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Alexander Maclaren Sermons on The Epistle to the Hebrews Part 6

Hebrews 13:5, 6 God's Voice and Man's Echo

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.' — Hebrews 13:5, 6.

'HE hath said'; 'we may... say.' So, then, here are two voices; or, rather, a voice and an echo — God's voice of promises, and man's answering voice of confidence. God speaks to us that we may speak to Him; and when He speaks His promises, the only fitting answer is to accept them as true in all their fulness fixed confidence.

The writer quotes two passages as from the Old Testament. The first of them is not found verbatim anywhere there; the nearest approach to it, and obviously the source of the quotation, occurs in a connection that is worth noting. When Moses was handing over the charge of his people to his successor, Joshua, he said first to the people and then to Joshua, 'Be strong and of good courage ... He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.' The writer of the Epistle falls back upon these words with a slight alteration, and turns 'He' into 'I,' simply because he recognised that when Moses spoke, God was speaking through him, and countersigning with His own seal the promise which His servant made in His name. The other passage comes from the 118th Psalm. So, then, let

us listen to the divine voice and the human answer.

I. God's voice of promise.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, notice that there is a distinct parallel between the position of the people to whom this Epistle was addressed, and that of the Hebrews to whom the original promise was made. The latter were standing on the verge of a great change. They were passing from under the leadership of Moses, and going under the leadership of the untried Joshua. Is it fanciful to recall that Joshua and Jesus are the same name; and that the difficulty which Israel on the borders of Canaan had to face, and the difficulty which these Hebrew Christians had to encounter, were similar, being in each case a change of leaders — the ceasing to look to Moses and the beginning to take commands from another? To men in such a crisis, when venerable authority was becoming antiquated, it might seem as if nothing was stable. Very appropriate, therefore, and strong was the encouragement given by pointing away from the flowing river to the Rock of Ages, rising changeless above the changing current of human life. So Moses said to his generation, and the author of the Epistle says after him to his contemporaries you may change the leaders, but you keep the one Presence.

This letter goes on the principle throughout that everything which belonged to Israel, in the way of institutions, sacred persons, promises, is handed over to the Christian Church, and we are, as it were, served heirs to the whole of these. So, then, to every one of us the message comes, and comes in its most individual aspect, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, 'to leave' and 'to forsake' are identical, and the promise, if we keep to the Authorised Version, is a repetition, in the two clauses, of the same thought. But whilst the two clauses are substantially identical, there is a very beautiful variation in the form in which the one assurance is given in them. With regard to the first of them, 'I will never leave thee,' both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word which is employed, and which is translated 'leave,' means the withdrawing of a hand that sustains. And so the Revised Version wisely substitutes for 'leave thee,' 'I will never fail thee.' We might even put it more colloquially, and approach more nearly the original expression, if we said, 'He will never drop thee'; never let His hand slacken, never withdraw its sustaining power, but will communicate for ever, day by day, not only the strength, but the conscious security that comes from feeling that great, strong, gentle hand, closing thee round and keeping thee tight. No man 'shall pluck them out of My father's hand.'

'The Lord upholdeth all that fall,' says one Psalm, and another of the psalmists puts it even more picturesquely; 'When I said my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up,' To Say 'my foot slippeth,' with a strong emphasis on the 'my' is the sure way to be able to say the other thing: 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'He shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.' Suppose a man on some slippery glacier, not accustomed to ice-work, as he feels his foot going out from under him, he gets nervous, and nervousness means a fall, and a fall means disaster and sometimes death.

So he grips the guide's hand, and then he can walk. There is Peter, out on the sea that he had presumptuously asked leave to walk on, and as he feels the cold water coming above his ankle, and sees it rising higher and higher, he begins to fear, and his fear makes him heavier, so that he sinks the faster, till the very extremity of need and paroxysm of terror strike out a spark of faith, and faith and fear are strangely blended in the cry: 'Lord, save me.' Christ's outstretched hand answered the cry, and its touch held Peter up, made him buoyant again, and as he rose, the water seemed to sink beneath his feet, and on that heaving pavement, glistening in the moonlight, he walked till he was helped into the boat again. So will God do for us, if we will, for He has said: 'I will never relax My grasp. Nothing 'shall ever come between My hand and thine.' When a nurse or a mother is holding a child's hand, her grip slackens unless it is perpetually repeated by fresh nervous tension. So all human helps tend to become less helpful, and all human love has its limits. But God's hand never slackens its grip, and we may be sure that, as He has grasped He will hold, and 'keep that which we have committed unto Him.'

But mark the other form of the promise. 'I will never drop thee' — that promises the communication of sustaining strength according to our need: 'nor forsake thee' — that is the same promise, in another shape.

The tottering limbs need to be held up. The lonely heart walking the way of life, lonely after all companionship, and which has depths that the purest human love cannot sound, and sometimes dark secrets that it durst not admit the dearest to behold — that heart may have a divine companion. Here is a word for the solitary, and we are all solitary. Some of us, more plainly than others, are called upon to walk a lonely road in a great darkness, and to live lives little apprehended, little sympathised with, by others, or perchance having for our best companion, next to God, the memories of those who are beside us no more. Moses died, Joshua took his place; but behind the dying Moses-buried in his unknown grave, and left far away as the ties crossed the Jordan — and behind the living Joshua, there was the Lord who liveth for ever. 'I will not forsake thee.' Dear ones go, and take half our hearts with them. People misunderstand us. We feel that we dare not open out our whole selves to any. We feel that, just as scientists tell us that no two atoms of the most solid body are in actual juxtaposition, but that there is a film of air between them, and hence all bodies are more or less elastic, if sufficient pressure be applied, so after the closest companionship there is a film. But that film makes no separation between us and God. 'I will not drop thee' — there is the of strength according to our need. I will not forsake

thee,' there is companionship in all our solitude.

But do not let us forget that all God's promises have conditions appended, and that this one has its conditions like all the rest. Was not the history of Israel a contradiction of that glowing promise which was given them before they crossed the Jordan? Does the Jew to-day look as if he belonged to a nation that God would never leave nor forsake? Certainly not. And why? Simply because God's promise of not dropping us, and of never leaving us, is contingent upon our not dropping Him, and of our never leaving Him.

'No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand' No; but they can wriggle themselves out of their Father's hand. They can break the communion; they can separate themselves, and bring a film, not of impalpable and pure atmosphere, but of poisonous gases, between themselves and God. And God who, according to the grand old legend, before the Roman soldier flung his torch into the Holy of Holies, and 'burnt up the beautiful house where our fathers praised Him with fire,' was heard saying, 'Let us depart hence,' does say sometimes, when a man has gone away from Him, 'I will go and return to My place until they seek Me. In their affliction, they will seek Me early.'

And now let me say a word about the second voice that sounds here.

II. The human answer, or the echo of the divine voice.

If God speaks to me, He waits for me to speak to Him. My answer should be immediate, and my answer should embrace as true all that He has said to me, and my answer should build upon His great faithful promise a great triumphant confidence. Do we speak to God in the strain in which He speaks to us? When He says, 'I will,' do our hearts leap up with joyful confidence, and answer, 'Thou dost'? Do we take all His promises for our trust, or do we meet His firm 'assurance with a feeble, faltering faith? We turn God's 'verily' into a peradventure, often, and at best when He says to us 'I will,' we doubtingly say 'perhaps He may.' That is the kind of faith, even at its highest, with which the best of us meet this great promise, building frail tabernacles on the Rock of Ages and putting shame on God's faithfulness by our faithlessness. 'He hath said,' and then He pauses and listens, whether we are going to say anything in answer, and whether when He promises: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' We are bold to say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.' Now, I do not suppose that I am' keeping too slavishly to the mere words of the text if I ask you to look at the beautiful sequence of thought in these three clauses which make the response of the man to the divine promise. There is a kind of throb of wonder in that word. 'The Lord is my helper.' That is the answer of faith to the divine promise, grasping it, never hesitating about it, laying it upon the heart, or on the fevered forehead like a cooling leaf, to subdue the hot pulsations there. And then what comes next? 'I will not fear.' We have the power of controlling our apprehension of peril, but it is Of no use to screw ourselves up to a fictitious courage which consists mainly in the ostrich's wisdom of hiding its head from the danger, and in saying, 'Who is afraid?' Unless we can say 'The Lord is my helper,' it is folly to say, 'I will not be afraid, I will brace myself up, and be courageous to meet these difficulties. That is all right, but it is not all right unless we have laid the right foundation for courage. Having our purged ears opened to hear the great, strong, sweet divine promise, we are able to coerce our terrors, and to Banish them from our minds By the assurance that, whatever comes, God is with us. 'The Lord is my helper' — that is the foundation, and built upon that — and madness unless it is built upon it— is the courage which says to all my fears,' Down, down, you are not to get the mastery over me.' 'I will trust,' says the Psalmist, 'and not be afraid.' Faith is the antagonist to fear, because faith grasps the fact of the divine promise.

Now, there is another thought which may come in here since it is suggested by the context, and that is, that the recognition of God thus, as always With us to sustain us, makes all earthly conditions tolerable. The whole of my text is given as the ground of the exhortation: 'Be content with such things as ye have,' for He hath said, 'I will never leave thee.' If Thou dost not leave me, then such things as I have are enough for me, and if Thou hast gone away, no things that I merely have are of much good to me. And then comes the last stage in our answer to what God says, which is better represented by a slight variation in translation, putting the last words of my text as a question: 'What can man do unto me?' It is safe to look at men and things, and their possibly calamitous action upon our outward lives, when we have done the other two things, grasped God and rested in faith on Him. If we begin with what ought to come last, and look first at what man can do unto us, then fear will surge over us, as it ought to do. But if we follow the order of faith, and start with God's promise, grapple that to our heart, and put down with strong hand the craven dread that coils round our hearts, then we can look out with calm eyes upon all the appearances that may threaten evil, and say, 'Come on, Come all, my foot is on the Rock of Ages, and my back is against it, No man can touch me,' So we may boldly say, 'What can man do unto me?'

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Hebrews 13:8 The Unchanging Christ

'Jesus Christ the mine yesterday, and today, and for ever: — Hebrews 13:8.

