

# PAUL'S MESSAGE FOR TO-DAY

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

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**PAUL'S MESSAGE FOR TO-DAY**

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I

THE MESSAGE OF PAUL'S LIFE

B

## CHAPTER I

### THE CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

ACTS ix. 1-27

THE first mention of Saul is in Acts vii. 58, at the close of the story of the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. We are told that when the witnesses who had given testimony against Stephen were about to cast the first stone at the condemned man, they "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul." It is further said of him that he was consenting to Stephen's death, or taking pleasure in it. Although Saul was called a young man, he was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, Acts xxvi. 10, and so must have been above thirty. Men were called young in those days till forty or forty-five.

Young as he was, Saul was full of zeal for the Jewish church, in which he had been trained. Earnestly believing that the followers of Christ

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were making a mistake, he became a chief agent in persecuting those who were known as Christians. Having received authority from the rulers, he searched far and near for the deluded people. Entering into every house, he dragged out men and women, committing them to prison.

It was perhaps after he had been engaged in the work of persecution for several months that he went to the high priest and asked for letters to the rulers of the synagogues of Damascus, authorizing him to search there for Christians and bring them away. As there were perhaps thirty or forty synagogues and not less than forty thousand Jews in Damascus, he thought he would have abundant opportunity to serve God there, by discovering those who had become adherents of "the way," as the Christians were described. The Christians still worshipped in the synagogues. The men and women whom he discovered were to be taken to Jerusalem to be tried before the Sanhedrin, which alone could pronounce the death sentence.

The time necessary for making the journey to Damascus would be five or six days. Saul was allowed to go on unhindered until he had nearly

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 5

completed his journey. Then "suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven." We gather further facts from the other accounts of this occurrence given by Paul himself in chapters xxii. and xxvi. The time was about noon, and the sun's light was at its brightest ; yet this great light shone above the brightness of the sun. Saul's companions saw it as well as himself. It was not any natural phenomenon, like lightning. It was not a mere vision, but an actual occurrence. It was nothing less than the appearance to the persecutor of the glorified Jesus. This is evident from the words addressed to Saul, "Why persecutest thou me?" Also from what Ananias said to him subsequently ; from the words of Barnabas ; and from Paul's own reference to the fact that he had seen Jesus (chap. xxii. 14 ; 1 Cor. ix. 1, xv. 8).

Every word in the question asked him by Jesus is emphatic : "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What could be the reason? What cause had Jesus ever given for such treatment? If he had been a despot or a tyrant when on the earth ; if he had gone about burning towns and pillaging and desolating homes, crushing the weak and the

## 6 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

poor, and causing pain and poverty and sorrow, there would have been some excuse for Saul's animosity. But he had gone about doing good, scattering blessings, healing, comforting, lifting up, helping, teaching. "Why this treatment?" "Why persecutest thou me?" The question became personal. He had to stand face to face with the glorified Christ and answer why he, Saul, was his enemy. This personal relation of every human soul to Christ is a very startling thought. We are not lost sight of in any crowd. We must each stand before Christ as individuals and settle our own relation to him. "Why persecutest thou me?" He had never lifted a hand against Christ. It is not likely that he ever saw him. This persecution Saul had been carrying on had not touched Christ. Ah! but whatever touched any of his followers touched him. Christ identifies himself so closely with his own people that he feels every pain, every wrong, every cruelty toward any of them as personal to himself. Parents can understand this. If anyone strikes my child, he strikes me. A husband can understand it. If anyone injures his wife, the injury touches him. These close human relationships help us to under-

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 7

stand how dear believers are to Christ, and how well defended they are. This truth teaches us also to be most careful how we treat others lest we be found lifting up our hand against Christ in the person of some of his lowly followers.

Saul's reply was instant: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Here is a case of immediate surrender to Christ. He had not believed Jesus to be the Messiah. He had supposed him to be but an ordinary man, perhaps self-deceived, perhaps a deceiver. He had supposed that he was dead, and that the belief of his followers in his resurrection was either a delusion on their part or a conspiracy. Now, however, he saw Jesus for himself, saw him living and glorified; heard from his own lips who he was. Before this plain appearance all doubt vanished. He saw that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. And at once he accepted him and yielded to him, transferring his allegiance to him and asking for direction. This second question presents also several emphatic points. "What wilt thou have me to do?" Every disciple must do something; everyone has a mission. "What wilt thou?" Christ has

## 8 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

the sole right to command us and give us our work. We get our work from him. "What wilt thou have me to do?" Duties are individual. Each one's work is personal. Everyone's life is a plan of God. "What wilt thou have me to do?" It has been remarked that he showed the same eagerness of zeal that many young converts show, in wanting to do something right away, while there was something to be done in him first.

Jesus told the trembling man to go into the city; it would be told him what he must do. And this is how Jesus prepared the way for him. He spoke to Ananias, one of his disciples in Damascus, as follows: "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul." This remarkable verse shows how intimately acquainted our Lord is with all the circumstances of our lives. He knows our names and the street and the number of the house in which we live or are stopping, and just what we are doing. We need never fear that we are forgotten or overlooked by him in the crowd, or that he has too many things to do at any moment to attend to our



## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 9

needs. Especially if we are seeking light and peace we may be sure that he keeps his eye upon us and will not fail to send help.

The reason was clearly stated why Ananias should seek Paul : " Behold, he prayeth." When men pray on the earth God knows it. A little child sat musing on her mother's knee, and she said to herself, " When I begin to say my prayers God says to the angels, ' Keep quiet ; I hear a noise.' And when they ask, ' What noise ? ' he answers, ' A little girl's noise.' Then all the angels stop their singing and playing on their harps till I say Amen." The child's sweet fancy is not far from the truth. Although God does not need to stop the angels' songs, he does hear every " little girl's noise," and listens till she says Amen. He knows when anyone is praying anywhere on this crowded earth.

But Ananias objected, " Lord, I have heard . . . of this man, how much evil he hath done."

It is hard for us to believe that a very wicked man has truly been converted. We are apt to doubt his profession. We need to be very careful at this point lest we refuse Christian sympathy and

## 10 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

help to one whom Christ wants us to help in starting in his new life.

Jesus' answer was ready, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name." Every word here is rich with meaning. He is a vessel—nothing more. We are nothing in ourselves; we have nothing in ourselves to give to men; we are only vessels to carry that which God may give us. "A chosen vessel." He had been chosen from the beginning for the work to which he was now called. He spent years as a bitter enemy of Christ, but he was still the Lord's chosen vessel, waiting only the appointed time to be called into service. He was to bear Christ's name. That is what God wants us to do in this world, not to carry our own wisdom, our own sympathy and love, our own help, to men, but to carry his name, the message of his grace and love, the bread from his table.

Ananias obeyed at once. Coming into the house of Simon, and finding Saul, "Ananias . . . putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, . . . Jesus, . . . hath sent me." God often uses his human servants to answer men's prayers. He likes to send blessings to distressed souls

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 11

through human hands. We should always be ready to impart comfort or strength or to give help or joy to other souls, for it may be that God has sent us to them for this very purpose. We should give a cordial welcome and prompt brotherly friendship to every new convert. He may never need our help so much again as just at the beginning. A hand of friendship now may lead him into the light ; that hand withheld may leave him to walk long in darkness.

Then Ananias ministered unto Saul, who had been blind since he had seen the vision of Jesus. His sight was restored, and he rose and was baptized. From that day he was as zealous in the service of Jesus as he had been in the persecution of the Christians. He remained some days with the disciples in the city. That was not the way he had meant to pass his time in Damascus. He intended to search out all the believers in the city and drag them off to Jerusalem for trial, and perhaps for death. He intended to begin a fierce and unrelenting persecution against the disciples. Instead of this, he was with the disciples in close and loving fellowship. He came hating them ; he stayed loving them and forming close friend-

## 12 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

ships with them. He came to destroy ; he stayed to help. This shows what the grace of God can do, what one look at Jesus can do.

More than this, he became a worker for Christ. "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues." V. 20. Here is an example for all young converts. They should at once begin to testify for Christ. They should immediately show where they stand. It is better for themselves, for by boldly confessing Jesus before the world they cut themselves loose from all entanglements. A young sailor was converted at the Mariner's Bethel, New York. One evening at the close of the service he came to the minister in charge with a large card and asked him if he would write something on it for him. "You can do it better than I can," he said. The minister took the card and asked, "What shall I write?" "Put on it," said the young seaman, "'I love Jesus—Do you?' Make it large and plain." When the words were written the minister asked him what he was going to do with the card. "I go to sea to-morrow," he replied, "and I am going to tack this on my bunk before I sail, and then they will all know at once where I stand." He

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 13

did the right thing. He took his true place at first, and there was no question after that as to where he stood. A Christian who has not come out boldly is always entangled by his old associations. He had better cut all entanglements by coming clear out at first. This is the true way, too, to honour Christ. As soon as he has saved us and we have given ourselves to him, we should begin to serve him and work for him. There was another strong impulse in Saul's case. He had been a bitter persecutor. He had done all he could to destroy the cause of Christ. Now he felt an irresistible desire to correct and undo the evil he had wrought. Still another motive in the same direction is our duty to others. We have found Christ ourselves, and we should seek at once to have others receive the same blessing.

Of course, the Christians were surprised. They began to ask, "Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name?" Yes, the same man. Yet it is no wonder the people could scarcely believe it. Surely it was a marvellous transformation. It would indeed be far less strange if we saw a lion changed into the gentleness and harmlessness of a lamb. We must not fail to ask

## 14 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

how this transformation was wrought. Was it the result merely of Saul's own meditations and reflections on the way to Damascus? Was it caused by a lightning flash which stunned and blinded him and threw him from his horse, thus frightening him? Was it effected by the talk he had with Ananias and his earnest words in the house of Judas? Was he won over by the disciples into whose company he had fallen? The simple answer to the question is that he met Jesus in the way and was thoroughly convinced that he was the Messiah, and at once accepted him as such; and that he received the Holy Ghost when Ananias visited him. The change was wrought therefore by seeing Christ, believing on him and being filled with the Holy Spirit. It was as much a divine work as was the creation of Adam. This same power is working in Christianity wherever it goes. That is what gives such triumph to the gospel everywhere.

As Saul's work continued, he "increased the more in strength." This is another point to be marked in the history of this young convert. He seemed very earnest at first, but he grew in grace. He became stronger—stronger in faith,

stronger in purpose, stronger in work and argument, and stronger in influence. The same should be true of every young Christian. No matter how well he starts, his course should be like "the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Faithfulness is good in a Christian, but progress is better. There are too many people who enter the Church and never get past their starting point. Babies are very sweet and beautiful, but we would not want them always to remain babies. Yet a good many Christians remain "babes" all their life. See Ephesians iv. 13-15 for a description of what should and should not be the history of every Christian life. Saul is an example of the right kind of life. He grew.

Naturally the Jews did not welcome this activity on the part of one who had been their helper. They "took counsel to kill him."

The world does not like earnestness. It has killed many of its best and most earnest men, and has persecuted many more. So long as a man moves on quietly and takes no decided stand, and does not have any opinions of his own, or, if he has, does not press them with any particular ardour,

## 16 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

the world will let him live in peace, and will pat him on the back and call him "good fellow." But let him grow earnest and begin to think for himself, and then put emphasis into his utterances, and begin to work with zeal and intensity and enthusiasm, and the world wants to kill him. It is a great deal easier and safer just to live quietly and never speak out and never grow enthusiastic. Whether it is the better way is another question.

When these Jewish enemies sought to kill him, and lay in wait for him at a gate of the city, he escaped in a basket, which was let down from the wall by some of the disciples. Then he hurried back to Jerusalem.

At Jerusalem Saul tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him. A bad name clings to a man for a long time. It is almost impossible to outgrow it. One's past life throws a shadow over one, from which it is hard to escape. It takes a good many years sometimes of faithful life and service to win back the confidence which has been forfeited by a very brief period of wrong living.

"But Barnabas took him, and brought him



## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 17

to the apostles." Here we have an illustration of the office and the value of true Christian friendship. Saul yet lay under suspicion among those who had known him in his former days as a fierce enemy of Christianity. Barnabas knew that he was now a sincere Christian and ought to be no longer under suspicion, and he became his friend, speaking manly words for him and winning for him the confidence of the other believers. It was a noble and beautiful act, and shows us what we should be ready to do on every similar occasion. How much help it was to Saul we can easily understand. Many a young Christian needs just such a friend as Barnabas was to Saul. Most of us have known others who were unjustly under suspicion, who were suffering from some past error, or who were misunderstood. Have we spoken the few brave words needed to set them in proper light? It is very easy to fall into the current that sets against another, or to keep quiet even when we know the person is unjustly blamed; but it is not the Christian way. The way Barnabas did is the Christian way.

Barnabas had been sent to Jerusalem to take charge of the Christians in the city. He found that

## 18 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

everywhere there seemed to be an open door for the gospel. He saw at once that there was need for other helpers. Then it was that he thought of Saul. Saul had left Jerusalem and had retired to his old home in Tarsus. He seems to have been living there in obscurity. He probably had become disheartened and discouraged, perhaps feeling that he was not to have an opportunity to do much in the Church. There are good men whom the coldness and indifference of others prevent from taking the place in the Church which they might take. Sometimes men get even soured and embittered by the lack of confidence and interest in them. We do not know precisely what Saul's mood was in Tarsus, but it seems that if it had not been for Barnabas, he might have remained there altogether, and have been lost to the Church, buried in his studies, living perhaps the life of a recluse, and all his magnificent labour would have been lost to the Church. But when another man was needed to enter upon the great work at Antioch, Barnabas thought at once of Saul. The record says, "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch."

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 19

One of the most distinguished scientific men of the latter part of the eighteenth century was Sir Humphry Davy. He made many great discoveries and added many valuable contributions to science.

Among those who worked with Sir Humphry Davy as a journeyman and amanuensis was Michael Faraday. He was employed at first only at weekly wages in unimportant positions. But soon it became apparent that Faraday was himself possessed of a great genius for scientific researches and discoveries. It is said that when Sir Humphry Davy was asked what had been his greatest discovery, he said, "Michael Faraday." He claimed to have been himself the discoverer of Faraday, of his gifts and possibilities, and the means of bringing him to public notice and to his high place.

We may say that Barnabas was the discoverer of Paul. He seems to have been the only man who recognized in the young convert the abilities he had for work and service. But for Barnabas, Saul might have remained all his life in obscurity. Think what the world would have lost if Paul had not been discovered and had never been led

## 20 CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR

into his place of marvellous usefulness. So far as we can see, Christianity never would have attained the place it holds in the world had it not been for Paul. He became the great missionary, carrying the gospel to all lands. He became the writer, also, of the fourteen Epistles which have had such wonderful influence all these centuries. It is high honour, therefore, that belongs to Barnabas in having been the discoverer of Paul.

It showed also a beautiful spirit in Barnabas that he was willing to bring into the work with him at Antioch a man who almost certainly would soon surpass him in usefulness and power among men. At the beginning we read of Barnabas and Saul, but soon the order of the names is reversed, and we read of Saul and Barnabas. Some people are afraid to help others into positions, or to encourage them in doing their work, lest these persons excel them and go beyond them, by and by, in honour. Barnabas seems to have been entirely free from any jealousy or envy of this kind. He was willing to help Saul to a place of usefulness, although he knew that in a little while he himself would be left in the shadow by the superior brilliance of his young helper. The

## CONVERSION OF THE PERSECUTOR 21

Christian who would do the greatest good in the world must have the same spirit as Barnabas. Jealousy of each other is always a most unchristian spirit.

We must seek first the honour of Christ and the advancement of his cause, and not the promotion of our own dignity and influence. There is not one of us who may not be tempted at some time to unseemly behaviour in this regard. Suppose Barnabas had grown jealous of Paul when he saw him in Antioch revealing his best gifts, preaching wonderful sermons, getting masterly influence over the people, and going quietly forward in his humility and lowliness to the highest place! The man who accepts the lowest place, when it is evident that the Master wants him to take that place, and does the work humbly, sweetly, rejoicingly, honouring meanwhile his brother, who is being divinely led to the highest place, is showing a spirit like his Master's. On the other hand, the man who is not willing to take a lowly and obscure place, claiming a place of earthly honour instead, is only dishonouring himself in the presence of the angels and of men, and belittling his influence for power and good.

## CHAPTER II

### PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY: CYPRUS

ACTS xiii. 1-13

**W**E have here the beginning of foreign missions. It was at Antioch, the church which had been built up by Barnabas and Paul, which proved a centre of holy influence, reaching out widely. This church was blessed with an unusual number of earnest and efficient workers. Being so strong it became its duty to spare some of its valuable helpers to carry the gospel elsewhere.

It is interesting to study the names here recorded. Some of them are mentioned only here. Manaen was an active Christian worker, foster brother of Herod. There could not have been a much worse man than Herod. Yet the boys were nursed by the same foster mother, growing up amid the same influences, and Herod became a

wicked, unscrupulous, degraded man, while Manaen grew into saintly character. There is encouragement here for those who find themselves living in unfavourable conditions. No boy need decide that, because his home influence is not wholesome, therefore he is doomed to be a bad man.

It is probable that the meeting referred to in the second verse had been called by the ministers to pray for the heathen world, and to ask for guidance regarding their own duty. When God wants to have a good work done he puts the thought into one or more of his people. Then they begin to pray, and the blessing comes.

We should notice that the missionaries were not chosen by the Church itself, but by the Holy Spirit. So this foreign missionary movement was not merely an outgrowth of Christian enthusiasm. God himself began it. He named the first missionaries. When the Spirit had indicated who should be sent out on this new mission, the Church set them apart. "When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." It was not easy to give up these two good men. They were the best ministers of

## 24 FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

this Antioch church, too, that were chosen for this mission to the heathen. Yet the people did not say, "We cannot spare these good men." They were ready at God's call to make the sacrifice and to give up their best workers to carry the gospel message over the sea.

The men went forth under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit. "They, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, . . . sailed to Cyprus." It is a great thing to be sent forth by the Holy Spirit. If we live as we may live we are sent forth thus every day and upon every errand. If we start always at God's feet in the morning, asking him for guidance, he will lead us where he would have us to go and give us the work he would have us to do.

There is a work for all kinds of helpers. A little sentence here tells us about John who went with Barnabas and Saul as their attendant. This is the Mark whom we know through the Gospel he wrote. He was not a preacher or even a teacher at this time; he was only a helper. He probably had to do many things that were not easy. This suggests that there are ways of helping in the Lord's work besides being pastors, elders or



Sunday-school superintendents. The lesson is for young men like Mark. If they cannot be teachers, they can be attendants, and can find a great deal to do in the Lord's service. Samuel ministered to the Lord in the tabernacle when he was only a child. He could not then do the work of a priest, but there were many things he could do. He could tend the door, look after the lamps, and run errands for Eli. So always there are many things which even the youngest Christians can do for the Master.

Wherever the gospel of Christ goes it finds opposition. These missionaries in their work came into contact with a sorcerer who withstood them, and sought to interfere with their work. It was a superstitious age and fortune tellers abounded everywhere. Even men of distinction—governors and others—were often under the influence of these men, and turned to them for counsel. This sorcerer was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, and when he found that his patron was listening to the teaching of the Christian missionaries he tried to interfere. "Elymas the sorcerer . . . withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith." It is a great

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sin to try to turn any believer away from Christ, or to prevent anyone from coming to Christ. Yet there are at all times people who are doing this very thing. They seek to cast doubt upon the religion of Christ and to keep back those who would accept it.

Paul (whose name in this form appears here for the first time) very strongly rebuked the sorcerer. He unmasked his heart, showing its blackness. "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness." This is not a bit of bad temper in Paul; he is exposing the man's wickedness as the Spirit of God revealed it to him.

Judgment came swiftly upon the sorcerer. Paul said to him, "The hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind." It was not Paul, but the Lord who inflicted this judgment. Elymas had been trying to blind the eyes of others, that they might not see Christ, and now he himself is struck with blindness. In Roman history is a story of one who had been proscribed, who, in order to save his life, disguised himself by wearing a black patch over one eye. When he had worn this for a long while, and when there was

no longer any danger of his being discovered, he removed the patch, but his eyesight had now been destroyed. The darkening of the eye for a time in the practice of deception, led to the putting out of its light. If we stubbornly shut our hearts against the truth, the light that is in us will become blindness.

The influence of this judgment upon the proconsul was to lead him at once to accept Christ fully. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." The very punishment of Elymas became convincing proof to the proconsul of the power of God in the missionaries.

It is somewhat discouraging to read about John Mark's defection. When Paul and his company passed over into Perga, "John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." When he saw what hardship he would have to endure if he continued on this missionary journey, he decided to withdraw. It showed lack of courage and of constancy in the young disciple. No one knows how much Mark lost through his discouragement and failure. Yet we must not too severely condemn him. It is probable that his early failure

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made him all the better Christian afterwards. At least his defection was only temporary.

It is pleasant to read, also, later in the story, that even Paul at length commended Mark, speaking of him in words of strong approval. We know that Mark became highly honoured, also, as a writer of one of the Gospels. The lesson we learn is, that though a young man at the beginning of his Christian life may fail, this should not discourage him nor prevent his returning with new fervour and earnestness to the work which he has once deserted.

## CHAPTER III

### PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY : ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

ACTS xiii. 14-52

**A** CHANGE in the relative place of the two missionaries appears about this time. It was Barnabas and Paul when they were sent out—Barnabas, the leader, Paul, the associate. Now it is Paul and Barnabas. The reason for this change no doubt was that Paul, by his superior ability, naturally came to take the lead as the work went on. There is no indication of any feeling of envy on the part of Barnabas when he was thus superseded. Evidently he was so sincere in his devotion to his Master and in his interest in the work, that he cared not who was first, if only the cause of Christ were advanced. It is not easy, however, for anyone who has been first to take the second place, keep sweet and cheerful and work as earnestly as ever ; but Barnabas

seems to have gladly yielded to Paul the place of leader. Love for Christ constrained him.

Paul and Barnabas attended the Jewish synagogue the first Sabbath after their arrival. After the opening worship, the presence of strangers being noted, and they being visitors from another country, they were invited to speak. Paul promptly availed himself of the invitation and spoke long and earnestly. He was addressing his own people, the Jews, and he told them the story of Jesus of Nazareth, his life, death and resurrection. He then declared, "We declare unto you good tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled." The people besought Paul to tell them the story again the next Sabbath. It would seem, too, that many at once accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul and Barnabas spoke to these new Christians and urged them to continue faithful. All the week the meeting was talked about and the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the new teaching.

Those who came out on the following Sabbath were not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles. This made the Jews angry. "When the Jews

saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy." There are some people who never can bear to see others enjoy favours. If they cannot have the good thing all to themselves they do not want it at all. One of the first evidences of true conversion is interest in others and the eager desire to tell others of the Saviour and to share the blessings of redemption with them.

It could not but grieve the missionaries to have their own people treat the gospel in this way. But all they could do was to preach to those who would receive them. "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." One truth taught here is that sinners can get clear of Christ only by actually thrusting him away. He waits long and pleads earnestly with men. He presses the blessings of heaven upon our souls with loving persistency.

Another truth taught here is that rejected blessings fly away. Who can tell what these Jewish people lost that day in thrusting Jesus Christ from them? When they had rejected him,

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the offer was withdrawn from them and carried to others who would receive it. We must not forget Christ's command to the apostles to shake off the dust from their feet as a testimony against the cities or towns that would reject them, while they hastened on to other places.

Then we must never forget that every offer of grace which comes to us leaves us under deeper guilt if we reject the offer. Let us beware lest through our rejection our very light make the darkness of the world to come more terrible for us. A writer says, "You may buy a New Testament for three pence, yet it may be to you at last the most costly possession you ever had." It may condemn you, because, having it, you rejected its light.

Paul put the rejection of Christ in an unusual light when he told his hearers that their refusal to accept him meant that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. The way we receive the Word of God when it comes to us reveals our true character in God's sight. Every lost soul writes its own condemnation. Men perish only because they will not be saved. In Retzsch's illustrations of Goethe's Faust, angels are seen



dropping down roses upon the demons who are contending for the soul of Faust. But every rose falls like molten lead, burning and blistering where it touches. So the very words of divine love become droppings of divine fire upon the soul that rejects.

It brought great joy to the Gentiles when the missionaries turned to them with the gospel. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad." Ofttimes it is not those who seem the most likely to accept the grace of God that actually take it. The Jews, who had been looking for the Messiah, rejected the Messiah when he came, while the Gentiles, who had been regarded by the Jews as unworthy of salvation, gladly received Christ and entered the kingdom.

