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The True Estimate of Life

AND HOW TO LIVE

ADDRESSES DELIVERED AT NORTHFIELD

BY

REV. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN

Author of "Discipleship," "God's Methods with Man," etc.



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Chicago : New York : Toronto

Publishers of Evangelical Literature

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The True Estimate of Life

AND HOW TO LIVE

PAUL'S ESTIMATE OF LIFE

No man in the history of the Christian church, upon whom the eyes of the world have been fixed, so wondrously fulfilled in his own life and character the ideal of Christianity as did the Apostle Paul. Most of us will agree that he realized more fully than any man of his own time the purposes of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. His life and teaching have revealed Christianity to us as a force in a way that is revealed by no other life or teaching. It is very interesting in his letter to the Philippians, one of his later epistles, to find him talking of himself, and yet of himself in the new life, which he had then been living for about three and thirty years. He speaks with human tenderness of human sensibilities and human thoughts, while upon all these there rests the light of the divine, and through all there is manifested the power that has taken possession of him.

In this epistle, written to his children in the faith at Philippi, it is very evident that he writes under the stress of circumstances. Not that circumstances are

causing him one moment's anxiety, but they are bringing him face to face with the possible issues that lie just ahead of him. It is while in this condition that he writes this letter and condenses into one swift burning sentence an epitome of Christianity as he has realized it: "To me to live is Christ."

To this man all the marvelous unfoldings of the doctrine and scheme of redemption can be condensed and expressed in the simplest of words. He writes the whole story of Christianity out of his own experience when he says, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. i: 21). To this man Christianity is Christ. It is as though he had penned the words of another, who has said:

"Christ. I am Christ's, and let the name suffice you. Yea, for me, too, He greatly hath sufficed. Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning. Christ was the beginning, so the end is Christ. To me to live is Christ."

This statement of the apostle's view of Christianity gathers force when we remember the exact position which he was in as he wrote it. He was then a prisoner in charge of the Prætorian guard. He was waiting, most probably, for the final word of the emperor that should decide in which of two ways his destiny should lead. If the emperor's command be given, the apostle will tread the road through the door of his prison, through the city to the place of execution, and then, by one swift, sudden stroke, his life will end. He looks along that road and thinks of the possibility of traversing it. Then he looks in the other direction. Suppose that the emperor command that he be set at liberty. Then back to Philippi he will speed to see his children, and on to some new region to tell the same story and live the same life and win more trophies for Christ. He looks at these

TWO ROADS

stretching before him, and he says:

"To live—is Christ, and to die—is gain. I am in a strait betwixt two. I desire to depart, and yet for your sakes I would tarry a little longer."

Life and death have lost their old significance to him, because there is one vision that fills the horizon whether he look this way or that. Here it is Christ, and there it is gain, and gain is Christ, and Christ is gain. There is no darkness and no light, but everywhere he sees the Master. That is Christianity.

Now, beloved, I want to take that estimate of Christian life and meditate upon it for a little while. Do not expect me to exhaust it, for in this text lie all the possibilities and potentialities of the Christian life.

"To me to live is Christ." What did the apostle mean? There are seven things which he might have meant. By these words he intended to say that:

1. Christ was the author of his life. It was as though he had written, "To me to live at all is Christ."

2. Christ was the sustainer of his life. "To me to continue to live is Christ."

3. Christ was the law of his life. "The conditions in which I live my life are summed up in Christ."

4. Christ was the product of his life. "To me to live is to reproduce Christ."

5. Christ was the aim and influence of his life. "To me to live is to lead men to Christ."

6. Christ was the impulse of his life. "To me to live is to be swept along under the compassion of the Christ."

7. Christ was the finisher, the crown of his life.

“To me to live is at last to be what He is, and to find the crowning of all my manhood in Him.”

Christ the end, as Christ was the beginning. Christ the beginning, and therefore Christ the end. Whether this man looked back upon the past, at the present, or into the future, within or without, behind, above or beyond to the consummation—wherever he turned his eyes, he saw Jesus only.

I. CHRIST THE AUTHOR OF LIFE.

The first thought is that when Paul first wrote these words, “To me to live is Christ,” he meant to say, “Christ is the author of my life.”

This man did not count that he had any life except the life which was named “Christ.” He began to reckon his life only from the day when Christ was born within him through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the life of this man, you find one clean line dividing it at about its center. Behind that line is the old life, the “old man,” to which he so often referred, while on the other side of the line is the new life, the “new man.” To Paul, the crossing of that line was something that went to the very depths of his being. It transformed him so that in looking back to the days when he became a new man in Christ, he said of the old days, “Old things are passed away.” They had all vanished out of his sight. He took no account of anything that was behind him, and he said, “All things are become new,” and in the new things he lived. The years that he spent on the earth, prior to the moment when Jesus found him, he did not reckon as worth speaking of for a single moment.

Was Paul not mistaken? Had not very much of value been crowded into the years before his conversion? Stop him for a moment and ask him:

"Paul, what do you mean by this? You lived a very remarkable life before you met Jesus of Nazareth. You had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. You had all of the advantages of learning and religion. You had never been a profligate. Your life had been straight and pure, clean through. You were a Pharisee of the Pharisees, a Hebrew of the Hebrews. In all outward seeming, and, what is infinitely more, in all inward sincerity, you had been a remarkable man."

"Perfectly true; but the things I counted gain, I now count but dross."

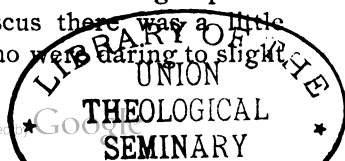
"Why?"

"In comparison with what I found when Christ found me. When I turned my back upon the old, I did it forever, because my face was set toward the new."

I do not think this man ever had five minutes' questioning as to whether he ought to go back into that old life once a week for enjoyment, and live the new life all the remainder of the week as a duty. The old life *passed away*, and the new life opened before him bright with joy, thrilling with delights, expanding all the way.

THE APOSTLE'S NEW LIFE BEGAN

when there shone a light round about him on the way to Damascus. We learn so much by contrast. Look at him for a moment on the way to Damascus. Remember that he was straight, upright, moral, righteous, sincere to the core of his being; and on his way to Damascus he carried in his hand some very important documents—letters from the high priest. What for? Because in Damascus there was a little company of men and women who were daring to slight



the religion of their fathers, singing hymns about this Jesus, whom the friends of Paul had crucified. If they should go on singing their hymns they would soon undermine the national religion, and Paul was going to put a stop to it. So he was riding with the priest's letters in his hand, when a light from heaven fell and a voice from heaven spoke. Paul fell to the ground, and the man upon the earth said in answer to the voice from heaven:

“Who art thou, Lord?”

The revelation that came to him must have been the most startling in his life:—“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

Now hear the next word and never forget it:

“LORD!”

What a change! Why, this man has joined the church at Damascus before he gets there! That is all they are doing, calling Jesus Lord, and Paul has done it. Do you not see the radical nature of this change? Do you not see that he has taken the crown of his life from off his own head and has put it on the head of Jesus?

“Lord,”—and what else? “What wilt thou have me to do?”

That is henceforth the keynote of his life. The music is true to it through all the future; through missionary journeyings, through perils by land and by sea, in prison and among robbers, when suffering persecutions or preaching the gospel of the grace of God, he is always true to the keynote which he struck when he said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” There his life began. There the old life dropped away, and the new life opened before him; and looking back to that beginning from the jail in Rome, he writes:

“To me to live is Christ.”

Life began there, and we may judge how real the change was by asking him

A QUESTION,

which I often think I shall want to ask him when by God's grace I meet him in the glory:

"Paul, you have not forgotten the ride to Damascus?"

"No, my friend, I have not forgotten it."

"But, Paul, *what did you do with the high priest's letters?*"

Did you ever think of that? I shall want to know some day. They went clean out of his life like everything else of the old life. Old things passed away.

That is when Paul began to live. When is your birthday, my brother? Let me say something for the sake of those who say, "I cannot find my birthday." By a question like that, some trembling soul may be unsettled. The devil is only too glad to take hold of anything whereby he may unsettle any one. If the devil says to you, "You haven't had any birthday," treat him as I do and say, "If I never had one, I will have one now." If Satan is so very particular about a definite date, take this one and say to God right now:

"Here I give my all to thee,
Friends and time and earthly store;
Soul and body, thine to be,
Wholly thine forever more."

The Master says, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." We have the date, so we will dismiss the devil and pass on. The point is that there is a passing into the new life and a turning the back upon the old. "To me to live is Christ." Blessed fact of regeneration, to which we owe everything that comes after it! All the new possibilities which God

offers to us are the result of the fact that the Master arrested us and gave us His life, so that old things passed away and all things became new.

2. CHRIST THE SUSTAINER OF LIFE.

But Paul means infinitely more. He means also, "To me to continue to live is Christ." Three and thirty years, or thereabouts, he has been following Jesus, and the music of his life has been running on amid earth's lamentations. The harmonies have been varied, but that has always been the chord of the dominant.

But what does he mean when he says that to him "to continue to live is Christ"?

It is a confession on the part of this man of his own helplessness. He says:

"Here I am after three and thirty years, by the grace of God. I am still living the same life that then began."

"But how?"

"Christ. I have not kept Him; He has kept me. I have not clung to the cross; the Man of the cross has clung to me, which is infinitely better. He has sustained my life during these three and thirty years."

Beloved in Christ, do we sufficiently grasp that great truth for ourselves? Weak, trembling men and women, who have started the Christian life, are crying and wondering how they will hold out. If it is left to you, I will not expect to meet you in the Christian pathway twelve months hence. If it is left to me, I will be a castaway from service very shortly.

You remember that wonderful figure from the lips of Jesus recorded in the Gospel by John. There Christ says that He is not only the giver but the sus-

tainer of life. "I am the true vine, ye are the branches." Paraphrase that; put it into other words so as to bring out the inner thought. People have an idea Jesus meant to say: "I am the main stem of the vine, and you are the branches grafted into me. Through me, the main stem, all the forces of life pass into you the branches."

That is very beautiful, but Jesus meant something infinitely stronger.

What did he say? "I am"—not the main stem—"I am *the vine*." What is the vine? Root, main stem, branches, leaves, tendrils, fruit—everything. That is the vine. People speak as though the main stem alone was the vine, held up by roots and expressing itself in branches. That is true in a sense, but I like to take this word of Christ's in its simplicity, and therefore in its sublimity. "I am the vine"—the whole of it. What does this mean? "Ye are the branches—part of the vine—and the life of the branch is the life of the vine." In a sense the vine gives its life to the branch, but not as a separate thing. The branch is part of the vine, and the very life that courses through the branch and reproduces itself in fruit is the life of the vine. "To me to live is Christ." His life it is that sustains me. It is He Himself in me. I am His; He is mine. We are one by a solemn union, a union infinitely beyond anything that metaphor or figure can teach, one with each other, and by that fact of our oneness my life has been sustained. "To me to live is Christ."

3. CHRIST THE LAW OF LIFE.

I love this third thought: "To me to live is Christ. Christ is the condition of my life; Christ is the law of my life."

That is why Paul was so put out with the Galatians. He said to them:

“O foolish Galatians, ye ran well; who hath hindered you?”

How did he say they had been hindered? They were getting back under legalism, into the place where they continually said “Thou shalt not” and “Thou shalt”; and where they were bringing everybody up to the mental category of forbiddings and permissions, and asking for a rule for everything. Paul said:

“You ran well; what hath hindered you? How is it you are so soon entangled with the yoke of bondage?”

How is it with you, Paul?

“To me to live is *Christ*; not a set of rules, but a life principle within me; not the conditioning of my days by time-tables and maxims and rules, but the ever-present Christ stretching to the farthest territory of my being, and by His presence there ordering all my life within the bounds of His own sacred will.”

Paul lived in the new covenant of which Jeremiah spoke, the covenant in which the law should be written no longer upon the table of stone outside a man's personality, but on his heart, so that if a man wanted to know what God would have him do, he need go to no temple, to no priest, to no altar, to no code of rules. He need but to turn himself to silence and quietness and say:

“O strong life of God in Christ within me, direct, control, suggest, this day all I design or do or say!”

The man that lived there had a fresh code of ethics every morning, a new list of regulations every moment; and all these came along the impulse of the Christ-life within him. Christ is the law of my life; He conditions my days; He is the author, the sustainer and the law.

4. CHRIST THE PRODUCT OF LIFE.

Again, it is as though this man had said: "Christ is the product of my life. To me to live *is* Christ."

But if a man says that and there is no manifestation of it, who believes him? Not I. And I am quite sure that this man did not want any one to believe him unless it was perfectly evident in his life.

Suppose that here is a man living a life that is selfish and malicious and proud and critical and unkind, and he says:

"To me to live is Christ."

O man, do not blaspheme! Your life is selfish, your life is malicious, your life is critical, your life is unkind; was Jesus anything of this?

"Oh, no," he says, "I do not mean that. I mean that I have accepted His creed."

Never! No man ever really accepted the creed who did not get the Christ first. The creed grows out of the living Christ; and when that is so, the creed is forever true to that which the life manifests.

Do you not see, beloved, the necessity for this? Nature, so far as we understand it, always reproduces itself true to type. I remember the last season in which I put flowers in my garden in Birmingham, I went down to a shop and bought some bulbs, because I wanted a fine show of tulips in the earlier days of the year. I put them all carefully in my garden. I even arranged them according to a color scheme, a diamond pattern, and all manner of things. I dreamed of it, for I love God's flowers, though I do not understand them. The winter went; spring came, and the bulbs came up, but they were crocuses. Why? Because I had planted crocus bulbs. I thought I had a bargain—that is the worst of going to bargain sales—

and the result was that what I had sowed that I reaped.

Now work out that great principle of life and put it in this region of sainthood. If the life implanted in you is the life of Christ, that must reproduce itself true to type. If a man has not quit singing, "I want to be an angel," he is on a sorry business, because he has not even a promise of wings anywhere on him. But if a man is singing reverently, with strong crying and tears and earnest desire, "I want to be like Jesus," that is possible. Why? Because the life you live, if you are born again, is the Christ-life, and if the life of Christ be implanted within you, it will, in His own out-working, reproduce itself, and you will, individually as well as with His church, grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

Let us endeavor to understand this better by looking at

TWO ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PAUL'S LIFE.

We saw him just now on the way to Damascus—and I have the profoundest admiration for Saul of Tarsus—before he was converted. I love a man who is sincere and out and out in anything. But do you see what Paul's sincerity did for him in those old days? It made him say this:

"I am sincere, and I am determined that the religion of my God shall be *the* religion. If men will not bow to it, then I will haul them to prison and death in the prisons. My sincerity arouses my animal nature, and I am determined to smite to death the men that will not give in to what is a divinely revealed religion."

There he is, a magnificent man, the best that human nature can ever do for a man apart from Jesus Christ. Do not forget it. There has nothing finer been

brought out of fallen human nature than Saul of Tarsus before Christ found him.

Thirty years have gone, and here he is. Look at him now in front of Agrippa and his friends, who wanted to amuse themselves by looking at this strange man, and hear what he has to say. Paul gives his testimony, tells the story of how Jesus found him and transformed him. Agrippa looked at him and said not, "Almost thou persuadest," but looked at him, and said with scorn:

"*With a very little* would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

What does Paul say? Is he any less sincere and consecrated than he was when he rode to Damascus? No. Is he less enthusiastic? No. Is there any difference? Yes, worlds of difference! How does he show it? Manacles are on his wrists, and chains upon his ankles, but he looks into the face of Agrippa and says:

"O King Agrippa, I wish that, not with a very little, but that altogether thou wast such as I am, except these bonds. I do not want you to wear my chains, Agrippa. Have my Christ, have my light, have my life, but I would not put these on even you, Agrippa."

Do you see any change in the man? Perfectly sincere thirty years ago, but if you did not agree with him he would put you to death. Infinitely more sincere now, because capable of greater sincerity in an enlarged nature, he says:

"O King Agrippa, if you could only change places with me without having my chains; but I would not harm or pain you for a moment!"

If that man lives Christ, he reproduces Christ. Is not that what Paul has done? Are not his words the living echo of that most wondrous prayer of all, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do"?

Men always in some measure reproduce Christ when they live His life. You make your own applications. When one is conscious of having received a great blessing, the best thing is not to talk much about it. If the Christ-life is there it will come out through the glory on the face and the tenderness of the touch and the new love for everybody. The very best testimony that you can ever give to the power of Jesus Christ is to live His life over again, not in your own effort, but by the propulsion of that same life within you. "For me to live is to reproduce Christ."

5. CHRIST THE AIM OF LIFE.

Let me mention the other points briefly. "To me to live is to influence men toward Christ. The *aim* of my life is Christ."

Do you think that many of those soldiers that were fastened to Paul got away without being influenced for Christ? I do not. Every soul he came into contact with was an opportunity, and all his life, so far as active service went, was poured out in the doing of this one thing: the bringing of men who had never seen the Christ into the place where they might see Him, and the building up of those who had seen Him in their most holy faith from height to height and from glory unto glory. The whole aim and influence of his life was Christ.

6. CHRIST THE IMPULSE OF LIFE.

Again, the *impulse* of his life was Christ.

I use the word "impulse" in the sense of the great force behind it, that impelled him to service. Take one illustration. You know the epistle to the Romans, —that is, you know where it is. Well, read it again.

You have never fathomed it yet. I am just beginning to see light upon it, beauteous gleams of glory on it. Chapter five, justification; six, the question of sin; seven, that question still discussed; eight, no condemnation, the larger, purer life; nine, what there? Well, do not read the ninth without reading the last verses of the eighth. What is the highest height of experience in the eighth? "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I always think of the apostle here as on some mountain eminence, looking at his enemies. They are all around him—death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present; and then his imagination sweeps him into all the infinite possibilities of the future—things to come, height, depth, or any other creation. There they all are, the possibilities of danger. He says, "I am persuaded that none of them shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus." There he is at the height of vision, the height of experience.

