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

**JOHN-089**. **THE GUIDE INTO ALL TRUTH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you."*

*John 16:12-15*

This is our Lord's last expansion, in these discourses, of the great promise of the Comforter which has appeared so often in them. First, He was spoken of simply as dwelling in Christ's servants, without any more special designation of His work than was involved in the name. Then, His aid was promised, to remind the Apostles of the facts of Christ's life, especially of His words; and so the inspiration and authority of the four Gospels were certified for us. Then He was further promised as the witness in the disciples to Jesus Christ. And, finally, in the immediately preceding context, we have His office of convincing, or convicting, the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. And now we come to that gracious and gentle work which that divine Spirit is declared by Christ to do, not only for that little group gathered round Him then, but for all those who trust themselves to His guidance. He is to be the Spirit of truthto all the ages, who in simple verity will help true hearts to know and love the truth. There are three things in the words before us--first, the avowed incompleteness of Christ's own teaching; second, the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit of truth guides; and, last, the unity of these two.

**I. First, then, we have here the avowed incompleteness of Christ's own teaching.**

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Now in an earlier portion of these great discourses, we have our Lord asserting that all things whatsoever He had heard of the Father He had made knownunto His servants. How do these two representations harmonise? Is it possible to make them agree? Surely, yes. There is a difference between the germ and the unfolded flower. There is a difference between principles and the complete development of these. I suppose you may say that all Euclid is in the axioms and definitions. I suppose you may also say that when you have learned the axioms and definitions, there are many things yet to be said, of which you have not grown to the apprehension. And so our Lord, as far as His frankness was concerned, and as far as the fundamental and seminal principles of all religious truth were concerned, had even then declared all that He had heard of the Father. But yet, in so far as the unfolding of these was concerned, the tracing of their consequences, the exhibition of their harmonies, the weaving of them into an ordered whole in which a man's understanding could lodge, there were many things yet to be said, which that handful of men were not able to bear. And so our Lord Himself here declares that His words spoken on earth are not His completed revelation.

Of course we find in them, as I believe, hints profound and pregnant, which only need to be unfolded and smoothed out, as it were, and their depths fathomed, in order to lead to all that is worthy of being called Christian truth. But upon many points we cannot but contrast the desultory, brief, obscure references which came from the Master's lips with the more systematised, full, and accurate teaching which came from the servants. The great crucial instance of all is the comparative reticence which our Lord observed in reference to His sacrificial death, and the atoning character of His sufferings for the world. I do not admit that the silence of the Gospels upon that subject is fairly represented when it is said to be absolute. I believe that that silence has been exaggerated by those who have no desire to accept that teaching. But the distinction is plain and obvious, not to be ignored, rather to be marked as being fruitful of blessed teaching, between the way in which Christ speaks about His Cross, and the way in which the Apostles speak about it after Pentecost.

What then? My text gives us the reason. You cannot bear them now. Now the word rendered bearhere does not mean bearin the sense of endure, or tolerate, or suffer, but bearin the sense of carry. And the metaphor is that of some weight--it may be gold, but still it is a weight--laid upon a man whose muscles are not strong enough to sustain it. It crushes rather than gladdens. So because they had not strength enough to carry, had not capacity to receive, our Lord was lovingly reticent.

There is a great principle involved in this saying--that revelation is measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of the men who receive it. The light is graduated for the diseased eye. A wise oculist does not flood that eye with full sunshine, but he puts on veils and bandages, and closes the shutters, and lets a stray beam, ever growing as the curve is perfected, fall upon it. So from the beginning until the end of the process of revelation there was a correspondence between men's capacity to receive the light and the light that was granted; and the faithful use of the less made them capable of receiving the greater, and as soon as they were capable of receiving it, it came. To him that hath shall be given. In His love, then, Christ did not load these men with principles that they could not carry, nor feed them with strong meatinstead of milk, until they were able to bear it. Revelation is progressive, and Christ is reticent, from regard to the feebleness of His listeners.