How far back does this 'yesterday' go? The limit must be found by observing that it is 'Jesus Christ' who is spoken of — that is to

say, the Incarnate Saviour. That observation disposes of the reference of these words to the past eternity in which the eternal Word of God was what He is to-day. The sameness that is referred to here is neither the sameness of the divine Son from all eternity, nor the sameness of the medium of revelation in both the old and the new dispensations, but the sameness of the human Christ to all generations of His followers. And the epoch referred to in the 'yesterday' is defined more closely if we observe the previous context, which speaks of the dying teachers who have had the rule and have passed away. The 'yesterday' is the period of these departed teachers; the 'to-day' is the period of the writer and his readers.

But whilst the words of my text are thus narrowly: limited, the attribute, which is predicated of Christ in them, is something more than belongs to manhood, and requires for its foundation the assumption of His deity. He is the unchanging Jesus because He is the divine Son. The text resumes at the end of the Epistle, the solemn words of the first chapter, which referred the declaration of the Psalmist to 'the Son' — 'Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.' That Son, changeless and eternal by divine immutability, is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer.

This text may well be taken as our motto in looking forward, as I suppose we are all of us more or less doing, and trying to forecast the dim outlines of the coming events of this New Year. Whatever may happen, let us hold fast by that confidence, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.'

I. I apply these words, then, as a New-Year's motto, in two or three different directions, and ask you to consider, first, the unchanging Christ in His relation to our changeful lives.

The one thing of which anticipation may be sure is that nothing continues in one stay. True, 'that which is to be hath already been'; true, there is 'nothing new under the sun'; but just as in the physical world the infinite variety of creatures and things is all made Out of a few very simple elements, so, in our lives, out of a comparatively small number of possible incidents, an immense variety of combinations results, with the effect that, while we may be sure of the broad outlines of our future, we are all in the dark as to its particular events, and only know that ceaseless change with characterise it. So all forward looking must have a touch of fear in it, and there is only one thing that will enable us to front the else intolerable certainty of uncertainty, and that is, to fall back upon this thought' of my text, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

The one lesson of our changeful lives ought to be for each of us the existence of that which changes not. By the very law of contrast, and by the need of finding sufficient reason for the changes, we are driven from the contemplation of the fleeting to the vision of the permanent. The waves of this stormy sea of life ought to fling us all high and dry on the safe shore. Blessed are they who, in a world of passing phenomena, penetrate to the still centre of rest, and looking over all the vacillations of the things that can be shaken, can turn to the Christ and say, Thou who movest all things art Thyself unmoved; Thou who changest all things, Thyself changest not. As the moon rises slow and silvery, with its broad shield, out of the fluctuations of the ocean, so the one radiant Figure of the all sufficient and immutable Lover and Friend of our souls should rise for us out of the billows of life's tossing ocean, and come to us across the seal Brother! let the fleeting proclaim to you the permanent; let the world with its revolutions lead you up to the thought of Him who is the same for ever. For that is the only thought on which a man can build, and, building, be at rest.

The yesterday of my text may either be applied to the generations that have passed, and then the 'to-day' is our little life; or may be applied to my own yesterday, and then the to-day is this narrow present. In either application the words of my text are full of hope and of joy. In the former they say to us that no time can waste, nor any drawing from the fountain can diminish the all-sufficiency of that divine Christ in whom eighteen centuries have trusted and been 'lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' The yesterday of His grace to past generations: is the prophecy of the future and the law for the present. There is nothing that any past epoch has ever drawn from Him, of courage and confidence, of hope and wisdom, of guidance and strength, of love and consolation, of righteousness and purity, of brave hope and patient endurance, which He does not stand by my side ready to give to me too to-day, 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts,' and the old Christ of a thousand years ago is the Christ of to-day, ready to help, to succour, and to make us like Himself.

In the second reference, narrowing the 'yesterdays' to our own experiences, the words are full of consolation and of hope. 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me,' is the prayer that ought to be taught us by every remembrance of what Jesus Christ has been to us. The high-water mark of His possible sweetness does not lie in some irrevocable past moment of our lives. We never have to say that we have found a sufficiency in Him which we never shall find any more. Remember the time in your experience when Jesus Christ was most tender, most near, most sweet, most mysterious, most soul-sufficing for you, and be sure that He stands beside you, ready to renew the ancient blessing and to surpass it in His gift. Man's love sometimes wearies, Christ's never; man's basket may be emptied, Christ's is fuller after the distribution than it was before. This fountain can never run dry. Not until seven times, but Until seventy times seven — perfection multiplied into perfection, and that again multiplied by perfection once more — is the limit of the inexhaustible mercy of our Lord, and all in which the past has been rich lives in the present. Remember,

too, that this same thought which heartens us to front the inevitable changes, also gives dignity, beauty, poetry, to the small prosaic present. 'Jesus Christ is the same to-day.' We are always tempted to think that this moment is commonplace and insignificant. Yesterday lies consecrated in memory; to-morrow, radiant in hope; but to-day is poverty-stricken and prose. The sky is farthest away from us right over our heads; behind and in front it seems to touch the earth. But if we will only that all that sparkling lustre and all that more than mortal tenderness of pity and of love with which Jesus Christ has irradiated and sweetened any past is verily here with us amidst the commonplaces and insignificant duties of the dusty to-day, then we need look back to no purple distance, nor forward to any horizon where sky and earth kiss, but feel that here or nowhere, now or never, is Christ the all-sufficient and unchanging Friend. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

II. So, secondly, I apply these words in another direction. I ask you to think of the relation between the unchanging Christ and the dying helpers.

That is the connection in which the words occur in my text. The writer has been speaking of the subordinate and delegated leaders and rulers in the Church 'who have spoken the word of God' and who have passed away, leaving a faith to be followed, and a conversation the end of which is to be considered. And, turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he bids us think of Him who liveth for ever, and for ever is the teacher, the companion the home of our hearts, and the goal of our love. All other ties — sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me. Some of us have to look back upon their snapping; some of us have to look forward. But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He separates us from all others; blessed be God! he cannot separate us from Christ. 'I shall lose Thee though I die'; and Thou, Thou diest never.

God's changeful providence comes into all our lives, and parts dear ones, making their places empty, that Christ Himself may fill the empty places, and, striking away other props, though the tendrils that twine round them bleed with the wrench, in order that the plant may no longer trail along the ground, but twine itself round the Cross and climb to the Christ upon the throne. 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.' The true King was manifested when the earthly, shadowy monarch was swept away. And just as, on the face of some great wooded cliff, when the leaves drop, the solemn strength of the everlasting rock gleams out pure, so when our dear ones fall away, Jesus Christ is revealed, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' 'They tautly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.' 'This Man continueth ever.' He lives, and in Him all loves and companionships live unchanged. III. So, further, we apply, in the third place, this thought to the relation between the unchanging Christ and decaying institutions and opinions.

The era in which this Epistle was written was an era of revolution no great that we can scarcely imagine its apparent magnitude. It was close upon the final destruction of the ancient system of Judaism an external institution. The temple was tottering on its fall, the nation was ready to be scattered, and the writer, speaking to Hebrews, to whom that crash seemed to be the passing away of the eternal verities of God, bids them lift their eyes above all the chaos and dust of dissolving institutions and behold the true Eternal, the ever-living Christ. He warns them in the verse that follows nay text not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines, but to keep fast to the unchanging Jesus. And so these words may well come to us with lessons of encouragement, and with teaching of duty and steadfastness, in an epoch of much unrest and change — social, theological, ecclesiastical— such as that in which our lot is cast. Man's systems are the shadows on the hillside. Christ is the everlasting solemn mountain itself, Much in the popular conception and representation of Christianity is in the act of passing. Let it go; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We need not fear change within the limits of His Church or of His world. For change there means progress, and the more the human creations and embodiments of Christian truth crumble and disintegrate, the more distinctly does the solemn, single, unique figure of Christ the Same, rise before us. There is nothing in the world's history to compare with the phenomenon which is presented by the unworn freshness of Jesus Christ after all these centuries. All other men, however burning and shining their light, flicker and die out into extinction, and but for a season can the world rejoice in any of their beams; but this Jesus dominates the ages, and is as fresh to-day, in spite of all that men say, as He was eighteen centuries ago. They tell us He is losing His power; they tell us that mists of oblivion are wrapping Him round, as He moves slowly to the doom which besets Him in common with all the great names of the world. The wish is father to the thought. Christ is not done with yet, nor has the world done with Him, nor is He less available for the necessities of this generation, with its perplexities and difficulties, than He was in the past. His sameness is consistent with an infinite unfolding of new preciousness and new powers, as new generations with new questions arise, and the world seeks for fresh guidance. 'I write no new commandment unto you'; I preach no new Christ unto you, 'again, a new commandment I write unto you,' and every generation will find new impulse, new teaching, new shaping energies, social and individual, ecclesiastical, theological, intellectual, in the old Christ who was crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification, and remains 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' IV. Lastly, look at these words in their application to the relation between the unchanging Christ and the eternal life of heaven.

The 'for ever' of my text is not to be limited to this present life, but it runs on into the remotest future, and summons up before us

the grand and boundless prospect of an eternal unfolding and reception of new beauties in the old earthly Christ. For Him the change between the 'to-day' of His earthly life and the 'for ever' of His ascended glory made no change in the tenderness of His heart, the sweetness of His smile, the nearness of His helping hand. The beloved apostle, when he saw Him for the first time after He was ascended, fell at His feet as dead, because the attributes of His nature had become so glorious. But when the old hand, the same hand that had been pierced with the nails on the Cross, though it now held the seven stars, was laid upon him, and the old voice, the same voice that had spoken to him in the upper room, and in feebleness from the Cross,' though it was now as the 'sound of many waters,' said to him, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive for ever more'; John learned that the change from the Cross to the throne touched but the circumference of his Master's Being, and left the whole centre of His love and brotherhood wholly unaffected.

Nor will the change for us, from earth to the close communion of the heavens, bring us into contact with a changed Christ. It will be but like the experience of a man starting from the outermost verge of the solar system, where that giant, planet welters, away out in the darkness and the cold, and travelling inwards ever nearer and nearer to the central light, the warmth becoming more fervent, the radiance becoming more wondrous, as he draws closer and closer to the greatness which he divined when he was far away, and which he knows better when he is beside it. It will be the same Christ, the Mediator, the Revealer in heaven, whom we here dimly saw and knew to be the Sun of our souls through the clouds and mists of earth.

