

# JAMES DENNEY

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:  
THE SECOND EPISTLE  
TO THE CORINTHIANS

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**The Expositor's Bible: The**  
**Second Epistle to the Corinthians**

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The Expositor's Bible: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians:*

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# **James Denney**

## **The Expositor's Bible:**

### **The Second Epistle to the Corinthians**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Introduction, in the scientific sense, is not part of the expositor's task; but it is convenient, especially when introduction and exposition have important bearings on each other, that the expositor should indicate his opinion on the questions common to both departments. This is the purpose of the statement which follows.

(1) The starting-point for every inquiry into the relations between St. Paul and the Corinthians, so far as they concern us here, is to be found in the close connexion between the two Epistles to the Corinthians which we possess. This close connexion is not a hypothesis, of greater or less probability, like so much that figures in Introductions to the Second Epistle; it is a large and solid fact, which is worth more for our guidance than the most ingenious conjectural combination. Stress has been

justly laid on this by Holtzmann,<sup>1</sup> who illustrates the general fact by details. Thus 2 Cor. i. 8-10, ii. 12, 13, attach themselves immediately to the situation described in 1 Cor. xvi. 8, 9. Similarly in 2 Cor. i. 12 there seems to be a distinct echo of 1 Cor. ii. 4-14. More important is the unquestionable reference in 2 Cor. i. 13-17, 23, to 1 Cor. xvi. 5. From a comparison of these two passages it is plain that before Paul wrote either he had had an intention, of which the Corinthians were aware, to visit Corinth in a certain way. He was to leave Ephesus, sail straight across the sea to Corinth, go from Corinth to Macedonia, and then return, *viâ* Corinth, to Asia again. In other words, on this tour he was to visit Corinth twice. In the last chapter of the First Epistle, he announces a change of plan: he is *not* going to Corinth direct, but *viâ* Macedonia, and the Corinthians are only to see him once. He does not say, in the First Epistle, why he has changed his plan, but the announcement caused great dissatisfaction in Corinth. Some said he was a fickle creature; some said he was afraid to show face. This is the situation to which the Second Epistle directly addresses itself; the very first thing Paul does in it is to explain and justify the change of plan announced in the First. It was not fickleness, he says, nor cowardice, that made him change his mind, but the desire to spare the Corinthians and himself the pain which a visit paid at the moment would certainly inflict. The close connexion between our two Epistles, which on this point is unquestionable, may be further illustrated. Thus, not to point to

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<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung*, 2nd ed., p. 255 f.

general resemblances in feeling or temper, the correspondence is at least suggestive between ἀγνὸς ἐν τῷ πράγματι, 2 Cor. vii. 11 (cf. the use of πᾶγμα in 1 Thess. iv. 6), and τοιαύτη πορνεία in 1 Cor. v. 1; between ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ, 2 Cor. ii. 10, and ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Κ. ἡμῶν Ἰ. Χ., 1 Cor. v. 4; between the mention of Satan in 2 Cor. ii. 11 and 1 Cor. v. 5; between πενθεῖν in 2 Cor. xii. 21 and 1 Cor. v. 2; between τοιοῦτος and τις in 2 Cor. ii. 6 f., 2 Cor. ii. 5, and the same words in 1 Cor. v. 5 and 1 Cor. v. 1. If all these are carefully examined and compared, I think it becomes extremely difficult to believe that in 2 Cor. ii. 5 ff. and in 2 Cor. vii. 8 ff. the Apostle is dealing with anything else than the case of the sinner treated in 1 Cor. v. The coincidences in detail would be very striking under any circumstances; but in combination with the fact that the two Epistles, as has just been shown by the explanation of the change of purpose about the journey, are in the closest connexion with each other, they seem to me to come as nearly as possible to demonstration.

(2) If this view is accepted, it is natural and justifiable to explain the Second Epistle as far as possible out of the First. Thus the letter to which St. Paul refers in 2 Cor. ii. 4 and in 2 Cor. vii. 8, 12, will be our First Epistle to the Corinthians; the persons referred to in 2 Cor. vii. 12 as "he who did the wrong" and "he to whom the wrong was done" will be the son and the father in 1 Cor. v. 1. There are, indeed, many who think that it is absurd to speak of the First Epistle to the Corinthians as written "out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with

many tears"; and who cannot imagine that Paul would speak of a great sin and crime, like that of the incestuous person, in such language as he employs in 2 Cor. ii. 5 ff. and 2 Cor. vii. 12. Such language, they argue, suits far better the case of a personal injury, an insult or outrage of which Paul – either in person or in one of his deputies – had been the victim at Corinth. Hence they argue for an intermediate visit of a very painful character, and for an intermediate letter, now lost, dealing with this painful incident. Paul, we are to suppose, visited Corinth on the business of 1 Cor. v. (among other things), and there suffered a great humiliation. He was defied by the guilty man and his friends, and had to leave the Church without effecting anything. Then he wrote the extremely severe letter to which ii. 4 refers – a letter which was carried by Titus, and which produced the change on which he congratulates himself in ii. 5 ff. and vii. 8 ff. It is obvious that this whole combination is hypothetical; and hence, though many have been attracted by it, it appears with an infinite variety of detail. It is obvious also that the grounds on which it rests are subjective; it is a question on which men will differ to the end of time, whether the language in 2 Cor. ii. 4 is an apt description of the mood in which Paul wrote (at least certain parts of) the First Epistle to the Corinthians, or whether the language in 2 Cor. ii. 5 ff., vii. 8 ff. is becoming language in which to close proceedings like those opened in 1 Cor. v. If many have believed that it is not, many, on the other hand, have no difficulty in believing that it is; and those who take the negative not only fail

to explain the series of verbal correspondences detailed above, but dissolve the connexion between our two Epistles altogether. Thus Godet allows more than a year, crowded with events, to come between them. In view of the palpable fact with which we started, I cannot but think this quite incredible: it is far easier to suppose that the proceedings about the incestuous person took a complexion which made Paul's language in the second and seventh chapters natural than to come to any confident conviction about this hypothetical visit and letter.

(3) But the visit, it may be said, at all events, is not hypothetical. It is distinctly alluded to in 2 Cor. ii. 1, xii. 14, xiii. 1. These passages are discussed in the exposition. The two last are certainly not decisive; there are good scholars who hold the same opinion of the first. Heinrici, for instance, maintains that Paul had only been once in Corinth when he wrote the Second Epistle; it was the *third* time he was *starting*, but once his intention had been frustrated or deferred, so that when he reached Corinth it would only be his second visit. A case can be stated for this, but in view of chap. ii. 1 and chap. xiii. 2, I do not see that it can be easily maintained. These passages practically compel us to assume that Paul had already visited Corinth a second time, and had had very painful experiences there. But the close connexion of our Epistles equally compels us to assume that this second visit belongs to an earlier date than our first canonical Epistle. We know nothing of it except that it was not pleasant, and that Paul was very willing to save both himself



and the Corinthians the repetition of such an experience. It is nothing against this view that the visit in question is not referred to in Acts or in the first letter. Hardly anything in chap. xi. 24 ff. is known to us from Acts, and probably we should never have known of this journey unless in explaining the change of purpose which the first letter announced it had occurred to Paul to say: "I did not wish to come when it could only vex you; I had enough of that before."

(4) As for the letter, which is supposed to be referred to in 2 Cor. ii. 4, it also has been relieved of its hypothetical character by being identified with chaps. x. 1-xiii. 10 of our present Second Epistle. In the absence of the faintest external indication that the Epistle ever existed in any other than its present form, it is perhaps superfluous to treat this seriously; but the comment of Godet seems to me sufficiently to dispose of it. The hypothetical letter in question – in which Godet himself believes – must have had two main objects: first, to accredit Titus, who is assumed to have carried it, as the representative of Paul; and, second, to insist on reparation for the assumed personal outrage of which Paul had been the victim on his recent visit. This second object, at an events, is indisputable. But chaps. x. 1-xiii. 10 have no reference whatever to either of these things, and are wholly taken up with what the Apostle means to do, when he comes to Corinth the third time; they refer not to this (imaginary) insolent person, but to the misbelieving and the immoral in general.

(5) Except in the points specified, the interpretation of the

Epistle is little affected by the questions raised in *Introduction*. Even in the points specified it is the historical reference, not the ethical import, which is affected. Whichever view we take of them, we get on the whole substantially the same impression of the spirit of Christ as it lives and works in the soul of the Apostle. It is part of the man's greatness, it is the seal of his inspiration, that in his hands the temporal becomes eternal, the incidental loses its purely incidental character, and has significance for all time. It is the expositor's task to deal with the spiritual rather than the historical side, and it will be sufficient here to indicate in outline what I conceive the series of Paul's relations with the Corinthians to have been.

(6) His first visit to Corinth was that which is recorded in Acts xviii.; according to the statement of ver. 11 it extended over a period of eighteen months. In all probability he had many communications with the Church, through deputies whom he commissioned, in the years during which he was absent; the form of the question in 2 Cor. xii. 17 (μή τινα ὧν ἀπέσταλκα πρὸς ὑμῶν κ.τ.λ.) implies as much. But it is only after his coming to Ephesus, in the course of his third missionary journey, that personal intercourse with Corinth can have been resumed. To this period I should refer the visit which we are bound to assume on the ground of 2 Cor. ii. 1, xiii. 2. What the occasion was, or what the circumstances, we cannot tell; all we know is that it was painful, and perhaps disappointing. Paul had used grave and threatening language on this occasion (2 Cor. xiii. 2), but he had

been obliged to tolerate some things which he would rather have seen otherwise. This visit was probably made toward the close of the three years' stay in Ephesus, and the letter referred to in 1 Cor. v. 9 – the one in which he warned the Corinthians not to associate with fornicators – would most likely be written on his return from it. In this letter he may very naturally have announced that purpose of visiting Corinth twice – once on his way to Macedonia, and again on his way back – to which reference has already been made. This letter, plainly, did not serve its purpose, and not long afterwards Paul received at Ephesus deputies from the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. xvi. 17), who apparently brought written instructions with them, in which Paul's judgment was sought more minutely on a variety of ethical questions (1 Cor. vii. 1). Before these deputies arrived, or at all events before Paul wrote the letter (our First Epistle) in which he addressed himself to the state of affairs in Corinth which their reports had disclosed, Timothy had left Ephesus on a journey of some interest. Paul meant Corinth to be his destination (1 Cor. iv. 17), but he had to go *viâ* Macedonia, and the Apostle was not certain that he would get so far (1 Cor. xvi. 10: "But *if* Timothy come," etc.). In point of fact, he does not seem to have gone farther than Macedonia; and Luke in Acts xix. 22 mentions Macedonia as the place to which he had been sent. That he got no farther is suggested also by the fact that Paul joins his name with his own in the salutation of the Second Epistle, which was written in Macedonia, but never hints that he owed to *him* any information whatever on the state

of the Corinthian Church. All that he knew of this, and of the effect of his first letter, he learned from Titus (2 Cor. ii. 13, vii. 13 f.). But how did Titus happen to be in Corinth representing Paul? By far the happiest suggestion here is that which makes Titus and the brother of 2 Cor. xii. 18 the same as "the brethren" of 1 Cor. xvi. 12, whose return from Corinth Paul expected in company of Timothy. Timothy, as we have seen, did not get so far. Paul's departure from Ephesus was apparently hastened by a great peril; his anxiety, too, to hear the effect produced by that letter which had cost him so much – our First Epistle – was very great; he pressed on, past Troas, where a fair field of labour waited for workers, and finally encountered Titus in Macedonia, and heard his report.

(7) This is the point at which the Second Epistle to the Corinthians begins. It falls of itself into three clearly marked divisions. The first extends over chaps. i. – vii. In this the Apostle makes his peace, so to speak, with the Corinthians, and does everything in his power to remove any feeling of "soreness" which might linger in their minds over his rigorous treatment of one particular offender. But embedded in this there is a magnificent vindication of the spiritual apostolic ministry, especially in contrast with that of the legalists, and an appeal for love and confidence such as he had always bestowed on the Church. Chaps. viii. and ix. form the second part, and are devoted to the collection which was being made in the Gentile Churches for poor Christians in Jerusalem. The third part

consists of chaps. x. to xiii. In this Paul confronts the disorders which still assert themselves in the Church; the pretensions of certain Judaists, "superlative apostles" as he calls them, who were assailing his apostolic vocation and subverting his gospel; and the immoral licence of others, presumably once pagans, who used liberty for a cloak to the flesh. He writes of both with unsparing severity, yet he does not wish to be severe. He parts from the Church with words of unaffected love, and includes them all in his benediction.

# I

## *SUFFERING AND CONSOLATION*

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in the whole of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ. But whether we be afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or whether we be comforted, it is for your comfort, which worketh in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: and our hope for you is stedfast; knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so also are ye of the comfort." – 2 Cor. i. 1-7 (R.V.).

The greeting with which St. Paul introduces his Epistles is much alike in them all, but it never becomes a mere formality, and ought not to pass unregarded as such. It describes, as a rule, the character in which he writes, and the character in which his

correspondents are addressed. Here he is an apostle of Jesus Christ, divinely commissioned; and he addresses a Christian community at Corinth, including in it, for the purposes of his letter, the scattered Christians to be found in the other quarters of Achaia. His letters are occasional, in the sense that some special incident or situation called them forth; but this occasional character does not lessen their value. He addresses himself to the incident or situation in the consciousness of his apostolic vocation; he writes to a Church constituted for permanence, or at least for such duration as this transitory world can have; and what we have in his Epistles is not a series of *obiter dicta*, the casual utterances of an irresponsible person; it is the mind of Christ authoritatively given upon the questions raised. When he includes any other person in the salutation – as in this place "Timothy our brother" – it is rather as a mark of courtesy, than as adding to the Epistle another authority besides his own. Timothy had helped to found the Church at Corinth; Paul had shown great anxiety about his reception by the Corinthians, when he started to visit that turbulent Church alone (1 Cor. xvi. 10 f.); and in this new letter he honours him in their eyes by uniting his name with his own in the superscription. The Apostle and his affectionate fellow-worker wish the Corinthians, as they wished all the Churches, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not necessary to expound afresh the meaning and connexion of these two New Testament ideas: grace is the first and last word of the Gospel; and peace – perfect spiritual soundness – is the

finished work of grace in the soul.

