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

**2 CORINTHIANS-001**. **GOD'S YEA; MAN'S AMEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea: wherefore also through Him is the Amen."*

*2 Corinthians 1:20 (R.V.)*

This is one of the many passages the force and beauty of which are, for the first time, brought within the reach of an English reader by the alterations in the Revised Version. These are partly dependent upon the reading of the text and partly upon the translation. As the words stand in the Authorised Version, yea and amen seem to be very nearly synonymous expressions, and to point substantially to the same thing--viz. that Jesus Christ is, as it were, the confirmation and seal of God's promises. But in the Revised Version the alterations, especially in the pronouns, indicate more distinctly that the Apostle means two different things by the yea and the amen. The one is God's voice, the other is man's. The one has to do with the certainty of the divine revelation, the other has to do with the certitude of our faith in the revelation. When God speaks in Christ, He confirms everything that He has said before, and when we listen to God speaking in Christ, our lips are, through Christ, opened to utter our assenting Amen to His great promises. So, then, we have the double form of our Lord's work, covering the whole ground of His relations to man, set forth in these two clauses, in the one of which God's confirmation of His past revelations by Jesus Christ is treated of, and in the other of which the full and confident assent which men may give to that revelation is set before us. I deal, then, with these two points--God's certainties in Christ, and man's certitudes through Christ.

Now these two things do not always go together. We may be very certain, as far as our persuasion is concerned, of a very doubtful fact, or we may be very doubtful, as far as our persuasion is concerned, of a very certain fact. We speak about truths or facts as being certain, and we ought to mean by that, not how we think about them, but what they are in the evidence on which they rest. A certain truth is a truth which has its evidence irrefragable; and the only fitting attitude for men, in the presence of a certain truth, is to have a certitude of the truth. And these two things are, our Apostle tells us, both given to us in and through Jesus Christ. Let me deal, then, with these two sides.

**I. First, God's certainties in Christ.**

Of course the original reference of the text is to the whole series of great promises given in the Old Testament. These, says Paul, are sealed and confirmed to men by the revelation and work of Jesus Christ, but it is obvious that the principle which is good in reference to them is good on a wider field. I venture to take that extension, and to ask you to think briefly about some of the things that are made for us indubitably certain in Jesus Christ.

And, first of all, there is the certainty about God's heart. Everywhere else we have only peradventures, hopes, fears, guesses more or less doubtful, and roundabout inferences as to His disposition and attitude towards us. As one of the old divines says somewhere, All other ways of knowing God are like the bended bow, Christ is the straight string. The only means by which, indubitably, as a matter of demonstration, men can be sure that God in the heavens has a heart of love towards them is by Jesus Christ. For consider what will make us sure of that. Nothing but facts; words are of little use, arguments are of little use. A revelation, however precious, which simply says to us, God is Love is not sufficient for our need. We want to see love in operation if we are to be sure of it, and the only demonstration of the love of God is to witness the love of God in actual working. And you get it--where? On the Cross of Jesus Christ. I do not believe that anything else irrefragably establishes the fact for the yearning hearts of us poor men who want love, and yet cannot grope our way in amidst the mysteries and the clouds in providence and nature, except this--Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The question may arise in some minds, Is there any need for proving God's love? The question never arose except within the limits of Christianity. It is only men who have lived all their lives in an atmosphere saturated by Christian sentiment and conviction that ever come to the point of saying, We do not want historical revelation to prove to us the fact of a loving God. They would never have fancied that they did not need the revelation unless, unconsciously to themselves, and indirectly, all their thoughts had been coloured and illuminated by the revelation that they profess they reject. God as Love is our dearest faith, our ghastliest doubt, and the only way to make absolutely certain of the fact that His heart is full of mercy to us is to look upon Him as He stands revealed to us, not merely in the words of Christ, for, precious as they are, these are the smallest part of His revelation, but in the life and in the death which open for us the heart of God. Remember what He said Himself, not He who hath listened to Me, doth understand the Father, but He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. In Him is yea, and the hopes and shadowy fore-revelations of the loving heart of God are confirmed by the fact of His life and death. God establishes, not commends as our translation has it, His love towards us in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

