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

**2 THESSALONIANS-004**. **THE HEART'S HOME AND GUIDE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."*

*2 Thessalonians 3:5*

A word or two of explanation of terms may preface our remarks on this, the third of the Apostle's prayers for the Thessalonians in this letter. The first point to be noticed is that by the Lord here is meant, as usually in the New Testament, Jesus Christ. So that here again we have the distinct recognition of His divinity, and the direct address of prayer to Him.

The next thing to notice is that by the love of God is here meant, not God's to us, but ours to Him; and that the petition, therefore, respects the emotions and sentiments of the Thessalonians towards the Father in heaven.

And the last point is that the rendering of the Authorised Version, patient waiting for Christ, is better exchanged for that of the Revised Version, the patience of Christ, meaning thereby the same patience as He exhibited in His earthly life, and which He is ready to bestow upon us.

It is not usual in the New Testament to find Jesus Christ set forth as the great Example of patient endurance; but still there are one or two instances in which the same expression is applied to Him. For example, in two contiguous verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read of His enduring contradiction of sinners against Himself, and enduring the Cross, despising the shame, in both of which cases we have the verb employed of which the noun is here used. Then in the Apocalypse we have such expressions as the patience of Christ, of which John says that he and his brethren whom he is addressing are participators, and, again, thou hast kept the word of my patience.

So, though unusual, the thought of our text as presented in the amended version is by no means singular. These things, then, being premised, we may now look at this petition as a whole.

**I. The first thought that it suggests to me is, the home of the heart.**

The Lord direct you into the love of God and the patience of Christ. The prayers in this letter with which we have been occupied for some Sundays present to us Christian perfection under various aspects. But this we may, perhaps, say is the most comprehensive and condensed of them all. The Apostle gathers up the whole sum of his desires for his friends, and presents to us the whole aim of our efforts for ourselves, in these two things, a steadfast love to God, and a calm endurance of evil and persistence in duty, unaffected by suffering or by pain. If we have these two we shall not be far from being what God wishes to see us.

Now the Apostle's thought here, of leading us into these two seems to suggest the metaphor of a great home with two chambers in it, of which the inner was entered from the outer. The first room is the love of God, and the second is the patience of Christ. It comes to the same thing whether we speak of the heart as dwelling in love, or of love as dwelling in the heart. The metaphor varies, the substance of the thought is the same, and that thought is that the heart should be the sphere and subject of a steadfast, habitual, all-pleasing love, which issues in unbroken calmness of endurance and persistence of service, in the face of evil.

Let us look, then, for a moment at these two points. I need not dwell upon the bare idea of love to God as being the characteristic of the Christian attitude towards Him, or remind you of how strange and unexampled a thing it is that all religion should be reduced to this one fruitful germ, love to the Father in heaven. But it is more to the purpose for me to point to the constancy, the unbrokenness, the depth, which the Apostle here desires should be the characteristics of Christian love to God. We sometimes cherish such emotion; but, alas, how rare it is for us to dwell in that calm home all the days of our lives! We visit that serene sanctuary at intervals, and then for the rest of our days we are hurried to and fro between contending affections, and wander homeless amidst inadequate loves. But what Paul asked, and what should be the conscious aim of the Christian life, is, that we should dwell all our days in the house of the Lord, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple.

Alas, when we think of our own experiences, how fair and far seems that other, contemplated as a possibility in my text, that our hearts should abide in the love of God!

Let me remind you, too, that steadfastness of habitual love all round our hearts, as it were, is the source and germ of all perfectness of life and conduct. Love and do as Thou wilt, is a bold saying, but not too bold. For the very essence of love is the smelting of the will of the lover into the will of the beloved. And there is nothing so certain as that, in regard to all human relations, and in regard to the relations to God which in many respects follow, and are moulded after the pattern of, our earthly relations of love, to have the heart fixed in pure affection is to have the whole life subordinated in glad obedience. Nothing is so sweet as to do the beloved's will. The germ of all righteousness, as well as the characteristic spirit of every righteous deed, lies in love to God. This is the mother tincture which, variously coloured and with various additions, makes all the different precious liquids which we can pour as libations on His altar. The one saving salt of all deeds in reference to Him is that they are the outcome and expression of a loving heart. He who loves is righteous, and doeth righteousness. So, love is the fulfilling of the law.

That the heart should be fixed in its abode in love to God is the secret of all blessedness, as it is the source of all righteousness. Love is always joy in itself; it is the one deliverance from self-bondage to which self is the one curse and misery of man. The emancipation from care and sorrow and unrest lies in that going out of ourselves which we call by the name of love. There be things masquerading about the world, and profaning the sacred name of love by taking it to themselves, which are only selfishness under a disguise. But true love is the annihilation, and therefore the apotheosis and glorifying, of self; and in that annihilation lies the secret charm which brings all blessedness into a life.