That radiant and eternal sameness will consist with continual variety, and an endless streaming forth of new lustres and new powers. But through all the growing proximity and illumination of the heavens He will be the same Jesus that we knew upon earth; still the Friend and the Lover of our souls. So, dear friends, if you and I have Him for our very own, then we do not need to fear change, for change will be progress; nor loss, for loss will be gain; nor the storm of life, which will drive us to His breast; nor the solitude of death, for our Shepherd will be with us there. He will be 'the same for ever'; though we shall know Him more deeply; even as we shall be the same, though 'changed from glory into glory'. If we have Him, we may be sure, on earth, of a 'to-morrow,' which 'shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' If we have Him, we may be sure of a heaven in which the sunny hours of its unending day will be filled with fruition and ever new glories from the old Christ who, for earth and heaven, is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

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Hebrews 13:9 - An Established Heart

'... It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.' — Hebrews 13:9.

This saying immediately follows the exhortation with which it is contrasted: 'Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines.' Now, it is quite clear that the unsettlement and moving past some fixed point which are suggested in the word 'carried away' are contrasted with the fixedness which is implied in the main word of our text. They who are established, 'rooted and grounded,' are not apt to be swept away by the blasts of 'divers and strange doctrines.' But there is another contrast besides this, and that is the one which exists between doctrines and grace; and there is a still further subsequent contrast in the words that follow my text, 'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats.'

Now I need not trouble you with the question as to what was the original reference of either of these two expressions, 'doctrines' and 'meats,' or whether they both point to some one form of teaching. What I rather want to emphasise here, in a sentence, is how, in these three principal words of three successive clauses, we get three aspects of the religious life — two of them spurious and partial, one of them sufficing and complete — 'teachings'; 'grace'; 'meats.' Turned into modern English, the writer's meaning is that the merely intellectual religion, which is always occupied with propositions instead of with Jesus Christ, 'Who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' is worthless, and the merely ceremonial religion, which is always occupied with casuistries about questions of meats, or external observance of any sort, is as valueless. There is no fixity; there is no rest of soul, no steadfastness of character to be found in either of these two directions. The only thing that ballasts and fills and calms the heart is what the writer here calls 'grace,' that is to say, the living personal experience of the love of God bestowed upon me and dwelling in my heart. You may have doctrines chattered to all eternity, and you may be so occupied about the externals of religion as that you never come near its centre, and its centre is that great thing which is here called 'grace,' which alone has power to establish the man's heart.

So, then, the main theme of these words is the possible stability of a fluctuating human life, the means of securing it, and the glory and beauty of the character which has secured it. Let us turn to then thoughts for a moment.

I. First, then, mark what this writer conceives to be the one source of human stability.

'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.' Now I have a strong suspicion that a great deal of preaching goes over the heads of the hearers, because preachers have not gauged the ignorance of their auditory, and that, howsoever familiar to the ear the key-words of Christian revelation may be, it by no means follows that there is any definite and clear idea attached to these.

So I do not think that it will be a waste of time for just a minute or two to try and put, as plainly as I can, what the New Testament means by this familiar and frequently reiterated word 'grace,' which, I suspect, is oftener pronounced than it is understood by a great many people.

To begin with, then, the root meaning of that word, which runs all through the New Testament, is simply favour, benignity, kindness, or to put all into a better and simpler form, the active love of God. Now, if we look at the various uses of the expression we find, for instance, that it is contrasted with a number of other things. Sometimes it is set in opposition to sin — sin reigns to righteousness, grace reigns to life. Sometimes it is contrasted with 'debt,' and sometimes put in opposition to 'works,' as, for instance, by Paul when he says, 'If it be of works then is it no more grace.' Sometimes it is opposed to law, as in the same apostle's words, 'Ye are not under law, but under grace.' Now, if we keep these various uses and contrasts in view we just come to this thought, that that active love of God is conditioned, not by any merit on our part — bubbles up from the depths of His own infinite heart, not because of what we are, but because of what He is, transcends all the rigid retributions of law, is not turned away by my sin, but continues to flood the world, simply because it wells up from the infinite and changeless fountain of love in the heart of God.

And then, from this central, deepest meaning of active love manifesting itself irrespective of what we deserve, there comes a second great aspect of the word. The cause gives its name to the effect, and the communicated blessings and gifts which flow to men from the love of God are designated by this great name. You know we have the same kind of idiom in our own tongue. 'Kindness' is the disposition; 'a kindness' is a single deed which flows from that disposition. 'Favour' is the way in which we regard a man; 'a favour' is the act or gift which manifests and flows from the regard. The water in the pitchers is the same as the water in the spring. The name of the cause is extended to all the lustrous variety of its effects. So the complex whole of the blessings and gifts which Jesus Christ brings to us, and which are sometimes designated in view of what they do for us, as salvation or eternal life, are also designated in view of that in God from which they come, as being collectively His 'grace.'

All the gifts that Christ brings are, we may say, but the love of God made visible in its bestowal upon us. The meteor that rushes through space catches fire when it passes into our atmosphere. The love of God, when it comes into our manifold necessities, is made visible in the large gifts which it bestows upon them.

And then there is a final application of the expression which is deduced from that second one — viz., the specific and individual excellences of character or conduct which result from the communication to men of the blessings that flow to Him from the love of God.

So these three: first the fountain, the love undisturbed and unalterable; second, the stream, the manifold gifts and blessings that flow to us through Christ; and third, the little cupfuls that each of us have, the various beauties and excellences of character which are developed under the fertilising influences of the sunshine of that love—these three are all included in this great Christian word.

There are other phases of its employment in the New Testament which I do not need to trouble you with now. But thus far we just come to this, that the one ground on which all steadfastness and calm tranquillity and settlement of nature and character can be reared is that we shall be in touch with God, shall be conscious of His love, and shall be receiving into our hearts the strength that He bestows. Man is a dependent creature; his make and his relationships to things round him render it impossible that the strength by which he is strong and the calmness by which he is established can be self-originated. They must come from without. There is only one way by which we can be kept from being drifted away by the currents and blown away by the tempests that run and range through every life, and that is that we shall anchor ourselves on God. His grace, His love possessed, and the sufficing gifts for all our hungry desires which come through that love possessed, these, and these alone, are the conditions of human stability.

II. And so I come, in the second place, to look at some of the various ways in which this establishing grace calms and stills the life.

We men are like some of the islands in the Eastern Tropics, fertile and luxuriant, but subject to be swept by typhoons, to be shaken by earthquakes, to be devastated by volcanoes. Around us there gather external foes assailing our steadfastness, and within us there He even more formidable enemies to an established and settled peace. We are like men carrying powder through a conflagration; bearing a whole magazine of combustibles within us, upon which at any moment a spark may alight. How are such creatures ever to be established? My text tells us by drawing into themselves the love, the giving love of God; and in the consciousness of that love, and in the rest of spirit that comes from the true possession of its gifts, there will be found the secret of tranquillity for the most storm-ridden life.

I would note, as one of the aspects of the tranquillity and establishment that comes from this conscious possession of the giving love of God, how it delivers men from all the dangers of being 'carried away by divers strange doctrines.' I do not give much for any orthodoxy which is not vitalised by personal experiences of the indwelling love of God. I do not care much what a man believes, or what he denies, or how he may occupy himself intellectually with the philosophical and doctrinal aspect of Christian revelation. The question is, how much of it has filtered from his brain into his heart, and has become part of himself, and verified to himself by his

own experience? So much, and not one hairbreadth more, of the Christian creed is your creed. So much as you have lived out, so much you are sure of because you have not only thought it but felt it, and cannot for a moment doubt, because your hearts have risen up and witnessed to its truth. About these parts of your belief there will be no fluctuation. There is no real and permanent grasp of any parts of religious truth except such as is verified by personal experience. And that sturdy blind man in the gospels had got hold of the true principle of the most convincing Christian apologetics when he said, 'You may talk as long as you like about the question whether this man is a sinner or not; settle it anyhow you please. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.' The 'grace' that had come to him in a purely external form established as a foundation axiom for his thinking, that the man who had done that for him was a messenger from God. That is the way by which you will come to a hold worth calling so of Christian truth, and unless you come to it by that hold it does not matter much whether you believe it or deny it all.

But, if there be such a living consciousness of the true possession of God's love giving you these blessings, then with great equanimity and openness of mind you can regard the discussion that may be raging about a great many so-called 'burning' questions. If I know that Jesus Christ died for me, and that my soul is saved because He did, it does not matter very much to me who wrote the Pentateuch, or whether the Book of Jonah is a parable or a history. I can let all such questions—and I only refer to these as specimens — be settled by appropriate evidence, by the experts, without putting myself in a fluster, and can say, 'I am not going to be carried away. My heart is established in grace.'

Still further, this conscious possession of the grace of God will keep a man very quiet amidst all the occasions for agitation which changing circumstances bring. Such there are in every life. Nothing continues in one stay. Thunder-claps, earthquakes, tempests, shocks of doom come to every one of us. Is it possible that amidst this continuous fluctuation, in which nothing is changeless but the fact of change, we can stand fixed and firm? Yes! As they say on the other side of the Border, there is a 'low,' place at the back of the wall. There is shelter only in one spot, and that is when we have God between us and the angry blast. And oh, brother, if there steal into a man's heart, and be faithfully kept there, the quiet thought that God is with him, to bless and keep and communicate to him all that he needs, why should he be troubled? 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.' What?

In this world full of evil? Yes. 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed; trusting in the Lord.' An empty heart is an easily agitated heart. A full heart, like a full sack, stands upright, and it is not so easy for the wind to whirl it about as if it were empty. They who are rooted in God will have a firm bole, which will be immovable, howsoever branches may sway and creak, and leaves may flutter and dance, or even fall, before the power of the storm. They who have no hold upon that grace are like the chaff which the wind drives from the threshing-floor. The storms of life will sweep you away unless the heart be 'established in grace.'

Further, another form of the stability communicated by that possessed love of God is in regard to the internal occasions for agitation. Passion, lust, hot desires, bitter regrets, eager clutching after uncertain and insufficient and perishable good, all these will be damped down if the love of God lives in our hearts. Oh, brethren, it is ourselves that disturb ourselves, and not the world that disturbs us. 'There is no joy hut calm'; and there is no calm but in the possession of the grace which is the giving love of God.

