**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-030**. **ANATHEMA AND GRACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"21. The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. 22. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha. 23. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 24. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus."*

*1 Corinthians 16:21-24*

Terror and tenderness are strangely mingled in this parting salutation, which was added in the great characters shaped by Paul's own hand, to the letter written by an amanuensis. He has been obliged, throughout the whole epistle, to assume a tone of remonstrance abundantly mingled with irony and sarcasm and indignation. He has had to rebuke the Corinthians for many faults, party spirit, lax morality, toleration of foul sins, grave abuses in their worship even at the Lord's Supper, gross errors in opinion in the denial of the Resurrection. And in this last solemn warning he traces all these vices to their fountainhead--the defect of love to Jesus Christ--and warns of their fatal issue. Let him be Anathema.

But he will not leave these terrible words for his last. The thunder is followed by gentle rain, and the sun glistens on the drops; The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Nor for himself will he let the last impression be one of rebuke or even of warning. He desires to show that his heart yearns over them all; so he gathers them all--the partisans; the poor brother that has fallen into sin; the lax ones who, in their misplaced tenderness, had left him in his sin; the misguided reasoners who had struck the Resurrection out of the articles of the Christian creed--he gathers them all into his final salutation, and he says, Take and share my love--though I have had to rebuke--amongst the whole of you.

Is not that beautiful? And does not the juxtaposition of such messages in this farewell go deeper than the revelation of Paul's character? May we not see, in these terrible and tender thoughts thus inextricably intertwined and braided together, a revelation of the true nature both of the terror and the tenderness of the Gospel which Paul preached? It is from that point of view that I wish to look at them now.

**I. I take first that thought--the terror of the fate of the unloving.**

Now, I must ask you for a moment's attention in regard to these two untranslated words. Anathema Maran-atha. The first thing to be noticed is that the latter of them stands independently of the former, and forms a sentence by itself, as I shall have to show you presently. Anathema means an offering, or a thing devoted; and its use in the New Testament arises from its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, where it is employed for persons and things that, in a peculiar sense, were set apart and devoted to God. In the story of the conquest of Canaan, for instance, we read of Jericho and other places, persons, or things that were, as our version somewhat unfortunately renders it, accursed, or as it ought rather to be rendered, devoted, or put under a ban. And this devotion was of such a sort as that the things or persons devoted were doomed to destruction. All the dreadful things that were done in the Conquest were the consequences of the persons that endured them being thus consecrated, in a very dreadful sense, or set apart for God. The underlying idea was that evil things brought into contact with Him were necessarily destroyed with a swift destruction. That being the meaning of the word, it is clear that its use in my text is distinctly metaphorical, and that it suggests to us that the unloving, like those cities full of uncleanness, when they are brought into contact with the infinite love of the coming Judge, shrivel up and are destroyed.

The other word Maran-atha, as I said, is to be taken as a separate sentence. It belongs to the dialect, which was probably the vernacular of Palestine in the time of Paul, and to which belong, for the most part, the other untranslated words that are scattered up and down the Gospels, such as Aceldama, Ephphatha, and the like. It means our Lord comes. Why Paul chose to use that untranslated scrap of another tongue in a letter to a Gentile Church we cannot tell. Perhaps it had come to be a kind of watchword amongst the early Jewish Christians, which came naturally to his lips. But, at any rate, the use of it here is distinctly to confirm the warning of the previous clause, by pointing to the time at which that warning shall be fulfilled. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be devoted and destroyed. Our Lord comes. The only other thing to be noticed by way of introduction is that this first clause is not an imprecation, nor any wish on the part of the Apostle, but is a solemn prophetic warning (acquiesced in by every righteous heart) of that which will certainly come. The significance of the whole may be gathered into one simple sentence--The coming of the Lord of Love is the destruction of the unloving.

