

THE FAMILY PREACHER.

A FEW PARTING WORDS.

A Farewell Sermon

PREACHED AT ST. PAUL'S (SEAMEN'S) CHURCH, WHITECHAPEL,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 12th, 1862,

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CURATE.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts xx. 32.

THESE words are a part of St. Paul's pathetic farewell to the elders of the Church at Ephesus. He had made a long stay in their city, and his labours had been marvellously successful. When he first came he began his holy work by preaching, as was his custom, in the Jewish synagogue. For three months he there laboured boldly among his own countrymen, "arguing and endeavouring to convince his hearers of all that related to the kingdom of God." Some heard his words with great gladness, repented and believed the Gospel; but others not only closed their eyes, and hardened their hearts, but even calumniated the way of salvation before the multitude. Great must have been the apostle's sorrow at finding his message rudely rejected by God's ancient people: but his course was plain. When the Jews refused to hear he must turn to the Gentiles. He did so; and in the school-room of one Tyrannus he laboured daily in the Gospel, so that all the dwellers in the province of Asia, both Jews and Gentiles, heard the Word of the Lord Jesus. St. Paul's conduct in that city forms indeed a beautiful example for the guidance of every Christian minister. His was no light employment, no sinecure. From the first day that he came among them they knew,—they must have known,—that he was deeply in earnest for their soul's welfare. His was not the life of a mere popularity-seeker, for though "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles," he served the Lord "in all humility of mind." Not only did he daily preach to the crowds that assembled to hear him; but as he himself expressly tells us, "from

house to house," night and day, in season and out of season, with many tears, he ceased not to warn and teach his beloved converts. He had many trials to endure, but he could bear them, for there was One in whom he believed, who supplied all his needs. Patiently, fervently, affectionately, he did his Master's work, "coveting no man's silver, or gold, or apparel," labouring with his own hands, supporting not only himself but some poor members of his flock, and glorying in the proclamation of those great foundation truths of his Lord's Gospel, "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." And of course his labours were blest. A large Church was formed. The minds of men were stirred. There was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The pretenders to magical arts who infested the city, came and confessed their wicked deeds; and to show the sincerity of their repentance burnt their costly books in the sight of all men. Hitherto Ephesus had been a city almost wholly given to idolatry. Standing at the head of the harbour was the far-famed temple of Diana—the pride of the country—one of the seven wonders of the world. Thousands came yearly to visit the shrine; but now it was found that, through the steady earnest work of the apostle, the trade in idolatry began to fail; and those who made silver shrines of the goddess were provoked into open tumult. But "mightily grew the Word of the Lord, and prevailed" against all opposition. For three years did St. Paul labour on, spending and being spent, in his Master's cause at Ephesus; and then at last, with much sorrow, he left the city to visit other parts, and to plant the standard of the cross among other nations. He preached throughout Macedonia, and then passed on into Greece. But the time came for the apostle to make his journey towards Jerusalem for the last time. He determined to be there on the day of Pentecost. On his road to the holy city he felt persuaded that dire calamities were about to befall him. He would probably never see his beloved converts at Ephesus again. The ship in which he was, sailed past the city, and he could not but feel the warmest interest in the welfare of his spiritual children there. At Miletus, a port thirty miles down the coast, the vessel put in. From that town he sent quickly to the ministers at Ephesus, to hasten to him, in order that they might receive his farewell exhortation. The elders came; and we have in the chapter before us an account of the very words that St. Paul spoke on that sad occasion. We may easily imagine the scene. The ship, about to convey the apostle away for ever, was waiting to weigh her anchor. The apostle stood on the beach; around him clustered the faithful servants of God, eagerly listening to catch the words as they fell from their dear teacher's lips. In tenderest affection he reminded them of his conduct when he lived among them; of his tears, of his trials, of his dangers, of his labours night and day, and of his one great message to them. "And now, behold," said he, "I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Faithfully he then warned them that danger was at hand; and touchingly he reminded them of his preaching and living when he staid amongst them. They were about to lose their earthly leader for ever; but there was One on whose strength they could rely; One whose presence was a tower of defence. To Him—his God and theirs—the apostle committed them. To his word—the one guide for the erring sons of men—the apostle commended them; feeling sure that in God, and in his Word alone, could they find satisfaction

and safety. "I commend you to God, and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

