

# Concluding Reflections on Paul's Character.

by Thomas Reade

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*The sermon reflects on the character and experience of Paul, highlighting the nature and blessedness of Christianity, and emphasizing the importance of love and obedience to Christ.*

**Topics:** "Christian Character", "Faith And Persecution"

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## Description

Thomas Reade concludes reflections on the character of Paul, emphasizing the transformative power of Christianity in Paul's life, from a persecutor to a new creature in Christ. Paul's sacrifice, zeal, and intellectual strength attest to the authenticity of his faith and conversion. His unwavering commitment to Christ despite trials and persecutions exemplifies true faith. The sermon highlights the opposition faced by Paul and the early Christians, emphasizing the world's enmity towards Christ and His followers. It calls believers to emulate Paul's sacrificial love, zeal for evangelism, and unwavering faith in Christ, urging them to prioritize heavenly treasures over worldly comforts.

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## Transcript

### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON PAUL'S CHARACTER.

The character and experience of Paul, though imperfectly delineated in the foregoing pages, show the nature and blessedness of Christianity. Its heavenly doctrines, its consoling promises, its holy precepts, were so many sources of light, joy, and purity, which, through the transforming power of the Spirit, made the once persecuting Saul of Tarsus, a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is interesting to trace the origin, and pursue the course, of those principles which made him such a burning and shining light. Perhaps no mere man was ever made so great a blessing to mankind, or underwent such trials for the sake of the Gospel.

From the short review which we have taken of the life of this holy man, it will be evident, that he was no impostor. His sacrifice of reputation, wealth, and power; his willingness to suffer contempt, poverty, and persecution, abundantly clear his character from this imputation. As far as respects earthly things, he had nothing to gain, but every thing to lose, by declaring himself to be a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ. It is also evident, that he was no visionary enthusiast. His spirit was free from the violent impulses of fanatical delusion; and his zeal, though fervent, was never tainted with melancholy or vanity. He did not court persecution or popularity to obtain a name; neither did he, like the votaries of Pagan and Papal superstition, inflict upon himself useless and absurd penances, with a view of propitiating the Almighty, or purchasing heaven. But, if to love Jesus with all the heart- if to devote all the powers of the mind and body

to his service- if to count all things but loss to win Christ, and be found in Him, be enthusiasm; then we do not hesitate to say, that Paul was indeed of all enthusiasts, the Chief.

It must also be apparent from what we have seen, that the Apostle did not embrace Christianity through the weakness of his mental powers; neither was he duped by the artifice of others. Being brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, a noted doctor of the law, his mind was well stored with the learning of those times. His Epistles afforded ample proof both of the strength and cultivation of his intellectual faculties; while his commanding eloquence extorted from King Agrippa that striking confession- "You almost persuade me to be a Christian."

On his way to Damascus, he heard the voice, he saw the glory, he felt the power of Jesus. Being taught by immediate revelation from above, he embraced the Truth in all its greatness, and immediately preached Christ, in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Can we review so marvelous an event, and not exclaim, "This has God wrought! The finger of God is here!"

Since Paul, as appears from the clearest evidence, neither sought to deceive others, nor was himself deceived; every candid mind must be led to these conclusions- that his faith in Jesus was the result of an overwhelming conviction of the truth of Christianity, which all his Jewish prejudices could not withstand- that his conversion to the faith which once he destroyed, was the work of God- that the Christian religion is a Divine Revelation- and that to reject or neglect the Gospel, is dishonoring to God, and destructive to ourselves.

Blessed is he, who with a thankful heart believes the heavenly Record- "That God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son." As there can be no happiness without holiness, so there can be no holiness without an union by faith to Jesus. Are we abiding in Him- deriving strength from Him- and depending solely upon his great atonement? He died for sinners- we are sinners. He has said, "Him that comes unto me, I will in no wise cast out." If then, as poor sinners, we come unto Him, we shall assuredly be saved. This is the simple truth of the Gospel. Happy are they, who, like Paul, are enabled to embrace it with child-like simplicity; for to all such, there shall be a performance of those things, which were told them of the Lord.

In the sufferings of Paul, we have seen exemplified that marked hostility which was manifested by the king of Syria, when he commanded his captains to fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. The enmity of the Jews and Gentiles was not directed against Saul of Tarsus until he became a Christian, and labored most zealously in the cause of the despised Nazarene. It was Christ dwelling in his heart by faith, Christ proclaimed by him, as the King of Israel, who was the real object of their attack.

