

JOINING THE CHURCH NO. 3411

A SERMON
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*“And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves
unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”*
2 Corinthians 8:5.

SOME persons are always trying to prove what is customary in the Christian Church. They are always seeking after instances and precedents. The worst of it is that many of these people look for old things that are not old enough—the old things of the Church of Rome, for instance, and mediaeval customs and observances which are nothing but authentic trumpery! If they want the real old solid things, they should go back to the Apostolic times. The best book of Church history from which to gather ritual, true ritual, is the Acts of the Apostles! And when the Christian Church shall go back to that, instead of enquiring about what the primitive Christians did in the second or third century, she will come much nearer to the knowledge of what she ought to do!

Now, our text tells us of one old custom in the Apostles' days. Those who became Christians first gave themselves to the Lord and then they gave themselves to the Church, according to God's will. Let us ponder these things in their order. Of course we shall think of the main and most important point first—that action which gives value and beauty to all that follows and is its fruit—

I. THE SOUL'S SUPREME GIFT

The first thing that the original Christians, the Christians of the old and Holy Spirit times did was, “they gave themselves unto the Lord.” This is vital, the one all-important bestowal. Have all of us who are professors that we are Christ's disciples really given ourselves to the Lord? Are there not in this House of Prayer some who have never thought of doing so, and even some who would reject with contempt the idea of doing so? Oh, my Hearers, the day will come when you will look at these matters in a very different light! And in the next world it will be seen that it would have been your highest wisdom to have given yourselves to the Lord—and your supreme folly to have lived unto self!

When these early Christians gave themselves to the Lord, the first thing manifestly was *that the giving and the gift were sincere*. Should any here present have given themselves to the Lord, let them ask themselves whether their gift was sincere. These primitive Believers meant what they said. There was a deep reality about their consecration—they gave themselves over to Jesus Christ to be entirely His. Remember that in those times this meant very much more than we are ever made to suffer now. A man who gave himself to Christ in those days was put out of the synagogue if he was a Jew. He was cast out of society if he happened to be a heathen. He was dragged up before the tribunals. He was frequently cast in prison—as frequently beaten with many stripes—and very often he was put to death by fire, or by the sword. But these early Christians knew what was to happen and, knowing it, yet deliberately they gave themselves up to the Lord. Oh, dear professors here present, has your gift of yourselves to Christ been as sincere as that, or did you merely come and make a profession because others did? And have you stuck to that profession, lie though it was, because you did not like the shame of confessing that you had made a mistake? Oh, is it sincere or not? If it is not, God make it so, for it is only that which is of the heart that will stand the trial of the Last Great Day! Lord, deliver us from having any religion in which the heart is not found!

Their gift of themselves to the Lord was, in the next place, *a willing gift*. All the soldiers of Christ are volunteers and yet they are all pressed men. The Grace of God constrains men to become Christians, but yet only constrains them consistently with the laws of their mind! The freedom of the will is as great a truth as is the Predestination of God. The Grace

of God, without violating our wills, makes men willing in the day of God's power—and they give themselves to Jesus Christ. You cannot be a Christian against your will! How could it be? A servant of God against his will? A child of God against his will? No, it never was so and it never shall be so! Here and now, you Christians, I shall ask you whether you are not cheerfully, gladly, unreservedly the servants of God! I know you are and that bond you made years ago is not irksome to you now, but if you are genuine saints, you repeat it again tonight and you hope to repeat it in life and in death, for you are willingly and exultantly the Lord's own!

The gift that these early Christians made was, in the next place, *an intelligent one*. They did not receive into the Church in Paul's days unintelligent people. They knew that no sponsorship could avail here. They knew, as one would think all rational people ought to know, that the religion of Jesus Christ cannot exist where there is no clear apprehension of the saving Truth of God.

Only where the understanding was able to grasp the Saviorship of Jesus could there be spiritual life and true conversion. No religious rite, or ceremony, or ordinance could confer this. I have heard ministers tell their congregations, "You were made Christians in your infancy and you ought to stand to the vows then made for you." Surely every man's conscience tells him there is not a shadow of ground for such reasoning! What have I to do with, or what do I care about vows that were made for me when I was a child? Were they bad or were they good—they never consulted me and I have nothing to do with them, nor will I have! Whether they promised that I would serve God, or that I would serve the devil, I equally reject their responsibility and their sponsorship! As an intelligent being, I speak for myself before God and none shall speak for me! If I had been dedicated to Moloch, should I in my manhood accept the dedication? God forbid! And even if I were dedicated to Christ, I will not accept a dedication which I know Christ never accepted because He never asked for it. He asks my *personal* dedication. He asks only for intelligent love, intelligent service—and I trust that many of you came to Christ knowing what you did, knowing what repentance meant, knowing what faith meant, having counted the cost of what a life of holiness would be and then deliberately, as men and women of judgment and understanding, said, "O Prince, we enlist beneath Your banner! O Immanuel, write our names in Your muster-roll, for we will be Your servants from now on and forever!" It was a sincere gift, it was a willing gift and it was an intelligent gift that these first Christians made of themselves to the Lord!