But, then, though love in itself be always bliss, yet, by reason of the imperfections of its objects, it sometimes leads to sorrow. For limitations and disappointments and inadequacies of all sorts haunt our earthly loves whilst they last; and we have all to see them fade, or to fade away from them. The thing you love may change, the thing you love must die; and therefore love, which in itself is blessedness, hath often, like the little book that the prophet swallowed, a bitter taste remaining when the sweetness is gone. But if we set our hearts on God, we set our hearts on that which knows no variableness, neither the shadow of turning. There are no inadequate responses, no changes that we need fear. On that love the scythe of death, which mows down all other products of the human heart, hath no power; and its stem stands untouched by the keen edge that levels all the rest of the herbage. Love God, and thou lovest eternity; and therefore the joy of the love is eternal as its object. So he who loves God is building upon a rock, and whosoever has this for his treasure carries his wealth with him whithersoever he goes. Well may the Apostle gather into one potent word, and one mighty wish, the whole fulness of his desires for his friends. And wise shall we be if we make this the chiefest of our aims, that our hearts may have their home in the love of God.

Still further, there is another chamber in this house of the soul. The outer room, where the heart inhabits that loves God, leads into another compartment, the patience of Christ.

Now, I suppose I need not remind many of you that this great New Testament word patience has a far wider area of meaning than that which is ordinarily covered by that expression. For patience, as we use it, is simply a passive virtue. But the thing that is meant by the New Testament word which is generally so rendered has an active as well as a passive side. On the passive side it is the calm, unmurmuring, unreluctant submission of the will to whatsoever evil may come upon us, either directly from God's hand, or through the ministration and mediation of men who are His sword. On the active side it is the steadfast persistence in the path of duty, in spite of all that may array itself against us. So there are the two halves of the virtue which is here put before us--unmurmuring submission and bold continuance in well-doing, whatsoever storms may hurtle in our faces.

Now, in both of these aspects, the life of Jesus Christ is the great pattern. As for the passive side, need I remind you how, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth? When He was reviled He reviled not again, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth uprightly. No anger ever flushed His cheek or contracted His brow. He never repaid scorn with scorn, nor hate with hate. All men's malice fell upon Him, like sparks upon wet timber, and kindled no conflagration.

As for the active side, I need not remind you how He set His face to go to Jerusalem--how the great solemn must which ruled His life bore Him on, steadfast and without deflection in His course, through all obstacles. There never was such heroic force as the quiet force of the meek and gentle Christ, which wasted no strength in displaying or boasting of itself, but simply, silently, unconquerably, like the secular motions of the stars, dominated all opposition, and carried Him, unhasting and unresting, on His path. That life, with all its surface of weakness, had an iron tenacity of purpose beneath, which may well stand for our example. Like some pure glacier from an Alpine peak, it comes silently, slowly down into the valley; and though to the eye it seems not to move, it presses on with a force sublime in its silence and gigantic in its gentleness, and buries beneath it the rocks that stand in its way. The patience of Christ is the very sublimity of persistence in well-doing. It is our example, and more than our example--it is His gift to us.

Such passive and active patience is the direct fruit of love to God. The one chamber opens into the other. For they whose hearts dwell in the sweet sanctities of the love of God will ever be those who say, with a calm smile, as they put out their hand to the bitterest draught, the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?'

Love, and evil dwindles; love, and duty becomes supreme; and in the submission of the will, which is the true issue of love, lies the foundation of indomitable and inexhaustible endurance and perseverance.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, that in this resolve to do the will of God, in spite of all antagonism and opposition, lies a condition at once of moral perfection and of blessedness. So, dear friends, if we would have a home for our hearts, let us pass into that sweet, calm, inexpugnable fortress provided for us in the love of God and the patience of Christ.

**II. Now notice, secondly, the Guide of the heart to its home.**

The Lord direct you. I have already explained that we have here a distinct address to Jesus Christ as divine, and the hearer of prayer. The Apostle evidently expects a present, personal influence from Christ to be exerted upon men's hearts. And this is the point to which I desire to draw your attention in a word or two. We are far too oblivious of the present influence of Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, upon the hearts of men that trust Him. We have very imperfectly apprehended our privileges as Christians if our faith do not expect, and if our experience have not realised, the inward guidance of Christ moment by moment in our daily lives. I believe that much of the present feebleness of the Christian life amongst its professors is to be traced to the fact that their thoughts about Jesus Christ are predominantly thoughts of what He did nineteen centuries ago, and that the proportion of faith is not observed in their perspective of His work, and that they do not sufficiently realise that to-day, here, in you and me, if we have faith in Him, He is verily and really putting forth His power.