The world hated Christ, and would not have him to reign over them. They also hated his faithful servants, and sought to destroy them. The enmity of the natural heart still remains the same. Let a worldly man, however elevated his station, become an humble follower of the crucified Jesus, and condemn the world by his holy life, and soon his once attached friends will manifest their displeasure, either by leaving him with disgust, or by visiting him with scorn and insult.

This spirit of opposition began its deadly ravages in the family of Adam, and is still in active operation. For, "As he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him who was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." The prayer of David conveys the same truth, and speaks the language of the despised children of God, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt. We have endured much ridicule from the proud, much contempt from the arrogant."

Should it be asked- Are not the followers of Christ in danger of deserting him through fear of suffering? The conduct of Paul will afford a sufficient reply. If left to themselves, they would indeed fall away; therefore they dare not say we will not; but through the grace of Christ supporting them, they are enabled boldly to say- "We are ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The exhortation of Peter is truly animating. Having fallen through self-confidence, but being again restored through grace, he knew how to strengthen his brethren, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Jesus himself has put the seal of blessedness upon his persecuted saints, "God blesses you who are hated and excluded and mocked and cursed because you are identified with me, the Son of Man. When that happens, rejoice! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven."

How bitter is the enmity of wretched fallen man against the God who made him, who redeemed him, and who waits to be gracious to him. The zealous Paul once felt this enmity in his state of blindness, and when converted, deplored it deeply at the foot of the cross. May we not enquire; What is the state of our hearts? Can we suffer shame and reproach for Jesus' sake; or, do we turn aside through fear, when a cross is appointed for us to bear?

What words can be more awakening, than those which Jesus spoke to his disciples- "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give it up for me, you will find it." Ah! who can bear this touchstone of sincerity? Who can endure the bitter pang of separation from the dearest objects of their earthly affection? Yet it must be so. With undivided hearts, and disengaged affections, we must follow our all-gracious Savior, though we incur the frowns of relatives, and the loss of friends. We must be ready to suffer for his sake, if we would enjoy Him as our portion. To gain all, we must be willing to lose all; for Christ has said- "He that finds his life shall lose it; and he that loses his life for my sake shall find it."

Do we feel our hearts growing cold? Oh! let us look unto Jesus, until they are filled with holy love. He left the bosom of the Father. He took upon him our nature. He entered into our world of woe. He carried our sorrows. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He endured the cross, despising the shame; and then, as the Lord of glory, he burst the bands of death, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right-hand of the throne of God, where he ever lives to make intercession for us. Can we be insensible to such grace as this? O that the love of God were shed abroad in every heart, then would earth resemble heaven, and the Church of Christ form one holy, happy, and united family.

It cannot be too deeply impressed on the consciences of men, that love to Jesus is the spring of holy obedience. It is the Divine Chemistry which turns all into gold. A cup of cold water given from this principle shall not lose its reward, while the most costly sacrifice is worthless, if it does not spring from love.

The sacred fire of love can only be kindled by Him whose name and nature is love; and when once kindled, it can only be kept burning on the altar of our hearts, by the constant supply of his grace. The prayer of faith obtains the holy oil with which our vessels must be filled, and our lamps trimmed, while waiting in joyful expectation for the coming of the Bridegroom. Increasing with the increase of faith in the atonement of Christ, this heavenly flame will burn brighter and more fervently, the nearer it approaches the

source from where it came.

"Yes! love indeed is light from heaven;

A spark of that immortal fire

With angels shared, by Jesus given,

To lift from earth our low desire.

Devotion wafts the mind above;

But heaven itself descends in love;

A feeling from the Godhead caught

To wean from self, each sordid thought;

A ray of Him who formed the whole.

A glory circling round the soul."

"Love is from God; and every one that loves, is born of God, and knows God." "God is love; and he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him." Happy then is the heart in which the spirit of love dwells and reigns. Such a heart is the abode of the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, and who delights in the lowly, loving disciple of the crucified and glorified Jesus- his coequal, co-eternal Son.