Now that same principle is true in a modified form about us. How many things there are which we sometimes feel we should like to know, that God has not told us, because we have not yet grown up to the point at which we could apprehend them! Compassed with these veils of flesh and weakness, groping amidst the shadows of time, bewildered by the cross-lights that fall upon us from so many surrounding objects, we have not yet eyes able to behold the ineffable glory. He has many things to say to us about that blessed future, and that strange and awful life into which we are to step when we leave this poor world, but ye cannot bear them now. Let us wait with patience until we are ready for the illumination. For two things go to make revelation, the light that reveals and the eye that beholds.

Now one remark before I go further. People tell us, Your modern theology is not in the Gospels. And they say to us, as if they had administered a knockdown blow, We stick by Jesus, not Paul. Well, as I said, I do not admit that there is no Paulineteaching in the Gospels, but I do confess there is not much. And I say, What then?Why, this, then--it is exactly what we were to expect; and people who reject the apostolic form of Christian teaching because it is not found in the Gospels are flying in the face of Christ's own teaching. You say you will take His words as the only source of religious truth. You are going clean contrary to His own words in saying so. Remember that He proclaimed their incompleteness, and referred us, for the fuller knowledge of the truth of God, to a subsequent Teacher.

**II. So, secondly, mark here the completeness of the truth into which the Spirit guides.**

I must trouble you with just a word or two of remark as to the language of our text. Note the personality, designation, and office of this new Teacher. He, not it, He, is the Spirit of truth whose characteristic and weapon is truth. He will guide you--suggesting a loving hand put out to lead; suggesting the graciousness, the gentleness, the gradualness of the teaching. Into all truth --that is no promise of omniscience, but it is the assurance of gradual and growing acquaintance with the spiritual and moral truth which is revealed, such as may be fitly paralleled by the metaphor of men passing into some broad land, of which there is much still to be possessed and explored. Not to-day, nor to-morrow, will all the truth belong to those whom the Spirit guides; but if they are true to His guidance, to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant, and the land will all be traversed at the last. He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear that shall He speak. Mark the parallel between the relation of the Spirit-Teacher to Jesus, and the relation of Jesus to the Father. Of Him, too, it is said by Himself, All things whatsoever I have heard of the Father I have declared unto you. The mark of Satan is, He speaketh of his own; the mark of the divine Teacher is, He speaketh not of Himself, but whatsoever things, in all their variety, in their continuity, in their completeness, He shall hear,--where? yonder in the depths of the Godhead--whatsoever things He shall hear there, He shall show to you, and especially, He will show you the things that are to come. These Apostles were living in a revolutionary time. Men's hearts were failing them for fear of the things that were coming on the earth. Step by step they would be taught the evolving glory of that kingdom which they were to be the instruments in founding; and step by step there would be spread out before them the vision of the future and all the wonder that should be, the world that was to come, the new constitution which Christ was to establish.

Now, if that be the interpretation, however inadequate, of these great and wonderful words, there are but two things needful to say about them. One is that this promise of a complete guidance into truth applies in a peculiar and unique fashion to the original hearers of it. I ventured to say that one of the other promises of the Spirit, which I quoted in my introductory remarks, was the certificate to us of the inspiration and reliableness of these Four Gospels. And I now remark that in these words, in their plain and unmistakable meaning, there lie involved the inspiration and authority of the Apostles as teachers of religious truth. Here we have the guarantee for the authority over our faith, of the words which came from these men, and from the other who was added to their number on the Damascus road. They were guided into all the truth, and so our task is to receive the truth into which they were guided.

The Acts of the Apostles is the best commentary on these words of my text. There you see how these men rose at once into a new region; how the truths about their Master which had been bewildering puzzles to them flashed into light; how the Cross, which had baffled and dispersed them, became at once the centre of union for themselves and for the world; how the obscure became lucid, and Christ's death and the resurrection stood forth to them as the great central facts of the world's salvation. In the book of the Apocalypse we have part of the fulfilment of this closing promise: He will show you things to come; when the Seer was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and the heavens were opened, and the history of the Church (whether in chronological order, or in the exhibition of symbols of the great forces which shall be arrayed for and against it, over and over again, to the end of time, does not at present matter), was spread before Him as a scroll.

Now, dear friends, this great principle of my text has a modified application also to us all. For that divine Spirit is given to each of us if we will use Him, is given to any and every man who desires Him, does dwell in Christian hearts, though, alas! so many of us are so little conscious of Him, and does teach us the truth which Christ Himself left incomplete.