What next? "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow."

Why, the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth verses of the eighth chapter do not sound like that! They are a shout of triumph, "Nothing can separate me from His love, but I have great heaviness and continual sorrow."

What about? About himself? No; self had perished in the struggle of these preceding chapters. What about? "I could wish that myself were accursed

from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." What is that? That is, "To me to live is Christ. The impulse of my life is the Christ-impulse. The passion that brought Him down to redeem men, consumes me, and when I have touched the highest height of His life so that I know that nothing can separate me from His love, then I have learned the deepest experience of all, that of fellowship in His suffering, and I wish I could be accursed." Jesus Himself was made a curse for us.

"Oft, when the world is on me to deliver,
 Lifts the illusion and the truth lies bare,
 Desert or throng, the city or the river,
 Melts in a lucid paradise of air.
 Only like souls I see the folk thereunder
 Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings.
 Then with a rush the intolerable craving
 Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call.
 Oh, to save these, to perish for their saving,
 Die for their life, be offered for them all!"

Let commentators cease their blasphemous criticism of those verses. Paul has come nearer to Jesus Christ here than ever before. This impulse of Christ-life that wrought redemption for the race at the cost of his own life enters a human soul and floods it to overflowing, until he says:

"I could wish that even I were accursed for my brethren's sake."

7. CHRIST THE CROWN OF LIFE.

What is the last thing? *Christ is the crown.* He is not only the author; He is the finisher. He not only began; He will end the good work.

And when it ends, what is it? Christ. What is the music of the land to come? Christ. What the fellowship? Christ, and Christ reproduced in the saints

transformed. What will be my chief joy when I look again in the face of my child who has gone before me and is to wait for me in the shining city? It will be that she is like Jesus. Not only will we see Christ Himself, but Christ reproduced again in the loved ones.

Imagination is sometimes ahead of truth. Poetry guesses at more than prose ever fathoms. Follow out the thought, and everywhere, on the thrones, amid multitudes, what see you? Christ. That is why this man Paul stands and looks at little Nero's ax, and says:

"To die is gain."

"Do you not see that executioner, Paul?"

"No, I do not see him."

"What do you see?"

"Christ! To die is gain."

WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH?

Now let me ask you to finish this theme for yourself. Imagine that you have in your hand a clean piece of paper, and write on it for yourself—God help you!—take the pencil and write! Write the story of your life, honestly, faithfully, truly, in as brief a sentence as Paul wrote the story of his. Write:

"To me to live is—money."

Now, be honest, in God's name. If you have played the hypocrite before, do not do it now. Write it down, not for man's eyes, but for God's. "To me to live is money." If that is true, put it down.

"To me to live is pleasure."

"To me to live is fame."

Oh, fill them in for yourself!

Now you have it written, your life's story. You never looked it squarely in the face like that before. There it is, right in front of you, the self-evident truth, the inner meaning of all your life. There it is.

Now finish it. Write under it what Paul did. That is your estimate of life; now tack onto it Paul's estimate of death:

"To me to live is money; to die is—I cannot write 'gain' after that. To die is *loss*. I shall leave it all. Naked came I out of my mother's womb; naked shall I return thereunto."

"To me to live is pleasure; to die—oh! do not talk to me about death! It is the last thing I want to think about. I want my pleasure, my laughter, this hollow crackling of thorns in a pot, methinks. Let me have it, but in God's name do not talk about death. Why, man, I do not like to walk down the street in the dark because I think of death. I cannot write that."

"To me to live is fame." Now, finish it. "And to die—no, I cannot. For if they put my name on a marble monument, directly it is erected, nature, with mossy fingers, will begin to pull it down. I cannot write that. To die is to perish, to be forgotten! What is fame when I am gone? I cannot write it."

No, beloved, and you cannot write Paul's estimate of death after anything except Paul's estimate of life. If, by God's great grace, you can write, "To me to live is Christ," you can write, "To die is gain." To die is to see Him more clearly, to be closer to Him, to enter into larger service for Him, to touch the height and the depth and the length and the breadth of His life; "to die is gain." You can only write it if you write the first.

Somebody else says: "Well, I have never written the first; can I start?"

Yes.

"Where can I start?"

Where he started.

"Where did he start?"

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That is it. Will you do that?

"Yes, we will do it. Is it easy?"

No, it is not easy. The cross is there, crucifixion is there, the ending of self is there, the abandoning of everything, of hope, and wife, and child, and home, and friends, and ambition, all is there. "Lord—we have had other lords—Lord, I have been governed by self, I have been governed by human loves, I have been mastered by passions, I have been swept along by ambitions; Lord, Nazarene, depose these other lords and be King."

That is the place to begin; and there is not a man or woman who begins there honestly to whom He will not come with healing on His wings, the sun rising; then the old things for you shall pass away, and all things shall become new.

WILT THOU BE MADE WHOLE?

Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of one of the Jewish feasts (John v. 1-14), and as He walked through the porches which surrounded the pool of Bethesda He saw multitudes of impotent people, blind, and lame, and halt, people whose powers were paralyzed and withered. One man especially attracted our Lord's notice, and upon this man and upon the Master I want our attention to be fixed.

Mark the three times that our Lord spoke to him. For thirty-eight years the man has had an infirmity which made him unable to walk. As Jesus passes He pauses and looks at him. The man did not know Him, but Jesus looked right into his face and said to him, "Willest thou to be made whole?" for I think that is the true form of the question.

The man went on to say how it was that he was not made whole. "Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool: but while I am coming another steppeth down before me."

Jesus then said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk."

The man had been looking at Christ. He arose, took up his bed, and started.

But where is Jesus? He has withdrawn. Then the man finds his way to the temple and mixes with the worshipers—a thing that he has not been able to do for thirty-eight years. Jesus meets him again suddenly in the crowd, and apparently without any reminder of what He had done for him a little while before, says:

“Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.”

I think that we have in this story and in our Lord's three words to the impotent man a very beautiful and simple revelation of the Lord's method of dealing with men that they may receive healing and strength.

I. THE QUESTION AS TO WILLINGNESS.

Look at the first word, for we must take them in order. Our Lord looks upon this man as he lies there powerless in the porch, and going up to him says:

“Wilt thou be made whole?”

See what that question means. Notice that the Lord stands outside this man's personality, in the presence of this man's need, and shows him that He is limited in the man and by the man alone. “Willest thou to be made whole?” Christ wants to get that man's weakness and make it strength; He wants to get that man's disease and transform it into health. But until the man recognizes his own deep need and limitation, and desires to be brought out of that limitation, the Lord Jesus is unable to help him. So the Master begins with the question, “Willest thou to be made whole?”

The question for every single soul that needs healing is, first of all, “Wilt thou be made whole?” Just as long as we are contented within the limitations of the sin in our hearts and lives, just so long is our Lord standing outside and cannot come in in order to give us the blessing that we need. There must first be a deep sense of need and willingness on our part to take that blessing which the Lord Jesus is waiting to bestow.

HOPE LOST.

Our Lord's question reveals to that man a condition of his life of which he has hardly been conscious until

that moment. The man wants to be made whole, but *he has lost all hope that he can be made whole.* Put yourself in the man's place.

"Will I to be made whole? Of course! What do you think I am here for every day? Certainly I will to be made whole."

The man did not say that; he opened his heart unknowingly, and revealed his true position. What he did say was:

"Sir, I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool."

That means: "Of course I want to be whole, the proof of that is that I am lying here. I have been waiting for the angel to trouble the water, and he comes; then I have been waiting for a man to put me in, but I am not in yet."

Oh, how beautifully Jesus shows the man his condition so that before he knows it he has blurted out the whole truth! The inwardness of that man's answer is this:

"Yes, I will, I want to, but I cannot; there is no man to put me in."

Now, beloved, is that not the condition of some of you? With the deepest sincerity, so far as inward thought and desire is concerned, you want healing and blessing. You have no man to put you in, and cannot get in by yourselves.

HOPE REVIVED.

But Christ's question does more than that. This man has been here thirty-eight years. He is living in the region of despair, and is not conscious of it, but when Jesus looks at him and says, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He touches the deep substratum of his life. and spring seems to come into the winter of his life as

this question brings *the revival of an old hope*. I doubt not that in the early days when he was carried to the pool he had passionately longed to get in and expected to be cured. He still wanted to, but he had forgotten his want in his despair. Jesus said, "Wilt thou be made whole?" and the old hope was revived, but from a new source. I do not think that man thought much about the water or the angel as he looked into the face of Jesus. Here is a new sort of man, some one for whom he has been waiting. There was something more than words in Jesus' question. There was the heart, and the force, and love of the person behind it. The King here comes into the presence of the subject; the King of kings recognizes the kingship of the man when He says, "Wilt thou?" thereby suggesting the possibility and his own responsibility.

Christ has spoken to many of our hearts and has asked us if we will be made whole. That question has brought back the old longing, and has revealed the fact that we had almost lost hope. But it has done more; it has suggested to us the possibility that the loving Lord who has faced us can help. But God help the crowd who are waiting for a *man* to put them in.

2. HELPLESSNESS, BUT OBEDIENCE.

Now comes the second step. Jesus looks at the man and simply says to him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk,"—oh, these trinities!—"Rise—take up thy bed—and walk."

This is the one point that I want you to see. What does it mean? The Lord Jesus looks into the face of this man and presents to him, as the next thing to be done, *the one impossible thing in his life*, "Rise." Why,

if he could rise he would have been in the water long ago, or he would never have come there at all!

This is what Christ is always doing with us. When He comes into the life to be the living force that heals and cleanses, He brings us to this point and says, "Now, rise." The one thing that is absolutely impossible is the one thing you have to do.

Do you not see what that does?

It, first of all, begets in the heart of the man a sense of his own utter helplessness, and that sense of helplessness flings him with terrific force upon the strength of the One who commands him to rise. If the Lord had said to me, "Rise," I might have said, "Lord, I can't." But when that man willed to obey and started to get up, did nothing happen? Oh, yes! The crowd in the porches did not see it, the disciples did not see it, the man himself did not see it, but there passed from the living, loving son of God into his poor, weak, crippled frame the very energy of the Most High, and he got up in the strength that was given him. How did he get this strength? Jesus said, "Rise," and though the man said it not with his lips, he said it in his will, "Lord, I will," and he did; and as he began to do it there came the strength. That is the first point.

O my brother, my sister, what is the Master thrusting in front of you? He does not give us a program. One step is all I need to see. I would rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light. What is that first step? It may be habit, friendship, will, pet scheme and plan, evil temper, this or that or the other, the Spirit of God is bringing you right up to your one supreme difficulty, and He says:

"Man, rise."

"O Lord, that is just where I am so weak."

Do not talk about it.

“Master, I will. In Thy strength, I will get up and do it right here and now.”

What happens? It is then that God gives me the very energy of His own life.

NO RELAPSE.

“Take up thy bed.” Why was he to take up the bed? Because, as some one has beautifully said, there is to be *no provision made for a relapse*. Oh, how many of us have made that provision in the past! Yes, we will get up, but we will have the bed ready for a relapse. Burn every bridge behind you! So far as you are able make it impossible, by the absoluteness of your surrender and consecration, ever to get back. Step clean out upon God.

“Walk.” I like that coming there. It is as though Jesus said to the man, “You cannot walk *into* the water, you cannot walk *in order to get healing*, but you can walk *because you have healing*.” My brother and sister, do not try to walk for healing, but get your healing by casting yourself upon the word of the Master. Listen to His command, “Rise, take up thy bed, and then walk.”

3. “SIN NO MORE.”

The Lord met the man later on and said to him, “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.”

See the beautiful connection between these two words. The Lord never said, “Sin no more,” until He had first said, “Thou art made whole.” He gives the ground and the reason of the future life in which there was to be no willful sin: “Thou art made whole. I have brought thee not only healing for the infirmity

that has bound thee for years, but I have given thee that fullness of my own strength by which thou mayest live for me. Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee."

Is it possible for a man to live without sin, is it possible to sin no more? It *is* possible, but it is *only* possible as the Lord Himself has pronounced upon you His own words, "Thou art made whole." I do not mean to say that you can ever come to the place, so long as you are sojourning here below, in which you can say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." We shall say that in the morning when we see Him as He is, and we are transformed into His perfect likeness, and He presents us faultless before the presence of our Father. What I do mean is that it is possible, in the holiness Jesus gives you, for you to go your way without willful sin against God. The command, "Sin no more," seems to mark two great things: First, that it is *possible* for this man to sin, and second, it is *not necessary* that he should sin, because Christ has made him whole.

BLAMELESS AND FAULTLESS.

Is it possible for us to be perfect? Most assuredly it is; but we must draw the distinction between perfection of condition and perfection of maturity. The *perfection of maturity* is the great goal toward which we press, the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. The *perfection of condition* is that which comes when at the word of Christ we rise and walk. In the New Testament there is a very beautiful difference between the blameless and the faultless life. *Blameless* we may be in the power and strength of this healing which Christ gives us, but *faultless* we cannot be until He presents us so before the throne.

But is there a difference between a blameless and a faultless life?

Last year I received a letter from my wife in which there was another little letter written by the hand of my boy, then six years old. If I should show you that letter and ask:

“Is that letter faultless?” Well, no.

“Is it blameless?” Most assuredly. Love wrote it, love prompted it, love did the best possible thing under the conditions of that time, but it is not faultless. By and by I may have a letter from that son, better written, better spelled, but none can ever be more blameless than the first letter that crossed the sea to me.

You can write a blameless epistle if you will, if not faultless; the epistle that love prompts, that love dictates. Oh, can we write blameless letters? can we live blameless lives? Yes. How? Rise. You know where.

God help us all!

HEALTH OF SOUL

Holiness is simply another word for health, both being derived from the old Anglo-Saxon word *halig*, meaning whole and complete. It would be perfectly correct to speak of a holy body and healthy soul and spirit, but we have come to speak of bodily holiness as health and of spiritual health as holiness. Holiness is not maturity, it is not finality; it is rather a condition for growth into maturity and unto finality.

In the third chapter of Philippians we have a brief autobiographical sketch by the apostle Paul. He first makes mention of the old life in which he formerly had confidence, and in which he still might have confidence in the flesh, did he measure it by the standards of other men. Then he goes on to the point where the things that had been gain to him he counted loss for Christ. Notice he says:

“But what things were gain to me, those I *counted* loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I *count* all things but loss for the excellency of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

In the past, on the way to Damascus, he *counted* loss the things in which he had prided himself, when he surrendered himself, absolutely, with all his hopes and aspirations and prejudices—everything—to Christ, and said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Now over thirty years later he writes that he still *counts* all things but loss. He has not gone back upon the position which he took up so long ago, and it is because he is in the same position that he is still in the place of blessing and power.

What more is he seeking? "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Then he goes on to say in verse 15: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you." These words "perfect" are different in the original. Verse 12 may be read: "Not as though I had already attained or were already *perfected*." And verse 15: "Let us therefore, as many as be *perfect*." The difference between being perfected and being perfect is the difference between maturity of Christian life and holiness, the difference between the condition that I may be in now and the condition that I never shall attain until my Lord shall come and He shall fashion anew the body of my humiliation, and make it after the pattern of the body of His glory. I shall be perfected when I see Him as He is; my nature, and even this body shall be transformed into perfect likeness to Himself. I never can be perfected here, but I can be perfect in the sense of being made whole.

The apostle uses the figure of a race to illustrate the Christian life, and what he says I think may be paraphrased in this way: "I am not yet perfected, I am not yet crowned; that for which my Lord apprehended me was not the place of temptation and conflict, but it was the brightness of the joyful day when He will present me—whom He found so low down—in the very presence of God, faultless as He Himself is faultless. That is the goal of my running, and the crowning point to which I have not yet attained; but," he says, "let us therefore, as many as are perfect"—as many of us as are running the race in the strength and energy of the Holy Spirit, with every weight and sin laid

aside, and with the very joy and love of God possessing us. We can be perfect thus. It is the difference between the crown upon the brow, and the passionate attitude of life which has the crown in view and, forgetting all that is behind, presses toward it with full and complete purpose of life.

That condition of life is the condition of health of soul before God, it is the condition of perfection in the present moment, and it is a condition which ought to mark every child of God from the moment of conversion.

The blossom upon the tree is perfect, beautifully perfect, but it is not perfected. It is not consummation; it is not maturity. It needs the ministry of sun, and shower, and atmosphere, to ripen it into perfection. Not until the fires of autumn have come upon it, and it stands in all the glory of perfect fruit, will it be perfected.

Put a child of six months by the side of a man of forty; what a difference! They are both perfect, but the man is perfected with the perfection of maturity.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MATURITY AND HEALTH.

To make clear this difference between maturity and health let us take three or four passages of Scripture.

Philippians ii. 12, 13: "Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

"It is GOD." I am to work out what God works in, and I can never work out any more than God works in. It is only when we see this that we come into the place of health and blessing.

I. Thessalonians v. 23, 24: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole

spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." "*Who also will do it.*" It is not we who must preserve blameless these three great departments of our being; it is GOD who is going to do it, and all we have to do is to fall back upon Him and realize that it is His work.