In the first verse of the following chapter, we are told that the missionaries "so spake, that a great multitude . . . believed." How did they "so speak" as to convince and lead to Christ such a multitude of people? Was it their eloquent manner, or was it something in what they said that won people's hearts and drew them to Christ? We all would like to know, for who does not with all his heart desire to be a winner of

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souls? Who does not want to learn the art of speaking in such a way as to lead men to believe? Many of us go on talking for years, and yet almost none are persuaded by our words to accept Christ. What is the trouble? Is it some defect in our elocution? Would it remedy the defect if we should take lessons in oratory? Or is the fault in our language, and would a few lessons in English grammar and rhetoric make us more successful? Or may it be that the trouble lies within us, in our own hearts? Is it not worth while when we are at this place in the story to try to find out just what the trouble is? How did Paul and Barnabas "so speak" that the multitude believed?

As another illustration of the perverseness of human nature and its natural opposition to God, we are told that the Jews "stirred up . . . persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts." There are some people who when they do not like a person or when they have some grudge or prejudice against him, will take every opportunity to influence others against him.

One person, evilly disposed, can poison the

minds of a whole community, turning them against the one he dislikes. We need to watch lest unwittingly and unintentionally we fall into the habit of saying things against others which we ought not to say of them. We have no right to use our dislikes to injure others.

## CHAPTER IV

### PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY: ICONIUM AND LYSTRA

Acts xiv

THE healing of the lame man at Lystra made a great stir in the town. Lystra was a wild place. The traditional meaning of the name was wolf-land, and the character of the people corresponded to this designation. They were easily excited and knew no self-control. Paul was preaching and this lame man was in the audience. He had been a cripple—"a creeple," one who creeps—from his infancy. He had never walked.

There seems to have been no request from the man himself for healing. There was something, however, in him which interested Paul. Probably it was the man's infirmity. His condition made its own appeal. As Paul observed him from time to time, he noticed his intentness and earnestness, and saw that the man was accepting

Christ. So he spoke to him, saying, "Stand upright on thy feet." Instantly the man's faith responded, and he leaped up and walked.

People say there are no miracles in these days, and that if there were they would believe on Christ. But are there no miracles? Christianity itself is the most marvellous miracle the world ever knew. We have but to think what it has wrought in the world. Every day we see about us evidences of a divine power in the changing of lives, and in victories over weakness, temptation, sin and sorrow.

The effect of the miracle upon the people was startling. "When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying . . . The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." What they said was true in a sense. God had come down in the likeness of men in Jesus Christ. Christ had returned to heaven, having accomplished his work on the earth, but now he lived again in the lives of these missionaries who had come to tell the people of God's love and mercy. God himself, though unseen, walks ever with us and lives among us. We do not need to go far to find him. Christ lives also in all his

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true followers. "Christ liveth in me," said Paul himself. We do not need to speak of Christ's kindnesses in the past tense.

The apostles were greatly grieved, however, when the people came to offer sacrifice to them as deities. "They rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying . . . We also are men of like passions with you." They would not for a moment accept the homage which belonged to God alone. They were but ministers of Christ, human messengers from God to the people, and they were horrified at the thought of being worshipped.

No one is coming to fall down and worship us and call us "gods," and yet we are in danger of allowing ourselves to come in between people and God. When we are doing Christ's work, helping and blessing others in his name ; when people love us and express their gratitude for the good they have received at our hands, we are in danger of forgetting that the honour does not belong to us but to Christ, and that if we take it as our own and do not point the grateful people to our Master, we are accepting that which ought to be laid at his feet only. It is always easier to get people

to love us and thank us, than to love and thank Christ. We should most jealously guard the honour of our blessed Lord and turn every thought and every adoring word and all gratitude and trust toward him, seeking to be nothing, that he may be all in all.

Paul and Barnabas hastened to tell the people what they should do. "We . . . preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God." Idols are vain things. They have no power to give help. We all know this. We would not turn to a marble statue of Jupiter if we were in trouble; we know that it could give us no help. But there are idols which are not carved in statues. Wealth, power, pleasure, honour, self are idols, and are just as really vanities—empty things—as were those which Paul and Barnabas condemned. When we are in need, in trouble, in sorrow, in the depth of remorse, in the presence of death, what power have any of these things to give us comfort, help, or deliverance? There is only one living God who can aid us in any of the great needs of life. If we rest on anything but God we shall find ourselves in fearful plight when our trust is swept

away from us and we have nothing left to which to cling.

The missionaries spoke to the people further of the living God whose messengers they were. He had not left himself without witness even to heathen people, but had done them good, giving them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness. We oft-times forget that the common mercies of life are evidences of a Father's loving thought and care for his children. There is no such thing as chance in this world. Then God, too, sends the rains, orders the seasons and brings the harvests. In enjoying the gifts, we should not forget the Giver. In accepting and using the blessings, we should not fail to see the Hand which brings them to us.

Now we have an illustration of the fickleness of these Lystrans. One hour they came with their garlands and their offerings to honour the missionaries as deities ; the next hour they were stoning them and dragging them out of the city. They dropped the garlands they had brought and picked up stones and began to hurl them at Paul. There is too much of the same kind of friend-



ship in all times. Many persons are very enthusiastic in their devotion to a leader until some one comes and talks against him, when they veer round at once and become his violent enemies. Their friendship is only a selfish impulse. True friendship rests on character and is constant and firm, unaffected by what other people say. When enemies malign our friend we cling to him all the more closely and stand by him all the more loyally, if our friendship is sincere. One of the lessons to learn here is not to rely too much on the admiration of professed friends when we are on the wave of popularity. Any evil word, any sinister influence, may in a day turn the whole drift of sentiment.

Another lesson to teach here is the baseness of such fickle friendship as this. When we are friends let us be loyal through all changes of sentiment. We see an illustration of this kind of faithfulness in the Christians at Lystra. "The disciples stood round about him." When Paul had been stoned and dragged out of the city, and left for dead, those who had become followers of Christ through his preaching stood about him, no doubt weeping over him as a friend they had

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lost. The secret was that these men had accepted Christ. Christ was the common bond. How nobly this little group, standing about the apparently lifeless body of the apostle, contrasts with the fickle crowd ! It was dangerous at that time to profess friendship for the apostle, but these disciples did not think of the danger. They were one in Christ.

## CHAPTER V

### PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY: ANTIOCH TO PHILIPPI

ACTS xvi. 6-15

**P**AUL was forbidden to preach in Asia. We would say there is no place where one should not be glad to preach. But we see here that sometimes, even where there are people who need the Word, it may not be our duty to speak to them. God shuts doors as well as opens them. We are not to do whatever work we find for ourselves, but what God gives us to do. Opportunities are not always doors of duty. There are needy places to which we are not to go—some other one must go to these, while we pass on to farther fields. We must then be as ready to accept the Lord's restraints as his leadings forward.

One night Paul had a vision. He saw a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us."

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Twice in the preceding verses have we seen doors shut, because the Lord did not wish Paul to enter them, having other work waiting for him a little farther on. Now a great door was opened. There was a large and needy field lying beyond in the darkness. The gospel had never yet crossed over into Europe, and now God wanted Paul to carry it there. That is why he had hindered him from entering the other fields. So for all of us some doors are shut and others opened. No vision may come to guide us in our work, but there will always be some kind of guidance if we are ready to go wherever God wants us to go.

Paul understood it now and was eager to go into Macedonia. He was sure God had called him. "Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia." This is a splendid example. Mark the word "immediately." There was no loitering. The moment the Master called, the servant was ready. We should always promptly and cheerfully go wherever God sends us. We can never know what will come out of our doing just what he wants us to do, even though it be not what we would choose to do. Who can tell the result of

Paul's crossing into Europe that day? He took Christianity there, and it became a power for blessing to all the Western world. Does there never break on our ears the cry, "Come over . . . and help us"? There certainly are human needs somewhere that appeal to us; what shall our answer be?

Paul's first preaching in Europe was to a mere handful of godly women. It seemed a small beginning, but it was like a little spring from the mountains which is the source of a mighty river. No one can ever estimate the extent or the value of the influences which took their rise in that women's prayer meeting. Lydia was in the right place that day, too. She was in the place of blessing. It surely paid her well to shut up her shop and keep the Sabbath. Had she been absent for any reason from that service she would have missed a great deal which might never have come to her again. If we would make sure of receiving all the blessings God wants to give us, we must always be at the place of duty. It is never safe to stay away even once from the Sabbath school or the church or the prayer meeting, for that may be the

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time when some special blessing will be there for you.

“Lydia . . . heard us : whose heart the Lord opened.” First, she listened while the apostle preached. Then she believed the things he said ; then she let the Spirit into her heart and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour. The Lord opened her heart, yet in a certain sense she opened it herself. She never would have been saved if there had been no divine hand at the door, yet neither would she have been saved if she had not of her own free will risen and opened the door. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock,” said the Master ; “if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” He knocks, and holds in his hands the blessings we need, but we must open, or he will never come in. He will not force his way in. We can keep the blessed, omnipotent Christ outside forever if we will, simply by refusing to open to him when he knocks. Lydia yielded her heart, her will, her affections to Christ and bade him enter. That was her part. Then Christ opened the door and entered, and all the saving work was his. When

the Lord strives, the soul must yield to him ; then all will be well. The Lord has many ways of opening people's hearts. The other day a young mother presented herself to be received into the Church. Her baby had made her think of her duty. To a wicked man who was sick, a teacher sent some flowers. The flowers opened the man's heart and he let Christ in.

“ She was baptized.” She did not wait till she had had a certain experience as a Christian ; she at once made confession of Jesus as her Saviour, and herself as one of the friends and followers of Jesus. She did not try to be a Christian quietly, with no public confession, no declaration of her intention. She made her confession at once, and was the first person in Europe to become a Christian and to be baptized. She did the right thing. There should not be one hour's delay when one has decided to accept Christ. There is no place provided in the gospel for secret discipleship, and dallying is always perilous. There are many persons who are trying to be Christians, but hesitate about the public act of confessing Christ, and delay, thinking that by and by they will be better able to live a Christian

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life. But the whole New Testament is against any such delaying.

“ When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, . . . come into my house, and abide there.” Lydia promptly showed her faith by her works, and by her changed life. Not only did she become a Christian herself ; she also brought her family with her. We do not know what family she had. If they were adults, she led them also to accept Christ and confess him with her. If they were little children, she brought them into the covenant with her and consecrated them to God. Everyone who is saved ought to try to bring his family and his friends, also, to Jesus. Every parent who receives Christ should bring his children with him.

Another immediate fruit of her conversion was her hospitality to the missionaries. Believing in Christ warms our hearts toward all Christ's friends. Love for Jesus makes us love those who are his disciples. For his sake we want to show kindness to others. This is one of the surest marks of the Christian life. If the cruel man still remains cruel after professing to follow Christ, there must be something wrong ; his heart



has not admitted Christ. A man ought to be better, gentler, kindlier, even to his dog or his horse, after he has Christ in his heart. Especially must he be gentler and kindlier to other people, to other Christians, to the sick, to the poor, the weak, the troubled.

## CHAPTER VI

### PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY : THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

ACTS xvi. 16-40

**A**S Paul and Timothy were going to the place of prayer at Philippi they were attracted by an unfortunate girl possessed by a demon. She was used by her owners to make money for them. She "brought her masters much gain by soothsaying." They traded upon her supposed inspiration, using her as a fortune teller. Paul was disturbed by her following him, and, being sore troubled on her behalf, he turned and said to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Instantly the demon obeyed, and the girl was left sane. Her owners, however, were very angry, and had Paul arrested and dragged before the magistrates.

The missionaries were cast into a dungeon, but nothing could make prisoners of them. They

refused to be crushed by the sufferings through which they had passed. They had been beaten by many stripes, and then, when brought into the prison, were put into the lower dungeon, their feet being made fast in stocks. At midnight a strange thing happened. The prisoners in other parts of the prison heard praying and singing. It seemed a strange time and place for a prayer meeting. It is not so surprising to hear of men praying in such circumstances, for even wicked men turn to God in distress, but it is certainly unusual to hear hymns in a dungeon. Most people are in the singing mood only when their condition is pleasant, and too often a very small trouble hushes every voice of song. But here were men singing in the midst of greatest suffering. What was the secret? It was their strong faith in God. These missionaries had learned to rejoice even in tribulations. They had the peace of God in their hearts. Christ was with them in their prison, and instead of being cast down, they rejoiced.

Something else happened. There was a great earthquake. The prison walls were shaken, the doors were opened and the prisoners' chains were

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loosed. This was Heaven's answer to the prayers and songs of the dungeon. Heaven is not very far from earth—at least, it did not take long for the prayer to ascend and the help to return after these good men began to plead. No doubt the prayers rose all the more swiftly because they went up on the wings of song. God likes prayers that are songs—he likes them far better than complaining, repining prayers, such as too many people offer up when they are in trouble.

The prisoners were listening that night to the songs, and they must have been deeply impressed ; but there was another Listener. We do not know for what these men prayed in the prison. Perhaps it was for release, if that were God's will. They may have recalled Peter's release, when the angel came and took off his chains, opened the gates and led him out to liberty. They knew that God could get them out in some way if that were the best thing for them, for he knows how to deliver his own children. No doubt they prayed that if God did not see fit to set them free, he would give them strength to bear their imprisonment submissively. There is no prison too strong for God to break open, there are no chains too

heavy for him to snap asunder, there are no walls too thick for him to shatter. There are other kinds of prisons besides those built with stone—prisons of trial, of temptation, of trouble, of circumstances. If we are in any of these, God is just as able to bring us out of them as he was to release his servants that night at Philippi.

The conduct of the jailer was singular. When he was roused from sleep and saw the prison doors open, he supposed that the prisoners had all escaped, and knowing that he would be held responsible for them, he drew his sword to kill himself. He knew no better refuge from his trouble than this. But there was a better refuge. Paul saved him from this rash act. The gospel does not merely save men's souls from the pains of death; it also saves them from earthly dangers.

But soon another fear fell upon the jailer. Some strange power touched him, and, trembling from fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" What frightened the jailer so? Why did he ask this question with such dread? The danger was past, the earthquake was over, his prisoners

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were all safe. The worst danger in this world is not found in earthquakes and falling walls and the displeasure of despotic rulers. The jailer had a glimpse of another Judge besides the emperor at Rome. He had a glimpse of God, and in the light that shined upon him he saw that he was a lost man.

The jailer had brought his question to the right place. Paul himself had experienced the consciousness of a perishing condition, had asked the same question and had found the true answer. So he told the jailer what to do—“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Suppose the jailer had received a wrong answer—suppose some one who did not know how to answer had tried to tell him what to do. His soul would have been hopelessly lost. We should always be prepared to give the right answer to those who may come to us with questions like this. There was only one Saviour, and the way of salvation was by believing on him. What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? It is not enough to give an intellectual assent to the truths of the gospel. To believe on one is to commit oneself to the person. There must be a com-

mitting of the soul with all its needs and dangers into the strong hands of Jesus Christ.

The trembling jailer accepted the gospel, committed himself to Christ and rose up a Christian man. We see the evidence of this at once in the man's new spirit and character. "He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, . . . set meat before them, and rejoiced." Immediately after believing on Christ, the cruel pagan became as gentle as a woman. The love of Christ began to work in his heart and to work out through his life. He became kindly and compassionate. At once he began to love the disciples of Christ and to relieve the sufferings of the men who had told him the way of salvation. At once he made confession of Christ before his family and friends, and was baptized. He also began to rejoice. The songs the prisoners had been singing a little while ago in the dungeon broke now from this new convert's lips, too. No better proofs of conversion can be found than we see in him.

## CHAPTER VII

### PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY : THESSALONICA AND BEREA

Acts xvii. 1-15

**T**HE passage begins with an account of the passing of Paul and his company from Philippi to Thessalonica. These missionaries never rested. They went on continually from place to place. They were men with burning hearts. They had a great mission, and were intent upon fulfilling it. They had intrusted to them heavenly blessings which they must hasten to carry to a perishing world. Sometimes they only passed through a town, finding no way of reaching the people. But whenever they came to a place where they could stop and speak their message, they lingered. Thus, at Thessalonica, they found a Jewish synagogue, and at once began to tell there the story of Christ. We should get a lesson of earnestness from the example of these



men. God has given us the bread of life. All about us everywhere are hungry souls perishing. Are we eager to pass the bread to those who need it so sorely ?

We have a glimpse of Paul's earnestness in this narrative. He had no missionary board back of him to support him. He worked at his trade of tent-making during the week, and then on the Sabbath went to the synagogue and preached. They were Jews to whom he spoke, and he sought to make it plain to them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah for whom they had been waiting and hoping. As a rose with all its beauty and fragrance lies folded up in the unopened bud, so Paul found the whole gospel of Christ with all its preciousness wrapped up in the Old Testament. To him the Old Testament was like a nut. He broke the shell and found food in it, which he gave to the hungry people. "The Jews were like little children who had a fruit tree in their garden. They had gathered the nuts and laid them up with reverence in the storehouse, but they knew not how to break the hulls so as to get the meat out of the nuts." Paul does this for them, extracting the fruit and giving it to them.

The result of Paul's preaching was not entirely discouraging. Some of his hearers were persuaded and joined the company of the missionaries. They became convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah. As soon as they were thus convinced, they came out openly and joined Paul's party. This was the right thing for them to do—just what young people should always do when they receive Christ. They should consort with Christ's people, finding their friends among them and taking them for companions. They should come out and be separate from the world, thus casting all their influence on Christ's side. Too many people in these days join the Church and yet stay in the world, keeping their companionships, their friendships, their pleasures, their business, their amusements in the world.

It has always been true that women were ready in great numbers to accept of Christ and enter his service. Jesus had many personal women friends. There are many Christian women named in the Acts. In these modern days it is said that at least two-thirds of all church members are women. Many of them are engaged as teachers and physicians on mission fields. Women's boards

are gathering a large proportion of the money that is used in sending the gospel to heathen lands. Women's hearts and hands make the Christian homes whose influence is so rich in the world. It is good to hear that in this ancient city, where Paul preached, there were many women who took their place on Christ's side.

But there were enemies, also, rejecters of Paul's teaching concerning the Messiah. They were not content merely to reject—they became active enemies. "The Jews, . . . moved with envy, took . . . certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar." The two parties which were formed were very distinct, with marked differences. Those who attached themselves to the missionaries were of good character. But it is a very different class that we see gathering on the other side—"certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." These were the idle, worthless men, like those who, in modern cities, are found about saloons and pool rooms, who are always ready for anything that will cause excitement. Not all those who are outside of churches belong to this rough class—there are people of refinement and culture who

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do not accept their place among Christians. But the vile fellows of the rabble are still found among the opposers of Christ and Christianity.

It is good to make the enemies of the gospel write its history and describe its triumphs. Many of the finest and truest things said about Christ are words that were spoken by his bitter foes. For example, when the Jews saw the publicans and sinners drawn to Jesus they said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Again, when Jesus went home with Zacchæus, they said that he was "gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." Both these bitter words really expressed great truths which were the very glory of Christ's commission. In their charge against these missionaries the Jews first gave a striking testimony to the influence of the gospel in the world at that time and the work Christianity had done. They confessed that the missionaries had been turning the world upside down. And one says, "The world is wrong side up, and needs to be turned upside down to be right side up."

It is sometimes a duty to flee from opposition and persecution. The missionaries, when they could no longer preach in Thessalonica, went

quietly away to Berea. Here they found themselves in a different atmosphere. The people of Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica, "in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." The Thessalonians refused even to listen to Paul or to give him any opportunity to verify his statements from their scriptures. The Bereans, on the other hand, were ready to listen and to consider carefully what the apostle said. Not only did they listen, but they listened with childlike teachableness, ready to receive every word of truth they heard. They were willing to know the truth, whatever it might be, even if it made havoc among their pet ideas. That is what everyone should do who listens to a sermon or a Sunday-school lesson. Do not say that what you hear is not true, but take it to the Word of God, and compare it with this divine rule, and see whether it be true or not.

The result of this examination of the Scriptures was that many of the Bereans believed. They found that what Paul had said was according to their scriptures, and they received Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. When we find that

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the words of God are true, we should unhesitatingly accept them. Believing, in the Bible sense, means the shaping of life and conduct according to the divine teaching. If you are satisfied that Jesus is the only Saviour, you should immediately make him your Saviour by personal faith.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY AT ATHENS

ACTS xvii, 16-34

**P**AUL did not go to Athens as a tourist, nor as a student of art ; he went there as a missionary, carrying the gospel of Christ. He found the city full of idols. No wonder his spirit was stirred within him. Among others he encountered certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, some of whom were curious to know what this "babbling" would say. Others decided that he was a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. They took hold of him, therefore, and brought him into the Areopagus—a council of the first men of Athens, a sort of court—not for trial, however, but that his opinions might be declared.

Athens was full of splendid temples and magnificent works of art, but these temples were the

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shrines of idols, and these works of art were worshipped as gods by the people. However, Paul had not a word to say about the fine architecture or the wonderful statues he saw. His soul was so full of the compassion of Christ that in such a place as Athens the one thing he saw was that perishing souls worshipped lovely creations of art, instead of the true God. He forgot the beauty in his pity over the delusions amid which souls were perishing, and could not but speak out of the fullness of his heart. Utterly alone, he did not hesitate to declare Jesus Christ in the face of the world's wisdom and culture, and to present the truth of the gospel in the presence of those who almost certainly would have only sneers and contempt for what he said. Paul began his address in a courteous way, referring to the apparent devoutness of his hearers. He then spoke of an altar he had seen as he passed through the city. "I found an altar with this inscription, To the UNKNOWN GOD." It was said that it was easier in Athens to find a god than a man. Although there were so many gods, with temples and shrines everywhere, yet the people's hearts were not satisfied. They still reached out after



some other god, and since nothing that they knew of or could conceive of would answer their cravings, they had set up this altar to an unknown god.

It may be safely said that in Athens heathenism had done its very best. Literature, art, poetry and philosophy had attained their proudest heights. If any people ever had an opportunity to test the value of "culture" the Athenians certainly had. If there is enough in learning and in art and in philosophy to meet the needs of human souls, it ought to have been proved there. Yet what do we see? Amid all this beauty, with thirty thousand gods, the people were still unsatisfied. Paul's words are very suggestive—he brings them the God for whom unconsciously their hearts were crying out. He says, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."

He then proceeds to declare to them the true God—"God that made the world and all things therein, . . . Lord of heaven and earth." One of the Athenian schools taught that there was no God, that the world was formed by chance. Another taught what is called Pantheism—that all things were God and God was all things. Then

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there was a popular mythology, a system of fables and fancies about a great many gods and goddesses. Paul taught that there was a God, that there was only one God, and that he was not only Creator, but sovereign Ruler and Dispenser of all things. He taught that this God is a spirit—"dwelleth not in temples made with hands." He thus swept away all idolatry and declared every splendid temple about him empty. He declared also that the true God is not "worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing." The Greeks brought costly offerings in food and drink, as though the gods required such things. The true God, said Paul, needed no such attention. Instead of requiring men's gifts to keep them alive, he is the Giver of all the things that men need to keep them living. Next he declared that all nations were alike, springing from one source, offspring of the one God. Thus he struck at the pride of the Athenians who claimed to be a superior race by themselves. He taught also the great truth of divine providence which extends to all creatures and to all their actions. This teaching was in the face of the Athenian belief in the doctrine of chance.

Paul taught further that it was the duty of all men to find the true God. "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." This is a vivid description of men in the natural state, without the gospel. They know not God, but they have a great hunger for God, stretching out their hands in the darkness and trying to find him.

Paul quotes to the Greeks one of their own poets who had given expression to a truth which belongs also to the very heart of the gospel. "As certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

Paul accepts this truth—that we are the offspring of God. This means more than that God is our Creator. Rocks, trees, flowers and birds were made by God, but they are not God's offspring, God's children. That which distinguishes man from all other creatures is that he is made in the image of God. God breathed into him his own life, and man became a living soul.

Accepting this truth which they themselves admitted, Paul showed how unreasonable it was to suppose that God would be like figures of gold,

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silver, or stone, fashioned by human skill into beauty. Thus again Paul attacked idolatry, showing how false, how unsatisfactory, how unreasonable, it was. God had always been very patient with men in their ignorance and sinfulness; but now a new dispensation had been introduced. "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth men that they should all every where repent." Before the light of divine revelation had broken on the earth God dealt with men pitifully and patiently, bearing with them in their sinfulness, overlooking their ways. But now Christ has come and all men are called to repent.

## CHAPTER IX

### CLOSE OF PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

ACTS xviii. 1-22

**N**OBODY noticed a plain man walking along the streets of Corinth, one day, travel-stained and weary. Yet his coming into Corinth meant more for that city than the entrance of any other man in the city's whole history. He brought the gospel there, and the gospel is the power of God wherever it goes.