III. Lastly, my text suggests how beautiful a thing is the character of the man that is established in grace.

The word translated 'good' in my text would be better rendered 'fair,' or 'lovely,' or 'beautiful,' or some such expression conveying the idea that the writer was thinking, not so much about the essential goodness as about the beauty, in visible appearance, of a character which was thus established by grace. Is there anything fairer than the strong, steadfast, calm, equable character, unshaken by the storms of passion, unaffected by the blasts of calamity, un-devastated by the lava from the hellish subterranean fires that are in every soul; and yet not stolidly insensible nor obstinately conservative, but open to the inspiration of each successive moment, and gathering the blessed fruit of all mutability in a more profound and unchanging possession of the unchanging good? Surely the gospel which brings to men the possibility of being thus established brings to them the highest ideal of fair human character.

So do you see to it that you rectify your notions of what makes the beauty of character. There is many a poor old woman in a garret who presents, if not to men, at any rate to angels and to God, a far fairer character than the vulgar ideals which most people have. The beauty of meek patience, of persistent endeavour, of calm, steadfast trust, is fairer than all the 'purple patches' which the world admires because they are gaudy, and which an eye educated by looking at Jesus turns from with disgust, And do you see to it that you cultivate that type of excellence. It is a great deal easier to cultivate other kinds. It is hard to be quiet, hard to rule one's stormy nature, hard to stand 'foursquare to every wind that blows.' But it is possible — possible on one condition, that we drive our roots through all the loose shingle on the surface, 'the things seen and temporal,' and penetrate to the eternal substratum that lies beneath it all.

Then, my brother, if we keep ourselves near Jesus Christ, and let His grace flow into our hearts, then we, too, shall be able to say, 'Because I set Him at my right hand I shall not be moved,' and we may be able to carry, by His grace, even through the storms of life and amidst all the agitations of our own passions and desires, a steady light, neither blown about by tempests without, nor pulsating with alternations of brightness and dimness by reason of intermittent supplies from within, but blazing with the steadfast

splendour of the morning star. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

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Hebrews 13:10, 15 Our Altar

'We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. 15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually: — Hebrews 13:10, 15.

'We have an altar.' There is a certain militant emphasis on the words in the original, as if they were an assertion of something that had been denied. Who the deniers are is plain enough. They were the adherents of Judaism, who naturally found Christianity a strange contrast to their worship, of which altar and sacrifice were prominent features.

Just as to heathen nations the ritual of Judaism, its empty shrine, and temple without a God, were a puzzle and a scoff, so to heathen and Jew, the bare, starved worship of the Church, without temple, priest, sacrifice, or altar, was a mystery and a puzzle.

The writer of this letter in those words, then, in accordance with the central theme of his whole Epistle, insists that Christianity has more truly than heathenism or Judaism, altar and sacrifice.

And he is not content with alleging its possession of the reality of the altar, but he goes further, insists upon the superiority, even in that respect, of the Christian system.

He points to the fact that the great sin-offering of the Jewish ritual was not partaken of by the offerers, but consumed by fire without the camp, and he implies, in the earlier words of my text, that the Christian sacrifice differs from, and is superior to, the Jewish in this particular, that on it the worshippers feasted and fed.

Then, in the last words of my text, he touches upon another point of superiority — viz., that all Christian men are priests of this altar, and have to offer upon it sacrifices of thanksgiving.

And so he exalts the purely spiritual worship of Christianity as not only possessed of all which the gorgeous rituals round about it presented, but as being high above them even in regard to that which seemed their special prerogative. So, then, we have three things here — our Christian altar; our Christian feast on the sacrifice; and our Christian sacrifices on the altar. Let us regard these successively.

I. First, then, our Christian altar.

'We have,' says the writer, with a triumphant emphasis upon the word, 'We have an altar'; 'though there seems none visible in our external worship; and some of our converts miss the sensuous presentation to which they were accustomed; and others are puzzled by it, and taunt us with its absence.'

Now it is to be noticed, I think, that though in sacrificial religions the altar is the centre-point round which the temple is reared, it is of no moment in itself, and only comes into consideration as being that upon which the sacrifice is offered. So I do not suppose that any specific object was in the mind of the writer as answering to the altar in those sacrificial systems. He was thinking most of the sacrifice that was laid upon the altar, and of the altar only in connection therewith. But if we are not satisfied with such an explanation of the words, there are two interpretations open to us.

One is that the Cross is the altar. But that seems to me too gross and material, and savouring too much of the very error which this whole Epistle is written to destroy — viz., that the material is of moment, as measured against the spiritual. The other explanation is much to be preferred, according to which, if the altar has any special significance, it means the divine-human personality of Jesus Christ, on and in which the sacrifice is offered.

But the main thing to be laid hold of here is, I take it, that the central fact of Christianity is an altar, on which lies a sacrifice. If we are to accept the significance that I have suggested as possible for the emblem of my text, then the altar expresses the great mystery and gospel of the Incarnation, and the sacrifice expresses the great mystery and gospel of the passion of Christ's life and death, which is the atonement for our sins.

But that possibly is too much of a refinement, and so I confine myself here to the general ideas suggested — that the very living heart of the gospel is an altar and a sacrifice. That idea saturates the whole New Testament, from the page where John the forerunner's proclamation is, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' to the last triumphant vision in

which the Apocalyptic seer 'beheld a Lamb as it had been slain'; the eternal Co-Regnant of the universe, and the mediation through whom the whole surrounding Church for ever worships the Father.

The days are past, as it seems to me, when any man can reasonably contend that the New Testament does not teach — in every page of it, I was going to say — this truth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Time was when violent contortions and effort were resorted to in order to explain its language as not necessarily involving that significance. But we have got beyond that now, and we oftener hear from deniers this: 'Oh yes! I admit that throughout the New Testament this sacrificial idea is present, but that is only a chip of the old shell of Judaism, and we are above that level of religious thought.'

Now, I am not going to enter upon a discussion, for which neither place nor time are suited; but I will just suggest that the relation between the ancient system of revelation, with its sacrifice, altar, priest, temple, and the new system of Christianity is far more profoundly, and, I believe, far more philosophically, set forth in this Epistle to the Hebrews, as being the relation between shadow and substance, between prophecy and fulfilment, than when the old is contemptuously brushed aside as 'Hebrew old clothes,' with which the true Christianity has no concern. Judaism teas because Christ was to be, and the ancient ritual (whether modern ideas of the date of its origin be accepted or no) was a God-appointed mirror, in which, the shadow of the coming event was presented. Jesus Christ is all which temple, priest, altar, sacrifice proclaimed should one day be. And just as the relation between Christ's work and the Judaic system of external ritual sacrifices is that of shadow and substance, prophecy and fulfilment, so, in analogous manner, the relation between the altar and sacrifice of the New Testament and all the systems of heathenism, with their smoking altars, is that these declare a want, and this affords its supply; that these are the confession of humanity that it is conscious of sin, separation, alienation, and that need of a sacrifice, and that Christ is what heathenism in all lands has wailed that it needs, and has desperately hoped that it might find.

There are many attempts made to explain on other grounds the universality of sacrifice, and to weaken the force of its witness to the deep necessities of humanity as rooted in the consciousness of sin, but I venture to affirm that all these are superficial, and that the study of comparative religions goes on wrong lines unless it recognises in the whole heathen world a longing, the supply of which it recognises in Jesus Christ and His work. I venture to say that that is a truer philosophy of religion than much that nowadays calls itself by the name.

And what lies in this great thought? I am not going to attempt a theory of the Atonement. I do not believe that any such thing is completely possible for us. But this, at least, I recognise as being fundamental and essential to the thought of my text; 'we have an altar,' that Christ in His representative relation, in His true affinity to every man upon earth, has in His life or death taken upon Himself the consequences of human transgression, not merely by sympathy, nor only by reason of the uniqueness-of His representative relation, but by willing submission to that awful separation from the Father, of which the cry out of the thick darkness of the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' is the unfathomable witness. Thus, bearing our sin, He bears it away, and 'we have an altar.'

Now notice that this great truth has a distinct teaching for those who hanker after externalities of ritual. The writer of this Epistle uses it for the purpose of declaring that in the Christian Church, because of its possession of the true sacrifice, there is no room for any other; that priest, temple, altar, sacrifice in any material external forms are an anachronism and a contradiction of the very central idea of the gospel. And it seems very strange that sections of Christendom should so have been blind to the very meaning of my text, and so missed the lesson which it teaches, and fallen into the error which it opposes, as that these very words, which are a protest against any materialisation of the idea of altar and sacrifice, should have been twisted to mean by the altar the table of the Lord, and by sacrifice the communion of His body and blood. But so it is. So strong are the tendencies in our weak humanity to grasp at some sensuous embodiment of the truth that the Christian Church, as a whole, has not been able to keep on the lofty levels of my text, and has hungered after some external signs to which it may attach notions of efficacy which attach only to the spiritual sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus we have got a strange contradiction, as it seems to me, of the spirit and letter of my text, and of the whole Epistle from which it comes, and there, has crept surreptitiously into, and been obstinately maintained in, large sections of the Christian Church the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, and of a true sacrifice offered upon a material altar. My text protests against all that, and said to these early Christians what it says to us: 'Go into your upper rooms and there offer your worship, which to sense seems so bare and starved. Never mind though people say there is nothing in your system for sense to lay hold of. So much the better. Never mind though you can present no ritual with an altar, and a priest, and a sacrifice. All these are swept away for ever, because once Jesus Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Our temple is His body; our priest is before the throne. We rear no altar; He has died. Our sacrifice was offered on Calvary, and henceforward our worship, cleared from these materialities, rises unto loftier regions, and we worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

Still further, this truth has a bearing on the opposite pole of error, on those who would fain have a Christianity without an altar. I am not going to say how far genuine discipleship of Jesus Christ is possible with the omission of this article from the creed. It is no business of mine to determine that, but it is my business, as I think, to assert this, that a Christianity without an altar is a Christianity without power; impotent to move the world or to control the individual heart, inadequate to meet the needs and the cravings of men.

Where are the decaying Christians? Where are the Christians that have let go the central fact of an incarnate sacrifice for the world's sin? The answer to the two questions is the same. Wherever you find a feeble grasp of that central truth, or a faltering utterance of it on the part of the preachers, there you find deadness and formality.

Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ's servants, I was going to say, obey the same law, and that law is, no cross, no crown. If Christ has not died, the world's sacrifice, He will never reign, the world's King. If His Cross be an altar it is a throne. If it be not, it is merely a gallows, on which a religious enthusiast, with many sweet and lovable qualities, died a long time ago, and it is nothing to me. 'We have an altar,' or else we have no religion worth keeping.