Oh! that we may daily live under the sweet constraining influence of the loving-kindness of our God. Without it, all is dark and cheerless; with it, joy and peace, like lovely flowers, spring up around our path. What are all the vanities of this world, but painted bubbles, when compared with this eternal treasure? Love, joy, peace, survive the tomb; and form that unending wreath which shall forever adorn and gladden the soul of the glorified believer.

Like his Divine Master, Paul had no certain dwelling-place. He was truly a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth. Wherever he went, bonds and imprisonments awaited him. We, on the contrary, in these days of the Church's prosperity, can dwell at ease, none making us afraid. The law does not unsheath the sword of persecution, nor kindle the martyr's fire. Is there not then cause for anxious apprehension, lest, while we profess much love for Christ, our hearts should cleave unto the dust? Are we not in danger of making a home of this world, and of setting up our rest here, as if this wilderness were the promised Canaan, rather than the road through which we have to pass to it?

As professing Christians, living in the midst of Gospel light and Gospel privileges, we can readily exclaim against the idolatries of the Heathen, while we forget, that whatever draws away the heart from God, is an idol in his sight. Our domestic ease, our family comforts, too often become our household gods, at whose shrine we sacrifice the claims of Christian charity, and the spiritual interests of perishing millions. "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." There is in every man a powerful principle, which God has wisely implanted for the purposes of self-preservation. The second great commandment in the Law appeals to this principle- "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus refers to it- "All things whatever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

But there is a sinful love of self- a spirit of selfishness which is utterly at variance with the law of love. Nothing can extirpate this evil principle but love to Christ. As believers in Jesus, we must daily live in the exalted spirit of his new commandment; "Love one another, as I have loved you." The love of Christ to us is the Gospel pattern of our love to others. With enlarged heart, the Apostle enforced this disinterested duty on the Philippian Christians- "Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had."

With thankfulness to Almighty God we must acknowledge, that of late years much has been done in our favored island to advance the cause of Christ throughout the earth, as well as to widen the circle of general beneficence; yet much still remains to be done. This is but the seed-time of the world. Let us then, in the spirit of faith and prayer, cast our bread upon the waters, for we shall find it after many days.

If we truly love the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall, and must, rejoice in everything which advances the interests of his kingdom. A heart warmed with the love of God, cannot rest, satisfied with mere verbal expressions of gratitude, for the blessings of redemption. Love is an active principle. Its language is, What can I do, however feebly, to promote the great and good work of evangelizing the world? If contributing of my substance will aid the noble cause, I will gladly cast into the treasury that which God has given me. If active exertion be required, I am willing to spend and be spent in advancing my Savior's kingdom. If advocating the cause of Christ be needed, I will endeavor to speak, though with a faltering tongue. Such is the language of love. To all this, the servant of Christ will join his fervent prayers, and rejoice, with all his Christian brethren, at the enlargement and prosperity of Zion.

"He who sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he who sows bountifully, shall reap also bountifully," -is the Apostle's appeal to our Christian liberality. Do we act agreeably to this practical knowledge? Do the rich professors of Christianity never first consult their family luxuries, their equipage and decorations, before they dare to answer the Savior's call; "Sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, and follow me." Our loving Savior, though he does not require his followers to enter upon a state of voluntary poverty, or to deny themselves the innocent enjoyment of his providential bounties; yet, he does demand their chief affection, and a willingness to impart cheerfully of their substance for his sake.

"Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two pennies." Many are willing to make an offering out of their surplus, but few, to make a sacrifice of their comforts. Liberality must be estimated, not by quantity, but proportion. A splendid gift from a wealthy person forms only an offering, when no inconvenience is felt by the rich donation. A small sum given by a poor man is a real sacrifice, when some privation is experienced by this act of generosity. On this account it was, that, looking at the largeness of her heart, and the smallness of her means, our Lord declared- "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

As the love of the world is the sin which easily besets us, when sheltering itself under the creditable appellation of prudence, economy, and planning, our Savior has given us a double caution against its pernicious influence. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." The Gospel indeed does not condemn a prudent management of our concerns- it rather enjoins it for, "a good man will guide his affairs with discretion." But, it does condemn that anxious, murmuring, fretful spirit, which disfigures the conduct of many professors.