There was a Hand guiding his steps that day. As he went about seeking employment, he came upon two persons who from that time proved good friends to him and helpers also in his work. He "found . . . Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla." It was a happy providence that brought these people together. It gave Paul a lodging place and a home in the great city. It furnished him also an opportunity to work and

support himself while he was engaged as a missionary. Then, no doubt, his influence upon them was also very great. The other day one friend wrote to another, " You have the power of bringing to the surface the very best that is in my nature, and of making me try to live up to my highest possibilities." Like power Paul seems to have had over Aquila and Priscilla. There was in them much that was good, and it needed only Paul's coming to them to bring out the good, to wake up the possibilities of beauty and strength that were in them.

The emperor had expelled the Jews from Rome. No doubt Aquila and Priscilla thought it a great hardship to be driven from their home in Rome. But in the end blessing came to them and also through them to the Church of Christ from this hardship. Being in Corinth, they had the opportunity of knowing Paul and of having him as an inmate of their own home for many months. Thus rich blessing came to them from him, and they in turn became a blessing to him and to the Church. By and by they went back to Rome, carrying with them all they had received from their contact with the apostle. Even the hard

things of our lives over which we grieve at the time, if we commit them all to God, will prove in the end full of blessing to us and to others.

It was a good custom of the Jews to require all their boys to learn a trade. They were thus fitted for any emergency which might make it necessary for them to earn their own bread. If Paul had had no trade he would not have been able to support himself in Corinth while doing missionary work. But by means of his trade he was able to care for himself by working during the week while he preached the gospel on the Sabbaths. There are thousands of young men in our country who fail in life because in youth they have not been trained to any useful employment. Thrown upon their own resources later, by some accident or misfortune, they are helpless. Work is honourable and dignified. Paul was a tentmaker, Jesus was a carpenter. No matter how rich a young man may be, he should never be content to live in idleness.

Paul was not satisfied, however, merely to be a tentmaker in Corinth. He had come there with the gospel, and he must preach. He did not abandon the ministry to go into business, as some

men find it easy to do. He wrought at his trade during the week that he might give his Sabbaths to preaching. A great many Christian people do this all the time. There are business men who spend six days in intense occupation and then give the Sabbath to Christian work in Sunday schools or missionary efforts.

It would seem that Paul got discouraged in some way. At least we are told that when his friends Silas and Timothy came his strength was renewed. Paul was a man who needed human love. The coming of Silas and Timothy made him all the more earnest as a preacher. This suggests one way in which we can help in the work of Christ. If we cannot ourselves be great workers we can give cheer and encouragement to those who are carrying the burdens, pouring fresh hope and earnestness into their hearts. We should never be discouragers of others—we should always seek to be encouragers. We do not know what help a little kindness or a word of cheer may give to one who is working under great pressure.

Not all Paul's work was successful. Not all who heard him yielded to Christ. There were



some who opposed and blasphemed. But having preached the gospel faithfully, Paul was able to lay upon the people themselves the burden of their rejection of Christ. "He shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean." He loved them still, with a deep and yearning love. But he had done his work faithfully, with a loving heart, and now he was free from responsibility. He could do nothing more for them. If they persisted in perishing, their blood would be upon their own heads. They could not say to him in the judgment that he had not been faithful to them. We must be very faithful, dealing with our friends and neighbours so that when we meet them at last on the judgment day they may not say to us that we did not warn them of their danger nor tell them of the Saviour. We must so bear ourselves now in our relations to them that if any of our friends perish we cannot blame ourselves. Christ is always an encourager of his people. Even the best Christian workers will sometimes feel disheartened when after faithful and diligent effort people still resist Christ. But even then they are not to conclude that their work is

in vain. The harvest which does not ripen to-day may ripen to-morrow. Paul was distressed by the small results of his preaching, but the Lord said to him, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace." Probably there was personal danger also, for he seems to have been afraid. The words read as if he were even thinking of giving up, for he was bidden to continue to speak and not to hold his peace. If such a man as Paul got discouraged, it is not strange that other workers for Christ have similar experiences at times and even feel like giving up their work. But the Lord's encouraging words to Paul are for all times and for all workers. No matter how much we may feel disheartened for the seeming failure of our work, by opposition, even by persecution, we must not yield to depression. God is with us, and his work never can fail.

In the midst of Paul's discouragements, when it seemed that he was making no impression, the Lord brought him a most cheering message, saying to him, "I have much people in this city." This was cheering news, indeed. It was as when Jesus told the weary, discouraged disciples, after their fruitless, all-night toiling, to cast their nets

again and they would find. Paul was thinking there was no use in preaching any more in Corinth, that there could be no results. Then the Lord told him that he had many people in that city and that they would believe if the apostle continued to preach the gospel faithfully. They were sinners yet, buried away in the world, but when the gospel was preached they would accept it and be saved. This was a wonderfully inspiring assurance. We should never allow ourselves to give up too soon in a place where no results come at once. We should labour on, believing that there are yet blessings to be obtained by our continued faithfulness. If Paul had ceased preaching in the midst of his discouragement and had gone away from Corinth, these people of Christ's in that city would not have learned of the Saviour.

## CHAPTER X

### PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY: EPHESUS

ACTS xix. 8-20

**F**ROM the beginning Christianity sought the cities as great centres of influence. Ephesus was an important city. It was a great centre of heathenism, having in it the magnificent temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. As usual, Paul began his work in Ephesus with his own people, the Jews, to whom he spoke boldly. But they rejected his preaching.

One result of the opposition of the Jews was the abandonment of the work in their synagogues. For two years Paul preached in a public hall. It was a glorious opportunity for Christianity. Ephesus was a great commercial centre, and people from all Asia Minor resorted thither. Many of these continually heard Paul's preaching, and thus the gospel was widely diffused. Ephesus

became a centre of evangelism in another way. Paul had a band of noble helpers who went out into the surrounding country, and a number of churches were established.

There was an unusual display of supernatural power in connection with the work in Ephesus. One remarkable example of this is given in the narrative. "From his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out." These sick people were not cured by the handkerchiefs or aprons—God wrought the miracles. He saw fit to use these garments which the apostles had worn as the instruments of healing. From every truly good man there goes forth an influence of blessing. Everything he does seems to be hallowed by his touch. Even his most commonplace words have a power that the words of other men have not. A portion of his own spirit seems to enter into whatever his hand touches.

As in the case of the magicians of Egypt, when Moses and Aaron were working great miracles there, the enemies of the gospel in Ephesus tried to outdo the work of the apostles. They "took

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upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus." If these enemies of Christianity had been able to do the works which the servants of Christ were doing, they might justly have claimed equal power. When John the Baptist sent from his prison to know if Jesus were really the Promised One, Jesus pointed the messengers to the works he was doing—the healing of the sick, the opening of the eyes of the blind, the cleansing of the lepers, the raising of the dead. These were the proofs of his Messiahship, he said.

Christianity still points to its works as its best evidences. Paul cast out evil spirits and healed the sick by naming over them the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Could those exorcists do the same thing? They tried, and ignominiously failed. Sceptics and atheists assail Christianity in these latter days, and it is fair again to point to the works of Christianity and ask its enemies if they can do the same things. Take the history of missions. Look at the nations and people lifted out from the degradation of heathenism. Can the enemies of Christianity do the same? Have they any record to show that they can?

Look at individual cases—men saved from the most depraved vices and changed into nobleness, purity and saintliness. Can infidelity imitate these works? Look at the benevolent institutions which Christianity has established—hospitals, orphanages, asylums and homes of all kinds. Where are the benevolent and philanthropic institutions erected by scepticism and atheism? “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”

Even demons recognized the power of Christ and his authority, and could not be deceived by those who thought by using the same formula, the words the apostle used, to invoke the divine power. “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” In the same way evil yet resists the efforts of pretenders to master it and expel it. The evils in our own hearts—wicked dispositions, lusts and unholy tempers, reply in the same way to our personal, unaided efforts to dispel them. It is the same with the vices of society, with all the world’s evils and corruptions. Human power alone is not able to drive them away. They look up and say, “Jesus I know, . . . but who are ye?” Jesus is well known all over Satan’s kingdom. He is recognized as the

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Almighty Conqueror, before whom all Satanic power has to yield. "But who are ye?" Here is where all pretended power fails, where all false religions are proved insufficient. Only Christ's power is strong enough to drive out Satan. If we would have our own hearts rid of the evil that is in them we must give ourselves to Christ, for these evils will recognize no other Master.

The effect of this remarkable display of supernatural power was felt at once. The people recognized the difference between the real power exercised through the apostle and his helpers and the pretended power of the magicians, and were awed by the manifest presence of God among them. Always the religion of Christ is characterized by the divine presence and work, thus evidencing its supernatural origin. Heathen religions pretend to do wonderful things, but they have no power to make the world better. They cannot comfort sorrow. They do not build up sweet homes. The work of Christianity is proved to be divine by what it does for men wherever it is accepted.

One proof of the power of Christianity as seen



at Ephesus was in the way the believers renounced their evil ways and gave up their profitable sins. Not only did many believe on Christ, but they saw the emptiness and folly of the things in which they had been trusting, and confessed before all men the sinful deeds they had been doing. Not a few of them that had been engaged in the practice of curious arts brought their books together and made a bonfire of them in the public square. The books, no doubt, contained descriptions of the various arts of magic and jugglery, and instructions for working all manner of incantations, charms, exorcisms. The scene when these paraphernalia of heathen arts were burned must have been very exciting. A modern scene of the same sort is that which took place in Florence when, under the powerful influence of Savonarola, the people brought out pictures, gay dresses, ornaments, the tokens of their worldliness, and burned them in the plaza of St. Mark.

Always those who follow Christ should be ready to part with whatever is sinful in their life and work, that Christ may be honoured above all. Sins kept in the heart poison the life, hide

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God's face and shut away blessing. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." The right thing to do with such things is to bring them to God. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." No matter what it may cost, our sins must be sacrificed, or they will destroy us.

The burning of these old Ephesian books suggests that it would be well if in many places there might be bonfires of evil books. There are many books which ought to be burned. They carry in them Satan's poison. To read them is to debauch our own souls. To put them into the hands of others is to ruin them. In India a man took down a book from the shelf and a viper came out of the book and stung him to death. There are many books in which deadly vipers lie hidden. Young people should be most careful in choosing the books they will read. A good book is a great blessing, but a bad book is a curse.

## CHAPTER XI

### PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY : THE RIOT AT EPHESUS

ACTS xix. 23-xx. 1

**T**HE gospel does not interfere with business unless the business is wrong. When it is right, it is really a part of Christian living as is attendance at prayer meetings. We may serve God as acceptably on Monday at our common work as we do on Sunday in our religious worship. But there are kinds of business which do not harmonize with Christian living. If the business be sinful, we cannot be diligent in it and at the same time be serving the Lord. The gospel made no small stir in Ephesus, it is said, because it was in conflict not merely with the worship of Diana, but with a profitable business which the worship of the goddess had built up. Wherever the gospel goes it makes a great deal of stir. Wicked men do not like it because it interferes with their life or with their methods of business.

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This opposition to the gospel took an organized form in Ephesus. A man named Demetrius seems to have had a sort of monopoly of the Diana shrine business. At least he was prominent among those who were engaged in this business. So he called a meeting of the workmen of his craft, and said to them, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth." Here we see at once the secret of the opposition to Christianity. Paul's preaching was damaging the business of these men. If he were allowed to go on preaching, soon nobody would believe in the goddess or care to worship her, and the result would be that no more little shrines could be sold. Anything that touches men's pockets is apt to be opposed by them. There are instances of this same spirit in our modern days. Note how the rum dealers of all grades hate Christianity, because it preaches temperance and tries to rescue men from the power of strong drink. Christianity declares open war against all evil, especially against every influence that debauches and destroys human lives and wrecks homes, and destinies.

Unintentionally Demetrius pays a high compliment to the influence of Paul's preaching. He

says to the men he is trying to stir up against the gospel, "This Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands." Paul had made no attack on the business of these men, but he had proclaimed the truth of the one God, declaring that idols were no gods. This is the way Christianity does wherever it goes. It does not directly start crusades against certain men or certain evils—it merely proclaims the great truth of Christianity, and then lets these truths have their own legitimate effect.

Demetrius was greatly alarmed over the prospective result of the preaching of the gospel. He said, There is danger "that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised." This temple was a splendid ornament—the pride and boast of the city. The argument of Demetrius was that if Christianity were allowed to spread this temple would lose its splendour, and the city would be the sufferer. That is, he looked at the matter in a purely business way. Christianity would injure the fame and distinction of the city. He thought nothing about the people's souls. The gospel came to Ephesus, not to con-

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serve heathen institutions, but to save the lost. It came to turn men from idols, and to lift them up to purity, righteousness and heaven. Yet the damage to business and the dimming of the fame of an idol were greater interests in the eyes of the silversmith than were all the blessings to the people's lives which the gospel brought to them.

The excitement was very great when Demetrius ended his speech. His fellow craftsmen who had heard his words were filled with wrath, and the whole city was filled with confusion. The meeting assumed a riotous form, and the men rushed with one accord into the theatre, dragging some of Paul's companions with them. When Paul learned this he was minded to go into the theatre himself. This incident gives us a glimpse of Paul's heroic soul. His companions and friends had been seized by the mob and dragged into the theatre, while he was outside and kept in a secure place by other friends. But he was determined to share the danger of his friends and speak in their defence. It took sublime courage thus to desire to face the mad crowd, when he knew that they might tear him to pieces the moment he faced them. But the spirit of Paul was equal

to it, and only the restraint of his friends kept him from rushing in before the furious and exasperated mob. When others are brought into trouble on our account we should desire either to rescue them or to share the trouble with them.

Others also besides Paul's companions saw his danger and sought to rescue him. "And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre." It seems strange that any of these distinguished men, so high in rank, should care enough for this Christian preacher in this heathen city to make any effort to save him. It seems still stranger to read that these men were his friends. Yet it only shows that God can raise up friends for his people wherever they may be. He had brought about these friendships before this trouble arose, so that his servant might be helped in the hour of need. In like manner Joseph and Nicodemus, two rich and influential men, were provided in advance as friends of Jesus, though only secretly, so that when he had died on the cross his body might be by them rescued from dishonour, and might

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receive fitting and loving burial. We need not fear if we are God's true and faithful children, that he will ever fail to raise up friends for us in our hour of need, wherever we may be.

The counsel given by the town clerk at this time, which led to the quieting of the mob, is very worthy of our thought. He said to them, "Ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly." That was good advice that day, and this town clerk showed much wisdom by the way he handled this mob. But the counsel is one that we may all with profit take to ourselves and put down among our life maxims. "Do nothing rashly." Rash people are forever getting themselves and their friends into trouble. They are continually doing things to-day which to-morrow they regret and wish they had not done. A great many of us have tongues that are always speaking rash words. We make rash promises that we fail to keep. We speak rashly when we are angry and then lose friends by our hasty sayings. Then many of us are continually doing rash things which cause any amount of trouble. We make rash bargains, and enter into rash speculations and spend money rashly. A very large percentage



of the blunders many of us make are due to rashness and could be prevented if we could always stop to think before we speak or act. It would be well for all of us to take counsel frequently of the town clerk of Ephesus.

## CHAPTER XII

### PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY : FAREWELLS

ACTS xx. 22-38

**P**AUL was on his way to Jerusalem. The ship which bore him stopped at Miletus. There he sent for the elders of the church at Ephesus and spoke to them some earnest farewell words. He spoke first of his journey to Jerusalem as leading him into suffering. "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there." We never know what lies just before us.

Paul did know, however, that he would suffer bonds and afflictions at Jerusalem. Yet this did not deter him from going forward. The incident shows noble heroism. "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself," he says, "so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the

Lord Jesus." His life was valuable only for one purpose, that with it he might do the Master's will and fulfil his mission. Life is worth living only when it is devoted to duty.

The counsels which Paul gave to the elders at Ephesus are valuable for us to-day. He first counselled them to take heed unto themselves. We should never neglect our own garden in caring for the gardens of others. The life which concerns us personally and most intimately, the one for which we are immediately responsible, is our own. Other people may need watching, and we may have some responsibility for them, but our first business is to watch ourselves. This is a responsibility no one can lift off us. We should take heed to our own hearts and be sure that they are kept with all diligence. We should take heed to our personal habits. We should take heed to our companionships. Watchfulness has abundant rewards.

But the duty of watching does not terminate with ourselves. These elders had a responsibility beyond their own lives. "Take heed . . . to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." The official position made them

responsible for all the care they could possibly give to others. The office of pastors is a very sacred one. They represent Christ on the earth in caring for his flock. When they give us advice or warn us of temptation or danger, we should not be vexed, but should remember that they do this because they love us.

Paul puts a high honour on the Church. A great price was paid for it. He also gives us a glimpse of the infinite value of Christ's death. He says the Church of God was purchased with his own blood. If our souls are so dear to God, should we not care for them ourselves? If we were purchased at such cost, should we ever do anything to degrade or dishonour ourselves? Then if Christ purchased us we belong to him and are to live for him and for him alone.

It is a sore loss to many when a good minister is taken away. There are plenty of wolves, yet, which watch for every opportunity of breaking into the fold, and they never spare the flock. There is no holy home into which they do not try to creep. There are bad papers and books circulated by hundreds of thousands, which are indeed "grievous wolves," and make terrible

havoc among tender lives. There are evil companions that creep in, wearing sheep's clothing, but are really wolves who come to devour. Every parent should keep sacred watch to protect his home and the children from the devouring wild beasts, and every teacher should use all diligence to shelter his class from such dangers. Keep the fences good, and let the under-shepherds never relax their vigilance for a moment.

Paul could say for himself that he was pure from the blood of all men. He meant that he had been so faithful in the presentation of Christ, toiling early and late, never saving himself in his efforts to save others, that no one could ever say he was lost because Paul had not done his part. All who are responsible for souls should so discharge their duty as to be able to say the same.

It is a great thing for a pastor or teacher to be conscious of setting a worthy and good example before those he instructs and seeks to lead. Paul says here, "I have shewed you all things." He refers to his own diligence. Although a minister of Christ and an apostle, he had laboured with his own hands during the week, at his trade, that he might preach to the people on the Sabbath

and minister to them in holy things. In every way Christians, not only ministers and teachers, but all Christians, should so live that their lives shall be examples to those who know them. One really never can preach higher truth than he lives. There is no use in telling the people about the love of God, the compassion, the gentleness, the forgiveness of God, if they do not see these divine qualities, at least in some dim measure, in our own lives. Once Christ came to this world to show us in human life what God is. But he is not here any more, and he wants us, his followers, now to show the people what God is like—not in our words, merely, but in our conduct, our disposition, our character. We are always giving examples, even unconsciously. There is not a little child even that has not some imitators. Somebody will do as we do. It will be a fearful thing if we show anyone the wrong way, if we set an example, the following of which would lead anyone to destruction.

One of the great teachings of Christianity has always been the duty of caring for the weak and the poor. Paul enunciates this teaching here. "Ye ought to support the weak." Jesus was

especially kind to the weak. He never broke a bruised reed. He reached out his strong hand to lift up those who had fainted and fallen on the way. He looked after the sick, saying that the well did not need the physician. There are many weak ones about us. Some are weak in body, feeble and sickly. We ought to be gentle to these and to help and encourage them. Some are weak in courage and resolution, in moral power. They cannot resist temptation. We ought to help these by giving them sympathy and inspiring courage in them. "Bear ye one another's burdens" is another of Paul's words. Elsewhere he says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak."

Another great lesson which Paul gave these Ephesian elders is contained in the words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is one of the lost words of Christ, which Paul picked up and saved for the world. It is not found in any of the Gospels. We may be very thankful, however, for its rescue, for it contains a great truth. It does not seem to us to be true that giving is better than getting. We all like to receive, and many of us do not like to give. But

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Jesus did not say it is more pleasant to give than to receive, but more blessed. Receiving and not giving feeds and inculcates selfishness ; giving trains toward unselfishness. "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister," was the motto of Christ's own life ; not to receive, but to give. "He is the first among you," Jesus said to his disciples, "who serves with the most complete self-forgetfulness." Blessed is Christlikeness, and he who gives, not he who receives, is most like the Master.





## CHAPTER XIII

### CLOSE OF PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

ACTS xxi. 1-17

**L**IFE is full of partings and meetings, of letting go things that are past and laying hold of things in the future. The missionaries and these friends had been together but a week, and yet they had become so attached to each other that their parting was tender. Wherever true Christians meet they are at once drawn to each other in holy affection. Jesus said that his disciples should be known in the world, not by their dress, nor by their creed, nor by any other external mark, but "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Wherever we go we will find something to do and may leave blessings. The ship which carried Paul's party stopped at Tyre to unload its cargo. This would require a week. But Paul was not

the man to sit upon a ship's deck in idleness for a week with a whole city of needy people close to him. He improved the opportunity. He left the ship and sought out the Christians who were in the city and did all he could for them during his stay. Here is a good suggestion for those who may be detained in some places for a while. Instead of passing the time in sight-seeing or in idleness, let them look up the Christian people of the place or let them find those who need help.

Not all human interpretations of divine teachings are right. These disciples at Tyre knew through the Spirit that danger lay before Paul if he went to Jerusalem. Then they inferred that he ought not to go on his way. "Who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." These friends probably considered the forewarning of danger a providential indication that Paul ought not to go on. We must be careful, however, in interpreting God's purposes in his providence. Difficulties looming up in the way of our advance are not always divine intimations that we should stop in our course or turn aside. Shut doors are sometimes to be opened, and open doors are not always to be

entered. The fact that we learn of dangers in our path which it will cost us much to encounter should not always be considered as forbidding us to proceed. It may be that the meeting of dangers and the enduring of sufferings and sacrifices is part of God's will for us, and therefore part of our duty. We must be careful not to misread providences, lest we draw wrong inferences.

He who does people good soon wins a place in their affections. Paul's week's stay at Tyre was full of kindness and helpfulness, for the Christians there, and when the time came for them to leave, the parting was very tender. "They all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city." Paul was a large-hearted man, sympathetic, ready always for helpfulness, with a rare genius for friendship. He had been only a week in Tyre, but when he came to leave, the people had learned to love him so much that it almost broke their hearts to have him go away. He was not one of those stately men who impress others with their intellectual acuteness, but are cold as icebergs. He was a mighty man intellectually, but he was also

gentle, affectionate, kindly. We all want to have friends. The reason Paul had friends was because he was a friend to the people. The reason people loved him so tenderly was because he loved them so truly. Nothing but affection will win affection. We never can get these friendships by patronizing airs, by empty talk about how much we think of people, nor even by gifts bestowed upon them. We must love if we would be loved. We must be a friend if we would have friends. Paul really loved people. He desired to help them and was ready to make any sacrifice in doing so. Like his Master, he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. His friendship for his people was not shown in mere professions, in soft words and in flattering phrases.

The beauty and influence of a Christian home are well illustrated in Philip's family. We remember Philip—we saw him first as one of the seven deacons. But he became an evangelist, also. He seems to have settled as a missionary pastor at Cæsarea. Not only Philip himself, but his four daughters as well, were engaged in the work of the gospel. They had given themselves to Christ's service. It were well if the daughters

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in every home were prophetesses, speaking out their message in whatever way Christ desires them to speak. We do not know in what particular ministries for Christ these young women were engaged. If they had lived in our day they would probably have taught classes in the Sunday school and would have been active in Christian Endeavour or some other form of young people's work. Every young woman who has given herself to Christ should find some way of working for her Master and of winning souls. Always, women have been friends of Jesus. Their hearts are warm, their hands are gentle, and they are fitted for noble service.

One of the blessings of life is that we do not know our future. Sometimes people rashly wish they could know what lies before them ; but it is a great deal better they do not know. If we knew our joys it might unfit us for the toils and tasks of our common days. If we knew our sorrows, it might make us afraid to go on and lead us to doubt and unbelief. It is better we should not know. In our story, however, the veil was lifted a little way for Paul, and he had a glimpse of trouble awaiting him. We see how this knowl-

edge affected the apostle's friends—they would have him turn away from the duty before him because of the danger that lay in it. It would have been better if they had not been told of what was before him.

When in any way we are made aware of dangers before us, we must not allow the dangers to make us less heroic and faithful. He who turns back because he sees trouble before him is failing Christ. Paul's heroism was noble. "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." It was not easy for Paul to make this determination. He was among friends who loved him and besought him to stay with them. Yonder was Jerusalem, and the lifted veil showed him suffering, and trial there, possibly death. Should he stay? or should he go? The struggle was hard, and almost broke his heart. Such pleadings of love make duty hard. But Paul had no doubt about what he ought to do. The will of the Lord was plain to him. He was wanted at Jerusalem. So his heroic purpose was formed. He did not ask what it might cost—chains or death—he was ready for either.