Paul's prayer is but an echo of Christ's promise. The Master said, He shall guide you into all truth. The servant prays, The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God. And if we rightly know the whole blessedness that is ours in the gift of Jesus Christ, we shall recognise His present guidance as a reality in our lives.

That guidance is given to us mainly by the Divine Spirit laying upon our hearts the great facts which evoke our answering love to God. We love Him because He first loved us; and the way by which Jesus directs our hearts into the love of God is mainly by shedding abroad God's love to us in our spirits by the Holy Spirit which is given to us.

But, besides that, all these movements in our hearts so often neglected, so often resisted, by which we are impelled to a holier life, to a deeper love, to a more unworldly consecration--all these, rightly understood, are Christ's directions. He leads us, though often we know not the hand that guides; and every Christian may be sure of this--and he is sinful if he does not live up to the height of his privileges--that the ancient promises are more than fulfilled in his experience, and that he has a present Christ, an indwelling Christ, who will be his Shepherd, and lead him by green pastures and still waters sometimes and through valleys of darkness and rough defiles sometimes, but always with the purpose of bringing him nearer and nearer to the full possession of the love of God and the patience of Christ.

The vision which shone before the eyes of the father of the forerunner, was that the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to guide our feet into the way of peace. It is fulfilled in Jesus who directs our hearts into love and patience, which are the way of peace.

We are not to look for impressions and impulses distinguishable from the operations of our own inward man. We are not to fall into the error of supposing that a conviction of duty or a conception of truth is of divine origin because it is strong. But the true test of their divine origin is their correspondence with the written word, the standard of truth and life. Jesus guides us to a fuller apprehension of the great facts of the infinite love of God in the Cross. Shedding abroad a Saviour's love does kindle ours.

**III. Lastly, notice the heart's yielding to its guide.**

If this was Paul's prayer for his converts, it should be our aim for ourselves. Christ is ready to direct our hearts, if we will let Him. All depends on our yielding to that sweet direction, loving as that of a mother's hand on her child's shoulder.

What is our duty and wisdom in view of these truths? The answer may be thrown into the shape of one or two brief counsels.

First, desire it. Do you Christian people want to be led to love God more? Are you ready to love the world less, which you will have to do if you love God more? Do you wish Christ to lay His hand upon you, and withdraw you from much, that He may draw you into the sanctities and sublimities of His own experienced love? I do not think the lives of some of us look very like as if we should welcome that direction. And it is a sharp test, and a hard commandment to say to a Christian professor, Desire to be led into the love of God.

Again, expect it. Do not dismiss all that I have been saying about a present Christ leading men by their own impulses, which are His monitions, as fanatical and mystical and far away from daily experience. Ah! it is not only the boy Samuel whose infancy was an excuse for his ignorance, who takes God's voice to be only white-bearded Eli's. There are many of us who, when Christ speaks, think it is only a human voice. Perhaps His deep and gentle tones are thrilling through my harsh and feeble voice; and He is now, even by the poor reed through which He breathes His breath, saying to some of you, Come near to Me. Expect the guidance.

Still your own wills that you may hear His voice. How can you be led if you never look at the Guide? How can you hear that still small voice amidst the clattering of spindles, and the roar of wagons, and the noises in your own heart? Be still, and He will speak.

Follow the guidance, and at once, for delay is fatal. Like a man walking behind a guide across some morass, set your feet in the print of the Master's and keep close at His heels, and then you will be safe. And so, dear friends, if we want to have anchorage for our love, let us set our love on God, who alone is worthy of it, and who alone of all its objects will neither fail us nor change. If we would have the temper which lifts us above the ills of life and enables us to keep our course unaffected by them all, as the gentle moon moves with the same silent, equable pace through piled masses of cloud and clear stretches of sky, we must attain submission through love, and gain unreluctant endurance and steadfast wills from the example and source of both, the gentle and strong Christ. If we would have our hearts calm, we must let Him guide them, sway them, curb their vagrancies, stimulate their desires, and satisfy the desires which He has stimulated. We must abandon self, and say, Lord, I cannot guide myself. Do Thou direct my wandering feet. The prayer will not be in vain. He will guide us with His eye, and that directing of our hearts will issue in experiences of love and patience, whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality. The Guide and the road foreshadow the goal. The only natural end to which such a path can lead and such guidance point is a heaven of perfect love, where patience has done its perfect work, and is called for no more. The experience of present direction strengthens the hope of future perfection. So we may take for our own the triumphant confidence of the Psalmist, and embrace the nearest and the remotest future in one calm vision of faith that Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.