The Apostle's greeting is usually followed by a thanksgiving, in which he recalls the conversion of those to whom he is writing, or surveys their progress in the new life, and the improvement of their gifts, gratefully acknowledging God as the author of all. Thus in the First Epistle to the Corinthians he thanks God for the grace given to them in Christ Jesus, and especially for their Christian enrichment in all utterance and in all knowledge. So, too, but with deeper gratitude, he dwells on the virtues of the Thessalonians, remembering their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope. Here also there is a thanksgiving, but at the first glance of a totally different character. The Apostle blesses God, not for what He has done for the Corinthians, but for what He has done for himself. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation." This departure from the Apostle's usual custom is probably not so selfish as it looks. When his mind travelled down from Philippi to Corinth, it rested on the spiritual aspects of the Church there with anything but unrelieved satisfaction. There was much for which he could not possibly be thankful; and just as the momentary apostasy of the Galatians led to his omitting the thanksgiving altogether, so the unsettled mood in which he wrote to the Corinthians gave it this peculiar turn. Nevertheless, when he thanked God for comforting him in all his afflictions, he thanked Him on their behalf. It was they who were eventually to have



the profit both of his sorrows and his consolations. Probably, too, there is something here which is meant to appeal, even to those who disliked him in Corinth. There had been a good deal of friction between the Apostle and some who had once owned him as their father in Christ; they were blaming him, at this very moment, for not coming to visit them; and in this thanksgiving, which dilates on the afflictions he has endured, and on the divine consolation he has experienced in them, there is a tacit appeal to the sympathy even of hostile spirits. Do not, he seems to say, deal ungenerously with one who has passed through such terrible experiences, and lays the fruit of them at your feet. Chrysostom presses this view, as if St. Paul had written his thanksgiving in the character of a subtle diplomatist: to judge by one's feeling, it is true enough to deserve mention.<sup>2</sup>

The subject of the thanksgiving is the Apostle's sufferings, and his experience of God's mercies under them. He expressly calls them the sufferings of Christ. These sufferings, he says, abound toward us. Christ was the greatest of sufferers: the flood of pain and sorrow went over His head; all its waves and billows broke upon Him. The Apostle was caught and overwhelmed

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<sup>2</sup> The same view is strongly held by Schmiedel. He infers from chap. vi. 9 that Paul's sufferings had been interpreted at Corinth as a divine chastisement; in opposition to this the Apostle shows that they are divinely intended to profit the Corinthians. Hence the opening of the letter is not a simple outpouring of his heart, but is delicately calculated to set aside a reproach without naming it. The same purpose rules in the assumption that the Corinthians will intercede and give thanks on his behalf; it takes for granted their reconciliation to him.

by the same stream; the waters came into his soul. That is the meaning of τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ περισσεύει εἰς ἡμᾶς. In abundant measure the disciple was initiated into his Master's stern experience; he learned, what he prayed to learn, the fellowship of His sufferings. The boldness of the language in which a mortal man calls his own afflictions the sufferings of Christ is far from unexampled in the New Testament. It is repeated by St. Paul in Col. i. 24: "I now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church." It is varied in Heb. xiii. 13, where the sacred writer exhorts us to go out to Jesus, without the camp, bearing *His* reproach. It is anticipated and justified by the words of the Lord Himself: "Ye shall indeed drink of My cup; and with the baptism with which I am baptised shall ye be baptised withal." One lot, and that a cross, awaits all the children of God in this world, from the Only-begotten who came from the bosom of the Father, to the latest-born among His brethren. But let us beware of the hasty assertion that, because the Christian's sufferings can thus be described as of a piece with Christ's, the key to the mystery of Gethsemane and Calvary is to be found in the self-consciousness of martyrs and confessors. The very man who speaks of filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for the Church's sake, and who says that the sufferings of Christ came on him in their fulness, would have been the first to protest against such an idea. "Was Paul crucified for you?"

Christ suffered alone; there is, in spite of our fellowship with His sufferings, a solitary, incommunicable greatness in His Cross, which the Apostle will expound in another place (chap. v.). Even when Christ's sufferings come upon us there is a difference. At the very lowest, as Vinet has it, we do from gratitude what he did from pure love. We suffer in His company, sustained by His comfort; He suffered un comforted and unsustained. We are afflicted, when it so happens, "under the auspices of the divine mercy"; He was afflicted that there might be mercy for us.

Few parts of Bible teaching are more recklessly applied than those about suffering and consolation. If all that men endured was of the character here described, if all their sufferings were sufferings of Christ, which came on them because they were walking in His steps and assailed by the forces which buffeted Him, consolation would be an easy task. The presence of God with the soul would make it almost unnecessary. The answer of a good conscience would take all the bitterness out of pain; and then, however it tortured, it could not poison the soul. The mere sense that our sufferings *are* the sufferings of Christ – that we are drinking of His cup – is itself a comfort and an inspiration beyond words. But much of our suffering, we know very well, is of a different character. It does not come on us because we are united to Christ, but because we are estranged from Him; it is the proof and the fruit, not of our righteousness, but of our guilt. It is our sin finding us out, and avenging itself upon us, and in no sense the suffering of Christ. Such suffering, no

doubt, has its use and its purpose. It is meant to drive the soul in upon itself, to compel it to reflection, to give it no rest till it awakes to penitence, to urge it through despair to God. Those who suffer thus will have cause to thank God afterwards if His discipline leads to their amendment, but they have no title to take to themselves the consolation prepared for those who are partners in the sufferings of Christ. Nor is the minister of Christ at liberty to apply a passage like this to any case of affliction which he encounters in his work. There are sufferings and sufferings; there is a divine intention in them all, if we could only discover it; but the divine intention and the divinely wrought result are only explained here for one particular kind – those sufferings, namely, which come upon men in virtue of their following Jesus Christ. What, then does the Apostle's experience enable him to say on this hard question?

(1) His sufferings have brought him a new revelation of God, which is expressed in the new name, "The Father of mercies and God of all comfort." The name is wonderful in its tenderness; we feel as we pronounce it that a new conception of what love can be has been imparted to the Apostle's soul. It is in the sufferings and sorrows of life that we discover what we possess in our human friends. Perhaps one abandons us in our extremity, and another betrays us; but most of us find ourselves unexpectedly and astonishingly rich. People of whom we have hardly ever had a kind thought show us kindness; the unsuspected, unmerited goodness which comes to our relief makes us ashamed. This is

the rule which is illustrated here by the example of God Himself. It is as if the Apostle said: "I never knew, till the sufferings of Christ abounded in me, how near God could come to man; I never knew how rich His mercies could be, how intimate His sympathy, how inspiring His comfort." This is an utterance well worth considering. The sufferings of men, and especially the sufferings of the innocent and the good, are often made the ground of hasty charges against God; nay, they are often turned into arguments for Atheism. But who are they who make such charges? Not the righteous sufferers, at least in New Testament times. The Apostle here is their representative and spokesman, and he assures us that God never was so much to him as when he was in the sorest straits. The divine love was so far from being doubtful to him that it shone out then in unanticipated brightness; the very heart of the Father was revealed – all mercy, all encouragement and comfort. If the martyrs have no doubts of their own, is it not very gratuitous for the spectators to become sceptics on their account? "The sufferings of Christ" in His people may be an insoluble problem to the disinterested onlooker, but they are no problem to the sufferers. What is a mystery, when viewed from without, a mystery in which God seems to be conspicuous by His absence, is, when viewed from within, a new and priceless revelation of God Himself. "The Father of mercies and God of all comfort" is making Himself known now as for want of opportunity He could not be known before.

Notice especially that the consolation is said to abound "through Christ." He is the mediator through whom it comes. To partake in His sufferings is to be united to *Him*; and to be united to Him is to partake in His *life*. The Apostle anticipates here a thought on which he enlarges in the fourth chapter: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." In our eagerness to emphasise the nearness and the sympathy of Jesus, it is to be feared that we do less than justice to the New Testament revelation of His glory. He does not suffer now. He is enthroned on high, far above all principality and power and might and dominion. The Spirit which brings His presence to our hearts is the Spirit of the Prince of Life; its function is not to be weak with our weakness, but to help our infirmity, and to strengthen us with all might in the inner man. The Christ who dwells in us through His Spirit is not the Man of Sorrows, wearing the crown of thorns; it is the King of kings and Lord of lords, making us partakers of His triumph. There is a weak tone in much of the religious literature which deals with suffering, utterly unlike that of the New Testament. It is a degradation of Christ to our level which it teaches, instead of an exaltation of man toward Christ's. But the last is the apostolic ideal: "More than conquerors through Him that loved us." The comfort of which St. Paul makes so much here is not necessarily deliverance from suffering for Christ's sake, still less exemption from it; it is the strength and courage and immortal hope which rise up, even in the midst of

suffering, in the heart in which the Lord of glory dwells. Through Him such comfort abounds; it wells up to match and more than match the rising tide of suffering.

(2) But Paul's sufferings have done more than give him a new knowledge of God; they have given him at the same time a new power to comfort others. He is bold enough to make this ministry of consolation the key to his recent experiences. "He comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." His sufferings and his consolation together had a purpose that went beyond himself. How significant that is for some perplexing aspects of man's life! We are selfish, and instinctively regard ourselves as the centre of all providences; we naturally seek to explain everything by its bearing on ourselves alone. But God has not made us for selfishness and isolation, and some mysteries would be cleared up if we had love enough to see the ties by which our life is indissolubly linked to others. This, however, is less definite than the Apostle's thought; what he tells us is that he has gained a new power at a great price. It is a power which almost every Christian man will covet; but how many are willing to pass through the fire to obtain it? We must ourselves have needed and have found comfort, before we know what it is; we must ourselves have learned the art of consoling in the school of suffering, before we can practise it for the benefit of others. The most painfully tried, the most proved in suffering, the souls

that are best acquainted with grief, provided their consolation has abounded through Christ, are specially called to this ministry. Their experience is their preparation for it. Nature is something, and age is something; but far more than nature and age is that discipline of God to which they have been submitted, that initiation into the sufferings of Christ which has made them acquainted with His consolations also, and has taught them to know the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Are they not among His best gifts to the Church, those whom He has qualified to console, by consoling them in the fire?

In the sixth verse the Apostle dwells on the interest of the Corinthians in his sufferings and his consolation. It is a practical illustration of the communion of the saints in Christ. "All that befalls *me*," says St. Paul, "has *your* interest in view. If I am afflicted, it is in the interest of your comfort: when you look at me, and see how I bear myself in the sufferings of Christ, you will be encouraged to become imitators of me, even as I am of Him. If, again, I am comforted, this also is in the interest of *your* comfort; God enables me to impart to you what He has imparted to me; and the comfort in question is no impotent thing; it proves its power in this – that when you have received it, you endure with brave patience the same sufferings which we also suffer." This last is a favourite thought with the Apostle, and connects itself readily with the idea, which may or may not have a right to be expressed in the text, that all this is in furtherance of the salvation



of the Corinthians.<sup>3</sup> For if there is one note of the saved more certain than another, it is the brave patience with which they take upon them the sufferings of Christ. ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται (Matt. x. 22). All that helps men to endure to the end, helps them to salvation. All that tends to break the spirit and to sink men despondency, or hurry them into impatience or fear, leads in the opposite direction. The great service that a true comforter does is to put the strength and courage into us which enable us to take up our cross, however sharp and heavy, and to bear it to the last step and the last breath. No comfort is worth the name – none is taught of God – which has another efficacy than this. The saved are those whose souls rise to this description, and who recognise their spiritual kindred in such brave and patient sufferers as Paul.

The thanksgiving ends appropriately with a cheerful word about the Corinthians. "Our hope for you is steadfast; knowing that, as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so are ye also of the comfort." These two things go together; it is the appointed lot of the children of God to become acquainted with both. If the sufferings could come alone, if *they* could be assigned as the portion of the Church apart from the consolation, Paul could have

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<sup>3</sup> The text is incurably perplexed. The variations can be seen in any critical edition. The MS. authority does not justify any confident decision, and the happiest suggestion yet made seems to be that of Professor Warfield, who would omit altogether the words καὶ σωτηρίας (*and salvation*). The MSS. vary most in regard to these words, inserting, omitting, and transposing them. Hence they are very probably an old gloss, and their omission simplifies both the grammar and the sense.

no hope that the Corinthians would endure to the end; but as it is, he is not afraid. The force of his words is perhaps best felt by us, if instead of saying that the sufferings and the consolation are inseparable, we say that the consolation depends upon the sufferings. And what is the consolation? It is the presence of the exalted Saviour in the heart through His Spirit. It is a clear perception, and a firm hold, of the things which are unseen and eternal. It is a conviction of the divine love which cannot be shaken, and of its sovereignty and omnipotence in the Risen Christ. This infinite comfort is contingent upon our partaking of the sufferings of Christ. There is a point, the Apostle seems to say, at which the invisible world and its glories intersect this world in which we live, and become visible, real, and inspiring to men. It is the point at which we suffer with Christ's sufferings. At any other point the vision of this glory is unneeded, and therefore withheld. The worldly, the selfish, the cowardly; those who shrink from self-denial; those who evade pain; those who root themselves in the world that lies around us, and when they move at all move in the line of least resistance; those who have never carried Christ's Cross, – none of these can ever have the triumphant conviction of things unseen and eternal which throbs in every page of the New Testament. None of these can have what the Apostle elsewhere calls "eternal consolation." It is easy for unbelievers, and for Christians lapsing into unbelief, to mock this faith as faith in "the transcendent"; but would a single line of the New Testament have been written without it? When we weigh

what is here asserted about its connexion with the sufferings of Christ, could a graver charge be brought against any Church than that its faith in this "transcendent" languished or was extinct? Do not let us hearken to the sceptical insinuations which would rob us of all that has been revealed in Christ's resurrection; and do not let us imagine, on the other hand, that we can retain a living faith in this revelation if we decline to take up our cross. It was only when the sufferings of Christ abounded in him that Paul's consolation was abundant through Christ; it was only when he laid down his life for His sake that Stephen saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

## II

# *FAITH BORN OF DESPAIR*

"For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the answer of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that He will also still deliver us; ye also helping together on our behalf by your supplication; that, for the gift bestowed upon us by means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf.

"For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or even acknowledge, and I hope ye will acknowledge unto the end: as also ye did acknowledge us in part, that we are your glorying, even as ye also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." – 2 Cor. i. 8-14 (R.V.).

Paul seems to have felt that the thanksgiving with which he opens this letter to the Corinthians was so peculiar as to require explanation. It was not his way to burst upon his readers thus

with his private experiences either of joy or sorrow; and though he had good reason for what he did – in that abundance of the heart out of which the mouth speaks, in his desire to conciliate the good-will of the Corinthians for a much-tried man, and in his faith in the real communion of the saints – he instinctively stops here a moment to vindicate what he has done. He does not wish them to be ignorant of an experience which has been so much to him, and ought to have the liveliest interest for them.

Evidently they knew that he had been in trouble, but they had no sufficient idea of the extremity to which he had been reduced. We were weighed down, he writes, in excess, beyond our power; the trial that came upon us was one not measured to man's strength. We despaired even of life. Nay, we have had<sup>4</sup> the answer of death in ourselves. When we looked about us, when we faced our circumstances, and asked ourselves whether death or life was to be the end of this, we could only answer, Death. We were like men under sentence; it was only a question of a little sooner or a little later, when the fatal stroke should fall.

The Apostle, who has a divine gift for interpreting experience and reading its lessons, tells us why he and his friends had to pass such a terrible time. It was that they might trust, not in themselves, but in God who raises the dead. It is natural, he implies, for us to trust in ourselves. It is so natural, and so

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<sup>4</sup> Notice the perfect ἐσχήκαμεν. We *had* this experience, and in its fruit – a newer and deeper faith in God – we *have* it still. It is a permanent possession in this happy form. The same idea is expressed in the pft. ἠλπίκαμεν, ver. 10.

confirmed by the habits of a lifetime, that no ordinary difficulties or perplexities avail to break us of it. It takes all God can do to root up our self-confidence. He must reduce us to despair; He must bring us to such an extremity that the one voice we have in our hearts, the one voice that cries to us wherever we look round for help, is Death, death, death. It is out of this despair that the superhuman hope is born. It is out of this abject helplessness that the soul learns to look up with new trust to God.

It is a melancholy reflection upon human nature that we have, as the Apostle expresses it elsewhere, to be "shut up" to all the mercies of God. If we could evade them, notwithstanding their freeness and their worth, we would. How do most of us attain to any faith in Providence? Is it not by proving, through numberless experiments, that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps? Is it not by coming, again and again, to the limit of our resources, and being compelled to feel that unless there is a wisdom and a love at work on our behalf, immeasurably wiser and more benignant than our own, life is a moral chaos? How, above all, do we come to any faith in redemption? to any abiding trust in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of our souls? Is it not by this same way of despair? Is it not by the profound consciousness that in ourselves there is *no* answer to the question, How shall man be just with God? and that the answer must be sought in Him? Is it not by failure, by defeat, by deep disappointments, by ominous forebodings hardening into the awful certainty that we cannot with our own resources make ourselves good men –

is it not by experiences like these that we are led to the Cross? This principle has many other illustrations in human life, and every one of them is something to our discredit. They all mean that only desperation opens our eyes to God's love. We do not heartily own Him as the author of life and health, unless He has raised us from sickness after the doctor had given us up. We do not acknowledge His paternal guidance of our life, unless in some sudden peril, or some impending disaster, He provides an unexpected deliverance. We do not confess that salvation is of the Lord, till our very soul has been convinced that in it there dwells no good thing. Happy are those who are taught, even by despair, to set their hope in God; and who, when they learn this lesson once, learn it, like St. Paul, once for all (see [note](#) on ἐσχήκαμεν above). Faith and hope like those which burn through this Epistle were well worth purchasing, even at such a price; they were blessings so valuable that the love of God did not shrink from reducing Paul to despair that he might be compelled to grasp them. Let us believe when such trials come into our lives – when we are weighed down exceedingly, beyond our strength, and are in darkness without light, in a valley of the shadow of death with no outlet – that God is not dealing with us cruelly or at random, but shutting us up to an experience of His love which we have hitherto declined. "After two days will He revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him."