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In Millais' picture of the Huguenot we have an illustration. The brave man will not have the white ribbon bound round his arm, even by the tenderest and dearest human love. Duty to his God must come first. Luther, on his way to the Diet of Worms, affords another illustration of like heroism. We will have duties that are hard to meet, and friends with loving hearts will throw about us the silken cords of endearment, trying to hold us back. Then we must be brave to go on to do what Christ bids us do, in spite of love's persuasions and all the power of enemies.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PAUL A PRISONER: THE ARREST

ACTS **xxi.** 17-**xxii.** 29

**P**AUL had just come to Jerusalem after the close of his missionary journey. The elders feared there would be trouble when it became known that he had come. They arranged, therefore, for an observance of Jewish rites in the temple, in which Paul should take a public part. It was when this observance was about completed that he was discovered in the temple by some foreign Jews, who recognized him, seized him, and raised a great clamour against him. For him there was nothing new in this hostile outbreak.

They thought they had caught him in the very act. They cried out, "This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place." Their words were a gross misrepresentation. Paul never had uttered a word against the Jewish people, the law



or the temple. Many persons take the words of others, give a wrong sense to them, and then repeat them. Others exaggerate what they hear. There are many ways of misrepresenting others and many people who are ready always to do it. Misrepresentation is a grievous sin. Many a calumny that destroys a fair name grows out of a mere misstatement, an inexact reporting of what is said or done. We should be scrupulously careful in repeating, if we must repeat a matter at all, that we state the precise truth. No fault of speech is more common than want of accuracy in quoting or narrating. Most people's ears seem to hear with a bias in favour of their own prejudices. Then, in reporting what they have heard, the bias is too apt to show its influence a second time in the way the speaker's words are twisted or distorted.

This is only part of the misrepresentation, however. They charged further that Paul had taken Gentiles into the temple, thus defiling it. Some of them had seen Paul on the street one day in company with a Gentile Christian from Ephesus, and now when they recognized Paul and his four companions in the temple, they

jumped to the conclusion that this Gentile was one of the four. The charge was an entire misrepresentation. They "supposed" that this Gentile was one of the men with the apostle. The supposition was altogether groundless. But that is the way a great many evil stories about people are started. Somebody "supposes" something about another, and tells his supposition as a fact, and it goes on its ruinous errand. A good man does an entirely harmless and proper thing, but some one imagines something wrong back of it and reports his imagination as a fact, and a character is blackened. Many a scandal grows out of what some evil-disposed person supposes.

The lesson is, the duty of sacredly cherishing the good names of others, never permitting ourselves to infer evil when there is no real basis for it. We have no right to "suppose" that another has done a wrong thing and then start our supposition as a fact. A large proportion of the miserable gossip which is retailed by idle people in drawing-rooms and other places is started just as this story about Paul was started.

The government of Rome was not intention-

ally friendly to Christianity. In the case of Paul it not only delivered him at this time from the hands of his own people who were his bitter enemies, but a little later carried him without expense to Rome itself, where, under the continued shelter of the government, though a prisoner, he wrought as a missionary in the very capital of the Gentile world. So is the wrath of man overruled for the glory of God.

God is always active in the affairs of this earth, overruling all the things so that they work together for good. We need never be afraid to put into his hands the things that seem to be against us—the enmities, the dangers, the plots, the hurts of life, with the confidence that none of them can do us any harm if only we stay close to Christ and leave all in his hands. The mob in the temple that day tried to kill Paul, but they only started him on his way to Rome with the gospel of Christ. Enmities and efforts to harm us will always bring good rather than evil to us and the cause of Christ, if we let God take care of them and keep our own hands off.

The mob did not know why Paul was being dragged away. They did not know what the

charges against him were. They did not understand the motives of the Jews who had raised the first clamour against him. They merely saw his arrest, and then heard the violent outcry against him, and joined the crowd—they did not know why. The same thing happens in these days. Somebody starts an opposition against a man and others join in the clamour, not making any inquiry into the matter to know whether the charges are true, or even to know what the charges are. People are like sheep. If one sheep starts in a certain way, all the flock will follow. Common justice requires, however, that we investigate assertions and accusations against others before we believe them and join the crowd of maligners. It is a crime against a man to pursue him with evil charges, or to take any part whatever against him, without knowing the truth about the matter.

Lysias, too, had a wrong impression about Paul. He thought he was a notorious Egyptian, who had led four thousand assassins in sedition. This passage is full of misrepresentations and of unjust charges against the apostle—charges, too, not based on any testimony, but simply inferred.

Lysias supposed that Paul must be a bad man, a great criminal in fact, or the people would not have set upon him so mercilessly when they found him in the temple.

We should never take anybody's opinion about another when it is evil, without first making inquiries of our own to see if the things alleged are true. We should not join in every hue and cry raised against another, and begin to shout, "Away with him!" because that is the voice of the rabble. We should inquire into the truth of the charges and know upon what grounds they rest. Then if we find that the person is falsely charged and is suffering innocently, we should be brave enough to become his friend and defender instead of his enemy and defamer. That was the course of Lysias here. He inquired who Paul was and what he had done, and when he found out the truth he protected him from the mob. Every man should have the benefit of our charity until we know he is guilty. To condemn anyone unheard is an act of gross injustice.

## CHAPTER XV

### PAUL A PRISONER: THE PLOT

ACTS xxii. 30-xxiii. 35

**T**HE night after the stormy meeting described in the early portion of this chapter, Jesus appeared to Paul and bade him be of good cheer, promising him that as he had that day borne such faithful testimony in Jerusalem, he should bear witness also at Rome. This assured Paul that his life was safe amid all the plots of his enemies.

It is strange how bitter human hate may grow and to what depths of wickedness and treachery men may descend under the influence of passion. The records of persecution have many times since told of similar plots for the destruction of holy men and women whose only crime was that they worshipped God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

A fouler murder could not have been planned

than these men plotted. Yet their chief priests and elders, the representatives of religion about the temple, were ready to help carry out this nefarious conspiracy. They professed to want to look into the case of Paul more carefully. We may not be the objects of any such human conspiracy in our Christian life, but there are unseen enemies who are always plotting our destruction, and we need to fear these. There are many assassinations of souls of which no record is made in this world's chronicles.

God knows all that goes on in the most secret places. Men may make their plots in the darkness or in inner rooms where no human ear can hear what they are saying, but there is an ear that always hears. Nothing can be hidden from God. No conspiracy ever can surprise him or defeat any purpose of his. The method of the apostle's deliverance is well worth careful study. Forty desperate men used to just such work had banded together under an awful curse that they would kill Paul. They had asked the chief priests and elders to aid them by furnishing the opportunity for the assassination, and these holy ecclesiastics had promised to do so. The prisoner

was to be called for by the Sanhedrin on the plea of completing the hearing of his case. Then, as he passed from the barracks to the court room, the assassins would spring up out of their hiding-place and kill him. It looked as if nothing could thwart the plot. But our God is a loving God, and no human power can defeat his plans. Paul had a sister living somewhere, and she had a son. No other mention is made anywhere of this young man. How he came to be at Jerusalem at this time we know not. We know only that God had him there at the right time, and that in some way he learned of this conspiracy and then hurried to the castle to tell his uncle about it.

It is interesting to see on how many little things Paul's deliverance depended—the presence of his sister's son in the city, the young man's learning of the plot, his admittance to the castle, his ready access to Lysias, the chief captain's interest in the prisoner, and his prompt action when he heard of the plot. That is the way God always takes care of each one of his children. He keeps his eye on every life, every moment, so that nothing ever occurs without his notice



and permission, in the life even of the smallest or obscurest believer.

Of course, he does not always deliver his people from their enemies. Stephen was not delivered. But God helped him in another way by giving him grace to die so triumphantly, and to witness so grandly for Christ in his death, that even the sparing of his life for years could not have done so much for Christ's kingdom as Stephen did in his martyrdom. Only let us settle it in our minds that this is a sample of the care God is taking of each one of us day and night if we are his children.

The prophet Agabus had foretold that Paul should suffer in the hands of enemies, and Paul said he was ready to die at Jerusalem, if need be, for the sake of Christ. Yet here when he learns of the conspiracy to murder him, he does not let the plot go on without an effort to defeat it. Though willing and ready to die for Christ, he wants to live and does not needlessly throw away his life. We are required to use all lawful means to preserve our own life as well as the lives of others. We are not needlessly to rush into the jaws of death. We are to protect

ourselves against plots and dangers by all right means, though never by doing anything wrong. We are never to lie or commit any sin against God in order to save our life. God does not want his plans carried out by the breaking of his commandments. But in all right ways we are to defend our own lives and seek their preservation.

God has his plan for every life, and each one is to help to work out that plan for himself in his own case. God promises deliverance from danger and victory in temptation, but we ourselves have something to do in realizing the deliverance and the victory. It will not do to take up a promise and plead it while we put forth no hand of our own. We are saved altogether by grace, yet we have much to do in saving ourselves. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

All the powers of the world are subject to God's command, and when he needs them he calls for them. Here he calls into service nearly five hundred men of the imperial army of Rome to defend one despised missionary. The Roman

officer did not know that he was helping to carry out a plan of Almighty God when he ordered up the escort that night to carry his imperilled prisoner away from the hands of his enemies. Men are every day unconsciously fulfilling God's promises and carrying out God's plans, without the slightest thought of what they are doing.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PAUL A PRISONER : BEFORE FELIX

ACTS xxiv. 10-27

**W**ITH true oratorical instinct, Paul began his address with a kindly word to Felix. He had confidence in appealing to him, since the governor had been so long in his position that he knew well the laws, and could understand and appreciate the facts which Paul was about to state. Paul's fine courtesy appears in these words. Some good people are careless about their manners. They do not think it worth while to be always kindly and refined, and sometimes they speak brusquely or act rudely. This is not the Christian way. "Love . . . doth not behave itself unseemly." Courtesy is a Christian duty. We should study the art of pleasing others. Many a man's light is kept from shining out brightly by the faultiness of his manners.

"This I confess unto thee, that after the way

which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers." While Paul was most strenuous in denying the false charges against him, he was very careful to confess himself a believer in Christ. We should never be ashamed in any place or in any circumstances to own ourselves Christians. Anyone can confess Christ in a Christian Endeavour prayer meeting, where all are doing the same, or at the Lord's Table, where only Christians are sitting. But our Master wants those who confess him here to confess him just as boldly when they are out among his enemies in the world.

"Have hope . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." This was part of Paul's confession of Christ. The hope of the resurrection was a wonderful one. The grave is not the end—if we are Christians we shall come again in a new body and shall live on forever with Christ. For the Christian the truth of resurrection is full of the most inspiring hope. Immortality is before us. This truth should be a great power in our life. We should live for the eternal years, not for the brief passing moment.

“ Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” “ Herein ” refers to what Paul had just been saying about the resurrection and the judgment. He gets his motive of daily living from these great facts. If only we could realize and always remember that we shall rise again and go on with our life, and that every thought, word and act here will have a bearing on our character in the after life, it would certainly have its effect upon us in all that we think and do. Paul’s rule of life, with its mighty motive behind it, ought to be the motive of every Christian. We should train ourselves to live conscientiously. A true conscience keeps itself void of offence both toward God and toward man. Some people are apparently devout toward God and yet selfish and mean toward men. Others are philanthropic and benevolent toward men—tolerant, charitable, kind, generous, and yet pay God no homage, no love, no service, never bow at his feet, never recognize him.

“ As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.” Paul’s arrows had gone straight to the mark. He had

aimed truly and had not missed. Under his fearless words concerning righteousness, self-control and judgment, Felix saw his own life in the mirror of truth and holiness which the preacher held up before his eyes. We should often look our own life squarely in the face. If we are afraid to do this something is wrong.

Of course, if we are living in some simple way it is not a pleasant thing to do. It hurts. Yet we are cowards if we are afraid to do it. We are worse than cowards—we are fools, for some day we shall be compelled to look ourselves in the face, with every shred of veil torn away. It will not do to deny the Bible teachings, saying we do not believe them, that they are only old wives' fables. Such denials will not do away with the facts of eternity. An old sea captain would not believe that there was a rock at a certain spot indicated on his new chart. He said he had sailed those waters for years, and he knew there was no rock there. Coming near the place he said, "Now I will show you that there is no rock there." He then ran his ship right upon the place where the rock was marked on the chart; there was a grinding and a crash

and his vessel went down. Men disbelieve in the chart which marks judgment at the end, but too late they will discover that judgment is no myth, no fancy of devout souls, but a terrible reality.

“When I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” That is the way many men do. They hear the truth, feel its power, are terrified, but postpone action. Felix was false to his own best interests that day. He was not honest with himself. Under the apostle’s preaching he clearly saw the wrong in his life. He had a glimpse, too, of the judgment day as the preacher lifted the veil. He was terrified. He knew right well what he ought to do, and yet he put the matter off. He did not doubt the truth of what the preacher said; he did not actually reject the Saviour he offered—he merely postponed action. Some other time he would find it more convenient than now to adjust his life to the proper conditions. This way of postponement is a well-trodden road and there always are thousands going upon it.

For two years Paul remained in prison. Good came from this imprisonment, not only for Paul



himself, but for others and for the cause of Christ. It was a mild imprisonment. Every possible indulgence was granted to him. His friends had free access to him. The rigours of prison life were greatly softened for him. No doubt the long rest did Paul good physically. He was not a robust man, and he had so spent himself in his missionary journeys, amid hardship, persecution and suffering, that he was exhausted and sorely needed rest. Besides physical recuperation, he also got spiritual blessing in his quiet months. He learned new lessons in life which made him a better preacher ever after. Then his prison was a busy missionary centre to which people came continually with their questions, their needs, their temptations, their sorrows.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PAUL A PRISONER: BEFORE FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

ACTS xxv.-xxvi. 19-32

**W**HEN Paul told his judges of the command of Jesus that he should work for him whose followers he had persecuted, he said, "I was not disobedient." The trouble with too many people is that they are disobedient. They hear the voice of God and do not obey it. They have glimpses of the lovely things of Christian life and do not strive to reach them. If only we would always be obedient, in little things as well as in great things, our feet would constantly be lifted higher and higher, each step taking us into a nobler, truer life, nearer to God.

It was the heavenly vision which Paul obeyed. There are visions that are earthly and there are visions that are heavenly. This world starts dreams in our hearts. But he who follows only

earthly visions wins nothing that he can keep forever. There are also heavenly visions—glimpses of God's beauty, revealings of God's will, intimations of lovely things which we may attain. It was a heavenly vision that Paul had—a vision of Christ himself in his divine glory. Heavenly visions come to all young people, inviting them to pure, good, true, holy things. The Christian mother's teachings, as she holds her little one on her knee and talks to it of Christ, place before the young eyes a vision of the Saviour in his beauty and love. When we meditate upon a verse of Scripture and it opens, giving us a glimpse of something lovely in character or starting in our minds a thought of duty, it is a heavenly vision that we are having. Every fragment of loveliness we see in a human life is a vision sent to win us toward better things. We should never be disobedient to any heavenly vision, but should follow it as an angel sent to woo us nearer to God.

Obeying the heavenly vision, Paul declared to the people "that they should repent and turn to God." Repentance is a good word. It means to turn—to turn away from the things we have

found to be foolish and sinful. The other phrase is also important—"turn to God." It is not enough to drop the sins out of our life. If this is all we do, if we simply stand with our back on our evil ways, taking no step in the other direction, we have gained nothing. The mere giving up of bad habits will not save anyone.

These people were told, moreover, that they should "do works meet for repentance." The Ephesians did works worthy of repentance when they brought out their books of black arts and burned them. Zacchæus did works worthy of repentance when he made restitution to those he had wronged and began a new life with Christ. We need not talk about having repented unless our life proves our repentance.

Paul had now been a Christian about twenty-five years, and these had been years of struggle, amid enemies and dangers. But the heroic old apostle had never faltered, never turned back. He had stood faithful and true through all. It was a grand record, but he takes no praise to himself. He says the help came from God for all this standing and witnessing. Some young people are afraid to set out on a Christian life, because

they fear they will not be able to stand. Here is the word for all such—they may obtain help from God for every duty, for every hour of danger, for every struggle. God never puts a burden on us without providing us with the strength we need to carry it.

“ Paul, thou art beside thyself.” That is what the world is constantly saying about those who are very earnest in religious life. They said Jesus was crazy—his own family thought he was. Festus said that Paul was insane. But who really was the madman that day—Paul who believed on Christ and was living for the invisible things ; or Festus, who sat there and sneered ? Who is mad now—the devout and fervent Christian who loves Christ and serves him, or the scoffer and reviler ? There is no madness like that which disbelieves the realities of eternity and rejects the mighty love of Christ. Men really only come to themselves when they awake to their true condition as lost sinners and return to God their Father.

Agrippa, after listening to Paul’s speech and to the further personal appeal to yield his heart to Christ, said, “ Almost thou persuadest me to be

a Christian." Paul had turned from Festus to King Agrippa, asking him if he believed the prophets. Perhaps the reply of Agrippa was only a sneer. Possibly his heart was touched and he wished to hide it. No matter ; one thing we know—this was Agrippa's one great opportunity for salvation and he threw it away. Such opportunity comes to all. Every lost one was at some time on the edge of being saved. Men reach the door, but do not enter. They are near the kingdom of God and then turn away unsaved. There is a story of a woman lost in the Alps. All night she wandered, seeking the way to refuge. In the morning they found her a few steps from the hotel which she was vainly striving to reach. Close about heaven's gates countless souls perish—almost saved, yet lost. Almost will not avail.

The intensity of Paul's desire for the conversion of his judges was shown by his next words :

" I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were . . . altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Paul knew that he had something which Agrippa and the others had not. Sometimes Christian people for-

get that they are children of God, that they have eternal life, that heaven is theirs. But even in the presence of the king, the governor, and the other people of rank that day, Paul was conscious that he was far richer than they were, had a higher rank. He had something which they had not, and to possess which would greatly add to their happiness. If Christians all had this realization of their dignity, honour, and noble calling, it would greatly add to their power in urging others to come with them into the same blessed life.

After a conference, those who had heard Paul agreed that "this man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar." So it looked as if Paul had made a serious mistake in appealing to Cæsar. If he had not done so he would have been set free that day. His appeal that day, however, made it necessary that he should be sent to Rome. To some it would have seemed better that he should have been released from prison that he might go out to preach. But there was another Hand that was at work, unseen those days, amid the complicated movement of things. God's plan was being wrought out in spite of, even in and through, men's enmities and

persecutions. Paul had a mission to Rome. He was wanted to carry the gospel there. If he had been released at this time he would probably have been seized again by the Jews and might have fallen a victim to their rage and hatred. This appeal made it necessary that the government should take him to Rome. Thus protection was assured to him and he was carried to the world's capital, without expense, that he might there preach the gospel. Thus Rome itself became a helper in extending Christ's kingdom through the empire. God's plans for our lives are always good, and we need only to help him work them out.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### PAUL A PRISONER : THE VOYAGE

ACTS xxvii. 1-26

**P**AUL'S voyage to Rome was interrupted by a furious storm. It is recorded that "there arose . . . a tempestuous wind." The winds seemed to be fighting against Paul. We must not always decide, however, that opposition, difficulty, or hindrance shows divine displeasure. This ship was carrying God's servant to his destination, and yet this terrible storm arose on the sea. God's people are passing through this world to heaven, and yet they meet obstacles and hardships in the very path of duty. They must not conclude that these things indicate God's displeasure. There are reasons known to God why trials are better for us sometimes than favouring circumstances. If this ship had had smooth sailing right through we should never have had this wonderful story of Paul's sublime

faith and God's wonderful deliverance. This is one of the most remarkable chapters in the annals of Paul's career.

“The next day they lightened the ship.” They hoped that by casting out some of the freight they might save the ship and the lives of those on board. Next day, as the storm grew worse, they threw out even the furniture. Valuable and important as these things were, they must be sacrificed that something more important might be saved. It often becomes necessary in life's voyage to lighten the ship in order to save it. That is one of the blessings of tempests and storms in our lives ; they compel us to cast out the things of earth and our sins in order to save our souls. There are some things we never can take to heaven. If we ever get there we must lighten the ship or it will sink with us in the dark waves of death. There are too many people, however, who are not willing to make sacrifices of earthly things, even to gain spiritual blessings. There are stories of men who, on sinking ships, have sought to carry off their gold, but have lost their lives in the effort. We ought to be willing to sacrifice anything in

order to gain the favour of God. It is more to be desired than anything else.

If the master of the vessel and the officers in charge of the prisoners had remained in the safe shelter, as Paul had urged, they would have been safe. So Paul said to them, "Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not . . . have gained this harm and loss." Many a trouble in life comes from not taking good advice. No doubt the seamen laughed at Paul's counsel about not loosing from Crete. He was only a landsman, and what did he know about seamanship? By and by they learned that if they had only taken his advice they would have been spared the trouble and loss which the storm cost them. If they had only stayed in the quiet shadow of Crete, instead of putting out to sea, they would have been in no danger during this terrible tempest. There are young men who refuse to stay in the shadow of the Church, under the influence of parental love and home tenderness, beneath the protection of God's commandments, and who, disregarding all advice, put out to sea, and are caught in wild tempests. Then they learn what a mistake they made when they took

their own way instead of listening to wise counsel.

After rebuking them gently for their failure to hearken to him, Paul spoke encouraging words. "There stood by me this night the angel of God." So there are angels who come to earth with messages and ministries for God's children. God will always find some way to help his children in the dark hours of their earthly experiences. The old sailors on that ship did not know where they were that night, but God knew where his servant was, the angel had no trouble in finding the ship on the sea, and the man he sought amid the ship's company. Not one of God's children need ever have any fear of being lost to God or forgotten by him in his time of need.

Paul was proud to proclaim himself a follower of him who had sent his angel to speak to him ; he said, "Whose I am, and whom I serve." Many people profess to belong to Christ, and yet do not serve him. They sing consecration hymns and pray consecration prayers, but do not live their hymns and prayers. Their consecration is more a matter of sentiment than of life. Paul really belonged to Christ, and, therefore, served

him. At his conversion he relinquished all claim to himself, and all right to the direction and control of his own life. The highest nobleness in heaven or on earth is to serve the Lord Christ, saying from the heart, "I belong to Christ."

The message of the angel was an assurance of safety.

"Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar." If he must stand before Cæsar in Rome he could not perish in the sea on the way to Rome. Everyone, doing God's will, is immortal till his work is done. If God has something for us to do next year, he will not allow us to die this year. It ought to be a great comfort to us amid the sickness and danger of this world that each life is in the care of God, that no disease or accident can reach one of God's children without his permission. We need never give ourselves any anxiety about anything; our only care should be to be true to God, and faithful in duty. Then God will take care of us, and death cannot touch us until our work on earth is finished.

The angel had a further assurance for Paul's companions: "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." This word is very suggestive. Paul

had been praying, not only for himself, but for his fellow passengers and for the sailors. We see, therefore, that God answers prayer. If Paul had not been on that ship and if he had not prayed, all would have been lost in the storm. The men's lives were saved because there was one man on board who knew God, and who had faith in prayer. Another suggestion here is, how much even wicked people owe to the good. The lives of two hundred and seventy-five persons were carried safely through the storm for the sake of one good man, and because of his intercession. We never know how much we owe to the prayers of our friends. The wicked in any community know not what blessings come to them for the sake of the good people about them.

Probably those to whom Paul told these things looked as if they did not believe. Paul was content to rebuke them by making the assertion of his own faith.

"I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Paul's faith was very sublime. There was no human reason to expect anything but the foundering of the ship, and the perishing of all

on board. The angel of God had come to Paul with the assurance of his deliverance, and Paul simply believed his word. It was against all probability, yet Paul said quietly, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." That is faith—the laying hold of a word of God and absolutely believing it, believing it so really as to venture everything upon it. Once I entered a home where an old person was dying. Before I reached the bed the sick woman cried out, "Oh, give me some word that I may take hold of." Any word of God is a word that we may take hold of. Those who cling to God's promises never shall perish.

## CHAPTER XIX

### PAUL A PRISONER : THE SHIPWRECK

ACTS xxvii. 27-xxviii. 10

**W**HEN in the midst of the tempest an angel stood by Paul and assured him that he must be brought before Cæsar, which meant that he could not perish in the sea, he was assured that for his sake all on board should escape, though the ship would be lost.

“ Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved,” was the assurance. Yet Paul had said before that there should be no loss of life on the ship. He had received this assurance, too, from the angel. If it was the divine purpose that no life should perish in this storm, why did Paul say here that unless the seamen stood at their posts the passengers could not be saved? The divine assurance of safety did not do away with the use of all proper human means for securing deliverance.



“ Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.” The sailors had let the boat down, intending to escape in it. The soldiers foiled their plan by cutting the ropes and letting the boat drift off. Thus the sailors were kept on the ship and were compelled to do their duty. There is a story of a little girl with a warm heart for dumb animals, who prayed that the rabbits might not be caught in her brother’s traps. After praying very earnestly she whispered to her mother that she knew they would not be caught. When her mother asked her why she was so sure, she said she had destroyed the traps. We must work as well as pray.