Only let me make one remark here. We do not stand on the same level as these men who clustered round Christ on His road to Gethsemane, and received the first fruits of the promise--the Spirit. They, taught by that divine Guide and by experience, were led into the deeper apprehension of the words and the deeds, of the life and the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. We, taught by that same Spirit, are led into a deeper apprehension of the words which they spake, both in recording and interpreting the facts of Christ's life and death.

And so we come sharp up to this, If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I speak unto him are the commandments of the Lord. That is how an Apostle put his relation to the other possessors of the divine Spirit. And you and I have to take this as the criterion of all true possession of the Spirit of God, that it bows in humble submission to the authoritative teaching of this book.

**III. Lastly, we have here our Lord pointing out the unity of these two.**

In the verse on which I have just been commenting He says nothing about Himself, and it might easily appear to the listeners as if these two sources of truth, His own incomplete teaching, and the full teaching of the divine Spirit, were independent of, if not opposed to, one another. So in the last words of our text He shows us the blending of the two streams, the union of the two beams.

He shall glorify Me. Think of a man saying that! The Spirit who will come from God and guide men into all truthhas for His distinctive office the glorifying of Jesus Christ. So fair is He, so good, so radiant, that to make Him known is to glorify Him. The glorifying of Christ is the ultimate and adequate purpose of everything that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done, because the glorifying of Christ is the glorifying of God, and the blessing of the eyes that behold His glory.

For He shall take of Mine, and show it unto you. All which that divine Spirit brings is Christ's. So, then, there is no new revelation, only the interpretation of the revelation. The text is given, and its last word was spoken, when the cloud received Him out of their sight, and henceforward all is commentary. The Spirit takes of Christ's; applies the principles, unfolds the deep meaning of words and deeds, and especially the meaning of the mystery of the Cradle, and the tragedy of the Cross, and the mystery of the Ascension, as declaring that Christ is the Son of God, the Sacrifice for the world. Christ said, I am the Truth. Therefore, when He promises, He will guide you into all the truth, we may fairly conclude that the truthinto which the Spirit guides is the personal Christ. It is the whole Christ, the whole truth, that we are to receive from that divine Teacher; growing up day by day into the capacity to grasp Christ more firmly, to understand Him better, and by love and trust and obedience to make Him more entirely our own. We are like the first settlers upon some great island-continent. There is a little fringe of population round the coast, but away in the interior are leagues of virgin forests and fertile plains stretching to the horizon, and snow-capped summits piercing the clouds, on which no foot has ever trod. He will guide you into all truth; through the length and breadth of the boundless land, the person and the work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All things that the Father hath are Mine, therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and show it unto you. What awful words! A divine, teaching Spirit can only teach concerning God. Christ here explains the paradox of His words preceding, in which, if He were but human, He seems to have given that teaching Spirit an unworthy office, by explaining that whatsoever is His is God's, and whatsoever is God's is His.

My brother! do you believe that? Is that what you think about Jesus Christ? He puts out here an unpresumptuous hand, and grasps all the constellated glories of the divine Nature, and says, They are Mine; and the Father looks down from heaven and says, Son! Thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is Thine. Do you answer, Amen! I believe it?

Here are three lessons from these great words which I leave with you without attempting to unfold them. One is, Believe a great deal more definitely in, and seek a great deal more consciously and earnestly, and use a great deal more diligently and honestly, that divine Spirit who is given to us all. I fear me that over very large tracts of professing Christendom to-day men stand up with very faltering lips and confess, I believe in the Holy Ghost. Hence comes much of the weakness of our modern Christianity, of the worldliness of professing Christians, and when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them again which be the first principles of the oracles of God. Quench not, grieve not, despise not the Holy Spirit.

Another lesson is, Use the Book that He uses--else you will not grow, and He will have no means of contact with you.

And the last is, Try the spirits. If anything calling itself Christian teaching comes to you and does not glorify Christ, it is self-condemned. For none can exalt Him highly enough, and no teaching can present Him too exclusively and urgently as the sole Salvation and Life of the whole earth, And if it be, as my text tells us, that the great teaching Spirit is to come, who is to guide us into all truth, and therein is to glorify Christ, and to show us the things that are His, then it is also true, Hereby know we the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of Antichrist.