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

**PSALMS-074**. **SUBMISSION AND PEACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Great peace have they which love Thy law; and nothing shall offend them."*

*Psalm 119:165*

The marginal note says they shall have no stumbling block.

We do great injustice to this psalm--so exuberant in its praises of the law of the Lord--if we suppose that that expression means nothing more than the Mosaic or Jewish revelation. It does mean that, of course, but the psalm itself shows that the writer uses the expression and its various synonyms as including a great deal more than any one method by which God's will is made known to man. For he speaks, for instance, in one part of the psalm of God's word, as being settled for ever in the heavens, and of the heavens and earth as continuing to this day, according to Thine ordinances.

So we are warranted in giving to the thought of our text the wider extension of taking the divine law to include not only that directory of conduct contained in Scripture, but the expressed will of God, involving duties for us, in whatever way it is made known. The love of that uttered will, the Psalmist declares, will always bring peace. Such an understanding of the text does not exclude the narrower reference, which is often taken to be the only thought in the Psalmist's mind, nor does it obliterate the distinction between the written law of God and the disclosures of His will which we collect by the exercise of our faculties on events around and facts within us. But it widens the horizon of our contemplations, and bases the promised peace on its true foundation, the submission of the human to the divine will.

Let us then consider how true love to the will of God, however it is made known to us, either in the Book or in our consciousness, or in daily providences, or by other people's hints, is the talisman that brings to us, in all circumstances, and in every part of our nature, a tranquillity which nothing can disturb.

Of course, by love here is meant, not only delight in the expression of, but the submission of the whole being to, God's will; and we love the law only when, and because, we love the Lawgiver.

**I. Thus loving the law of God, not only with delight in the vehicle of its expression, but with inward submission to its behests, we shall have, first of all, the peacefulness of a restful heart.**

Such a heart has found an adequate and worthy object for the outgoings of its affections. Base things loved always disturb. Noble things loved always tranquillise. And he to whom his judgment declares that the best of all things is God's manifested will, and whose affections and emotions and actions follow the dictate of his judgment, has a love which grasps whatsoever things are noble and fair and of good report, and is lifted to a level corresponding with the loftiness of its objects. For our hearts are like the creatures in some river, of which they tell us that they change their colour according to the hue of the bed of the stream in which they float and of the food of which they partake. The heart that lives on the will of God will be calm and steadfast, and ennobled into reposeful tranquillity like that which it grasps and grapples.

Little boats which are made fast to the sides of a ship rise and fall with the tide, as does that to which they are attached. And our hearts, if they be roped to the fleeting, the visible, the creatural, the finite, partake of the fluctuations, and finally are involved in the destruction, of that which they have made their supreme good. And contrariwise, they who love that which is eternal shine with a light thrown by reflection from the object of their love, and he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever, like the will which he doeth. Great peace--the peace of a restful heart--have they that love Thy law.

**II. Then again, such love brings the calm of a submitted will.**

Brethren! it is not sorrow that troubles us so much as resistance to sorrow. It is not pain that lacerates; it cuts, and cuts clean when we keep ourselves still and let it do its merciful ministry upon us. But it is the plunging and struggling under the knife that makes the wounds jagged and hard to heal. The man who bows his will to the Supreme, in quiet acceptance of that which He sends, is never disturbed. Resistance distracts and agitates; acquiescence brings a great calm. Submission is peace. And when we have learned to bend our wills, and let God break them, if that be His will, in order to bend them, then nothing shall by any means hurt us; and nothing shall by any means trouble us.

If you were ever on board a sailing-ship you know the difference between its motion when it is beating up against the wind and when it is running before it. In the one case all is agitation and uneasiness, in the other all is smooth and frictionless and delicious. So, when we go with the great stream, in not ignoble surrender, then we go quietly. It is God's great intention, in all that befalls us in this life, to bring our wills into conformity with His. Blessed is the ministry of sorrow and of pain and of loss, if it does that for us, and disastrous and accursed is the ministry of joy and success if it does not. There is no joy but calm, and there is no calm but in--not the annihilation, but--the intensest activity of will, in the act of submitting to that higher will, which is discerned to be good, and is gratefully taken as acceptable, and will one day be seen to have been perfect. The joy and peace of a submitted will are the secret of all true tranquillity.

**III. Then again, there comes by such a love the peace of an obedient life.**

When once we have taken it (and faithfully adhere to the choice) as our supreme desire to do God's will, we are delivered from almost all the things that distract and disturb us. Away go all the storms of passion, and we are no more at the mercy of vagrant inclinations. We are no longer agitated by having to consult our own desires, and seeking to find in them compass and guide for our lives--a hopeless attempt! All these sources of agitation are dried up, and the man who has only this desire, to do his duty because God has made it such, has an ever powerful charm, which makes him tranquil whatever befalls.

And as thus we may be delivered from all the agitations and cross-currents of conflicting wishes, inclinations, aims, which otherwise would make a jumble and a chaos of our lives, so, on the other hand, if for us the supreme desire is to obey God, then we are delivered from the other great enemy to tranquillity--namely, anxious forecasting of possible consequences of our actions, which robs so many of us of so many quiet days. I do the little I can do, said Faber, and leave the rest with Thee, and that will bring peace. Instead of wondering what is to come of this step and that, whether our plans will turn out as we hope, and so being at the mercy of contingencies impossible to be forecasted, we cast all upon Him and say, I have nothing to do with the far end of my actions. Thou givest them a body as it has pleased Thee. I have to do with this end of my actions--their motive; and I will make that right, and then it is Thy business to make the rest right. And so, great peace have they which love Thy law.

An obedient life not only delivers us from the distractions of miscellaneous desires, and from the anxiety of unforeseen results, but it contributes to tranquillity in another way. The thing that makes us most uneasy is either sin done or duty neglected. Either of these, however small it may appear, is like a horse-hair upon the sheets of a bed, or a little wrinkle in that on which a man lies, disturbing all his repose. No man is really at rest unless his conscience is clear. The wicked is like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. But if the uttered will of the Lord is our supreme object, then in this direction, too, tranquillity is ours.

**IV. Lastly, such a love gives the peace of freedom from temptations.**

Nothing shall offend them. There shall be no stumbling-block to them. The higher love casts out the lower. It is well, when, by reinforcing conscience by considerations of duty, or even sometimes by the lower thoughts of consequences, a man is able to pass by a temptation which appeals to him, and conquers the inclination to go wrong. But it is far better--and it is possible--to be lifted up into such a region as that the temptation does not appeal to him any more.

To take a very homely illustration, whether is it better for a man to steel himself, and walk past the door of a public-house, though the fumes appeal to his sense, and stir his inclinations; or to go past, and never know any attraction to enter? Which is best, to overcome our temptations, or to live away up in the high regions to which the malaria of the swamps never climbs, and where no disease-germs can ever reach?

That elevation is possible for us, if only we keep in close touch with God, and love the law because our hearts are knit to the Law-giver. There shall be no occasion of stumbling in him, as the Apostle John varies the expression of my text. Within, there will be no traitors to surrender the camp to the enemy without. So Paul in the letter to the Philippians attributes to the peace of God which passeth understanding a military function, and says that it will garrison the heart and mind, and keep them in Christ Jesus, which is but the Christian way of saying, Great peace have they which love Thy law; and there is no occasion of stumbling in them.