Our Lord comes. Paul's Christianity gathered round two facts and moments--one in the past, Christ has come; one in the future, Christ will come. For memory, the coming by the cradle and the Cross; for hope, the coming on His throne in glory; and between these two moments, like the solid piers of a suspension bridge, the frail structure of the Present hangs swinging. In this day men have lost their expectation of the one, and to a large extent their faith in the other. But we shall not understand Scripture unless we seek to make as prominent in our thoughts as on its pages that second coming as the complement and necessary issue of the first. It stands stamped on every line. It colours all the New Testament views of life. It is used as a motive for every duty, and as a magnet to draw men to Jesus Christ by salutary dread. There is no hint in my text about the time of the Lord's coming, no disturbing of the solemnity of the thought by non-essential details of chronology, so we may dismiss these from our minds. The fact is the same, and has the same force as a motive for life, whether it is to be fulfilled in the next moment or thousands of years hence, provided only that you and I are to be there when He comes.

There have been many comings in the past, besides the comings in the flesh. The days of the Lord that have already appeared in the history of the world are not few. One characteristic is stamped upon them all, and that is the swift annihilation of what is opposed to Him. The Bible has a set of standing metaphors by which to illustrate this thought of the Coming of the Lord--a flood, a harvest when the ears are ripe for the sickle, the waking of God from slumber, and the like; all suggesting similar thoughts. The day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord, will include and surpass all the characteristics which these lesser and premonitory judgment days presented in miniature. I do not enlarge on this theme. I would not play the orator about it if I could; but I appeal to your consciences, which, in the case of most of us, not only testify of right and wrong, but of responsibility, and suggest a judge to whom we are responsible. And I urge on each, and on myself, this simple question: Have I allowed its due weight on my life and character to that watchword of the ancient church--Maran-atha, our Lord cometh?

Now, the coming of the Lord of Love is the annihilation of the unloving. The destruction implied in Anathema does not mean the cessation of Being, but a death which is worse than death, because it is a death in life. Suppose a man with all his past annihilated, with all its effort foiled and crushed, with all its possessions evaporated and disappeared, and with his memory and his conscience stung into clear-sighted activity, so that he looks back upon his former self and into his present self, and feels that it is all waste and chaos, would not that fulfil the word of my text--Let him be Anathema? And suppose that such a man, in addition to these thoughts, and as the root and the source of them, had ever the quivering consciousness that he was and must be in the presence of an unloved Judge; have you not there the naked bones of a very dreadful thing, which does not need any tawdry eloquence of man to make it more solemn and more real? The unloving heart is always ill at ease in the presence of Him whom it does not love. The unloving heart does not love, because it does not trust, nor see the love. Therefore, the unloving heart is a heart that is only capable of apprehending the wrathful side of Christ's character. It is a heart devoid of the fruits of love which are likeness and righteousness, without which no man shall see the Lord, nor stand the flash of the brightness of His coming. So there is no cruelty nor arbitrariness in the decree that the heart that loves not, when brought into contact with the infinite Lord of Love, must find in the touch death and not life, darkness and not light, terror and not hope. Notice that Paul's negation is a negation and not an affirmation. He does not say he that hateth, but he that doth not love. The absence of the active emotion of love, which is the child of faith, the parent of righteousness, the condition of joy in His presence, is sufficient to ensure that this fate shall fall upon a man. I durst not enlarge. I leave the truth on your hearts.

**II. Secondly, notice the present grace of the coming Lord.**

Our Lord cometh. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. These two things are not contradictory, but we often deal with them as if they were. And some men lay hold of the one side of the antithesis, and some men lay hold of the other, and rend them apart, and make antagonistic theories of Christianity out of them. But the real doctrine puts the two together and says there is no terror without tenderness, and there is no tenderness without terror. If we sacrifice the aspects of the divine nature, as revealed to us in the gentle Christ, which kindle a wholesome dread, we have, all unwittingly, robbed the aspects of the divine nature, which warm in us a gracious love, of their power to inflame and to illuminate. You cannot have love which is anything nobler than facile good nature and unrighteous indifference, unless you have along with it aspects of God's character and government which ought to make some men afraid. And you cannot keep these latter aspects from being exaggerated and darkened into a Moloch of cruelty, unless you remember that, side by side with them, or rather underlying them and determining them, are aspects of the divine nature to which only child-like confidence and calm beatific returns of love do rightly respond. The terror of the Lord is a garb which our sins force upon the love of the Lord, and when the one is presented it brings with it the other. Never should they be parted in our thoughts or in our teaching.