More and more the prisoner was revealed as the man for the emergency. “ While the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat.” We must always care for our bodily health. When Elijah was fleeing from Jezebel’s threat, despairing because of the seeming failure of his work, an angel found him under a juniper tree, wishing he were dead. Instead of giving him good advice, or even reminding him of the divine promises, the angel brought him something to eat. Then, after he had eaten,

he slept. Food and sleep were what Elijah needed. There are times when what persons need is not a tract, nor good advice, nor even a prayer, but something to eat, clothes to keep them warm.

The influence of Paul's act was magical. "Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat." By being brave, cheerful and composed in time of danger, Paul lifted up the whole ship's company into the same confident mood. By his cheerful manner and loving interest in the others he inspired them all with confidence. There are few things the world needs more than just such influence.

There come experiences in life when material things must be sacrificed for the sake of higher interest. In this storm the cargo was thrown overboard in order that the ship might be beached and the men's lives saved. We cannot reach the haven of eternal rest laden down with the things of this world. When a vessel was burning near the shore, and all were leaping into the water to swim to safety, there was one man who tied his gold about his body, thinking to carry it to shore ; but the moment he leaped into the water

he sank to the bottom like a stone. If he had been willing to give up his gold his life might have been saved.

We have an illustration of this truth in the history of the flight of Cortez, on that fearful night when the Aztecs compelled the invaders to escape for their lives. The vast masses of gold that had been accumulated were more than could be carried off, as each soldier would have to fight his way through the host of the enemy. Each man was allowed to take what he would, but their commander warned them against overloading. Said he, "He travels safest in the dark night who travels lightest." The more cautious men heeded the advice, but others were less self-restrained. Some bound heavy chains of gold about their necks and shoulders, and some filled their wallets with the bulky ingots until they literally staggered under their burdens. All who tried to carry off the gold became an easy prey to the lances of the enemy.

Anchors are very important, but here even they must be cast off. There are anchors which hold many people from salvation or from a full consecration to Christ. Sometimes a secret sin

is the chain, sometimes it is a human companionship or friendship, sometimes love for the world's riches or pleasures. Christ made this very plain when he said that if our hand or our foot causes us to sin, we should cut it off; that we would better escape into life, halt or maimed, than keep both hands and feet and perish. If we find that there is any such thing, no matter how dear it is to us, we should resolutely cut it off and cast it away.

The narrative tells us that "the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners." After a battle a wounded enemy within the lines piteously cried for water. An officer ran to him and gave him drink. Refreshed and revived by the water, the wounded man, seeing that his benefactor was of the opposite army, drew his pistol and shot him. Something like this was the spirit of these soldiers. The centurion, however, shows us the reverse spirit—gratitude. He remembered how much they all owed to one particular prisoner, and checked the evil purpose of his men, not only saving Paul himself, but for his sake all the prisoners.

The centurion's plan was far better than that

of the soldiers. He suggested "that they which could swim should . . . get first to land : and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship." We have here a beautiful parable. The voyage itself is a parable of the Christian's life-voyage. The island represents heaven. Everything has to be given up to reach it. But it will be noticed that not one person was lost—all reached the land. However, not all got to the shore in the same way. Some swam out, while others had to cling to pieces of board, or of furniture, thus barely escaping. Not all Christians reach heaven in the same way. Some enter triumphantly, with song and shout ; some are barely saved, gaining the shores of glory only on the shattered fragments of their earthly hopes. Happy will we be if we get into heaven at last in any way, through any difficulty or earthly loss. But it is possible for all to have the " abundant entrance," and we should strive so to live that we may secure it.

## CHAPTER XX

### PAUL A PRISONER : IN ROME

ACTS xxviii. 11-31

**I**T must have been a happy hour for Paul when he saw Rome and entered the gates. For a long time he had earnestly wished to preach the gospel there. He came, however, not as a free man, but as a prisoner. Yet this was really favourable, for he was under the protection of the Roman Government and free from Jewish persecution—much more free to preach than if he had gone there merely as a missionary. His prison was not a dungeon—he “was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.” He was treated kindly, with as little restraint as possible. He was secured by a slight chain round the right wrist to the left wrist of a soldier, but was allowed to be at large within the palace, or even, if he could afford it, to hire a lodging for himself outside. His prison became a centre of

influence for good, a place to which people were constantly coming.

“After three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together.” Paul lost no time. As soon as he was settled in his new lodgings he began his work. Some good people waste a great deal of time in waiting before taking up their duties. They loiter over their tasks. They put things off. They let golden days and hours pass unimproved. It is very important to learn how to use time so as not to waste it. For one thing we need an earnest purpose in the heart, and Paul carried a burning fire in his bosom, the love of Christ, which impelled him to instant and strenuous service. He had a message to men and he could not rest until he had delivered it.

“I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar,” he explained to the Jews his presence in the Eternal City. It seems remarkable that it was necessary for him thus to put himself under heathen protection in order that he might do Christ’s work freely. It is also very pleasant to think how the providence of God overruled this appeal. Paul was carried to Rome under the protection of Roman soldiers. This is another illustration of

the providence of God in the lives of all his people. We need not suppose, either, that Paul was exceptionally a man of providence. The same God who cared for him is thinking of us and of our lives, planning our circumstances and conditions, and is always ready to overrule what may seem to be evil, if only we put all into his hands.

With simple fervour he said, " Because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." He held up his arm with the chain on his wrist while he spoke these words. He was a prisoner, and yet we see in him nothing of the spirit of the captive. Indeed, he was the freest man in all Rome that day. A canary bird, when put into a cage, flies up on a bar and begins to sing. That is the kind of prisoner Paul was. He was a rejoicing captive. He was wearing a chain, not because he was a criminal, but because he was a Christian for Christ's sake. This fact made him bear the chain without being ashamed of it. It was not in his eyes a mark of dishonour. When a criminal looks down upon his chain he sees in it a token of shame and degradation. But Paul's chain never brought a blush to his cheek. No



chain of gold ever worn by prince or noble was such a mark of honour as the iron chain which the apostle held up that day. He gloried now that he could wear a chain for Christ. Then the chained hand was not idle.

While in his prison Paul wrote many letters, among others one to the Philippians, the most cheerful and joyous of all his epistles. Every line of it is full of gladness and bird songs. No part of his ministry yielded sweeter influences than that wrought in his prison. We shall not likely have the privilege of literally wearing chains for Christ, but there are many hindrances and limitations in every Christian life which are really chains upon us. Sickness sometimes shuts us in. Poverty ties the hands of many. Christians who are not free to do what their hearts prompt them to do for Christ should study Paul with his chain and gather the lesson of victoriousness and rejoicing. His prison life was not lost time for him—there went continually from his place of activity rich blessings for his fellow men.

At that time the Christian Church was only a poor, despised handful. The little church in Rome

seemed to have no influence in the great centre of worldly power. But what did it grow into? Old Rome has long since gone. Its glories have perished. Only a few of the ruins of the ancient city tell now the story of its greatness. But that despised sect, then everywhere spoken against, touches now all the world with its influence. We need not fear when our cause is weak and despised. Almost every great movement for good began in the same way. A divine life, however, was in Christianity, and it could not be crushed. The little stone cut from the mountain without hands now fills all the earth. We must not let the world's judgment of Christianity affect our confidence in it.

We are told that "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house." Prisons have often become centres of blessing in this world. The history of these years in Paul's prison in the heart of Rome never can be written. Thousands came to hear the gospel from his lips and went away rejoicing to tell the story to others. Letters were written there which went out to distant churches with their words of life starting immortal influences. Nero was emperor then. Contrast

Nero's palace with Paul's prison, and then the influence of Nero's life with Paul's. Which was the happier man—the emperor or the prisoner? Which made his life the nobler, the more beautiful, the greater blessing in the world?



**II**  
**THE MESSAGE OF PAUL'S**  
**LETTERS**



## CHAPTER XXI



### THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

ROMANS i. 8-17

**T**HE Epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth by an amanuensis named Tertius, at Paul's dictation. It was sent by Phœbe, a deaconess, who was journeying to Rome. The Christians at Rome were Jews and Gentiles, the latter predominating. It is not known who first preached the gospel at Rome, but it is probable that after the day of Pentecost some of the Christians went to the imperial capital and set up the first church there. It is evident from chapter xvi. that many of the members at that time at Rome were Paul's personal friends. Paul had not visited Rome when he wrote this letter.

One of the first things Paul said in his letter to the Romans was, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you." It is a good thing when we can thank God for people. It shows that they

are a comfort to us. We are not ashamed of them. They are not a burden nor a perplexity to us. Some people are. There often are Church members for whom the minister cannot give thanks. They do not live so as to honour God and adorn the Church. Are we living so that our friends, our teachers and pastors and others can give thanks for us and for our noble, beautiful life ?

The reason for Paul's thanksgiving was stated, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." It was not their wealth, their power, their fine talents, their large business, their beautiful homes, their princely entertainments that were proclaimed everywhere. There are people living now who are known the world over as millionaires, as great merchants, as brilliant statesmen, as eloquent orators, as owners of railroads. This is one kind of fame. This is the fame many people seek to win, oftentimes selling even their own souls to win it. But there are others in our own day whose faith is known everywhere. They are missionaries, or godly pastors, or men and women who have given up their lives to the service of Christ and are so



blessing the world by their ministry that far and near their names are spoken with love and reverence. This is by far the worthier fame.

The depth of Paul's affection for the Romans was further indicated by this assurance, "God is my witness, . . . that without ceasing I make mention of you." It is a sweet thing when one who lives near the heart of Christ speaks our name before God in his prayers. Little Willie Newton was a child about five years old. One day his mother had taken him into her room and prayed for him by name, and when she arose he exclaimed, "Mamma, mamma, I am glad you told Jesus my name; now he'll know me when I get to heaven. When the kind angels that carry little children to the Saviour take me and lay me in his arms, Jesus will look at me so pleased and say: 'Why, this is little Willie Newton; his mother told me about him. How happy I am to see you, Willie!' Won't that be nice, mamma?" The child's beautiful thought was not fanciful. It is a sweet privilege to have our names mentioned to Christ. Paul unceasingly made mention to God of the names of his friends. There are many of us whose names are daily spoken to God.

The other day I learned that a little girl in my parish never says her prayers without speaking my name. It filled me with a strange awe to know this. Few are the children in true homes whose names are not unceasingly mentioned in prayer.

It was Paul's prayer that he might "have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come" to the Romans. His request was granted, but it was in a strange way. He went to Rome by and by, but it was as a prisoner in chains. We do not know what we are asking in our prayers. Yet God's way is better than ours. Paul would not have chosen to go to Rome as he went, but he went really in the best way. He was taken there under the protection of the Roman Government. His going cost him nothing—Rome carried him there, a missionary to tell the story of Christ. As a prisoner he was enabled to preach in the very capital, winning disciples in the very palace of the Cæsars. God answers our prayers in the way that is best.

The desire to be with the Romans was absolutely unselfish. He wrote, "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift."

This is a noble yearning for friendship. We ought always to desire to be a blessing to those we love. God sends many of his best spiritual gifts through human hearts and lips and hands. There could be no fitter morning prayer, as we go out for the day, than that we may be permitted to carry some help, some comfort, some instruction, some inspiration, some courage or cheer to every life that our life touches. There are always those who need such help, and no aim in life is nobler than to be a help to others in all gentle, quiet ways.

“As we meet and touch each day  
 The many travellers on our way,  
 Let every such brief contact be  
 A glorious, helpful ministry;  
 The contact of the soil and seed,  
 Each giving to the other's need,  
 Each helping on the other's best,  
 And blessing, each, as well as blest.”

Paul realized that the Roman Christians would help him as well as receive help from him. His explanation of his desire to be with them shows this. “That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” That is it. I may need comfort as much as you do, but the best way to find it is to seek to become

helpful to you. Being a blessing to you blesses myself. The attitude of true faith and love toward others should always be that of desire to help—"not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Then all that we do for ourselves will bring back its reflex comfort to ourselves. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Some people are always wishing for "friends," wishing "to be loved," wishing to have others do things for them. This is not the way to begin—it is the selfish way. The true desire is to love others, to do for others, to become a friend to others. In cherishing this spirit we get close to Christ; for that is the way he feels. Then it is the directest way to get the other blessing, the love of friends.

Some men are never willing to own indebtedness to others. Paul was not one of these. He said, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." "Debtor!" What does that mean? That I owe something, that I am in debt. "In debt!" To whom? To my friends, who have done so much for me—my father and mother, my teachers, my physician, who so tenderly cared for me in my illness and brought me through? Yes;

there are a great many people to whom we are all in debt. They have done us some favour, brought some blessing or good to our life. You read a book that helps you by its thoughts ; you are in debt to the author. A friend, by wise, loving counsel, guides you through some perplexity. Another helps you in some difficulty. Another blesses you with sympathy when you are in sorrow. You are in debt to all these. Yes, but Paul meant more than that. He was a debtor to people who had never done anything for him. He was a debtor to barbarians, to the ignorant, to his enemies, to everybody. As a man he owed a debt of love to every other man. As a Christian his debt was still greater, for he had something which had been given him in trust—the blessing of divine love and grace, which was his not to keep all to himself but to pass on. We are all in debt. Elsewhere Paul says that we should owe no man anything but love ; this is a debt we never get paid off. It would change our feeling toward people if we remembered always that we are debtors to everybody. We owe every man, woman and child kindness, service, helpfulness, comfort in sorrow,

sympathy in trial, strength in weakness. We owe to all who are not saved the revealing of God's love. We are debtor to the Chinese, the Africans, the Hindus ; we have the gospel and are under obligation to send it to them. *Noblesse oblige* is a true motto—rank imposes obligation ; having obliges us to give, to share, to do for others.

Paul would give and receive blessing by preaching Christ. Some thought it would have been the part of wisdom to say nothing of Christ, but he would not keep it silent. His reason was, " I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Some people are ashamed of the gospel. They profess to be Christians, but they have not courage to confess Christ out in the world. It is easy to confess him at the communion table, or in the Christian Endeavour meeting, where everybody is Christ's friend, and where all are confessing him. But it is not so easy to confess him in the shop or office where you are about the only one who loves Christ, and where you must meet a chill and adverse temper. But the Christian should never anywhere be ashamed of Christ. The fewer Christians there are in the place or company, the more reason is there for the few

to be loyal and courageous for him. Miss Havergal tells of going into a boarding school as a pupil just after she had confessed Christ and united with the Church. She was young and gentle-hearted and was startled to find that in a school family of a hundred she was the only Christian. Her first feeling was that she could not avow her love for Christ in such a place, with all that company of worldly girls around her. But her second thought was that she could not but avow it, since she was the only one Christ had there to confess him and represent him. This thought was most strengthening, and from that hour she quietly but firmly took her place in the school as a friend of Christ. It ought to help us, whenever we stand amid enemies of Christ and those ignorant of his love, to remember that he has put us there to represent him, and that if we are ashamed or afraid, we shall be sadly failing him and disappointing him.

The reason for Paul's glory in the gospel was clearly stated, "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

People like power. The gospel has power. We need only to look at its effects in the world to see

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that this is true. It has wrought great moral revolutions. It has changed nations. Jackson Park was little more than a swamp, but it was reclaimed and transformed into a "white city," where for nearly six months the most wonderful exhibition the world has ever seen drew its throngs of visitors. So the gospel has transformed countries from scenes of savage barbarism into places of moral beauty. We have all seen the results wrought by the power of the gospel in lives, in homes, in communities. Those who open their hearts to the gospel experience its power in themselves, in the changing of their nature. Those who take the gospel and use it to help others, use an influence greater than any of earth's power, with which they can bless and help and comfort and lift up and save others. It is the power of God. It is God himself working in men's lives.



## CHAPTER XXII

### REDEMPTION IN CHRIST

ROMANS iii. 19-26

**A**FTER trial and conviction, before the judge utters the sentence, he asks the prisoner if he has anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon him. So every human soul is tried at the bar of divine law and convicted and stands dumb. "What things soever the law saith, it saith . . . that every mouth may be stopped." No one can claim to have kept the law without ever breaking it. We have but to read this chapter from the beginning to see where we all stand. We are all guilty before God. The man without the wedding garment, when he stood before the host, was speechless. He had no excuse to offer for his lack of proper dress. He was guilty and could not say a word in extenuation of his guilt. So do men stand before the divine law. They are dressed only in rags ; they have

not on a wedding garment. They are speechless, too, when accused, for the garment was provided for them and offered to them, and they rejected it.

✓ Some people fancy that their morality is enough to save them. They do not know what they are saying. Paul said, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." As well hope to climb to the stars by going up the tallest mountain, as to gain heaven by the best moralities. Moralities are only a few tinselled garments put on a dead body. No man can live well enough to merit salvation. No one can live without sin, and wherever there is sin, even the least, the law is broken and its penalties are incurred. "The wages of sin is death." There have been some very holy people in this world, who have lived very close to God in faithful obedience and loving service; but there never has been one who was received into heaven on the ground of his own good works. The law is so broad and deep, extending not only to acts and words, but to thoughts, motives, feelings and affections, that it is utterly impossible for any fallen being fully and perfectly to meet all its demands. If this verse were the last

*the  
law*

word of the Bible ; if the book of inspiration revealed to us only the law and our sinfulness, inability and guilt, declaring that by our own works none of us ever can be justified in God's sight, it would be a dark and terrible finality. But thank God, this is not the last word. We are not left without hope.

A colporteur left a Bible in a godless home. As the man and his wife sat together in the evenings, the man took up the book, and reading in it began to feel its power. "If this book is true," he said one evening to his wife, "we are wrong." He read more, and a few evenings after said again, with deep concern and alarm, "If this book is true we are lost." He read still further, and through the darkness the light began to break, as he caught a glimpse of the cross and the Saviour, and at last he said to his wife with glowing joy, "If this book is true we may be saved." That is the story always of the work of grace in the heart. First there is the law-work, which shows us our guilt and hopelessness in ourselves. Then the gospel comes, showing us salvation and life. Verse 20 is not the last word of inspiration ; this verse comes after with

its blessed revelation of mercy: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." We have no righteousness of our own, but God has provided for us a righteousness. No flesh can be justified in his sight by the works of the law, but there is a way of justification which is not dependent on our obedience.

And all must take this way, if they would be justified. "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." That seems a strange teaching. Surely there is a difference between the cultured moralist and the sinner. Yes, in a way. The moralist is not so repulsive, but perhaps his sins are as bad in God's sight as his fellow neighbour's. But in another sense there is no difference. Both men are sinners. Neither is able to save himself. "All have sinned." There are degrees of sinfulness. All "come short of the glory of God." Sin means missing the mark. Whether one misses the mark by an inch or a foot; whether one comes short of the goal one foot or one mile, it matters little. Both "come short," and so cannot be saved by their own works. Let us not lose the

11:11  
 by justification  
 faith

*John 8:11*

solemn teaching that there is no difference in sinners so far as getting along without Christ is concerned. We all need Christ, must have Christ, or we shall perish.

No one can be justified by his own works, yet there is a way of justification whereby a sinner may appear before God as if he had never sinned, and as if he had faithfully performed every duty.

*g<sup>12</sup>*

It is by grace that this is possible. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." That is our justification. It is only an act of mercy on God's part. It is not something we can claim or demand, but something that is given out of the great love and kindness of the Lord. Yet we must not think that this justifying of sinners costs no one anything. It is not merely an act of clemency on the part of the great Ruler of the universe. While we enjoy the blessings of civil and religious liberty, we should remember what these blessings cost our forefathers in hardship, toil, blood and treasure; and while we rest secure in the hope of forgiven sins, we should never forget that these blessings all come to us "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" and what they cost him.

Nothing is clearer in the Bible than that it was by his death Christ redeemed his people—Christ, “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” His teachings were important ; his words are the seeds of the world’s life. His example was important ; he lived out a perfect human life to show us how to live. His daily obedience all his three-and-thirty years was important ; he kept the law and fulfilled all righteousness. But after all it was in dying that he wrought the great act of redemption through which salvation comes to sinners. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” There is a reference here, no doubt, to his expiatory sacrifice. Then Christ’s own words assert the same. “The Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many.” “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you, which is shed for many unto the remission of sins.” He died the just for the unjust, the holy for the sinner. That great act on Calvary was the expiation of our sins. Our justification comes through it. All our hopes spring out of the darkness of those hours.

“Through the forbearance of God.” The for-

bearance of God is wonderful. All the ages are full of it. Men have sinned and God has borne with them. He sent his servants in the olden days, with offers of mercy ; the mercy was rejected and the messengers were thrust out or killed. Last of all he sent his own Son with the fullest revealing of love. The answer to this most amazing overture was a cross for the beloved Son of God. But we must not think that the divine forbearance is seen only in the past ; it is seen to-day, in the story of our own lives. We put God's love to wonderful testing by our rejection and sin. Our only hope of ever being saved rests on the forbearance of God, for all of us reject him and grieve his heart over and over again.

If God had simply declared pardon to sinners without any atonement, what would have become of his law, his holiness, his justice, his truth ? But when he laid the sins of men on Jesus, and when Jesus made expiation for them, the law was satisfied, and the claims of justice were met, and now sinners may be freely justified. No one can say that God is not just since Christ died for man's sins. Yet there is something for us to do. This verse does not read, " That he himself

might be just, and the justifier of all sinners." Many people wish it did. It leaves a link for human faith. Not all are justified. The gospel is not a universal emancipation proclamation. In one sense it is. Emancipation is offered to all. But there must be an individual acceptance of it on the part of each sinner who would receive its blessing. This is called faith. It is believing this message of God's mercy and accepting its conditions. It is faith in Jesus that is required; not merely believing in God's mercy, but receiving Christ as the Saviour, and resting upon him alone for salvation. This implies a great deal. If we take Christ as our Saviour we take him also as our Master. That means that we forsake our sins and begin to do his will; that we devote ourselves to him and follow him with love and obedience.



## CHAPTER XXIII CHRISTIAN LIVING

ROMANS xii. 1-15

**P**AUL'S philosophy of Christian living is compactly stated in these fifteen verses. "I beseech you . . . that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." God wants us to be his. We are his by actual right. "All souls are mine." "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." By the right of creation we belong to him; he made us. By the right of redemption also we are his; he purchased us with his own blood. Yet God wants us to give ourselves to him. Indeed we are not his at all in the true sense until we have done this. We hold our life in our own hands until we voluntarily surrender it. This truth is well expressed in two lines of Tennyson's "In Memoriam"—

"Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

“Our wills are ours.” This is the profound truth of human sovereignty. God made us in his image, made us free to do as we will. Even God himself, with his omnipotence, cannot compel our will. Our wills are ours. Our lives are our own. But this is only half the truth.

“Our wills are ours, to make them thine.”

They are ours to give to God. He wants them, but we must “present” them to him. We must renounce all our own right and claim and give them to God to be his utterly and forever. We must notice that it is our “bodies” we are to present to God. That means that he is to be Lord of our whole life. Our hands are to be given to him, to do all they do for him. Our feet we are to give to him, to run only for him. If we have presented our bodies to God, they must be well cared for, and they must be kept clean and holy. It is a “living” sacrifice we are to make. We are not to slay or crush our bodily powers, but are to make them God’s for obedience, for his use and service.

“Which is your reasonable service.” A Christian man had been speaking to a congre-

gation and had quoted this verse, urging those whom he addressed to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice. When he closed his address, a good Friend, who sat beside him, said, "Friend John, the next time thee quotes that verse, thee would better quote all of it." "Didn't I quote it all?" "No; thee left off the last words, 'which is your reasonable service.' That is very important." The old Quaker was right. We would better quote the whole verse. It is not an unreasonable thing that God asks us to do when he beseeches us to present ourselves to him as a living sacrifice. We may think of our relation to God. He is our father and we are his children. Is it unreasonable that a child shall be asked to do a father's will? We may think of all God's goodness and kindness to us, the countless mercies and favours he bestows upon us. We may think of our redemption and remember at what tremendous cost God bought us, and then of all the blessings and hopes that are ours through his sacrifice for us. Is it unreasonable that we should be asked to consecrate our lives to God when he has done such things for us? We may think of what will be the result if we

do not yield ourselves to God—that our lives will be lost in sin's darkness and death; and of the good that will come to us through devoting ourselves to him—eternal life, eternal blessedness. Is it then unreasonable that we should be called to make this presentation of ourselves to God?

“Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” We are not of this world if we are Christians. We belong to the kingdom of heaven. We ought never to forget this. It is very easy for us, being in the world to become of it, to let our lives grow like the world. But this is not the way to make ourselves a living sacrifice to God. Some Christians get the impression that they can do more good, have more influence over those who are not Christians, if they will not be too strict in their lives, if they will meet them half-way. But this is a great mistake. We can never impress the world by agreeing with it. “It is not conformity that we want,” says Dr. Bushnell: “it is not being able to beat the world in its own way, but it is to stand apart and above it, and to produce the impression of a holy and separate life. This only is safety and success.” Instead

then of conforming to the world, taking the world's colour, our duty is to seek to be transformed into the heavenly life. This word "transformed" means to be transfigured, that is, to become bright and shining in our life. The secret of it is given here in the words "by the renewing of your mind." The candle is to be lighted within our heart, that its beams may shine out through our life, making it glow. The meaning is that our character shall become like the character of Christ in its beauty, its purity, its spirit.