Hebrews xiii. 20, 21: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Notice that the power that is to sanctify me is the power that brought again the Lord Jesus from among the dead. The one impossible thing in all the ages was the resurrection of a man from the dead, but the whole fabric of Christianity rests upon it, and the one stupendous power that brought Him from the dead is the power that is to bring about my sanctification and my perfection. It is dependent not upon my poor miserable attempts, but upon the force of God who brought from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 24, 25: "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen." The true rendering is, "keep you from *stumbling*," not only from falling down. And what else? "To present you not only blameless, but *faultless*, before the presence of His glory." There is the perfected and the perfect. We are perfect because He keeps us from stumbling; we shall be perfected because He

will present us faultless before the presence of His glory. The forgiveness of my sins at the cross depends upon Him, the power that heals and keeps me whole depends upon Him, my sanctification hour by hour depends upon Him, my final presentation before the presence of His glory depends upon Him. Just in proportion as you and I see that HE is to do this, in that proportion do we come into the place of blessing.

But while it is His *work*, the responsibility rests on me that I be in the place in which God can do that work; that I am in the attitude to which He will respond with His power. What is the attitude? II. Corinthians vi. 17, 18:

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

I am to take up the attitude of separation and renunciation. God does not call us to renounce the great underlying principle of sin, for we cannot. God cleanses from that. But He does call us to the renunciation of sin as an active principle in our life, something that we commit of our own free will.

THREE STAGES IN WILLFUL SIN.

There are three stages in this form of sin:

First, “Sin is the transgression of the law.” (I. John iii. 4.) Every one believes that. It is the simple, everyday definition of sin. In other words, sin is wrongdoing.

Second, “Him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (James iv. 17.) Sin is neglecting to do right. A great many fall in heartily with the first definition, but not with the second. A great

many of our church members say that sin is wrongdoing, but have not learned that when God gives them an opportunity to do a piece of work for Him, and they neglect to do it, that is sin.

Third, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans xiv. 23.) This definition goes deeper still. If there comes into my life as a Christian a question of right and wrong about which I am doubtful, and I continue to act as though it were right, as long as I am doubtful concerning it, I am sinning, because my action is "not of faith."

Scores of young believers, if they could only see and believe that, would be saved from asking many questions. They ask:

"Is it right for me to go here and there?"

What do you think about it?

"Well, I don't know."

Then it is *wrong*. The moment you are doubtful about a certain course of action your solemn duty is to cease that action. In the doing of that doubtful thing there is actual sin against God. There may be something which has been perfectly legitimate for you thus far, but suddenly, in your own communion, in the midst of a piece of service for God, that thing comes up and you see it as never before, and say:

"I wonder if that is right."

Now your business, the moment the doubt is suggested, is to cease from doing that thing. In process of time you may be able to go back to it because the doubt may be removed, but you cannot afford to let anything about which there is a suspicion of doubt stand between you and your personal communion with God. The moment you begin to do it you are in the region of sin.

We are called upon to-day, so far as our will is con-

cerned, to say: "Lord, we will put away actual wrongdoing out of our lives, and we will come into the place of quick and ready obedience. To Thy will, when Thou shalt make it known, anywhere, in our houses, in our habits, in our inward life, there shall be no resistance. We will cease doing anything about which we are doubtful."

FULL SURRENDER.

One other thing. Romans xii. 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." There is not only to be separation and renunciation, but there is to be the surrender of my whole being to God.

No one word seems to convey all that I mean by this surrender. "*Consecration*" is a blessed word, but people seem to have an idea that consecration means coming every now and then to give ourselves up to God anew. We cannot reconsecrate and reconsecrate, though we may repeatedly call to mind the perpetual fact of our consecration. The word that helps me more than any other as marking my attitude toward God is the word "*abandonment*." It is a mighty word filled with weakness. It indicates my falling back upon God.

"But what about consequences?"

I have nothing to do with consequences.

"But God may take me clean out of the place where I am."

I have nothing to do with that. Whether it is in China, India, America, England, or heaven, I do not care. That is surrender, that is abandonment, if I know anything about it. "Lord, do with me as Thou wilt, in all the relations of my life, in all the avenues

of my being, everywhere and at all times." "Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Now by God's grace renounce sin, cut the dead line between the old life and the new, so far as actual wrong is concerned, so far as the will is concerned. You cannot give up your wrongdoing unless you get the energy of God, but you cannot get the energy of God until you give up your wrongdoing. As long as you are clinging to sin, or neglecting what you ought to do, or doing doubtful things, you will not get God's blessing. Let the sin go, and say, "God, take me."

And then what?

Believe. Abandon and believe—I do not know which comes first. They go together.

Some may say, "We will abandon, but we cannot trust."

Then you do not abandon. There is no use standing on the edge of a pond of lovely ice and saying that it bears beautifully while you will not go on it. Out on it, man! I do not believe it bears until I see you on it. Believe and abandon yourself to Him in the one great act. O my brother, longing as you are for whole health as the one great thing, will you quit your sin and fall back upon God? You cannot live the blessed life by your own effort, but HE lives it in you by His own overwhelming grace, and to Him always and forever be the glory. He has taught me that I nothing can, but HE all things can. There is my condition and there is power.

SMALL HINDRANCES.

What a small thing will keep men and women from this blessed life! In 1895 I went to Douglas, on the Isle of Man, and in one of my afternoon meetings

there came to me a young lady who said that all the joy had gone out of her life four years ago.

"Praise God," I said.

"What about?" said she.

"That you know when it went; because if you know when it went, you know how it went."

She said: "I do not think I do."

"Yes, you do, you are very definite about the time; now go back four years and tell me what happened."

She hung her head for a while, and I knew that something had happened.

"What was it?"

She replied: "I disagreed with my oldest friend. We were both Christians, and I wanted to tell her that I was wrong, but I did not, and she has gone away from the country."

"Well," I said, "you know all about it."

"What am I to do?" she asked.

"Write to her and tell her that you were wrong; that is what the Master wanted you to do then."

"I cannot do that."

"You will never get back to the joy until you do."

She came all through that fortnight to the meetings and fought against God. She had all the knowledge of the blessed life that had come to her from her past experience, and yet was in darkness because she would not go back to God's point and be obedient.

The next year I went back to Douglas, and my very first meeting was a meeting for workers. One of the first persons I spoke to was that young woman. The first thing I said to her was:

"You have sent that letter."

She said, "Yes," and every line on her face convinced me that the joy had returned. She said: "I wrote it *last night!* I have been fighting God for

twelve months about that letter, and all last week as I looked forward to this mission I have been in hell, and at last I said, 'O God, I cannot bear this any longer, I will give in.' I wrote that letter and sealed it and carried it at midnight and dropped it in the letter box, and as that letter went into the box, heaven came back into my heart."

Of course it did.

What is the little thing that is keeping heaven and God out of your heart, and all these blessings away from your soul? It is He that brings the cleansing and the light, but you must be obedient. I beseech you, attend to that upon which He has put His hand. Separate. Renounce sin. Step out upon God, and the healing and the blessing will come.

THE CLEANSING OF NAAMAN

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Luke there is a verse which suggests a line of practical application which is of the utmost value:

“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke iv. 27. R. V.)

I thank God that the New Testament comes after the Old, and that the words of Jesus light up for us that old-time story of Naaman the Syrian with great suggestiveness; that from the words of the Master we find that Naaman had a second “but” in his life. We were introduced to the first one in the Old Testament, and it was full of sadness. He was a great man with his master; he was honorable; he was rich—BUT he was a leper! Now, Jesus says there were a great many lepers in Israel, and none of them was cleansed BUT Naaman. Naaman got into blessing. Naaman found a place where the leprosy passed absolutely out of his life. Sweetest word of all, it seems to me, in that story—“his flesh came again as the flesh of *a little child*.”

My brother, it is you and I that alter our minds—God never alters His; and the great ideals of the past are the ideals of to-day; and the great law of life in the past is the law of life to-day. The law of life in the physical realm, as revealed in the healing of Naaman, is the law of life in the spiritual realm. The Master confronts you and confronts me with leprosy, the leprosy of sin; and He says to us: “Except ye be converted, and become as *a little child*, ye can by no means enter into the kingdom of God.”

I need not dwell at any length upon the story of Naaman. It is familiar to us all. We know all its points and its beauties. My business is to find out how we may get the second "but" into our lives. We are all conscious that the first "but" is there—at least, if we are not, we shall never find our way into the second. We are all ready to say:

"It is quite true, perfectly true; this, that and the other tell the story of our blessings; BUT we are sinners."

Well, are we coming over, are we coming to the point, not theoretically but actually, definitely, positively, for ourselves, that it may also be said of us: "BUT he was cleansed"?

LEPERS IN ISRAEL.

Here there is a very solemn thought in this word which Jesus utters about Naaman: "There were many lepers in Israel."

Lepers in Israel! Children of the covenant! Men and women living right in the region of blessing! And yet how absolutely and utterly useless was privilege to them, because they did not make use of it; because they did not take hold of the great blessing of God which was theirs as a nation, and in the covenant, and appropriate it to themselves! Yet this man outside of the covenant, this man who had not lived in the realm of privilege, this man who had not been brought up in the very oracles of God, this man who knew nothing in his family or in his past history of the wonderful working power of the Most High, this outsider passed into blessing, while the men who were inside missed it! Oh, again the Master's words come back and light this up:

"He that is first shall be last; he that is last shall be first."

The great truth that is impressed upon our minds from this thought is just this: it is not enough that you and I have been privileged people; it is not enough that we know the power of God; it is not enough that we have been brought up and nurtured in the fear of the Lord; there must be a personal appropriation of all the blessing presented to us in Christ, or else we miss the blessing. "And they will come from the north and the south, from the east and the west, and sit down in the kingdom, while the children of the kingdom are cast out." It is not enough that we know these things. We must do them.

May I say a word first as to the need of every heart that has found the first "but" in their lives? Then a word as to the message of the Gospel to such needy hearts. And then I want to press home the practical last message: "Try it." That is the great point to which we need to come.

THE NEED OF EVERY HEART.

I believe there is a general conviction of need. Hundreds of people in general think they need the cleansing and the pardon that Christ alone can bring; but I want, if I may, to analyze that general sense of need, and ask as though my own heart's experience:

"What do I need?"

I answer it with these three things: (1) I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; (2) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-day; (3) I need that something shall be done with regard to to-morrow—all in my own experience.

I need that something shall be done with regard to yesterday; for yesterday was the day of sin. The years that have passed have been years of wrongdoing, actual wrongdoing; years of carnal, self-pleasing

rebellion against God. What am I going to do with these years? Suppose that I now surrender myself to Christ, accepting His invitation,—what about the past? I need that something shall be done with the past, or else I can have no peace, no sense of purity, no blessing.

And then I know that something must be done in the present moment. Supposing it be possible to deal with the deeds of the past, I shall still be the same being; still in my own nature there will be that which will propel me towards wrong and towards sin, and therefore I shall still be in the presence of God unacceptable to Him. I need forgiveness. I need the consciousness of acceptance with God.

And then, when I have faced these two needs, if there be a message in the Gospel that shall meet me in the yesterday of my life, and the to-day of my life, I still have another need. I look out to the future. I see to-morrow coming on, if my life be spared, with the same old forms of temptation, the same old suggestions to evil from without, and I reverently say that if God forgive me yesterday, and accept me to-day, yet am I helpless unless He make some special provision for me to-morrow.

The general sense of the need is analyzed to my own heart when I take this three-fold outlook upon my life—yesterday, to-day, to-morrow. And what need I? I need that somehow or another I shall be pardoned for the past; I need that in the present moment purity shall be given to me in order that my nature shall be changed, and I shall be accepted with God; and for to-morrow I need power for all that lies ahead. Pardon, purity, and power; pardon for yesterday; purity for to-day; power for to-morrow. I stand amid the years of my life, coming and going so swiftly that they seem to glide away before I know it, and I say:

“In the past I have sinned; I want pardon. In the present moment I am impure; can I have purity? And to-morrow—I dread it, because of my own weakness—can there be for me a power that shall come into my life, and energize me in the future?”

HOW THE GOSPEL MEETS THE NEED.

Now, is not this the Gospel that you have heard through all your lives? Is not every need thus expressed met in the message that Jesus Christ sends to you again to-day?

What about the past? He meets you by His cross, and He says to you: “I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.” Do you know what it is to blot out a transgression? Do you know what it is to have sin put away at the cross of Christ? He does it by His own blood-shedding.

But what is this blessing of the blotting out of sin?

Recall the story of the boy who ran in one day to his mother, after he had read that promise, “I will blot out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.” And he said:

“Mother, what does God mean when He says He will blot out my sins? What is He going to do with them? I can’t see how God can really blot them out and put them away. What does it mean—blot out?”

The mother, who is always the best theologian for a child, said to the boy: “Didn’t I see you yesterday writing on your slate?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Well, fetch it to me.”

He fetched his slate. Holding it in front of him, the mother said:

“Where is what you wrote?”

“Oh,” he said, “I rubbed it out.”

“Well, where is it?”

"Why, mother, I don't know."

"But how could you put it away if it was really there?"

"Oh, mother, I don't know. I know it was there, and it is gone."

"Well," she said, "that is what God means when He said, 'I will blot out thy transgressions.'"

My brother, are you troubled about the past? Are sins of the past haunting you to-day? I do not ask you to make a list of them—you cannot do it; but I ask you to remember that the list is made. The whole black list of sins is before thee, and there comes thy way to-day the Man of sorrows and of tears, the Man of suffering and of triumph, and He says: "I will blot out thy transgressions." He will put across that list of thy sins His own pierced hand, and His own precious blood shall cleanse the page of all thy sins. It is His promise. He is able to promise because He has been into the darkness of His death, and out of that darkness He has brought authority by which He blots out the sin of the past, and puts it all away.

But I need more than that: I need purity; I need to know that I am accepted by God. And again He calls me to His cross, and at the cross He tells me that He will not only forgive sins, but cleanse from all unrighteousness. He tells me that He will take my nature, and purify it, and make it like unto His own; and that in Him, and in the power of His life communicated to me, I shall be accepted of God.

But how may I know this?

On His oath, on His covenant, on His blood, I am to depend, as He says: "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

"Ah, but what about to-morrow? How am I going to manage to-morrow?"

The Master bends over the trembling soul that asks that question, and says: "Lo, I am with you always."

Some years ago, in Scotland, a Scotch lord gave to his old servant Donald a little farm. He called him in one day and said:

"Donald, I am going to give you that farm, that you may work it for yourself, and spend the rest of your days there upon your own property."

Donald, with all the canniness that characterizes a Scotchman, looked up into the face of his lord, and said to him:

"It is nae gude to gie me the farm; I have nae capital to stock it."

His lordship looked at him, and said: "Oh, Donald, I think I can manage to stock it also."

And Donald said: "Oh, well, if it is you and me for it, I think we will manage."

Trembling soul, if Christ Jesus pardoned thee, if He purified thee, then say to Him:

"Now, Lord, I thank Thee for the pardon; I magnify Thee for the purity; but, Master, I have no capital; how am I going to live in the future?"

And He says: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up freely for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? Lo, I am with you."

"Jesus, Master, if it be Thee and me for it, we can manage."

That is the point I want you to come to—the need: yesterday, pardon; to-day, purity; to-morrow, power. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and forever; pardoning the past, purifying to-day, and energizing you and me for every moment that is left to us in the world.

“TRY IT.”

Now we come to the point of actual dealing with God for ourselves. I cannot help you here, except to say what Naaman's servants said: “Try it.” Even if you are very weak and trembling and doubting, never mind. Try it. Venture on God. Take some risk in the matter. Two men in the life of Jesus came to Him—and one never can read the story of either without feeling it was a poor, poor business—one said to Jesus Christ: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst.” Don't you see, he wasn't perfectly sure that the Master was willing, but he ventured on Him. He came to Him on a crutch, because he could not walk straight, and the crutch was a little “if”—“*If* Thou wilt.” The other had to get another crutch, a crutch for the other side, and he said: “If Thou canst do something for my boy, do it.” And how did the Master deal with this man? “No, I cannot help you; your faith is not strong enough; you haven't confidence enough”? Not He. If a man got to Him, He didn't care. It is better for a man to come with, “Lord, Thou canst,” “Thou wilt,” and “I believe”; but if you cannot come that way, come the other way. Come with your “if.” “Lord, if Thou canst make me clean, do it; only I come to Thee.”

Do you remember those four leprous men that sat in the gate of the city of Samaria? One of the most sensible committees that ever sat in the history of the world, was that committee of starvation. There in the city of Samaria famine stared them in the face. The host of the besieging army had cut the city off from supplies. The committee of four lepers held one of the only committee meetings I ever cared to attend; and I like to go there, and watch these men as, dis-

cussing the situation, they propose a resolution, and carry it. What is the resolution? Said they:

“What do we sitting here? If we go into the city we shall die. That is very evident. If we sit still here we shall die. If we go down to the host of Syria, while they may save us alive, they may kill us. That is the outlook: firstly, certain death in the city; secondly, certain death sitting here; thirdly, half a chance of life down yonder. We move as a resolution that we turn our back upon the certain death in the city, certain death in the gateway, and venture upon the half chance of life down yonder.”

Wasn't that a sensible thing for a committee to do? And you know how it worked. They took the half chance of life, and found that it wasn't only a chance of life, but it was more abundant life, life for everybody except the men who didn't believe God could do it.

My brother, I want you to come to Jesus Christ that way now, if you feel that you cannot come any other way. It is certain death to go back to the old life. It is certain death to sit in the gateway sighing for virtue, and never finding it. You are not quite sure Jesus can do for you what He has done for others, but you think He may. Then try Him on the off chance! Venture on Him. Come to Him now and say:

“Lord, if Thou canst do anything with such as I am—
—Lord, I give myself to Thee!”

How will it work? Many a believer could tell you:

“I came to Jesus as I was—
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.”