My Brothers and Sisters, it was, moreover, *a complete surrender which they made*. No Christian in the olden times gave himself in part to the Lord and in part reserved himself for idols, or for himself—and had any attempted to have done so, they would have been spurned, for it is of Christ's rule in the Church that He will have all or none. You must, as a Christian, be all a Christian, or nothing of a Christian! There is no such thing as dividing between God and the devil, between righteousness and sin. The surrender must be without reserve and without limit. If you have truly given yourselves to the Lord, you have given Him your body—no more to be polluted with sin, but to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit. You have given Him your mind—no more to be a free thinker after the boasted free thought of the slaves of skepticism. You have given up your faculties—to sit with them at the feet of Christ to learn of Him, to take His teaching for the Truth of God and His Word the one court of appeal for all questions. You take Him to be your Teacher beyond all dispute and His Doctrine to be unsullied truth for you. You have also given up to Him your tongue to speak for Him, your hands to work for Him, your feet to walk or run for Him—your every faculty of body and mind in beautiful partnership for His service!

As for your newborn, angelic, spiritual nature—that must emphatically be the Lord's—and will always be the royal and reigning power within. You are today in the trinity of your nature—body, soul and spirit—altogether Christ's! And this includes, if you are a sincere Christian, all that you have—all of talents, all of time, all of property, all of influence, all of relationship, all of opportunity. You count nothing to be your own from this time forth, but you say with the spouse, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine."

Again, the surrender which every true Christian makes is *a surrender to the Lord*. That, my Brothers and Sisters, is where it must begin—with the Lord! We ought not to give ourselves up to the Church until we have given ourselves up to the Lord. And it must never be a giving of ourselves up to priests. Oh, scorn that! Of all the wretches that live, the worst are priests! Of all the curses that ever fell upon earth—I will not except even the devil—the worst is priestcraft! I care not whether it wears the garb of the dissenting minister, or the clergyman of the Established Church, or the Roman Catholic, the Muslim or the heathen—no man can do your religion for you! If any man pretends that he can, or that he

can pardon your sin, or do anything for you before God, put him aside—he is a base impostor! Never surrender your thoughts or your mind to any man. Pin your opinions to no man’s coat sleeves. To the Lord make the surrender complete and ample—to His Truth, to His Law, to His Gospel make your surrender as complete as if you made yourselves slaves, or a stone to be carved by His hands! You shall rise in dignity as you sink in selfhood. You shall become free in proportion as you wear God’s bonds. You shall become great as you become little in yourselves. Give yourselves wholly up to God. Mind it is to Him—not to any man, not to any creed, not to any sect—but wholly and entirely to the Lord who loved you from before the foundation of the world! To the Lord who bought you with His heart’s blood! To the Lord whose Spirit sealed your adoption within your souls!

Mind this, then! Mark it as the first step in all public acts of religion—you must give yourselves first to the Lord! You have no right to talk about joining a Christian Church until you have done that—“first to the Lord.” You have no right to be baptized until you have done that—“first to the Lord.” You have no right to sit at the Communion Table until you have done that—“first to the Lord.” Give yourselves first to the Lord with unfeigned repentance for sin and simple and hearty confidence in Jesus! And then, as a complete giving-up of yourselves to the Lord—you may come to every hallowed act of service, to every privilege-feast of love—but not until then! Oh, Sirs, your sacraments and your ceremonies—God abhors them until first you have given Him your hearts! Vain are your oblations! Your incense is an abomination to Him! It is an evil, and worse than an evil—it is a mockery of God, an insult to Him—until first your heart surrenders itself to Jesus and your manhood becomes the rightful property of God by your willing yielding of it to Him!