II. Mark here, secondly, our feast on the sacrifice.

From this altar, says the writer, the adherents of the ancient system have no right to partake. That implies that those who have left the ancient system have the right to partake, and do partake. Now the writer is drawing a contrast, which he proceeds to elaborate, between the great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The former was not, as many other sacrifices were, partaken of by priests and worshippers, but simply the blood was brought within the holy place, and the whole of the rest of the sacrifice consumed in a waste spot without the camp. And this contrast is in the writer's mind. We have a sacrifice on which we feast.

That is to say, the Christ who died for my sins is not only my means of reconciliation with God, but His sacrifice and death are the sustenance of my spiritual life. We live upon the Christ that died for us. That this is no mere metaphor, but goes penetratingly and deep down to the very basis of the spiritual life, is attested sufficiently by many a word of Scripture on which I cannot now dwell. The life of the Christian is the indwelling Christ. For he whose heart hath not received that Christ within him is dead whilst he lives, and has no possession of the one true Hie for a human spirit, viz., the life of union with God. Christ in us is the consequence of Christ for us; and that Christianity is all imperfect which does not grasp with equal emphasis the thought of the sacrifice or the cross, and of the feast or the sacrifice.

But how is that feeding on the sacrifice accomplished? 'He that eateth Me, even he shall 'live by Me.' He that believeth, eateth. He that with humble faith makes Christ his very own, and appropriates as the nourishment and basis of his own better life the facts of the life and death of sacrifice, he truly lives thereby. To eat is to believe; to believe is to live.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how, though there be no reference in the words of my text, as I have tried to show, to the external rite of the communion of the Lord's body and blood, and though the 'altar' here has no reference whatever to that table, yet there is a connection between the two representations, inasmuch as the one declares in words what the other sets forth in symbol, and the meaning of the feast on the sacrifice is expressed by this great word. 'This is My body, broken for you.' 'This is the new covenant in My blood': 'Drink ye all of it.' 'We have an altar,' and though it be not the table on which the symbols of our Lord's sacrificial death are spread for us, yet these symbols and the words of my text, like the words of His great discourse in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, point to the same fact, that the spiritual participation of Christ by faith is the reality of 'eating of Him,' and the condition of living for ever.

III. And now, lastly, my text suggests our Christian offerings on the altar.

'By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' What are these offerings? Christ's death stands alone, incapable of repetition, meeting no repetition, the eternal, sole, 'sufficient obligation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' But there be other kinds of sacrifice. There are sacrifices of thanksgiving as well as for propitiation. And we, on the footing of that great sacrifice to which we can add nothing, and on which alone we must rest, may bring the offerings of our thankful hearts. These offerings are of a two-fold sort, says the writer. There are words of praise. There are works of beneficence. The service of man is sacrifice to God. That is a deep saying and reaches far. Such praise and such beneficence are only possible on the footing of Christ's sacrifice, for only on that footing is our praise acceptable; and only when moved by that infinite mercy and love shall we yield ourselves, thank offerings to God. And thus, brethren, the whole extent of the Christian life, in its inmost springs, and in its outward manifestations, is covered by these two thoughts — the 'feast on the sacrifice once offered, and the sacrifices which we in our turn offer on the altar. If we thus, moved by the mercy of God, 'yield ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service,' then not only will life be one long thank-offering, but as the Apostle puts it in another place, death itself may become, too, a thankful surrender to Him. For He says, 'I am ready to be offered.' And so the thankful heart, resting on the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, makes all life a thanksgiving, 'death God's endless mercy seals, and makes the sacrifice complete.' There is one Christ that can thus hallow and make acceptable our living and our dying, and that is the Christ that has died for us, and lives that in Him we may be priests to God. There is only one Christianity that will do for us what we will need, and that is the Christianity whose centre is an altar, on which the Son of God, our Passover, is slain for us.

Hebrews 13:13, 14 Without the Camp

‘Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, Bearing His reproach. 14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.’ —Hebrews 13:13, 14

CALVARY was outside Jerusalem. That wholly accidental and trivial circumstance is laid hold of in the context, in order to give picturesque force to the main contention and purpose of this Epistle. One of the solemn parts of the ritual of Judaism was the great Day of Atonement, on which the sacrifice that took away the sins of the nation was borne outside the camp, and consumed by fire, instead of being partaken of by the priests, as were most of the other sacrifices. Our writer here sees in these two roughly parallel things, not an argument but an imaginative illustration of great truths. Though he does not mean to say that the death on Calvary was intended to be pointed to by the unique arrangement in question, he does mean to say that the coincidence of the two things helps us to grasp two great truths—one, that Jesus Christ really did what that old sacrifice expressed the need for having done, and the other that, in His death on Calvary, the Jewish nation, as one of the parables has it, ‘cast Him out of the vineyard.’ In the context, he urges this analogy between the two things. But a Christ outside the camp beckons His disciples to His side. If any man serve Him, he has to follow Him, and the blessedness, as well as the duty, of the servant on earth, as well as in heaven, is to be where his Master is.

So the writer finds here a picturesque way to enforce the great lesson of his treatise, namely, that the Jewish adherent to Christianity must break with Judaism. In the early stages, it was possible to combine faith in Christ and adherence to the Temple and its ritual. But now that by process of time and experience the Church has learnt better who and what Christ is, that which was in part has to be done away, and the Christian Church is to stand clear of the Jewish synagogue.

Now it is to be distinctly understood that the words of my text, in the writer’s intention, are not a general principle or exhortation, but that they are a special commandment to a certain class under special circumstances, and when we use them, as I am going to do now, for a wider purpose, we must remember that that wider purpose was by no means in the writer’s mind. What he was thinking about was simply the relation between the Jewish Christian and the Jewish community. But if we take them as we may legitimately do — only remembering that we are diverting them from their original intention — as carrying more general lessons for us, what they seem to teach is that faithful discipleship involves detachment from the world. This commandment, ‘Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,’ stands, if you will notice, between two reasons for it, which buttress it up, as it were, on either side. Before it is enunciated, the writer has been pointing, as I have tried to show, to the thought that a Christ without the camp necessarily involves disciples without the camp. And he follows it with another reason, ‘here we have no continuing city, but we seek that which is to come.’ Here, then, is a general principle, supported on either side by a great reason.

Let me first try to set before you,

I. What this detachment is not.

The Jewish Christian was obliged utterly and outwardly to break his connection with Judaism, on the peril, if he did not, of being involved in its ruin, and, as was historically the case with certain Judaizing sects, of losing his Christianity altogether. It was a cruel necessity, and no wonder that it needed this long letter to screw the disciples of Hebrew extraction up to the point of making the leap from the sinking ship to the deck of the one that floated. The parallel does not hold with regard to us. The detachment from the world, or the coming out from the camp, to which my text exhorts, is not the abandonment of our relations with what the Bible calls ‘the world,’ and what we call — roughly meaning the same thing — society. The function of the Christian Church as leaven, involves the necessity of being closely associated, and in contact with, all forms of human life, national, civic, domestic, social, commercial, intellectual, political. Does my text counsel an opposite course? ‘Go forth without the camp,’ — does that mean huddle yourself together into a separate flock, and let the camp go to the devil? By no means. For the society or world, out of which the Christian is drawn by the attraction of the Cross, like iron filings out of a heap by a magnet, is in itself good and God-appointed. It is He ‘that sets the solitary in families.’ It is He that gathers humanity into the bonds of civic and national life. It is He that gives capacities which find their sphere, their education, and their increase in the walks of intellectual or commercial or political life. And He does not build up with one hand and destroy with the other, or set men by His providence in circumstances out of which He draws them by His grace. By no means. To go apart from humanity is to miss the very purpose for which God has set the Church in the world. For contact with the sick to be healed is requisite for healing, and they are poor disciples of the ‘Friend of publicans and sinners’ who prefer to consort with Pharisees. ‘Let both grow together till the harvest’ — the roots are intertwined, and it is God that has intertwined them. Now, I know that one does not need to insist upon this principle to the average Christianity of this day, which is only too ready to mingle itself with the world, but one does need to insist that, in so mingling, detachment from the world is still to be observed; and it does need to be taught that Christian men are not lowering the standard of the Christian life, when they fling themselves frankly and energetically into the various forms of human activity, if and only if, whilst they do so, they still remember

and obey the commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.' The commandment misinterpreted so as to be absolutely impossible to be obeyed, becomes a snare to people who do not keep it, and yet sometimes feel as if they were to blame, because they do not. And, therefore, I turn in the next place to consider —

II. What this detachment really is.

Will you let me put what I have to say into the shape of two or three plain, practical exhortations, not because I wish to assume a position of authority or command, but only in order to give vividness and point to my thoughts?

First, then, let us habitually nourish the inner life of union with Jesus Christ. Notice the words of my text, and see what comes first and what comes second. 'Let us go forth unto Him' — that is the main thing: 'Without the camp' is second, and a consequence; 'unto Him,' is primary, which is just to say that the highest, widest, noblest, all-comprehensive conception of what a Christian life is, is that it is union with Jesus Christ, and whatever else it is follows from that. The soul is ever to be looking up through all the shadows and shows, the changes and circumstances, of this fleeting present unto Him, and seeking to be more closely united with Him. Union with Him is life, and separation from Him is death. To be so united is to be a Christian. Never mind about camps or anything else, to begin with. If the heart is joined to Jesus, then all the rest will come right. If it is not, then you may make regulations as many as you like, and they will only be red tape to entangle your feet in. 'Let us go forth unto Him'; that is the sovereign commandment. And how is that to be done? How is it to be done but by nourishing habitual consciousness of union with Him and life in Him, by an habitual reference of all our acts to Him? As the Roman Catholics put it, in their hard external way, 'the practice of the presence of God' is the keynote to all real, vigorous Christianity. For, brethren, such an habitual fellowship with Jesus Christ is possible for us. Though with many interruptions, no doubt, still ideally is it possible that it shall be continuous and real. It is possible, perfectly possible, that it shall be a great deal more continuous than, alas! it is with many of us.