Further, in Him we have the certainty of pardon. Every deep heart-experience amongst men has felt the necessity of having a clear certainty and knowledge about forgiveness. Men do not feel it always. A man can skate over the surface of the great deeps that lie beneath the most frivolous life, and may suppose, in his superficial way of looking at things, that there is no need for any definite teaching about sin and the mode of dealing with it. But once bring that man face to face, in a quiet hour, with the facts of his life and of a divine law, and all that superficial ignoring of evil in himself and of the dread of punishment and consequences, passes away. I am sure of this, that no religion will ever go far and last long and work mightily, and lay a sovereign hand upon human life, which has not a most plain and decisive message to preach in reference to pardon. And I am sure of this, that one reason for the comparative feebleness of much so-called Christian teaching in this generation is just that the deepest needs of a man's conscience are not met by it. In a religion on which the whole spirit of a man may rest itself, there must be a very plain message about what is to be done with sin. The only message which answers to the needs of an awakened conscience and an alarmed heart is the old-fashioned message that Jesus Christ the Righteous has died for us sinful men. All other religions have felt after a clear doctrine of forgiveness, and all have failed to find it. Here is the divine Yea! And on it alone we can suspend the whole weight of our soul's salvation. The rope that is to haul us out of the horrible pit and the miry clay had much need to be tested before we commit ourselves to it. There are plenty of easygoing superficial theories about forgiveness predominant in the world to-day. Except the one that says, In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin, they are all like the rope let down into the dark mine to lift the captives beneath, half of the strands of which have been cut on the sharp edge above, and when the weight hangs on to it, it will snap. There is nothing on which a man who has once learned the tragical meaning and awful reality and depth of the fact of his transgression can suspend his forgiveness, except this, that Christ has died, the just for the unjust, to bring us unto God. In Him the promise is yea.

And, again, we have in Christ divine certainties in regard to life. We have in Him the absolutely perfect pattern to which we are to conform our whole doings. And so, notwithstanding that there may, and will still be many uncertainties and much perplexity, we have the great broad lines of morals and of duty traced with a firm hand, and all that we need to know of obligation and of perfectness lies in this--Be like Jesus Christ! So the solemn commandments of the ethical side of Divine Revelation, as well as the promises of it, get their yea in Jesus Christ, and He stands the Law of our lives.

We have certainties for life, in the matter of protection, guidance, supply of all necessity, and the like, treasured and garnered in Jesus Christ. For He not only confirms, but fulfils, the promises which God has made. If we have that dear Lord for our very own, and He belongs to us as He does belong to them who love Him and trust Him, then in Him we have in actual possession these promises, how many soever they be, which are given by God's other words.

Christ is Protean, and becomes everything to each man that each man requires. He is, as it were, a box where sweets compacted lie. In Him are hid all the treasures, not only of wisdom and knowledge, but of divine gifts, and we have but to go to Him in order to have that which at each moment as it emerges, we most require. As in some of those sunny islands of the Southern Pacific, one tree supplies the people with all that they need for their simple wants, fruit for their food, leaves for their houses, staves, thread, needles, clothing, drink, everything--so Jesus Christ, this Tree of Life, is Himself the sum of all the promises, and, having Him, we have everything that we need.

And, lastly, in Christ we have the divine certainties as to the Future over which, apart from Him, lie cloud and darkness. As I said about the revelation of the heart of God, so I say about the revelation of a future life--a verbal revelation is not enough. We have enough of arguments; what we want is facts. We have enough of man's peradventures about a future life, enough of evidence more or less valid to show that it is probable, or not inconceivable, or more likely than not, and so on and so on. What we want is that somebody shall cross the gulf and come back again, and so we get in the Resurrection of Christ the one fact on which men may safely rest their convictions of immortality, and I do not think that there is a second anywhere. On it alone, as I believe, hinges the whole answer to the question--If a man die, shall he live again? This generation is brought, in my reading of it, right up to this alternative--Christ's Resurrection,--or we die like the brutes that perish. All the promises of God in Him are yea.

**II. And now a word as to the second portion of my text--viz. man's certitudes, which answer to God's certainties.**

The latter are in Christ, the former are through Christ. Now it is clear that the only fitting attitude for professing Christians in reference to these certainties of God is the attitude of unhesitating affirmation and joyful assent. Certitude is the fitting response to certainty.

