the first nobles. So it is with us. The aristocracy of humanity are the slaves of Jesus Christ.

And let us be proud of the marks of the branding iron, whether they come in the shape of sorrows and pains, or otherwise. It is well that we should have to carry these. It is blessed, and a special mark of the Master's favour that He should think it worth His while to mark us as His own, by any sorrow or by any pain. Howsoever hot may be the iron, and howsoever deeply it may be pressed by His

firm, steady, gentle hand upon the quivering flesh and the shrinking heart, let us be thankful if He, even by it, impresses on us the manifest tokens of ownership. Oh, brethren! if we could come to look upon sorrows and losses with this clear recognition of their source, meaning and purpose, they change their nature, the paradox is fulfilled that we do 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles.' 'I bear in my body,' with a solemn triumph and patient hope, 'the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

IV. And now, lastly, the immunity from any disturbance which men can bring, which these marks, and the servitude they express, secure.

'From henceforth let no man trouble me.' Paul claims that his apostolic authority, having been established by the fact of his sufferings for Christ, should give him a sacredness in their eyes; that henceforth there should be no rebellion against his teaching and his word. We may expand the thought to apply more to ourselves, and say that, in the measure in which we belong to Christ, and bear the marks of His possession of us, in that measure are we free from the disturbance of earthly influences and of human voices; and from all the other sources of care and trouble, of perturbation and annoyance, which harass and vex other men's spirits. 'Ye are bought with a price,' says Paul elsewhere. 'Be not the servants of men.' Christ is your Master; do not let men trouble you. Take your orders from Him; let men rave as they like. Be content to be approved by Him; let men think of you as they please. The Master's smile is life, the Master's frown is death to the slave; what matters it what other people may say? 'He that judgeth me is the Lord.' So keep yourselves above the cackle of 'public opinion'; do not let your creed be crammed down your throats even by a consensus of however venerable and grave human teachers. Take your directions from your Master, and pay no heed to other voices if they would command. Live to please Him, and do not care what other people think. You are Christ's servant; 'let no man trouble' you.

And so it should be about all the distractions and petty annoyances that disturb human life and harass our hearts. A very little breath of wind will ruffle all the surface of a shallow pond, though it would sweep across the deep sea and produce no effect. Deepen your natures by close union with Christ, and absolute submission to Him, and there will be a great calm in them, and cares and sorrows, and all the external sources of anxiety, far away, down there beneath your feet, will, show scarce so gross as beetles,' whilst you stand upon the high cliff and look down upon them all 'From henceforth no man shall trouble me.' 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

My brother! Whose marks do you bear? There are only two masters. If an eye that could see things as they are, were to go through this congregation, whose initials would it discern in your faces? There are some of us, I have no doubt, who in a very horrid sense bear in our bodies the marks of the idol that we worship. Men who have ruined their health by dissipation and animal sensualism — are there any of them here this morning? Are there none of us whose faces, whose trembling hands, whose diseased frames, are the tokens that they belong to the flesh and the world and the devil? Whose do you bear?

Oh! when one looks at all the faces that pass one upon the street — this all drawn with avarice and earthly-mindedness; that all bloated with self-indulgence and loose living — when one sees the mean faces, the passionate faces, the cruel faces, the vindictive faces, the lustful faces, the worldly faces, one sees how many of us bear in our bodies the marks of another lord. They have no rest day nor night who worship the beast; and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

I pray you, yield yourselves to your true Lord, so on earth you may bear the beginnings of the likeness that stamps you His, and hereafter, as one of His happy slaves, shall do priestly service at His throne and see His face, and His name shall be in your foreheads.