Accept that testimony. Come, venture on him.

How was it that Naaman nearly missed cleansing? Two things very nearly wrecked his faith. The first

was: "Behold, I thought"—preconceived notions of how God was going to deal with him; and the second was: "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than the Jordan?"—an attempt to dictate terms to God as to how he should get healed. First of all, he had an idea as to how God should work, and because God was not going to work that way, he nearly missed his blessing; and then he wanted to say that he knew a better way—Abana and Pharpar were better rivers than the muddy Jordan.

PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS.

Thousands of souls have been wrecked upon one or other of those rocks at the entrance of the harbor of safety. "I thought"—what did you think? Did you think God was coming to wave over you some magician's wand, and give you some strange feeling? He never does. His way is the way of obedience. "To the Jordan! Dip seven times! To Christ, in absolute abandonment of self!" Along that line only comes His blessing. And the only way in which some men and women will ever get through into salvation or sanctification, is to sweep out of their life, by a determined effort of their will, all preconceived notions, and to say:

"Oh, God, get Thy way in Thy way, whatever I think."

DICTATING TERMS.

The other danger is that we want to dictate terms. That is so often done. I remember years ago conducting a mission, and at the back of the chapel sat a man. In the very first after-meeting, as I moved around speaking to various persons, I came to that man. I found the Holy Spirit of God had gripped him, but he looked at me, and said—I had been inviting people to come out into an inquiry-room:

"Can't I be saved without going in there?"

Now, when a man begins to ask that question you must deal with him just in one way. And I said:

"No; I don't think you can."

"Why," he said, "is salvation in the inquiry-room?"

"No, it is in God; but just as long as you sit here and want to dictate terms to God, you are proving that you have not got to the end of self, and there is no salvation for you. That is the trouble with you."

"Then," he said, "if I cannot be saved without going into that room, I will go to hell."

"My brother," I answered, "that is not God's choice for you. If you have chosen it for yourself, I cannot help it."

Every night that man came and sat there. Oh, how gracious God is! He does not take us at our word. He does not leave us alone when we have said some rash, foolhardy thing.

I had warned the workers, and said:

"Don't talk to that man. Leave him alone. Let God have His way with him."

I shall never forget the last night of the mission. Before I had time to ask a soul to move, that man came forward over the backs of the seats to the altar. I looked at him and said:

"I thought you were going to hell, my brother?"

He said: "Oh, I have been there all the week."

Praise God! it does a man good to get there a little while that way sometimes.

As long as you are dictating terms—"Can't I be saved right here?"—you are likely to miss the blessing. You *can* be saved there. You can be saved without a man knowing of it at the time. Somebody is bound to know of it soon, however. Nobody ever became a Christian without it flaming out sooner or

later. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea both tried to be Christians in private; but by and by there came the day of crucifixion, and these two men got the body of the dead Christ, and laid it to its last rest. You cannot be a Christian and keep it under a bushel long: the light will either go out, or put the bushel on fire. You may think you can get to Jesus Christ quietly; but as long as you are trying to dictate terms, as long as you are saying, "I don't like this noisy, babbling, rushing, muddy stream of Jordan; let me have the quiet, placid, sweet waters of Abana," just so long you are not in a condition for blessing. It is when you come to say: "Anywhere that He points the way; any means that He mentions to me; any cross He puts in front of me, I will take to get to Him, to have His cleansing"—when men come there, then they are in the way of blessing. There were many lepers in Israel, but none of them were cleansed save Naaman; and he was cleansed because he entered into the spirit of true relationship to God by obeying. And there are many who are suffering from the leprosy of sin, but they, and they only, will have cleansing who in the divinely marked way come to Him, who alone can cleanse, and abandoning all preconceived notions, and sweeping every temptation to dictate terms aside, say:

"Just as I am, without one plea,

But"—(*best plea of all!*) "that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,

Oh, Lamb of God" (*through doubt, darkness, difficulty, in spite of obstacles,*)—"I come."

God help us all so to come!

CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HAND

“As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.” (Jeremiah xviii. 6.)

This, in the first instance, is, of course, a national statement, but since the greater includes the less, we may argue that the principles which regulate national life must also influence individual life. The only social and national upbuilding there ever can be must be brought about by the upbuilding of the individual life and character. Out of this great national statement made to God's own chosen people we shall take out then the principle which it contains and look at it in its individual application.

I shall first ask you to consider the great principle contained in this solemn word, “As clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, saith the Lord;” second, our relationship to that principle; and third, the deep underlying truth, which makes this principle one in which we may rejoice.

I. GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY.

Look first then at this principle. “As clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.”

Can anything convey this truth more forcibly and simply than these words? If you have ever seen the clay on the potter's wheel, and as the wheel turned round have seen the clay molded and fashioned by the thought and will and activity of the potter himself, you must have seen how there was surrender, how without desire or suggestion the clay was simply a mass in the hands of the potter. It was plastic to his

will and touch. God says, "As clay is in the hand of the potter, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."

This word teaches *God's absolute sovereignty*. God has designed and created and sustained me, and I have absolutely no appeal against His will. God has supreme right to do whatsoever He will with the earth, and the nations, and with each particular individual in the nations. If God chooses to mark a line, and say, "There thy service ends," have I any right to complain? If God were to take me right out of my present circumstances or out of this world to-day, no matter what use I have made of my opportunities here, have I any right to complain or appeal against it? None. Whatever God chooses to do, He has the right to do. God has never ceded His sovereign right to the devil or to any one else. Though He still permits evil to exist in the world, He holds the reins, and the devil could not touch a single hair upon the back of a single camel that belonged to Job until God gave him permission. God reigneth! He is not dead nor deposed.

The tendency of this day is to a loose doctrine of divine government that is producing impious blasphemy in the way that men look into the face of God, and tell Him what He ought and ought not to do. Blessed be His name that His ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts our thoughts, or how many a man would be smitten and stricken to the very death! How long-suffering God is! Clay in the hand of the Potter: that is our position, and He can make or break, mold or fashion us as He will so far as our right of resistance or questioning or complaint is concerned.

2. WEAKNESS AND ABANDONMENT.

What is my relation to this great principle of divine government? There is this difference between the

clay and myself: I have intelligence, I have will, but my will is to omnipotence as the materialism of the clay is to my will. The clay is infinitely below the potter, and must submit to his pleasure. In the hands of God I am yet more powerless than the clay in the hands of the potter.

What, then, is my relation to this principle? My proper attitude is to *acknowledge my weakness*, and to say that I have no power to alter my own shape or substance. What I am I am, and out of that I can never evolve anything better. That which is flesh is flesh. That is my state by nature, and the part of wisdom is to acknowledge it, and take that place before God.

The next step is to use that will about which we talk so much, and to act on the truth which Tennyson saw when he said:

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

We show our wisdom when our weakness is acknowledged by *yielding ourselves to God* and lying plastic in His hand that He may work His will in our lives. There is to be perfect acquiescence in the will of God.

That is better than resignation, but there is something even beyond acquiescence, it is *delight* in the will of God. There must be no desire as to the shape I am to take, or as to the manner of my preparation. You and I must be willing to have God work out His purpose in our lives, by sickness, if He so wills it, by suffering, by sorrow, by bereavement, by breaking us in order to make us. If I set my will up against that, then I am thwarting the Potter, and I am hindering His purpose. In brief, I must *abandon* myself to God. I must abandon myself to Him without questioning as to whether it is to be there or here, this way or that

way, under these circumstances or those; the one question for me to ask must be, "What is Thy will?" God is King, and I am to say Yes to His will.

3. GOD'S UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF LOVE.

Now look at the purpose of God underlying all His dealings with us. Let everything else be put out of the vision. When we get to this point, though it be through heartbreak and disappointment, everything else vanishes from sight, and only the thought that God is doing a great work stands before us. We never saw this when God was dealing with us. We simply stood in the presence of God and yielded ourselves to His will.

Underlying this is a deeper truth. It is contained in that old text which no preacher has ever exhausted, which every child loves; a truth contained in three short words; a truth which every child seems to feel, and which every aged saint confesses to have hardly touched its fringe; a truth which holds all revelations and blessedness in it—GOD IS LOVE.

What has that to do with it?

Everything. I am clay in the hands of God, and I tremble; I am clay in the hands of love, and I trust. God is love. My creation is the creation of love. His purpose in creating me was love; His government is the government of love. He alone understands me and knows all my possibilities. I might live among you for years and you would not know me. There are depths in every nature that no man knows. No man hath seen God at any time; it is equally true that no man hath seen man at any time. We do not even know ourselves, but God knows us through and through; He understands our thoughts afar off, and there is no hiding ourselves from the searching of His

eye. God is love, and consequently when He surrounds me with law and permission it is love that fences me round.

It is not a hard, capricious taskmaster that says, "Now I have a being in my hands, I will enjoy having my way on him."

That is human. No, it is devilish! God says:

"This is the child of my heart, this is the highest work of my creation, made in my image, and I will hedge him about with law and commandments, because I love him and know all the depths of his nature. If I lead him through tears and suffering and sorrow they shall be but the sweet ministers of my tender love and infinite compassion for him."

Love is on the throne. How can I learn that? By submitting to the kingship.

Many people have said to me:

"We don't love God. We reverence Him and adore Him, but we do not really love Him. What shall we do?"

My answer is, "We love Him because He first loved us."

How do we find this out? Only as we face this first fact of His kingship and begin to obey Him. By obeying the law a man discovers the love in the law.

LAW AND LOVE.

Let me earnestly warn you against dividing God into halves and saying: "This is law and that is love." His law and His love are identical. A man should never talk about the providence of God as though it were a sort of afterthought by which He helps a man to bear the severity of law. God's providence is God's government, and no man ever passes into the realm of love until he recognizes God's kingship, and submits at the foot of the cross to that kingship.

Take that exquisite teaching of our Lord when He says: "Take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." He has been speaking to His disciples about food, and clothing, and the necessities of this life, and then He says, "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." If I could see God as my Father, I could love Him. How, then, am I to come to see Him as my Father? What does Jesus say? "Seek ye first the *kingdom* of God."

You will find the fatherhood in the kingship of God, the love of God in the law of God; you will discover the exquisite tenderness of the divine compassion when you submit to the sovereignty of God and yield yourself to His absolute control. How have I come to realize my mother's love to me and my father's love more than I ever could in my childhood? It has been by coming to understand that the very restrictions which they placed upon me of old were the restrictions of an intense love for me. I used to think they loved me when they let me have my own way, but I have discovered they loved me most when they did not let me have my own way. So men get an insight into the deep love of God by obeying the law of God, which at first seems irksome, and by submitting to this great supreme truth of the sovereignty of God.

On and on God is leading you, putting His hand on this and that, hedging you in here, and holding you up there; and it is always love that does it. There is always a more marvelous unfolding of His love in these acts of God, and you will only discover the love of God as your own heart responds, and as you submit yourself to His kingship.

Most reverently do I take the supreme illustration of

the love of God from the life of my blessed Lord. It was He who said, "I delight to do Thy will." And why? Because in His perfect, unquestioning obedience to the will of God, He knew what the love of God was.

All the divine blessings which we are seeking are conditioned upon this, that we do recognize God's kingship and submit to it really, absolutely, with thorough abandonment of all questioning. Some people tell us that we should always count the cost. We ought, in everything except this. Here there should be no counting the cost; and by refusing to count the cost, we count the cost in the best way; by refusing to reckon up God and ourselves in the little puny laws of human mathematics we reach the divine mathematics which take good care of us all the way, and see to it that we abide in Him forever. To rebel against this law is to take my life for a little while out of the hand of the Potter, and by so doing to render it purposeless and shapeless, so that it is to become loss and ruin. To rebel is useless. God's law and righteousness are vindicated in human failure as well as in human success, and the man who makes shipwreck is the man who, knowing the will of God, disobeys, and goes out into the darkling void where God is not. That man in his eternal loss vindicates the kingship of Jehovah. But, my brother, what God wants is your submission, because He loves to take you, perhaps to break you, but for your good, for I read that the potter broke the vessel on the wheel, "and he did *make it again.*" The secret of all blessing is:

"I worship thee, sweet will of God,
And all thy ways adore;
And every day I live, I learn
To love thee more and more."

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT OF HUMAN LIVES

“The Lord our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount.” (Deuteronomy i. 6.)

The sojourn of Israel, the ancient people of God, at Horeb had been important and interesting. There they had received from God the words of the law, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the ritual of worship. They had there had revelations of the glory of God, and revelations of their own hearts; they had found themselves in rebellion and sin even in that brief time. They had also had revelations of the tenderness and compassion of their God.

At last the organization is complete; they are ready to move forward and to take possession of the land which God has given them, and the word comes to them suddenly, with a pertinence that reminds them that in actual practice they are

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under the direct government of God. Every man of them holds to the theory of the divine government; but now a sudden order takes hold of the creed which they had professed and turns it into a fact to be put into practice. To these people sojourning at the mount, in the place of revelation, in the place of wonderful blessing, the word comes swift and sudden and startling:

“Ye have tarried long enough in this mount.” (Deut. i.6.)

This was a startling and urgent word, revealing

certain great truths concerning this government of God, which it is of the utmost importance that we should perpetually bear in mind.

It reveals to me, first of all, that *the divine government is a fact*. It also reveals certain truths concerning that divine government, namely:

1. That the divine government is a disturbing element in human life.

2. Therefore that the divine government is a progressive element in human life.

3. That the divine government is a methodical element in human life.

If it be a fact that God governs my life and your life, then He will disturb us; He will disturb us in order that we may make progress; and He will disturb us that we may make progress along certain definitely marked lines.

DIVINE GOVERNMENT A FACT.

First of all, then, these words reveal the fact of the divine government. How easy it would have been for Israel to settle down there and say, "We believe in God and in the divine government." Had there been no voice speaking to them in actual leading, no word coming to disturb them, they might have come to hold the divine government merely as a theory. Then it would have passed out of their lives, and would have failed to be what it was intended to be to them.

Beloved, let me remind you that the divine government is a very definite fact. God is absolute monarch wherever He is King at all. His government is autocratic. He does not consult us as to what He shall do with us, where He shall send us, what He would have us to do. Moreover, His government is an imperative government. He never permits us to make compro-

mises with Him for a single moment. He speaks the word of authority. He marks the path without ever consulting us, and having done so, our only relationship to that government is that of implicit, unquestioning, immediate obedience.

I. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS A DISTURBING ELEMENT.

Now, consider what this government means. Imagine the stir that must have been created in that camp when the word came, "Ye have tarried long enough in this mount." Imagine how tents would be struck and camels loaded throughout the whole of the camp. The people who had been living there for a little more than a year were suddenly rooted up and ordered to move away. Think how at the sudden proclamation of that word of God all social and family arrangements had to be set aside. That word touched every tent and touched every soul, and wherever families had arranged to meet together at a certain time for social intercourse, the whole plan was swept away. The divine voice was sounded, "Ye have tarried long enough, and no engagement is of sufficient importance to hinder the divine word. Tents must be struck immediately." All the minor arrangements of everyday life, important in their place, must be set on one side, because the word of the King is supreme and is sufficient in itself to set aside every arrangement that these people have made.

What a disturbing business! What a serious thing to be under the authority of some one who can upset everything in our lives without consulting us, and by a word can mark for us the moment of departure! That is the government of God. We may talk and sing about the kingdom, and pray about the kingdom, but until we face that fact we know nothing of what it

is to be living in the kingdom of God and under the government of the Most High.

Human arrangements are constantly disturbed in the kingdom of God, and what is more remarkable still,

DIVINE PLANS SEEM TO BE CHANGED,

and orders that we have most definitely received from on high are countermanded, and the whole program of life again and again is changed to the men and women who are in the kingdom of God and are desirous of obeying only His will. To-day a man is in a sphere where God has put him and on every hand God is graciously setting His seal upon the work that He has given him to do. But the divine voice comes: "Ye have tarried here long enough." That work must be dropped. All its hallowed associations must be left behind, and all the tender ties that have become entwined around the heart on account of that work must be snapped. The divine voice is heard—the only voice to which a man in the kingdom of God should pay any attention—and the sphere of work entered into because the divine finger pointed that way must be left the moment that voice bids the man move forward.

God comes into our lives in strange, mysterious ways when we are under His government. He may pluck away a loved one, and leave us with broken homes and almost desolate hearts for a time. Earthly friendships are often severed by divine government. Two souls knit together in the sacred bond of friendship, seemingly created for mutual service in the kingdom of God, are taken by the divine government and separated by thousands of miles. Divine government is a disturbing element, breaking cherished plans and associations and hopes. The aspiration of our heart, centered upon a friend, a child, an event, suddenly

crushed, and in a moment we find ourselves stranded in darkness! All this comes to men and women in the line of the divine government. It is a disturbing element in every human life. God has made His heroes and heroines by such dealings.

In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses thirty-five and thirty-six, we have very clearly indicated

THE ATTITUDE OF A CHRISTIAN.

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning: and be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their Lord, when He shall return from the marriage feast; that, when He cometh and knocketh, they may straightway open unto Him.”

Here is the character of the Christian. The loins girded like a pilgrim; no settling down amid the things of the earth, but a continual waiting for the divine voice, ready to be disturbed when God would disturb; willing ever to respond to the expression of the divine will, and satisfied in obedience. Of course the ultimate issue of this is the waiting for the Master Himself to come, but if I am living with my loins girded, waiting for the last summons that calls me to fellowship in the ages beyond, then am I ready for every call that precedes, whether it be to suffering, or to service, or to waiting.

