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

**COLOSSIANS-006**. **ALL POWER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy."*

*Colossians 1:11 (R.V.)*

There is a wonderful rush and fervour in the prayers of Paul. No parts of his letters are so lofty, so impassioned, so full of his soul, as when he rises from speaking of God to men to speaking to God for men. We have him here setting forth his loving desires for the Colossian Christians in a prayer of remarkable fulness and sweep. Broadly taken, it is for their perfecting in religious and moral excellence, and it is very instructive to note the idea of what a good man is which is put forth here.

The main petition is for wisdom and spiritual understanding applied chiefly, as is to be carefully noted, to the knowledge of God's will. The thought is that what it most imports us to know is the Will of God, a knowledge not of merely speculative points in the mysteries of the divine nature, but of that Will which it concerns us to know because it is our life to do it. The next element in Paul's desires, as set forth in the ideal here, is a worthy walk, a practical life, or course of conduct which is worthy of Jesus Christ, and in every respect pleases Him. The highest purpose of knowledge is a good life. The surest foundation for a good life is a full and clear knowledge of the Will of God.

Then follow a series of clauses which seem to expand the idea of the worthy walk and to be co-ordinate or perhaps slightly causal, and to express the continuous condition of the soul which is walking worthily. Let us endeavour to gather from these words some hints as to what it is God's purpose that we should become.

**I. The many-sided strength which may be ours.**

The form of the word strengthened here would be more fully represented by being strengthened, and suggests an unintermitted process of bestowal and reception of God's might rendered necessary by our continuous human weakness, and by the tear and wear of life. As in the physical life there must be constant renewal because there is constant waste, and as every bodily action involves destruction of tissue so that living is a continual dying, so is it in the mental and still more in the spiritual life. Just as there must be a perpetual oxygenation of blood in the lungs, so there must be an uninterrupted renewal of spiritual strength for the highest life. It is demanded by the conditions of our human weakness. It is no less rendered necessary by the nature of the divine strength imparted, which is ever communicating itself, and like the ocean cannot but pour so much of its fulness as can be received into every creek and crack on its shore.

The Apostle not merely emphasises the continuousness of this communicated strength, but its many-sided variety, by designating it all power. In this whole context that word all seems to have a charm for him. We read in this prayer of all spiritual wisdom, of walking worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, of fruit in every good work, and now of all power, and lastly of all patience and longsuffering. These are not instances of being obsessed with a word, but each of them has its own appropriate force, and here the comprehensive completeness of the strength available for our many-sided weakness is marvellously revealed. There is infinite riches in a narrow room. All power means every kind of power, be it bodily or mental, for all variety of circumstances, and, Protean, to take the shape of all exigencies. Most of us are strong only at points, and weak in others. In all human experience there is a vulnerable spot on the heel. The most glorious image, though it has a head of gold, ends in feet, part of iron and part of clay.

And if this ideal of many-sided power stands in contrast with the limitations of human strength, how does it rebuke and condemn the very partial manifestations of a very narrow and one-sided power which we who profess to have received it set forth! We have access to a source which can fill our whole nature, can flower into all gracious forms, can cope with all our exigencies, and make us all-round men, complete in Jesus Christ, and, having this, what do we make of it, what do we show for it? Does not God say to us, Ye are not straitened in me, ye are straitened in yourselves; I beseech you be ye enlarged.

The conditions on our part requisite for possessing all might are plain enough. The earlier portion of the prayer plainly points to them. The knowledge of God's Will and the walk worthy of the Lord are the means whereby the power which is ever eager to make its dwelling in us, can reach its end. If we keep the channel unchoked, no doubt the river of the water of life which proceedeth from the throne of God and the Lamb will rejoice to fill it to the brim with its flashing waters. If we do not wrench away ourselves from contact with Him, He will strengthen us with all might. If we keep near Him we may have calm confidence that power will be ours that shall equal our need and outstrip our desires.

