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

**2 CORINTHIANS-002**. **ANOINTED AND STABLISHED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God."*

*2 Corinthians 1:21*

The connection in which these words occur is a remarkable illustration of the Apostle's habit of looking at the most trivial things in the light of the highest truths. He had been obliged, as the context informs us, to abandon an intended visit to Corinth. The miserable crew of antagonists, who yelped at his heels all his life, seized this change of purpose as the occasion for a double-barrelled charge. They said he was either fickle and infirm of purpose, or insincere, and saying Yea with one side of his mouth and Nay with the other. He rebuts this accusation with apparently quite disproportionate vehemence and great solemnity. He points in the context to the faithfulness of God, to the firm Gospel which he had preached, to God's great Yea! as his answer. He says in effect, How could I, with such a word burning in my heart, move in a region of equivocation and double-dealing; or how could I, whose whole being is saturated with so firm and stable a Gospel, be unreliable and fickle? The message must make the messenger like itself. Communion with a faithful God must make faith-keeping men; the certainties of God's "Yea," and the certitudes of our "Amen," must influence our characters. And so to suppose that a man, influenced by Christianity, is a weak, double-dealing, unsteadfast man is a contradiction in terms. In the text he carries his argument a step further, and points, not only to the power of the Gospel to steady and confirm, but also to the fact that God Himself communicates to the believing soul Christian stability by the anointing which He bestows.

So, then, we have in these words the declaration that inflexible, immovable steadfastness is a mark of a Christian, and that this Christian steadfastness, without which there is no Christianity worth the naming, is a direct gift from God Himself by means of that great anointing which He confers upon men. To that thought, in one or two of its aspects, I ask your attention.

**I. Notice the deep source of this Christian steadfastness.**

The language of the original, carefully considered, seems to me to bear this interpretation, that the anointing of the second clause is the means of the establishing of the first--that is to say, that God confers Christian steadfastness of character by the bestowment of the unction of His Divine Spirit.

Now notice how deep Paul digs in order to get a foundation for a common virtue. There are many ways by which men may cultivate the tenacity and steadfastness of purpose which ought to mark us all. Much discipline may be brought to bear in order to secure that; but the text says that the deepest ground upon which it can be rested is nothing less divine and solemn than this, the actual communication to men, to feeble, vacillating, fluctuating wills, and treacherous, wayward, wandering hearts, of the strength and fixedness which are given by God's own Spirit.

I suppose I need not remind you that from beginning to end of Scripture, anointing is taken as the symbol of the communication of a true divine influence. The oil poured on the head of prophet, priest, and king was but the expression of the communication to the recipient of a divine influence which fitted him as well as designated him, for the office that he filled. And although it is aside from my present purpose, I may just, in a sentence, point to the felicity of the emblem. The flowing oil smoothes the surface upon which it is spread, supples the limbs, and is nutritive and illuminating; thus giving an appropriate emblem of the secret, silent, quickening, nourishing, enlightening influences of that Spirit which God gives to all His sons.

And inasmuch as here this oil of the Divine Spirit is stated as being the true ground and basis of Christian steadfastness, it is obvious that the anointing intended cannot be that of mere designation to, and inspiration for, apostolic or other office, but must be the universal possession of all Christian men and women. Ye, says another Apostle, speaking to the whole democracy of the Christian Church, and not to any little group of selected aristocrats therein--ye have an unction from the Holy One, and every man and woman who has a living grasp of the living Christ, receives from Him this great gift.