I cannot press this matter by way of questioning everyone present, but still I would like to ask of every conscience, especially of every professing Christian, to answer this question, “My Soul, have you given yourself up, through the Grace of God, to belong to the Lord?” Do you mean that, or is it a farce? Have you made it real, or is it all a sham? Do you feel within your soul tonight a desire to make it more complete a gift? Do you pray for Grace to make it perfect in the future? Do you rest alone upon the precious blood of Jesus? Then do you desire to glorify God so long as you are in this body? Oh, then ‘tis well with you and you may go the next step with me. If not, hands off all ordinances, hands off all promises! There is nothing in the Bible and there is nothing in the Church for you until you first are reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ! And now let us turn to consider briefly the second giving of the soul—

II. THE GIFT THAT FOLLOWS THE SUPREME ONE.

I want to know this passage aright. I think I do. “They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us”—that is, they gave “their own selves” unto us—by the will of God. After a true Christian has given himself or herself to the Lord, the very next act should be to give themselves to the Christian Church. They should at once assay, as Paul did, to be united to the Brethren of Christ. Somewhere in the district where he lives, if there is a Christian Church, the newborn Believer should at once seek fellowship with others who love his Lord, because saved by His Grace. The right way to do this is to give *himself*. Not his name, his money, not his mere presence, his sympathy, his active labors—all these are part of the gift—but the soul of it all is to give *himself*. In the whole force and weight of his influence, personality and ability, as far as God shall help him, he is to give up to the Church.

What is involved in this giving up of ourselves to the Christian Church? I will repeat it, so as to refresh the memories of many members here who have forgotten it. It is your *duty* to be united to the Christian Church. What does that mean? What duties spring out of it? There is, first, *consistency of character*. If you make no profession of religion and live as you like—you shall answer for that at the Last Great Day. But if you join a Christian Church, take heed how you live, for your actions may become doubly watched—and will be doubly sinful if you fall into inconsistency! You are a servant in the family and a member of a Christian Church—there must be in you no eye-service! There must be about you nothing which would dishonor a good servant of Jesus Christ! You are a husband—you have no business to be a bad-tempered, domineering tyrant to your wife! If you are, you ought not to be a member of a Christian Church at all! You are a wife—you ought not to be an untidy, idle, novel-reading woman, neglecting your family duties! If so, I do not care what classes you attend, or what Prayer Meetings—you have no business to act like that and profess to be a Christian! You are a Christian, you say, and have joined the Church—then in your trade you have no business to fall into the tricks and knavery that are common on all sides! If you cannot live without being a rogue, do not be a professor of religion! It will be quite as well for you to go to Hell at once, as you are, as to go there with a millstone about your neck through having

made a profession, a base and wicked profession, of godliness which you did not carry out. No, Sirs, if you will not, in the strength and spirit of God's Grace, strive after consistency of moral conduct, you have no right to talk about giving yourselves to the Church, which you will disgrace! You will only sin yourselves into a deeper condemnation. Therefore, stay away from it!

The next thing that is required of every member of Christ's Church is *attendance upon the means of Grace*. I do not mean merely Sunday attendance. Any hypocrite comes on a Sunday, but they do not, to my knowledge, all of them, come on Monday to the Prayer Meeting, nor all to the weeknight service on a Thursday. I am pretty certain of this, though some of them may. Weeknight meetings and services are a powerful test. Many cannot come, I know, and I do not ask that domestic duties be sacrificed, even for public worship. But there are some who ought to be present who are not and, indeed, all of you, so far as opportunity will permit, and if you reside within reasonable distance, should come. Take care that you do not become lax in that respect.

Another duty of all Church members is *to aid and comfort one another*. Just as among Freemasons—give the grip and you get a kindly word and a brotherly recognition—so should it be among Christians, only in a higher sense. You must comfort those that mourn, help those who are poor and, in general, we ought to watch out for each other's interests, seeing that in the Church we are all members of one family. You are to “do good unto all men, especially unto such as are of the household of faith.” Let your crumbs be given to the sparrows out of doors, but let your Brothers and Sisters have the most and best of what you can give! This is the plain duty of every Christian.