The Apostle describes the God on whom he learned to hope as "God who raises the dead." He himself had been as good as dead,

and his deliverance was as good as a resurrection. The phrase, however, seems to be the Apostle's equivalent for omnipotence: when he thinks of the utmost that God can do, he expresses it thus. Sometimes the application of it is merely physical (*e. g.*, Rom. iv. 17); sometimes it is spiritual as well. Thus in Eph. i. 19 ff. the possibilities of the Christian life are measured by this – that that power is at work in believers with which God wrought in Christ when *He raised Him from the dead*, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. Is not that power sufficient to do for the weakest and most desperate of men far more than all he needs? Yet it is his need, somehow, when brought home to him in despair, that opens his eyes to this omnipotent saving power.

The text of the words in which Paul tells of his deliverance can hardly be said to be quite certain, but the general meaning is plain. God delivered him from the awful death which was impending over him; he had his hope now firmly set on Him; he was sure that He would deliver him in the future also.<sup>5</sup> What the

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<sup>5</sup> The doubtful words here are καὶ ῥύεται in ver. 10 of the Received Text, from DC, E, F, G, K, etc. ("*and doth deliver*," in the Authorised Version). They are not found in A, D, Syr., Chrys., while the most authoritative MSS.,  $\aleph$ , B, C, P, have καὶ ῥύσεται ("*and will deliver*," of the Revised Version). Most editors take the last reading, as best attested; but on internal grounds two of the most recent and acute interpreters, Schmiedel and Heinrichi, prefer the Received Text. The present tense ("*doth deliver*") presupposes that the danger to which Paul had been exposed in some form or in some sense continued. If this were the case, of course it could not have been, as Hofmann supposes, the shipwreck in which the Apostle spent a night and a day in the deep. Otherwise this would be a plausible and tempting supposition.



danger had been, which had made so powerful an impression on this hardy soul, we cannot now tell. It must have been something which happened after the First Epistle was written, and therefore was not the fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, whatever that may have been (1 Cor. xv. 32). It may have been a serious bodily illness, which had brought him to death's door, and left him so weak, that still, at every step, he felt it was God's mercy that was holding him up. It may have been a plot to make away with him on the part of the many adversaries mentioned in the First Epistle (xvi. 9) – a plot which had failed, as it were, by a miracle, but the malignity of which still dogged his steps, and was only warded off by the constant presence of God. Both these suggestions require, and would satisfy, the reading, "who delivered us from so great a death, and *doth deliver*." If, however, we take the reading of the R.V. – "who delivered us from so great a death, and *will deliver*"; on whom we have set our hope that He will also still deliver us" – the existence of the danger, at the moment at which Paul writes, is not necessarily involved; and the danger itself may have been more of what we might call an accidental character. The imminent peril of drowning referred to in chap. xi. 25 would meet the case; and the confidence expressed by Paul with such emphatic reference to the future will not seem without motive when we consider that he had several sea voyages in prospect – as those from Corinth to Syria, from Syria to Rome, and probably from Rome to Spain. So Hofmann interprets the whole passage: but whether the interpretation be good or bad, it is elsewhere than

in its accidental circumstances that the interest of the transaction lies for the writer and for us. To Paul it was not merely a historical but a spiritual experience; not an incident without meaning, but a divinely ordered discipline; and it is thus that we must learn to read our own lives if the purpose of God is to be wrought out in them.

Notice in this connexion, in the eleventh verse, how simply Paul assumes the spiritual participation of the Corinthians in his fortunes. It is God indeed who delivers him, but the deliverance is wrought while they, as well as other Churches, co-operate in supplication on his behalf. In the strained relations existing between himself and the Corinthians, the assumption here made so graciously probably did them more than justice; if there were unsympathetic souls among them, they must have felt in it a delicate rebuke. What follows – "that, for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf" (R.V.) – simple and intelligible as it looks in English, is one of the passages which justify M. Sabatier's remark that Paul is difficult to understand and impossible to translate. The Revisers seem to have construed τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα διὰ πολλῶν together, as if it had been τὸ διὰ π. ε. ἡ. χάρισμα, the meaning being that the favour bestowed on Paul in his deliverance from this peril had been bestowed at the intercession of many. Others get virtually the same meaning by construing τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα with ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων: the inversion is supposed to emphasise these last words; and as it was, on

this view, prayer on the part of many persons that procured his deliverance, Paul is anxious that the deliverance itself should be acknowledged by the thanksgiving of many. It cannot be denied that both these renderings are grammatically violent, and it seems to me preferable to keep τὸ εἰς ἡμᾶς χάρισμα by itself, even though ἐκ πολλῶν προσώπων and διὰ πολλῶν should then reduplicate the same idea with only a slight variation. We should then render: "in order that, on the part of many persons, the favour shown to us may be gratefully acknowledged by many on our behalf." The pleonasm thus resulting strikes one rather as characteristic of St. Paul's mood in such passages, than as a thing open to objection.<sup>6</sup> But grammar apart, what really has to be emphasised here is again the communion of the saints. All the Churches pray for St. Paul – at least he takes it for granted that they do; and when he is rescued from danger, his own thanksgiving is multiplied a thousandfold by the thanksgivings of others on his behalf. This is the ideal of an evangelist's life; in all its incidents and emergencies, in all its perils and salvations, it ought to float in an atmosphere of prayer. Every interposition of God on the missionary's behalf is then recognised by him as a gift of grace (χάρισμα) – not, be it understood, a private favour, but a blessing and a power capacitating him for further service to the Church. Those who have lived through his straits and his

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<sup>6</sup> To render διὰ πολλῶν *prolixè*, copiously, is at least precarious; and to take πρόσωπα as "faces" ("that from many faces upturned in prayer to God"), though lexically admissible, seems on all other grounds out of place.

triumphs with him in their prayers know how true that is.

At this point (ver. 12) the key in which Paul writes begins to change. We are conscious of a slight discord the instant he speaks about the testimony of his conscience. Yet the transition is as unforced as any such transition can be. I may well take for granted, seems to be the thought in his mind, that you pray for me; I may well ask you to unite with me in thanks to God for my deliverance; for if there is one thing I am sure of, and proud of, it is that I have been a loyal minister of God in the world, and especially to you. Fleshly wisdom has not been my guide. I have used no worldly policy; I have sought no selfish ends. In a holiness and sincerity which God bestows, in an element of crystal transparency, I have led my apostolic life. The world has never convicted me of anything dark or underhand; and in all the world none know better than you, among whom I lived longer than elsewhere, working with my hands, and preaching the Gospel as freely as God offers it, that I have walked in the light as He is in the light.

This general defence, which is not without its note of defiance, becomes defined in ver. 13. Plainly charges of insincerity had been made against Paul, particularly affecting his correspondence, and it is to these he addresses himself. It is not easy to be outspoken and conciliatory in the same sentence, to show your indignation to the man who charges you with double-dealing, and at the same time take him to your heart; and the Apostle's effort to do all these things at once has

proved embarrassing to himself, and more than embarrassing to his interpreters. He begins, indeed, lucidly enough. "We write nothing else to you than what you read." He does not mean that he had no correspondence with members of the Church except in his public epistles; but that in these public epistles his meaning was obvious and on the surface. His style was not, as some had hinted, obscure, tortuous, elaborately ambiguous, full of loopholes; he wrote like a plain man to plain men; he said what he meant, and meant what he said. Then he qualifies this slightly. "We write nothing to you but what you read – or in point of fact acknowledge," even apart from our writing. This seems to me the simplest interpretation of the words ἡ καὶ ἐπιγινώσκετε; and the simplest construction is then that of Hofmann, who puts a colon at ἐπιγινώσκετε, and with ἐλπίζω δὲ begins what is virtually a separate sentence. "And I hope that to the end ye will acknowledge, as in fact you acknowledged us in part, that we are your boast, as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus." Other possibilities of punctuation and construction are so numerous that it would be endless to exhibit them; and in the long-run they do not much affect the sense. What the reader has to seize is that Paul has been accused of insincerity, especially in his correspondence, and that he indignantly denies the charge; that, in spite of such accusations, he can point to at least a partial recognition among the Corinthians of what he and his fellow-workers really are; and that he hopes their confidence in him will increase and continue to the end. Should this bright hope be

gratified, then in the day of the Lord Jesus it will be the boast of the Corinthians that they had the great Apostle Paul as their spiritual father, and the boast of the Apostle that the Corinthians were his spiritual children.

A passage like this – and there are many like it in St. Paul – has something in it humiliating. Is it not a disgrace to human nature that a man so open, so truthful, so brave, should be put to his defence on a charge of underhand dealing? Ought not somebody to have been deeply ashamed, for bringing this shame on the Apostle? Let us be very careful how we lend motives, especially to men whom we know to be better than ourselves. There is that in all our hearts which is hostile to them, and would not be grieved to see them degraded a little; and it is that, and nothing else, which supplies bad motives for their good actions, and puts an ambiguous face on their simplest behaviour. "Deceit," says Solomon, "is in the heart of them that imagine evil"; it is our own selves that we condemn most surely when we pass our bad sentence upon others.

The immediate result of imputing motives, and putting a sinister interpretation on actions, is that mutual confidence is destroyed; and mutual confidence is the very element and atmosphere in which any spiritual good can be done. Unless a minister and his congregation recognise each other as in the main what they profess to be, their relation is destitute of spiritual reality; it may be an infinite weariness, or an infinite torment; it can never be a comfort or a delight on one side or the other. What

would a family be, without the mutual confidence of husband and wife, of parents and children? What is a state worth, for any of the ideal ends for which a state exists, if those who represent it to the world have no instinctive sympathy with the general life, and if the collective conscience regards the leaders from a distance with dislike or distrust? And what is the pastoral relation worth, if, instead of mutual cordiality, openness, readiness to believe and to hope the best, instead of mutual intercession and thanksgiving, of mutual rejoicing in each other, there is suspicion, reserve, insinuation, coldness, a grudging recognition of what it is impossible to deny, a willingness to shake the head and to make mischief? What an experience of life we see, what a final appreciation of the best thing, in that utterance of St. John in extreme age: "Beloved, let us love one another." All that is good for us, all glory and joy, is summarily comprehended in that.

The last words of the text – "the day of the Lord Jesus" – recall a very similar passage in 1 Thess. ii. 19: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing – is it not even ye – before our Lord Jesus at His coming?" In both cases our minds are lifted to that great presence in which St. Paul habitually lived; and as we stand there our disagreements sink into their true proportions; our judgments of each other are seen in their true colours. No one will rejoice then that he has made evil out of good, that he has cunningly perverted simple actions, that he has discovered the infirmities of preachers, or set the saints at variance; the joy will be for those who have loved and trusted each other, who have

borne each other's faults and laboured for their healing, who have believed all things, hoped all things, endured all things, rather than be parted from each other by any failure of love. The mutual confidence of Christian ministers and Christian people will then, after all its trials, have its exceeding great reward.



### III

## *THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION*

"And in this confidence I was minded to come before unto you, that ye might have a second benefit; and by you to pass into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come unto you, and of you to be set forward on my journey unto Judæa. When I therefore was thus minded, did I show fickleness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay? But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in Him is yea. For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea: wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us." – 2 Cor. i. 15-20 (R.V.).

The emphatic words in the first sentence are "in this confidence." All the Apostle's plans for visiting Corinth, both in general and in their details, depended upon the maintenance of a good understanding between himself and the Church; and the very prominence here given to this condition is a tacit accusation of those whose conduct had destroyed his confidence. When he intimated his intention of visiting them, according to the programme of vv. 15 and 16, he had felt sure of a

friendly welcome, and of the cordial recognition of his apostolic authority; it was only when that assurance was taken away from him by news of what was being said and done at Corinth, that he had changed his plan. He had originally intended to go from Ephesus to Corinth, then from Corinth north into Macedonia, then back to Corinth again, and thence, with the assistance of the Corinthians, or their convoy for part of the way, to Jerusalem. Had this purpose been carried out, he would of course have been twice in Corinth, and it is to this that most scholars refer the words "a second benefit,"<sup>7</sup> or rather "grace." This reference, indeed, is not quite certain; and it cannot be proved, though it is made more probable, by using *πρότερον* and *δεύτερον* to interpret each other. It remains possible that when Paul said, "I was minded to come before unto you, that ye might have a second benefit," he was thinking of his original visit as the first, and of this purposed one as the second, "grace." This reading of his words has commended itself to scholars like Calvin, Bengel, and Heinrici. Whichever of these interpretations be correct, the Apostle had abandoned his purpose of going from Ephesus to Macedonia *viâ* Corinth, and had intimated in the First Epistle (chap. xvi. 5) his intention of reaching Corinth *viâ* Macedonia. This change of purpose is not sufficient to explain what follows. Unless there had been at Corinth a great deal of bad feeling,

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<sup>7</sup> For *χάρις*, (benefit) *NC*, *B*, *L*, *P*, have *χαράν* (joy.) Though Westcott and Hort put this in the text, and *χάρις* in the margin, most scholars are agreed that *χάρις* is the Apostle's word, and *χαράν* a slip or a correction.

it would have passed without remark, as a thing which had no doubt good reasons, though the Corinthians were ignorant of them; at the very most, it would have called forth expressions of disappointment and regret. They would have been sorry that the benefit (χάρις), the token of Divine favour which was always bestowed when the Apostle came "in the fulness of the blessing of Christ," and "longing to impart some spiritual gift," had been delayed; but they would have acquiesced as in any other natural disappointment. But this was not what took place. They used the Apostle's change of purpose to assail his character. They charged him with "lightness," with worthless levity. They called him a weathercock, a Yes and No man, who said now one thing and now the opposite, who said both at once and with equal emphasis, who had his own interests in view in his fickleness, and whose word, to speak plainly, could never be depended upon.

The responsibility for the change of plan has already, in the emphatic ταύτη τῇ πεποιθήσει, been indirectly transferred to his accusers; but the Apostle stoops to answer them quite straightforwardly. His answer is indeed a challenge: "When I cherished that first wish to visit you, *was* I – dare you say I was – guilty of the levity with which you charge me? Or – to enlarge the question, and, seeing that my whole character is attacked, to bring my character as a whole into the discussion – the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be the yea yea and the nay nay?" Am I, he seems to say, in my character and conduct, like a shifty,

unprincipled politician – a man who has no convictions, or no conscience about his convictions – a man who is guided, not by any higher spirit dwelling in him, but solely by considerations of selfish interest? Do I say things out of mere compliment, not meaning them? When I make promises, or announce intentions, is it always with the tacit reservation that they may be cancelled if they turn out inconvenient? Do you suppose that I *purposely* represent myself [Pg 38] (ἵνα ἤ παρ' ἐμοί) as a man who affirms and denies, makes promises and breaks them, has Yes yes and No no dwelling side by side in his soul?<sup>8</sup> You know me far better than to suppose any such thing. All my communications with you have been inconsistent with such a view of my character. As God is faithful, our word to you is not Yes and No. It is not incoherent, or equivocal, or self-contradictory. It is entirely truthful and self-consistent.

In this eighteenth verse the Apostle's mind is reaching out already to what he is going to make his real defence, and ὁ λόγος ἡμῶν ("our word") therefore carries a double weight. It covers at once whatever he had said to them about the proposed journey, and whatever he had said in his evangelistic ministry at Corinth.

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<sup>8</sup> Mention may be made here of another interpretation of ver. 17, modifications of which recur from Chrysostom to Hofmann. In substance it is this: "The things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh (*i. e.*, with the stubborn consistency of a proud man, who disposes as well as proposes), that with *me* (ἐμοί emphatic: *me*, as if *I* were God, always to do what I would like to do) the Yes should be yes, and the No, no —*i. e.*, every promise inviolably kept?" This is grammatically quite good, but contextually impossible.

