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

**2 CORINTHIANS-017**. **WILLING AND NOR DOING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will so there may be a performance also."*

*2 Corinthians 8:11*

The Revised Version reads: But now complete the doing also; that as there was the readiness to will, so there may be the completion also out of your ability. A collection of money for the almost pauper church at Jerusalem bulked very largely in the Apostle's mind at the date of the writing of the two letters to the Corinthian church. We learn that that church had been the first to agree to the project, and then had very distinctly hung back from implementing its promises and fulfilling its good intentions. So the Apostle, in the chapter from which my text is taken, with wonderful delicacy, dignity, and profundity, sets forth the true principle, not only of Christian giving, but of Christian asking. The text advises that the gushing sentiments of brotherly sympathy and liberality which had inspired the Corinthians a year ago should now bear some fruit in action. So Paul is going to send Titus, his right-hand man at the time, to hurry up and finish off the collection and have done with it. The text is in effect the message which Titus was to carry; but it has a far wider application than that. It is a needful advice for us all about a great many other things: As there was a readiness to will, so let there be a performance also.

Resolutions, noble and good and Christlike, have a strange knack of cheating the people who make them. So we all need the exhortation not to be befooled by fancying that we have done, when we have only willed. Of course we shall not do unless we will. But there is a wide gap, as our experience witnesses, between the two things. We all know what place it is to which, according to the old proverb, the road is paved with good intentions; and the only way to pull up that paving is to take Paul's advice here and always, and immediately to put into action the resolves of our hearts. Now I desire to say two or three very plain and simple things about this matter.

**I. I would have you consider the necessity of this commandment.**

Consider that the fault here warned against is a universal one. What different men we should be if our resolutions had fruited in conduct! In all regions of life that is true, but most emphatically is it true in regard to religion. The damning tragedy of many lives, and I dare say of those of some of my hearers, is that men have over and over again determined that they would be Christians, and they are not Christians yet; just because they have let the native hue of resolution be sicklied over by some paleness or other, and so have resolved and resolved and resolved till every nerve of action is rotted away, and they will die unchristian. I dare say that there are men or women listening to me now, perhaps with grey hairs upon them, who can remember times, in the springtide of their youth, when they said, I will give my heart to Jesus Christ, and set my faith upon Him; and they have not done it yet. Now, therefore, as there was a readiness to will, let there be also the performance.

But it is not only in regard to that most important of all resolves that I wish to say a word. All Christians, I am sure, know what it is, over and over again, to have had stirrings in their hearts which they have been able to consolidate into determination, but have not been able to carry into act. The children have come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring them forth. That is true about all of us, more or less, and it is very solemnly true of a great many of us professing Christians. We have tried to cure--we have determined that we will cure--manifest and flagrant defects or faults in our Christian life. We have resolved, and some nipping frost has come, and the blossoms have dropped on the grass before they have ever set into fruit. I know that is so about you, because I know that it is so about myself. And therefore, dear brethren, I appeal to you, and ask you whether the exhortation of my text has not a sharp point for every one of us--whether the universality of this defect does not demand that we all should gravely consider the exhortation here before us?

Then, again, let me remind you how this injunction is borne in upon us by the consideration of the strength of the opposition with which we have always to contend, in every honest attempt to bring to act our best resolutions. Did you ever try to cure some little habit, some mere trifle, a trick of manner or twist of the finger, or some attitude or tone that might be ugly and awkward, and that people told you that it would be better to get rid of? You know how hard it is. There is always a tremendous gulf between the ideal and its realisation in life. As long as we are moving in vacuo we move without any friction or difficulty; but as soon as we come out into a world where there are an atmosphere and opposing forces, then friction comes in, and speed diminishes; and we never become what we aim to be. We begin with grand purposes, and we end with very poor results. We all start, in our early days, with the notion that our lives are going to be radiant and beautiful, and all unlike what the limitations of power and the antagonisms that we have to meet make of them at last. The tree of our life's doings has to grow, like those contorted pines on the slopes of the Alps, in many storms, with heavy weights of snow on its branches, and beaten about by tempests from every quarter of the heavens; and so it gets gnarled and knotted and very unlike the symmetrical beauty that we dreamed would adorn it. We begin with saying: Come! Let us build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven; and we are contented at last, if we have put up some little tumble-down shed where we can get shelter for our heads from the blast.