"I say . . . to every man . . . not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly." That is a needed lesson always. Many of us are in danger of making this mistake. We think we are better than we are. We want higher places than we are qualified to fill. We are taught not to overestimate our powers and gifts. But neither are we to think meanly of ourselves. Some people undervalue their ability. To think soberly is to think the truth about ourselves. It is to look at our life reverently as a gift of God, as something God has made and given to us to care for and use and then to answer for. We are responsible for making the

most of our talent, if we have but one—or our talents, whether few or many. It is sacrilege of the saddest kind not to think soberly about our life. Whether lowly or great, it is a holy trust for which we must give account.

“We . . . are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” The illustration of the body is very suggestive. We are all members of one body. The members are not all alike. Each has its own function. Each is important in its place. Each is essential. The losing of the member maims the body. There is a difference in the apparent prominence of the members. Some are always seen, others are obscure and do their part out of sight. But, perhaps, the conspicuous member is really no more useful than the member that nobody ever sees or praises. All of which is a parable. There are a great many varieties among the members of Christ’s body. Some are prominent, others obscure. Some get praise, some never get a compliment. Some appear to do great things, others small things. But, perhaps, the obscure member who does nothing that ever attracts attention is just as important and honours

God and blesses his fellow men just as much as the conspicuous member who is always in the gaze of men.

“Having then gifts differing.” There are reasons why our gifts should differ. Suppose that all the men in the United States were Long-fellows, what would we do with so much poetry? And who would write the prose? Who would attend to the business, the commerce, the farming, the factories and mills? Gifts differing ensure a hand for every task, the smallest as well as the largest duties. There are a thousand different things to do and there is somebody to do each thing.

Let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching. Let everyone attend to his own business, do the thing he is fitted to do, called to do, set to do. Then let each one give his whole energy to the thing he does. The words are very suggestive—we are to give ourselves to our own particular work and do our best in it. It is like another of Paul’s words, “This one thing I do.” Oliver Wendell Holmes says the race is divided into two classes: those who go ahead and do something, and those

who sit still and inquire, "Why wasn't it done the other way?" Paul belonged to the first class. There are some people living at this very time who belong to the other class.

"He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity." Some people give grudgingly. They do not want to give away anything, and whatever benefactions they do bestow are always dragged out of them. They give in a bad spirit, which destroys all the beauty of their charity. But that is not the way God wants his children to give. He would have them give liberally, that is generously as they are able to give. He would have them give lovingly, cheerfully. "God loveth a cheerful giver," Paul elsewhere says, and the literal meaning is, "God loveth a hilarious giver." We need to think of this.

"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." It is well to be intensely earnest in our moral sentiments and feelings. Some people are altogether too mild, both in their hatred of sin and their love for what is good and right. We are forbidden to hate wicked people, but we are to hate wickedness. God hates everything that is sinful, and if we would be



like him we must do the same. Too many of us are very tolerant of wrong things, especially in ourselves. We ought to keep our moral sense so keen that we shall always hate whatever is not strictly right.

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” We are too cold in our love for each other. There is something wondrously beautiful in the way Jesus loved his disciples and friends. Not only did he love them, but he let them know that he loved them. He spoke to them of his tender interest in them and showed it, too, in many sweet and gentle ways. His command to his friends was that they should love one another as he had loved them. We have more love for each other than we express. We seem to be afraid to show our love. The words “kindly affectioned” do not suggest the cold reserve that is so common.

“In honour preferring one another.” That is not easy. We like to claim first place for ourselves. We do not like to sink ourselves out of sight when we have been doing something good or beautiful, and quietly allow some other one to carry off the honour. It is in associated

Christian work that this lesson has its special application. Dr. Peloubet has this bit of personal experience which is suggestive: "One of the first lessons I learned as a pastor was, that if I would succeed I must let others have the honour, must put them on the throne, while I was the unseen power behind the throne. It is not the figurehead on the bow, but the unseen screw beneath the water that makes the steamship go."

"Bless them which persecute you." That is a hard lesson. We like to pay debts of this kind with the same sort of coin we have received. Or at best we would drop the matter and not pay at all. If anyone wrongs us we do not want to have anything more to do with him. But neither of these treatments is what this lesson teaches. We are not to return injury for injury. Nor are we to return nothing. We must pay the debt, but we must pay it with love.

"Dear Lord, will it not do

If we return not wrong for wrong,  
And neither love nor hate?

But love—O Lord, our souls are far from strong,  
And love is such a tender, home-nursed dove—  
How can we, Lord, our enemies bless and love?"

Yet that is what we are to do. We must "get

even " with our enemy. And the only payment that will settle the account is love.

" Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." Strange to say, the first of these counsels is harder to follow than the second. It is easier to weep with them that weep than it is to rejoice with them that rejoice. When one is in sorrow, all one's friends are touched with sympathy, and many seek ways to express their feelings. But when one is in special joy there is not the same sympathy. One does not require help when specially glad and happy as when suffering. Yet it is well for us to mark the lesson. It is a close test of character—this being able to be glad because our friend is prospered, even though we do not have prosperity of our own at the time.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### PAUL ON SELF-DENIAL

ROMANS xiv. 10-21

**W**E are not done with life as we live it ; we shall meet it again, every act of it. We are not answerable to men. But we must never forget that there is One to whom we are all answerable. " Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The only true way to live, therefore, is to keep God always before us, and do each thing we do to please him. We have not to answer for other people, but neither can other people answer for us.

" Let us not therefore judge one another any more." It is God alone to whom all men are responsible. Of course, if a man lies, or steals, or gets drunk, or forges another's name, or beats his wife, it is not to be expected that nobody shall blame him. But there is a vast amount of fault-finding, condemning and criticism that

has to do with things of mere indifference in a moral way—people's manners, their personal habits, their dress, their way of living, their private affairs.

“ But judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock . . . in his brother's way.” That is, we are to watch ourselves, not our brother. Instead of keeping our eye ever on others, looking for faults and mistakes in them, we are to look to our own example lest something we do may hurt their lives, or cause them to do wrong. If everyone would do this it would go far toward making a paradise of this world of thorns and briars. We dash at our neighbour's eye to pull out some little mote we imagine we see in it, while at the same time we have a great beam in our own eye which sadly disfigures us and is a reproach to us in the sight of others. The habit of judging and condemning others, for example, is usually a great deal more serious blemish than any of the things we so glibly point out as flaws or faults. The first duty of every Christian is to make sure that he lays no stumblingblocks in others' way. The other day a prominent man said, “ I am very fond of wine and I believe I could drink moderately without

danger to myself, but I never touch any kind of wine. I might set the example for some who could not drink moderately without becoming drunkards. My liberty would thus become a stumblingblock to others."

"If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably." Love is always to be the law of life. Love must decide all questions. We may exercise our liberty to almost any extent, but it must never be so exercised that it will hurt our neighbour. If a man is fond of dogs there would seem to be no restriction on his having his home and his grounds full of dogs, provided his neighbours are not annoyed by them. But he must think of his neighbours and restrain his fancy for dogs within the limits of the law of love—the golden rule, we will say. Paul is talking of eating meat that had first been carried to an idol temple and then sold. He knew that the meat was not hurt by this bit of superstition, and he could eat it freely. But some weak people thought the meat had been defiled and that it was a sin to eat it. "Better give up your meat," said Paul to the strong Christians, "than grieve your weak brethren."

It is liberty to eat, regardless of your brother's feeling ; but it is love to deny yourself for his sake. There are other people, and we must always think of them in living our own life. It is astonishing, too, how thinking of them by the rule of love will cut into our plans for ourselves.

“ Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” A little selfish indulgence is poor compensation for a hurt to a human soul. Since Christ thought souls valuable enough to die for them, we should have enough regard for them to lead us to make so slight a sacrifice as doing without certain kinds of meat.

“ Let not then your good be evil spoken of.” There are many ways in which people's good is evil spoken of. Some good men have queer ways that bring them into ridicule and prevent them from being useful. Some excellent women, with kind hearts, spoil all their charity by unfortunate blemishes of speech or manner, which make their good to be evil spoken of, and which destroy its influence. “ Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odour ; so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour.”

“ The kingdom of God is not meat and drink ;

but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It matters not whether a man eat meat or eat no meat, so far as his relation to Christ is concerned. One may be carnivorous and get to heaven just as readily as one who is a vegetarian. The same is true of dress; one may be just as holy in camel's-hair garments as in purple robes. But there are vital things—things one must have to be in the heavenly kingdom. Among them are "righteousness, and peace, and joy." There are a great many things we do not need to have to get to heaven. But there are things we must do if we would be God's children. We must be righteous. We must have some measure at least of the peace of God. And we must have joy in the Holy Ghost.

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." One of our Lord's beatitudes is, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." A verse in another chapter in Romans reads, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." We ought not to be quarrelsome. The special meaning here is that we ought to deny ourselves



things we like if our indulgence in them will stir up bitter feeling. The second lesson is in the same line. We are to do only the things that will edify or build up the life and character of others—that is, things that will make them better, that will add to the beauty of their life, that will strengthen them, cheer, encourage, inspire and stimulate them to ever nobler things.

“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth.” This is the summing up of the whole lesson. Anything of the nature of mere indulgence, which would harm another or endanger him, should surely be given up. Some time since there was a terrific explosion in a colliery, by which four hundred miners were suddenly hurled amid shattered ruins into a horrible death. It was ascertained that the explosion was caused by a miner who had opened his safety lamp to light his pipe. For the poor gratification of his taste for a smoke this wretched man sent four hundred of his fellows into eternity. There are men who, for the privilege of sipping their wine, are making ruin in their homes and sending other souls to degradation and death. Is it right ?

CHAPTER XXV  
PAUL'S PREACHING

I CORINTHIANS i. 17-31

THE First Epistle to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus in the spring of A.D. 57. The apostle had heard that dissensions were troubling the church at Corinth, and he wrote to them, giving many exhortations and commands. Early in the letter he stated his conception of his mission, "Christ sent me . . . to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." As if one should prepare a fountain of pure, fresh water by a great dusty highway, to give drink to the weary pilgrims who pass by, but should plant so many lovely trees and flowers about the fountain as to hide it from the eyes of those whom it was designed to refresh. That is the danger when men use the wisdom of this world in preaching the gospel; the perishing

ones who listen are too often charmed by the beautiful flowers of rhetoric or poetry or science with which the cross is ornamented, and fail to see the cross itself. The story is familiar of the artist who had painted his picture of the Last Supper, and then called his friends to look at it. He had tried to make the Master's face the central object of attraction, and was pained to hear his friends praise this and that subordinate feature in the picture, while they did not speak of the Blessed Face. Taking his brush he erased from the canvas the features that had won the beholders, that nothing might keep any eye from the Saviour himself. Those of us who teach and preach need to learn this lesson well, lest in our desire to make our lessons and sermons attractive we hide the Redeemer and the cross which we desire all to see.

“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.” There is nothing grand or noble about this way of salvation to proud human wisdom. Men have nothing to do themselves, no chance to display their own power or wealth or skill. If heaven could be gotten by philosophical or scientific research, or won in battle

by brave deeds, or achieved by power, or bought with money, the world would have been far readier to accept it. The very simplicity of the gospel makes it appear foolishness to the world's wise men ; then its ignominy adds to the impression. What makes it all the sadder is that it is to perishing souls the cross seems foolishness. If it were to some unfallen race it would not matter so much ; but here it leads the lost to reject the only way of salvation that ever has been or will be offered to them. It is as if starving men were to refuse bread because it was not offered in dainty forms on delicate plates ; or, as if drowning men were to reject rescue because the lifeboat was not decorated in an artistic way, or was rowed by rough, weather-beaten sailors, and not by kid-gloved gentlemen. Surely the " foolishness " is not in the gospel, but in the rejecters.

" Unto us which are saved it is the power of God." Naaman first scorned the idea of washing in Jordan to be healed of leprosy ; it was foolishness to him. Afterwards, however, he found this washing " the power of God "—that is, being God's appointed way, God used it to work a cure. The sprinkling of a lamb's blood on the

doorpost seemed a foolish thing to do, yet it was God's way, and it became the power of God in saving from death the first-born of a nation. The gospel way of salvation seems foolishness to proud human wisdom, but to those who accept it it proves to have in it all the power of God, by which lost souls are forgiven, renewed, lifted up to life and saved eternally. God does not present his blessings in forms to attract worldly eyes. They often appear to such unlovely, undesirable. But when they are once accepted, their beauty and worth appear.

“Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” We need only to run our eyes over the history of the world to see that this is true. Wise men have been doing their best for ages, but what have they accomplished to bless mankind? They have discovered no way of salvation. With all their philosophies they have failed to make men any better. The days when mere human wisdom had reached its highest achievements, the days of the glory of ancient Greece and Rome, saw the world at its worst, morally. All that boasted wisdom God has proved to be only foolishness. The gospel light

proves all the world's philosophies and systems of religion utter folly. The history of human science is full also of illustrations. Men have announced discovery after discovery, and theory after theory, only to have them swept away by the discoveries and theories of the next generation. The history of the progress of the natural sciences would furnish a splendid commentary on this verse.

“After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” God gave men a chance to know him, and to find out the way to him. He gave them four thousand years for their wisdom to do its best. But at the end of that time they had not brought the world to God. Then he revealed his way. The cross was set up, and Jesus died upon it. Then the disciples were sent out to tell men of this way. Human wisdom was altogether ignored. Instead of great philosophers, a few humble men, fishermen and others, were appointed to do the preaching. Instead of teaching systems of worldly philosophy, they were to go and tell the simple story of the cross, and tell it, too, not in

dress of human wisdom, but in simple words that would not hide the cross itself. And by this men were to be saved; not merely instructed, or refined, or cultured, but saved, lifted up out of condemnation, made children of God and heirs of heaven, transformed into Christ's likeness, and exalted to glory.

“Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” It is not any wise, mighty or noble are called, but not many. Lady Huntingdon thanked God for this one letter m, because it told her she was not excluded by her rank; not many noble are found among the called, but there are some, showing that if they will only accept of Christ crucified, the highest in rank will be saved.

“God hath chosen the foolish things . . . the weak things . . . base things . . . which are despised . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence.” God has chosen to build up his spiritual kingdom without calling in the aid of the world's wise men. Macaulay tells of a stained-glass window in a cathedral, made by an apprentice from pieces of glass which had been rejected and thrown away as unfit to be used, and

Salvation: yet when it was finished it was the finest window in all the splendid building. So God is building his spiritual kingdom from materials which the world's wisdom and skill reject and refuse to use; yet when it is completed it will far outshine the greatest kingdoms ever reared on this earth. The reason why human power and skill are so ignored in God's work is, that no flesh should glory before God. That is, the work of redemption is altogether a divine work; there is no place in it for any human part; there is nothing left for human hands to do. We are saved by grace, entirely by grace. All the glory of salvation must be given to God. The wisest man the world ever saw, if saved, must be saved altogether through the favour and mercy of God. So of the mightiest; so of the noblest in rank. There is only one way of salvation, and that is by the crucified Christ, and the salvation must be received by faith as a free gift, unmerited.

"Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We are nothing in ourselves, and all the blessings that become ours when we are saved come from Christ. His wisdom becomes



ours, as we receive his Spirit and learn of him through his Word. His treasures of wisdom are put so freely at our hand that we are told if we lack wisdom we have only to ask of him in faith. We ought never to act foolishly when we have such a promise. His wisdom is not like the world's; the maxims of the world are often very foolish in God's sight. Then we have no righteousness of our own. Our best moralities are only filthy rags. Our holiest deeds are unclean. Wash as we may in the purest water, we shall still be vile before God. We need Christ's righteousness, and he becomes righteousness to us. This he does in two ways. By his atonement he made merit for us, and thus our standing in law before God is made right. This is justification. Then by his Spirit and word he renews us and makes us righteous in heart and character. This is sanctification. So all our redemption is from Christ; that is, until the work of redemption is completed in glory it is all Christ's work, and every blessing comes from him. At the end, when we shall stand before his throne, with white robes and palms and crowns, it will be found that it is all of Christ. Nothing will be our own.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### CHRISTIAN SELF-RESTRAINT

I CORINTHIANS ix. 19-27

**P**AUL taught this lesson in verse 19, "I made myself servant unto all." We are not our own. We are Christ's. But we are Christ's for love and service. He does not want us to spend our time merely praising him in words and songs. He wants us to go out into the world and do our work. He wants us to live to serve others—that is his work in this world. No matter how independent of others we may be in our earthly condition or circumstances, as Christians we are under bondage to all, to every man, woman and child. We are to love all, and love means readiness to deny ourselves in any necessary way in order to do good. We are to serve others as Jesus did. He kept nothing back, but gave all, even gave himself on the cross.

"That I might gain them." We are in this

world to win souls for Christ—not to win friends for ourselves, but to get people to be friends of Christ; not to gain honour for our own name, but to add honour to the name of Christ. We should think of what it means to gain a friend and a follower for Christ—what it means to the person thus gained. It means the saving of a soul from death, and the hiding of a multitude of sins. A great many people who join the Church seem to forget that they have anything to do in getting others to become Christians. It is the plan of Christ for saving this world, that his Church shall grow through the efforts of its members. One day, by the Jordan River, two men followed Jesus—the Church had two members then. These were the first. But soon each of these had brought another and then there were four. So the work of getting disciples went on. Each Christian has been brought by somebody else.

“To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak.” There are many weak people in this world. Some have narrow views or imperfect consciences and are hard to get along with. Some are weak morally, unable to resist

temptation. Some are weak in character—sensitive, touchy, easily offended. Some are weak in mind, unable to grasp the truth. Some are unreasonable, obstinately attached to certain views and uncharitable to those who do not think just as they do. A wise winner of souls must know how to deal with all of these classes. To the weak he must become weak. That is, he must accommodate himself to their feelings, prejudices and frailties, even to their whims and caprices, to their narrowness, touchiness, or sensitiveness. It requires infinite patience, gentleness and tact to do this. It is easy to get impatient and cross with people, to become vexed with their unreasonableness, or their narrowness and uncharitableness. It is easy to be offended by their whims and prejudices. But if we yield to this spirit we shall do little good in the world. We must condescend to people's weaknesses and never vary in trying to help them. Teachers need this lesson if they would succeed in doing the best work in their classes. Tact, patience and gentleness are essential. Pastors need the lesson—many a pastor, by his lack of this apostolic grace, is continually marring with one

hand the work of Christ which he is earnestly doing with the other. Parents need the lesson, that they may do their children good in the truest way. Many a child's life is hurt irreparably by parents whose love is deep, tender and true, but who do not know how to become weak to the weak. We may learn from God's fatherly treatment of us how we should condescend to weakness in our children or in others. Coventry Patmore's poem teaches in a pathetic way a needed lesson. A father had punished his little son and put him to bed, "his mother, who was patient, being dead." Sore himself he went to see the child, and found him asleep, with all the queer and trivial contents of a little boy's pocket set out beside him to comfort him.

So when that night I prayed  
 To God, I wept, and said :  
 " Ah ! when at last we lie with tranced breath,  
 Not vexing thee in death,  
 And thou rememberest of what toys  
 We made our joys,  
 How weakly understood  
 Thy great commanded good—  
 Then, Fatherly not less  
 Than I whom thou hast moulded from the clay,  
 Thou'lt leave thy wrath and say,  
 ' I will be sorry for their childishness.' "

“This I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.” One does not read very far in his New Testament without finding that a Christian life means utter self-denial. There is no room in Christ’s method of life for selfishness in any form. One can never make self the aim and goal and be a Christian. Whatever we do with our life, the motive must be something outside of self. “Hitch your wagon to a star,” is a word of deep and wise philosophy. We must tie our life to Christ, that he may draw it after him wheresoever he will. We must live for Christ and his gospel, no matter what it may cost us, how it may interfere with our self-interests in business, in pleasure, or with our comfort and ease. In no other way can we really save our life. All other saving is losing. But when we thus devote our life to the gospel and the work of the gospel, we become joint partakers with those we help to the blessing which they receive through us. It is always more blessed to give than to receive—the giver gets the larger share of the blessing.

“So run, that ye may obtain.” The picture is that of the racecourse, with contestants striving

for the prize. Yonder is the goal, and there is a laurel wreath held up which is to be given to the victor. Christian life is a race. A great company of witnesses are looking on—earthly and also heavenly witnesses. We know how boys run in a race on the playground, how everyone tries to be first. So Christians should strive to run, to excel in life and service. There is only one prize to be won in the racecourse ; but in the Christian race there is a prize for everyone who persists in running well.

“ Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” That is very plain, so plain that no one can fail to understand it. Those who are in training for any kind of game are kept on plain diet and are rigidly required to observe all the rules of the health for some time before the contest comes off. Thus their bodies grow lithe and strong, and they are prepared for doing their best. So it should be in Christian life. If we would be good Christians and excel in character and attainment, we must be temperate in all things. We use the word temperate generally with reference only to strong drinks. This is very important. Intemperance in drink is ruining

thousands of lives. But the Christian must be "temperate in all things." We must learn to control our appetites, feelings and tempers, and must keep all our earthly life in subjection. Young people do not usually understand the importance of this. It applies in school work. If we do the best with our mind, we must watch our bodily life—never overeating, never indulging in strong drink, guarding our temper and our passions and affections, taking plenty of exercise and of sleep, and in every way learning to master the body, making it the servant of the mind. It applies also to the moral and spiritual life. We must train our body, for it is the temple of the Holy Ghost. If our soul is to be saved and our character is to grow into its best strength and beauty, we must keep our body under and hold it always in subjection. Thousands of young men lose all that is worthy and beautiful in life by allowing their appetites and passions to rule them.

"Lest . . . I myself should be a castaway." Even the great apostle saw the possibility of danger in his own life, if he failed to keep his body in subjection. This ought to be a solemn



warning to all of us. Many people make light of this matter. Young men are often heard saying, when warned against the habit of drinking: "Oh, I am all right. I can stop whenever I please." But a little later we see them dragged down into debasing drunkenness. The body has mastered the soul, and the higher life has become the slave of the lower. The only sure way to noble and victorious living is to keep the body always in subjection. It is a fearful thought that even after one has been helpful to others in teaching or preaching, one's own life may yet be dragged down by bodily appetites and passions, and the person who was so honoured under God be rejected of Christ, unfit for further service.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### ABOUNDING GRACE

2 CORINTHIANS IX. 1-11

**G**IVING is always an important part of Christian duty. There is always need for it, because God's cause ever requires assistance, and "ye have the poor always with you," thus calling for charity on their behalf.

Paul was writing to the Corinthian Christians concerning the collection to be taken among the Macedonian churches for the relief of the Christians at Jerusalem, many of whom seem to have been in need. He gave this message: "Touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you." It was superfluous because they had already made the promise, and there should be no need of reminding Christians of their promises. There should always be love enough in the heart to prompt to this duty without any reminder, more than a knowledge

of the needs. If we hear that any other Christian is suffering, our sympathy should go out toward him, and wherever there is true sympathy there is always a desire to help. Christians are all one family, children of the one Father. When, therefore, one suffers all should feel the pain and desire to give relief. In nature, when one branch of a tree is bruised or injured, all the other branches send a part of their vitality to help to heal the wound. So it should be among the branches on the great vine. Besides, every suffering Christian represents Christ himself, for he said the kindness we show to the least of his brethren we show to him. The other side of this truth is that when we neglect to show needed kindness we are neglecting Christ.

“Hush, I pray you!

What if this friend should happen to be—God!”

“Your zeal hath provoked very many.” Paul had freely told in the different churches, as he went from place to place, about the promptness and generosity of the Corinthian Christians, and the telling of this had kindled a like spirit in many other hearts. Good example is contagious. Far

more than we know are we influenced by what other people do. One generous giver in a church is apt to make many others generous. When we hear of good deeds which some other one has done, we feel stimulated to do like deeds. Generosity in a neighbour makes us ashamed of our niggardliness. This is one of the indirect results of benevolence. One church doing well in its missionary collections stirs up other churches to give largely. One liberal class in the Sunday school makes all other classes desire to be liberal. In one place our Saviour exhorts us not to give to be seen of men, but in another place he says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

"Make up beforehand your bounty, . . . that the same might be ready." Some people who promise very promptly and very easily, find it hard to keep their promises when the time comes for doing so. In an enthusiastic meeting when everybody is subscribing to a good cause, Christians sometimes put their names down with a good deal of eagerness and earnestness, and then by and by when the time for payment comes

respond grudgingly. This seems to have been Paul's fear in this case. We ought to get a lesson here—what we engage to do we should always do. There is a word in an old psalm which says of the good man that "he . . . sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not"—that is, he keeps his vow. We should always give promptly. He gives twice who gives promptly. The time to do a kindness is when it is needed. If you hear that some one is suffering for food, the time to send relief is not to-morrow, but at once. The time to call to see the sick person is while he is sick, and not when he is going about again, or when, perhaps, he is dead. It is a fine habit in life to learn to do all our kindnesses promptly.