How cheering are the words of Paul, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Christian Reader, behold your privilege- "Do not be anxious about anything." When any trial comes upon you which would fill you with anxiety, (for who can escape from trouble in this fallen world) do not grapple with it in your own strength, nor lean to your own understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart; betake yourself by earnest prayer to the Father of mercies; implore Him to direct and overrule for good, "the cloud you so much dread," and then, calmly leave at his feet the burden of your fears. Do this with thankfulness, that you have such a God who cares for you, and on whom you may boldly cast all your concerns. While you thus acknowledge Him in all your ways, God will direct your paths, and either support you under, or deliver you out of, all your troubles.

How sweet is the voice of mercy speaking peace to the troubled heart- "But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit." He, on the contrary, who, when trouble overtakes him, will first measure it with his reason, and manage it with his own counsel, and take the care upon himself, rather than cast his burden upon the Lord by faith and prayer, shall involve himself in many miseries, lose his joy and peace in God, sink deeper in the miry clay, and in the end obtain nothing but vexation of spirit. This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans and turn their hearts away from the Lord. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, on the salty flats where no one lives."

O how quieting to the afflicted believer are the words of Jesus- "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Let not your heart be troubled." "Neither be you of doubtful mind." Happy is that soul whose hopes are firmly anchored on the promises of Christ! We live alas! far, far too much below our privileges. Had we more faith, and spiritual-mindedness, we would have more strength and joy in every tribulation; our moderation would be known unto all men; our conversation would be without covetousness; we would be content with such things as we have on our journey heavenward; and our minds being fully stayed upon Him who has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," would be kept in perfect peace. Such was the happy spirit in which the primitive Christians lived and died. They learned in whatever state they were, therewith to be content; and took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Do we act as stewards of the manifold gifts of God avoiding miserly anxieties, and wasteful expenditures? Knowing that we are not our own, being bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God, do we seek for grace to live to our Redeemer's glory? The world would no longer sway our affections, did we daily reflect how quickly it is passing away; and how soon we shall be called to give an account of our stewardship, either for the one, or for the ten, talents which may have been entrusted to our care.

Though all do not become martyrs, yet all must possess the martyr's spirit; and though all are not called upon to forsake their houses and friends, as the noble-minded Paul did, yet all must be in readiness to do so, when the cause and glory of Christ demand the sacrifice. It was "to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," that he gave the exhortation, "Do not be conformed to this world." The very admonition implies the danger of worldly conformity, and the proneness of the heart to earthly things. Who can say that he is always raised above the undue influence of terrestrial objects- that he is daily passing, as it were, upon tiptoe, across this world of vanity. Alas! alas! we too often sink into the mire of

earthly-mindedness, and have our thoughts absorbed amid the trifles of a day! But what can the world profit us? It can neither secure us against temporal evils, nor save us from eternal misery. It cannot, for a single moment, prolong our existence here, or make that existence peaceful and happy. It is often a clog, but never a help in moments of spiritual distress. And yet, we love the world, though, by its deceitful smile, it robs us of our peace, entangles us in its snares, and would, if left under its power, eventually destroy our souls.

The heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the world which shone so brightly in the lives of the first Christians may well cause us to blush. These devoted followers of a crucified Redeemer did not study those arts of splendor which have overspread the Christian world. When the honor of their Divine Master required the sacrifice, they could trample under foot, those profits and pleasures which ensnare and enslave mankind. They looked upon the delights and advantages of this life, as things not worthy to arrest their affections in their journey homeward. Their spirits breathed in too pure an air, to be caught with the delusive charms of this lower world. It was their continual regard to keep company with dying thoughts, and to dwell within the prospect of eternity.

Hence, Justin Martyr in his Epistle says, "that Christians, even in their native country, live as pilgrims and strangers. They are in the flesh, but do not live after the flesh; they dwell upon the earth, but their conversation is in heaven. As the soul lives in the body, but is not of the body, so Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world; for, while sojourning in corruptible tabernacles of clay, their immortal spirits are daily longing for, and expecting an incorruptible state of glory in heaven."

The simplicity of these early believers in Jesus, kept them from aspiring after worldly honors and distinctions; and, if at any time advanced to them, their greatest care was, to keep themselves unspotted from the world. When Cyprian was elected Bishop of Carthage, his modesty and humility made him fly from the first approaches of the news. Thinking himself unfit for so weighty and honorable an employment, he desired that a more worthy person, and some of his seniors in the faith might possess the place. So far from accepting his refusal, the people were more urgent in their entreaties; his doors were immediately crowded, and passages of escape blocked up. He would indeed have fled out at the window, but finding it in vain, he unwillingly yielded, the people in the meanwhile impatiently waiting, divided between hope and fear, until seeing him come forth, they received him with universal joy and satisfaction.