And the difficulty in bringing into action our best selves besets us in the matter of translating our resolutions into practice. What are arrayed against it? A feeble will, enslaved too often by passions and flesh and habits, and all about us lie obstacles to our carrying into action our conscientious convictions, our deepest resolutions; obstacles to our being true to our true selves; to which obstacles, alas, far too many of us habitually, and all of us occasionally, succumb. That being the case, do not we all need to ponder in our deepest hearts, and to pray for grace to make the motto of our lives, As there was a readiness to will, let there be a performance?

**II. Consider the importance of this counsel.**

That is borne in upon mind and conscience by looking at the disastrous effects of letting resolutions remain sterile. Consider how apt we are to deceive ourselves with unfulfilled purposes. The quick response which an easily-moved nature may make to some appeal of noble thought or lofty principle is mistaken for action, and we are tempted to think that willing is almost as good as if we had done what we half resolved on. And there is a kind of glow of satisfaction that comes when such a man thinks, I have done well in that I have determined. The Devil will let you resolve as much as you like--the more the better; only the more easily you resolve, the more certainly he will block the realisation. Let us take care of that seducing temptation which is apt to lead us all to plume ourselves on good resolutions, and to fancy that they are almost equivalent to their own fulfilment. Cheques are all very well if there be bullion in the bank cellars to pay them with when they fall due, but if that be not so, then the issuing of them is crime and fraud. Our resolutions, made and forgotten as so many of our good resolutions are, are very little better.

Note, too, how rapidly the habit of substituting lightly-made resolutions for seriously-endeavoured acts grows.

And mark, further, how miserable and debilitating it is to carry the dead weight of such unaccomplished intentions.

Nothing so certainly weakens a man as a multitude of resolves that he knows he has never fulfilled. They weaken his will, burden his conscience, stand in the way of his hopes, make him feel as if the entail of evil was too firm and strong to be ever broken. O wretched man that I am! said one who had made experience of what it was to will what was good, and not to find how to perform, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? It is an awful thing to have to carry a corpse about on your back. And that was what Paul thought the man did who loaded his own shoulders with abortive resolutions, that perished in the birth, and never grew up to maturity. Weak and miserable is always the man who is swift to resolve and slow to carry out his resolutions.

**III. And now let me say a word before I close about how this universal and grave disease is to be coped with.**

Well, I should say to begin with, let us take very soberly and continually into our consciousness the recognition of the fact that the disease is there. And then may I say, let us be rather slower to resolve than we often are. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. The man who has never had the determination to give up some criminal indulgence--say, drink--is possibly less criminal, and certainly less weak, than the man who, when his head aches, and the consequences of his self-indulgence are vividly realised by him, makes up his mind to be a teetotaller, and soon stumbles into the first dram-shop that is open, and then reels out a drunkard. Do not vow until you have made up your minds to pay. Remember that it is a solemn act to determine anything, especially anything bearing on moral and religious life; and that you had far better keep your will in suspense than spring to the resolution with thoughtless levity and leave it with the same.

Further, the habit of promptly carrying out our resolves is one that, like all other habits, can be cultivated. And we can cultivate it in little things, in the smallest trifles of daily life, which by their myriads make up life itself, in order that it may be a fixed custom of our minds when great resolves have to be made. The man who has trained himself day in and day out, in regard to the insignificances of daily life, to let act follow resolve as the thunder peal succeeds the lightning flash, is the man who, if he is moved to make a great resolve about his religion, or about his conduct, will be most likely to carry it out. Get the magical influence of habit on your side, and you will have done much to conquer the evil of abortive resolutions.

But then there is something a great deal more than that to be said. The Apostle did not content himself, in the passage already referred to, with bewailing the wretchedness of the condition in which to will was present, but how to perform he found not. He asked, and he triumphantly answered, the question, Who shall deliver me? with the great words, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is the secret; keep near Him, trust Him, open your hearts to the influences of that Divine Spirit who makes us free from the law of sin and death. And if thus, knowing our weakness, recognising our danger, humbly trying to cultivate the habit of prompt discharge of all discerned duty, we leave ourselves in Jesus Christ's hands, and wait, and ask, and believe that we possess, His cleansing Spirit, then we shall not ask and wait in vain. Work out your own salvation, ... for it is God that worketh in you, both the willing and the doing.