"As a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness." Some people's good deeds must be dragged out of them almost by force. When they give, they grumble about it and complain, whereas they ought to give gladly. We are to do good because we desire to help friends in need, and not because some one urges us to do it and we feel that we must give although we do not want to, and have not the least desire to relieve the distress. We should give out of a heart of love,

because we would bless others and do them good. There should go with our gift a part of ourself,

“ For the gift without the giver is bare.”

“ He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” This is very simple and applies to sowing natural seed. If a man looks covetously at his pile of wheat and says, “ I cannot bear to waste this golden grain by casting it into the ground,” and sows but a little of it, hoarding the remainder, we know what the result will be. He will have but a scant harvest when the time comes, while the grain he hoarded will perhaps be worm-eaten and destroyed. But on the other hand, if he scatters the precious grains broadcast over his field, though he seems to be robbing his garner, he will have a plentiful return in the harvest. Gifts and good deeds are seeds sown which will yield a harvest just as surely as the grains of wheat one may sow in his field. They will yield many different harvests. The blessing they carry to those who receive them is one harvest. Then the blessing that the mere act of giving brings back to the giver is another, for

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Then there will be the harvest gathered in the other world, when Jesus shall reward even the giving of a cup of cold water in his name. It is true also that the harvest will be small or large, just as the seed has been sparingly or liberally scattered. He who keeps and hoards loses, while he who scatters and dispenses holds. An old epitaph reads, "What I gave I have; what I kept I lost."

"Every man do according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give." Our good deeds must begin in our heart. If there is no feeling, no thought of doing good, no love, we can scarcely expect God's blessing. If we do not give any thought to our deed how can we expect God to think of it? Some people give a little to everything that comes before them, never thinking about the merit of the case, merely putting their hand in their pocket and taking out a piece of money and laying it on the collection plate. This verse seems to reprove such thoughtless giving. There is no real charity in the relief we bestow unless love goes with our gift. The old psalm does not say, "Blessed is he that giveth to the

poor," but "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Throwing a coin to a poor man may serve him, but it does not bless us. If we consider the case, and for love to our brother give to him, then we both help him and get a blessing for ourselves. All our charities should begin in our heart. They should be thought about and considered. Attention should be given to them. As far as possible we should consider each case that comes before us, so as to give heart as well as gift. Then we shall be sure that while our benefactions give relief, we also shall get a blessing for ourselves.

"Not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." There are some people who never give any way but grudgingly. When appeals for help are made to them, they grumble about their own poverty and inability to give, and then under stress make a contribution. They give merely for decency's sake, because they cannot get clear of giving, and then whine and complain about it afterwards. Such giving never pleases God. He wants us to give lovingly, not with murmuring, but with gladness. He wants us to do all our good work cheerfully. There is a ministry in cheerfulness itself. People who go



into sick rooms and among the troubled and the poor, with long face and sad voice, may do good in a way with their gifts or words, but they do not do the most possible good ; they fail to carry the highest measure of blessing to those they visit. God loves cheerfulness in all kinds of doing good. Often people say that Jesus never smiled. I don't believe it. I think he was the most cheerful, sunny-hearted, sunny-faced man who ever lived in this world.

“ God is able to make all grace abound toward you ; that ye . . . may abound to every good work.” We need not fear that God will not take care of us, if we use his gifts to us to bless others. We may freely and confidently trust him for more. The barley loaves did not give out when Jesus was feeding the multitude. The disciples had more when all had been fed than before they began to distribute—they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that were left. The lesson in this verse seems to be that those shall never lack who abound in good work. The teaching also is that one reason God gives to us so abundantly is that we may dispense to others. He wants to make us his almoners, his

trustees, to pass things through our hands to others. When he finds that we are willing to do this he loves to intrust to us the blessings.

“Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness.” Liberality is an enriching grace. Those who distribute God’s blessings to others are enriched in their own life in many ways. The heart grows larger, the feelings grow finer, the whole life grows gentler and more Christlike, when one has formed the habit of giving and doing good. We begin to be like God only when we begin to be helpful to others, and we grow in likeness to Christ in the measure in which we are Christlike in our life and service.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### PAUL'S OWN STORY OF HIS LIFE

2 CORINTHIANS xi. 22-xii. 10

**M**ORE than twenty years after the conversion of Saul the Persecutor further facts were added to the biography when Paul (as he was known during the years of his ministry) wrote his second letter to the church at Corinth. Charges of weakness and cowardice had been made against him, and he defended himself, not for his own sake, but for the sake of his preaching. He spoke of his trials and sufferings, but he refused to boast of his own achievements, as he knew that he owed everything to God.

In making his defence he said, "Are they Hebrews? so am I." The Hebrews were proud of their name, and well they might be. They were God's chosen people. They had been honoured above all other nations in being the custodians of divine revelations. To them God had made

himself known in holy ordinances. They had the tabernacle, the temple, the law, the prophets. It was a great thing to be a Hebrew. The people boasted of their honour. But Paul was not behind them in this honour, for he was a Hebrew too. They boasted of their descent from Abraham—he was descended from Abraham too. He wanted the Jewish people who were now his enemies to know that whatever of the glory of birth and ancestry they had, he had the same. They gloried "after the flesh"; he had the same glory.

Again, Paul asked, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool.) I am more." What does he mean? Was he more than a minister of Christ? He seems to feel the unfitness of boasting in the matter. No true man ever likes to boast or to have to uphold himself. As a patriot he could boast, but a Christian should always be lowly like his Master. What he meant was to tell of his devotion to Christ. A minister is a servant—Paul was Christ's servant in a most earnest way. He loved to call himself Christ's slave. This he explains and illustrates further in what he says of his services and sacrifices for the sake of Christ. It was in this way

that he was more a minister of Christ than they were. We show the quality of our devotion in what we will do or suffer or give.

Then Paul breaks into the story of his life, what it had cost him to be a Christian—a minister of Christ. “In labours more abundant, . . . in prisons more frequent.” That is, more abundantly than those he was addressing. He is not boasting of the superiority of his ministry, but is defending himself against their criticisms of him and his work, and speaks out of his heart as he remembers the sufferings he had endured in serving Christ. He is not complaining, either, in what he says about what he has suffered—indeed, he is glorying in it. It was the highest honour to be permitted to suffer for Christ. His wounds and scars were marks of Jesus, decorations. The patriot soldier is not ashamed of his wounds received in his country's wars, he does not hide them, for they tell of his devotion to his land. The missionary is not ashamed of the marks he bears of the injuries he received in doing his duty.

The story of his sufferings as Paul tells it here shows us something of the meaning of his

life as a missionary. The life of the Christian minister in Christian lands is one of honour and comfort. However self-denying he may be, he is loved and respected. He is not beaten, stoned, cast into prison, loaded with chains. The minister's life is as a rule one of delight. The life of the modern missionary is likewise as a rule measurably happy and comfortable. Now and then, as in the Boxer outbreak in China, missionaries are called to endure great sufferings. But such experiences are exceptional, even in newest missionary countries. The story of what Paul had suffered in his missionary work shows how much it cost him.

*2007-11-17*

“ Five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck.” He did not go about telling of his persecutions—this is almost the only mention he made of them. He is not complaining now, but glorying. He is not showing how hard it was to be a missionary, advising young men not to study for the ministry. He is rejoicing that he was counted worthy. These records are lines of victory.

Paul refers in passing to other matters which

had made his ministry one of pain and suffering. "In perils among false brethren" suggests disloyalties, charges, accusations, enmities. "It is not things that trouble us," quotes Robert E. Speer, from an experienced missionary to a traveller—"our difficulties are folks." Paul found much of his trouble in folks. The "care of all the churches" he mentions, too. He loved his churches and it grieved him to know of their strifes. His was a marvellous ministry. The world never saw anything like it before, and it has never seen anything like it since.

In the twelfth chapter Paul passes to visions. He is still explaining "I am more." "I will come to visions and revelations." In these two he had surpassed his enemies. He tells of experiences of remarkable character. He had been caught up even to the third heaven, into Paradise, and had heard unspeakable words. Then it was that there was given to Paul the "thorn in the flesh." What this "thorn" was we need not try to find out, for nobody knows. All we need to know is told us that it was the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted overmuch by reason of the exceeding greatness

of the revelations. It was a humbling experience of some kind. Then he tells us what he sought to do. He went to God in prayer with this torturing thorn. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." But his prayer was not answered in the way he hoped it would be. Yet it was answered in another way. He must keep his thorn, but he received the promise of grace to enable him to endure the pain, the humiliation, and yet go on with his work. "My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness." That is, he would get more of Christ's strength just in proportion to his own weakness. Then we have Paul's triumphant word. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Thus we have the marks of Paul's superiority as a minister of Christ. There is no unfit boasting in this story of what he had suffered and what he had experienced. It was in his weakness that he gloried—that he was nothing and that Christ was all in all.



CHAPTER XXIX  
CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

*Justified by faith*

GALATIANS IV. 1-16

WHEN Paul sent his message to the Christians of Galatia, he emphasized emphatically the great doctrine of justification by faith, for this was the preaching they most needed. After saying that all Christians, without regard to nation, were children of God by faith in Christ, he went on to tell of the condition of the heir while under age, "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." This is illustrated in the infancy and early years of royal children. An interesting little story is told of the late King Edward of England. When he was a child he once refused obedience to his governess and appealed to his dignity and rank as heir to the throne of England. Prince Albert was called, and bringing a Bible, he read this verse to him

and chastized him. One application here is, that in entering upon a Christian life its requirements and restraints may seem at the beginning burdensome. The first duty of a child of God is absolute and unquestioning obedience, and obedience may not at first be a delight. Yet we are to obey, whether it is a pleasure or not. The fact that we are children of God and heirs of eternal glory does not free us from the most commonplace duties that our earthly relations impose. Freedom has to be gotten through submission to law.

“ Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” All learning is bondage at first. We listen to a fine player on the piano. Her fingers wander over the keys without a pause or mistake. But there was a time when every note had to be picked out on the keyboard, and when the simplest exercise cost painful effort. There was bondage under the rudiments before there was freedom. So it is in reading ; the child begins with the A B C, and learns to spell syllables and frame words. It is a slavish process. But in a few years he takes up and reads any page with

fluency and ease, never thinking of the letters and syllables. It is the same in all arts and in all learning. So it is in Christian life. Duties have to be learned, sometimes painfully, and repeated over and over until they become gracious habits. The value of this truth here is to press the importance of perseverance in all Christian duties, however irksome and hard at first, until bondage becomes freedom and delight.

“God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” A gentleman interested in the education of the Indians has many photographs of parties that have passed under his notice. One day he picked up three pictures and was struck by the order in which they lay. The first was of a group of Indians at the time of their arrival at Hampton, in all their wild savagery of feature and dress. The third picture was of that same group at the close of their course at Hampton, when they wore all the marks of civilization and Christian refinement. Then between these two pictures there had slipped by mere accident a photograph of one of the famous paintings of

the Saviour. The suggestion was very beautiful. Between the state of savage rudeness and Christian refinement there was Christ. It was, indeed, Christ that had wrought the wondrous transformation. It needs only to be pointed out here that between the bondage and freedom of these verses there is Christ and his redemption.

“That we might receive the adoption of sons.” It is a blessed relation into which redemption brings all that accept Christ. Even to be made God’s servants, in the lowliest places, would be a high honour; but we become God’s children.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” It is said that when a convert in India was translating these words of John, he said, “Surely it cannot mean that”; and he wrote instead, “That we should be allowed to kiss his feet.” But the words are not thus to be toned down. The adoption is real. “As many as received him,” said John again, “to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” All, therefore, who truly receive Christ as their Saviour and Lord become God’s children. The Holy

Spirit is given to them, and thus they are born again. Some people seem almost ashamed to be known as Christians. They act as if it were something unmanly or unwomanly. But when we learn into what dignity it exalts us we should rather glory in being Christians. The children of Queen Victoria are never ashamed to be recognized as such. They do not try to hide the fact. Why should any human being be ashamed to be known as a child of the God of heaven?

“ Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” This is the way God “ seals ” his children, that is, testifies that they are his children. He gives them the Holy Spirit. It is in this way, too, that he changes their hearts. One day in Africa a chief of one of the tribes said to Dr. Livingstone: “ I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it, for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always.” Dr. Livingstone lifted up a New Testament and was about to tell him of the only way in which the heart can be changed, but the chief interrupted him, “ Nay, I will have it changed by medicine

to drink, and changed at once, for it is always very proud and very uneasy, and continually angry with some one." Yet there is no medicine that will change a heart. But when the Spirit comes and enters the heart it is changed, and one of the evidences of the change is a new feeling toward God. For the first time we feel toward him as a Father, and call him out of our hearts with loving joy, "Our Father."

"Thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." It takes many Christians a long while to realize this. They do not seem to understand their privileges, their dignity. There is a picture which somewhere I have seen described, which, looked at in the ordinary light, shows but the figure of a wearied and defeated pilgrim, stretched in his last sickness on a straw pallet in the poorest sort of a city garret. But when you look at the picture in the light the artist meant it to be seen in, you see that above the head of that outcast and dying man the air is all athrong with angels, and the light that streams down from the heavenly home points out the pathway thither. In the picture, as at first it appears, we see the man as he

seems ; in the other view we have the man as he really is, a child of God, an heir of glory. If all Christians but realized their glorious dignity and destiny, what joy it would inspire in their hearts ! This was the freedom that Paul had. See him in the jail at Philippi, in the inner prison, his feet fast in stocks, but his spirit free as the eagle that soars in the sky. That is a glimpse of his whole experience. He could not be bound. Nero might thrust him into the Mammertine dungeon, but it was the tyrant and not his prisoner that was the real slave. A child of God who realizes his dignity cannot be robbed of his liberty.

“ When ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.” Many people think they are free only when they keep away from Christ and out of his service, and that if they become Christians they would become slaves. But really they are slaves while they live in sin, and can only become free by taking Christ’s yoke.

“ Now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements ? ” They had gone back from the blessed liberty of Christ to

the old ceremonies of the Jewish Church, and had made themselves slaves again to its burdensome observances. There are Christians now also who are slaves to ritualism. They can worship God only in certain forms. They observe days and minute rules. Their liturgies written or unwritten are to them what the lame man's crutches are to him. A Christian who has the true liberty of Christ worships God in Spirit, and is not dependent on the mode. He uses all helps and means of grace, but is himself above all. Yet it must not be inferred that Christian liberty is freedom from the law and will of God. Liberty is not licence. Rather, it is the bringing of the whole heart and life into such perfect subjection to God that the highest freedom is the truest devotion to him. The child that is free is not the prodigal who has torn away from the restraints of the home, but the one who is lovingly and faithfully doing filial duty. Christian freedom is consecration to Christ's will. He who can say, "Thy will be done," and say it sweetly and lovingly, whether it be a hard duty or a painful submission, is free. George MacDonald says, "When God's will is our law, we



are a kind of noble slaves ; but when God's will is our will, then we are his free children." So it is not freedom from God's law, but in it that is the Christian's privilege.

## CHAPTER XXX

### SAVED BY GRACE

EPHESIANS ii. 1-10

**T**HE passage on which this chapter is based begins with a look backward at the condition from which the Ephesians had sprung. They had been raised from the dead. Jesus Christ came into a world of dead men. He himself was the only living man in the world. He came to give life to the dead. "I am come that they might have life." "You . . . who were dead," says the apostle to the Ephesians. They had lived in trespasses and sins. They had walked according to the course of this world instead of after the way of God's commandments. They had come out of heathenism. "The prince of the power of the air" had been their master. This "prince of the power of the air" is Satan. We need not, however, accept the view of the Jewish rabbis that the air is Satan's abode, that it is peopled

by demons flitting about invisibly. Probably Paul means here the moral atmosphere of the world. "The power of the air is a fitting designation of the prevailing spirit of the times, whose influence spreads itself like a miasma through the whole atmosphere of the world."

Not only the Ephesians, but we all, lived at one time the same sinful life. We are "children of disobedience" and consequently "children of wrath." If we keep God's commandments we abide in his love. If we do not keep his commandments we are under condemnation. "It is God's smile or frown that makes the sunshine or the gloom of our whole life."

It is an unflattering picture of human life which we have in these verses, but who will deny its truthfulness? Who will claim that we are not prone to disobedience? Who will say that wrath is not our just deserving? It is well that we should look at this picture of our natural state, that we may be reminded of what we were when God found us and had mercy upon us. "Lest we forget!" If we forget what our great need was, our state before we were redeemed, gratitude will die out of our hearts. But if we

remember, we will always praise God for his abounding mercy.

Next we have a view of what has been done for us. Instead of being dead, we are now alive—"quickenened." The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are used to illustrate the change that takes place when one is saved, and also to indicate the source of that change. "The same almighty hand that was laid upon the body of the dead Christ and lifted him from Joseph's grave to the highest seat in heaven, is now laid upon your soul. It has raised you from the grave and death of sin to share by faith his celestial life." We are dead in our natural state, like a body lying in the grave. Then we are raised up, made to live. We are raised up with Christ. This suggests what a stupendous work our salvation is. "When a human soul wakes from its trespasses and sins, when the love of God is poured into a heart that was cold and empty, when the Spirit of God breathes into a spirit that lies powerless and buried in the flesh, there is as true a rising from the dead as when Jesus our Lord came out from his sepulchre." Not only are we raised up with Christ from the grave,

but we ascend with him into the heavenly places. We should live the heavenly life in this world. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

We should study also the divine part in our salvation as it is here described. The thought of our redemption began not in any desire of our own, but in the heart of God. "We love him, because he first loved us." We have it here in the words, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead . . . quickened us." God did not save us because we asked him to do so—there never would be anyone lifted up out of death, if God waited for us to call upon him before showing mercy.

Four qualities in God combine in saving us out of our sins—his mercy, his love, his grace, his kindness. Mercy inclines God to have pity upon the unworthy. We all are sinners. If there were no mercy in God, none ever could be saved, for none are without sin. But God is merciful—he is "rich in mercy." All the wealth of his being pours itself out in tenderness, in compassion, in

forgiveness. His mercy is so great that the greatest sinner may be forgiven, that the guiltiest does not exhaust it.

Then there is love as well as mercy in God. We can conceive of him as being rich in mercy, yet not loving us. A monarch might pardon a host of convicts and yet not love one of them. But in the heart of God there is love as well as mercy. The love is the fountain from which the mercy springs. The love of God is that which makes his mercy so wonderful. He not only frees from condemnation, but he takes the forgiven one into his own family. We become children of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

Grace and kindness are phases of the working of love. Grace is love in action, working out and blessing in spite of sin. The cross is its highest manifestation. We have its ministry in the gospel. Kindness is the expression of love in all gentle ways. Kindness has been called the small coin of love. It is the touch of God's hand, the expression of his affection.

In the first verses we have a picture of our state

before God found us and saved us, and it is dark, indeed. Here we have a picture of what the mercy and love of God have done for us in exalting us from death to life, from condemnation to companionship with Christ in heavenly places.

The closing verses tell us something of the way this great redemption is wrought. For one thing, we are saved by grace. That is, our salvation is not earned or won by us; it is not got by any deserving of our own; it comes purely as a divine favour. That is what grace means—free, unmerited love and kindness. We should get this thought clearly fixed in our minds. Some people seem to think that God owes them mercy, that they have earned it. But we deserve nothing save wrath. Salvation is the gift of God. We cannot buy it. There is a story of a woman whose daughter was ill, and who sought at a garden gate to buy some grapes for her child. The gardener treated her harshly, but the king's daughter who was near heard her piteous request and brought her all the grapes she could carry. The woman wanted to pay for them, but the princess answered: "My father is the king. He does not sell grapes

—he gives them.” God does not sell the favours of his love—he gives them freely.

*Faith*  
We are saved through faith. Faith accepts Christ and rests in him, and thus receives the salvation which he has made for all who believe. Faith is the empty hand which takes what is put into it.

*works*  
 “Not of works.” ~~We are not saved because we have done good deeds. We are to do good deeds.~~ There is not a word in the Bible against good works. Indeed, they are enjoined upon all who would follow Christ. We are always to abound in the work of the Lord. We are taught to be kind to the poor, the sick, the distressed, the needy. In the judgment they who will be on the right hand will be those to whom the Judge will say, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” Those on the left hand will be those who shall hear just the reverse, “I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat.” Yet we are not saved by good works. We are saved altogether by grace



through the mercy and love of God. Then, being thus saved, the grace enters our hearts and inspires in us all manner of loving service. ✱

“We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” This shows us the place of good works—the result in us of the new creation wrought by the grace of God. We are not saved because we are good—we are to be good because we have been saved. ✱ For salvation is infinitely more than the forgiveness of sins. The forgiven sinner is regenerated, born again, becomes a new creature ; and this new creature is a child of God, filled with love and abounding in all good works.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### CHEERFUL COUNSEL FOR CHRISTIANS

PHILIPPIANS iv. 1-13

**T**HE Epistle to the Philippians is full of cheer and inspiration. Although written in a prison, a sweet song sings through it all. No other of the churches established by Paul seems to have given him so much comfort as did this church at Philippi. His cheerful counsels to these church members are golden words for all Christians. The passage begins with an expression of the apostle's love for his people, from whom now he was separated. He speaks to them as beloved and longed for, his joy and crown. No reward that a pastor can have is so great as souls led to Christ and lives helped, built up, and enriched.

The first lesson taught is that of steadfastness. "Stand fast in the Lord." Next, he exhorts them to unity in spirit and life. It would seem

that two women, Euodias and Syntyche, had been estranged in some way, and Paul writes to his yokefellow urging him to seek a restoration of kindly relations between them. Paul thus sought to realize the Beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." It is a pleasant thought that the names of all those who work for Christ are in the book of life. They may not be written in the list of those who are distinguished on the earth, but the humblest and lowliest name is down in the register of heaven.

The keynote of Paul's life from first to last is joy. We have it here, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." This word sounds a little strange, coming from a prison. But Paul had in him that which mastered all gloom and depression. Christians ought always to be happy. Of course this does not mean that they should be hilarious. Christian joy is not silly giggling, nor mere light-heartedness. Life is not all fun—it is real and earnest, oftentimes grave and serious, sometimes solemn and tearful. "Rejoice . . . always" does not mean that one never is to have a serious thought, is always to be

in some round of gaiety. This word is for the sick room and the hour of sorrow, as well as for the play room and the wedding day. It is Christian joy we are to have—"Rejoice in the Lord." It does not draw its inspiration from circumstances—it is in the heart. It is not joy which this world's favours and pleasures give—it is joy which springs from fellowship with Christ.

Another lesson in Christian living is forbearance—"Let your forbearance be known unto all men." This does not mean that you are to go about telling everybody how patient, gentle and meek you are. That would be a troublesome task, and then, people might not always believe you. There is a better way of letting others know that you possess these traits. Show your forbearance in your life and conduct, in your daily intercourse with men. Be patient under injury, provocation, or annoyance. Be forgiving. Show your forbearance as Christ showed his: in your speech, in the returning of love for hate, of kindness for unkindness, of gentleness for rudeness. Such a quality in the life is like sweet perfume—you cannot hide it, and it needs no

advertising. It makes itself known if only you have it truly in your life.

Another life lesson is never to be anxious. "Be careful for nothing." This seems rather strong counsel for ordinary mortals. It would apparently be a great deprivation to many people if they could not worry and fret about something. A state of peaceful repose would be very wearisome and monotonous to them. Anxiety is a chronic state with too many. What a change it would bring about in the world if every Christian would learn this lesson—in nothing to be anxious! It would add almost infinitely to the sum of human happiness if we would eliminate this one element of misery. Worry does double work in the way of wretchedness—it makes wretched, first, the man himself who worries; then it makes his neighbours wretched. How useless worrying is, too! It removes no trouble, lightens no burden, softens no hardness in one's lot. On the other hand, it only makes the trial greater and the heart in its feverishness less strong for endurance. Even philosophy, without religion, would seem to teach us to be anxious for nothing. The trouble is, however, that philosophy is more

plentiful than philosophers. Everybody can tell you how not to worry, but nobody seems to live his own philosophy.

What to do with one's worries, Paul tells us also. We are to put them into God's hands and leave them there. "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Take them to God, tell him all about them, and leave them with him. You are God's child ; he is caring for you and also for your affairs. You have no troubles or perplexities which he does not understand, which he is not able either to remove or to carry you through. This is the divine cure for care, and the result will be that "the peace of God . . . shall keep your hearts and minds."