It is this latter sense of it that is continued in ver. 19: "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us, by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not Yes and No, but in him Yes has found place. For how many soever are the promises of God, in Him is the Yes." Let us notice first the argumentative force of this. Paul is engaged in vindicating his character, and especially in maintaining his truthfulness and sincerity. How does he do so here? His unspoken assumption is, that character is determined by the main interest of life; that the work to which a man gives his soul will react upon the soul, changing it into its own likeness. As the dyer's hand is subdued to the element it works in, so was the whole being of Paul – such is the argument – subdued to the element in which he wrought, conformed to it, impregnated by it. And what was that element? It was the Gospel concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ. Was there any dubiety about what that was? any equivocal mixture of Yes and No there? Far from it. Paul was so certain of what it was that he repeatedly and solemnly anathematised man or angel who should venture to qualify, let alone deny it. There is no mixture of Yes and No in Christ. As the Apostle says elsewhere (Rom. xv. 8), Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision "*in the interest of the truth of God, with a view to the confirmation of the promises.*" However many the promises might be, in Him a mighty affirmation, a mighty fulfilment, was given of every one. The ministry of the Gospel has this, then, as its very subject, its constant preoccupation, its highest glory – the absolute faithfulness of God. Who would venture to assert that

Paul, or that anybody,<sup>9</sup> could catch the trick of equivocation in such a service? Who does not see that such a service must needs create true men?

To this argument there is, for the natural man, a ready answer. It by no means follows, he will say, that because the Gospel is devoid of ambiguity or inconsistency, equivocation and insincerity must be unknown to its preachers. A man may proclaim the true Gospel and in his other dealings be far from a true man. Experience justifies this reply; and yet it does not invalidate Paul's argument. That argument is good for the case in which it is applied. It might be *repeated* by a hypocrite, but no hypocrite could ever have *invented* it. It bears, indeed, a striking because an unintentional testimony to the height at which Paul habitually lived, and to his unqualified identification of himself with his apostolic calling. If a man has ten interests in life, more or less divergent, he may have as many inconsistencies in his behaviour; but if he has said with St. Paul, "This one thing I do," and if the one thing which absorbs his very soul is an unceasing testimony to the truth and faithfulness of God, then it is utterly incredible that he should be a false and faithless man. The work

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<sup>9</sup> According to Schmiedel, in the words δι' ἡμῶν ... δι' ἐμοῦ καὶ Σιλουανοῦ καὶ Τιμοθέου we ought to discover an emphatic reference, by way of contrast, to Judaising opponents of Paul in Corinth. These are said to have brought *another* Jesus (xi. 4), who was *not* God's ἰδιος υἱὸς in Paul's sense (Rom. viii. 32), and in whom there *was* Yea and Nay – namely, the confirmation of the promises to the Jews or those who became Jews to receive them, and the refusal of the promises to the Gentiles as such. It needs a keen scent to discover this, and as the Corinthians read without a commentator it would probably be thrown away upon them.

which claims him for its own with this absolute authority will seal him with its own greatness, its own simplicity and truth. He will not use levity. The things which he purposes, he will not purpose according to the flesh. He will not be guided by considerations perpetually varying, except in the point of being all alike selfish. He will not be a Yes and No man, whom nobody can trust.

The argumentative force of the passage being admitted, its doctrinal import deserves attention. The Gospel – which is identified with God's Son, Jesus Christ – is here described as a mighty affirmation. It is not Yes and No, a message full of inconsistencies, or ambiguities, a proclamation the sense of which no one can ever be sure he has grasped. In it (ἐν αὐτῷ means "in Christ") the everlasting Yea has found place. The perfect tense (γέγονεν) means that this grand affirmation has come to us, and is with us, for good and all. What it was and continued to be in Paul's time, it is to this day. It is in this positive, definite, unmistakable character that the strength of the Gospel lies. What a man cannot know, cannot seize, cannot tell, he cannot preach. The refutation of popular errors, even in theology, is not gospel; the criticism of traditional theories, even about Scripture, is not gospel; the intellectual "economy," with which a clever man in a dubious position uses language about the Bible or its doctrines which to the simple means Yes, and to the subtle qualifies the Yes enormously, is not gospel. There is no strength in any of these things. Dealing in them does not make character simple, sincere, massive, Christian. When they stamp

themselves on the soul, the result is not one to which we could make the appeal which Paul makes here. If we have any gospel at all, it is because there are things which stand for us above all doubts, truths so sure that we cannot question them, so absolute that we cannot qualify them, so much our life that to tamper with them is to touch our very heart. Nobody has any right to preach who has not mighty affirmations to make concerning God's Son, Jesus Christ – affirmations in which there is no ambiguity, and which no questioning can reach.

In the Apostle's mind a particular turn is given to this thought by its connexion with the Old Testament. In Christ, he says, the Yes has been realised; for how many soever are the promises of God, in Him is the Yes. The mode of expression is rather peculiar, but the meaning is quite plain. Is there a single word of good, Paul asks, that God has ever spoken concerning man? Then that word is reaffirmed, it is confirmed, it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is no longer a word, but an actual gift to men, which they may take hold of and possess. Of course when Paul says "how many soever are the promises," he is thinking of the Old Testament. It was there the promises stood in God's name; and hence he tells us in this passage that Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament; in Him God has kept His word given to the fathers. All that the holy men of old were bidden to hope for, as the Spirit spoke through them in many parts and in many ways, is given to the world at last: he who has God's Son, Jesus Christ, has all God has promised, and all He can give.



There are two opposite ways of looking at the Old Testament with which this apostolic teaching is inconsistent, and which, by anticipation, it condemns.

There is the opinion of those who say that God's promises to His people in the Old Testament have not been fulfilled, and never will be. That is the opinion held by many among the modern Jews, who have renounced all that was most characteristic in the religion of their fathers, and attenuated it into the merest deistical film of a creed. It is the opinion also of many who study the Bible as a piece of literary antiquity, but get to no perception of the life which is in it, or of the organic connexion between the Old Testament and the New. What the Apostle says of his countrymen in his own time is true of both these classes – when they read the Scriptures, there is a veil upon their hearts. The Old Testament promises have been fulfilled, every one of them. Let a man be taught what they mean, not as dead letters in an ancient scroll, but as present words of the living God; and then let him look to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and see whether there is not in Him the mighty, the perpetual confirmation of them all. We smile sometimes at what seems the whimsical way in which the early Christians, who had not yet a New Testament, found Christ everywhere in the Old; but though it may be possible to err in detail in this pursuit, it is not possible to err on the whole. The Old Testament is gathered up, every living word of it, in Him; we are misunderstanding it if we take it otherwise.

The opinion just described is a species of rationalism. There is another opinion, which, while agreeing with the rationalistic one that many of God's promises in the Old Testament have not yet been fulfilled, believes that their fulfilment is still to be awaited. If one might do so without offence, I should call this a species of fanaticism. It is the error of those who take the Jewish nation as such to be the subject of prophecy, and hope for its restoration to Palestine, for a revived Jerusalem, a new Davidic monarchy, even a reign of Christ over such an earthly kingdom. All this, if we may take the Apostle's word for it, is beside the mark. Equally with rationalism it loses the spirit of God's word in the letter. The promises have been fulfilled already, and we are not to look for another fulfilment. Those who have seen Christ have seen all that God is going to do – and it is quite adequate – to make His word good. He who has welcomed Christ knows that not one good word of all that God has spoken has failed. God has never, by the promises of the Old Testament, or by the instincts of human nature, put a hope or a prayer into man's heart that is not answered and satisfied abundantly in His Son.

But leaving the reference to the Old Testament on one side, it is well worth while for us to consider the practical meaning of the truth, that *all* God's promises are Yea in Christ. God's promises are His declarations of what He is willing to do for men; and in the very nature of the case they are at once the inspiration and the limit of our prayers. We are encouraged to ask all that God promises, and we must stop there. Christ

Himself then is the measure of prayer to man; we can ask all that is in Him; we dare not ask anything that lies outside of Him. How the consideration of this should expand our prayers in some directions, and contract them in others! We can ask God to give us Christ's purity, Christ's simplicity, Christ's meekness and gentleness, Christ's faithfulness and obedience, Christ's victory over the world. Have we ever measured these things? Have we ever put them into our prayers with any glimmering consciousness of their dimensions, any sense of the vastness of our request? Nay, we can ask Christ's glory, His Resurrection Life of splendour and incorruption – the image of the heavenly. God has promised us all these things, and far more: but has He always promised what we ask? Can we fix our eyes on His Son, as He lived our life in this world, and remembering that this, so far as this world is concerned, is the measure of promise, ask without any qualification that our course here may be free from every trouble? Had Christ no sorrow? Did He never meet with ingratitude? Was He never misunderstood? Was He never hungry, thirsty, weary? If all God's promises are summed up in Him – if He is everything that God has to give – can we go boldly to the throne of grace, and pray to be exempted from what He had to bear, or to be richly provided with indulgences which He never knew? What if all unanswered prayers might be defined as prayers for things not included in the promises – prayers that we might get what Christ did not get, or be spared what He was not spared? The spirit of this passage, however, does not urge

so much the definiteness as the compass and the certainty of the promises of God. They are so many that Paul could never enumerate them, and all of them are sure in Christ. And when our eyes are once opened on Him, does not He Himself become as it were inevitably the substance of our prayers? Is not our whole heart's desire, Oh that I might win *Him*! Oh that *He* might live in me, and make me what He is! Oh that *that* Man might arise in me, that the man I am may cease to be! Do we not feel that if God would give us His Son, all would be ours that we could take or He could give?

It is in this mood – with the consciousness, I mean, that in Jesus Christ the sure promises of God are inconceivably rich and good – that the Apostle adds: "wherefore also through Him is the Amen." It is not easy to put a prayer into words, whether of petition or thanksgiving, for men are not much in the habit of speaking to God; but it is easy to say Amen. That is the part of the Church when God's Son, Jesus Christ, is proclaimed, clothed in His Gospel. Apart from the Gospel, we do not know God, or what He will do, or will not do, for sinful men; but as we listen to the proclamation of His mercy and His faithfulness, as our eyes are opened to see in His Son all He has promised to do for us, nay, in a sense, all He has already done, our grateful hearts break forth in one grand responsive Amen! So let it be! we cry. Unless God had first prompted us by sending His Son, we could never have found it in our hearts to present such requests to Him; but through Christ we are enabled to present them, though it should

be at first with only a look at Him, and an appropriating Amen. It is the very nature of prayer, indeed, to be the answer to promise. Amen is all, at bottom, that God leaves for us to say.

The solemn acceptance of a mercy so great – an acceptance as joyful as it is solemn, since the Amen is one rising out of thankful hearts – redounds to the glory of God. This is the final cause of redemption, and however it may be lost sight of in theologies which make man their centre, it is always magnified in the New Testament. The Apostle rejoices that his ministry and that of his friends (δι' ἡμῶν) contributes to this glory; and the whole connexion of thought in the passage throws a light on a great Bible word. God's glory is identified here with the recognition and appropriation by men of His goodness and faithfulness in Jesus Christ. He is glorified when it dawns on human souls that He has spoken good concerning them beyond their utmost imaginings, and when that good is seen to be indubitably safe and sure in His Son. The Amen in which such souls welcome His mercy is the equivalent of the Old Testament word, "Salvation is of the Lord." It is expanded in an apostolic doxology: "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Him be glory for ever."

## IV

# *CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES*

"Now He that stablisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave *us* the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." – 2 Cor. i. 21, 22 (R.V.).

It is not easy to show the precise connexion between these words and those which immediately precede. Possibly it is emotional, rather than logical. The Apostle's heart swells as he contemplates in the Gospel the goodness and faithfulness of God; and though his argument is complete when he has exhibited the Gospel in that light, his mind dwells upon it involuntarily, past the mere point of proof; he lingers over the wonderful experience which Christians have of the rich and sure mercies. Those who try to make out a more precise sequence of thought than this are not very successful. Of course it is apparent that the keynote of the passage is in harmony with that of the previous verses. The ideas of "stablishing," of "sealing," and of an "earnest," are all of one family; they are all, as it were, variations of the one mighty *affirmation* which has been made of God's promises in Christ. From this point of view they have an argumentative value. They suggest that God, in all sorts of ways, makes believers as sure of the Gospel, and as constant to it, as He has made it sure and certain to them; and thus they exclude more decisively than ever

the idea that the minister of the Gospel can be a man of Yes and No. But though this is true, it fails to do justice to the word on which the emphasis falls – namely, God. This, according to some interpreters, is done, if we suppose the whole passage to be, in the first instance, a disclaimer of any false inference which might be drawn from the words, "to the glory of God *by us*." "By us," Paul writes; for it was through the apostolic preaching that men were led to receive the Gospel, to look at God's promises, confirmed in Christ, with an appropriating Amen to His glory; but he hastens to add that it was God himself whose grace in its various workings was the beginning, middle, and end both of their faith and of their preaching. This seems to me rather artificial, and I do not think more than a connexion in sentiment, rather than in argument, can be insisted upon.

But setting this question aside, the interpretation of the two verses is of much interest. They contain some of the most peculiar and characteristic words of the New Testament – words to which, it is to be feared, many readers attach no very distinct idea. The simplest plan is to take the assertions one by one, as if God were the subject. Grammatically this is incorrect, for Θεός is certainly the predicate; but for the elucidation of the meaning this may be disregarded.

(1) First of all, then, God confirms us into Christ. "Us," of course, means St. Paul and the preachers whom he associates with himself, – Silas and Timothy. But when he adds "with you," he includes the Corinthians also, and all believers. He

does not claim for himself any steadfastness in Christ, or any trustworthiness as dependent upon it, which he would on principle refuse to others. God, who makes His promises sure to those who receive them, gives those who receive them a firm grasp of the promises. Christ is here, with all the wealth of grace in Him, indubitable, unmistakable; and what God has done on that side, He does on the other also. He confirms believers into Christ. He makes their attachment to Christ, their possession of Him, a thing indubitable and irreversible. Salvation, to use the words of St. John, is true *in Him and in them*; in them, so far as God's purpose and work go, as much as in Him. He who is confirmed into Christ is in principle as trustworthy, as absolutely to be depended upon, as Christ Himself. The same character of pure truth is common to them both. Christ's existence as the Saviour, in whom all God's promises are guaranteed, and Paul's existence as a saved man with a sure grasp on all these promises, are alike proofs that God is faithful; the truth of God stands behind them both. It is to this that the appeal of vv. 15-20 is virtually made; it is this in the long-run which is called in question when the trustworthiness of Paul is impeached.

All this, it may be said, is ideal; but in what sense is it so? Not in the sense that it is fanciful or unreal; but in the sense that the divine law of our life, and the divine action upon our life, are represented in it. It is our calling as Christian people to be steadfast in Christ. Such steadfastness God is ever seeking to impart, and in striving to attain to it we can always appeal to Him



for help. It is the opposite of instability; in a special sense it is the opposite of untrustworthiness. If we are letting God have His way with us in this respect, we are persons who can always be depended upon, and depended upon for conduct in keeping with the goodness and faithfulness of God, into which we have been confirmed by Him.

(2) From this general truth, with its application to all believers, the Apostle passes to another of more limited range. By including the Corinthians with himself in the first clause, he virtually excludes them in the second – "God anointed us." It is true that the New Testament speaks of an anointing which is common to all believers – "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One; ye all know" (1 John ii. 20): but here, on the contrary, something special is meant. This can only be the consecration of Paul, and of those for whom he speaks, to the apostolic or evangelistic ministry. It is worth noticing that in the New Testament the act of anointing is never ascribed to any one but God. The only unction which qualifies for service in the Christian dispensation, or which confers dignity in the Christian community, is the unction from on high. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power," and it is the participation in this great anointing which capacitates any one to work in the Gospel.<sup>10</sup> Paul undoubtedly claimed, in virtue of his divine call to apostleship, a peculiar authority in the Church; but we cannot define any peculiarity in his possession of the

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<sup>10</sup> Observe the play on the words in βεβαυῶν εἰς Χ ρ ι σ τ ὸ ν and Χ ρ ῖ σ α ς.