Every Church member, too, is to try to give himself to the Church in the sense of *doing his share in all Church work*. Shame on the Church member who has no post that he can occupy, who is neither generous with his purse, nor diligent with his hands, nor earnest with his heart, nor speaking with his tongue! You cannot all do all, but each must take his place and niche, for everyone who is doing nothing—what is he but a drone in the hive who will surely be expelled before long? I hope, my dear Friends, I can say that I did this when I joined the Church of Christ. I well remember how I joined it, for I forced myself into the Church of God by telling the minister—who was lax and slow—after I had called four or five times and could not see him, that I had done my duty and if he did not see me, I would call a Church Meeting, myself, and tell them I believed in Christ and ask them if they would have me! I know when I did it, I meant it! I know there was not one among them all who more intensely meant it, then, and I mean it now! I give myself up to Christ and to Christ's religion. I do not mind speaking upon politics when they touch upon Christianity. I do not mind helping on the common cause of philanthropy, or any work for the good of my fellow men—but to no work do I give myself with my whole heart and spirit but to that of spreading abroad the knowledge of Christ's name! This, I think, ought to be to the Christian the first and last thing. Does your religion cover your drapery, or your drapery your Christianity—which, Sir? You are a politician—right enough—I am glad that there should be an honest man in such a place. Does your religion, however, cover your politics, or do your politics devour your religion? You are a working man. Well, it is an honorable position and all honor to the hard-working man—but does your religion permeate and give quality to your hard work? Do you love Christ with it all? Do you feel all the while that, most of all, you must be a Christian? Then I do not care what you are, whether you are a blacksmith or a chimney-sweep, a king or a crossing-sweeper—it is of small account! First and foremost, must you be a Christian and all else must be subordinated to that—for this the Christian Church has a right to expect.

Now I know there are some who say, “Well, I hope I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any *church*, because _____.” Now, why not? “*Because I can be a Christian without it.*” Now, are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord's commands as by being obedient? Well, suppose everybody else did the same? Suppose all Christians in the world said, “I shall not join the Church.” Why there would be no visible Church! There would be no ordinances! That would be a very bad thing and yet, *one* doing it—what is right for one is right for all—why should not all of us do it? Then you believe that if you were to do an act which has a tendency to destroy the visible Church of God, you would be as good a Christian as if you did your best to build up that Church? I do not believe it, Sir! Nor do you, either. You have not any such a belief—it is only a trumpety excuse for something else. There is a brick—a very good one. What is the brick made for? To help to build a house with. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick! Until it is built into the wall, it is no good! So you rolling-stone Christians, I do

not believe that you are answering your purpose—you are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live—and you are much to blame for the injury you do! “Oh,” says one, “though I hope I love the Lord, yet if I were to join the Church, *I would feel it such a bond upon me.*” Just what you ought to feel! Ought you not to feel that you are bound to holiness, now, and bound to Christ, now? Oh, those blessed bonds! If there is anything that could make me feel more bound to holiness than I am, I should like to feel that fetter, for it is only liberty to feel bound to godliness, uprightness and carefulness of living!

“Oh,” says another, “if I were to join the Church, *I am afraid that I would not be able to hold on.*” You expect to hold on, I suppose, *out of the Church*—that is to say, you feel safer in disobeying Christ than in obeying Him! Strange feeling, that! Oh, you had better come and say, “My Master, I know Your saints ought to be united together in Church fellowship, for Churches were instituted by Your Apostles—and I trust I have Grace to carry out the obligation. I have no strength of my own, my Master, but my strength lies in resting upon You—I will follow where You lead and leave the rest to You.”

“Ah, but,” says another, “*I cannot join the Church—it is so imperfect.*” You then, are perfect, of course! If so, I advise you to go to Heaven and join the Church, there, for certainly you are not fit to join it on earth and would be quite out of place!

“Yes,” says another, “but I see so much that is wrong about Christians.” There is nothing wrong in yourself, I suppose? I can only say, my Brother, that if the Church of God is not better than I am, I am sorry for it. I felt, when I joined the Church, that I would be getting a deal more good than I should be likely to bring into it. And with all the faults I have seen in living these 20 years or more in the Christian Church, I can say, as an honest man, that the members of the Church are the excellent of the earth in whom is all my delight—though they are not perfect, but a long way from it! If, out of Heaven, there are to be found any who really live near to God, it is the members of the Church of Christ.

“Ah,” says another, “*but there are a rare lot of hypocrites.*” You are very sound and sincere yourself, I suppose? I trust you are so, but then you ought to come and join the Church to add to its soundness by your own. I am sure, my dear Friends, none of you will shut up your shops tomorrow morning, or refuse to take a sovereign when a customer comes in because there happen to be some smashers about who are dealing with bad coins! No, not you! And you do not believe the theory of some, that because some professing Christians are hypocrites, therefore all are, for that would be as though you would say that because some sovereigns are bad, therefore all are bad—which would be clearly wrong, for if all sovereigns were counterfeits, it would never pay for the counterfeiter to try to pass his counterfeits! It is the quantity of good metal that passes off the bad. There is a fine good quantity of respectable golden Christians still in the world and still in the Church—rest assured of that!