Then, notice further that this anointing by a Divine Spirit, which is a true source of life to those that possess it, is derived from, and parallel with, Christ's anointing. We use the word Christ as a proper name, and forget what it means. The Christ is the Anointed One. And do you think that it was a mere accident, or the result of a scanty vocabulary, which compelled the Apostle, in these two contiguous clauses, to use cognate words when he said:--He that establisheth us with you in the Anointed, and hath anointed us, is God? Did he not mean to say thereby, Each of you in a very true sense, if you are a Christian, is a Christ? You, too, are anointed; you, too, are God's Messiahs. On you in a measure the same Spirit rests which dwelt without measure in Him. The chief of Christ's gifts to the Church is the gift of His own life. All His brethren are anointed with the oil that was poured upon His head, even as the oil upon Aaron's locks percolated to the very skirts of his garments. Being anointed with the anointing which was on Him, all His people may claim an identity of nature, may hope for an identity of destiny, and are bound to a prolongation of part of His function and a similarity of character. If He by that anointing was made Prophet, Priest, and King for the world, all His children partake of these offices in subordinate but real fashion, and are prophets to make God known to men, priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and kings at least over themselves, and, if they will, over a world which obeys and serves those that serve and love God. Ye are anointed--Messiahs and Christs, by derivation of the life of Jesus Christ.

And if these things be true, it is plain enough how this divine unction, which is granted to all Christians, lies at the root of steadfastness.

We talk a great deal about the gentleness of Christ; we cannot celebrate it too much, but we may forget that it is the gentleness of strength. We do not sufficiently mark the masculine features in that character, the tremendous tenacity of will, the inflexible fixedness of purpose, the irremovable constancy of obedience in the face of all temptations to the contrary. The figure that rises before us is that of the Christ yearning over weaklings far oftener than it is that of the Christ with knitted brow, and tightened lips, and far-off gazing eye, steadfastly setting His face to go to Jerusalem, and followed as He pressed up the rocky road from Jericho, by that wondering group, astonished at the rigidity of purpose that was stamped on His features. That Christ gives us His Spirit to make us tenacious, constant, righteously obstinate, inflexible in the pursuit of all that is lovely and of good report, like Himself. That Divine Spirit will cure the fickleness of our natures; for our wills are never fixed till they are fixed in obedience, and never free until they elect to serve Him. That Divine Spirit will cure the wandering of our hearts and bind us to Himself. It will lift us above the selfish and cowardly dependence on externals and surroundings, men and things, in which we are all tempted to live. We are all too like aneroid barometers, that go up and down with every variation of a foot or two in our level, but if we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, it will cut the bonds that bind us to the world, and give us possession of a deeper love than can be sustained by, or is derived from, these superficial sources. The true possession of the Divine Spirit, if I might use such a metaphor, sets a man on an insulating stool, and all the currents that move round about him are powerless to reach him. If we have that Divine Spirit within us, it will give us an experience of the preciousness and the truth, the certitude and the sweetness, of Christ's Gospel, which will make it impossible that we should ever cast away the confidence which has such recompense of reward. No man will be surely bound to the truth and person of Christ with bonds that cannot be snapped, except he who in his heart has the knowledge of Him which is possession, and by the gift of the Divine Spirit is knit to Jesus Christ.

So, dear friends, whilst the world is full of wise words about steadfastness, and exalts determination of character and fixity of purpose, rightly, as the basis of much good, our Gospel comes to us poor, light, thistledown creatures, and lets us see how we can be steadfast and settled by being fastened to a steadfast and settled Christ. When storms are raging they lash light articles on deck to holdfasts. Let us lash ourselves to the abiding Christ, and we, too, shall abide.

**II. In the next place, notice the aim or purpose of this Christian steadfastness.**

He stablisheth us with you in Christ, or as the original has it even more significantly, into or unto Christ. Now that seems to me to imply two things--first, that our steadfastness, made possible by our possession of that Divine Spirit, is steadfastness in our relations to Jesus Christ. We are established in reference or in regard to Him. In other words, what Paul here means is, first, a fixed conviction of the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and my Saviour. That is the first step. Men who are steadfast without their intellect guiding and settling the steadfastness are not steadfast, but obstinate and pigheaded. We are meant to be guided by our understandings, and no fixity is anything better than the immobility of a stone, unless it be based upon a distinct and whole-brained intellectual acceptance of Jesus Christ as the All-in-all for us, for life and death, for inward and outward being.