The next life lesson the apostle teaches is contained in the wonderful cluster of "whatsoever." This is one of the great ethical texts of the Bible. All of these qualities belong to a noble Christian character. Those first named are the sturdy elements—truth, honour, justice, purity ; then come the more delicate and beautiful things—qualities that are winning and of good repute. Some people cultivate the first

class and neglect the other. They are sturdy and just, but not lovable. We have no right to make our religion repulsive; it ought to be lovely and attractive. Then there are some who cultivate the æsthetics of religion and leave out the grand qualities of truth and uprightness. This is worse than the other omission. It takes both classes to make a full-rounded Christian character.

Paul tells us to think of these things, but thinking is not enough—he says, also, “These things . . . do.” Thinking and doing are both important. Our thoughts make our character. They build it up little by little, as coral insects build up great reefs. Every thought we cherish leaves an impression, a touch, a mark of beauty or blemish. How important that we think only good and beautiful things! That is what Paul teaches here. The things that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, are what we are to think on. Thinking on false things, dishonourable things, unlovely things, makes us like those things; but pondering the noble qualities transforms us into the same nobleness.

“Beautiful thoughts make a beautiful soul,  
And a beautiful soul makes a beautiful face.”

But thinking is not enough. "One only knows what one practises." When Joan of Arc was asked what virtue she supposed dwelt in her white standard, her reply was, "I said to it, 'Go boldly among the English,' and then I followed it myself." It is not enough to raise the standard of pure white thoughts—we must follow the thoughts with acts; we must think right things, then do them.

Another of the great life lessons taught here is contentment. "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." There may be some who study this lesson that cannot yet say this. It may be a comfort to such to remember that Paul says he had "learned" it. He was not always so contented. It probably took him a good while to get the lesson learned, for he was quite an old man when he wrote this sentence. All lessons in life have to be learned; they do not come to us as gifts of God, but only as copies set for us which we are to try to follow. Of course the great secret lies within the heart. If we have in us the "well of water" which Christ gives, we need not be dependent on the little springs of earthly water which go dry so often. If we have



Christ, we really ought not to be greatly affected either by the possession or the loss of earthly comforts. That was Paul's secret.

The last life lesson taught is the ability of the Christian to do anything that God really gives him to do. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Here Paul puts the honour where it belongs. His contentment was not his own achievement. It was not the result of philosophy, was not caused by the dying out of ambition in his breast ; it was because he was in Christ that he could be content ; Christ gave him strength for it, so that in whatever circumstances he was he could quietly trust and rejoice. Christian life is full of impossibilities—things that are impossible to anyone with only human strength. But when God gives us a command he always means to give the strength required to keep the command. It was a prayer of Augustine's, "Command what thou wilt, and give what thou commandest." We should never hesitate to attempt any task that God gives, for he will always give us all the strength we need.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### WORKING AND WAITING FOR CHRIST

I THESSALONIANS iv. 9—v. 2

**I**T was probably during the early part of his mission at Corinth that Paul wrote the epistle from which this passage is taken. The church at Thessalonica had been in existence almost a year. Erroneous views, especially about Christ's second coming, had spread among its members. Many of them had given up their daily employments, claiming that it was unnecessary to work and that the richer members should support them while they idly awaited the Lord's return. To correct these errors and to exhort the people to a life of order, self-control and industry, Paul wrote this epistle.

The best way to prepare for Christ's coming is to live a life of love. "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another," Paul wrote. This seems to us a very commonplace lesson, for during nineteen hundred years the world has been hearing

it. But at the time these words were written it was a new teaching. Christ brought love into the world. Of course there was love before—love of parent for child, love of brother for sister, love of friend for friend. But Jesus taught a new lesson—that we should love all men—our neighbour as ourself—and that his followers should love one another as brethren. After the day of Pentecost there was a wonderful development of this new affection. The disciples had all things common. The rich aided the poor, the strong supported the weak, the joyful comforted the sorrowing, the victorious helped the defeated and fallen to rise again. Since that time Christian love has been doing a marvellous work in this world. All hospitals, asylums, homes for the poor, for orphans, for the blind, and all manner of institutions for the helping of the unfortunate, have sprung from this teaching of Christ. As it were, the heart of Jesus broke on Calvary, and its love poured out, streaming all over the earth, wherever the gospel was carried. We must be sure that we get this lesson well into our lives, and in our close, personal relations love one another as brethren.

“Study to be quiet.” This is a counsel against all blustering, all restlessness, all fussiness, all passion for notoriety. Jesus himself, in his own life, gives us the best possible interpretation. It was said of him by the prophet, “He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.” We know how quietly he moved. He never sought notoriety. He did his work silently. The Christian should cultivate the same spirit. We are to put away all bitterness and all wrath and evil speaking and all clamour—whatever is noisy; and are to put on meekness, peace, gentleness, patience, mercy, humility—the quiet graces. Perhaps we shall find it true at last that the things we have sought to do with noise and advertising have left but small results in men’s lives, in the bettering of the world, while the unconscious influences of our lives have left everywhere deep and inefaceable impressions.

“Do your own business.” Some persons have so much to do in looking after other people’s affairs that they have very little time left for their own. It is well for us to learn the lesson that our first responsibility is for our own life, our own conduct,

the way we manage our own affairs. Every man must bear his own burden. We would better learn to keep our hands off other people's matters, unless in cases where they need our help, when it is a part of our duty to look not only upon our own things but also upon the things of others. Love must always be ready to help, to share another's burden. But we must never be "meddlers in other men's matters." On the other hand, we must do our own business. This means that we must not expect other people to do it for us. It is unmanly to wish to be helped through life, letting others bear the burdens for us. We must take up our own burden and carry it manfully. It means also that we must do our own business, that is, put our whole heart into it and do it energetically, bravely. Some people who claim to be very pious and good are too indolent to do anything, and their life proves to be a miserable failure. Have some business of your own and put your heart into it.

"Walk honestly toward them that are without." The world is watching Christians all the time to see how they live. They represent Christ in this world, and have Christ's honour in their

keeping. All those who profess to be God's children must take heed that they never dishonour the name of their Father. This covers far more than the worship and the behaviour on Sabbaths or when engaged in religious services ; it applies still more to the conduct of Christians during the week, in their business, in their social life, in their many contacts with the people of the world. They are always on duty as Christians, and must never do anything that will bring dishonour upon Christ's name.

“I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep.” Very much of the bitterness of the sorrow of Christians is caused by ignorance concerning their beloved ones who have fallen asleep. If we would give careful heed to the teachings of the New Testament concerning the death of believers and the blessedness into which they enter after death our sorrow would not be bitter. Of course, Christian faith does not deaden our hearts, does not make it easy for us to give up our friends, does not make the pang of separation slight ; but the comfort which Christianity reveals ought so to change the aspect of death as to bring a deep joy to our

hearts even in our greatest sorrow. When Jesus came to the home at Bethany in a time of bereavement he comforted the sorrowing ones by revealing the immortal life. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." We should be Christians in our sorrow as well as in our business.

"Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Jesus died and rose again. We are told that in his resurrection he was the first fruits of them that are asleep. Jesus was the first to rise from the grave, but his resurrection was the pledge that all who sleep in him will rise too. One of the New Testament portraits of Jesus shows him holding in his hand a bundle of keys—the keys of death and the grave. He has conquered death and dethroned the king of terrors, and is now himself the king of the realm of spirits. Our loved ones who have fallen asleep are safe in his keeping, sleeping in their chambers of peace, and in his own time he will call them forth.

"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." The stupendous events described in these verses we cannot explain ; it is better we

should not try to explain them. Lowly faith would better accept them as true, and rejoice in the glorious assurances which they contain.

“ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” It is the mission of Christian people to be comforters of others in their sorrow. Yet too many Christians who go to their friends in the time of bereavement are anything but comforters. They go with a certain kind of sympathy, but it is a weak, almost hopeless sympathy. They sit down by the sorrowing ones, listen to their story of grief, talk with them about the sad phases of their sorrow, thus taking them down into the darkest shadows. Then they turn away with a few more sad words, and leave them in the depths. Miserable comforters, indeed, are such people ! When we go to those who are in sorrow we should rather carry to them the strong consolations of God’s Word. We should not linger with them upon the sad phases of the experience through which they are passing, but should turn their thoughts to the promises of God, to the truth of immortality, and thus lift them up toward strength and rejoicing. The word “ comfort ” means to give strength ; and we should always



try to make our friends stronger, that they may be better able to carry their burden of sorrow. Trouble should never crush a Christian ; on the other hand, the Christian should rejoice in God and sing songs in the night.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS

I THESSALONIANS V. 12-24

**T**HERE is a duty of warning others. We may not always speak words of commendation and approval. When persons are living in a disorderly way, that is, not in harmony with the divine laws, they are to be admonished. We must make sure, however, that we do this in the spirit of Christ, in love, in order to help and save those we admonish. No other duty requires more wisdom than that of telling others of their faults.

Then we should always be encouragers, for there are many timid, faint-hearted people who continually need to be lifted up and helped onward. We should never be discouragers of others, but always encouragers. There are those, too, who are weak and need the strength and support which we can give them. The strong should help the weak. We should bear each

other's burdens. We are also to be long-suffering to all, no matter how they may treat us. It is not easy, but we are not Christians if we are not trying to live after this law of love.

The teaching of Christ also requires us to render always good for evil, never evil for evil. This is a very practical counsel, and it is never easy to follow it. Yet it is an inseparable part of all Christian life. If one contends for the heroic in Christian character, nothing could be more heroic than this. To return love for hate, kindness for injury, is far braver than to be angry and resentful, demanding satisfaction. We should always follow that which is good, that is, we should think ever of the good of others and in all things make this our aim for them. Anything that would injure or harm another is absolutely un-Christian.

Joy is never to be left out of any scheme of Christian life. We are to rejoice not now and then only, but always. Even sorrow should not hush the songs in our hearts. This element of joy can be only in the life in which Christ lives and rules. There is difference in people in the matter of joyousness, but true Christian joy is not that

which nature inspires, but the joy which comes from the heart of God and which nothing ever can overcome or destroy.

Prayer is another essential element in every true Christian life. Not to pray is not to live at all as a Christian, for prayer is "the Christian's vital breath." The exhortation to pray without ceasing may seem a strange one. It means, however, that our communion with God never need be broken, never should be broken. We cannot be always on our knees; for we have work to do, duties to perform, which we may not neglect, and which are just as sacred as praying. But we may pray at our work, by keeping always close to Christ, so that anywhere, any moment, we can look up into his face and speak to him and get an answer.

Thanksgiving should never be wanting in a Christian life. It is not enough to observe one day in the year for thanksgiving, although that is a beautiful thing to do. Nor is it enough to put a sentence of thanksgiving into our daily prayers, although that, also, is proper. It is the grateful spirit that pleases God, the spirit that is always full of praise. There should be a note

of thanksgiving running through all our life. Too many of us go to God only with requests, with our burdens, our worries, our troubles; while we but rarely go to him with any word of thanks. We are not to be thankful only for the pleasant and agreeable things that come into our days—we are to be thankful, too, for the things that appear to us to be adversities. “In every thing give thanks.” That means,—in the sad days as well as in the glad days, when clouds are in the sky, as well as when the sunshine is pouring everywhere. It is said here that this is the will of God for us. A rabbinical teaching says that the highest angel in heaven is the angel of praise. The Christliest life is one that is always keyed to the note of praise and thanksgiving.

It is the glory of our Christian life that God lives in it. Paul said, “Christ liveth in me.” A fire burns in our hearts which is fed from heaven. We live at our best only when we let this flame burn brightly in us. We are exhorted here not to quench the Spirit. Fire is quenched by pouring water upon it, or by covering it up so as to exclude the air. The Spirit may be quenched in us by sin, by worldliness, by evil thoughts, by bad

passions, by resistance. To quench this heavenly flame is to put out the light of life, leaving the darkness of death within us.

We are also exhorted not to despise prophesyings. Prophesyings, in a general way, are divine teachings, the messages of God to us. The Bible is a book of prophesyings. All heavenly instructions, counsels, warnings, from whatever source, may in a sense be called prophesyings. We should keep our minds and hearts always wide open to receive the words of God and to welcome all divine influences and impressions and inspirations, whether they are spoken by the Spirit of God or by a human friend.

Not all voices, however, that speak in this world are divine voices. Not all words that fall upon our ears are words from heaven. We should prove all things, to see whether they are of God or not. Then we should hold fast only "that which is good." A traditional saying of Jesus, not contained in the Gospels, is, "Show yourselves approved money-changers." That is, judge carefully between genuine and counterfeit coins. Put to the test of truth all counsels that are given to you. Not all such counsels are from

God. We should make sure that the voice which we hear is our Master's own voice, is the voice of one who counsels us wisely, and not the voice of a stranger speaking to us in heavenly words to draw us away from the truth. Blessed are they that hear.

We are accustomed to think of some things as only slightly evil, while others are very black in their sinfulness. Some persons appear to think that if we keep ourselves from the worse kinds of wrongdoing we need not be so watchful against the minor forms of evil. They will not lie, nor steal, nor swear, nor do other things which would brand them in the eyes of the community as wicked. But meanwhile they are ungentle, unkind, selfish, bad-tempered, loving the world, neglecting God's work in attending to their own affairs. But Paul's exhortation is, "abstain from all appearance of evil." We are not to pick out certain things and condemn these alone as evil, abstaining from them, meanwhile indulging in pet vices and sinful habits of our own. Whatever is wrong in even the slightest way is to be abstained from.

The prayer for consecration in the twenty-

third verse is very comprehensive. It is that we may be sanctified, that is, set apart wholly for God and God's use. We belong to God, for he has bought us with a price, and we should make ourselves altogether God's by keeping ourselves separate from sin and from the world. It is a prayer that our whole being, body, soul and spirit, shall be kept pure and holy, amid all the world's evil ; preserved entire, without blame, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may seem impossible for anyone to realize this high ideal of living. But the words which follow tell us how it becomes possible. " Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." We are safe in this world, therefore, when God keeps us ; when his sheltering, protecting love enfolds us.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### PAUL'S ADVICE TO TIMOTHY

2 TIMOTHY i. 1-7; iii. 14-17

**I**T is very interesting to study Paul's friendships. Evidently he was a man of very warm and tender heart, with deep sympathies. He needed Christian companionship and his heart hungered for love. In The Acts and Epistles we can trace the story of many of his friendships. None of them is more beautiful than that with Timothy. Timothy was a young man who had been brought to Christ by the apostle and who was his companion and helper during many years. In this passage we have glimpses of the strong affection that bound this young man to the old apostle's heart.

"Paul . . . to Timothy, my dearly beloved son." We all like to get letters from our friends. Letters are so common now that they are not prized as they used to be when they were rare.

## 258 PAUL'S ADVICE TO TIMOTHY

We can imagine Timothy receiving this letter from his old friend in Rome. It was written from a prison. It is full of loving counsel. It contained the last words of Paul that have been preserved to us.

“I thank God . . . that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers.” It is a noble thing to live so that people thank God for us. Parents are very happy when they can thank God for their children. Sometimes they cannot do so—sometimes children live so as to bring great sorrow to the hearts of their parents. It is beautiful, too, to find that Paul prayed so earnestly for his young friend Timothy. It is a great privilege to be remembered in prayer by good people.

“Greatly desiring to see thee.” Paul was very lonely in his prison. In the closing part of his letter he says he was almost entirely alone. “Only Luke is with me.” He mentioned different friends who had been with him, but who had gone away, some of them having forsaken him. He begged Timothy to come to him as soon as possible. There is something very pathetic about this picture of Paul's aloneness. He speaks of

his first trial, and says that no one took his part then but that all forsook him. It is not hard to be faithful to God when other persons stand beside us. It is not hard to be a Christian in a Christian home, in a Christian church, in a Christian school, or when one's companions are in full sympathy with one's religion. But it is very hard to be a Christian when one must stand alone, when no one sympathizes. Every young person should learn to stand so firmly for Christ that even if left entirely alone in the midst of ungodly people he may still be able to stand, faithful to Christ. Paul longed to see Timothy. We are reminded of Jesus himself in Gethsemane, when he craved the presence and sympathy of his closest friends in his great sorrow.

“The unfeigned faith . . . which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice ; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” Here is a glimpse of a beautiful home of the olden time. We can picture to ourselves the old grandmother with gentle heart and softened speech, who took delight in teaching the boy the words of God, and in praying with him and for him. Then we can think of the mother, amid her

household cares supported by the promises of God and the hopes of religion, also teaching her child the truths which gave so much joy and comfort to the Jewish mothers in those days. No wonder, with such training, amid such influences, Timothy grew to be such a good man. It is a great privilege to be born and reared amid such holy influences.

“Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee.” Evidently Timothy was not doing the best possible with his life. He was not making the most of the grace of God that was in him. The fire needs to be stirred up that it may blaze and flame and send out heat and light. In Timothy's heart the blessings of God's grace were smouldering too quietly, and needed to be stirred up. Many young Christians need the same counsel. They are good, honest, truthful, faithful, in many ways, but they are not doing their best. They must live much more earnestly and be much more useful to their fellow men.

“God hath not given us the spirit of fear ; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” It seems as if Timothy was fearful, shy, almost cowardly. The times were hard for Christian

living. Those who followed Christ were sure to meet persecution, and oftentimes death was the certain consequence of faithful confession of Christ. In our days it is much easier to follow Christ. No danger is involved in it. We need have no fear of persecution. Yet even in these times there are those who are in danger of suffering from shyness and fearfulness. God wants us to be brave and loyal wherever we are called upon to stand.

“That good thing which was committed unto thee keep.” A follower of Christ never should be swerved from the things which are true and right. A great many people know plenty of truth, but do not live it out. The test of knowing is doing. It is not enough to learn. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” We really know only so much truth as we get into our experience and conduct. All of the Bible we can truly call our own is what we have learned to live. It is a beautiful thing when a young person has been well taught, it is still more beautiful when he abides in the things which he has been taught, living out the lessons in daily life.

“From a child thou hast known the holy

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scriptures." It is a great privilege to grow up in an atmosphere of Bible teaching, to have for first teacher a godly mother, who whispers into the ear sweet things of God's love and the counsels of heavenly wisdom. Such influences affect the life to its very close.

"The holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation." There are other kinds of wisdom in this world which do not make one wise to salvation. A man may know a great deal about science or literature or history and be very wise in this world's learning, and yet not be saved. The Bible gives the true wisdom. It tells us that we are lost sinners, but it does not stop there. It answers our questions about duty, about God, about the future life and how to live so as to gain the heavenly blessedness. It makes us wise unto salvation.

"Through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The Bible itself does not save anyone—it only shows the way to be saved. One might know all the Bible and yet be lost. We are saved only when we lay hold upon Christ, when we accept him as our Saviour. It is faith that does this. We see Christ as he is offered to aid sinners. When we

FAITH

take him as our Saviour, appropriating the blessings of his cross and resurrection, we are saved. Faith means the acceptance of Christ and the committing of our life to him.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." The Bible is the word of God. Holy men wrote it as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. When therefore we open the Scriptures we know that it was God who wrote, through holy men, the words we read. There are other good books in the world, but none like the Bible. We ought to read it reverently, since it is God who speaks to us in its pages. We ought to believe it, for God's Word must be absolutely true. We ought to obey it, since what God commands must be right and the best for us. We ought to yield our whole life to its influence, to be moulded by it, since it will fashion us into the divine likeness. It is profitable for teaching—telling us things we could never learn anywhere else. It is profitable for reproof. We often need reproof, and the Word of God is faithful in telling us when we sin. It is profitable for correction. It would set us right when we are going wrong ; it shows us the faults in our life or character, that

we may put them away. It is profitable for instruction in righteousness—that is, in right things and right ways.

“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The object of the Word of God is to make perfect men out of us. If we follow it in everything, that is what it will do. It will draw out every feature of beauty. It will correct the faults and blemishes. It will develop our life at the points of weakness and incompleteness. It will prune off what is over-luxuriant and strengthen those parts which are deficient. It will furnish us for every good work, preparing us for every duty.



## CHAPTER XXXV

### PAUL'S LAST WORDS

2 TIMOTHY iv. 1-18

**I**T is the year A.D. 64, and the great apostle is lying in a damp Roman prison cell waiting for his final trial. Two charges are filed against him ; one, taking part in the burning of Rome, July 19, A.D. 64 ; the other, treason, in attempting to change the established customs of society and weaken imperial authority. All his friends, except Luke, have forsaken him ; he is becoming nerved for martyrdom ; before his fate is sealed he writes a final farewell word to Timothy. He began, " I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Life is very serious. We are always standing before God and before the Judge. Our commonest days are judgment days. We should learn to do everything in the sight of God. This makes every word and act serious. If only

we were more conscious of God and of eternity we should live better.

“Preach the word.” Timothy was not making the most of himself. He seems to have been indolent—he was not preaching with the burning ardour which should characterize a minister of Christ. Paul wished to stir him up to do better work. He charges him to preach the Word, not only in season—at the stated times of public service—but out of season, wherever and whenever he had opportunity. Many of us are not making the most of our life. We are not doing our best in our efforts to help save the world. From this Roman prison comes the call to everyone to arouse his best energies in behalf of the kingdom of Christ.

“Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering.” The minister is to watch the souls intrusted to his care as a shepherd watches his sheep. Perhaps a word at the right time may prevent their wandering altogether away. Yet no duty of friendship is so difficult as that of reproof or rebuke. Too often the word of admonition is sharp, bitter, censorious. Paul wisely adds that we need to have all long-suffering in our exhorting

or rebuking of others. Words of reproof should always be spoken in love and patience.

Not always do people receive graciously the simple truths of God's Word. "Having itching ears . . . they shall turn away their ears from the truth." Plain, old-fashioned teaching is not brilliant enough to please them. The old, old story lacks interest, and they want something new. The fault is with the hearers, not with the teachers. "Take heed . . . how ye hear," is one of the Master's wise exhortations. Of course, one should teach well. There is no excuse for being prosy or dull in presenting the truths of Christianity. Paul urges Timothy to do his part with earnestness for the very reason that the people would be apt to turn away to fables instead of listening to the old gospel.

The words of exhortation are emphasized by Paul's closing message about himself. They were his parting thoughts. Before he had spoken of Timothy. Now he spoke of himself, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." It is interesting to study Paul's view of death as we have a glimpse of it here. He thinks of it in two ways. He was about to die

as a martyr, and this made his death an offering to God. His life would be poured out on the altar as a sacrifice. Then he thinks of it also as a departure, not the end of life, but a going away to another country. The body is only a temporary home, where the man stays for a while. At death he leaves it and goes on to his permanent abiding place. For the Christian dying is not the end—it is only a departure from the frail tabernacle to the eternal house, from the body of weakness and mortality, to be at home with Christ. If we would think more of death in this Christian way, it would lose its terrors for us, and would come to appear as it is, but a phase of life—an emerging from frailty, weakness and sin into strength, perfectness and holiness.

“ I have fought a good fight.” Here we have Paul’s retrospect. He saw his life under three different forms. It was a fight. He was not a quarrelsome man, and yet his life had been a contest from beginning to end. It was a strife against sinfulness within himself and evil without. Life is not easy for anyone who tries to live worthily. We are always in the enemy’s country until we pass over to glory. We can never lay

off our armour, nor sheath our sword, nor cease to fight while we stay here. But we need not fail, for the Captain of our salvation is strong. He has met and conquered every enemy and will help us to be victorious, more than conquerors, if only we keep close to him and let him fight for us as he wishes to do.

Paul thinks of his life also as a race: "I have finished my course." Yonder is the goal, with the judge waiting to crown the successful competitor. Along the course are the witnesses, watching the contest, cheering their favourites. Paul had now run the race almost to the end. Just before him was the goal, and he saw the crown shining, ready to be put upon his brow. The racer strains every muscle, and puts all his strength into the race. So Paul had lived. We must do our very best always if we would win in life's race.

Then life is also a trust, something given to keep and guard and use, and bring home at last unimpaired. "I have kept the faith." Everyone's life is a trust—something he has to answer for. Whatever God gives us is a trust. The parable of the talents illustrates this. Young

people should think of life and its privileges as not their own—they receive all they have and are from God, not to be spent on their own pleasure, but for the blessing of others and then to be accounted for—not the bare talents merely as first received, but the talents increased by use. The story of the man with the one talent is forever a warning to all who do not make the most of their gifts and opportunities.

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown.” It was only a wreath of laurel that the ancient racer who first touched the goal received, but it is a crown of fadeless glory which every Christian racer will receive. So there is something to live for besides the pleasure of success in this world. Those who live the life of faith will receive a crown. One may even fail in this world's struggles, not making a success of his life, as men estimate life, and yet be wonderfully successful in the true sense, gaining eternal reward. If we live well in this present time we lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven.

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