“Well,” says one, “I do not think—though I *hope* I am a servant of God—that I can join the Church. You see, *it is so looked down upon.*” Oh, what a blessed look-down that is! I do think, Brothers and Sisters, there is no honor in the world equal to that of being looked down upon by that which is called, “Society,” in this country! The most of people are slaves to what they call, “respectability.” Respectability? When a man puts on a coat on Sunday that he has paid for. When he worships God by night or by day. Whether men see him or not—when he is an honest, straightforward man—I do not care how small his earnings are, he is a respectable man! And he need never bend his neck to the idea of Society or its artificial respectability!

These various kinds of humbug, for they are no other, keep many from joining the Christian Church because they are afraid of being looked down upon by respectable people in Society. I read in a paper only yesterday that it would be no use to create Nonconformist peers, because in the next generation they would cease to be Nonconformist and become respectable in their religion—and *I am afraid it is true!* It is outrageous that as soon as some persons rise in social position they renounce the Church to which they gave themselves when they gave themselves to the Lord! The day will come when the poorest Christian will be exalted above the proudest peer that did not fear God—when God will take out of the hovels and cottages of England a peerage of an Imperial race that will put to the blush all the kings and princes of the world! And these He will set above the seraphim when others will be cast from His Presence!

I say to any of you who will not join this Church because doing so would lower your respectability—neither I or Jesus Christ asks you to join it! If these are the gods you worship—Society and Respectability—go to your beggarly gods and worship them, but God will require it of your hands in the Day of Account. There is nothing better than the

service of Christ! For my own part, to be despised, pointed at, hooted in the streets, called by all manner of evil names—I would accept it all, sooner than all the stars of knighthoods and peerages if the service of Christ necessitated it, for this is the true honor of the Christian when he truly serves his Master! The day is coming when the Lord will divide between those that love Him and those that love Him not—and every day is getting ready for that last division. This very night the division is being made! In the preaching of the Gospel it is being carried out. Let each man take his stand and ask himself the question—Are you with Christ or with Belial? Are you with God, with Christ, with the precious blood, or do you still rank with sinful pleasures and their delights? As you will have to answer for it when the skies are on a blaze and the earth reels, and the Judgment trumpet summons you before the Great White Throne, so answer it now! And you brave spirits who have loved your Savior—if you have never yet joined His army, come and enlist now! And you loving spirits who are tender and who have shrunk back awhile, come forward now—

*“You that are men now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes!
Your courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.”*

Today stand up for Jesus! Today be willing to be the off-scouring of all things for His name’s sake. And then, when He comes in His Glory, yours shall be the reward, a reward that shall far outweigh any losses that you can sustain today! “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” “He that with his heart believes and with his mouth makes confession shall be saved.” Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and may His blessing rest upon you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *2 CORINTHIANS 8.*

The Apostle is writing concerning a certain collection which was being made for the poor saints of Jerusalem. It was from Jerusalem that the Gospel had spread into Greece and, therefore, those who had received spiritual things from the poor Jews at Jerusalem were bound by every tie of holy brotherhood to remember their benefactors in the time of famine. The Apostle stirs up the Corinthian Church about this contribution.

Verse 1. *Moreover, brethren, we make known to you.* Or, “we make you to know.”

1, 2. *Of the Grace of God bestowed on the Churches of Macedonia. How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their generosity.* It is good to stir one Christian up by the example of another and Paul excites those at Corinth by the example of the Churches in Macedonia—especially, no doubt, the Church at Philippi. He says that they were in great affliction and they were very poor, but yet they had been so filled with the Grace of God that their very poverty had enabled them to “abound to the riches of their generosity,” for what they gave became more in proportion because they were so poor.

3. *For to their power, I bear record, yes, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves.* Without any pressure! Without even a hint—spontaneously!

4. *Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.* “Take upon us the communion,” for that blessed word “*Koinonia*,” communion, is applied not only to the Lord’s Supper and to such fellowship as that, but to communion with poor saints—fellowship with them by helping their necessities. And Paul says that the Macedonian Churches pressed it upon him that he should take their money and go with it to Jerusalem and distribute it. He appears to have been very reluctant to do this, but they pressed it upon him.

5. *And this they did, not as we hoped.* That is, “according to our hopes.”

6. *But first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God.* They first gave of themselves to God and then asked Paul to take it that he might use it for God in the distribution of Christian charity among the poor saints at Jerusalem.