Spirit. The great gift which must be held in some sense by all Christians – "for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" – was in him intensified, or specialised, for the work he had to do. But it is one Spirit in him and in us, and that is why we do not find the exercise of his authority alien or galling. It is authority divorced from "unction" – authority without this divine qualification – against which the Christian spirit rebels. And though "unction" cannot be defined; though no material guarantee can be given or taken for the possession of the Spirit; though a merely historical succession is, so far as this spiritual competence and dignity are concerned, a mere irrelevance; though, as Vinet said, we think of unction rather when it is absent than when it is present, – still, the thing itself is recognisable enough. It bears witness to itself, as light does; it carries its own authority, its own dignity, with it; it is the *ultima ratio*, the last court of appeal, in the Christian community. It may be that Paul is preparing already, by this reference to his commission, for the bolder assertion of his authority at a later stage.

(3) These two actions of God, however – the establishing of believers in Christ, which goes on continually (βεβαιῶν), and the consecration of Paul to the apostleship, which was accomplished once for all (χρίσας) – go back to prior actions, in which, again, all believers have an interest. They have a common basis in the great deeds of grace in which the Christian life began. God, he says, is He who also sealed us, and gave the earnest of the Spirit

in our hearts.

"He also sealed us." It seems strange that so figurative a word should be used without a hint of explanation, and we must assume that it was so familiar in the Church that the right application could be taken for granted. The middle voice (σφραγισάμενος) makes it certain that the main idea is, "He marked us as His own." This is the sense in which the word is frequently used in the Book of Revelation: the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads, that they may be recognised as His. But what is the seal? Under the Old Testament, the mark which God set upon His people – the covenant sign by which they were identified as His – was circumcision. Under the New Testament, where everything carnal has passed away, and religious materialism is abolished, the sign is no longer in the body; we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. i. 13 f.). But the past tense ("He *sealed* us"), and its recurrence in Eph. i. 13 ("ye *were* sealed"), suggest a very definite reference of this word, and beyond doubt it alludes to baptism. In the New Testament, baptism and the giving of the Holy Spirit are regularly connected with each other. Christians are born of water and of the Spirit. "Repent," is the earliest preaching of the Gospel (Acts ii. 38), "and be baptised every one of you, ... and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In early Christian writers the use of the word "seal" (σφραγίς) as a technical term for baptism is practically universal; and when we combine this practice with the New Testament usage in question, the inference is inevitable. God puts His *seal* upon us, He *marks*

us as His own, when we are baptised.<sup>11</sup>

But the seal is not baptism as a ceremonial act. It is neither immersion nor sprinkling nor any other mode of lustration which marks us out as God's. The seal by which "the Lord knoweth them that are His" is His Spirit; it is the impress of His Spirit upon them. When that impress can be traced upon our souls, by Him, or by us, or by others, then we have the witness in ourselves; the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

But of all words "spirit" is the vaguest; and if we had nothing but the word itself to guide us, we should either lapse into superstitious ideas about the virtue of the sacrament, or into fanatical ideas about incommunicable inward experiences in which God marked us for His own. The New Testament provides us with a more excellent way than either; it gives the word "spirit" a rich but definite moral content; it compels us, if we say we have been sealed with the Spirit, and claimed by God as His, to exhibit

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<sup>11</sup> When we consider the New Testament use of this idea (cf. Rom. iv. 11; Rev. vii. 2 ff.; Eph. i. 13 f., and this passage), and remember that Paul and John can have had nothing to do with the Greek mysteries, it will be apparent that to adduce the ecclesiastical use of σφραγίς as a proof that the conceptions current in these mysteries had a powerful influence from the earliest times on the Christian conception of baptism is beside the mark. One of the earliest examples outside the New Testament is in the Shepherd of Hermas, *Simil.*, viii. 6: οἱ πιστεύσαντες καὶ εἰληφότες τὴν σφραγίδα καὶ θελοῦντες αὐτὴν καὶ μὴ τηρήσαντες ὑγιῇ. This figure of *breaking the seal*, by falling into sin and losing what baptism confers, is common. Sometimes it is varied: "Keep the flesh pure, καὶ τὴν σφραγίδα ἄσπιλον," in 2 Clem. viii. 6. This may be made to carry superstition, but there is nothing superstitious or unscriptural in it to begin with.

the distinguishing features of those who are His. "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 17). To be sealed with the Spirit is to bear, in however imperfect a degree, in however inconspicuous a style, the image of the heavenly man, the likeness of Jesus Christ. There are many passages in his Epistles in which St. Paul enlarges on the work of the Spirit in the soul; all the various dispositions which it creates, all the fruits of the Spirit, may be conceived as different parts of the impression made by the seal. We must think of these in detail, if we wish to give the word its meaning; we must think of them in contrast with the unspiritual nature, if we wish to give it any edge. Once, say, we walked in the lusts of the flesh: has Christ redeemed us, and set on our souls and our bodies the seal of His purity? Once we were hot and passionate, given to angry words and hasty, intemperate deeds: are we sealed now with the meekness and gentleness of Jesus? Once we were grasping and covetous, even to the verge of dishonesty; we could not let money pass us, and we could not part with it: have we been sealed with the liberality of Him who says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"? Once a wrong rankled in our hearts; the sun went down upon our wrath, not once or twice, but a thousand times, and found it as implacable as ever: is that deep brand of vindictiveness effaced now, and in its stead imprinted deep the Cross of Christ, where He loved us, and gave Himself for us, and prayed, "Father, forgive them"? Once our conversation was corrupt; it had a taint in it; it startled and betrayed the innocent; it was vile and foolish and unseemly: are these things of the past

now? and has Christ set upon our lips the seal of His own grace and truth, of His own purity and love, so that every word we speak is good, and brings blessing to those who hear us? These things, and such as these, are the seal of the Spirit. They are Christ in us. They are the stamp which God sets upon men when He exhibits them as His own.

The seal, however, has another use than that of marking and identifying property. It is a symbol of assurance. It is the answer to a challenge. It is in this sense that it is easiest to apply the figure to baptism. Baptism does not, indeed, carry with it the actual possession of all these spiritual features; it is not even, as an *opus operatum*, the implanting of them in the soul; but it is a divine pledge that they are within our reach; we can appeal to it as an assurance that God has come to us in His grace, has claimed us as His own, and is willing to conform us to the image of His Son. In this sense, it is legitimate and natural to call it God's seal upon His people.

(4) Side by side with "He sealed us," the Apostle writes, "He gave the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." After what has been said, it is obvious that this is another aspect of the same thing. We are sealed with the Spirit, and we get the earnest of the Spirit. In other words, the Spirit is viewed in two characters: first, as a seal; and then as an earnest. This last word has a very ancient history. It is found in the Book of Genesis (xxxviii. 18: עֶרְבֹון), and was carried, no doubt, by Phœnician traders, who had much occasion to use it, both to Greece and Italy. From the classical

peoples it has come more or less directly to us. It means properly a small sum of money paid to clench a bargain, or to ratify an engagement. Where there is an earnest, there is more to follow, and more of essentially the same kind – that is what it signifies. Let us apply this now to the expression of St. Paul, "the earnest of the Spirit." It means, we must see, that in the gift of this Spirit, in that measure in which we now possess it, God has not given all He has to give. On the contrary, He has come under an obligation to give more: what we have now is but "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 23). It is an indication and a pledge of what is yet to be, but bears no proportion to it. All we can say on the basis of this text is, that between the present and the future gift – between the earnest and that which it guarantees – there must be some kind of congruity, some affinity which makes the one a natural and not an arbitrary reason for believing in the other.

But the Corinthians were not limited to this text. They had St. Paul's general teaching in their minds to interpret it by; and if we wish to know what it meant even for them, we must fill out this vague idea with what the Apostle tells us elsewhere. Thus in the great text in Ephesians (i. 13 f.), so often referred to, he speaks of the Holy Spirit with which we were sealed as the earnest *of our inheritance*. God has an "inheritance" in store for us. His Spirit makes us sons; and if sons, then heirs; heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ. This connexion of the Spirit, sonship, and inheritance, is constant in St. Paul; it is one of his most characteristic combinations. What then *is* the inheritance

of which the Spirit is the earnest? That no one can tell. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him." But though we cannot tell more precisely, we can say that if the Spirit is the earnest of it, it must be in some sense a development of the Spirit; life in an order of being which matches the Spirit, and for which the Spirit qualifies. If we say it is "glory," then we must remember that only Christ in us (the seal of the Spirit) can be *the hope* of glory.

The application of this can be made very plain. Our whole life in this world looks to some future, however near or bounded it may be; and every power we perfect, every capacity we acquire, every disposition and spirit we foster, is an earnest of something in that future. Here is a man who gives himself to the mastery of a trade. He acquires all its skill, all its methods, all its resources. There is nothing any tradesman can do that he cannot do as well or better. What is that the earnest of? What does it ensure, and as it were put into his hand by anticipation? It is the earnest of constant employment, of good wages, of respect from fellow-workmen, perhaps of wealth. Here, again, is a man with the scientific spirit. He is keenly inquisitive about the facts and laws of the world in which we live. Everything is interesting to him – astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, history. What is this the earnest of? It is the earnest, probably, of scientific achievements of some kind, of intellectual toils and intellectual victories. This man will enter into the inheritance of science; he



will walk through the kingdoms of knowledge in the length of them and the breadth of them, and will claim them as his own. And so it is wherever we choose to take our illustrations. Every spirit that dwells in us, and is cultivated and cherished by us, is an *earnest*, because it fits and furnishes us for some particular thing. *God's* Spirit also is an earnest of an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, imperishable: can we assure ourselves that we have anything in our souls which promises, because it matches with, an inheritance like this? When we come to die, this will be a serious question. The faculties of accumulation, of mechanical skill, of scientific research, of trade on a great or a small scale, of agreeable social intercourse, of comfortable domestic life, may have been brought to perfection in us; but can we console ourselves with the thought that *these* have the earnest of immortality? Do they qualify us for, and by qualifying assure us of, the incorruptible kingdom? Or do we not see at once that a totally different equipment is needed to make men at home there, and that nothing can be the earnest of an eternal life of blessedness with God except that Holy Spirit with which He seals His own, and through which He makes them, even here, partakers of the divine nature?

We cannot study these words without becoming conscious of the immense enlargement which the Christian religion has brought to the human mind, of the vast expansion of hope which is due to the Gospel, and at the same time of the moral soundness and sobriety with which that hope is conceived. The promises of

God were first really apprehended in Jesus Christ; in Him as He lived and died and rose again from the dead, in Him especially as He lives in immortal glory, men first saw what God was able and willing to do for them, and they saw this in its true relations. They saw it under its moral and spiritual conditions. It was not a future unconnected with the present, or connected with it in an arbitrary or incalculable way. It was a future which had its earnest in the present, a guarantee not alien to it, but akin – the Spirit of Christ implanted in the heart, the likeness of Christ sealed upon the nature. The glorious inheritance was the inheritance, not of strangers, but of sons; and it still becomes sure as the Spirit of sonship is received, and fades into incredibility when that Spirit is extinguished or depressed. If we could live in the Spirit with the completeness of Christ, or even of St. Paul, we should feel that we really had an earnest of immortality; the glory of heaven would be as certain to us as the faithfulness of God to His promise.

# V

## *A PASTOR'S HEART*

"But I call God for a witness upon my soul, that to spare you I forbore to come unto Corinth. Not that we have lordship over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. But I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow. For if I make you sorry, who then is he that maketh me glad, but he that is made sorry by me? And I wrote this very thing, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy* of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." – 2 Cor. i. 23-ii. 4 (R.V.).

When Paul came to the end of the paragraph in which he defends himself from the charge of levity and untrustworthiness by appealing to the nature of the Gospel which he preached, he seems to have felt that it was hardly sufficient for his purpose. It might be perfectly true that the Gospel was one mighty affirmation, with no dubiety or inconsistency about it; it might be as true that it was a supreme testimony to the faithfulness of God; but bad men, or suspicious men, would not admit that its character covered his. Their own insincerities would keep them

from understanding its power to change its loyal ministers into its own likeness, and to stamp them with its own simplicity and truth. The mere invention of the argument in vv. 18-20 is of itself the highest possible testimony to the ideal height at which the Apostle lived; no man conscious of duplicity could ever have had it occur to him. But it had the defect of being too good for his purpose; the foolish and the false could see a triumphant reply to it; and he leaves it for a solemn asseveration of the reason which actually kept him from carrying out his first intention. "I call God to witness against my soul, that sparing you I forbore to come<sup>12</sup> to Corinth." The soul is the seat of life; he stakes his life, as it were, in God's sight, upon the truth of his words. It was not consideration for himself, in any selfish spirit, but consideration for them, which explained his change of purpose. If he had carried out his intention, and gone to Corinth, he would have had to do so, as he says in 1 Cor. iv. 21, with a rod, and this would not have been pleasant either for him or for them.

This is very plain – plain even to the dullest; the Apostle has no sooner set it down than he feels it is too plain. "To spare us," he hears the Corinthians say to themselves as they read: "who is he that he should take this tone in speaking to us?" And so he hastens to anticipate and deprecate their touchy criticism: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are helpers of your joy; as

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<sup>12</sup> The R.V. "forbare to come" has the same vagueness as οὐκέτι ἦλθον, which may mean (1) "I came not as yet" – so A.V.; or (2) "I came not again"; or (3) "I came no more."

far as faith is concerned, your position, of course, is secure."

This is a very interesting aside; the digressions in St. Paul, as in Plato, are sometimes more attractive than the arguments. It shows us, for one thing, the freedom of the Christian faith. Those who have received the Gospel have all the responsibilities of mature men; they have come to their majority as spiritual beings; they are not, in their character and standing as Christians, subject to arbitrary and irresponsible interference on the part of others. Paul himself was the great preacher of this spiritual emancipation: he gloried in the liberty with which Christ made men free. For him the days of bondage were over; there was no subjection for the Christian to any custom or tradition of men, no enslavement of his conscience to the judgment or the will of others, no coercion of the spirit except by itself. He had great confidence in this Gospel and in its power to produce generous and beautiful characters. That it was capable of perversion also he knew very well. It was open to the infusion of self-will; in the intoxication of freedom from arbitrary and unspiritual restraint, men might forget that the believer was bound to be a law to himself, that he was free, not in lawless self-will, but only in the Lord. Nevertheless, the principle of freedom was too sacred to be tampered with; it was necessary both for the education of the conscience and for the enrichment of spiritual life with the most various and independent types of goodness; and the Apostle took all the risks, and all the inconveniences even, rather than limit it in the least.

This passage shows us one of the inconveniences. The newly enfranchised are mightily sensible of their freedom, and it is extremely difficult to tell them of their faults. At the very mention of authority all that is bad in them, as well as all that is good, is on the alert; and spiritual independence and the liberty of the Christian people have been represented and defended again and again, not only by an awful sense of responsibility to Christ, which lifts the lowliest lives into supreme greatness, but by pride, bigotry, moral insolence, and every bad passion. What is to be done in such cases as these, where liberty has forgotten the law of Christ? It is certainly not to be denied in principle: Paul, even with the peculiar position of an apostle, and of the spiritual father of those to whom he writes (1 Cor. iv. 15), does not claim such an authority over their faith – that is, over the people themselves in their character of believers – as a master has over his slaves. Their position as Christians is secure; it is taken for granted by him as by them; and this being so, no arbitrary *ipse dixit* can settle anything in dispute between them; he can issue no orders to the Church such as the Roman Emperor could issue to his soldiers. He may appeal to them on spiritual grounds; he may enlighten their consciences by interpreting to them the law of Christ; he may try to reach them by praise or blame; but simple compulsion is not one of his resources. If St. Paul says this, occupying as he does a position which contains in itself a natural authority which most ministers can never have, ought not all official persons and classes in the Church to beware of the claims they make for

themselves? A clerical hierarchy, such as has been developed and perfected in the Church of Rome, does lord it over faith; it *legislates* for the laity, both in faith and practice, without their co-operation, or even their consent; it keeps the *cætus fidelium*, the mass of believing men, which *is* the Church, in a perpetual minority. All this, in a so-called apostolic succession, is not only anti-apostolic, but anti-Christian. It is the confiscation of Christian freedom; the keeping of believers in leading-strings all their days, lest in their liberty they should go astray. In the Protestant Churches, on the other hand, the danger on the whole is of the opposite kind. We are too jealous of authority. We are too proud of our own competence. We are too unwilling, individually, to be taught and corrected. We resent, I will not say criticism, but the most serious and loving voice which speaks to us to disapprove. Now liberty, when it does not deepen the sense of responsibility to God and to the brotherhood – and it does not always do so – is an anarchic and disintegrating force. In all the Churches it exists, to some extent, in this degraded form; and it is this which makes Christian education difficult, and Church discipline often impossible. These are serious evils, and we can only overcome them if we cultivate the sense of responsibility at the same time that we maintain the principle of liberty, remembering that it is those only of whom he says, "Ye were bought with a price" (and are therefore Christ's slaves), to whom St. Paul also gives the charge: "Be not ye slaves of men."