Can we wonder that such a feeling should be expressed towards this excellent man, when it is recorded of him, that upon his becoming Christian, he sold his estate, to relieve the necessities of his poor brethren, from which he could not be restrained, either by the persuasions of others, or from the considerations of the poverty to which he himself might be reduced. After his entrance upon the ministry, his doors were open to all who came, from which no widow ever returned empty. To any who were blind, he became a guide to direct them; to them who were lame, he lent his assistance and support. None were oppressed, but he was ready to defend them. He was the father, the friend, and the shepherd of his flock. With Job, he could truly say- "All who heard of me praised me. All who saw me spoke well of me. For I helped the poor in their need and the orphans who had no one to help them. I helped those who had lost hope, and they blessed me. And I caused the widows' hearts to sing for joy. All I did was just and honest. Righteousness covered me like a robe, and I wore justice like a turban. I served as eyes for the blind and feet for the lame. I was a father to the poor and made sure that even strangers received a fair trial." Thus Cyprian like the blessed Paul, lived for one only object- the glory of Christ and the salvation of men.

Contentment, moderation, and thankfulness peculiarly distinguished the primitive Christians. This lovely feature in their character is strikingly portrayed by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa- "The transitory condition of man's life," says he, "calls for daily reparation of the decays of nature. He, therefore, that looks no farther than to minister to the desires of nature, and troubles not himself with vain anxious thoughts for more than is necessary, lives little less than the life of angels; while, by a mind content with little, he imitates their need of nothing. For this cause, we are commanded to seek only what is enough to keep the body in its due state and temper, and thus to address our prayers to God; 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Give us bread, not delicacies or riches, not splendid and purple clothing, not pearls and jewels, large fields and great possessions, not numerous flocks and herds of cattle, or a multitude of servants, not any of those things by which the soul is diverted, and drawn from more noble and divine thoughts and cares, but only our daily bread."

Thus practically did the primitive Christians follow the command of our Savior; "So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life--whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing?" Having food and clothing they learned to be content. Thus, unhesitatingly, could they declare their renunciation of all things for his sake, "Lo, we have left everything, and have followed you." Thus deeply did they drink into the spirit of their beloved Lord, who said, "My food and drink is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish his work."

O how seldom, in these modern times, do we find that full display of the mind of Christ, which was exhibited amid the storms of persecution in the early ages of Christianity. May the Divine Spirit revive our languid graces. May we daily look unto Him, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes, became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. The tendency of the Gospel is to expand the heart, to widen the stream of liberality, to diffuse happiness through the earth. When its power is felt, its fruits immediately appear. Love oils the wheels of action, while faith propels the ardent spirit in its career of universal benevolence.

But, if few be found willing to sacrifice their superfluities for the Gospel's sake, how much fewer are found ready to leave the bosom of an affectionate family, to brave the dangers of the ocean, to endure the sicknesses of foreign climates, and all those other trials which await the man, who in the spirit of the self-denying Apostle, delights to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and would rather die than forsake his God and Savior.

Few, like Caleb, follow the Lord fully. Yet nothing is more abhorrent to our all-gracious Redeemer, than a divided heart and a lukewarm spirit. As all our happiness in time and in eternity is the fruit of his love to us; so all our holiness is the fruit of his Spirit, drawing our hearts, and fixing them wholly upon Himself. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and to show them unto us; to convince us of the emptiness of every earthly good; and the folly of seeking our happiness in a world which lies in wickedness. Sin blinds the understanding, and sears the conscience; but, when the heart is filled with the love and Spirit of Jesus, how weak are the temptations of Satan- how powerless are the allurements of the world- how comparatively smooth the paths of sorrow. May we be graciously delivered from a worldly spirit, which can assume a thousand forms to allure and to deceive. To be in the world, and yet not of the world- to use it for our temporal necessities, and yet not to abuse it for carnal purposes, is a high Christian attainment, which Paul possessed in an eminent degree.

From the book of Nature we may derive much useful knowledge. Solomon sends the sluggard to the ant. Isaiah, the inconsiderate, to the ox and the donkey. Jeremiah, the forgetful, to the stork and the swallow.