Depend upon it, this nourishing of an inward life of fellowship with Jesus, so that we may say, 'our lives are hid' — hid, after all vigorous manifestation and consistent action — 'with Christ in God,' will not weaken, but increase, the force with which we act on the things seen and temporal. There is an unwholesome kind of mysticism which withdraws men from the plain duties of everyday life; and there is a deep, sane, wholesome, and eminently Christian mysticism which enables men to come down with greater force, and to act with more decision, with more energy, with more effect, in all the common deeds of life. The greatest mystics have been the hardest workers. Who was it that said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'? That man had gone far, very far, towards an habitual consciousness of Christ's presence, and it was the same man that said, 'That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches.' The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages, the saint that rode by the lake all day long, and was so absorbed in contemplation that he said at night, 'Where is the lake?' was the man that held all the threads of European politics in his hands, and from his cell at Clairvaux guided popes, and flung the nations of the West into a crusade. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers that the Church has ever had, and was one of those who lived most habitually without the camp. Be sure of this, that the more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic will they be in the world. They tell us that the branches of a spreading tree describe roughly the same circumference in the atmosphere that its roots do underground, and so far as our roots extend in Christ, so far will our branches spread in the world. 'Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp.'

Again, let me say, do the same things as other people, but with a difference. The more our so-called civilisation advances, the more, I was going to say, mechanical, or at least largely released from the control of the will and personal idiosyncrasy, become great parts of our work. The Christian weaver drives her looms very much in the same fashion that the non-Christian girl who is looking after the next sot does. The Christian clerk adds up his figures, and writes his letters, very much in the same fashion that the worldly clerk does. The believing doctor visits his patients, and writes out his prescriptions in the fashion that his neighbour who is not a Christian does. But there is always room for the personal equation — always! and two lives may be, superficially and roughly, the same, and yet there may be a difference in them impalpable, undefinable, and very obvious and very real and very mighty. The Christian motive is love to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, and that motive may be brought to bear upon all life —

**'A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine.'**

He that for Christ's sake does a common thing it out of the fatal region of the commonplace, and makes it great and beautiful. We do not want from all Christian people specifically Christian service, in the narrow sense which that phrase has acquired, half so much as we want common things done from an uncommon motive; worldly things done because of the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. And, depend upon it, just as, from some unseen bank of violets, there come odours in opening spring, so from the unspoken and deeply hidden motive of love to Jesus Christ, there will be a fragrance in our commonest actions which all men will recognise. They tell us that rivers which flow from lakes are so clear that they are tinged throughout with celestial blue, because all the mud that they brought down from their upper reaches has been deposited in the still waters of the lake from which they flow; and if from the deep tam of love to Jesus Christ in our hearts the stream of our lives flows out, it will be like the Rhone below Geneva, distinguishable from the muddy waters that run by its side in the same channel. Two people, partners in business, joined in the same work,

marching step for step in the same ranks, may yet be entirely distinguishable and truly separate, because, doing the same things, they do them from different motives.

Let me say, still further, and finally about this matter, that sometimes we shall have to come actually out of the camp. The world as God made it is good; society is ordained by God. The occupations which men pursue are of His appointment, for the most part. But into the thing that was good there have crept all manner of corruptions and abominations, so that often it will be a Christian duty to come away from all outward connection with that which is incurably corrupt. I know very well that a morality which mainly consists of prohibitions is pedantic and poor. I know very well that a Christianity which interprets such a precept as this of my text simply as meaning abstinence from certain conventionally selected and branded forms of life, occupation, or amusement, is but a very poor affair. But 'Thou shalt not' is very often absolutely necessary as a support to 'Thou shalt.' If you go into an Eastern city, you will find the houses with their fronts to the street, having narrow slits of windows all barred, and a heavy gate, frowning and ugly. But pass within, and there are flower-beds and fountains. The frowning street front is there for the defence of the fountains and the flower-beds within, from the assaults of foes, and speaks of a disturbed state of society, in which no flowers can grow and no fountains can bubble and sparkle, unless a strong barrier is round them. And so 'thou shalt not, in a world like this, is needful in order that 'thou shalt' shall have fair play. No law can be laid down for other people. Every man must settle this matter of abstinence for himself. Things that you may do, perhaps I may not do; things that you may not do, I very likely may. 'A liberal Christianity,' as the world calls it, is often a very shallow Christianity. 'A sour Puritanical severity,' as loose-living men call it, is very often plain, Christian morality. An inconsistent Christian may be hailed as 'a good fellow,' and laughed at behind his back. Samson made sport for the Philistines when he was blind. The uncircumcised do often say of professing Christians, that try to be like them, and to keep step with them, 'What do these Hebrews here?' and God always says to such, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?'

Lastly —

III. Why this detachment is enforced.

'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' That translation does not give the full force of the original, for it suggests the idea of a vague uncertainty in the seeking, whereas what the writer means is, not 'one to come,' but one which is coming. The Christian object of seeking is definite, and it is not merely future but present, and in process of being realised even here and now, and tending to completion. Paul uses the same metaphor of the city in one of his letters, 'Your citizenship is in heaven.' He says that to the Philippians. Philippi was a colony; that is to say, it was a bit of Rome put down in a foreign land, with Roman laws, its citizens enrolled upon the registers of the Roman tribes, and not under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor. That is what we Christians are, whether we know it or not.' We are here in an order to which we outwardly belong, but in the depths of our being we belong to another order of things altogether. Therefore the essentials of the Christian life may be stated as being the looking forward to the city, and the realising of our affinities to it and not to the things around us. In the measure in which, dear brethren, we realise to what community we belong, will the things here be seen to be fleeting and alive to our deepest selves. 'Here we have no continuing city' is not merely the result of the transiency of temporal things, and the brevity of our earthly lives, but it is much rather the result of our affinity to the other order of things beyond the seas.

Abraham dwelt in tents, because he 'looked for a airy,' and so it was better for him to stop on the breezy uplands, though the herbage was scant, than to go with Lot into the vale of Sodom, though it looked like the garden of the Lord. In like manner, the more intensely we realise that we belong to the city, the more shall we be willing to 'go forth without the camp.' Let these two thoughts dominate our minds and shape our lives; our union with Jesus Christ and our citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the measure in which they do, it will be no sacrifice for us to come out of the transient camp, because we shall thereby go to Him and come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, 'which hath the foundations.'

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Hebrews 13:15, 16 Christian Sacrifice

'By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. 16. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. —Hebrews 13:15, 16.

MUCH attention is given now to the Study of comparative religion. The beliefs and observances of the rudest tribes are narrowly scrutinised, in order to discover the underlying ideas. And many a practice which seems to be trivial, absurd, or sanguinary is found to have its foundation in some noble and profound thought. Charity and insight have both gained by the study.

But, singularly enough, the very people who are so interested in the rationale of the rites of savages will turn away when anybody applies a similar process to the ritual of the Jews. That is what this Epistle to the Hebrews does. It translates altar, ritual festivals,

priests, into thoughts; and it declares that Jesus Christ' is the only adequate and abiding embodiment of these thoughts. We are not dressing Christian truth in a foreign garb when we express the substance of its revelation in language borrowed from the ritualistic system that preceded it. But we are extricating truths, which the world needs to-day as much as ever it did, from the form in which they were embodied for one stage of religion, when we translate them into their Christian equivalents.

So the writer here has been speaking about Christ as by His death sanctifying His people. And on that great thought, that He is what all priesthood symbolises, and what all bloody sacrifices reach out towards, he builds this grand exhortation of my text, which is at once a lofty conception of what the Christian life ought to be, and a directory as to the method by which it may become so.

**'By Him let us offer sacrifices continually, for
with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'**

Now, it seems to me that there are here mainly three points to be looked at. First, the basis of; second, the material of; and third, the divine delight in, the sacrifices of the Christian life. And to these three points I ask your attention.

I. First, then, note here the emphatic way in which the one basis of Christian sacrifice is laid down.

Anybody who can consult the original will see, what indeed is partially expressed in our translation, that the position of these two words 'through' (or by) 'Him' underscores and puts great emphasis upon them. There are two thoughts which may be included in them; the one, that Jesus is the Priest by whose mediation we come to God, and the other that He is the sacrifice, on the footing of which we can present our sacrifices. It seems to me, however, that it is the latter idea principally that is in the writer's mind here. And on it I touch lightly in a few words.

Now, let me recall to you, as a world-wide fact which is expressed in the noblest form in the ancient Jewish ritual, that there was a broad line of distinction drawn between two kinds of sacrifices, differing in their material and in their purpose. If I wanted to use mere theological technicalities, which I do not, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as we can, for the moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal.

Now I want to know whether that world-wide confession of need is nothing more to us than a mere piece of interesting reminiscence of a stage of development beyond which we have advanced. I do not believe that there is such a gulf of difference between the lowest savage and the most cultivated nineteenth-century Englishman, that the fundamental needs of the one, in spirit, are not almost as identical as are the fundamental needs of the one and the other in regard to bodily wants. And sure I am that, if the voice of humanity has declared all the world over, as it has declared, that it is conscious of a cloud that has come between it and the awful Power above, and that it seeks by sacrifice the removal of the cloud, the probability is that that need is your need and mine; and that the remedy which humanity has divined as necessary has some affinity with the remedy which God has revealed as provided.

I am not going to attempt theorising about the manner in which the life and death of Jesus Christ sweep away the barrier between us and God, and deal with the consciousness of transgression, which lies coiled and dormant, but always ready to wake and sting, in human hearts. But I do venture to appeal to each man's and woman's own consciousness, and to ask, Is there not something in us which recognises the necessity that the sin which stands between God and man shall be swept away? Is there not something in us which recognises the blessedness of the message, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin'? Oh, brethren! do not fancy that it is a mere theological doctrine of an atonement that is in question. It is the possibility of loving access to God, as made possible through Jesus, and through Him alone, that I want to press upon your hearts.

'Through Him let us offer.'

II. Secondly, notice the light which our text throws upon the material or contents of the Christian sacrifice.

I need not dwell at all, I suppose, upon the explanation of the words, which are plain enough. The writer seems to me to divide the sacrifice of praise, which he prescribes, into two parts, the praise of the lip and the praise of the life.

But before I deal with this twofold distribution of the thought, let me fix upon the main general idea that is expressed here, and that is that the highest notion, the noblest and purest of what a Christian life is, is that it is one long sacrifice. Have we risen to the height

of that conception? I do not say, Have we attained to the fulfilment of it? The answer to the latter question one knows only too well. But has it ever dawned upon us that the true ideal of the Christian life which we profess to be living is this — a sacrifice?