The same thing is taught by Paul in his letter to the Romans, the thirteenth chapter, the eleventh and twelfth verses: “And this, knowing the season, that now it is high time for you to awake out of sleep; for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

Paul's figure is that of a beleaguered camp. Soldiers

have been sleeping in their tents, and suddenly the cry goes out that the day is breaking. Men rise, fling back the garments of the night, and gird on the armor ready for the coming of the king and for the word of command. The awakening here referred to is at the end of the dispensation, but it has its application to the whole of life. Men and women who are under the government of God are always homeless men and women, sojourners in tents, never dwelling in houses. That is the character of the people whom God governs.

But you ask, "Would you break down home life?"

Of course I would not; but my home is to be my lodging place, and if God orders me to strike my tent and move away immediately the tent is to be struck and I am to move. See how Abraham, the father of the faithful, lived. "A tent and an altar, a tent and an altar." He pitched his tent and erected his altar. His altar was the mark of the fact that he lived in relationship to the divine. The tent marked the fact that he was only a sojourner, a stranger and a pilgrim upon the road.

The divine government is a disturbing element. My duty is so to live that I shall be ready to be disturbed at any moment when God pleases.

2. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS A PROGRESSIVE ELEMENT.

Now turn to the second point, because that explains the first. The divine government is not only a disturbing element in human life, it is a *progressive element*.

God disturbs a man. Why? To move him on to something better—never that there may be retrogression, never merely for the sake of disturbance. If God asks me to strike my tent to-day and move out yonder, it is because yonder there is a higher possi-

bility, a more glorious outlook, a more perfect sphere. I may not see the advantage at first, but God's eye is always on the consummation, and He moves His people step by step at the right moment in the right way, and ever, ever onward towards that glorious consummation.

Progress is not necessarily pleasant. Notice how, years after, Moses speaks of the departure from Horeb. In the nineteenth verse of the first chapter of Deuteronomy, he says:

"And when we departed from Horeb, we went through all that great and terrible wilderness, which ye saw by the way of the mountain of the Amorites, as the Lord our God commanded us; and we came to Kadesh-barnea."

That was the movement. But how? Through that great and terrible wilderness. It was not a pleasant experience, but it was progress; it was moving onward. It was the further march into the purposes of God.

Now, beloved, if the divine government is a disturbing element, to be undisturbed is to be God-forsaken. If we know nothing of the voice calling us to alter plans and set aside arrangements and simply step out upon the divine word in faith as Abraham did, then we are God-forsaken men and women. Beyond that, to be God-forsaken is to settle to failure.

"Oh," you say, "let me stay here; my home is so comfortable, I am so happy."

God says: "Move from this place and go yonder."

You say: "I cannot. Let me remain where I am."

What are you asking? You are asking for your own breakdown and failure. God's plan for you is progress, growth; and you are asking for arrested development and for failure.

"Oh, no," you say, "I am only asking not to be disturbed."

They are the same things. When you and I pray, in our foolishness, that God will not disturb us, we ask Him to give us no more progress, but to let us settle where we are and pass down to failure.

There is no more exquisite figure, I think, in the whole Book of God of the disturbing element of divine government and its issue, than that in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy. It is a beautiful picture. Read from the ninth verse, "For the Lord's portion is His people." This is exactly what Paul says to the Ephesians about God's inheritance in the saints. Very well, then, if the Lord's portion is His people, He will value His people; and what will He do to them?

"Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He compassed him about, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of His eye; as an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings, He took them, He bare them on His pinions; the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the increase of the field; and He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat," etc.—you cannot exhaust it.

But here is what I want you to notice. The Lord's portion is His people; where do we find them? "In the waste howling wilderness, and He compassed them about." Then comes the verse that reveals the disturbing and the progressive elements of divine government: "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,

that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings, He took them, He bare them on His pinions."

STIRRING THE EAGLE'S NEST.

That picture is full of poetry, full of life and truth and beauty. Mark it. Have you ever seen an eagle stir up her nest? You know what happens. There in the nest, right upon the rocky height, are the eaglets; the mother eagle comes, and, taking hold of them, flings them out of their nest. They were so comfortable there, but she flings them right out of the nest high above the earth. They begin to fall straightway. They have never been in air before; they have always been in the nest.

Is not that mother bird cruel? Why does she disturb the eaglets?

Watch her and you will understand. As long as you look upon the struggling eaglets in the air you miss the point. Watch the eagle. Having stirred up her nest, "she spreadeth abroad her pinions," the pinions that beat the air behind her as she rises superior to it. Where are the eaglets? Struggling, falling; she is superior; they are falling. Then what does she do? "She beareth them on her pinions." She swoops beneath them, catches them on her wings, and bears them up. What is she doing? Teaching them to fly. She drops them again, and again they struggle in the air, but this time not so helplessly. They are finding out what she means. She spreads her pinions to show them how to fly, and as they fall again, she catches them again.

That is how God deals with you and with me. Has He been stirring up your nest? Has He flung you out until you felt lost in an element that is new and strange? Look at Him. He is not lost in that ele-

ment. He spreads out the wings of His omnipotence to teach us how to soar. What then? He comes beneath us and catches us on His wings. We thought when He flung us out of the nest it was unkind. No; He was teaching us to fly that we might enter into the spirit of the promise, "They shall mount up with wings, as eagles." He would teach us how to use the gifts which He has bestowed on us, and which we cannot use as long as we are in the nest.

Fancy keeping eaglets in the nest! It is contrary to their nature, contrary to the purposes for which they are framed and fitted. There is a purpose in the eagle. What is it? Flight sunward. There is a purpose in your life, newborn child of God. What is it? Flight Godward, sunward, heavenward. If you stop in the nest, you will never get there. God comes into your life and disturbs you, breaks up your plans, and extinguishes your hopes, the lights that have lured you on. He spoils everything; what for? That He may get you on His wings and teach you the secret forces of your own life, and lead you to higher development and higher purposes. This government of God is a disturbing element, but, praise His name! it is a progressive element.

3. THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS A METHODICAL ELEMENT.

Now take the third point. Not only is the divine government disturbing and progressive, but it is methodical. Strike your tents, get away from this mountain; where to? The land! That is the ultimate issue—possession of the land.

Now notice, beloved, that not only is there an ultimate issue in the mind of God when He disturbs His people, but there is clearly marked direction. We see this in the seventh verse of this chapter:

“Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the Arabah, in the hill country, and in the lowland, and in the south and by the seashore, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.”

There is direction towards possession.

But the most exquisite verse of all that marks the divine arrangement for the journey is the thirty-third verse: “Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God, who went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to show you by what way ye should go, and in the cloud by day.”

Did you ever read anything more beautiful than that? It is one of those things that absolutely master me. God going in front; what for? Choosing them a place in which to pitch their tent. They have struck their tents, and given up their plans, obedient to the disturbing voice of His government. Then what does He do? He goes in front and shows them the next place. At nightfall the cloud stands still and changes into a pillar of fire, giving them light.

There is nothing haphazard or accidental in such a life. God's people move in a plainly marked pathway, step by step. The government of God not only disturbs them and disturbs them for progress, but every inch of the way He has arranged for them.

O men and women, as we ask you to submit to the government of God, remember this: God is not making an experiment with you. We are not pawns upon a chessboard, moved about that God may win or lose. Every move is arranged. I did not know what was to come to pass to-day, but God was in this day before I came into it. Doing what? Choosing the place for

me, making arrangements, controlling everything. If your life is under the divine government, do not forget that every day you come to, God has been preparing for you. Do you believe it? Is God sending you to some foreign land? God is there getting ready for you to come. God goes in front as well as behind me. He is my rearward, but He is also in front, choosing, selecting, planning, arranging everything for me.

It is something to be thankful for, then, if God is disturbing me that I may progress, and if He is all the way marking out the path before me. There can be no accident to such a man. Nothing can go wrong in the life surrendered to such a divine government. A disturbing element, a progressive element, and yet, thank God, a government that makes no experiments, but that moves along divine lines of order.

MAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

Now, what is my relation to this government of God? I can put it in very few words. First, I should be always ready; and second, I should move the instant the word comes. That marks the line of wisdom. Ready to be disturbed if God disturbs; immediate obedience when He calls.

Now I do not think that any one can possibly say, "But that is very hard." It would be hard if we did not know God and if we did not know that the disturbance is for progress, and that the progress is along lines definitely marked and divinely arranged. Oh, the inexpressible comfort, the absolute rest of life to men and women who say:

"If God disturb me to-morrow, in being disturbed is my chief rest, because I know that when He moves it is to higher reaches of life, to better positions beyond; and though the ultimate issue of this present disturb-

ance may be far on, every mile of the journey He has chosen and every place where I pitch my tent He has selected for me.”

That is the kingdom in which I want to live; that is where I want to abide more and more. I want to be a man waiting for the disturbing element, responsive to the progressive element, rejoicing in the methodical element by which God leads me day by day and hour by hour.

ISRAEL'S FOLLY.

And, beloved, how may we mark our folly? By doing just what Israel did. They were characterized by wisdom at first. They struck their tents and moved, but at last they came up to the borders of this land that God had told them to go in and possess, and then they began to doubt the King; they began to wonder whether He knew His business. When they reached the borders of the land, they said:

“We will send men in to spy out this land.”

When the men came back with the report that there were giants and walled cities, those who up to that point had been responsive to the divine government said:

“Ah, well, you see God did not understand this when He sent us here. We cannot go on. He did not know that there were walled cities; He had no idea of the giants.”

Did they not say that? They said, “*We* had no idea,” which is the same thing. If they had believed that God knew and had been moving before them, choosing the place, what would they have cared for walled cities and giants?

Some of you have obeyed thus far. God has said to you, “Ye have tarried long enough in this mount.” He has broken up your nest somewhere. You strike your tent and start; you say:

“But somebody tells me that ahead are giants and walled cities.”

So there are; it is quite true; but the giants are for you to slay, and the walled cities are for you to live in. The God who disturbed you did it in order that you might come into possession of that very land; and if you live in His government, rest assured that for every step of the way that lies ahead He will move before you, and choose the place, and equip you for life and for service.

But it was a very sad business for these people. They disobeyed God, and were sent back. What then? They thought they would go and try by themselves. They were defeated and driven back, and for nearly forty years they had to stay in that wilderness instead of possessing the land straightway.

Now, in conclusion, I want to ask this one pointed question of my own heart and of yours: Where do we stand in relation to this government of God? You may have just heard the voice saying, “Ye have tarried long enough in this mount,” and He marks for you a new course of life. It is as clear as the sunlight in the blue. Wherever there are hearts waiting for the voice of God, that voice is to be heard. You know what God wants you to do. Now what are you going to do? I beseech you for your own sake, as well as for the glory of the kingdom of God, that you do not stop to count the cost of obedience, but that you say:

“He bids me go, and I go.”

That is the spirit which has brought men into the places of heroism and victory.

You know the old story of Luther; when he was warned against going to Worms, he said:

“Though every slate on every house were a devil, I would go.”

God had marked the path, and he was bound to go.

If you begin to count the cost, you are in the place of peril. It is the man who says to the King, "At thy word, O King, in the face of what seems to be an absolute combination of circumstances that must wreck me completely, I will go." You need have no fear, for He goeth before you to choose you out a place in which to pitch your tent, and the life abandoned to God is in perfect safety forever more.

WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS.

But perhaps you heard that voice speaking to you years ago, and you disobeyed and you have been in the wilderness ever since. You have been away from the land, towards which God was sending you forward to possess it. Thank God, He is full of tender compassion and graciousness, and all He asks is that you go back to the point of disobedience, and obey. God's path led that way, and you turned from it; go back. You know how you got off the definitely marked pathway, and missed the place that God had chosen for you to pitch your tent. Go back, man, and go along that path.

But you say: "That path is thorny and rough."

Tramp it; for, mark you, you will find that whenever you put your foot upon a thorn, another foot has been there first and taken off the sharpness; and whenever you begin to tramp a rough piece of road in obedience to the divine voice, another by your side will take the roughness from it, and you will simply walk in perfect harmony with Him who is your perpetual companion in the way of His own marking out. God not only goes before me to choose me a place; He walks with me along the pathway, and leaning on His strength, then am I strong.

One word more. There may be some to whom all this is as a foreign tongue. You have never heard the voice of God, and say: "The day of miracles is past. I am never disturbed. I make my own plans and live where I please and do as I like. What do you mean by a disturbing element?"

Beloved, you are living still among the fleshpots and the garlic of Egypt. You are still in slavery. Oh, if men could but see themselves! The man who does as he likes is the biggest slave. The man who never does as he likes is God's free man. You know no disturbing voice? God never points out for you a pathway altogether different from the one you had planned? Then, my brother, you are living still in the land of slavery, in the land of darkness. Back to your King! In His government alone lies safety, in His government alone is the place of life, and light, and liberty, and love. Any man who lives outside this government of God is in the place of dust and ashes and emptiness. Oh, back to your King!

O men, O women, my brethren, my sisters in Christ, those of you who have never yet submitted to Him, come under His control actually and positively. Fling away your theories, and get into the actuality of this business, and let God govern your life, disturb you, mark for you your progress, and prepare for you your sphere of service. He will call you away from some loved relationship, from some cherished habit, and will say, "This is the way." As you look at the pathway, you will think that it is a hard one; but as you begin to tread it, you will find that He is with you, and every step is leading you into finer air and larger life and more infinite possibilities.

REDEEMING THE TIME

Ephesians, chapter v., 15 to 18, inclusive: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit."

These verses form a setting to the particular part of them that I wish to consider, the sixteenth verse, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

I have quoted from the Revised Version, and the marginal thought there gives another reading for this particular part of our paragraph. Instead of "Redeeming the time," the margin has, "Buying up the opportunity." I venture to suggest that that is a clearer translation of the original word; and I intend to take that as conveying the thought in the mind of the apostle, "Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

"Buying up." The word translated "redeeming" in our Bible comes from another word which means "the market-place." One very often sees in rural districts the market held upon one certain day of the week somewhere in the center of the town, sometimes under cover, sometimes in the open; and to that common meeting-place come those who have goods to offer for sale and those who desire to purchase, and they transact their business in the hours of the market in that open market-place. It is just from that this word comes. In eastern towns the same habit obtained.

The merchantman came to the market-place in the center of the town, bringing his wares with him, there to transact his business; and he watched the market and waited for a favorable opportunity either to buy or sell, and when the opportunity presented itself he acted, he did business, he did that which he desired to do. He bought up his opportunity.

Now the apostle tells us, who are the children of God, to buy up the opportunities because the days are evil. You cannot have carefully read the epistles of Paul without having noticed how he never forgets the relation that exists between doctrine and duty; that he perpetually lays down for us great principles of life, unfolds before us the great truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But he never does that in order that men and women may possess the knowledge as theorists merely—he always does it in order that he may lead on to a practical application of the truth he declares. The apostle never forgets that the wonderful sanctifying force is the force of truth. Take his epistles and look through them, and you will find invariably that there is a statement of some great doctrine, and then you come to the point in the epistle where he uses his favorite word "Wherefore," and from that point he begins to apply his doctrine to the details of daily life.

OUR VOCATION.

This epistle to the Ephesians may well be spoken of as the epistle of vocation. He warns those to whom he writes. He unfolds to them the truth of their vocation; he endeavors to set their eyes upon God's ultimate purpose for them, and when he has done so through the first and second and third chapters, you find that the fourth chapter opens thus:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation.”

The vocation is declared in the opening part of the epistle. The effect that the holding of the truth of that vocation would have upon daily life is declared in the after part of the epistle. He begins by taking us to the heights of vision; then he brings us to the every-day level of life, and shows us how that vision unfolded before us will affect us as we live as fathers and children and masters and servants.

A charge has been made against certain ministers during recent years, that their preaching has been “other-worldly.” My dear brothers in the ministry, I am not perfectly sure that we have not been too much afraid of that taunt and sneer. The moment the church of Jesus Christ ceases to be “other-worldly,” she loses her power to affect this world. It is only in proportion as we have a true view of the heavenly calling that we are able to touch the earth upon which we live, as men and women of power. It is only as we realize that everything that transpires to us in the little while between our conversion and the coming of Jesus Christ, all the service rendered and all the lessons learned, are to prepare us for the higher service that lies beyond, that we shall ever be able to render service at its fullest and best upon this earth. I dwell upon that in opening because it lends force to the present duty as laid down in this verse:

“Buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil.”

This first thought must be the very background of all our study. Paul, in these opening chapters, has written down the great truth that the church of Jesus Christ will only reach its full sphere of service when it has passed clean away from this life, when it has left

behind it the temptation and the sin and all the various experiences of these passing years. Not to-day can we render our full service, but in God's great to-morrow, when (as Paul shows in this epistle) we, the church of Christ, the Catholic church, the church universal, the church redeemed out of the earth, gathered into eternal union with Christ in the heavens—that church has become the minister of the grace of God to the ages that are yet unborn; a medium through which God shall unfold in perfect clearness to principalities and powers in the heavenly places, His own wisdom and His own power. We are a heavenly people sojourning upon the earth; but, brother, if that be true, through us the light of the heavenly is to fall upon the earthly. The powers of the world to come are to touch the present age through the men and women who are sons and daughters of the world to come, and who will only find the fulfillment of their highest vocation when that eternal day breaks beyond the mists and beyond the shadows.

Now with that thought in mind, remembering that we are a heavenly people called to vocation in the heavens, how are we to act upon the earth? Well, all the second half of the epistle unfolds it. I choose to take from it this one word, expressing our present duty and privilege: "Look therefore carefully how ye walk"—you remember it is the same thing: "I beseech you to walk worthy of your vocation"—"Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise, buying up the opportunity, because the days are evil."

I. THE REASON.

Notice, first of all, the reason that Paul gives why Christian men and women should buy up the opportunity: "Because the days are evil."