Animals and birds teach us many important lessons- Thus, when the squirrel is disturbed, it skips from bough to bough, continuing always near the earth; while the lark, when alarmed in her nest, flies upwards with rapid wing, singing as she soars. Just so the worldling, when beset with grief, goes from one terrestrial object to another; while the Christian, leaving all his earthly cares behind him, rises on the wings of faith and prayer, to seek, with tuneful heart, his rest in God.

Do we thus seek for consolation from our God and Savior, and find it in the hour of trial? Jacob wrestled and prevailed. May we be Israels with God, and never cease to pray, until he gives that realizing faith, which lessens the weight of earthly sorrow; that hope and fear which bear the soul with steady flight to heavenly glory!

Jesus, dwelling in the heart by faith, invigorates the feeblest saint, and dispels the deepest gloom. The believer, resting in the full assurance of hope upon the unchanging promises of his Savior, triumphs over every enemy, and reaches in safety his eternal rest. Such was the blessedness which cheered and strengthened the heart of Paul, and such is the blessedness which animates all the children of God.

In the days of his unregeneracy, we have seen how the Apostle prided himself in being a descendant of Abraham; or, as he styled himself, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." Like the rest of the Pharisees, he esteemed himself to be righteous, and despised others, especially the Gentiles, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. But, when it pleased God to reveal to him that Savior, by whom the middle wall of partition was broken down, he could give the right-hand of fellowship to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

This is the true Christian spirit, which unites the whole body of the Church, by that charity which is the bond of perfectness. For this uniting spirit, our divine Redeemer supplicated his Holy Father, previous to his crucifixion, "Sanctify them through your Truth; your Word is truth; that they all may be one; as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also maybe one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me." If union be the strength and beauty of the Church of Christ, how great must be the guilt of those who tarnish and weaken it by contentions and divisions.

Through the blindness of our minds, we are too ready to value ourselves upon our external privileges, as if belonging to a pure Church must of necessity make us pure. It is one thing to make a profession of religion, and another to possess its spirit, and to feel its power.

From Scripture and experience we learn that the heart of man, while alienated from the life of God, is the same in all ages and countries. Outward circumstances indeed make some difference, but the radical evils of the heart remain the same. In Christian lands, unconverted people are no better than heathens, except as they are brought under the predominating influence of Christianity, which restrains their vices; while, in those nations, where sensuality forms a part of the prevailing superstition, they are more openly licentious.

How little reason have we then to plume ourselves upon our outward advantages, or to exalt ourselves above others; when the difference arises, not from any superior natural goodness of our own, but from circumstances over which, as far as we are concerned, our wisdom and foresight had no control. Wicked men are greatly indebted to Christianity, and to the restraining grace of God, for numberless outward comforts which they enjoy, though they either know it not, or are unwilling to acknowledge it. But oh! what an unspeakable mercy is converting grace, which brings unnumbered blessings in its train; for godliness has the promise not only of the life that now is, but also of that which is to come.

This blessedness, Paul experienced in all its richness, and proclaimed it to a dying world, in all its fullness. He knew, that the grace of God makes all the difference between one man and another; collectively, between nations, where Christianity is established, and where it is not- individually, between those who are Christians indeed, and those who are Christians only in name. Being well acquainted with the workings of spiritual pride, he put these humbling questions to each Corinthian convert, "Who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have, that you did not receive? Now, if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?"

Are we the subjects of this distinguishing grace? With what ardor then should we follow the footsteps of the Apostle, and engage with all our hearts in the service of our Redeemer. Has the Spirit drawn us to Christ with the cords of love? How zealously then should we labor for the conversion of mankind. Though despised by the world, we shall be precious in the sight of God. Though, by nature, devoid of spiritual light and power, we shall become, through the Spirit, "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." Thus was Abraham blessed of God, and made a blessing to all around him; and so are all who walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which obtained for him that exalted title- "the Friend of God."

May the universal Church of Christ, by whatever names its several parts may be distinguished among men, be stirred up to active zeal and self-denial, to increased liberality and fervent prayer. Then will our Zion become a praise in the earth, and all the ends of the world shall see the salvation of our God. When we survey those regions of the earth, where the light of Truth has not yet penetrated, inhabited by millions of immortal beings who are successively passing into eternity, what daily cause have we to bless God, that our lot has been cast in a land of Bibles and Sabbaths; a land, where his ministers are appointed to proclaim the Gospel of peace; where we are governed by equal laws; and where we enjoy the blessing of civil and religious liberty.