This passage not only illustrates the freedom of Christian

faith, it presents us with an ideal of the Christian ministry. "We are not lords over your faith," says St. Paul, "but we are helpers of your joy." It is implied in this that joy is the very end and element of the Christian life, and that it is the minister's duty to be at war with all that restrains it, and to co-operate in all that leads to it. Here, one would say, is something in which all can agree: all human souls long for joy, however much they may differ about the spheres of law and liberty. But have not most Christian people, and most Christian congregations, something here to accuse themselves of? Do not many of us bear false witness against the Gospel on this very point? Who that came into most churches, and looked at the uninterested faces, and hearkened to the listless singing, would feel that the soul of the religion, so languidly honoured, was mere joy – joy unspeakable, if we trust the Apostles, and full of glory? It is ingratitude which makes us forget this. We begin to grow blind to the great things which lie at the basis of our faith; the love of God in Jesus Christ – that love in which He died for us upon the tree – begins to lose its newness and its wonder; we speak of it without apprehension and without feeling; it does not make our hearts burn within us any more; we have no joy in it. Yet we may be sure of this – that we can have no joy without it. And he is our best friend, the truest minister of God to us, who helps us to the place where the love of God is poured out in our hearts in its omnipotence, and we renew our joy in it. In doing so, it may be necessary for the minister to cause pain by the way. There is no joy, nor any possibility of it,



where evil is tolerated. There is no joy where sin has been taken under the patronage of those who call themselves by Christ's name. There is no joy where pride is in arms in the soul, and is reinforced by suspicion, by obstinacy, even by jealousy and hate, all waiting to dispute the authority of the preacher of repentance. When these evil spirits are overcome, and cast out, which may only be after a painful conflict, joy will have its opportunity again, – joy, whose right it is to reign in the Christian soul and the Christian community. Of all evangelistic forces, this joy is the most potent; and for that, above all other reasons, it should be cherished wherever Christian people wish to work the work of their Lord.

After this little digression on the freedom of the faith, and on joy as the element of the Christian life, Paul returns to his defence. "To spare you I forbore to come; for I made up my own mind on this, not to come to you a second time in sorrow." Why was he so determined about this? He explains in the second verse. It is because all his joy is bound up in the Corinthians, so that if he grieves them he has no one left to gladden him except those whom he has grieved – in other words, he has no joy at all. And he not only made up his mind definitely on this; he wrote also in exactly this sense: he did not wish, when he came, to have sorrow from those from whom he ought to have joy. In that desire to spare himself, as well as them, he counted on their sympathy; he was sure that his own joy was the joy of every one of them, and that they would appreciate his motives in not fulfilling a promise,

the fulfilment of which in the circumstances would only have brought grief both to them and him. The delay has given them time to put right what was amiss in their Church, and has ensured a joyful time to them all when his visit is actually accomplished.

There are some grammatical and historical difficulties here which claim attention. The most discussed is that of the first verse: what is the precise meaning of τὸ μὴ πάλιν ἐν λύπῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐλθεῖν? There is no doubt that this is the correct order of the words, and just as little, I think, that the natural meaning is that Paul had once visited Corinth in grief, and was resolved not to repeat such a visit. So the words are taken by Meyer, Hofmann, Schmiedel, and others. The visit in question cannot have been that on occasion of which the Church was founded; and as the connexion between this passage and the last chapter of the First Epistle is as close as can be conceived (see the [Introduction](#)), it cannot have fallen between the two: the only other supposition is, that it took place before the First Epistle was written. This is the opinion of Lightfoot, Meyer, and Weiss; and it is not fatal to it that no such visit is mentioned elsewhere —*e. g.*, in the book of Acts. Still, the interpretation is not essential; and if we can get over chap. xiii. 2, it is quite possible to agree with Heinrici that Paul had only been in Corinth once, and that what he means in ver. 1 here is: "I determined not to carry out my purpose of revisiting you, in sorrow."

There is a difficulty of another sort in ver. 2. One's first thought is to read καὶ τίς ὁ εὐφραίνων με κ.τ.λ., as a real

singular, with a reference, intelligible though indefinite, to the notorious but penitent sinner of Corinth. "I vex you, I grant it; but where does my joy come from – the joy without which I am resolved not to visit you – except from one who is vexed by me?" The bad man's repentance had made Paul glad, and there is a worthy considerateness in this indefinite way of designating him. This interpretation has commended itself to so sound a judge as Bengel, and though more recent scholars reject it with practical unanimity, it is difficult to be sure that it is wrong. The alternative is to generalise the τίς, and make the question mean: "If I vex you, where can I find joy? All my joy is in you, and to see you grieved leaves me absolutely joyless."

A third difficulty is the reference of ἔγραψα τοῦτο αὐτὸ in ver. 3. Language very similar is found in ver. 9 (εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ἔγραψα), and again in chap. vii. 8-12 (ἐλύπησα ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ). It is very natural to think here of our First Epistle. It served the purpose contemplated by the letter here described; it told of Paul's change of purpose; it warned the Corinthians to rectify what was amiss, and so to order their affairs that he might come, not with a rod, but in love and in the spirit of meekness; or, as he says here, not to have sorrow, but, what he was entitled to, joy from his visit. All that is alleged against this is that our First Epistle does not suit the description given of the writing in ver. 4: "out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears." But when those parts of the First Epistle are read, in which St. Paul is not answering questions

submitted to him by the Church, but writing out of his heart upon its spiritual condition, this will appear a dubious assertion. What a pain must have been at his heart, when such passionate words broke from him as these: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? – What is Apollos, and what is Paul? – With me it is a very little thing to be judged by you. – Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I begot you through the Gospel. – I will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power." Not to speak of the fifth and sixth chapters, words like these justify us in supposing that the First Epistle may be, and in all probability is, meant.<sup>13</sup>

Putting these details aside, as of mainly historical interest, let us look rather at the spirit of this passage. It reveals, more clearly perhaps than any passage in the New Testament, the essential qualification of the Christian minister – a heart pledged to his brethren in the love of Christ. That is the only possible basis of an authority which can plead its own and its Master's cause against the aberrations of spiritual liberty, and there is always both room and need for it in the Church. Certainly it is the hardest of all authorities to win, and the costliest to maintain, and therefore substitutes for it are innumerable. The poorest are those that are

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<sup>13</sup> To suppose the reference to be to an epistle carried by Titus and now lost, is to suppose what is incapable of proof or disproof. To take ἐγγραφα as "epistolary" aorist, and translate "I write," is grammatically, but only grammatically, possible. The supposed reference to chaps, x. i-xiii. 10 as a separate epistle is noticed in the Introduction.

merely official, where a minister appeals to his standing as a member of a separate order, and expects men to reverence that. If this was once possible in Christendom, if it is still possible where men secretly wish to shunt their spiritual responsibilities upon others, it is not possible where emancipation has been grasped either in an anarchic or in a Christian spirit. Let the great idea of liberty, and of all that is cognate with liberty, once dawn upon their souls, and men will never sink again to the recognition of anything as an authority that does not attest itself in a purely spiritual way. "Orders" will mean nothing to them but an arrogant unreality, which in the name of all that is free and Christian they are bound to condemn. It will be the same, too, with any authority which has merely an intellectual basis. A professional education, even in theology, gives no man authority to meddle with another in his character as a Christian. The University and the Divinity Schools can confer no competence here. Nothing that distinguishes a man from his fellows, nothing in virtue of which he takes a place of superiority apart: on the contrary, that love only which makes him entirely one with them in Jesus Christ, can ever entitle him to interpose. If their joy is his joy; if to grieve them, even for their good, is his grief; if the cloud and sunshine of their lives cast their darkness and their light immediately upon him; if he shrinks from the faintest approach to self-assertion, yet would sacrifice anything to perfect their joy in the Lord, – then he is in the true apostolical succession; and whatever authority may rightly be exercised, where the freedom

of the spirit is the law, may rightly be exercised by him. What is required of Christian workers in every degree – of ministers and teachers, of parents and friends, of all Christian people with the cause of Christ at heart – is a greater expenditure of soul on their work. Here is a whole paragraph of St. Paul, made up almost entirely of "grief" and "joy"; what depth of feeling lies behind it! If this is alien to us in our work for Christ, we need not wonder that our work does not tell.

And if this is true generally, it is especially true when the work we have to do is that of rebuking sin. There are few things which try men, and show what spirit they are of, more searchingly than this. We like to be on God's side, and to show our zeal for Him, and we are far too ready to put all our bad passions at His service. But these are a gift which He declines. Our wrath does not work His righteousness – a lesson that even good men, of a kind, are very slow to learn. To denounce sin, and to declaim about it, is the easiest and cheapest thing in the world: one could not do less where sin is concerned, unless he did nothing at all. Yet how common denunciation is. It seems almost to be taken for granted as the natural and praiseworthy mode of dealing with evil. People assail the faults of the community, or even of their brethren in the Church, with violence, with temper, with the tone, often, of injured innocence. They think that when they do so they are doing God service; but surely we should have learned by this time that nothing could be so unlike God, so unfaithful and preposterous as a testimony for Him. God Himself overcomes

evil with good; Christ vanquishes the sin of the world by taking the burden of it on Himself; and if we wish to have part in the same work, there is only the same method open to us. Depend upon it, we shall not make others weep for that for which we have not wept; we shall not make that touch the hearts of others which has not first touched our own. That is the law which God has established in the world; He submitted to it Himself in the person of His Son, and He requires us to submit to it. Paul was certainly a very fiery man; he could explode, or flame up, with far more effect than most people; yet it was not there that his great strength lay. It was in the passionate tenderness that checked that vehement temper, and made the once haughty spirit say what he says here: "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote unto you with many tears, not that you might be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly toward you." In words like these the very spirit speaks which is God's power to subdue and save the sinful.

It is worth dwelling upon this, because it is so fundamental, and yet so slowly learned. Even Christian ministers, who ought to know the mind of Christ, almost universally, at least in the beginning of their work, when they preach about evil, lapse into the scolding tone. It is of no use whatever in the pulpit, and of just as little in the Sunday-school class, in the home, or in any relation in which we seek to exercise moral authority. The one basis for that authority is love; and the characteristic of love in the presence of evil is not that it becomes angry, or insolent, or

disdainful, but that it takes the burden and the shame of the evil to itself. The hard, proud heart is impotent; the mere official is impotent, whether he call himself priest or pastor; all hope and help lie in those who have learned of the Lamb of God who bore the sin of the world. It is soul-travail like His, attesting love like His; that wins all the victories in which He can rejoice.



# VI

## *CHURCH DISCIPLINE*

"But if any hath caused sorrow, he hath caused sorrow, not to me, but in part (that I press not too heavily) to you all. Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was *inflicted* by the many; so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you to confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things. But to whom ye forgive anything, I *forgive* also: for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, for your sakes *have I forgiven it* in the person of Christ; that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices." — 2 Cor. ii. 5-11 (R.V.).

The foregoing paragraph of the Epistle has said a great deal about sorrow, the sorrow felt by St. Paul on the one hand, and the sorrow he was reluctant to cause the Corinthians on the other. In the passage before us reference is evidently made to the person who was ultimately responsible for all this trouble. If much in it is indefinite to us, and only leaves a doubtful impression, it was clear enough for those to whom it was originally addressed; and that very indefiniteness has its lesson. There are some things

to which it is sufficient, and more than sufficient, to allude; least said is best said. And even when plain-speaking has been indispensable, a stage arrives at which there is no more to be gained by it; if the subject *must* be referred to, the utmost generality of reference is best. Here the Apostle discusses the case of a person who had done something extremely bad; but with the sinner's repentance assured, it is both characteristic and worthy of him that neither here nor in chap. vii. does he mention the name either of offender or offence. It is perhaps too much to expect students of his writings, who wish to trace out in detail all the events of his life, and to give the utmost possible definiteness to all its situations, to be content with this obscurity; but students of his spirit – Christian people reading the Bible for practical profit – do not need to perplex themselves as to this penitent man's identity. He may have been the person mentioned in 1 Cor. v. who had married his stepmother; he may have been some one who had been guilty of a personal insult to the Apostle: the main point is that he was a sinner whom the discipline of the Church had saved.<sup>14</sup>

The Apostle had been expressing himself about his sorrow with great vehemence, and he is careful in his very first words to make it plain that the offence which had caused such sorrow was no personal matter. It concerned the Church as well as him. "If any one hath caused sorrow, he hath not caused sorrow to me, but in part to you all." To say more than this would be to exaggerate

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<sup>14</sup> On the identity of the person referred to, see [Introduction](#), p. 2 f.

(ἐπιβαρεῖν).<sup>15</sup> The Church, in point of fact, had not been moved either as universally or as profoundly as it should have been by the offence of this wicked man. The penalty imposed upon him, whatever it may have been, had not been imposed by a unanimous vote, but only by a majority; there were some who sympathised with him, and would have been less severe.<sup>16</sup> Still, it had brought conviction of his sin to the offender; he could not brazen it out against such consenting condemnation as there was; he was overwhelmed with penitential grief. This is why the Apostle says, "Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority." It has served the purpose of all disciplinary treatment; and having done so, must now be superseded by an opposite line of action. "Contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow." In St. Paul's sentence "such a one" comes last, with the emphasis of compassion upon it. He had been "such a one," to begin with, as it was a pain and a shame even to think about; he is "such

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<sup>15</sup> This meaning of ἐπιβαρεῖν, taken as intransitive, is rather vague, but I believe substantially correct. If the word is to be taken as virtually transitive, the object must be the partisans of the offender. It would "bear hardly" on them, to assume that *they* had been grieved by what Paul considered an offence. They had not been grieved. That is why he excludes them from πάντας ὑμᾶς by ἀπὸ μέρους.

<sup>16</sup> This suits with either idea as to the identity of the man. (1) If he were the incestuous person of 1 Cor. v., the minority would consist of those who abused the Christian idea of liberty, and were "puffed up" (1 Cor. v. 2) over this sin as an illustration of it. (2) If he were one who had personally insulted Paul, the minority would probably consist of the Judaistic opponents of the Apostle.

a one," now, as the angels in heaven are rejoicing over; "such a one" as the Apostle, having the spirit of Him who received sinners, regards with profoundest pity and yearning; "such a one" as the Church ought to meet with pardoning and restoring love, lest grief sink into despair, and the sinner cut himself off from hope. To prevent such a deplorable result, the Corinthians are by some formal action (κυρωσαι: cf. Gal. iii. 15) to forgive him, and receive him again as a brother; and in their forgiveness and welcome he is to find the pledge of the great love of God.

This whole passage is of interest from the light which it throws upon the discipline of the Church; or, to use less technical and more correct language, the Christian treatment of the erring.