And now the parting time had come. St. Paul kneeled upon the shore, and the elders with him; and they lifted up their hearts and voices to that God, to whose care the Apostle had commended them. The prayer was over. They rose from their knees. The Ephesian elders clung to their beloved Apostle with the embrace of love, and wept upon his neck, and kissed him, "sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake that they should see his face no more; and they accompanied him unto the ship." Oh, what a pattern minister St. Paul was! What utter fearlessness for self! What deep anxiety for the welfare of others! What mighty love for the souls of men! What childlike confidence in God does this parting address of his exhibit! What minister of Christ could dare to use such language as this now? Where are our tears, night and day, for our flocks? When are we filled with the spirit of devotion to our Master's cause such as St. Paul had? Who of us can make bold to say, "I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare all the counsel of God?" No! no! Our language must be,—the language of the very holiest and best of us must be,— "Lord, be not extreme to mark what we have done amiss." "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Brethren! beloved in the Lord! it has been my great privilege to labour for the Lord a little while amongst you. And now, at the conclusion of my ministry here, the thought will rush into my mind, and I cannot get rid of it, Have I been faithful to your precious souls? Have I spoken plainly, in no smooth terms, against sin? Have I striven to exalt my Master, and to lay the sinner low? Has it been the one great object of my life and ministry among you to preach Him,—as the only sacrifice for sin—as the one only righteousness for fallen man—as your Prophet, your Priest, your King, your example, your all? Have I, while I warned the sinner, fed the flock of God, giving to each his portion of meat in due season? My language to-night, and for the remainder of my days, must be, "Wash my ministry, O Lord, in the blood of Jesus Christ." Brethren, we are all of us but poor judges of our own performances. We always form too good an opinion of our own actions; but this I may say, If I have been at all faithful to my charge; if I have, in any humble way, followed a very far off, in the steps of the Apostle, it is to grace that the praise must be given.

In reading this beautiful farewell charge, I thought there was but one passage in it, that a minister of God might dare to preach from on such an occasion as the present. When St. Paul speaks of his humility, we must hide our eyes as we call to mind our vanity and pride. When he speaks of his fervent zeal, we must blush as we think upon our lukewarmness and carelessness. When he speaks of his fidelity to his charge, we must pray that our faithlessness and worldliness may not be mentioned against us. But when he speaks of his desires and prayers for the future welfare of his flock, we, I think, may join with him. I may and do say to night, from a warm heart, "I commend you to God, and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

Brethren! beloved brethren! *I commend you to God.* I know there are some

before me who have just begun to run the Christian race. They know very little of themselves, and of the deceitfulness of their own heart; still less do they know of Jesus; and less still of the world that surrounds them. I tremble when I think of the danger before you, my younger brethren and sisters in the Lord. I am not very old, but I know that the path of the young convert is full of snares;—the world with its bewitching pleasures;—sin with her painted face;—the devil with his lying words;—your own heart with its deceitful counsels! Your piety may be nipped in the bud before you know it; your first love, now so ardent, may grow cold before you think it; your simple faith, now so childlike, may fail before you are aware of it. Ay! the very frank, open-heartedness of youth, which we all so much admire, may be the occasion of your falling. What security have you? What comfort have I when I think over your future? Men may tempt you. Preachers may deceive you. Churches may lead you astray. There is one security, and but one;—one friend and but one. Your God. I commend you to him. To *God the Father* I commend you. Let him be your Father. Tell him your wants, your wishes, your plans, your hopes, your fears. Say, not only to night, but every day, "My Father, be thou the guide of my youth." To *God the Son* I commend you. Let him be your Saviour, your sacrifice, your righteousness. He shed his precious blood for you. He loves you now. He will love you ever. He, "above all others, well deserves the name of friend." Study his character. Meditate upon his work. Feed on his precious body and blood. Walk by his perfect example. May ever your language be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do." To *God the Holy Spirit* I commend you. Let him be your sanctifier, your comforter. Honour his work, his office. Wait for his influence. Be strong in his grace. Grieve not that Spirit. Resist not that Spirit. Quench not that Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." My younger brethren, I commend you to your God.