Now if it were possible for us to find our way into Ephesus as it then was, taking that as an example; and if we told the leading men of the city that they had fallen in their lives upon evil days, they would angrily have resented the charge. They would have said:

“There never was such a time for Ephesus as this. We were never so prosperous as we are to-day. We were never as wealthy as we are to-day. Progress has marked the past, and to-day we are rich and wealthy.”

At that time there was a very peculiar combination in Ephesus. Commerce and religion had been united,—that is, of course, the religion of Ephesus. The great temple of their worship was also the banking-house of the merchants, and as the merchants poured their wealth into the temple for safe custody, that became an act of worship. Men were perfectly satisfied with themselves in Ephesus, and thought it was a day of prosperity and a day over which they might rejoice; but Paul was writing, not to the citizens of Ephesus, not to the rank and file of the people who dwelt there, but to the church of Jesus Christ, to the children of God, to the men and women of heavenly vocation; and, writing to them, he says:

“The days are evil days.”

So they were. They were evil to the men and women who had turned their backs towards idols to serve the living God. The prosperity of Ephesus was the adversity of the church. That in which the men of Ephesus made their boast was what rendered the days evil days to the called-out, separated, sanctified men and women whom God was preparing for the high vocation that lay beyond in the heavens.

EVIL DAYS.

The apostle says to these people, “You are to redeem the time; you are to buy up the opportuni-

ties." This great message comes to us. Our calling is a heavenly calling. The life of Christ bestowed in conversion and coming in all its fullness in the moment when we surrendered to Him, subduing us unto Himself, is preparing us for the high calling that lies beyond. For the present moment the word to us is that we are able to buy up the opportunities, and just as surely as the apostle said to these people of Ephesus the days are evil, so he says to us the days are evil.

Now in what sense are the days in which we live said to be evil days? Because you know that the world is perfectly satisfied. We are constantly being told there never was such an age as this, an age of progress, an age of advancement, an age of enlightenment. There is a danger of some men dying of pride before the century ends, because it has been such a wonderful century. Our cities have marks of progress on every hand. Our commerce is more wonderful than it ever was, and throughout the land you hear the voices of men and women telling you that these are the best days, days full of hope, characterized by progress, days in which the race may be perfectly proud of themselves; and yet in these days the message comes to us, "Evil days!"

BUSINESS LIFE.

Now analyze the thought for a moment or two. The majority of the men with whom you come into contact in ordinary business life are not godly, but ungodly. You are bound to mix with them, as matters stand in our cities and in our daily life to-day. Please do not misunderstand me. I do not say that these men are all disreputable or profligate or fallen. Never forget that a vast amount of the ungodliness of this age, as of every other, is cultured and refined; but it is none the less ungodliness. You can have an ungodliness

which is educated and cultured and refined and accomplished, but it is ungodliness—and I say the majority of the people with whom you come in daily contact are ungodly people. The days are evil days, then, in that sense, for the development of Christian character.

MATERIAL THINGS.

Take the activities of your own life for a single moment in this age when we have got away from simplicity, when we are living a complex life all around. Did you every try how little you could live on for one single week in your life? Did you ever discover how you are almost compelled by the very character of the age in which you live, to give hours' thought and attention every day to an enormous number of things which you could very well do without, material things all of them, with no touch of spirit in them? What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed? These are the questions that we are bound to face to-day in a measure in which our forefathers did not have to face them. The higher realization of the purpose that we have as we go forth day by day, perishes as we touch it. You know that isn't helpful to spirituality. These are evil days.

RELIGIOUS LIFE.

Then we are told that this is the age of progress. It is the age of rush, of movement, of effort. The old sacred art of meditation and contemplation is almost dead. It is the age when men and women are trying to live by the excitements of certain kinds of religious services even within the church, and the old solemn hours of quiet loneliness with God that made the saints of the past, where are they to-day? We are

carried up and borne forward, before we know it, upon the rush that characterizes the closing years of this century. Oh, when men and women come to me, as they do sometimes, and tell me, "What we need in the church is just to catch the spirit of the age and keep level with it," I say:

"In God's name, no! What we need is to be born of the Spirit of God, and that will send us against the spirit of the age and never bear us along with it."

All the rush and restlessness of the age that have crept into the church of Jesus Christ mark these days as evil days, and the very atmosphere by which we are surrounded is against the government of God. Do not let us deceive ourselves. Do not let us have meetings and sing our praises about what we have done and where we have reached to. I tell you that if Jesus of Nazareth came back to London and preached the Gospel He preached in Jerusalem, they would crucify Him quicker than they did in Jerusalem. If He came again with the same words, the same teaching, the same actual statements of divine will and government, He would find no room for Himself in the very cities that bear the name of Christian to-day. The very atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being is an atmosphere against the government of God; and the most terrible thing is this, that while men are against the government of God, they are praying, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done." The most terrible blasphemy of the age is not the blasphemy of the slums, but the blasphemy of the temple and the church and the place of worship, where men pray these prayers and then go out to deny every principle of divine government in their lives. And Christian men and women are living in the midst of all this, and the message that came to men at the church at Ephesus is

the message that comes to us, "Buy up the opportunities, because the days are evil."

Now do you see what the apostle says? He says that the fact that these are evil days is a fact which is to urge you to new watchfulness, to new carefulness, to new zeal. You are to translate all these contrary facts into opportunities for prosecuting the commerce of God. God calls you, God calls me, God calls every child of His to be His representative in the world, taking hold of the things that are against the development of spiritual character and turning them into opportunities for prosecuting His work upon the earth. And when we have said all we have said concerning the days, we have simply laid down the foundation upon which we may build for God. We have simply stated the opportunities which throng upon every side for doing His business and buying up the opportunities for Him.

BUYING UP OPPORTUNITIES.

Take any of those I have spoken of. Do I say that the majority of the men that you are surrounded by every day are ungodly men? Every ungodly man that you do business with is an opportunity that you may buy up for God, if you will; an opportunity for the display of your godliness upon his ungodliness.

But you ask: "How are we to do it? We have no time to be talking to these people about religion."

I won't say anything about that. I personally believe that the gift of personal dealing with men and women is a great gift earnestly to be coveted; but apart from the actual definite saying of words, for which I am not pleading for the moment, if you are a real godly man, your godliness will tell upon ungodliness without ever speaking a single word. I am not saying that business men should always put tracts into

their letters; I do not know that it would be wise. I am asking that the business man should remember:

“I belong to the heavens, and when I touch the earth I must touch it with the equity of the heavens. When I sell goods I must bring into my transaction the righteousness of the heavens. If I sell a certain measure over the counter, I must remember that the God of the heavens to whom I go for higher service hates an iniquitous measure, and an unjust scale, and in every piece of transaction which I do in my business I am to bring into it the principles that make the foundation of the heaven of God. I must bring into all those transactions the principles of righteousness upon which God is building His city and accomplishing His work. I am to make a name for Jesus Christ in my business. I am so to transact my business amid ungodly men that they shall say, ‘You can trust that man because he is a Christian.’ ”

There will be a great revolution before that day comes. People do not say that now, alas! And we, because we have labeled men Christians that are not Christians, because we have said these men are God’s own children and they are not His children, because we have a false label on the nation and a false label on men and a false label everywhere, what we need is that the true children of God, the members of the church with the light of the heavenly calling upon them, should take hold of ungodly men and should look upon them as an opportunity for influencing them by the godliness of their own lives.

So with the activities of life. Jesus Christ was no ascetic. No Christian man has any right to attempt to create saintliness of character by hiding himself from the activities of everyday life. No. I must live in my home, but that home must have upon it the stamp

of the heavens. I must mix among my friends, but my contact with my friends is to be that which will draw them towards God.

I very well remember when I was married, my father came into my home. He was a Puritan, and I used to think that it was hard lines that he was; but to-day I thank God for it. He came into my home soon after I was married, and looked around. We showed him into every room, and then, in his rough way, he said to me:

“Yes, it is very nice; but nobody will know walking through here whether you belong to God or the devil ”

I went through and looked at the rooms again, and I thought, “He is quite right;” and we made up our minds straightway that there should be no room in our house henceforward that had not some message for every comer which should tell them that we, at any rate, would serve the King.

It is our privilege to take the home in which we live, all the recreations which we have, and turn them into opportunities for manifesting godliness. We should take all those things and let the light of the heavenly fall upon them; we should go through life showing how all the things of the earth may shine in new beauty as the glory of the heaven falls upon them. Everything in life is to be an opportunity for prosecuting the commerce of God.

The unrest of the present age is a glorious opportunity for manifesting the quietness and the calmness in the secret place of the Most High. Oh, for quiet men and women, men and women that know how to be at peace in the midst of the strife! We know a few. That man who, whenever he walks into the committee meeting, brings heaven’s calm as he comes. His words are few, but his presence tells. As he

comes you feel that you are coming into contact with one who amid the rush and the bustle and the hurry of a godless age dwells in the secret place of the Most High and abides under the shadow of the Almighty. A blessed thing to have men and women who have learned the secret of quietness, and so buy up the rush of the age and turn it into account for a manifestation of the peace and the quietness of God!

THREE LAWS.

But if I am to take all life in this way, if I am to seize these opportunities as they go and come, and turn them into account for God, there are certain facts that I must bear in mind: the responsibility that lies upon me that I see the opportunity in the first place, and seeing the opportunity, that I should be willing to make some sacrifice in order to possess it; and that if I am to see an opportunity and make a sacrifice in order to possess it, I must maintain perpetually a right attitude before God, living forevermore in the power of the heavenly calling, and allowing Him to have His way with me and do His own work through me. Now there are just three laws manifested in the verses that I quoted, upon which we may prosecute this commerce of the heavens. Let me very briefly point them out to you.

WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY.

1. The first is in the fifteenth verse. Men and women who are going to do God's work, "Look therefore carefully how ye walk." "Walk circumspectly," the old version has it. Look carefully how ye walk.

My dear brother, my dear sister, you cannot do God's work in the world, buying up opportunities for Him, transacting His commerce, if you are careless and indifferent about it. Look therefore carefully how ye

walk. I know men and women who are very careful when they are at home and awfully careless when they get away from home. I know other men and women who seem to imagine that they can live the Christian life and do God's work without carefulness in the small details of everyday life. If I am to translate my life into service for God, not merely in the deeds done in connection with the church, but in all hours, I shall only do it as I live carefully day by day.

That word "circumspectly," what does it mean? Let me give an illustration which is very quaint and forceful of what it is to walk circumspectly:

You have sometimes seen the top of a wall covered with mortar, and in the mortar pieces of glass are stuck all the way along, so as to prevent boys from climbing and going along. Now I have before now seen a cat walk along the top of that wall; and it walks "circumspectly." How it picks its way! With what carefulness it puts down the foot every time. It gets along by walking very carefully, and looking for each place where the foot is to be put among those pieces of glass.

You and I have to walk, my brother, like that, if we are going to do anything for God in the world. You can't go through a single day carelessly and let things go as they will. Every step must be watched. Every moment must be held as sacred for God, and we are ever to live in the power of the thought that we may miss an opportunity. We must take every moment as an opportunity that needs watching and buying up carefully. We must walk circumspectly.

DISCOVERING THE WILL OF GOD.

2. Then the second law of this commerce of God is to be found in the seventeenth verse: "Wherefore be

ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." That is to say, if I am to do this business of God as a Christian man, I am not only to be careful about it, but I must have keenness, shrewdness. I must know the will of God. I must form the habit of discovering the will of God.

You remember that wonderful word about the Messiah uttered by Isaiah long before He came: "He shall be quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord." One Bible student says that that might be rendered, "He shall be keen of scent in the fear of the Lord"—discovering the will of God quickly by a kind of intuition.

You only discover the will of God as you obey it the moment you do discover it. It is in proportion as I walk carefully, obeying the will as it is unfolded, that I become quick to discover the will. We are not to foresee; we are to understand the will of God. We are to be a people shrewd, keen, having in our Christian life—having in our prosecution of this work of God—a spiritual acumen which is as necessary as business acumen to the man that is going to make his fortune in business.

HEAVEN'S CAPITAL.

3. And then there is another thing. I must not only be careful, shrewd and keen, understanding the will of the Lord; but I must have capital, or I never can do God's work in the world. I cannot be a merchantman for heaven unless I have heaven's capital, and here it is in the eighteenth verse:

"Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."

When a man is filled with the Spirit, he has the capital of God to do the work of God. Then all that I

have spoken of will become easy and natural. It will become—I was going to say second nature; I will say something better—it will become first nature. It will be perfectly natural to influence men toward God. This great subject of influence, we have heard about it since we have been children, but we have hardly begun to understand or tell it. We have never seemed yet to grasp this truth, that the influence a man exerts is the influence of what he actually is in himself. You talk about keeping up appearances. You talk about living straight before men. You say, "Well, I wouldn't like to do this, that and the other before men because I must keep up an appearance or I will lead them wrong." It doesn't matter. Do what you are; because whether you do or not, you will influence men by what you are. Influence is altogether too subtle to be changed by any outward activities. If a man is filled with the Spirit of God, he is spiritual, and his influence will be spiritual.

Some years ago I was at work in Hull, England. God was giving us gracious seasons of refreshing, and a man came to me one night and said:

"Do you know, the strangest thing has happened to me!"

Said I: "What has happened?"

He said: "I am a cabinet-maker, and I work at a bench, and another man works by my side. He has worked by my side for five years. I thought I would like to get him to come to some of these meetings, and this morning I summoned up my courage and said to him, 'Charlie, I want you to come along to-night to some meetings we are having down in Wilberforce Hall.' He looked at me and said, 'You don't mean to say you are a Christian?' and I answered, 'Yes, I am.' 'Well,' he said, 'so am I.'"

This man said to me: "Wasn't it funny?"

"Funny!" I said. "No. Is he here? for if so, both you and he want to get down here and start. You never have been born again."

It is an absolute impossibility for two men born again of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, to work side by side for five years, and neither one or the other find it out. If one man is a Christian and the other isn't, the man that isn't will soon see the difference in the work the Christian man does. Christian men do pure, strong work, and the best work in the world.

"But," you say, "I have had a man working for me who doesn't; and he is a Christian."

No, he isn't! If a man is filled with the Spirit of God it will bring all the facts of the divine will into every action of his life; and if you get this capital behind you, it won't be hard work to influence men for Christ; it will be the necessity of your life. The passion of your soul will be to win another soul for Christ, to weave another garland wherewith to deck His brow, to plant another gem in His diadem; and your life will be doing it as well as your words. You must have the capital of God to prosecute the commerce of God.

And again, that is true about all the activities of life. People often come and ask me questions about amusements:

"Ought we to do this, that and the other?"

Well, you must only take up amusements in which it is possible for the Holy Spirit to reveal Jesus Christ.

You say: "That is very narrow."

No, it isn't; it is very broad. That for me settles a great many questions of amusements. I know young people who make tennis an instrument of the devil.

If a man gives himself wholly up to it, so as to neglect other things and make other people uncomfortable in the world, that isn't Christianity. But that and other kindred kinds of amusement can be had as pure recreation and so played that the very gentleness and beauty of Jesus Christ shall be manifested in the playing. Every activity of life which is in itself right and pure will shine with glory the moment you become a spirit-filled soul; and instead of being narrow and shut up within confined walls, you will be able to see that He has set your feet in a large room, He has unlocked for you all the avenues of life. Filled with the Spirit, you will be able to manifest the beauty and the glory of the will of God as against all the rebellion of the age in which we live.

HOW MUCH ARE YOU WORTH ?

And now I want to press a question on you that you will answer to yourself: How much are you worth?

You know how men usually answer that question. I very well remember in England how we were impressed during one month some years ago by the death of two men, one on this side of the water, and one on that. The man over here was a millionaire, and the other was Cardinal Manning. As I traveled in a train just about the time these two died, I was impressed by hearing several commercial men talking, and they asked:

"Well, how much was he worth?"

"Oh," said one, "so many millions."

"And how much was he worth?" said they of the other.

"Well, he died worth five hundred dollars."

Do you see? We measure things this way: we say

a man is worth so much. Don't you see the horror of it now?

What are you worth? I don't ask to know anything about your balance at the bank. What are you worth? What do you possess?

You say: "I possess so much. I possess my home."

No, no, you don't! What do you possess? You only possess the things you have bought for the kingdom of God. You are rich as the number of the hours which you have bought up. The time redeemed is wealth. Every time you buy up an opportunity for Him, every time your life tells upon an ungodly man, every time your dealings with God shine out in some of the activities of your life, every time by sacrifice you influence a soul towards God, in that moment buying up an opportunity, you invest an hour in God, and with those hours God is making your fortune. You are not worth the things you possess upon the earth. They fade and vanish. They are of the earth, earthy. You are only worth the treasure that you have laid at His gates, the influence which you have purchased by sacrifice for Him. These are the things which mark your value and your work, and make your fortune.

Oh, what a day it will be when God gives us back these fortunes! How surprised some will be when the Master comes and says: "You bought up an opportunity one day for me. You met a soul that was thirsty on the dusty highway of life, and it was an opportunity for you to show that soul what I would have done if I had been there, and you gave that soul a cup of water. Now here is the result of it," and what it will be, who can tell? God will meet you some day, my brother, and He will say, "Do you remember that day when in your store you might have made \$10,000 at a stroke, and you didn't because there was

a trick and a twist behind it, and you said: 'No, I will be that much poorer for the kingdom of heaven's sake?'" God will say: "That was your investment. See, that was the result," and He will show how you helped that day to bring in righteousness, and to move with God towards the consummation of the purpose of His heart of love.