It shows us, for one thing, the aim of all discipline: it is, in the last resort, the restoration of the fallen. The Church has, of course, an interest of its own to guard; it is bound to protest against all that is inconsistent with its character; it is bound to expel scandals. But the Church's protest, its condemnation, its excommunication even, are not ends in themselves; they are means to that which is really an end in itself, a priceless good which justifies every extreme of moral severity, the winning again of the sinner through repentance. The judgment of the Church is the instrument of God's love, and the moment it is accepted in the sinful soul it begins to work as a redemptive force. The humiliation it inflicts is that which God exalts; the sorrow, that which He comforts. But when a scandal comes to light in a Christian congregation – when one of its members is

discovered in a fault gross, palpable, and offensive – what is the significance of that movement of feeling which inevitably takes place? In how many has it the character of goodness and of severity, of condemnation and of compassion, of love and fear, of pity and shame, the only character that has any virtue in it to tell for the sinner's recovery? If you ask nine people out of ten what a scandal is, they will tell you it is something which makes talk; and the talk in nine cases out of ten will be malignant, affected, more interesting to the talkers than any story of virtue or piety – scandal itself, in short, far more truly than its theme. Does anybody imagine that gossip is one of the forces that waken conscience, and work for the redemption of our fallen brethren? If this is all we can do, in the name of all that is Christian let us keep silence. Every word spoken about a brother's sin, that is not prompted by a Christian conscience, that does not vibrate with the love of a Christian heart, is itself a sin against the mercy and the judgment of Christ.

We see here not only the end of Church discipline, but the force of which it disposes for the attainment of its end. That force is neither more nor less than the conscience of the Christian people who constitute the Church: discipline is, in principle, the reaction of that force against all immorality. In special cases, forms may be necessary for its exercise, and in the forms in which it is exercised variations may be found expedient, according to time, place, or degree of moral progress; the congregation as a body, or a representative committee of it, or its ordained

ministers, may be its most suitable executors; but that on which all alike have to depend for making their proceedings effective to any Christian intent is the vigour of Christian conscience, and the intensity of Christian love, in the community as a whole. Where these are wanting, or exist only in an insignificant degree, disciplinary proceedings are reduced to a mere form; they are legal, not evangelical; and to be legal in such matters is not only hypocritical, but insolent. Instead of rendering a real Christian service to offenders, which by awakening conscience will lead to penitence and restoration, discipline under such conditions is equally cruel and unjust.

It is plain also, from the nature of the force which it employs, that discipline is a function of the Church which is in incessant exercise, and is not called into action only on special occasions. To limit it to what are technically known as cases of discipline – the formal treatment of offenders by a Church court, or by any person or persons acting in an official character – is to ignore its real nature, and to give its exercise in these cases a significance to which it has no claim. The offences against the Christian standard which can be legally impeached even in Church courts are not one in ten thousand of those against which the Christian conscience ought energetically to protest; and it is the vigour with which the ceaseless reaction against evil in every shape is instinctively maintained which measures the effectiveness of all formal proceedings, and makes them means of grace to the guilty. The officials of a Church may deal in their official place

with offences against soberness, purity, or honesty; they are bound to deal with them, whether they like it or not; but their success will depend upon the completeness with which they, and those whom they represent, have renounced not only the vices which they are judging, but all that is out of keeping with the mind and spirit of Christ. The drunkard, the sensualist, the thief, know perfectly well that drunkenness, sensuality, and theft are not the only sins which mar the soul. They know that there are other vices, just as real if not so glaring, which are equally fatal to the life of Christ in man, and as completely disqualify men for acting in Christ's name. They are conscious that it is not a *bona fide* transaction when their sins are impeached by men whose consciences endure with equanimity the reign of meanness, duplicity, pride, hypocrisy, self-complacency. They are aware that God is not present where these are dominant, and that God's power to judge and save can never come through such channels. Hence the exercise of discipline in these legal forms is often resented, and often ineffective; and instead of complaining about what is obviously inevitable, the one thing at which all should aim who wish to protect the Church from scandals is to cultivate the common conscience, and bring it to such a degree of purity and vigour, that its spontaneous resentment of evil will enable the Church practically to dispense with legal forms. This Christian community at Corinth had a thousand faults; in many points we are tempted to find in it rather a warning than an example; but I think we may take this as a signal proof that it was really

sound at heart: its condemnation of this guilty man fell upon his conscience as the sentence of God, and brought him in tears to the feet of Christ. No legal proceedings could have done that: nothing could have done it but a real and passionate sympathy with the holiness and the love of Christ. Such sympathy is the one subduing, reconciling, redeeming power in our hands; and Paul might well rejoice, after all his affliction and anguish of heart, when he found it so unmistakably at work in Corinth. Not so much formal as instinctive, though not shrinking on occasion from formal proceedings; not malignant, yet closing itself inexorably against evil; not indulgent to badness, but with goodness like Christ's, waiting to be gracious, – this Christian virtue really holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and opens and shuts with the authority of Christ Himself. We need it in all our Churches to-day, as much as it was needed in Corinth; we need it that special acts of discipline may be effective; we need it still more that they may be unnecessary. Pray for it as for a gift that comprehends every other – the power to represent Christ, and work His work, in the recovery and restoration of the fallen.

In vv. 9-11, the same subject is continued, but with a slightly different aspect exposed. Paul had obviously taken the initiative in this matter, though the bulk of the Church, at his prompting, had acted in a right spirit. Their conduct was in harmony with his motive in writing to them,<sup>17</sup> which had really been to make proof of their obedience in all points. But he has already

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<sup>17</sup> This is the force of the καὶ before ἔγραψα in ver. 9.



disclaimed either the right or the wish to lord it over them in their liberty as believers; and here, again, he represents himself rather as following them in their treatment of the offender, than as pointing out the way. "Now to whom ye forgive anything, I also forgive" – so great is my confidence in you: "for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, for your sakes have I forgiven it in the presence of Christ." When he says "if I *have* forgiven anything," he does not mean that his forgiveness is dubious, or in suspense; what he does is to deprecate the thought that his forgiveness is the main thing, or that he had been the person principally offended. When he says "*for your sakes* have I forgiven it," the words are explained by what follows: to have refused his forgiveness in the circumstances would have been to perpetuate a state of matters which could only have injured the Church. When he adds that his forgiveness is bestowed "in the presence of Christ," he gives the assurance that it is no complaisance or formality, but a real acceptance of the offender to peace and friendship again.<sup>18</sup> And we should not overlook the fact that in this association of Christ, of the Corinthians, and of himself, in the work of forgiveness and restoration, Paul is really

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<sup>18</sup> In spite of the Vulgate, which has *in persona Christi*; of Luther, who gives *an Christi Statt*; and of the English versions, Authorised and Revised, which both give "in the person of Christ" (though the R.V. puts *presence* in the margin), there seems no room to doubt that "in the presence of Christ" is the true meaning. The same words in chap. iv, 6 are admittedly different in import; and in the only passages where ἐν προσώπῳ occurs with a genitive, it means "in presence of." These are Prov. viii. 30, where ἐν προσώπῳ αὐτοῦ is = וּפְנֵי; and Sir. xxxii. 6, where "Thou shalt not appear *before the Lord* empty" is ἐν π. Κυρίου.

encompassing a desponding soul with all the grace of earth and heaven. Surely he will not let his grief become despair, when all around him and above him there is a present and convincing witness that, though God is intolerant of sin, He is the refuge of the penitent.

The gracious and conciliatory tone of these verses seems to me worthy of special admiration; and I can only express my astonishment that to some they have appeared insincere, a vain attempt to cover a defeat with the semblance of victory, a surrender to the opposition at Corinth, the painfulness of which is ill-disguised by the pretence of agreement with them. The exposition just given renders the refutation of such a view unnecessary. We ought rather to regard with reverence and affection the man who knew how to combine, so strikingly, unflinching principle and the deepest tenderness and consideration for others; we ought to propose his modesty, his sensitiveness to the feelings even of opponents, his sympathy with those who had no sympathy with him, as examples for our imitation. Paul had been deeply moved by what had taken place at Corinth, possibly he had been deeply injured; but even so his personal interest is kept in the background; for the obedient loyalty which he wishes to prove is not so much *his* interest as theirs to whom he writes. He cares only for others. He cares for the poor soul who has forfeited his place in the community; he cares for the good name of the Church; he cares for the honour of Jesus Christ; and he exerts all his power with these interests

in view. If it needs rigour, he can be rigorous; if it needs passion, he can be passionate; if it needs consideration, graciousness, a conciliatory temper, a willingness to keep out of sight, he can be depended upon for all these virtues. If they were only affected, Paul would deserve the praise of a great diplomatist; but it is far easier to believe them real, and see in them the signs of a great minister of Christ.

The last verse puts the aim of his proceedings in another light: all this, he says, I do, "that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan: for we are not ignorant of his devices." The important words in the last clause are of the same root; it is as if Paul had said: "Satan is very knowing, and is always on the alert to get the better of us; but we are not without knowledge of his knowing ways." It was the Apostle's acquaintance with the wiles of the devil which made him eager to see the restoration of the penitent sinner duly carried through. This implies one or two practical truths, with which, by way of application, this exposition may close.

(1) A scandal in the Church gives the devil an opportunity. When one who has named the name of Jesus, and vowed loyal obedience to Him, falls into open sin, it is a chance offered to the enemy which he is not slow to improve. He uses it to discredit the very name of Christ: to turn that which ought to be to the world the symbol of the purest goodness into a synonym of hypocrisy. Christ has committed His honour, if not His character, to our keeping; and every lapse into vice gives Satan an advantage over

Him.

(2) The devil finds his gain in the incompetence of the Church to deal with evil in the Spirit of Christ. It is a fine thing for him if he can drive the convicted sinner to despair, and persuade him that there is no more forgiveness with God. It is a fine thing if he can prompt those who love little, because they know little of God's love, to show themselves rigid, implacable, irreconcilable, even to the penitent. If he can deform the likeness of Christ into a morose Pharisaism, what an incalculable gain it is! If the disciples of Him who received sinners look askance on those who have lapsed, and chill the hope of restoration with cold suspicion and reserve, there will be joy over it, not in heaven, but in hell. And not only this, but the opposite is a device of the devil, of which we ought not to be ignorant. There is hardly a sin that some one has not an interest in extenuating. Even the incestuous person in Corinth had his defenders: there were some who were puffed up, and gloried in what he had done as an assertion of Christian liberty. The devil takes advantage of the scandals that occur in the Church to bribe and debauch men's consciences; indulgent words are spoken, which are not the voice of Christ's awful mercy, but of a miserable self-pity; the strongest and holiest thing in the world, the redeeming love of God, is adulterated and even confounded with the weakest and basest thing, the bad man's immoral forgiveness of himself. And not to mention anything else under this head, could any one imagine what would please and suit the devil better than the absolutely

unfeeling but extremely interesting gossip which resounds over every exposure of sin?

(3) But, lastly, the devil finds his advantage in the dissensions of Christians. What an opportunity he would have had in Corinth, had strained relations continued between the Apostle and the Church! What opportunities he has everywhere, when tempers are on edge, and every movement means friction, and every proposal rouses suspicion! The last prayer Christ prayed for His Church was that they might all be one: to be one in Him is the final security against the devices of Satan. What a frightful commentary the history of the Church is on this prayer! What frightful illustrations it furnishes of the devil's gain out of the saints' quarrels! There are plenty of subjects, of course, even in Church life, on which we may naturally and legitimately differ; but we ought to know better than to let the differences enter into our souls. At bottom, we should be all one; it is giving ourselves away to the enemy, if we do not, at all costs, "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

## VII

# *CHRIST'S CAPTIVE*

"Now when I came to Troas for the Gospel of Christ, and when a door was opened unto me in the Lord, I had no relief for my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia. But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of His knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savour of Christ unto God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing; to the one a savour from death unto death; to the other a savour from life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as the many, corrupting the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ." – 2 Cor. ii. 12-17 (R.V.).

In this passage the Apostle returns from what is virtually, if not formally, a digression, to the narrative which begins in chap. i. 8 f., and is continued in i. 15 f. At the same time he makes a transition to a new subject, really though not very explicitly connected with what goes before – namely, his independent and divinely granted authority as an apostle. In the last verses of chap. ii., and in chap. iii. 1-4, this is treated generally, but with reference in particular to the success of his ministry. He then

goes on to contrast the older and the Christian dispensation, and the character of their respective ministries, and terminates the section with a noble statement of the spirit and principles with which he fulfilled his apostolic calling (chap. iv. 1-6).

Before leaving Ephesus, Paul had apparently made an appointment to meet Titus, on his return from Corinth, at Troas. He went thither himself to preach the Gospel, and found an excellent opportunity for doing so; but the non-arrival of his brother kept him in such a state of unrest<sup>19</sup> that he was unable to make that use of it which he would otherwise have done. This seems a singular confession, but there is no reason to suppose that it was made with a bad conscience. Paul was probably grieved that he had not the heart to go in at the door which had been opened to him in the Lord, but he did not feel guilty. It was not selfishness which made him turn away, but the anxiety of a true pastor about other souls which God had committed to his care. "I had no relief *for my spirit*," he says; and the spirit, in his language, even though it be a constituent of man's nature, is that in him which is akin to the divine, and receptive of it. That very element in the Apostle, in virtue of which he could act for God at all, was already preoccupied, and though the people were there, ready to be evangelised, it was beyond his power to evangelise them. His spirit was absorbed and possessed by hopes and fears

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<sup>19</sup> The perfect ἔσχηκα seems at first sight out of place, but it is more expressive than the aorist. It suggests the *continuous* expectation of relief which was always anew disappointed.

and prayers for the Corinthians; and as the human spirit, even when in contact with the divine, is finite, and only capable of so much and no more, he was obliged to let slip an occasion which he would otherwise have gladly seized. He probably felt with all missionaries that it is as important to secure as to win converts; and if the Corinthians were capable of reflection, they might reflect with shame on the loss which their sin had entailed on the people of Troas. The disorders of their wilful community had engrossed the Apostle's spirit, and robbed their fellow-men across the sea of an apostolic ministry. They could not but feel how genuine was the Apostle's love, when he had made such a sacrifice to it; but such a sacrifice ought never to have been required.

When Paul could bear the suspense no longer, he said good-bye to the people of Troas, crossed the Thracian Sea, and advanced into Macedonia to meet Titus. He did meet him, and heard from him a full report of the state of matters at Corinth (chap. vii. 5 ff.); but here he does not take time to say so. He breaks out into a jubilant thanksgiving, occasioned primarily no doubt by the joyful tidings he had just received, but widening characteristically, and instantaneously, to cover all his apostolic work. It is as though he felt God's goodness to him to be all of a piece, and could not be sensitive to it in any particular instance without having the consciousness rise within him that he lived and moved and had his being in it. "Now to God be thanks, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ."



The peculiar and difficult word in this thanksgiving is θριαμβεύοντι. The sense which first strikes one as suitable is that which is given in the Authorised Version: "God which always *causeth us to triumph*." Practically Paul had been engaged in a conflict with the Corinthians, and for a time it had seemed not improbable that he might be beaten; but God had caused him to triumph in Christ – that is, acting in Christ's interests, in matters in which Christ's name and honour were at stake, the victory (as always) had remained with him; and for this he thanks God. This interpretation is still maintained by so excellent a scholar as Schmiedel, and the use of θριαμβεύειν in this transitive sense is defended by the analogy of μαθητεύειν in Matt. xxviii. 19.

But appropriate as this interpretation is, there is one apparently fatal objection to it. There is no doubt that θριαμβεύειν is here used transitively, but we have not to guess, by analogy, what it must mean when so used; there are other examples which fix this unambiguously. One is found elsewhere in St. Paul himself (Col. ii. 15), where θριαμβεύσας αὐτοὺς indubitably means "having triumphed over them." In accordance with this, which is only one out of many instances,<sup>20</sup> the Revisers have displaced the old rendering here, and substituted for it, "Thanks be to God, which always *leadeth us in triumph*." The triumph here is God's, not the Apostle's; Paul is not the soldier who wins the battle, and shouts for victory, as he marches in the triumphal procession; he is the captive who is led in the

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<sup>20</sup> See Grimm's Lexicon s. v., or Lightfoot on Col. ii. 15.

Conqueror's train, and in whom men see the trophy of the Conqueror's power. When he says that God always leads him in triumph *in Christ*, the meaning is not perfectly obvious. He may intend to define, as it were, the area over which God's victory extends. In everything which is covered by the name and authority of Christ, God triumphantly asserts His power over the Apostle. Or, again, the words may signify that it is through Christ that God's victorious power is put forth. These two meanings, of course, are not inconsistent; and practically they coincide.