O! that we may not, by our willful and continued ingratitude, provoke our God to withdraw these blessings from us. As a nation, we have long enjoyed his peculiar favor; and as a nation, we are unmindful of his benefits. By his present dispensations towards us, he calls to us, in mercy, to consider our ways. But, if his call of mercy be disregarded, he will speak with a voice of judgment, which shall cause the stoutest hearts to tremble.

The Almighty has put a singular honor upon his Church, not only by imparting to it his blessing, and causing it to reflect his glory, but by rendering it the medium, whereby his perfections are more fully known to the angelic host. In heaven, they behold one unbroken stream of love; in hell, one unmixed torrent of wrath. But, in this our world, the seemingly opposing attributes of justice and mercy, are displayed in all their glory at the Cross of Christ.

This wonderful truth is mentioned by Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Can we be indifferent to this mystery of grace? Can we treat with lightness these wonders of redemption, which occupy the highest thoughts, and call forth the loudest praise, of principalities and powers in heavenly places? Could angels weep, surely, tears would be shed in heaven over the insensibility of man.

To display this redeeming grace to a dying world, was at once the labor and delight of Paul. The Godhead of Christ, his atonement, resurrection, and glorification, constituted the grand subjects of his preaching. He was truly a scribe well-instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom.

This wise master-builder did not exalt Christ on the ruins of the Moral Law, nor raise human works to an equality with the righteousness of Christ. He did not magnify the sovereignty of God to the disparagement of his holiness, nor lower the claims of justice to enhance the charms of mercy. In the beautiful harmony of truth, he so revealed the divine perfections, that with David we are led to exclaim, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Having receive the Gospel by the revelation of Jesus Christ, he saw and proclaimed the glory of the cross, whereby God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly; faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"If we desire that our faith may be kept from faltering, we ought to be always upon our guard against every opinion, the drift of which is to lower the Author and Finisher of it; because everything that tends to lessen our Redeemer's glory, and to detract from what he has done for us, weakens our faith, unhinges our hope, and destroys our confidence. Therefore, as we should avoid those as the spreaders of the most dangerous plague, who would reduce our Savior to the lots rank of a creature; so we shall be afraid of partaking of the infectious leaven of such as would bring us off from looking for our salvation from Christ alone, and would persuade us to expect that from our faith, repentance, sincerity, and obedience; which was procured for us by his agonies, toils, and death. And, at the same time that we are exalting Christ to the utmost, we should avoid the extreme of those, who, under pretense of magnifying our Savior's infinite merit, pretend to a liberty to act as they will; because whatever swelling words we may speak, we do not sincerely trust in the infinite merit of the sacrifice of our Lord offered up as our Priest, unless we manifest the sincerity of our faith, by submitting to him as a King.

"It shows that people have no desire to be saved by Christ, when they take pains to degrade him. None can better judge of his worth, than those, who having washed their robes in his blood, and by his aid, passed through great tribulation, are brought to behold his face in righteousness. They suffer no diminishing thoughts concerning him to find the least harbor in their spotless breasts; but, in the company of angels and archangels, with the highest strains of rapture, praise and adore him.

"As long then, as Christians are traveling through the dark and gloomy valley of life, they should not be backward to ascribe the highest honors to him who was slain, and has redeemed them to God by his blood; which they will do without ceasing and weariness, when, passing out of time into eternity, they shall come to be forever with the Lord in the peaceful realms of light and immortality, where faith will be turned into sight, and hope will be swallowed up in enjoyment."

Blessed Jesus, O Light of the world, and the Glory of your Church, cause the bright beams of your Truth to shine into my heart. Open my understanding that I may understand the Scriptures. Reveal Yourself as my Savior, as the Lord my Righteousness, as my Great Atonement and Example. Wash me from all my sins through your precious blood. Fill me with faith and love, meekness and humility. Wean my affections from the world, and enable me to receive the truths of the Gospel in simplicity, to walk in the way of your precepts with sincerity, and to feed upon your promises with gratitude. Prepare me by Your Holy Spirit for the mansions of glory; and place me near your throne as a monument of mercy, there to praise You with saints and angels forever and ever.

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