That is how men are making fortunes. Aren't you going in for this sort of business? Aren't you going to take life anew from this time and say, "I am going to make this life a place in which I prosecute heaven's commerce. I will take the opportunities as they come, and buy them up for God. I will take my home; it is an opportunity which I will purchase for the exhibition of all the beauties of the Christlike character and all the purposes of the divine heart. Life to me henceforth shall be an opportunity for doing God's business and laying up treasure in heaven."

Is that your determination? Then you must go to the King and say, "O King, I want to be Thy merchantman on earth. Give me the capital I need. Give me the filling of Thy Holy Spirit. Then shall all my service be a delight, and I shall be able to take all hours and all activities and everything that comes to me and transmute it from the dross of earth into the gold of heaven."

May God help us every one to be His merchantmen!

GATHERING OR SCATTERING

We are living in a day that is known as the day of toleration. We have ceased very largely to desire to force our own particular views upon other people save by the methods of persuasion. Torture and excommunication are things of the past. And I believe that there cannot be too much toleration. No man has any right to usurp the judgment throne of Jesus Christ and pass sentence upon his fellow men. But while this is perfectly true, we cannot forget that the very freedom of the atmosphere in which we draw our breath has produced in individual life something of indifference to the truth of God. Much as we deprecate any attempt by persecution to compel belief, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the old days of persecution were also the days of purity in the church of Christ. It is a very remarkable thing that the church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. The church of Christ patronized has always become the church of Christ impure. The very saddest day in church history was the day that Constantine espoused the cause of Christianity. When an earthly emperor and empire took upon them to patronize the Nazarene, to say that the religion of the Nazarene should have a position under the wing of the state, that day there passed into Christendom the most damning and blighting influence that has ever touched it. Men and women, when they had to face death for the things that they held, were pure. Men and women who were not prepared to do this kept outside

the churches of Jesus Christ. All that has passed away. No one will persecute you now for being a Christian. There is a sense, I know, in which they that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; but the old days of fiery tests of faith have passed away, and with them we have entered into a region of peril and danger. The peril and danger that threatens us to-day is that of indifference.

THE LINE OF DIVINE CLEAVAGE.

Now, if this be true—and you know it is—it is well for us sometimes to come into the presence of Jesus Christ, and to learn that while no man has any right to pronounce sentence upon us, yet Christ has. And not only has He the right to that, but in unmistakable language in His teaching He has made a clean line of demarkation between man and man, setting certain people upon one side and certain upon the other. No verse that I know of in the whole realm of the teaching of Jesus Christ is more searching than the thirtieth verse of the twelfth chapter of Matthew:

“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad.”

One can imagine that it fell from the lips of Jesus quietly and calmly, but it is a veritable throne of judgment dividing men swiftly and surely into two opposite camps, leaving no *via media*, no middle way, no neutral ground. As the Master uttered these words in the old days, and by uttering them divided the crowd in front of Him, so from that time until now, through every successive century, amongst all sorts and conditions of men, this verse has come as the line of divine cleavage, separating men to the right and to the left.

Here in this gathering we are made up of a great

many differently circumstanced persons, but as God looks upon us He moves us to the right and to the left. He ranks us amid the gatherers or the scatterers. No one takes a middle position. A friend of mine, Dr. Jowett, Dr. Dale's successor in Birmingham, once said that God and man had an entirely different way of dividing up humanity. Man's method of dividing humanity is the horizontal; God's method is the perpendicular. And while we who heard him looked and wondered what he meant, he illustrated it thus: Taking his hymn book in his hand, he said, "Man's method is the horizontal. Man divides into upper, middle and lower classes; God, to the right and left."

I shall never forget that, and I want you to see the truth of it. The trouble with us is that we are always comparing ourselves with ourselves. We test the experience of to-day by the experience of yesterday. We allow ourselves to be puffed up because we think our conduct is a little superior to every one else's. Now, let us be done with all this comparison of self with self and man with man. Let us come to the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and see what He means, and where we stand in the light of it.

In order that we may rightly do that, we must first of all understand what our Lord meant when He said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." There are two lines of thought that I want you to pursue with me as we consider this verse, the first leading to the second. I shall, therefore, consider briefly in the first place the claim that Jesus Christ makes for Himself. Inferentially, and yet with perfect clearness, He sets up on His own behalf a certain very definite claim. In the second place, we shall notice how that claim defines our position.

I. OUR MASTER'S CLAIM.

What is the claim that the Master sets up for Himself? Listen: "He that is not with me is against me." So far we have no claim made; but in order that that statement may be understood He goes on to explain it by saying: "He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." His claim is that He is the Gatherer. His mission to the world was to gather together.

Having set up this claim for Himself, He proceeds to say to the men and women around Him that every human being is exercising through life the great force that gathers together with Christ, or that other force, which is of hell, that scatters abroad against Christ. Christ claims for Himself that He is God's gatherer. Christ says that every man is either with or against Him, gathering or scattering.

How let us take these two things and look at them a little more closely, patiently and prayerfully in order that we may understand them. What does the Master mean when He says "gathereth with me"? You remember that other word that Christ uttered in the Gospel of John, the eleventh chapter, forty-ninth verse: "A certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." I am not interested for the moment in these extraordinary words Caiaphas uttered, but I pass on to that which comes after: "Now this he said not of himself; but being a high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus"—this is John's exposition of it, John's inspired statement—"that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together

into one the children of God that are scattered abroad." That doesn't simply mean the one nation. It is most explicitly stated, "not the nation only," but "the children of God that are scattered abroad." There is the clear statement that Jesus Christ came into the world to gather into one the scattered family of the Most High.

THE SOLIDARITY OF HUMANITY.

Now turn away from the Gospel narrative, and come to the day in which we live. There is a phrase that has been very much on the lips and pens of certain men for the last five and twenty years or more: the solidarity of humanity. It is one of those phrases that sounds as if there was a good deal in it, and men have made the most of it. They have written books under the impulse of what there is behind that phrase; they have formulated philosophies, designing them upon that phrase. Trench tells us that it comes to us from the Communists. "The solidarity of humanity." What do they mean when they talk about the solidarity of humanity? It means that humanity is not a gathering together of units, each one separate and alone, but that humanity is one; that all men are dependent upon all other men, and that the race is united from its beginning to its end; that this particular generation of which you and I form a part owes an enormous amount to the generations that have preceded us; that we are helping to make the history of the generations that are coming after us; that what Kingsley sang about the new-born babe is perfectly true; that that child is heir of all the ages. Not only is humanity one when you trace it in its movements through history, but in its relationship to-day. Every nation of the world is linked to every other nation of the world.

We owe something to other men; other men owe much to us. "No man liveth unto himself." The race is one, bound up by bonds that cannot be broken.

Now if Trench is right, that we get that phrase from the Communists, the truth that is enshrined in it we do not get from the Communists. It is a divine truth. It is a revelation of the purpose and thought of God for humanity.

What is God's thought for the human race? Hear it in these words of inspiration: "He hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth." The divine ideal for humanity is that humanity is to be one family; that man should serve his brother man, and in that service find his purest delight; that man should make perpetual acknowledgment every day and always of his indebtedness to his fellow men; that there should be no self-consciousness and self-seeking which is at the expense of the right and the comfort and of the blessedness of other men. That is the divine ideal. It is upon that ideal of humanity as a whole that Jesus Christ based all His work and all His teaching; that the apostles of Jesus Christ prosecuted their mission in the world.

But is this realized? As I have said, men are writing about it. This great country of America has produced some men who have dreamed wonderful dreams on this very line. There has lately passed to his rest a most remarkable man, Edward Bellamy, whose books I have read with keen interest, and have detected beneath them the aspiration of a great heart after a divine ideal that he never understood; and the trouble is, Edward Bellamy wanted to get into the kingdom of God without going along the way of the cross of Jesus Christ, and he could never do it. He and other dreamers of beautiful dreams, in which men shall lose

the miserable idea that any work is dishonorable, wanted to pass into that realm outside the actual positive interfering government of God; and it can never be done. You cannot grow the tulips of the kingdom of God except you get the bulbs from heaven. Never forget that.

THE DIVINE IDEAL LOST.

The fact is, that is an ideal, a dream. How about the realization? I tell you there is a great disintegration of humanity. We are broken up; we are split; we are divided. Look where you will you see that the divine ideal of the human race is lost. I do not want to be misunderstood at this point, but I feel that you are ready to take a high and spiritual outlook upon these things, and that you will bear with me patiently when I say that nationality is a poor business; that patriotism is something that perhaps is necessary for to-day in the midst of the chaos and break-up of the great human ideal that is in the heart of God; but that in the day when the King shall reign we will talk no more about my nationality against yours. We shall enter into the larger ideal that we are one the round world over; that every man with the image of God upon him, the breath of God in him, is a brother man, to be loved and served and cared for. We shall pass away from the idea that because we are a great and mighty nation we have any business to override and destroy other nations that are weaker than we are. We shall learn that every man has rights because he is a child of God, and we shall respect them. But that time has not come yet. If you want to know something about the disintegration of humanity as against the solidarity of humanity, see the civilized, the Christianized (God forgive us for abusing the word!)—the

Christianized nations of Europe watching each other with a suspicion that is devilish and horrible. There is nothing of the spirit of Christ in it.

Come down from the national outlook, and consider the home. There is nothing that is saddening me more in England to-day than the break-up of our home life; that the old family circles that made a poet write these words, "The heart has many a dwelling-place, but only once a home," are passing away from our country. Children are growing away from their parents, and parents from their children, and the old strong bands that made up a strong nation because we were strong in our family relationships, are being broken. Everywhere there are marks of disintegration.

Then come into the church of God. Do you get any comfort out of the division in the church of God? I hope you don't. I hope you have never said that it is part of the divine plan that Christendom should be split into a thousand fragments. I tell you it isn't. He who prayed the great intercessory prayer which took hold of heaven in my behalf and your behalf for all time, said, "Father, I will that they may be one, that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me." We are not one, and that is why the world doesn't know that God sent Jesus.

Come down into the detail of life, and you will find the same break-up everywhere; that instead of there being oneness in the human family, there is infinite division and infinite distrust. Men do not trust each other in commerce or in social life or in church life. Everywhere there are the marks of a great disintegrating force that has broken humanity into a thousand parts, and the great ideal of the oneness of the race is lost.

CHRIST THE GATHERER.

Christ came to gather together into one the children of God that are scattered. That was His mission. How is He going to do it? He will do it, as God does everything, fundamentally. He will never tinker with externals; He will go to the heart of the matter. He will never attempt to paint on the outside that which is rotten. He will demolish that which is old, and He will bring in better things. And how does He do it? He comes into the midst of men Himself to reveal God, to restore the divine government, to do battle in His own life and in His cross and passion, with the sin that has divided humanity.

That was His mission. He came to gather together. He came to wipe out the lines that create nationalities, and bring us back into the one family of God; to bind together into closer harmony the families of the earth; to heal the breach between man and man; to drive away from the earth every form of difference and dis-sension.

But some one says, "Didn't He say, 'I am come to send a sword'?"

That was a statement of the necessity of the Gospel He preached. He knew the condition of man, and He knew that His announcement of divine kingship, the only truth that could ever heal the divisions, must, before the great work is completed, scatter the sword and apparently rend humanity further and further apart. But that rending is only that which precedes the healing, and the sword He sends is the sword which makes way for purity and opens the door for peace. So He came to gather together.

Oh, how one would like to take up His life and look at it in that light! His teachings, His miracles, look

at Him again! Healing wounds, gathering together a few men in the first place, and of them saying, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? Those who do my will." What did He mean? He meant to say, Here is the higher relationship, above the relationship of blood, the relationship of spiritual affinity in the kingdom of God; and mother and brethren pass out of sight in the presence of this new relationship. He says to me, as He said to the men then:

"If you are coming after me, you must leave father, mother, and husband and wife. You must put me first."

I say, "Master, it is a hard thing to do."

He replies: "But that is what I did for you. I put you before mother and brother. If you come to me you must do as much for me as I have done for you."

And so He set off that little spiritual circle, and He came to gather others into it, and, thank God, His work will never cease until He Himself comes again and establishes the kingdom out of which He will drive all dissension, and into which He will gather the children of God that are scattered abroad. It is the great work of Christ to heal the wounds, to make dissension cease, and to bring the world around Himself into a sacred brotherhood in the Fatherhood of God. That is the great mission of Christ.

2. HOW THAT CLAIM DEFINES OUR POSITION.

Now I pass to the second point. After that vision of His work, what does He say? "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

Jesus came to gather, and He says that I am helping or hindering, with Him or against Him; that I am gathering or scattering. Let me say, first of all, that

the influence I exert in the world is created by my relationship to Jesus Christ. If I am with Him, I am a gatherer. If I am His and He is mine, if Christ be formed in me really and truly, what will be the effect? I shall be gathering with Him, bringing men to Him; and in bringing men to Him I am bringing men to each other. Did that ever strike you? The Man stands amid humanity who is its center of attraction Godward and heavenward. In proportion as men are brought near to Him, in that proportion they are coming near to each other; and any attempt to get men near together apart from the attraction of Jesus Christ and His power to hold them together, is a dream that cannot be realized. This is the trouble. Men have the dream of unity, but they haven't seen the center of attraction to unite them.

GATHERING IN THE HOME.

And how will it work out? It will begin in your home. You will gather your children together first. It is time some Christians ceased trying to gather men together who live in the slums, and gave their time to getting their children together. One of my deacons in Birmingham said to me one day, casually, lightly, smilingly, as though it was a very pretty, pleasing thing to say:

“Do you know, Mr. Morgan, I don't see my bairns” —and he had two beautiful children—“I haven't seen my bairns awake for several months.”

I said to him: “What do you mean?”

“Well,” he said, “don't you see, I have been so fearfully busy, business is growing at such a rate, that I am up and off in the morning before they are awake, and I do not get home at night until they are in bed;

and on Sunday I am down at the church all day, and I hardly see them then."

I said to him: "My dear brother, for God's sake and for your children's sake, drop something in your business; and if you cannot do that drop something at the church, and look after your bairns. It is an infinitely better investment to give your time to them and to keep your hand on them than anything else you can do."

A man that cannot hold his family together for Christ by the attractive power of Christ in his own life isn't wanted in the church; let him keep out. That man cannot do anything for God in public places if his own home is devastated and broken up by the principle of rebellion against God. And if the influence a man is exerting on his family is an influence that scatters, that man is not with Christ. If you are with Christ, hold your bairns for Him, and your family will be God's first circle of the kingdom, as it always has been, and it will be a witness to the power of Christ in you and through you to gather men together.

FALSE GATHERING-FORCES.

We had a craze across the water a few years ago, an æsthetic craze. Men raved about dandelions and about lilies. Men posed in womanly attitudes and said that they could exist for a week upon a lily. It was neurotic; it was rotten; and the high priest of the whole business, the apostle of the æsthetic craze, had to go to prison as a common prisoner for beastliness of conduct that cannot be named in public. If you try to gather men together by painting a lily on a plate and giving them a sweet willow pattern—oh, God, the mockery of it! You cannot touch men's hearts like that. If you are not with Christ you cannot gather

men, I don't care what your philosophy is, what your policy is, or what the basis of art, or education, or culture, or anything you please. No power the world has ever heard taught or preached, save the power of the crucified, risen Christ, is sufficient to gather men together into one.

HOW TO IMPROVE ENVIRONMENT.

You say, "Can't we improve the dwellings of the poor?"

Yes, God help us to do it; but one of the best ways to do it is to improve the man that lives in the dwelling.

I remember some years ago conducting a mission, and one of the office-bearers of the church where I was said to me:

"Mr. Morgan, I want you to come and see some people. A girl was married out of our Sunday School three years ago, to a man who is a slave to drink and impurity and gambling. I would like you to come along and see her."

I went—it was in '85—on a cold February day, to see that girl. Oh, I cannot picture the home to you! It was one of those awful houses in the midlands of England, upon an entry between other houses in a back court. When I got to the entry with my friend, some children who were hovering and shivering there, hearing our steps approaching, rushed down the entry. We followed them and went into the house. I see that room now. There was a broken table standing there, a chair with the back broken off standing by it, no fire in the grate; upon the mantel shelf a cup and saucer, broken; and not another thing that my eye rested on in that room. And there stood a woman in unwomanly rags with the mark of a brutal fist upon

her face, and three ill-clad bairns clinging to her gown. She said:

"Excuse the children running from you, but they thought that it was father."

Oh, the tragedy of it!

When I got on to the rostrum that night to preach, my friend came to me and said:

"He is here."

I said: "Who is here?"

"That woman's husband; he is right down under you."

Now, I don't often preach at one man, but I did that night. I put aside what I was going to talk about, and read the story of the prodigal, and I asked God to help me talk about it, and for about a solid hour I preached at that man. Do you think I hammered at him and scolded him? Not I. I told him God loved him, there and then; and when we got to our after-meeting, I asked, "What man is coming home to-night?" And he was the very first to rise. He came forward, and as I went down from the rostrum and gave that meeting into some one else's hands, and got my arm around him and prayed and wept with him, he entered into the kingdom of God.

My friend said to me one day about twelve months later, "I want you to go and see some people."

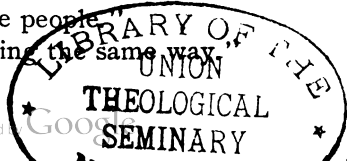
I said: "Who?"

He said: "Do you remember going to see a woman last year whose husband was converted? I want you to come and see those people."

I went. We hadn't gone far—it was February of the next year—before I said to him: "Friend, where are you taking me?"

"Oh, we are going to see those people."

"But," I said, "we are not going the same way."



"No," he said, "they have moved."