There are some here who have been servants of God for some little time past. To you, my friends, almost the same remarks apply. Let me ask you, Are you growing in grace? Do you find, upon self-examination, that the world is becoming more attractive to you than it was, or is Jesus, growing daily more precious to you? The great danger to Christians who have been for some converted, is that of spiritual declension. I dare not shut my eyes to the fact. Many run well for a time, and then they lose their first love—they lose the deep delight in prayer they once had; they lose that longing for Christian communion that once was theirs; they lose that thirst after Christ, his word, his people, his house, his ordinances, that once they felt. Brethren, I leave with you a searching text of Scripture, "Are the consolations of God small with thee?—is there any secret thing with thee?" Job xv. 11. Beloved brethren, I commend you to God. "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." "Faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it." Do but look up to Him for help, and you shall find, as thousands have before you, and you yourselves have in times past, that in the hour of your deepest need he will not desert you. Press on! press on! I beg you think not that you have attained your maturity. There are heights of God's grace that you have never reached; there are depths of his love that you have never fathomed. My parting prayer for you is, that of the

same apostle, for the same Ephesian church, a few years later: "That God would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." But there are some here, I know, who are thoughtless; careless; Christless souls. I see them before me. Oh my dear friends it makes one sick at heart to think of parting with you. What! what will become of you? You are daily, hourly, ripening for wrath. Sunday after Sunday have you listened to the most earnest appeals: if not from my lips, certainly from the lips of another whose privilege it is to minister to you. But you are cold and hard still. Ay! growing colder, harder, week by week. The love of Jesus melts you not. The joys of heaven move you not. The terrors of hell terrify you not. You seem past hope. The Gospel seems to you like an idle tale. The preachers of that Gospel are "like those that mock" to you. You think all is right with you, but all is wrong. You are like a ship, with an idiot at her helm, drifting on to destruction. What can I say to you? "I commend you to God." Oh that the Spirit of God would break down the stubbornness of your nature! Oh that you would fix your eyes on Jesus, and never take them off! Come to him now in prayer! Be thoughtful, be serious, be sober! Remember you have a precious, a never-dying soul that must be saved or lost. If you perish it will be your own fault. God hath said, ay! hath sworn by himself, "And I live saith the Lord God I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Wherefore turn yourselves and live ye." If you perish, you perish in spite of warning, in spite of entreaties; you perish beneath the sound of the Gospel, while the offer of mercy is ringing in your ears. Brethren, beloved! old and young, rich and poor, saint and sinner, I commend you to God, because God can and will "supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

But in my text St. Paul commends the Ephesian elders to *the Word of God's grace*; for this is the divinely appointed means for men to arrive at the knowledge of God. Dear brethren, that word has been preached to you from this pulpit many a time and oft, and what is still better, you have it in your Bible. Oh, I can well understand that St. Paul should commend that word to the Ephesians. He knew that after his departure "grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock," and that even "from themselves would men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." How were the Ephesians to test what they heard? How were they to know when their teachers taught them truth, or error? There was but one sure; one safe standard. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them."

My friends there is danger in the present day—yes, great danger,—that the traditions of men should be placed before you as the truth of God. How shall we know what, to believe? There are many systems, and creeds, and sects in the world, and they all profess to be the truth. How shall an unlettered man know what is truth? Let him hold fast by God's word. Let him make that the rule of his faith and practice, and he cannot go far astray.

There are certain fundamental truths which I earnestly beg of you ever to keep in mind. Never lose sight of the utter helplessness and sinfulness of man. Man has "no power of himself to help himself." "He cannot by his own natural strength and good works, prepare himself to faith and calling upon God." Let this never be absent from your thoughts. Once lose sight of it and other errors are sure to creep in. Again let us take fast hold of the all-sufficiency of Christ's work. This blessed truth has been much assailed lately. Let us never let it go. Christ's life was a perfect obedience to God's law for us. Christ's death was a perfect "sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." Nothing must be added to His work. No merits of our own must be thought of. The language of our hearts must be

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone!