Now, that thought involves two things. One is the continuous surrender of self, and that means the absolute suppression of our own wills; the bridling of our own inclinations and fancies; the ceasing obstinately to adhere to our own purposes and conceptions of What is good; the recognition that there is a higher will above us, ruling and guiding, to which we are to submit. Sacrifice means nothing if it does not mean surrender; and surrender is nothing if it is not the surrender of the will. It was a great deal easier for Abraham to take the knife in his hand, and climb the hill with the fixed intention of thrusting it into his son's heart, than it is for us to take the sword of the Spirit in our hands and slay our own wills, and I am here to say that unless we do we have very little right to call ourselves Christians.

But, then, surrender is only half the conception of the sacrifice which has to be accomplished in our whole days and selves. Surrender to God is the full meaning of sacrifice. And that implies the distinct reference of all that I am, and all that I do, to Him, as not only commanding, but as being the aim and end of my life. We are to labour on as at His command. You in your counting-houses, and mills, and shops, and homes; and we students in our studies, and laboratories, and lecture-rooms, are to link everything with Him, with His will, and with the thought of Him. What vice could live in that light? What meanness would not be struck dead if we were connected with that great reservoir of electric force? What slothfulness would not be spurred into unhesitating and unrelenting zeal if all our work were referred to God? Unless our lives be thus sacrifice, in the full sense of conscious surrender to Him, we have yet to learn what is the meaning and the purpose of the propitiatory sacrifice on which we say that our lives are built.

I need not, I suppose, remind you at any length of how our text draws broad and deep the distinction between the nature and the scope of the fundamental offering made by Christ, and the offerings made by us. The one takes away the separating barrier; the other is the flow of the stream where the barrier had stood. The one is the melting away of the cloud that hid the sun; the other is the flashing of the mirror of my heart when the sun shines upon it. Our sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the Creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thank-offering, then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like a scrupulous retail dealer afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than can be avoided.

**'Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely calculated less or more.'**

Power is the measure of duty, and they whose offering is the expression of their thankfulness will heap incense upon the brazier, and cover the altar with flowers.

Ah, brethren, what a blessed life it would be for us, if indeed all the painfulness and harshness of duty, with all the efforts of constraint and restriction and stimulus which it so often requires, were transmuted into that glad expression of infinite obligation for the great sacrifice on which our life and hopes rest!

I do not purpose to say much about the two classes of sacrifice into which our writer divides the whole. Words come first, work follows. That order may seem strange, because we are accustomed to think more of work than words. But the Bible has a solemn reverence for man's utterances of speech, and many a protest against 'God's great gift of speech abused.' And the text rightly supposes that if there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths, and that we should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband who never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother who never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man who is thankful for Christ's sacrifice and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described.

Brethren! the conventionalities of our modern life, the proper reticence about personal experience, the reverence due to sacred subjects, all these do prescribe caution and tact and many another thing, in limiting the evangelistic side of our speech; but is there any such limitation needful for the eucharistic, the thanksgiving side of our speech? Surely not. In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the four and twenty, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the psalter, so that night and day prayer and praise went up. It was a beautiful idea, beautiful as long as it was an idea, and, like a great many other beautiful ideas, made vulgar and sometimes ludicrous when it was put into realisation. But it is the symbol of what we should be, with hearts ever occupied with Him, and the voice of praise rising unintermittently from our hearts singing a quiet tune, all the day and night long, to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

And then the other side of this conception of sacrifice that my text puts forth is that of beneficence amongst men, in the general form of doing good, and in the specific form of giving money. Two aspects of this combination of word and work may be suggested. It has a message for us professing Christians. All that the world says about the uselessness of singing psalms, and praying prayers, while neglecting the miserable and the weak, is said far more emphatically in the Bible, and ought to be laid to heart, not because sneering, godless people say it, but because God Himself says it. It is vain to pray unless you work. It is sin to work for yourselves unless you own the bond of sympathy with all mankind, and live 'to do good and to communicate.' That is a message for others than Christians. There is no real foundation for a broad philanthropy except a deep devotion to God. The service of man is never so well secured as when it is the corollary and second form of the service of God.

III. And so, lastly — and only a word — note the divine delight in such sacrifice.

Ah! that is a wonderful thought, 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Now I take it that that 'such' covers both the points on which I have been dwelling, and that the sacrifices which please Him are, first, those which are offered on the basis and footing of Christ's sacrifice, and, second, those in which word and work accord well, and make one music.

'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

We are sometimes too much afraid of believing that there is in the divine heart anything corresponding to our delight in gifts that mean love, because we are so penetrated with the imperfection of all that we can do and give; and sometimes because we are influenced by grand philosophic ideas of the divine nature, so that we think it degrading to Him to conceive of anything corresponding to our delight passing across it. But the Bible is wiser and more reverent than that, and it tells us that, however stained and imperfect our gifts, and however a man might reject them with scorn, God will take them if they are 'such' — that is, offered through Jesus Christ. I dare say there are many parents who have laid away amongst their treasures some utterly useless thing that one of their little children once gave them. No good in it at all! No; but it meant love. And, depend upon it, 'if ye, being evil, know how to good gifts' — though they are useless — 'from your children, much more will your heavenly Father accept' your stained sacrifices if they come through Christ.

Dear brethren, my text preaches to us what is the true sacrifice of the true priesthood in the Christian Church. There is one Priest who stands alone, offering the one sacrifice that has no parallel nor second. No other shares in His priesthood of expiation and intercession. But around, and deriving their priestly character from Him, and made capable of rendering acceptable sacrifices through Him, stand the whole company of Christian people. And besides these there are no priesthoods and no sacrifices in the Christian vocabulary or in the Christian Church. Would that a generation that seems to be reeling backwards to the beggarly elements of an official priesthood, with all its corruptions and degradations of the Christian community, would learn the lesson of my text! 'Ye' — all of you, and not any selected number amongst you — 'ye, all of you are a royal priesthood.' There are only two sacrifices in the Christian Church: the one offered once for all on Calvary, by the High Priest Himself; the sacrifice of ourselves, by ourselves, thank-offerings for Christ and His name, which are the true Eucharist.

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Hebrews 13:20 Great Hopes a Great Duty

'The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.' — Hebrews 13:20.

A GREAT building needs a deep foundation; a leaping fountain needs a full spring. A very large and lofty prayer follows the words of my text, and these are the foundations on which it rests, the abundant source from which it soars heavenward. The writer asks for his readers nothing less than a complete, all-round, and thorough-going conformity to the will of God; and that should be our deepest desire and our conscious aim, that God may see His own image in us, for nothing less can be 'well-pleasing in His sight.' But does not such a dream of what we may be seem far too audacious, when we pursue the stained volume of our own lives, and remember what we are? Should we not be content with very much more modest hopes for ourselves, and with a vary partial attainment of them? Yes, if we look at ourselves; but to look at ourselves is not the way to pray, or the way to hope, or the way to grow, or the way to dare. The logic of Christian petitions and Christian expectations starts with God as the premiss, and thence argues the possibility of the impossible. It was because of all this great accumulation of truths, piled up in my text, that the writer found it in his heart to ask such great things for the humble people to whom he was writing, although he well knew that they were far from perfect, and were even in danger of making shipwreck of the faith altogether. My purpose now is to let him lead us along the great array of reasons for his great prayer, that we too may learn to desire and to expect, and to work for nothing short of this aim — the entire purging of ourselves from all evil and sin and the complete assimilation to our Lord. There are three points here: the warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God; the warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd; the warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

I. The warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God.

'The God of peace' — the name comes like a benediction into our restless lives and distracted hearts, and carries us away up into lofty regions, above the mutations of circumstances and the perturbations and agitations of our earthly life. No doubt, there may be some allusion here to the special circumstances of the recipients of this letter, for it is clear from the rest of the Epistle that they had much need for the peace of God to calm their agitations in the prospect of the collapse of the venerable system in which they had lived so long. It is obvious also that there were divisions of opinion amongst themselves, so that the invocation of the God of peace may have had a special sanctity and sweetness to them, considering the circumstances in which they were placed. But the designation has a bearing not so much on the condition of those to whom the words are spoken, as upon the substance of the grand prayer that follows it. It is because He is known, to us as being 'the God of peace' that we may be quite sure that He will 'make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

And how does that great name, sweet and strong as it is, bear with it the weight of such an inference as that? Plainly enough because it speaks, first of all, of that which I may call an immanent characteristic of the divine nature. He is the tranquil God, dwelling above all disturbance which comes from variability and all 'the shadows east by turning'; dwelling above all possibilities of irritation or agitation. And yet that great ocean is not stagnant, but through all its depths flow currents of love, and in all its repose is intensest energy. The highest activity coincides with the supremest rest. The wheel revolves so swiftly that it stands as if motionless.

Then, just because of that profound divine repose, we may expect Him, by His very nature, to impart His own peace to the soul that seeks Him. Of course, it can be but the faintest shadow of that divine indisturbance which can ever fall, like a dove's wing, upon our restless lives. But still in the tranquillity of a quiet heart, in the harmonies of a spirit all concentrated on one purpose, in the independence of externals possible to a man who grasps God, in the victory over change which is granted to them who have pierced through the fleeting clouds and have their home in the calm blue beyond, there may be a quiet of heart which does not altogether put to shame that wondrous promise: 'My peace I give unto you.' It is possible that they 'which have believed' should 'enter into the rest' of God.

But if the impartation of some faint but real echo of His own great repose is the delight of the divine heart, how can it be done? There is only one way by which a man can be made peaceful, and that is by his being made good. Nothing else secures the true tranquillity of a human spirit without its conformity to the divine will. It is submission to the divine commandments and appointments, it is the casting-off of self with all its agitations and troubles, that secures our entering into rest. What a man needs for peace is, that his relations with God should be set right, that his own nature should be drawn into one and harmonised with itself, and that his relations with men should also be rectified.

For the first of these, we know that it is 'the Christ that died,' who is the means by which the alienation and enmity of heart between us and God can be swept away. For the second of them, we know that the only way by which this anarchic commonwealth within can be brought into harmony and order, and its elements prevented from drawing apart from one another, is that the whole man shall be bowed before God in submission to His will. The heart is like some stormy sea, tossed and running mountains high, and there is only one voice that can say to it, 'Peace: be still,' and that is the voice of God in Christ. There is only one power that, like the white moon in the nightly sky, can draw the heaped waters round the whole world after itself, and that is the power of Christ in His Cross and Spirit, which brings the disobedient heart into submission, and unites the discordant powers in the liberty of a common service: so, brethren, if we are ever to have quiet hearts, they must come, not from favourable circumstances, nor from anything external. They can only come from the prayer being answered, 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' and then our inner lives will no longer be torn by contending passions — conscience pulling this way and desire that; a great voice saying within, 'you ought!' and an insistent voice answering, 'I will not!'; but all within will be at one, and then there will be peace. 'The God of peace sanctify you wholly,' says one of the apostles, bringing out in the expression the same thought, that inasmuch as He who Himself is supreme repose must be infinitely desirous that we, His children, should share in His rest, He will, as the only way by which that rest can ever be attained, sanctify us wholly. When — and not till, and as soon as — we are thus made holy are we made at rest.