Moved! Why did they move? Why, the man was converted, and he soon changed his dwelling-place. The man was remade, and he remade his environment; and he had gone, not into a palace, but into a cottage in the main street.

If I could paint pictures I would paint those two. I can see that home now. It was on a Sunday, after the afternoon service, and he sat by the fire with his three bairns, who had run away from him a year ago. One was on his knee, another on his shoulder, and another stood by him; and I never heard a sweeter solo in my life than the solo the kettle sang on the hob that day. The woman that last year was dressed in unwomanly rags was clothed, and the sunlight of love was on her face.

That is how you must deal with the problem of environment. Begin at its middle. Touch the man who makes the beastly environment, and remake him, and he will soon move out of the tenement house and out of the slum; he will soon find his way on to higher levels. That is the way to gather men and women. Unless you are with Jesus Christ, you can try education and culture, but it all comes short of life, and without life there is no remaking of men.

Now, my brother, are you with Christ in this enterprise?

THE TEST OF CONDUCT.

My last word is a reversal of that position. And now we come to this text as to a judgment seat. It is not only true that your influence will be created by your relationship to Jesus Christ; it is also true that your relationship to Jesus Christ is revealed by the influence you are exercising.

I am getting less and less anxious to hear what men

say. What is the influence you are exerting in the world? Show me a man that is gathering men, that is healing wounds, that is closing up breaches, that is coming into life with a sacred, subtle, forceful mien that makes men love each other because he is there; that man is with Christ. I am not particular whether he spells his denomination with a P or C, or anything you like; the point is whether he is gathering men. May God help us to drop trying to order men out of service because they do not follow with us.

You say, "You know it is apostolic."

I am not particular about being in apostolic succession; they made such miserable blunders right along. Go back to the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Mark. John said unto Christ:

"Master, we saw one casting out devils."

"Oh, did you? You must have been glad, John."

"Yes, and in the name of Jesus."

"Blessed work, glorious work! I want to know that man."

"We saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him."

"Why, why?"

"Because he followed not after us." "Followed not us," it really is. "Because he followed not us."

"Jesus said, Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us."

Ah, that is the test! Do you know a man that casts out devils, my dear brother in the Presbyterian Church, and he isn't a Presbyterian? Don't hinder him. "Oh, no," you say, "we shouldn't think of doing that; he is a Congregationalist." But supposing he isn't that; supposing he is none of your ists and

your isms; supposing he is just a man that has got into touch with Christ and hardly knows the truth himself yet. Let him alone! He cannot work a work in the name of Christ and speak evil of Him. If he is not against the Christ, he is with Him. Take this larger outlook, this practical test of position.

But there is another word, which is part of that last thought: a man who is scattering is not a Christian.

Do you know that man who has lost his children?

"What do you mean? a man that has buried them?"

Oh, no, no! God help him, it would have been better if he had, long ago. He has *lost* them. He has no hold on them, no influence over them. They have gone from his home and scattered, and going from his house they have gone from his God with great relief. They were glad to go away from him so as to get away from his God, and they are swearing against God to-day.

"Why?"

Because of that man's influence.

"But that man is a church member."

I don't care; he isn't a Christian.

"But that man preaches."

I don't care; if he has lost his children it is because he has not been with Christ, but against Him. Show me the man that is splitting and dividing the church, dividing the nation, setting man against man, that man isn't a Christian. I don't care what his subscription is, what his profession is, what the noise he makes in the world; all these things are nothing. If that man isn't gathering with Jesus, he is scattering; and if he is scattering, he is not *with*, he is *against*, Christ.

NO MIDDLE PLACE.

So much for the teaching of that verse, as I understand it. Now where are you, and where am I? Am I with the Master, or am I against Him?

You say: "Well, I am not exactly with Him, but I am not against Him."

You are wrong. There is no middle place.

"Oh," you say, "there must be a middle place. I have never done anything for Him; I have never led a soul to Him; I have never preached for Him or spoken for Him, or given a tract away for Him, or even given a cup of cold water for His sake; but I have never hindered Him; I haven't spoken against Him; I haven't denounced Christianity."

Some of you have been in London. When you visit London again, get down in the center of the great city and stand still and look in a window. You won't be there long before a man in blue will put his hand on your shoulder and say:

"Please move on."

"Why should I move on?"

"You are blocking the traffic."

"I am not interfering with any one."

"Your standing still and doing nothing is going to cause an obstruction here; you must please move on. Keep moving. You can go that road, or you can go that, but you cannot stand still; you must move."

My brother, my sister, you cannot stand still. The moment you stand still and say, "I am just going to be an interested onlooker," you become an obstacle in His way, you retard His progress. If you stand, some one else is going to stand. Don't you know that? You can't stand still without impeding progress. If you are not with Him, you are against Him. If you are not exercising the great force that gathers, by your very negation of that you are exercising the force that scatters men here and there and everywhere.

Men and women, will you take sides? Cease trying to be neutral, I pray you. Whether you have ever

before professed to be a Christian or not, I care not. I appeal to you now. I call for men and women to take sides definitely and positively in this matter. The great Lord Jesus, sweet and strong, tender and mighty, came from heaven to earth to gather men together, and He says every one is helping Him or hindering Him. Which is it?

Do not say, I beseech you, "It is no use for me to pretend to take sides with Christ; I can do so little."

It is your life that helps Him, not the extra activity in which you engage now and again. What the Master wants to-day in all the cities and villages of England and America is men and women who are living with Him. America is waiting for the manifestation of the sons and daughters of God; and wherever you are manifested to be related to God in Christ, you become part of the great force that is gathering men together. You contribute by that relationship to God in Christ to the work of Christ in healing wounds, closing up the breaches, and making all the families of the earth one, as God has purposed they should be.

TAKE SIDES WITH CHRIST.

What we want is not to ask men so much to take sides, because they are doing that whether or no; what we need is to appeal to them to take the side of Christ. Isn't it better to construct than to destroy, to heal than to wound? to gather men than to scatter them? Then will you not be among the number of those who come to the Nazarene and say:

"Oh, Jesus, by Thy infinite compassion, by Thy love passing all human telling, Thou hast conquered me. I am come to Thee. Take my life, poor, weak, insufficient by every standard of human measurement; but let Thy life flow into it and through it, that my life

may make some little contribution to the realization of Thy great purpose."

Lord Jesus, from to-day let me more than ever be a gatherer of Thine. Prevent me from scattering. Do this, Lord, by taking more complete possession of me that ever before. To this end I yield to thee all I am and have and hope for, in order that through me some part of Thy kingdom may come and Thy will be done. Amen.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF LOT

In the Old Testament stories we are at the springs of great histories. We move among individual men whose lives give character to the nations and all history. We cannot read these stories without being impressed with the likeness there is between those men and the men of to-day in all the great essential facts of their human nature. Manners have changed, customs have changed, motives have changed, methods of operation have changed, speech has changed; but sin and sorrow and temptation and love and hate and all such things are identical. And we may get lessons from these lives that will touch us at the very point where we are living to-day; and for that purpose I want you to look at the story of Lot.

Lot has been associated with Abraham from the first move from Ur of the Chaldees. With Abraham he tarried at Haran, and went down into Egypt and returned from Egypt. They became very wealthy men, moving to and fro according to the nomadic life characteristic of the times.

If you take the thirteenth chapter of Genesis and read it at your leisure, you will find it chronicles domestic difficulties. There was a quarrel between the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham. These difficulties had in them the elements of permanent discord. It was very evident this kind of quarrel would continue, and thus it is that Abraham, with the insight of a great statesman, and the magnanimity of a great soul, counseled separation, and

allowed Lot, the younger man, the man dependent upon him, to all outward seeming, to be the one to choose the way in which he shall go.

One word before we look at this choice. Crises never *make* character; crises *reveal* character. It is a great mistake to imagine that a crisis makes a man; it rather brings him out in his true colors. You can find out where men stand when they face a crisis.

Another thought. The most searching crises that ever come in the lives of men are not great events, but little ones. Imagine these two men, of great stature morally in that age, being brought to a crisis that revealed both of them in the clearest and most vivid light, because there had been a quarrel amongst the men they employed! Many a man has been revealed in his true light by some little event that might arise at any moment.

LOT'S CHOICE.

Lot has his chance, he thinks. He gets where he can look on the land, and then chooses, and says to Abraham:

“There is what I have chosen.”

What did he choose?

“Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.”

He chose a well-watered plain in the valley of Jordan, because it was rich and fruitful, a plain that was like the land of Egypt. He had never got Egypt out of his heart since he went down there, and he chose as he did because in that plain were cities—I want you to see that particularly—centers of commerce, places where men were making money very fast.

Study the cities of the Bible, and you will find that they have always been centers of evil; and they always will be until the great city of God is built. God did not start man in a city, but in a garden. It is well for us to remember that.

Lot looked at the cities, where men traded together and made wealth, and chose that. What is he seeking? His own personal advantage. That lies at the root of his choice.

It was as though he had said, "I have found a new way. I believe in God, and believing in God I want to strike a happy medium between godliness and Egypt. I am not going back to Egypt, but that plain is like Egypt, and I will choose it. There are cities there, and I will get near them."

Did you not notice what the verse said: "Lot pitched his tent *toward* Sodom"? Why not "within Sodom"? Because he knew the wickedness of Sodom; because he knew perfectly well that in those cities there were things that dishonored the God whom he loved, and whom he desired to serve; and he would not enter the city, but would get into its neighborhood. I believe if you could have read into the heart of Lot you would have found he was saying something like this:

"Well, I will go near to these cities because they will be advantageous to me, and it will not do me any harm; and I may be able to do Sodom some good."

So, not *in*, but *toward*, Sodom, Lot pitched his tent.

THE SEQUEL.

Now let us see the sequel.

Turn to Genesis xiv. 12: "And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed."

He has got in since we saw him last! Some time has elapsed since that day he made his choice, and he is no longer in the neighborhood of Sodom, but right inside. "He pitched his tent toward"; "he dwelt in Sodom";—that is advancement.

Now look still further. In chapter xix. 1, we read: "Lot sat in the gate of Sodom." In those eastern cities the men who sat in the gate were the chief magistrates. If you were to translate this into the language of the present day, you would say Lot is mayor of Sodom. He sits in the gate, the administrator of justice in all small and petty quarrels; a representative of the city to entertain visitors who come to it, and to ask them to share the hospitality of the city. That is where he is in this nineteenth chapter. It is no fanciful interpretation. The phrase "sat in the gate" marks the position of the magistrate and the civil governor.

What a wonderful case this is! How wonderfully he has got on! He was quite right that day, was he not, when he made his choice? Try him by some tests of the world and of business to-day. Was he not a keen, shrewd man? Look at Abraham! He has not got out of his tent yet; he has pitched his tent and altar up and down those valleys, and that is all he has amounted to! But this man Lot, how wise a thing he has done! After a while he moves into the city to be nearer the heart of the business, the trade, the commerce, and the wealth. Men say what a keen, shrewd, wonderful man of business he is, and so at last they make him the mayor of the city, and he is sitting in the gate. Is not that wonderful?

FOUR QUESTIONS.

Now let me ask: What is the real result of Lot's choice that day? I am going to test it by these four questions:

First, what has his choice done for himself?

Secondly, what has his choice done for his family?

Thirdly, what has his choice done for Sodom?

Lastly, what is the end he was seeking, and how much has he really made out of the transaction in worldly wealth?

1. What has he done for himself? You do not get to know all by reading this Old Testament story. So beautifully is the Old linked to the New, so incomplete is the Old without the New, and the New without the Old, that you must always take them together. In the New Testament a great ray of light shines back upon Sodom and the man who sits in the gate, and we learn that he vexed his righteous soul day by day. Is that a condition to live in—his house in the city, his wealth in the city, his place in the gate, and possessed of authority among the men of Sodom, but no peace, no satisfaction? What is the inner story? He was a good man in many senses. He believed in God and would like to see Sodom go right and be right; but he took the wrong way to accomplish a right work, and the result is that all through the years of his successes, when men are saying how well he was getting on, in his heart of hearts he never had half an hour's peace. He vexed his righteous soul, and all success to him was but wormwood and gall.

I do not think he made much out of it. Abraham pitched his tent yonder, and lit his altar fire, and worshiped God, a sojourner and stranger; but he got a good deal more peace than Lot.

2. Now consider his life as tested by his children. And I do not know any place to test a man more than that.

You know the story, the awful story, of corruption, and sin, and wrong that came out of that life. One

evening two angels came and warned Lot of the doom coming upon Sodom.

“And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: for we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law.”

That shows the influence he had over his family. Next morning when he fled the city, only his wife and his two daughters accompanied him.

3. What about Sodom itself? How far has Lot been able to influence Sodom?

Not to the making of five righteous men in that city! Mark that. A man who has lived there long enough to rise to be mayor of the city, and yet has not influence enough to make five righteous persons in that city! Notwithstanding that he has vexed his righteous soul about the iniquity of the place, he has not been able to stem the iniquity to the extent of five persons, though he has been there all these years.

Why not?

I will tell you why. The men of Sodom knew perfectly well he came to Sodom first, not to bless them, but to get wealth for himself. And when a man starts out to enrich himself first, he paralyzes his power to influence any one for God. A man says, “I am going to take up this business and engage in it in this neighborhood with all its disadvantages religiously, but I may be able to influence people.” If they know you start out, not to influence them, but to enrich yourself,

that very fact will rob you of all power to influence men.

4. One word about the result. What result did he have in the way he wished it? He wanted to make money, but how much did he make?

I do not know. His bank book was burned and everything else he had made was swept away in the devouring fire of God, and when he got out of Sodom he was the poorest man in the district. Yet I believe richer then than he had been ever since he had made that awful choice.

PITCHING TOWARD SODOM.

These are the lessons I want to impress upon your heart. I want you to see that whenever a man begins to choose for himself along the line of his personal advantage he is pitching his tent toward Sodom, and is in danger.

I go deeper into it than that and say the choice was all wrong. He had no business to have chosen thus. Yet men still choose along this line. There are Christian men to-day in our churches—I do not deny the fact of their Christianity—who are perpetually pitching their tents toward Sodom.

Men pitch toward Sodom with regard to their children over and over again. A father says, "What am I going to make of my boy?" He makes up his mind what business his boy is to have, and then he sets himself with full purpose to endeavor to find the college or situation where that boy is most likely to receive the best preparation for his business or profession.

You say that is right.

That is not right! His first business is to put the boy where his character will be kept right and pure. His first business is to see where he can best secure his

child's eternal interests, even though he may have to sacrifice something in temporal things. Men are pitching toward Sodom with their children over and over again, and to secure them a competence in earthly things and bring them to places of success in life, they are risking and ruining their eternal welfare.

Another way in which a man pitches toward Sodom is this: He lives in one of our large cities. God prospers him in his business. But what is he moving for? His children are growing up. He is looking for the best suburb, and when he makes up his mind, he looks for the best house, and presently tells you he has found what he wants.

“But where are you going to worship?”

“I never thought of that. I must go and see.”

In scores of instances men have blighted the spirituality of all their family by taking them away from the city house and the old home sanctuary into a neighborhood where there is nothing to help them spiritually. You are pitching toward Sodom by going to a new house unless you have taken into account what spiritual food you are going to provide for yourself and your bairns.

I have taken these cases at random to show how subtly men may choose watered plains near cities because of selfish advantage, and run risks stretching beyond the burning of the earth into the eternities that lie beyond.

NO COMPROMISE.

I take this story of Lot, in the second place, as an illustration of the futility of attempting to compromise with God.

I say it solemnly and with all earnestness, that if your heart is toward Sodom, you may just as well pitch

in Sodom at once, as *toward* Sodom. You cannot compromise with God. He never made a compromise with a soul yet, and He never will allow you to compromise with Him. And if, right down at the root of your choice, there is this desire to advantage yourself in matters that are material and earthly, all your religiosity is of no avail. Not only are you ruining your own prospects, but also your power to influence other men Godward.

SUCCESS ENDING IN FAILURE.

Thirdly, this story is an illustration of success on lines that finally bring most dismal failure.

Man can do a very great deal without God. You can pitch your tent toward the city, you can get into the city. Men may flatter you, and you may become mayor without God. But when you have done all, what good is it? What is the worth of every bit of success if you have put God out of your calculation in practical matters? Did that pious and godly man—and he was a good man in some senses, for he could not have lived with Abraham so long without knowing something of the will of God, and the New Testament speaks of him as righteous,—and so the man was wrong, though feeling right, because down in his heart there was simply this desire for selfish aggrandizement, and he made his choice upon that and nothing more;—did he gain in the long run?

LET GOD CHOOSE.

That day when the quarrel came, Abraham did not choose at all. He let the Lord choose. Lot selfishly “lifted up his eyes”—you remember the phrase. How high? As high as the plain. He chose, and when he had done his choosing he went out. After he was

gone, God said to Abram, "Lift up now thine eyes." Do you see? Lot lifted up his eyes of his own choosing, and when he had made his choice, God said to Abram, "It is your turn now to lift up your eyes."

"Which way?"

"Look to the north, and south, and east, and west." Abraham does as he is told, and God says:

"That is yours."

"But, Lord, that is Lot's!"

"That is yours, Abraham. Lot can do his own choosing, but he has no title deeds for the land, and the day is coming when it will all revert to the man to whom God has given it."

There you have the heart of this incident. Instead of choosing yourself, let God choose. He will say, Lift up thine eyes north, east, south, and west, over the whole land. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. The man who chooses for himself loses all he chooses; the man who lets God choose gets everything, and says, All is mine, because God is mine.

Cease your choosing, and let God choose. Amen.





G. CAMP

THE
ESTIMA

FLEMING H