6, 7. *So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same Grace also. Therefore, as you abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that you abound in this Grace also.* They were a famous Church—this Church at Corinth, having gifted men in abundance more than other Churches—to the extent that they did not have one man for a pastor because they so abounded in brethren able to edify. And he urges them, as they were forward in all things, not to be backward in their generosity.

8. *I speak not by commandment.* “I do not wish to put it upon you as a law. I want it to be spontaneous on your part.”

8, 9. *But by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For you know the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you, through His poverty, might be rich.* What a touching argument! How could he find a better? Help your Brothers and Sisters in Jerusalem that are in need, even though that help should pinch you, for you know the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and what He did, and what He gave that you might be rich!

10. *And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.* They had begun last year—perhaps not a year ago, but some months ago in the previous year—to talk the matter over and to make promises. And they had been among the first to undertake the work, but as yet they had not done it.

11. *Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance, also, out of that which you have.* They had not a minister, you see, and what is everybody’s business is nobody’s business—and so the contribution was not carried out. And in general, the Church at Corinth is about the worst in the New Testament, and that for this very reason—that it had not any oversight. It is the pattern Church of certain Brothers whom we have among us this day—in the very example of them! And they quote this as an example, whereas it is put here as a beacon, and a very excellent beacon, too, to warn us against any such thing! Everything was sixes and sevens, good people as they were. Seeing that they had no order and no discipline, nothing got done, and they wearied the Apostle’s life because of that. God would have things done decently and in order—and He gives to His Churches, pastors after His own heart! And when He does, then is the Church able to carry out her desires and her activities with something like practical common-sense. But here a year ago, months ago, they had talked the matter over and made a promise—and now Paul has to say to them, “Now, therefore, perform the doing of it.” They had no deacons to look them up, I will be bound to say.

12-14. *For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not. For I mean not that other men be eased and you burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their need—that their abundance may also be a supply for your need—that there may be equality.* It is in the Christian Church, alone, that we shall ever find liberty, equality and fraternity thoroughly represented. There, by the life of Christ within His people spiritually, that shall be realized, and the Apostle backs up this thought of his, which Bengel has beautifully put when he says, “We ought to minister of our luxuries to the comfort of others, and of our comforts to the necessities of others.” So we should, to keep up a balance that when one suffers needs and another abounds, there may be an equality made.

15. *As it is written, he that had gathered much.* Much manna

15-17. *Had nothing left over: and he that had gathered little had no lack. But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For, indeed, he accepted the exhortation, but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.* Or, “he is coming to you,” for he bore this letter to them.

18. *And we have sent with him the Brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches:* And what Brother was that? Nobody knows. And a Brother who has praise in all the Churches may be well content to have his name forgotten! Oh, it would be a sweet thing to have praise in all the Churches anonymously, so that it all might go up to God. It may have been Luke. Probably it was. It may not have been Luke. Probably it was not. We do not know who it was. But it is not important. What does it matter? As Mr. Whitfield used to say, “Let my name perish, but let Christ’s name last forever.” “And we have sent with him the Brother whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches.”

19. *And not that only, but who was also chosen of the Churches to travel with us with this Grace,* Or “with this gift.”

19, 20. *Which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind. Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us.* He had other brethren associated with him lest anybody should even hint that Paul was benefited thereby. And, oh, in the distribution of the Lord’s money, it becomes us to be exceedingly careful! Paul adds this.

21. *Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.* That the thing might be so clear and transparent that while God knew that Paul was honest, everybody else might know it, too, for others had been associated with him.

22, 23. *And we have sent with them our Brother whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent upon the great confidence which I have in you. Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow helper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the Churches, and the Glory of Christ.* How beautiful to see Paul so praising his brethren—very humble, commonplace persons as compared with himself, but he admires the Grace of God in them. How very different from the general spirit of depreciation that you find even among Christians—afraid to praise anybody lest they should be exalted above measure. You might leave that to the devil! He will take care that they are not exalted above measure but you need not be as particular about that. Often the best thing that can be done for God's servant is to encourage him, for, though you may not know it, he may have a multitude of depressions, heavy toil and earnest care and much watching which may bring him down. Paul speaks well of the Brotherhood—let us try to do the same. But what does he call these simple-minded men who are going with him to distribute this money? Does he call them the *Glory of Christ*? Yes! Christ is the Glory of God and His people are the Glory of Christ! He glories whenever He is glorified by them! They are the result of the travail of His soul and in that sense they are His Glory.

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