**II. The measure of the strength.**

It is according to the power of His glory. The Authorised Version but poorly represents the fulness of the Apostle's thought, which is more adequately and accurately expressed in the Revised Version. His glory is the flashing brightness of the divine self-manifestation, and in that Light resides the strength which is the standard or measure of the gift to us. The tremendous force of the sunbeam which still falls so gently on a sleeper's face as not to disturb the closed eyes is but a parable of the strength which characterises the divine glory. And wonderful and condemnatory as the thought is, that power is the unlimited limit of the possibilities of our possession. His gifts are proportioned to His resources. While He is rich, can I be poor? The only real limit to His bestowal is His own fulness. Of course, at each moment, our capacity of receiving is for the time being the practical limit of our possession, but that capacity varies indefinitely, and may be, and should be, indefinitely and continuously increasing. It is an elastic boundary, and hence we may go on making our own as much as we will, and progressively more and more, of God's strength. He gives it all, but there is a tragical difference between the full cup put into our hands and the few drops carried to our lips. The key of the treasure-chamber is in our possession, and on each of us His gracious face smiles the permission which His gracious lips utter in words, Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. If we are conscious of defect, if our weakness is beaten by the assaults of temptation, or crushed by sorrows that ride it down in a fierce attack, the fault is our own. We have, if we choose to make it our own and to use it as ours, more than enough to make us more than conquerors over all sins and all sorrows.

But when we contrast what we have by God's gift and what we have in our personal experience and use in our daily life, the contrast may well bring shame, even though the contrast brings to us hope to lighten the shame. The average experience of present-day Christians reminds one of the great tanks that may be seen in India, that have been suffered to go to ruin, and so an elaborate system of irrigation comes to nothing, and the great river that should have been drawn off into them runs past them, all but unused. Repair them and keep the sluices open, and all will blossom again.

**III. The great purpose of this strength.**

Patience and longsuffering with joyfulness seems at first but a poor result of such a force, but it comes from a heart that was under no illusions as to the facts of human life, and it finds a response in us all. It may be difficult to discriminate patience from longsuffering, but the general notion here is that one of the highest uses for which divine strength is given to us, is to make us able to meet the antagonism of evil without its shaking our souls. He who patiently endures without despondency or the desire to recompense evil for evil, and to whom by faith even the night is light about him, is far on the way to perfection. God is always near us, but never nearer than when our hearts are heavy and our way rough and dark. Our sorrows make rents through which His strength flows. We can see more of heaven when the leaves are off the trees. It is a law of the Divine dealings that His strength is made perfect in weakness. God leads us in to a darkened room to show us His wonders.

That strength is to be manifested by us in patience and longsuffering, both of which are to have blended with them a real though apparently antagonistic joy. True and profound grief is not opposed to such patience, but the excess of it, the hopeless and hysterical outbursts certainly are. We are all like the figures in some old Greek temples which stand upright with their burdens on their heads. God's strength is given that we may bear ours calmly, and upright like these fair forms that hold up the heavy architecture as if it were a feather, or like women with water-jars on their heads, which only make their carriage more graceful and their step more firm.

How different the patience which God gives by His own imparted strength, from the sullen submission or hysterical abandonment to sorrow, or the angry rebellion characterising Godless grief! Many of us think that we can get on very well in prosperity and fine weather without Him. We had better ask ourselves what we are going to do when the storm comes, which comes to all some time or other.

The word here rendered patience is more properly perseverance. It is not merely a passive but an active virtue. We do not receive that great gift of divine strength to bear only, but also to work, and such work is one of the best ways of bearing and one of the best helps to doing so. So in our sorrows and trials let us feel that God's strength is not all given us to be expended in our own consolation, but also to be used in our plain duties. These remain as imperative though our hearts are beating like hammers, and there is no more unwise and cowardly surrender to trouble than to fling away our tools and fold our hands idly on our laps.

But Paul lays a harder duty on us even in promising a great gift to us, when he puts before us an ideal of joy mingling with patience and longsuffering. The command would be an impossible one if there were not the assurance that we should be strengthened with all might. We plainly need an infusion of diviner strength than our own, if that strange marriage of joy and sorrow should take place, and they should at once occupy our hearts. Yet if His strength be ours we shall be strong to submit and acquiesce, strong to look deep enough to see His will as the foundation of all and as ever busy for our good, strong to hope, strong to discern the love at work, strong to trust the Father even when He chastens. And all this will make it possible to have the paradox practically realised in our own experience, As sorrowful yet always rejoicing. One has seen potassium burning underwater. Our joy may burn under waves of sorrow. Let us bring our weakness to Jesus Christ and grasp Him as did the sinking Peter. He will breathe His own grace into us, and speak to our feeble and perchance sorrowful hearts, as He had done long before Paul's words to the Colossians, My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is made perfect in weakness.