Note what that present grace is. It is a tenderness which gathers into its embrace all these imperfect, immoral, lax, heretical people in Corinth, as well as everywhere else--The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. There were men in that church that said, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, I of Christ. There were men in that church that had defiled their souls and their flesh, and corrupted the community, and blasphemed the name of Christ by such foul, sensual sin as was not even named among the Gentiles. There were men in that church so dead to all the sanctities even of the communion-table as that, with the bread between their teeth and the wine-cup in their hands, one was hungry and another drunken. There were men in that church, whose Christianity was so anomalous and singularly fragmentary that they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. And yet Paul flings the great rainbow, as it were, of Christ's enclosing love over them all. And surely the love which gathers in such people leaves none outside its sweep; and the tenderness which stoops from heaven to pity, to pardon, to cleanse such is a tenderness to which the weakest, saddest, sinfullest, foulest of the sons of men may confidently resort. Let nothing rob you of this assurance, that Christ, the coming Lord, is present with us all, and with all our weak and wicked brethren, in the full condescension of His all-embracing, all-hoping, all-forgetting, and all-restoring love. All that we need, in order to get its full sunshine into our hearts, is that we trust Him utterly, and, so trusting, love Him back again with that love which is the fulfilling of the Law and the crown of the Gospel.

**III. And now, lastly, note the tenderness, caught from the Master Himself, of the servant who rebukes.**

This last message of love from the Apostle himself, in verse 24, is quite anomalous. There is no other instance in his letters where he introduces himself and his own love at the end, after he has pronounced solemn benediction commending to Christ's grace. But here, as if he had felt that he must leave an impression of himself on their minds, which corresponded to the impression of his Master that he desired to leave, he deviates from his ordinary habit, and makes his last word a personal word--My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Rebuke is the sign of love. Sharp condemnation may be the language of love. Plain warning of possible evils is the simple duty of love. So Paul folds all whom he has been rebuking in the warm embrace of his proffered love, which was the very cause of his rebuke. The healing balm of this closing message was to be applied to the wounds which his keen edged words had made, and to show that they were wounds by a surgeon, not by a foe. In effect, this parting smile of love says, I am not become your enemy because I tell you the truth; I show my love to you by the plainness and roughness of my words. Generalise that, free it from its personal reference, and it just comes to this: There never was a shallower sneer than the sneer which is cast at Christianity, as if it were harsh, ferocious, or unloving, when it preaches the terror of the Lord. No! rather, because the Gospel is a Gospel, it must speak plainly about death and destruction to the unloving. The danger signal is not to be blamed for a collision, which it is hoisted to avert; and it is a strange sign of an unfeeling and unsympathetic, or of a harsh and gloomy system, that it should tell men where they are driving, in order that they may never reach the miserable goal. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. And when people say to us preachers, Is that your Gospel, a Gospel that talks about everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord at the glory of His coming--is that your Gospel? We can only answer, Yes, it is! Because, so to talk, may by God's mercy, secure that some who hear shall never know anything of the wrath, save the hearing of it with the ear, and may, by the warning of it, be drawn to the Rock of Ages for safety and shelter from the storm.

Therefore, dear friends, the upshot of all that I have been feebly trying to say is just this; let us lay hold with all our hearts, and by simple faith, of the present grace of the coming, loving Lord and Judge. You can do it. It is your only hope to do it. Have you done it? If so, then you may lift up your heads to the throne, and be glad, as those who know that their Friend and Deliverer will come at last, to help, to bless, to save. If not, dear friend, take the warning, that not to love is to be shrivelled like a leaf in the flame, at that coming which is life to them that love, and destruction to all besides. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.