Nor let us forget that, on the other hand, the divine peace, which is 'shed abroad in our hearts' by the love of God, does itself largely contribute to perfect the holiness of a Christian soul. We read that 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,' and also that 'the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds,' and again that the peace of God will sit as umpire in our hearts, detecting evil, judging actions, awarding the prizes. For, indeed, when that peace lies like a summer morning's light upon our quiet hearts there will be little in evil that will so attract us as to make us think it worth our while to break the blessed and charmed silence for the sake of any earthly influences or joys. They that dwell in the peace of God have little temptation to buy trouble, remorse perhaps, or agitation, by venturing out into the forbidden ground. So, brethren, the great name of the God of peace is itself a promise, and entitles us to expect the completeness of character which alone brings peace.

Then, further, we have here

II. The warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd.

'The God of peace who brought again' — or, perhaps, brought up — 'from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.' Now, it is remarkable that this is the only reference in this Epistle to the Hebrews to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is full of references to that which presupposes the Resurrection, namely, the ascended life of Jesus as .the great High Priest within the veil, and the fact that only this once is the act of resurrection referred to, confirms the idea, that in the New Testament there is no division of thought between the point at which the line begins and the line itself, that the Ascension is but the prolongation of the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is but the beginning of the Ascension, But here the act, rather than the state into which it led, is dwelt upon as being more appropriate to the purpose in hand.

Then we may notice further, that in that phrase, 'the great Shepherd of the sheep;' there is a quotation from one of the prophets, where the words refer to Moses bringing up the people from the Red Sea. The writer of the Epistle adds to Isaiah's phrase one significant word, and speaks of 'that great Shepherd,' to remind us of the comparison which he had been running in an earlier part of the letter, between the leader of Israel and Christ.

So, then, we have here brought before us Jesus who is risen and ascended, as the great Shepherd of the sheep. Looking to Him, what are we heartened to believe are the possibilities and the divine purposes for each of those that put their trust in Him? Gazing in thought for a moment on that Lord risen from the grave, with the old love in His heart, and the old greetings upon His lips, we see there, of course, as everybody knows, the demonstration of the persistence of a human life through death, like some stream of fresh water holding on its course through a salt and stagnant sea, or plunging underground for a short space, to come up again flashing into the sunshine. But we see more than that. We see the measure of the power, as the Apostle has it, that works in us, 'according to the energy of the might of the power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.' As we gaze, we see what may be called a type, but what is a great deal more than a type, of the possibilities of the risen life, as it may be lived even here and now, by every poor and humble soul that puts its trust in Him. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

But more than that, the risen Shepherd has risen as Shepherd, for the very purpose of imparting, to every soul that trusts in Him, His own life. And unless we grasp that truth, we shall not understand the place of the Resurrection in the Christian scheme, nor the ground on which the loftiest anticipations are not audacious for the poorest soul, and on which anything beneath the loftiest is, for the poorest, beneath what it might and should aspire to. When the alabaster box was broken, the ointment was poured forth and the house was filled with the odour. The risen Christ imparts His life to His people. And nothing short of their entire perfecting in all which is within the possibilities of human beauty and nobleness and purity, will be the adequate issue of that great death and triumphant Resurrection, and of the mighty, quickening power of a new life, which He thereby breathed into the dying world. On His Cross, and from His Tomb, and from His Throne, He has set aging processes which never can reach their goal — and, blessed be God! never will stop their beneficent working — until every soul of man, however stained and evil, that puts the humblest trust in Him, and lives after His commandment, is become radiant with beauty, complete in holiness, victorious over self and sin, and is set for ever more at the right hand of God. Every anticipation that falls short of that, and all effort that lags behind that anticipation, is an insult to the Christ, and a trampling under foot of the blood of 'the covenant wherewith ye are sanctified.'

So, brother, open your mouth wide, and it will be filled. Expect great things; believe that what Jesus Christ came into the world and died to do, what Jesus Christ left the world and lives to carry on, will be done in you, and that you too will be made complete in Him. For the Shepherd leads and the sheep follow — here afar off, often straying, and getting lost or torn by the brambles, and worried by the wolves. But He leads and they do follow, and the time comes when 'they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth,' and be close behind Him in all the good pastures of the mountains of Israel 'We see not yet all things put under Him,' but we see Jesus and that is enough.

III. The warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant. Space will not allow of my entering upon the question as to the precise relation of these final words to the rest of the verse, but their relation to the great purpose of the whole verse is plain enough. It has come to be very unfashionable nowadays to talk about the covenant. People think that it is archaic, technically theological, far away from daily life, and so on and so on. I believe that Christian people would be a great deal stronger, if there were a more prominent place given in Christian meditations to the great idea that underlies that metaphor. And it is just this, that God is under obligations, takes on Him by Himself, to fulfil to a poor, trusting soul the great promises to which that soul has been drawn to cleave. He has, if I might use such a metaphor, like some monarch, given a constitution to His people, He has not left us to grope as to what His mind and purpose may be. Across the infinite ocean of possibilities, He has marked out on the chart, so to speak, the line which He will pursue. We have His word, and His word is this: 'After those days, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant. I will write My law on their inward parts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' So the definite, distinct promise, in black and white, so to speak, to every man and woman on the face of the earth, is 'Come into the bends of the covenant, by

trusting Me, and you will get all that I have promised.'

And that covenant is, as my text says, sealed by 'the blood.' Which, being turned into less metaphorical English, is just this, that God's infinite pro- pension of beneficence towards each of us, and desire to clothe us in garments of radiant purity, are, by Christ's death, guaranteed as extending to, and working their effects on, every soul that trusts Him. What does that death mean if it does not mean that? Why should He have died on the Cross, unless it were to take away sin?

But the blood of the covenant does not mean only the death by which the covenant is ratified. We shall much misapprehend and narrow New Testament teaching, if we suppose that. The 'blood is the life.' There is further suggested, then, by the expression, that the vital energy, with which Jesus Christ came from the dead as the Shepherd of the sheep, is the power by which God makes us 'perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

So, two practical counsels may close my words. See that you aspire as high as God's purpose concerning you, and do not be content with anything short of the, at least, incipient and progressive accomplishment in your characters and lives, of that great prayer. Again, see that you use the forces which, by the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, are set in motion to make that wondrous possibility a matter-of-fact reality for each of us; and whoever you are, and whatever you have been, be sure of this, that He can lift you from the mud and cleanse you from its stains, and set you at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For the name, and the risen Shepherd, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, make a threefold cord, not to be quickly broken, and able to bear the weight of the loftiest hopes and firmest confidence that we can hang upon it.

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Hebrews 13:21 Great Prayer Based on Great Pleas

'Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' — Hebrews 13:21.

Massive foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in a previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is 'the God of peace,' therefore we may ask Him to 'make us perfect,' and be sure that He will. He is the God 'that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,' therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has sealed an 'everlasting covenant' with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the writer for his friends. Do our desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our text this morning! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great name on which they are based.

I. And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the name excites.

'Make you perfect in every good work.' Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated 'make perfect' is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in mending their nets. It is employed to describe the divine action which 'by faith we understand' when He 'made the worlds.' It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them 'restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.' It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be 'perfectly joined together, in one mind and in one judgment.' It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of 'filling up,' or 'perfecting that which is lacking in their faith.' The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit, or complete, by restoring, by mending, by filling up what is lacking, and by adapting all together in harmonious cooperation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when he says, 'make you perfect in every good work' where the word work is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the 'make you perfect in every good' refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonised, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and that in regard of all manner of good — 'whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report' — that character is 'well-pleasing to God.'

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes — ay! of the confidence — that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all

the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warning anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonise this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so as that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. 'The worlds' were harmonised, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of Peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, 'I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind.' 'Oh! wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' may be changed into perfect harmony, and the 'bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them' — the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other cause. Again; we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking, 'In every good' — an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. 'Star differeth from star in glory; and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man, and temperament is permanent. But still, whilst all that, is true, and while each shall ray back the divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand the gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles'; and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so as that the passionate man may be made meek, and the hesitating man may be made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a shrubbery, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lop-sided and awry; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equal all round the strong hole, and rising in perfect completeness of harmonious beauty to the topmost twig. that looks up to the sky. God means to make us 'perfect in every good'; to harmonise, to correct, to restore, to perfect us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah, brethren! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds; and do we live up to the height of this prayer? I would that we should all remember more, as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that 'this is the will of God, even our sanctification'; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the 'God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant'; and ask ourselves what result on us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II. And so, secondly, note the divine work which fulfils the prayer.

'Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' Creation, Providence and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation, by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the gospel teaching at all there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His divine spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that the Christianity of this generation has not a firm hold of this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less of what He has done, but, oh I think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the dove too small. And I would for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be — the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the divine spirit, in the hearts of all who

believe, and working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that has truth, surely these things follow as our plain duty. Expect that operation! Do you? You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it! Do you desire it? Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty corners? Do you want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, 'to try you and see if' — ah, it is not an if! — 'there be any wicked way in you, and lead you' — where alas! our feet are often not found — 'in the way everlasting'? Expect it! desire it! pray for it! And when you have got it, see that you profit by it!

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission; and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the buzzing of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for 'food of your own passions, will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to the workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say,

'Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete.'

III. Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence Between the human and the Divine Worker. 'To work His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of having this divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a divine operation. Let us bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God's will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road with never a turn in it, and the same thing to be done to-morrow that was done to-day, and so on for indefinite weeks and months, are you, with the spirit that freshens the monotony, doing God's will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you. If not, it is no use talking about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.' That is a pin prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit — miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God's sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God's will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest — viz., the will of God — in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without reference to God — good from the point of view of morality and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. 'Thou shalt make a league With the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee,' for all creatures being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, 'cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies.' Christ says, 'Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!' If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, 'I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart.' Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then, 'the God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good; to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'