There should be some kind of correspondence between the firmness with which we grasp, the tenacity with which we hold, the assurance with which we believe, these great truths, and the rock-like firmness and immovableness of the evidence upon which they rest. It is a poor compliment to God to come to His most veracious affirmations, sealed with the broad seal of His Son's life and death, and to answer with a hesitating Amen, that falters and almost sticks in our throat. Build rock upon rock. Be sure of the certain things. Grasp with a firm hand the firm stay. Immovably cling to the immovable foundation; and though you be but like the limpet on the rock hold fast by the Rock, as the limpet does; for it is an insult to the certainty of the revelation, when there is hesitation in the believer.

I need not dwell for more than a moment upon the lamentable contrast which is presented between this certitude, which is our only fitting attitude, and the hesitating assent and half belief in which so many professing Christians pass their lives. The reasons for that are partly moral, partly intellectual. This is not a day which is favourable to the unhesitating avowal of convictions in reference to an unseen world, and many of us are afraid of being called narrow, or dogmatisers, and think it looks like breadth, and liberality, and culture, and I know not what, to say Well! perhaps it is, but I am not quite sure; I think it is, but I will not commit myself. All the promises of God, which in Him are yea, ought through Him to get from us an Amen.

There is a great deal that will always be uncertain. The firmer our convictions, the fewer will be the things that they grasp; but, if they be few, they will be large, and enough for us. These truths certified in Christ concerning the heart of God, the message of pardon, the law for life, the gifts of guidance, defence, and sanctifying, the sure and certain hope of immortality--these things we ought to be sure about, whatever borderland of uncertainty may lie beyond them. The Christian verb is we know, not we hope, we calculate, we infer, we think, but we know. And it becomes us to apprehend for ourselves the full blessedness and power of the certitude which Christ has given to us by the certainties which he has brought us.

I need not speak about the blessedness of such a calm assurance, about the need of it for power, for peace, for effort, for fixedness in the midst of a world and age of change. But I must, before I close, point you to the only path by which that certitude is attainable. Through Him is the amen. He is the Door. The truths which He confirms are so inextricably intertwined with Himself that you cannot get them and put away Him. Christ's relation to Christ's Gospel is not the relation of other teachers to their words. You may accept the words of a Plato, whatever you think of the Plato who spoke the words. But you cannot separate Christ and His teaching in that fashion, and you must have Him if you are to get it. So, faith in Him, the intellectual acceptance of Him, as the authoritative and infallible Revealer, the bowing down of heart and will to Him as our Commander and our Lord, the absolute trust in Him as the foundation of all our hope and the source of all our blessedness--that is the way to certitude, and there is no other road that we can take.

If thus we keep near Him, our faith will bring us the present experience and fulfilment of the promises, and we shall be sure of them, because we have them already. And whilst men are asking, Do we know anything about God? Is there a God at all? Is there such a thing as forgiveness? Can anybody find anywhere absolute rules for his life? Is there anything beyond the grave but mist and darkness? we can say, One thing I know, Jesus Christ is my Saviour, and in Him I know God, and pardon, and duty, and sanctifying, and safety, and immortality; and whatever is dark, this, at least, is sun-clear. Get high enough up and you will be above the fog; and while the men down in it are squabbling as to whether there is anything outside the mist, you, from your sunny station, will see the far-off coasts, and haply catch some whiff of perfume from their shore, and see some glinting of a glory upon the shining turrets of the city that hath foundations. We have a present possession of all the promises of God; and whoever doubts their certitude, the man who knows himself a son of God by faith, and has experience of forgiveness and guidance and answered prayer and hopes whose sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality, knows the things which others question and doubt.

So live near Jesus Christ, and, holding fast by His hand, you may lift up your joyful Amen to every one of God's Yeas. For in Him we know the Father, in Him we know that we have the forgiveness of sins, in Him we know that God is near to bless and succour and guide, and in Him we know that, though our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God. Wherefore we are always confident; and when the Voice from Heaven says Yea! our choral shout may go up Amen! Thou art the faithful and true witness.