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

**ROMANS-034**. **STILL ANOTHER TRIPLET by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13.* *Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. 14. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. 15. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."*

*Romans 12:13-15*

In these verses we pass from the innermost region of communion with God into the wide field of duties in relation to men. The solitary secrecies of rejoicing hope, endurance, and prayer unbroken, are exchanged for the publicities of benevolence and sympathy. In the former verses the Christian soul is in the secret place of the Most High; in those of our text he comes forth with the light of God on his face, and hands laden with blessings. The juxtaposition of the two suggests the great principles to which the morality of the New Testament is ever true--that devotion to God is the basis of all practical helpfulness to man, and that practical helpfulness to man is the expression and manifestation of devotion to God.

The three sets of injunctions in our text, dissimilar though they appear, have a common basis. They are varying forms of one fundamental disposition--love; which varies in its forms according to the necessities of its objects, bringing temporal help to the needy, meeting hostility with blessing, and rendering sympathy to both the glad and the sorrowful. There is, further, a noteworthy connection, not in sense but in sound, between the first and second clauses of our text, which is lost in our English Version. Given to hospitality is, as the Revised margin shows, literally, pursuing hospitality. Now the Greek, like the English word, has the special meaning of following with a hostile intent, and the use of it in the one sense suggests its other meaning to Paul, whose habit of going off at a word, as it has been called, is a notable feature of his style. Hence, this second injunction, of blessing the persecutors, comes as a kind of play upon words, and is obviously occasioned by the verbal association. It would come more appropriately at a later part of the chapter, but its occurrence here is characteristic of Paul's idiosyncrasy. We may represent the connection of these two clauses by such a rendering as: Pursue hospitality, and as for those who pursue you, bless, and curse not.

We may look at these three flowers from the one root of love.

**I. Love that speaks in material help.**

We have here two special applications of that love which Paul regards as the bond of perfectness, knitting all Christians together. The former of these two is love that expresses itself by tangible material aid. The persons to be helped are saints, and it is their needs that are to be aided. There is no trace in the Pauline Epistles of the community of goods which for a short time prevailed in the Church of Jerusalem and which was one of the causes that led to the need for the contribution for the poor saints in that city which occupied so much of Paul's attention at Corinth and elsewhere. But, whilst Christian love leaves the rights of property intact, it charges them with the duty of supplying the needs of the brethren. They are not absolute and unconditioned rights, but are subject to the highest principles of stewardship for God, trusteeship for men, and sacrifice for Christ. These three great thoughts condition and limit the Christian man's possession of the wealth, which, in a modified sense, it is allowable for him to call his own. His brother's need constitutes a first charge on all that belongs to him, and ought to precede the gratification of his own desires for superfluities and luxuries. If we see our brother have need and shut up our bowels of compassion against him and use our possessions for the gratification of our own whims and fancies, how dwelleth the love of God in us? There are few things in which Christian men of this day have more need for the vigorous exercise of conscience, and for enlightenment, than in their getting, and spending, and keeping money. In that region lies the main sphere of usefulness for many of us; and if we have not been faithful in that which is least, our unfaithfulness there makes it all but impossible that we should be faithful in that which is greatest. The honest and rigid contemplation of our own faults in the administration of our worldly goods, might well invest with a terrible meaning the Lord's tremendous question, If ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?'

The hospitality which is here enjoined is another shape which Christian love naturally took in the early days. When believers were a body of aliens, dispersed through the world, and when, as they went from one place to another, they could find homes only amongst their own brethren, the special circumstances of the time necessarily attached special importance to this duty; and as a matter of fact, we find it recognised in all the Epistles of the New Testament as one of the most imperative of Christian duties. It was the unity and strength which this intercourse gave that formed one of the great forces which supported Christianity. But whilst hospitality was a special duty for the early Christians, it still remains a duty for us, and its habitual exercise would go far to break down the frowning walls which diversities of social position and of culture have reared between Christians.

**II. The love that meets hostility with blessing.**

There are perhaps few words in Scripture which have been more fruitful of the highest graces than this commandment. What a train of martyrs, from primitive times to the Chinese Christians in recent years, have remembered these words, and left their legacy of blessing as they laid their heads on the block or stood circled by fire at the stake! For us, in our quieter generation, actual persecution is rare, but hostility of ill-will more or less may well dog our steps, and the great principle here commended to us is that we are to meet enmity with its opposite, and to conquer by love. The diamond is cut with sharp knives, and each stroke brings out flashing beauty. There are kinds of wood which are fragrant when they burn; and there are kinds which show their veining under the plane. It is a poor thing if a Christian character only gives back like a mirror the expression of the face that looks at it. To meet hate with hate, and scorn with scorn, is not the way to turn hate into love and scorn into sympathy. Indifferent equilibrium in the presence of active antagonism is not possible for us. As long as we are sensitive we shall wince from a blow, or a sarcasm, or a sneer. We must bless in order to keep ourselves from cursing. The lesson is very hard, and the only way of obeying it fully is to keep near Christ and drink in His spirit who prayed Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

**III. Love that flows in wide sympathy.**

Of the two forms of sympathy which are here enjoined, the former is the harder. To rejoice with them that do rejoice makes a greater demand on unselfish love than to weep with them that weep. Those who are glad feel less need of sympathy than do the sorrowful, and envy is apt to creep in and mar the completeness of sympathetic joy. But even the latter of the two injunctions is not altogether easy. The cynic has said that there is something not wholly displeasing in the misfortunes of our best friends; and, though that is an utterly worldly and unchristian remark, it must be confessed not to be altogether wanting in truth.

But for obedience to both of these injunctions, a heart at leisure from itself is needed to sympathise; and not less needed is a sedulous cultivation of the power of sympathy. No doubt temperament has much to do with the degree of our obedience; but this whole context goes on the assumption that the grace of God working on temperament strengthens natural endowments by turning them into gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. Though we live in that awful individuality of ours, and are each, as it were, islanded in ourselves with echoing straits between us thrown, it is possible for us, as the result of close communion with Jesus Christ, to bridge the chasms, and to enter into the joy of a brother's joy. He who groaned in Himself as He drew near to the grave of Lazarus, and was moved to weep with the weeping sisters, will help us, in the measure in which we dwell in Him and He in us, that we too may look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

On the whole, love to Jesus is the basis of love to man, and love to man is the practical worship of Christianity. As in all things, so in the exhortations which we have now been considering, Jesus is our pattern and power. He Himself communicates with our necessities, and opens His heart to give us hospitable welcome there. He Himself has shown us how to meet and overcome hatred with love, and hurt with blessing. He shares our griefs, and by sharing lessens them. He shares our joys, and by sharing hallows them. The summing up of all these specific injunctions is, Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.