It cannot be denied, I think, if this is taken quite rigorously, that there is a certain air of irrelevance about it. It does not seem to be to the purpose of the passage to say that God always triumphs over Paul and those for whom He speaks, or even that He always leads them in triumph. It is this feeling, indeed, which mainly influences those who keep to the rendering of the Authorised Version, and regard Paul as the victor. But the meaning of θριαμβεύοντι is not really open to doubt, and the semblance of irrelevance disappears if we remember that we are dealing with a figure, and a figure which the Apostle himself does not press. Of course in an ordinary triumph, such as the triumph of Claudius over Caractacus, of which St. Paul may easily have heard, the captives had no share in the victory; it was not only a victory over them, but a victory against them. But when God wins a victory over man, and leads his captive in triumph, the captive too has an interest in what happens; it is the beginning of all triumphs, in any true sense, for him. If we apply

this to the case before us, we shall see that the true meaning is not irrelevant. Paul had once been the enemy of God in Christ; he had fought against Him in his own soul, and in the Church which he persecuted and wasted. The battle had been long and strong; but not far from Damascus it had terminated in a decisive victory for God. There the mighty man fell, and the weapons of his warfare perished. His pride, his self-righteousness, his sense of superiority to others and of competence to attain to the righteousness of God, collapsed for ever, and he rose from the earth to be the slave of Jesus Christ. That was the beginning of God's triumph over him; from that hour God led him in triumph in Christ. But it was the beginning also of all that made the Apostle's life itself a triumph, not a career of hopeless internal strife, such as it had been, but of unbroken Christian victory. This, indeed, is not involved *in the mere word* θριαμβεύοντι, but it is the real *thing* which was present to the Apostle's mind when he used the word. When we recognise this, we see that the charge of irrelevance does not really apply; while nothing could be more characteristic of the Apostle than to hide himself and his success in this way behind God's triumph over him and through him.

Further, the true meaning of the word, and the true connexion of ideas just explained, remind us that the only triumphs we can ever have, deserving the name, must begin with God's triumph over us. This is the one possible source of joy untroubled. We may be as selfish as we please, and as successful in our selfishness; we may distance all our rivals in the race for the

world's prizes; we may appropriate and engross pleasure, wealth, knowledge, influence; and after all there will be one thing we must do without – the power and the happiness of thanking God. No one will ever be able to thank God because he has succeeded in pleasing himself, be the mode of his self-pleasing as respectable as you will; and he who has not thanked God with a whole heart, without misgiving and without reserve, does not know what joy is. Such thanksgiving and its joy have one condition: they rise up spontaneously in the soul when it allows God to triumph over it. When God appears to us in Jesus Christ, when in the omnipotence of His love and purity and truth He makes war upon our pride and falsehood and lusts, and prevails against them, and brings us low, then we are admitted to the secret of this apparently perplexing passage; we know how natural it is to cry, "Thanks be unto God who in His victory over us giveth us the victory! Thanks be to Him who always leadeth us in triumph!" It is out of an experience like this that Paul speaks; it is the key to his whole life, and it has been illustrated anew by what has just happened at Corinth.

But to return to the Epistle. God is described by the Apostle not only as triumphing over them (*i. e.*, himself and his colleagues) in Christ, but as making manifest through them the savour of His knowledge in every place. It has been questioned whether "His" knowledge is the knowledge of God or of Christ. Grammatically, the question can hardly be answered; but, as we see from chap. iv. 6, the two things which it proposes to

distinguish are really one; what is manifested in the apostolic ministry is the knowledge of God as He is revealed in Christ. But why does Paul use the expression "*the savour* of His knowledge"? It was suggested probably by the figure of the triumph, which was present to his mind in all the detail of its circumstances. Incense smoked on every altar as the victor passed through the streets of Rome; the fragrant steam floated over the procession, a silent proclamation of victory and joy. But Paul would not have appropriated this feature of the triumph, and applied it to his ministry, unless he had felt that there was a real point of comparison, that the knowledge of Christ which he diffused among men, wherever he went, was in very truth a fragrant thing.<sup>21</sup> True, he was not a free man; he had been subdued by God, and made the slave of Jesus Christ; as the Lord of glory went forth conquering and to conquer, over Syria and Asia and Macedonia and Greece, He led him as a captive in the triumphal march of His grace; he was the trophy of Christ's victory; every one who saw him saw that necessity was laid upon Him; but what a gracious necessity it was! "*The love* of Christ constraineth us." The captives who were dragged in chains behind a Roman chariot also made manifest the knowledge of their conqueror; they declared to all the spectators his power and his pitilessness; there was nothing in that knowledge to suggest the idea of a fragrance like incense. But as Paul moved through the world,

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<sup>21</sup> In τὴν ὁσμὴν τῆς γνώσεως, γνώσεως is gen. of apposition: the ὁσμὴ and the γνώσις are one.

all who had eyes to see saw in him not only the power but the sweetness of God's redeeming love. The mighty Victor made manifest through Him, not only His might, but His charm, not only His greatness, but His grace. It was a good thing, men felt, to be subdued and led in triumph like Paul; it was to move in an atmosphere perfumed by the love of Christ, as the air around the Roman triumph was perfumed with incense. The Apostle is so sensible of this that he weaves it into his sentence as an indispensable part of his thought; it is not merely the knowledge of God which is made manifest through him as he is led in triumph, but that knowledge as a fragrant, gracious thing, speaking to every one of victory and goodness and joy.

The very word "savour," in connexion with the "knowledge" of God in Christ, is full of meaning. It has its most direct application, of course, to preaching. When we proclaim the Gospel, do we always succeed in manifesting it as a savour? Or is not the savour – the sweetness, the winsomeness, the charm and attractiveness of it – the very thing that is most easily left out? Do we not catch it sometimes in the words of others, and wonder that it eludes our own? We miss what is most characteristic in the knowledge of God if we miss this. We leave out that very element in the Evangel which makes it evangelic, and gives it its power to subdue and enchain the souls of men. But it is not to preachers only that the word "savour" speaks; it is of the widest possible application. Wherever Christ is leading a single soul in triumph, the fragrance of the Gospel should go

forth; rather, it does go forth, in proportion as His triumph is complete. There is sure to be that in the life which will reveal the graciousness as well as the omnipotence of the Saviour. And it is this virtue which God uses as His main witness, as His chief instrument, to evangelise the world. In every relation of life it should tell. Nothing is so insuppressible, nothing so pervasive, as a fragrance. The lowliest life which Christ is really leading in triumph will speak infallibly and persuasively for Him. In a Christian brother or sister, brothers and sisters will find a new strength and tenderness, something that goes deeper than natural affection, and can stand severer shocks; they will catch the fragrance which declares that the Lord in His triumphant grace is there. And so in all situations, or, as the Apostle has it, "in every place." And if we are conscious that we fall in this matter, and that the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ is something to which our life gives no testimony, let us be sure that the explanation of it is to be found in self-will. There is something in us which has not yet made complete surrender to Him, and not till He leads us unresistingly in triumph will the sweet savour go forth.

At this point the Apostle's thought is arrested by the issues of his ministry, though he carries the figure of the fragrance, with a little pressure, through to the end. In God's sight, he says, or so far as God is concerned, we are a sweet savour of Christ, a perfume redolent of Christ, in which He cannot but take pleasure. In other words, Christ proclaimed in the Gospel, and the ministries and

lives which proclaim Him, are always a joy to God. They are a joy to Him, whatever men may think of them, alike in them that are being saved and in them that are perishing. To those who are being saved, they are a savour "from life to life"; to those who are perishing, a savour "from death to death." Here, as everywhere, St. Paul contemplates these exclusive opposites as the sole issues of man's life, and of the Gospel ministry. He makes no attempt to subordinate one to the other, no suggestion that the way of death may ultimately lead to life, much less that it must do so. The whole solemnity of the situation, which is faced in the cry "And who is sufficient for these things?" depends on the finality of the contrast between life and death. These are the goals set before men, and those who are being saved and those who are perishing are respectively on their way to one or the other. Who *is* sufficient for the calling of the Gospel ministry, when such are the alternatives involved in it? Who is sufficient, in love, in wisdom, in humility, in awful earnestness, for the duties of a calling the issues of which are life or death for ever?

There is considerable difficulty in the sixteenth verse, partly dogmatic, partly textual. Commentators so opposite in their bias as Chrysostom and Calvin have pondered and remarked upon the opposite effects here ascribed to the Gospel. It is easy to find analogies to these in nature. The same heat which hardens clay melts iron. The same sunlight which gladdens the healthy eye tortures that which is diseased. The same honey which is sweet to the sound palate is nauseous to the sick; and



so on. But such analogies do not explain anything, and one can hardly see what is meant by calling them illustrations. It remains finally inexplicable that the Gospel, which appeals to some with winning irresistible power, subduing and leading them in triumph, should excite in others a passion of antipathy which nothing else could provoke. This remains inexplicable, because it is irrational. Nothing that can be pointed to in the universe is the least like a bad heart closing itself against the love of Christ, like a bad man's will stiffening into absolute rigidity against the will of God. The preaching of the Gospel may be the occasion of such awful results, but it is not their cause. The God whom it proclaims is the God of grace; it is never His will that any should perish – always that all should be saved. But He can save only by subduing; His grace must exercise a sovereign power in us, which through righteousness will lead to life everlasting (Rom. v. 21). And when this exercise of power is resisted, when we match our self-will against the gracious saving will of God, our pride, our passions, our mere sloth, against the soul-constraining love of Christ; when we prevail in the war which God's mercy wages with our wickedness, – then the Gospel itself may be said to have ministered to our ruin; it was ordained to life, and we have made it a sentence of death. Yet even so, it is the joy and glory of God; it is a sweet savour to Him, fragrant of Christ and His love.

The textual difficulty is in the words ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον, and ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν. These words are rendered in the Revised Version "*from* death to death," and "*from* life

to life." The Authorised Version, following the *Textus Receptus*, which omits ἐκ in both clauses, renders "a savour *of* death unto death," and "*of* life unto life." In spite of the inferior MS. support, the *Textus Receptus* is preferred by many modern scholars —e. g., Heinrichi, Schmiedel, and Hofmann. They find it impossible to give any precise interpretation to the better attested reading, and an examination of any exposition which accepts it goes far to justify them. Thus Professor Beet comments: "*From death for death* (comp. Rom. i. 17): a scent proceeding *from*, and thus revealing the presence of, *death*; and, like malaria from a putrefying corpse, causing *death*. Paul's labours among some men revealed the eternal death which day by day cast an ever-deepening shadow upon them [this answers to ὁσμή ἐκ θανάτου]; and by arousing in them increased opposition to God, promoted the spiritual mortification which had already begun" [this answers to εἰς θάνατον]. Surely it is safe to say that nobody in Corinth could ever have guessed this from the words. Yet this is a favourable specimen of the interpretations given. If it were possible to take ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον, and ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζώην, as Baur took ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν in Rom. i. 17, that would be the simplest way out of the difficulty, and quite satisfactory. What the Apostle said would then be this: that the Gospel which he preached, ever good as it was to God, had the most opposite characters and effects among men, – in some it was death *from beginning to end*, absolutely and unmitigatedly deadly in its nature and workings; in others, again, it was life

from beginning to end – life was the uniform sign of its presence, and its invariable issue. This also is the meaning which we get by omitting ἐκ: the genitives ζωῆς and θανάτου are then adjectival, – a vital fragrance, with life as its element and end; a fatal fragrance, the end of which is death. This has the advantage of being the meaning which occurs to an ordinary reader; and if the critically approved text, with the repeated ἐκ, cannot bear this interpretation, I think there is a fair case for defending the received text on exegetical grounds. Certainly nothing but the broad impression of the received text will ever enter the general mind.

The question that rises to the Apostle's lips as he confronts the solemn situation created by the Gospel is not directly answered. "Who is sufficient for these things? Who? I say. For we are not as the many,<sup>22</sup> who corrupt the Word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, we speak in Christ." Paul is conscious as he writes that his awful sense of responsibility as a preacher of the Gospel is not shared by all who exercise the same vocation. To be the bearer and the representative of a power with issues so tremendous ought surely to annihilate every thought of self; to let personal interest intrude is to declare oneself faithless

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<sup>22</sup> "The many" (οἱ πολλοί) seems to be the true reading. "The rest" (οἱ λοιποί) would be stronger still in its condemnation. But probably Paul is not thinking of the Church in general, but of the teachers as a body who crossed and thwarted him in his chosen field. The transition which is immediately made to the case of his opponents (τινὲς, iii. 1), and to the comparison of the old and new covenants, suggests that his Judaistic adversaries in Corinth (see chap. xi.) are in view.

and unworthy. We are startled to hear from Paul's lips what at first sight seems to be a charge of just such base self-seeking laid against the majority of preachers. "We are not as the many, corrupting the Word of God." The expressive word rendered here "corrupting" has the idea of self-interest, and especially of petty gain, at its basis. It means literally to sell in small quantities, to retail for profit. But it was specially applied to tavern-keeping, and extended to cover all the devices by which the wine-sellers in ancient times deceived their customers. Then it was used figuratively, as here; and Lucian, *e. g.*, speaks of philosophers as selling the sciences, and in most cases (οἱ πολλοί: a curious parallel to St. Paul), like tavern keepers, "blending, adulterating, and giving bad measure." It is plain that there are two separable ideas here. One is that of men qualifying the Gospel, infiltrating their own ideas into the Word of God, tempering its severity, or perhaps its goodness, veiling its inexorableness, dealing in compromise. The other is that all such proceedings are faithless and dishonest, because some private interest underlies them. It need not be avarice, though it is as likely to be this as anything else. A man corrupts the Word of God, makes it the stock-in-trade of a paltry business of his own, in many other ways than by subordinating it to the need of a livelihood. When he exercises his calling as a minister for the gratification of his vanity, he does so. When he preaches not that awful message in which life and death are bound up, but himself, his cleverness, his learning, his humour, his fine voice even or fine gestures, he does so. He

makes the Word minister to him, instead of being a minister of the Word; and that is the essence of the sin. It is the same if ambition be his motive, if he preaches to win disciples to himself, to gain an ascendancy over souls, to become the head of a party which will bear the impress of his mind. There was something of this at Corinth; and not only there, but wherever it is found, such a spirit and such interests will change the character of the Gospel. It will not be preserved in that integrity, in that simple, uncompromising, absolute character which it has as revealed in Christ. Have another interest in it than that of God, and that interest will inevitably colour it. You will make it what it was not, and the virtue will depart from it.

In contrast with all such dishonest ministers, the Apostle represents himself and his friends speaking "as of sincerity." They have no mixture of motives in their work as evangelists; they have indeed no independent motives at all: God is leading them in triumph, and proclaiming His grace through them. It is He who prompts every word (ὥς ἐκ Θεοῦ). Yet their responsibility and their freedom are intact. They feel themselves in His presence as they speak, and in that presence they speak "in Christ." "In Christ" is the Apostle's mark. Not in himself apart from Christ, where any mixture of motives, any process of adulteration, would have been possible, but only in that union with Christ which was the very life of his life, did he carry on his evangelistic work. This was his final security, and it is still the only security, that the Gospel can have fair play in the world.

## VIII

# *LIVING EPISTLES*

"Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? or need we, as do some, epistles of commendation to you or from you? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables *that are* hearts of flesh." – 2 Cor. iii. 1-3 (R.V.).

"Are we beginning again to commend ourselves?" Paul does not mean by these words to admit that he had been commending himself before: he means that he has been accused already of doing so, and that there are those at Corinth who, when they hear such passages of this letter as that which has just preceded, will be ready to repeat the accusation. In the First Epistle he had found it necessary to vindicate his apostolic authority, and especially his interest in the Corinthian Church as its spiritual father (1 Cor. ix. 1-27, iv. 6-21), and obviously his enemies at Corinth had tried to turn these personal passages against him. They did so on the principle *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*

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