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

**ROMANS-031**. **LOVE THAT CAN HATE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"9.* *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. 10. In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honour preferring one another."*

*Romans 12:9-10 (R.V.)*

Thus far the Apostle has been laying down very general precepts and principles of Christian morals. Starting with the one all-comprehensive thought of self-sacrifice as the very foundation of all goodness, of transformation as its method, and of the clear knowledge of our several powers and faithful stewardship of these, as its conditions, he here proceeds to a series of more specific exhortations, which at first sight seem to be very unconnected, but through which there may be discerned a sequence of thought.

The clauses of our text seem at first sight strangely disconnected. The first and the last belong to the same subject, but the intervening clause strikes a careless reader as out of place and heterogeneous. I think that we shall see it is not so; but for the present we but note that here are three sets of precepts which enjoin, first, honest love; then, next, a healthy vehemence against evil and for good; and finally, a brotherly affection and mutual respect.

**I. Let love be honest.**

Love stands at the head, and is the fontal source of all separate individualised duties. Here Paul is not so much prescribing love as describing the kind of love which he recognises as genuine, and the main point on which he insists is sincerity. The dissimulation of the Authorised Version only covers half the ground. It means, hiding what one is; but there is simulation, or pretending to be what one is not. There are words of love which are like the iridescent scum on the surface veiling the black depths of a pool of hatred. A Psalmist complains of having to meet men whose words were smoother than butter and whose true feelings were as drawn swords; but, short of such consciously lying love, we must all recognise as a real danger besetting us all, and especially those of us who are naturally inclined to kindly relations with our fellows, the tendency to use language just a little in excess of our feelings. The glove is slightly stretched, and the hand in it is not quite large enough to fill it. There is such a thing, not altogether unknown in Christian circles, as benevolence, which is largely cant, and words of conventional love about individuals which do not represent any corresponding emotion. Such effusive love pours itself in words, and is most generally the token of intense selfishness. Any man who seeks to make his words a true picture of his emotions must be aware that few harder precepts have ever been given than this brief one of the Apostle's, Let love be without hypocrisy.

But the place where this exhortation comes in the apostolic sequence here may suggest to us the discipline through which obedience to it is made possible. There is little to be done by the way of directly increasing either the fervour of love or the honesty of its expression. The true method of securing both is to be growingly transformed by the renewing of our minds, and growingly to bring our whole old selves under the melting and softening influence of the mercies of God. It is swollen self-love, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, which impedes the flow of love to others, and it is in the measure in which we receive into our minds the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and look at men as He did, that we shall come to love them all honestly and purely. When we are delivered from the monstrous oppression and tyranny of self, we have hearts capable of a Christlike and Christ-giving love to all men, and only they who have cleansed their hearts by union with Him, and by receiving into them the purging influence of His own Spirit, will be able to love without hypocrisy.

**II. Let love abhor what is evil, and cleave to what is good.**

If we carefully consider this apparently irrelevant interruption in the sequence of the apostolic exhortations, we shall, I think, see at once that the irrelevance is only apparent, and that the healthy vehemence against evil and resolute clinging to good is as essential to the noblest forms of Christian love as is the sincerity enjoined in the previous clause. To detest the one and hold fast by the other are essential to the purity and depth of our love. Evil is to be loathed, and good to be clung to in our own moral conduct, and wherever we see them. These two precepts are not mere tautology, but the second of them is the ground of the first. The force of our recoil from the bad will be measured by the firmness of our grasp of the good; and yet, though inseparably connected, the one is apt to be easier to obey than is the other. There are types of Christian men to whom it is more natural to abhor the evil than to cleave to the good; and there are types of character of which the converse is true. We often see men very earnest and entirely sincere in their detestation of meanness and wickedness, but very tepid in their appreciation of goodness. To hate is, unfortunately, more congenial with ordinary characters than to love; and it is more facile to look down on badness than to look up at goodness.