Once more; let us never forget also, the work of the Spirit of God. He is the author of spiritual life. He is the author of prayer. He "bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." He reveals to us what we are; what sin is; what God and holiness are. He leads us on step by step, from grace to grace, purifying us and making us fit for the master's presence and the master's service. These truths, my friends, are some of the great doctrines of the scriptures which men are in danger of forgetting. Thank God, they have been preached here from the first. Thank God, they will, I believe, be preached here. Oh that they may never be forgotten in years to come by any who shall occupy the pulpit or the pews! I beg you moreover to make "the word of God's grace"—the scriptures—the guide and comfort of your lives. The time will be sure to come when you will need such a guide and such comfort. The time of temptation will come to all of us sooner or later. My seafaring friends, you are specially exposed to temptation when you first come ashore. Oh! what a blessing in such seasons to know the power of God's Word. To know Satan when he comes to you as an angel of light: and to be able to resist Satan with—"It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. It is written, again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." And some day, too, the time of personal sorrow or bereavement will come. It seems far off now, but it may be very near. Some day that child will be snatched away from you—the darling of your eyes cut down at a stroke. Thy husband, O wife, in whom thou didst confide, who was so worthy of thy respect and esteem, and love, thou shalt see wasting away daily before thine eyes. Thy wife, O husband—the wife of thy bosom, the wife of thy youth, the mother of thy dear ones—thou shalt mourn to her grave. Or thou shalt lose thy property, thy position, thy name, thy character. Oh, what a comfort then to feel the power of some sweet text, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me." Oh what a support to feel then that "all

things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." And some day also the time of our own death will come. How soon to some of us! This day I read the beautiful service of our church over one, who but a few weeks ago, was in the full vigour of young manhood. Ah, when you feel Death's cold embrace, and find yourself carried, against your will, to the shores of the dark cold river, how blessed then to hear "when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee:" and to be able to exclaim "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Yes, you will find in all these circumstances, that God's word—the "word of his grace"—is able to build you up. To build you up so that you may resist the fiery darts of the devil. To build you up so that you may bear the sorrows and trials of the world. To build you up, so that "when your earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, you may have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Oh, my brethren, let this precious volume, I beseech you, be your constant companion and guide; your rule of faith, your comfort in distress, your counsellor in prosperity.

One more thought. The God whose word is able to build you up, is "*able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*" What is that inheritance? It is an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away; it is "the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

"Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end."



There shall be no farewells there, no widow's wail there, no orphan's cry there. "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall dwell among them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." This is your inheritance, dear child of God. You are sanctified now, "Sanctified by God the Father, in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit;" you shall one day hear the words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Happy art thou, O Israel, saved of the Lord."

And now, my dearly beloved in the Lord, one word, and I have done. My short ministry here is over; with all its faults, with all its errors, with all its sins, it is over. What have been its results? God knows. Have I wilfully kept back anything that was profitable to you? Have I wilfully shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God? If so, God pardon it. Amen. But if I have set before you the way of life and the way of death, as I think I have; I ask you, in all solemnity, in all affection, how have you received the message? **THE DAY SHALL DECLARE IT.** God grant that my feeble efforts may not have been in vain. Dearly beloved people, we shall probably never meet again on earth; we shall drop off one by one into the lonesome grave. But we shall meet again one day; yes, we shall meet again. Where shall we meet again? At the bar of our

great God. When shall we meet again? On the great day for which all other days were made. How shall we meet again? Aye, how! Shall we be separated then, as now? God forbid. It need not be so; no, it need not be so. The Saviour's blood is now ready to cleanse the vilest and the worst, and he will carry on the good work that he has commenced; "He will not leave thee nor forsake thee for ever." Do but cling to him, and, if I am enabled to persevere, we shall meet again in glory everlasting.

Now I have done. My dear friends, my beloved in the Lord, the flock of God's pasture, the first I ever tended, the flock I love, farewell! I go my way, to feed a distant fold; you stay where we have often loved to meet together. "The Lord watch between me and you when we are absent one from another." "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." "Brethren, pray for us." "Now, the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever." Amen. Farewell, dear brethren, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Farewell!