Paul means, next, a steadfastness in regard to Christ in our trust and love. Surely if from Him there is for ever streaming out an unbroken flow of tenderness, there should be ever on our sides an equally unbroken opening of our hearts for the reception of His love, and an equally uninterrupted response to it in our grateful affection. There can be no more damning condemnation of the vacillations and fluctuations of Christian men's affections than the steadfastness of Christ's love to them. He loves ever; He is unalterable in the communication and effluence of His heart. Surely it is most fitting that we should be steadfast in our devotion and answering love to Him. And Paul means not only fixedness of intellectual conviction and continuity of loving response, but also habitual obedience, which is always ready to do His will.

So we should answer His Yea! with our Amen! and having an unchanging Christ to rest upon, we should rest upon Him unchanging. The broken, fluctuating affections and trusts and obediences which mark so much of the average Christian life of this day are only too sad proofs of how scant our possession of that Spirit of steadfastness must be supposed to be. God's Yea is answered by our faltering Amen; God's truth is hesitatingly accepted; God's love is partially returned; God's work is slothfully and negligently done. Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Another thought is suggested by these words--viz. that such steadfastness as we have been trying to describe has for its result a deeper penetration into Jesus Christ and a fuller possession of Him. The only way by which we can grow nearer and nearer to our Lord is by steadfastly keeping beside Him. You cannot get the spirit of a landscape unless you sit down and gaze, and let it soak into you. The cheap tripper never sees the lake. You cannot get to know a man until you summer and winter with him. No subject worth studying opens itself to the hasty glance. Was it not Sir Isaac Newton who used to say, I have no genius, but I keep a subject before me? Abide in Me; as the branch cannot bear fruit except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me. Continuous, steadfast adhesion to Him is the condition of growing up into His likeness, and receiving more and more of His beauty into our waiting hearts. Wait on the Lord; wait, I say, on the Lord.

**III. Lastly, notice the very humble and commonplace sphere in which the Christian steadfastness manifests itself.**

It was nothing of more importance than that Paul had said he was going to Corinth, and did not, on which he brings all this array of great principles to bear. From which I gather just this thought, that the highest gifts of God's grace and the greatest truths of God's Word are meant to regulate the tiniest things in our daily life. It is no degradation to the lightning to have to carry messages. It is no profanation of the sun to gather its rays into a burning glass to light a kitchen fire with. And it is no unworthy use of the Divine Spirit that God gives to His children, to say it will keep a man from hasty and precipitate decisions as to little things in life, and from chopping and changing about, with a levity of purpose and without a sufficient reason. If our religion is not going to influence the trifles, what is it going to influence? Our life is made up of trifles, and if these are not its field, where is its field? You may be quite sure that, if your religion does not influence the little things, it will never influence the great ones. If it has not power enough to guide the horses when they are at a slow, sober walk, what do you think it will do when they are at a gallop and plunging? He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. So let us see to two things--first, that all our religion is worked into our life, for only so much of it as is so inwrought is our religion--and, second, that all our life is brought under the sway of motives derived from our religion: for only in proportion as it is, will it be pure and good.

And as regards this special virtue and prime quality of steadfastness and fixedness of purpose, you can do no good in the world without it. Unless a man can hold his own, and turn an obstinate negative to the temptations that lie thick about him, he will never come to any good at all, either in this life or in the next. The basis of all excellence is a wholesome disregard of externals, and the cultivation of a strong self-reliant and self-centred, because God-trusting and Christ-centred, will. And I tell you, especially you young men and women, if you want to do or be anything worth doing or being, you must try to get your natures hardened into being steadfast, unmovable. There is only one infallible way of doing it, and that is to let the strong Son of God live in you, and in Him to find your strength for resistance, your strength for obedience, your strength for submission. I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

There are two types of men in the world. The one has his emblem in the chaff, rootless, with no hold, swept out of the threshing-floor by every gust of wind. That the picture of many whose principles lie at the mercy of the babble of tongues round about them, whose rectitude goes at a puff of temptation, like the smoke out of a chimney when the wind blows; who have no will for what is good, but live as it happens. The other type of man has his emblem in the tree, rooted deep, and therefore rising high, with its roots going as far underground as its branches spread in the blue, and therefore green of leaf and rich of fruit We are made partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence, steadfast until the end.