But it needs ever to be insisted upon, and never more than in this day of spurious charity and unprincipled toleration, that a healthy hatred of moral evil and of sin, wherever found and however garbed, ought to be the continual accompaniment of all vigorous and manly cleaving to that which is good. Unless we shudderingly recoil from contact with the bad in our own lives, and refuse to christen it with deceptive euphemisms when we meet it in social and civil life, we shall but feebly grasp, and slackly hold, that which is good. Such energy of moral recoil from evil is perfectly consistent with honest love, for it is things, not men, that we are to hate; and it is needful as the completion and guardian of love itself. There is always danger that love shall weaken the condemnation of wrong, and modern liberality, both in the field of opinion and in regard to practical life, has so far condoned evil as largely to have lost its hold upon good. The criminal is pitied rather than blamed, and a multitude of agencies are so occupied in elevating the wrong-doers that they lose sight of the need of punishing.

Nor is it only in reference to society that this tendency works harm. The effect of it is abundantly manifest in the fashionable ideas of God and His character. There are whole schools of opinion which practically strike out of their ideal of the Divine Nature abhorrence of evil, and, little as they think it, are thereby fatally impoverishing their ideal of God, and making it impossible to understand His government of the world. As always, so in this matter, the authentic revelation of the Divine Nature, and the perfect pattern for the human are to be found in Jesus Christ. We recall that wonderful incident, when on His last approach to Jerusalem, rounding the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, He beheld the city, gleaming in the morning sunshine across the valley, and forgetting His own sorrow, shed tears over its approaching desolation, which yet He steadfastly pronounced. His loathing of evil was whole-souled and absolute, and equally intense and complete was His cleaving to that which is good. In both, and in the harmony between them, He makes God known, and prescribes and holds forth the ideal of perfect humanity to men.

**III. Let sincere and discriminating love be concentrated on Christian men.**

In the final exhortation of our text the love of the brethren takes the place of the more diffused and general love enjoined in the first clause. The expression kindly affectioned is the rendering of a very eloquent word in the original in which the instinctive love of a mother to her child, or the strange mystical ties which unite members of a family together, irrespective of their differences of character and temperament, are taken as an example after which Christian men are to mould their relations to one another. The love which is without hypocrisy, and is to be diffused on all sides, is also to be gathered together and concentrated with special energy on all who call upon Jesus Christ as Lord, both their Lord and ours. The more general precept and the more particular are in perfect harmony, however our human weakness sometimes confuses them. It is obvious that this final precept of our text will be the direct result of the two preceding, for the love which has learned to be moral, hating evil, and clinging to good as necessary, when directed to possessors of like precious faith will thrill with the consciousness of a deep mystical bond of union, and will effloresce in all brotherly love and kindly affections. They who are like one another in the depths of their moral life, who are touched by like aspirations after like holy things, and who instinctively recoil with similar revulsion from like abominations, will necessarily feel the drawing of a unity far deeper and sacreder than any superficial likenesses of race, or circumstance, or opinion. Two men who share, however imperfectly, in Christ's Spirit are more akin in the realities of their nature, however they may differ on the surface, than either of them is to another, however like he may seem, who is not a partaker in the life of Christ.

This instinctive, Christian love, like all true and pure love, is to manifest itself by preferring one another in honour; or as the word might possibly be rendered, anticipating one another. We are not to wait to have our place assigned before we give our brother his. There will be no squabbling for the chief seat in the synagogue, or the uppermost rooms at the feast, where brotherly love marshals the guests. The one cure for petty jealousies and the miserable strife for recognition, which we are all tempted to engage in, lies in a heart filled with love of the brethren because of its love to the Elder Brother of them all, and to the Father who is His Father as well as ours. What a contrast is presented between the practice of Christians and these precepts of Paul! We may well bow ourselves in shame and contrition when we read these clear-drawn lines indicating what we ought to be, and set by the side of them the blurred and blotted pictures of what we are. It is a painful but profitable task to measure ourselves against Paul's ideal of Christ's commandment; but it will only be profitable if it brings us to remember that Christ gives before He commands, and that conformity with His ideal must begin, not with details of conduct, or with emotion, however pure, but with yielding ourselves to the God who moves us by His mercies, and being transformed by the renewing of our minds and the indwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith.