

## First Sunday after Epiphany;

Rom 12:1-6 and 12:6-16

### THE FRUITS OF FAITH

*Rom 12:1-6*

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;*

1. In the preceding sermons I have treated sufficiently of faith and love; and of crosses and afflictions, the promoters of hope. Faith, love and affliction bound the Christian's life. It is unnecessary that I should further discourse on these topics. As they – or anything pertaining to the life of the Christian – present themselves, reference may be had to those former postils. It is my purpose now briefly to make plain that the sum of all divine doctrine is simply Jesus Christ, as we have often heard.

2. This epistle lesson treats not of faith, but of the fruits of faith – love, unity, patience, self-denial, etc. Among these fruits, the apostle considers first the discipline of the body – the mortification of evil lusts. He handles the subject here in a manner wholly unlike his method in other epistles. In Galatians he speaks of crucifying the flesh with its lusts; in Hebrews and Colossians, of putting off the old man and mortifying the members on earth. Here he mentions presenting the body as a sacrifice; he dignifies it by the loftiest and most sacred terms. Why does he so?

First, by making the terms glorious, he would the more emphatically urge us to yield this fruit of faith. The whole world regards the priest's office – his service and his dignity – as representing the acme of nobility and exaltation; and so it truly does. Now, if one would

be a priest and exalted before God, let him set about this work of offering up his body to God; in other words, let him be humble, let him be nothing in the eyes of the world.

3. I will let every man decide for himself the difference between the outward priesthood of dazzling character and the internal, spiritual priesthood. The first is confined to a very few individuals; the second, Christians commonly share. One was ordained of men, independently of the Word of God; the other was established through the Word, irrespective of human devices. In that, the skin is besmeared with material oil; in this, the heart is internally anointed with the Holy Spirit. That applauds and extols its works; this proclaims and magnifies the grace of God, and his glory. That does not offer up the body with its lusts, but rather fosters the evil desires of the flesh; this sacrifices the body and mortifies its lusts. The former permits the offering up to itself of gold and property, of honor, of idleness and pleasure, and of all manner of lust on earth; the latter foregoes these things and accepts only the reverse of homage. That again sacrifices Christ in its awful perversions; this, satisfied with the atonement once made by Christ, offers up itself with him and in him, by making similar sacrifices. In fact, the two priesthoods accord about as well as Christ and Barabbas, as light and darkness, as God and the world. As little as smearing and shaving were factors in Christ's priesthood, so little will they thus procure for anyone the Christian priesthood. Yet Christ, with all his Christians, is priest. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Ps 110, 4. The Christian priesthood will not admit of appointment. The priest is not made. He must be born a priest; must inherit his office. I refer to the new birth – the birth of water and the Spirit. Thus all Christians become priests, children of God and co-heirs with Christ the Most High Priest.

4. Men universally consider the title of priest glorious and honorable; it is acceptable to everyone. But the duties and the sacrifice of the office are rarely accepted. Men seem to be averse to these latter. The Christian priesthood costs life, property, honor, friends and all worldly things. It cost Christ the same on the holy cross. No man readily chooses death instead of life, and accepts pain instead of pleasure, loss instead of gain, shame rather than honor, enemies rather than friends, according to the example Christ set for us on the cross. And further, all this is to be endured, not for profit to one's self, but for the benefit of his neighbor and for the honor and glory of God. For so Christ offered up his body. This priesthood is a glorious one.

5. As I have frequently stated, the suffering and work of Christ is to be viewed in two lights: First, as grace bestowed on us, as a blessing conferred, requiring the exercise of faith on our part and our acceptance of the salvation offered. Second, we are to regard it an example for us to follow; we are to offer up ourselves for our neighbors' benefit and for the honor of God. This offering is the exercise of our love – distributing our works for the benefit of our neighbors. He who so does is a Christian. He becomes one with Christ, and the offering of his body is identical with the offering of Christ's body. This is what Peter calls offering sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ. He describes priesthood and

offering in these words: *"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* 1 Pet 2, 5.

6. Peter says "spiritual sacrifices," but Paul says our bodies are to be offered up. While it is true that the body is not spirit, the offering of it is called a spiritual sacrifice because it is freely sacrificed through the Spirit, the Christian being uninfluenced by the constraints of the Law or the fear of hell. Such motives, however, sway the ecclesiasts, who have heaped tortures upon themselves by undergoing fasts, uncomfortable clothing, vigils, hard beds and other vain and difficult performances, and yet failed to attain to this spiritual sacrifice. Rather, they have wandered the farther from it because of their neglect to mortify their old Adam-like nature. They have but increased in presumption and wickedness, thinking by their works and merits to raise themselves in God's estimation. Their penances were not intended for the mortification of their bodies, but as works meriting for them superior seats in heaven. Properly, then, their efforts may be regarded a carnal sacrifice of their bodies, unacceptable to God and most acceptable to the devil.

7. But spiritual sacrifices, Peter tells us, are acceptable to God; and Paul teaches the same (Rom 8 13): "If by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Paul speaks of mortifying through the Spirit; Peter, of a spiritual sacrifice. The offering must first be slain. Paul's thought is: "If ye mortify the deeds of the body in your individual, chosen ways, unprompted by the Spirit or your own heart, simply through fear of punishment, that mortification – that sacrifice – will be carnal; and ye shall not live, but die a death the more awful." The Spirit must mortify your deeds – spiritually it must be done; that is, with real enjoyment, unmoved by fear of hell, voluntarily, without expectation of meriting honor or reward, either temporal or eternal. This, mark you, is a spiritual sacrifice. However outward, gross, physical and visible a deed may be, it is altogether spiritual when wrought by the Spirit. Even eating and drinking are spiritual works if done through the Spirit. On the other hand, whatsoever is wrought through the flesh is carnal, no matter to what extent it may be a secret desire of the soul. Paul (Gal 5, 20) terms idolatry and heresies works of the flesh, notwithstanding they are invisible impulses of the soul.

8. In addition to this spiritual sacrifice – the mortifying of the deeds of the body – Peter mentions another, later on in the same chapter: "But ye are . . . a royal priesthood . . . that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Here Peter touches upon the preaching office, the real sacrificial office, concerning which it is said (Ps 50, 23), "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me." Preaching extols the grace of God. It is the offering of praise and thanks. Paul boasts (Rom 15, 16) that he sanctifies and offers the Gospel. But it is not our purpose to consider here this sacrifice of praise; though praise in the congregation may be included in the spiritual sacrifice, as we shall see. For he who offers his body to God also offers his tongue and his lips as instruments to confess, preach and extol the grace of

God. On this topic, however, we shall speak elsewhere. Let us now consider the words of the text.

## OUR SPIRITUAL SERVICE

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren."*

9. Paul does not say, "I command you." He is preaching to those already godly Christians through faith in the new man; to hearers who are not to be constrained by commandments, but to be admonished. For the object is to secure voluntary renunciation of their old, sinful, Adam-like nature. He who will not cheerfully respond to friendly admonition is no Christian. And he who attempts by the restraints of law to compel the unwilling to renunciation, is no Christian preacher or ruler; he is but a worldly jailer.

*"By the mercies of God."*

10. A teacher of the Law enforces his restraints through threats and punishments. A preacher of grace persuades and incites by calling attention to the goodness and mercy of God. The latter does not desire works prompted by an unwilling spirit, or service that is not the expression of a cheerful heart. He desires that a joyous, willing spirit shall incite to the service Of God. He who cannot, by the gracious and lovely message of God's mercy so lavishly bestowed upon us in Christ, be persuaded in a spirit of love and delight to contribute to the honor of God and the benefit of his neighbor, is worthless to Christianity, and all effort is lost on him. How can one whom the fire of heavenly love and grace cannot melt, be rendered cheerfully obedient by laws and threats? Not human mercy is offered us, but divine mercy, and Paul would have us perceive it and be moved thereby.

*"To present your bodies."*

11. Many and various were the sacrifices of the Old Testament. But all were typical of this one sacrifice of the body, offered by Christ and his Christians. And there is not, nor can be, any other sacrifice in the New Testament. What more would one, or could one, offer than himself, all he is and all he has? When the body is yielded a sacrifice, all belonging to the body is yielded also. Therefore, the Old Testament sacrifices, with the priests and all the splendor, have terminated. How does the offering of a penny compare with that of the body? Indeed, such fragmentary patchwork scarcely deserves recognition as a sacrifice when the bodies of Christ and of his followers are offered. Consequently, Isaiah may truly say that in the New Testament such beggarly works are loathsome compared to real and great sacrifices: "He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as he that breaketh a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as he that offereth swine's blood; he that burneth frankincense, as he that blesseth an idol." Is 66, 3. Similarly, also: "What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices? saith Jehovah: I have had enough of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight

not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." Is 1, 11. Thus, in plain words, Isaiah rejects all other sacrifices in view of this true one.

12. Our blind leaders, therefore, have most wretchedly deceived the world by their mass-offerings, for they have forgotten this one real sacrifice. The mass may be celebrated and at the same time the soul be not benefited, but rather injured. But the body cannot be offered without benefiting the soul. Under the New Testament dispensation, then, the mass cannot be a sacrifice, even were it ever one. For all the works, all the sacrifices of the New Testament, must be true and soul-benefiting. Otherwise they are not New Testament sacrifices. It is said (Ps 25, 10),

*"All the paths of Jehovah are lovingkindness and truth."*

*"A living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God."*

13. Paul here makes use of the three words "living," "holy" and "acceptable," doubtless to teach that the sacrifices of the Old Testament are repealed and the entire priesthood abolished. The Old Testament sacrifices consisted of bullocks, sheep and goats. To these life was not spared. For the sacrifice they were slain, burned, consumed by the priests. But the New Testament sacrifice is a wonderful offering. Though slain, it still lives. Indeed, in proportion as it is slain and sacrificed, does it live in vigor. "If by the Spirit ye put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Rom 8, 13. *"For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God."* Col 3, 3. *"And they that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof."* Gal 5, 24.

14. The word "living," then, is to be spiritually understood – as having reference to the life before God and not to the temporal life. He who keeps his body under and mortifies its lusts does not live to the world; he does not lead the life of the world. The world lives in its lusts, and according to the flesh; it is powerless to live otherwise. True, the Christian is bodily in the world, yet he does not live after the flesh. As Paul says (2 Cor 10, 3), "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh"; and again (Rom 8, 1), "Who walk not after the flesh." Such a life is, before God, eternal, and a true, living sacrifice. Such mortification of the body and of its lusts, whether effected by voluntary discipline or by persecution, is simply an exercise in and for the life eternal.

15. None of the Old Testament sacrifices were holy except in an external and temporal sense – until they were consumed. For the life of the animal was but temporal and external previous to the sacrifice. But the "living sacrifice" Paul mentions is righteous before God, and also externally holy. "Holy" implies simply, being designed for the service and the honor of God, and employed of God. Hence we must here understand the word "holy" as conveying the thought that we let God alone work in us and we be simply his holy instruments. As said in First Corinthians 6, 19-20, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost . . . and ye are not your own . . . therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Again (Gal 6, 17), "I bear branded on my body the

marks of Jesus.” Now, he who performs a work merely for his own pleasure and to his own honor, profanes his sacrifice. So also do they who by their works seek to merit reward from God, whether temporal or eternal. The point of error is, they are not yet a slain sacrifice. The sacrifice cannot be holy unless it first lives; that is, unless it is slain before God, and slain in its own consciousness, and thus does not seek its own honor and glory.

16. The Old Testament sacrifices were not in themselves acceptable to God. Nor did they render man acceptable. But in the estimation of the world – before men – they were pleasing, even regarded highly worthy. Men thought thereby to render themselves well-pleasing in God's sight. But the spiritual sacrifice is, in man's estimation, the most repugnant and unacceptable of all things. It condemns, mortifies and opposes whatever, in man's judgment, is good and well-pleasing. For, as before stated, nature cannot do otherwise than to live according to the flesh, particularly to follow its own works and inventions. It cannot admit that all its efforts and designs are vain and worthy of mortification and of death. The spiritual sacrifice is acceptable to God, Paul teaches, however unacceptable it may be to the world. They who render this living, holy sacrifice are happy and assured of their acceptance with God; they know God requires the death of the lusts and inventions of the flesh, and he alone desires to live and work in us.

17. Consequently, Paul's use of the word "body" includes more than outward, sensual vices and crimes, as gluttony, fornication, murder; it includes everything not of the new spiritual birth but belonging to the old Adam nature, even its best and noblest faculties, outer and inner; the deep depravity of self-will, for instance, and arrogance, human wisdom and reason, reliance on our own good works, on our own spiritual life and on the gifts wherewith God has endowed our nature.

To illustrate: Take the most spiritual and the wisest individuals on earth, and while it is true that a fraction of them are outwardly and physically chaste, their hearts, it will be found, are filled with haughtiness, presumption and self-will, while they delight in their own wisdom and peculiar conduct. No saint is wholly free from the deep depravity of the inner nature. Hence he must constantly offer himself up, mortifying his old deceitful self. Paul calls it sacrificing the body, because the individual, on becoming a Christian, lives more than half spiritually, and the evil propensities remaining to be mortified Paul attributes to the body as to the inferior, the less important, part of man; the part not as yet wholly under the Spirit's influence.

*”Which is your spiritual (reasonable) service.”*

18. A clear distinction is here made between the services rendered God by Christians and those which the Jews rendered. The thought is: The Jews' service to God consisted in sacrifices of irrational beasts, but the service of Christians, in spiritual sacrifices – the sacrifice of their bodies, their very selves. The Jews offered gold and silver; they built an inanimate temple of wood and stone. Christians are a different people. Their sacrifices

are not silver and gold. Their temple is not wood and stone; it is themselves. "Ye are a temple of God." I Cor 3, 16. Thus you observe the unfair treatment accorded Christians in ignoring their peculiar services and inducing the world to build churches, to erect altars and monasteries, and to manufacture bells, chalices and images by way of Christian service – works that would have been too burdensome for even the Jews.

19. In brief, this our reasonable service is rightly called a spiritual service of the heart, performed in the faith and the knowledge of God. Here Paul rejects all service not performed in faith as entirely unreasonable, even if rendered by the body and in outward act, and having the appearance of great holiness and spiritual life. Such have been the works, offerings, monkery and stringent life of the Papists, performed without the knowledge of God – having no command of God – and without spirit and heart. They have thought that so long as the works were performed they must be pleasing to God, independent of their faith. Such was also the service of the Jews in their works and offerings, and of all who knew not Christ and were without faith. Hence they were no better than the service and works of idolatrous and ignorant heathen. *"And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

20. As before said, the world cannot endure the sight or hearing of this living sacrifice; therefore it opposes it on every side. With its provocations and threats, its enticements and persecutions, it has every advantage, aided by the fact that our minds and spirits are not occupied with that spiritual sacrifice, but we give place to the dispositions and inclinations of the world. We must be careful, then, to follow neither the customs of the world nor our own reason or plausible theories. We must constantly subdue our dispositions and control our wills, not obeying the dictates of reason and desire. Always we are to conduct ourselves in a manner unlike the way of the world. So shall we be daily changed – renewed in our minds. That is, we come each day to place greater value on the things condemned by human reason – by the world. Daily we prefer to be poor, sick and despised, to be fools and sinners, until ultimately we regard death as better than life, foolishness as more precious than wisdom, shame nobler than honor, labor more blessed than wealth, and sin more glorious than human righteousness. Such a mind the world does not possess. The mind of the world is altogether unlike the Christian's. It not only continues unchanged and unrenewed in its old disposition, but is obdurate and very old.

21. God's will is ever good and perfect, ever gracious; but it is not at all times so regarded of men. Indeed, human reason imagines it to be the evil, unfriendly, abominable will of the devil, because what reason esteems highest, best and holiest, God's will regards as nothing and worthy of death. Therefore, Christian experience must come to the rescue and decide. It must feel and prove, must test and ascertain, whether one is prompted by a sincere and gracious will. He who perseveres and learns in this way will go forward in his experience, finding God's will so gracious and pleasing he would not exchange it for all the world's wealth. He will discover that acceptance of God's will affords him more

happiness, even in poverty, disgrace and adversity, than is the lot of any worldling in the midst of earthly honors and pleasures. He will finally arrive at a degree of perfection making him inclined to exchange life for death, and, with Paul, to desire to depart that sin may no more live in him, and that the will of God may be done perfectly in himself in every relation. In this respect he is wholly unlike the world; he conducts himself very differently from it. For the world never has enough of this life, while the experienced Christian is ready to be removed. What the world seeks, he avoids; what it avoids, he seeks.

22. Paul, you will observe, does not consider the Christian absolutely free from sin, since he beseeches us to be "transformed by the renewing of the mind." Where transformation and renewal are necessary, something of the old and sinful nature must yet remain. This sin is not imputed to Christians, because they daily endeavor to effect transformation and renovation. Sin exists in them against their will. Flesh and spirit are contrary to each other (Gal 5, 17), therefore we do not what we would. Rom 7, 15. Paul makes particular mention of "the mind" here, by contrast making plainer what is intended by the "body" which he beseeches them to sacrifice. The scriptural sense of the word "mind" has already been sufficiently defined as "belief," which is the source of either vice or virtue. For what I value, I believe to be right. I observe what I value, as do others. But when belief is wrong, conscience and faith have not control. Where unity of mind among men is lacking, love and peace cannot be present; and where love and faith are not present, only the world and the devil reign. Hence transformation by renewal of the mind is of vital importance. Now follows:

### **SOBER THOUGHTS OF OURSELVES.**

*"For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man a measure of faith."*

23. Paul, in all his epistles, is careful to give this instruction to Christians. His purpose is to preserve simplicity of faith among them everywhere; to prevent sects and schisms in Christian life, which have their origin in differing minds, in diversity of belief. To make admonition the more forcible, he refers to his apostolic office; to the fact that he was, by the grace of God, chosen and sent to teach the things he advocates. His words here mean: "Ye possess many graces, but let everyone take heed to confine his belief and opinions to the limits of faith. Let him not esteem himself above another, nor attach to the gifts conferred upon himself greater value than he accords those conferred upon another. Otherwise he will be inclined to despise the lesser gifts and emphasize the more exalted ones, and to influence others to the same practice." Where there is not such humility, recourse is had to works and to the honoring of gifts, while faith is neglected. Thus belief prompts to do as the world does, to value what is exalted and to despise what is humble.



24. This principle cannot be better illustrated than by the prevailing examples of our time. For instance, monks and priests have established spiritual orders which they regard highly meritorious. In this respect they do not think soberly, but extravagantly. They imagine ordinary Christians to be insignificant in comparison with them. But their orders represent neither faith nor love, and are not commanded by God. They are peculiar, something devised by the monks and priests themselves. Hence there is division. Because of the different beliefs, numerous sects exist, each striving for first place. Consequently, all the orders become unprofitable in God's sight. The love and faith and harmony which unite Christians are dissipated.

25. Paul teaches that, however varied the gifts and the outward works, none should, because of these, esteem himself good, nor regard himself better than others. Rather, every man should estimate his own goodness by his faith. Faith is something all Christians have, though not in equal measure, some possessing more and others less. However, in faith all have the same possession – Christ. The murderer upon the cross, through faith, had Christ in himself as truly as had Peter, Paul, Abraham, the mother of the Lord, and all saints; though his faith may not have been so strong. Therefore, though gifts be unequal, the precious faith is the same. Now, if we are to glory in the treasures of faith only, not in the gifts, every man should esteem another's gifts as highly as his own, and with his own gifts serve that other who in faith possesses equal treasure with him. Then will continue loving harmony and simple faith, and none will fall back upon his own works or merits. Of this "mind," or belief, you may read further in the preceding postils, especially in the epistle selection for the third Sunday in Advent. Further comment on this text will be left for the next epistle lesson, the two being closely connected.



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# Second Sunday after Epiphany.



## Romans 12:6-16

### GIFTS AND WORKS OF CHRIST'S MEMBERS.

*Rom 12:6-16*

*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.*

1. This lesson begins in a way that would seem to call for a portion properly belonging to the epistle for the preceding Sunday, and terminates short of its full connection. Evidently it was arranged by some unlearned and thoughtless individual, with a view simply to making convenient reading in the churches and not to its explanation to the people. It will be necessary to a clear comprehension, therefore, to note its real connections.

2. In the epistle for last Sunday, the apostle teaches that as Christians we are to renew our minds by sacrificing our bodies, thus preserving the true character of faith; that we are not to regard ourselves as good or perfect without faith, if we would avoid the rise of sects and conflicting opinions among Christians; that each is to continue firm in the measure of faith God has given him, whether it be weak or strong; that he shall use his gifts to his neighbor's profit, and then they will not be regarded special favors by the less gifted, and the common faith will be generally prized as the highest and most precious treasure, the result being satisfaction for all men. Paul next adds the simile: "*For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another.*" Then follows our selection for today, the connection being, "*And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us,*" etc. Paul likens the various gifts to ourselves, the different members of the common body of Christ. It is an apt and beautiful

simile, one he makes use of frequently; for instance, I Cor 12, 12 and Eph 4, 16. It teaches directly and clearly the equality of all Christians; that one common faith should satisfy all; that gifts are not to be regarded as making one better, happier and more righteous than another, in the eyes of God. The latter idea is certainly erroneous, and destructive of faith, which alone avails with God.

## **WE ARE BORN MEMBERS OF CHRIST**

3. First, if we examine this simile, we shall find that all the members perform certain functions of the body because they are members of it; and no member has its place through its own efforts or its own merits. It was born a member, before the exercise of office was possible. It acts by virtue of being a member; it does not become a member by virtue of its action. It derives existence and all its powers from the body, regardless of its own exertions. The body, however, exercises its members as occasion requires. The eye has not attained its place because of its power of seeing – not because it has merited its office as an organ of sight for the body. In the very beginning it derived its existence and its peculiar function of sight from the body. It cannot, therefore, boast in the slightest degree that by its independent power of seeing it has deserved its place as an eye. It has the honor and right of its position solely through its birth, not because of any effort on its part.

4. Similarly, no Christian can boast that his own efforts have made him a member of Christ, with other Christians, in the common faith. Nor can he by any work constitute himself a Christian. He performs good works by virtue of having become a Christian, in the new birth, through faith, regardless of any merit of his own. Clearly, then, good works do not make Christians, but Christians bring forth good works. The fruit does not make the tree, but the tree produces the fruit. Seeing does not make the eye, but the eye produces vision. In short, cause ever precedes effect; effect does not produce cause, but cause produces effect. Now, if good works do not make a Christian, do not secure the grace of God and blot out our sins, they do not merit heaven. No one but a Christian can enjoy heaven. One cannot secure it by his works, but by being a member of Christ; an experience effected through faith in the Word of God.

5. How, then, shall we regard those who teach us to exterminate our sins, to secure grace, to merit heaven, all by our own works; who represent their ecclesiastical orders as special highways to heaven? What is their theory? They teach, as you observe, that cause is produced by effect. Just as if mere muscular tissue that is not a tongue becomes a tongue by fluent speaking, or becomes mouth and throat by virtue of much drinking; as if running makes feet; keen hearing, an ear; smelling, a nose; nourishment at the mother's breast, a child; suspension from the apple-tree, an apple. Beautiful specimens, indeed, would these be – fine tongues, throats and ears, fine children, fine apples.

6. What sort of foolish, perverted individuals are they who so teach? Well might you exclaim: "What impossible undertakings, what useless burdens and hardships, they assume!" Yes, what but burdens do they deserve who pervert God's truth into falsehood; who change the gifts God designed for man's benefit into acts of service rendered by man to God; who, unwilling to abide in the common faith, aspire to exalted and peculiar place as priests and beings superior to other Christians? They deserve to be overwhelmed in astonishing folly and madness, and to be burdened with useless labors and hardships in their attempts to do impossible things. They cheat the world of its blessings while they fill themselves. It is said of them (Ps 14, 4-5): "*Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon Jehovah?*" – that is, they live not in faith. And continuing "*There were they in great fear*"; meaning that here and there they make that a matter of conscience which is not, because they cling to works and not to faith.

## **EACH MEMBER CONTENT WITH ITS OWN POWERS**

7. In the second place, the simile teaches that each member of the body is content with the other members, and rejoices in its powers, not being solicitous as to whether any be superior to itself. For instance, the nose is inferior in office to the eye, yet in the relation they sustain to each other the former is not envious of the latter; rather, it rejoices in the superior function the eye performs. On the other hand, the eye does not despise the nose; it rejoices in all the powers of the other members. As Paul says elsewhere (I Cor 12, 23): "*Those parts of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor.*" Thus we see that hand and eye, regardless of their superior office, labor carefully to clothe and adorn the less honorable members. They make the best use of their own distinction to remove the dishonor and shame of the inferior members.

8. However unequal the capacities and distinction of the individual members of the body, they are equal in that they are all parts of the same body. The eye cannot claim any better right to a place in the body than the least distinguished member has. Nor can it boast greater authority over the body than any other member enjoys. And thus it does not essay to do. It grants all members equal participation in the body. Likewise, all Christians, whether strong in faith or weak, perfect or defective, share equally in Christ and are equal in Christendom. Each may appropriate the whole Christ unto himself. I may boast as much in Christ as Peter or the mother of God may boast. Nor do I envy Peter because he is a more distinguished member of the Christian Church than I. I am glad of it. On the other hand, he does not despise me for being a less honored member. I am a part of the same body to which he belongs, and I possess Christ as well as he does.

9. The self-righteous are unable to concede this equality. They must stir up sects and distinctions among Christians. Priests aspire to be better than laymen; monks better than priests; virgins than wives. The diligent, in praying and fasting, would be better than the laborer; and they who lead austere lives, more righteous than they of ordinary life. This is

the work of the devil, and productive of every form of evil. Opposed to it is Christ's doctrine in our text. Under such conditions as mentioned, faith and love are subverted. The unlearned are deluded, and led away from faith to works and orders. Inequality is everywhere. The ecclesiasts desire to sit in high places, to receive all honor, to have their feet kissed, and will honor and respect none but themselves. Indeed, they would ultimately intercede for poor Christians, would be mediators between them and God, attaching no importance whatever to the stations in life occupied by these. They proceed as if they alone were members of Christ, and as if their relation to him could not be closer. Then they presume by their works to constitute others members of Christ, being careful, however, to demand adequate financial return for the service. They are members of the devil; not of Christ.

### **EACH MEMBER SERVES ALL THE OTHERS**

10. In the third place, according to the simile each member of the body conducts itself in a manner to profit the others – the whole body. The eye prepares the way for hand and foot. The foot, in its carriage of the body, safeguards the eye. Each member ever cares for and serves the others. More beautiful figures of love and good works are not to be found than those derived from the body with its members. In the members we daily bear about with us, and with which we are continually familiar, God has described the law of love in a living and forcible manner. Upon the principle there illustrated, the Christian should act, conducting himself in a way to profit not himself but others, and having a sincere interest in them. Under such conditions, schisms and sects could not spring up among us.

11. But we are blind; we neither see nor read the beautiful lesson taught us in our own bodies. We proceed to invent good works as a means of improving our condition and bringing ourselves into a saved state. This error is attributable to our lack of faith and of heart knowledge of Christ. Hence we are restless in soul, seeking to be liberated from sin and to become righteous. The heart in its ignorance of the sufficiency of common faith, engages in these abnormal, special works. There is where foolish individuals begin to disregard faith and love, imagining such works true ways to heaven. One takes up one thing, and another something else, and so it goes, until there is nothing but sects. One sect condemns and rejects the other. Each, exalting itself beyond measure, claims superiority.

### **EACH MEMBER SUFFERS AND REJOICES WITH ALL**

12. In the fourth place, *"whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it,"* as Paul says, I Cor 12, 26. In short, no member lives and acts for itself; all obey and serve one another, and the more honored members serve most. Each seems to say: *"I desire not to be otherwise than as I am. I am satisfied to be a member of the same body with the others, and to have equal rights and honors therein. It is unnecessary for me to exert myself to share in that body, for I am already a member of it, and content. My efforts I direct to serving the body – all*

*the members, my beloved brothers and partners. I assume no peculiarities. I would not cause discord and conflict.”*

13. Observe, this is the way all true, righteous Christians do, as we have frequently said. They who conduct themselves otherwise cannot be true Christians; they are worse – more pernicious – than heathen. They cannot refrain from instigating sects; from assuming some peculiarity, some special doctrine, wherein they proudly exalt themselves above other men. Thus they lure to themselves the hearts of the unlearned. Against this class Paul here, as everywhere, faithfully warns us.

14. See, then, that you become a member of Christ. This is to be accomplished through faith alone, regardless of works. And having become a member, if God has appointed you a duty according to your capacity, abide in it. Let no one allure you away from it. Esteem not yourself better than others, but serve them rejoicing in their works and their offices as you do in your own, even if they are less important. Faith renders you equal with others, and others equal with you, and so on.

## **CHRISTIAN EQUALITY AND CHRISTIAN GIFTS**

Paul's design in this epistle is to teach equality. He would have no one *“think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.”* Or, to express it differently: *“Let each one regard that his work for which he has a gift, and let him perform it. But he is not consequently to esteem himself superior to others differently gifted. He should delight in their works, justly recognizing those works as of God's grace, and knowing that God distributes the measure of faith and this his grace not in one way, but in many ways.”* Paul's peculiar choice of words here, referring to all gifts as the grace of God and the measure of faith, is meant to teach that no man may regard his individual gift as a peculiar instance in that respect, as do they who are not of the common faith. It is the one same God, Spirit and Lord, the apostle tells us (I Cor 12, 5-11), who effects in this work and that, whether small or great, in you or in me, in the one same faith, love and hope.

15. The importance, the nobleness and helpfulness of this doctrine is beyond our power of expression. The wretched condition of all Christendom, divided as it is into innumerable sects, is, alas, plain testimony that no body nor member, no faith nor love, seems longer to exist anywhere. Unity of mind in relation to the various gifts of God cannot exist in connection with human doctrines. Hence it is impossible for the orders and the doctrines of our ecclesiastical lords to stand with unity of mind; one or the other must fall.

16. *“Measure of faith”* may be understood as implying that God imparts to some more of faith itself; and to others, less. But I presume Paul's thought in employing the expression is that faith brings gifts, which are its chief blessing. These are said to be according to the measure of our faith, and not to the measure of our will or our merit. We have not merited

our gifts. Where faith exists, God honors it with certain gifts, apportioned, or committed, according to his will. As we have it in First Corinthians 12, 11, "*dividing to each one severally even as he will*"; and in Ephesians 4,16, "*to each member according to his measure.*" The same reason may be assigned for Paul's words, "Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us," not "differing according to our merits." Grace as well as faith brings these noble jewels – our gifts – to each one according to his measure. It excludes in every respect our works and our merits, and directs us to make our works minister only to our neighbors. "*Whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith.*"

17. The apostle enumerates several gifts, or works of Christian members, mentioning prophecy first. Prophecy is of two kinds: One is the foretelling of future events, a gift or power possessed by all the prophets under the Old Testament dispensation, and by the apostles; the other is the explanation of the Scriptures. "Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues." 1 Cor 14, 5. Now, the Gospel being the last prophetic message to be delivered previous to the time of the judgment, and to predict the events of that period, I presume Paul has reference here simply to that form of prophecy he mentions in the fourteenth of First Corinthians – explanation of the Scriptures. This form is common, ever prevails, and is profitable to Christians; the other form is rare. That reference is to this form, Paul implies in his words, "Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith." Doubtless he means the Christian faith then arising. No other faith, no other doctrine, is to be introduced. Now, when he says prophecy must be according to the proportion of faith, it is plain enough he does not refer to the foretelling of future events.

18. The apostle's meaning, then, is: "*They who have the gift of Scripture explanation must be careful to explain in conformity with the faith, and not to teach contrary to its principles.*" "*Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" I Cor 3, 11. Let every man be careful not to build upon this foundation with wood, hay, stubble-things unsuited to such a foundation; let him build with gold, silver and precious stones. Every doctrine, every explanation of the Scriptures, then, which leads us to rely upon our own works, and produces false Christians and self-righteous individuals, in the name of faith, is emphatically condemned. Any doctrine that teaches we are to exterminate our sins, to become happy and righteous and to obtain peace of conscience before God, in any other way than through faith alone – without works – is not in harmony with the Christian faith. For instance, all monastic life, and the doctrine of ricketing spirits from purgatory, are in conflict with faith.

19. Paul, you will observe, does not attach so much importance to the prediction of future events; for instance, the prophecies of Lichtenberger, Joachim and others in these latter times. Such predictions, though they may gratify the curiosity of men concerning the fate of kings, princes and others of prominence in the world, are unnecessary prophecies under the New Testament dispensation. They neither teach the Christian faith nor

contribute to its strength. Hence this form of prophecy may be regarded as among the least of God's gifts. More, it sometimes proceeds from the devil. But the ability to explain the Scriptures is the noblest, the best, prophetic gift. The Old Testament prophets derived their title to the name chiefly because they prophesied concerning Christ – according to Peter (Acts 4, 25 and I Pet 1, 10) – and because they led the people of their day in the way of faith by explaining – giving the sense of the divine Word. These things had much more to do with their title than the fact of their making occasional predictions concerning earthly kings and temporal affairs. In general, they did not make such predictions. But the first- mentioned form of prophecy they daily delivered, without omission. The faith whereto their prophecies conformed is perpetual.

20. It is of much significance that Paul recognizes faith as the controlling judge and rule in all matters of doctrine and prophecy. To faith everything must bow. By faith must all doctrine be judged and held. You see whom Paul would constitute doctors of the holy Scriptures – men of faith and no others. These should be the judges and deciders of all doctrines. Their decision should prevail, even though it conflict with that of the Pope, of the councils, of the whole world. Faith is and must be lord and God over all teachers. Note, then, the conduct of the Church orders who failed to recognize faith's right to judge, and assumed that prerogative themselves, accepting only power, numbers and temporal rank. But you know Pope, councils and all the world, with their doctrines, must yield authority to the most insignificant Christian with faith, even though it be but a seven-year-old child, and his decision of their doctrines and laws is to be accepted. Christ commands us to take heed that we despise not one of these little ones that believe in him. See Mt 18: 6, 10. Again, he says (Jn 6, 45), "They shall all be taught of God." Now, it is inconsistent to reject the judgment of him whom God himself teaches. Rather, let all men hearken to him.

*"Or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry."*

21. The office of the ministry is the second gift of God the apostle enumerates. With the early Christians the duties of this office were to serve poor widows and orphans, distributing to them temporal goods. Such were the duties of Stephen and his associates (Acts 6, 5), and such should be the duties of the stewards and provosts in monasteries today. Again, this was the office of those who ministered unto the prophets and apostles, the preachers and teachers: for instance, the women who followed Christ and served him with their substance; and Onesimus, Titus, Timothy and others of Paul's disciples. They made all necessary temporal provision, that the apostles and the preachers might give themselves uninterruptedly to preaching, teaching and prayer, and might be unencumbered with temporal affairs.

22. But things have changed, as we see. Now we have spiritual lords, princes, kings, who neglect, not alone to preach and to pray, but also to distribute temporal goods to the poor and the widow and the orphan. Rather, they pervert the rightful substance of these to add



to their own pomp. They neither prophesy nor serve; yet they appropriate the position and the name of minister, their purpose being to restrain and persecute true preachers and servants, and to destroy Christianity everywhere and spend its possessions to foster their own luxury.

*"Or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting."*

23. We treated of these two gifts in the epistle lesson for Christmas night. Titus 2. Teaching consists in instructing those unacquainted with faith and the Christian life; exhortation, in inciting, arousing, impelling, reproving and beseeching with all perseverance, those having knowledge of the faith. We are enjoined (2 Tim 4, 2) to be urgent, to "reprove, rebuke and exhort," that Christians may not grow weary, indolent and negligent, as too often they do, knowing already what is required of them. But prophecy must furnish the store of information for the teachers and exhorters. Scripture expositors must supply these latter. Prophesying, then, is the source of all doctrine and exhortation.

*"He that giveth, let him do it with liberality."*

24. The mention here made of giving has reference to the fund contributed into a common treasury, in charge of servants and officers, for distribution among teachers, prophets, widows, orphans and the poor generally, as before stated. This was according to an Old Testament command. Beside the annual tithes, designed for the Levites, special tithes were to be set aside every third year for the poor, the widows and the orphans. There is no New Testament law for specific giving, for this is the day of grace, wherein everyone is admonished to give freely. Paul says (Gal 6, 6), *"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."* Again (verse 10), *"Let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith."*

25. But giving is to be done with liberality – freely and gratuitously, to the honor of God alone, with no intent to secure favor, honor or profit; none shall dictate in the matter; and preference shall not be shown in giving much to the amiable and nothing to the uncongenial, as has been the case in the past in relation to the prebends and fiefs. These were distributed according to friendship and favor; for the sake of money, honor and profit. The same is true of nearly all paid services in the matter of purgatory and hell. Freely, freely, we are to give, being careful only that it be well pleasing to God and bestowed according to necessity. Paul, you will observe, frequently commends such liberality. It is rarely manifest, however. True gifts are made beyond measure, but they are unprofitable because not made with a free, liberal spirit; for instance, contributions to Monasteries and other institutions. Not being given with liberality, God does not permit these gifts to be used for Christian purposes. Given in an unchristian manner, they must, in an unchristianlike way, be wasted; as Micah says (ch. 1, 7): "Of the hire of a harlot

hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return.” Reference is to spiritual whoredom – unbelief – which never acts with liberality.

*”He that ruleth, with diligence.”*

26. ”Ruling,” or overseeing, is to be understood as relating to the common offices in the Christian Church. Paul is not speaking of temporal rulers, as princes and heads of families, but of rulers in the Church. He says (1 Tim 3, 5): ”If a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” He means those who have oversight of Church officers generally; who take care that teachers be diligent, that deacons and ministers make proper and careful distribution of the finances, and that sinners are reprov'd and disciplined; in short, who are responsible for the proper execution of all offices. Such are the duties of a bishop. From their office they receive the title of bishops – superintendents and ”Antistrites,” as Paul here terms them; that is, overseers and rulers.

27. It is the especial duty of these to be concerned about others, not about themselves; the latter care is forbidden rather than enjoined. Mt 6, 25. Diligence in the connection in which it is used in the text, is prompted by love and not by self-interest. It being the duty of a bishop to readily assume oversight, to minister and control, and all things being dependent upon him as the movements of team and wagon are dependent upon the driver, the bishop has no time for indolence, drowsiness and negligence. He must be attentive and diligent, even though all others be slothful and careless. Were he inattentive and unfaithful, the official duties of all the others would likewise be badly executed. The result would be similar to that when the driver lies asleep and allows the team to move at will. Under such circumstances, to hope for good results is useless, especially considering the dangerous roads wherein Christians must travel here, among devils who would, in every twinkling of the eye, overthrow and destroy them.

28. Why should Paul reverse the seemingly proper order? He does not mention ruling first – give it precedence. He rather assigns to prophecy the first place, making ministering, teaching, exhorting and contributing follow successively, while ruling he places last or sixth, among the common offices. Undoubtedly, the Spirit designed such order in view of future abominations that should follow the devil's establishment of tyranny and worldly dominion among Christians. This is the case at present. Dominion occupies chief place. Everything in Christendom must yield to the wantonness of tyranny. Prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, benevolence – all must give way to tyranny. Nothing may interrupt its sway; it must not yield to prophecy, teaching or any other office.

29. We must remember, however, that nothing takes precedence of the Word of God. The preaching of it transcends all other offices. Dominion is but a servant to arouse preaching to activity, like to the servant who wakes his master from sleep, or in other ways reminds

him of his office. This principle confirms Christ's words (Lk 22, 26): "He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Teachers and prophets, however, are to be obedient to rulers and continue subject to them; each Christian work and office must subserve the others. Thus is carried out Paul's doctrine in this epistle: that one should not esteem himself better than others; should not exalt himself over men, thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think; though one gift or office is more honorable than another, yet it must also subserve that other. While the office of ruler is the lowest, yet every other appointment is subject to it; on the other hand, in care and oversight the ruler serves all others. Again, the prophet, who holds the highest office, submits to the ruler, etc.

"He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

30. The six preceding obligations devolve upon the common governing powers of the Christian Church – at present known as the ecclesiastical order. Paul now proceeds to enumerate duties pertaining to every member of the Church. The six first-mentioned obligations are not, however, to be individualized to the extent of making but a single obligation devolve upon one individual. He who prophesies may also teach, admonish, serve and rule. And the same is true of each office. Let every man discover unto how many offices he is called, and conduct himself accordingly. He must not exalt himself over others, as if better than they, and create sects from the common gifts of God; he must continue in the common faith of his fellows, allowing mutual service and subjection in the gifts.

31. "Mercy" implies all good deeds or benefits conferred by neighbors upon one another, aside from the regular contributions of which we have spoken. The Hebrew word the apostle uses for "mercy" is "hesed." In Latin it is "beneficium"; in Greek, "eleemosyna"; and in common parlance, "alms." It is in this sense that Christ employs the term throughout the Gospel: "When thou doest alms" (Mt 6, 2) – that is, thy good deeds, or favors; "*I desire mercy, and not sacrifice*" (Mt 12, 27); "*He that showed mercy on him*" (Lk 10, 37). And there are other similar passages where the word "mercy" is equivalent to "*benefit*" or "*favor*"; for instance (Mt 5, 7), "*Blessed are the merciful.*"

32. Paul would say: "Let him who is himself so favored that he may confer benefits upon others, do it cheerfully and with pleasure." He declares (2 Cor 9, 7), "God loveth a cheerful giver." And he makes his meaning clear by another portion of the same verse, "not grudgingly, or of necessity." That is, the giver is not to twitter and tremble, not to be slow and tardy in his giving, nor to seek everywhere for reasons to withhold his gift. He is not to give in a way calculated to spoil the recipient's enjoyment of the favor. Nor is he to delay until the gift loses its sweetness because of the importunity required to secure it; rather he should be ready and willing. Solomon says (Prov 3, 28): "*Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee.*" "*Bis dat qui cito dat.*" He gives doubly who gives quickly. Again, "*Tarda gratia non est*

*gratia*," A tardy favor is no favor. The word "hilaris" in this connection does not imply joyful giving, but free, cheerful, willing and loving generosity, a generosity moved by slight entreaty.

## **THE WORKS OF CHRIST'S MEMBERS.**

*"Let love be without hypocrisy."*

33. How aptly the apostle points out the danger of error in each obligation, as well as the right course! Prophecy is carried beyond its proper sphere when it does not accord with the faith. This is the danger-point in all prophecy. The common error in ministering lies in the indolence manifested therein, and the constant preference for some other occupation. Again, the prevailing error in teaching and exhorting is in giving attention to something besides those obligations; for instance, deceiving men with human nonsense. The mistake in giving is that it is seldom done with liberality. Rulers are prone to seek quiet and leisure, desiring to escape being burdened with care and anxiety. Favors are seldom bestowed cheerfully and with a willing heart. So, too, pure love is a rare thing on earth. Not that love in itself is impure, but too often it is mere pretense. John implies as much in his words (1 Jn 3, 18), *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."*

34. Now, they who harbor hatred while pretending to love, or are guilty of similar gross hypocrisies, fall far short of the spirit of this teaching. But Paul refers to those of liberated conscience, who conduct themselves like true Christians, well knowing how to teach concerning Christ; but who are careless of their works, not realizing that they neglect their neighbors and fail to assist the needy and to rebuke the wicked; who are generally negligent, bringing forth none of the fruits of faith; among whom the true Word of God is choked, like seed among thorns, as Christ says. Mt 13, 22. But we have elsewhere explained the nature of pure love.

*"Abhor that which is evil."*

35. While to abhor evil is one of the chief principles of love, it is rare. The principle is too often lost sight of through hypocrisy and false love. We ignore, wink at, even make light of and are undisturbed by the evil deeds of our neighbor. We are unwilling to incur his displeasure by manifesting indignation and offering rebuke for his wickedness, or by withdrawing from his society. Especially do we hesitate when we thus must endanger body or life; for instance, when the vices of those in high life demand our censure. By such weakness on our part we merely dissimulate love. Paul requires, not only a secret abhorrence of evil, but an open manifestation of it in word and deed. True love is not influenced by the closeness of the friend, by the advantage of his favors, or by the standing of his connections; nor is it influenced by the perverseness of an enemy. It abhors evil, and censures it or flees from it, whether in father or mother, brother or sister, or in any other. Corrupt nature loves itself and does not abhor its own evil; rather, it

covers and adorns it. Anger is styled zeal; avarice is called prudence; and deception, wisdom.

*"Cleave to that which is good."*

36. The second feature of real, true love is that it cleaves to the good, even though found in the worst enemy, and though directly opposing love's desire. Love is no respecter of persons. It is not intimidated by the possible danger its expression might incur. But false love will dare, even for the sake of honor, profit or advantage, to forsake the good in its friend, particularly when danger threatens or persecution arises. Much less, then, will he whose love is false cleave to the good in an enemy and stand by and maintain it. And if it necessitated opposing his own interests, he would not support his enemy's deed, however good. Briefly, the proverb, "The world is false and full of infidelity," and that other saying, "Fair but empty words," clearly express the fact that the love of our corrupt human nature is false and hypocritical, and that where the Spirit of God dwells not, there is no real, pure love. These two principles – abhorring the evil and cleaving to the good – are clearly presented in Psalm 15, 4: "In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honoreth them that fear Jehovah" – in other words, "Who cleaves to the good, even though it be in an enemy; and hates the evil, even though in a friend." Try men by these two principles in their lending, their dealing and giving, reproof and teaching, tolerating and suffering, and their dissimulation and hypocrisy will be readily apparent.

*"In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another."*

37. Christians exhibit perfect love when, in addition to the love they manifest toward all men, they are themselves united by a peculiar bond of Christian affection. The term "tenderly affectioned" expresses the love parents have for children, and brothers for each other. Paul would say: "Christians are not simply to manifest a spirit of mutual love, but they are to conduct themselves toward one another in a tender, parental and brotherly way." Thus Paul boasts of doing in the case of the people of Thessalonica. I Thes 1, 11. Isaiah declares (ch. 66, 13) that God will so comfort the apostles: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." And Peter says (I Pet 3, 8): "*Loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded.*" The nature of the brotherly love we owe our neighbors is illustrated in the love of an affectionate mother for her child. Such love Christ has shown, and still shows, toward us. He sustains us, frail, corrupt, sinful beings that we are. So imperfect are we, we seem not Christians at all. But the love of Christ makes us his, regardless of our imperfections.

*"In honor preferring one another."*

38. Christ's love and friendship for ourselves should lead us to esteem one another precious. We should be dear to one another for the sake of the Christ within us. We may not reject any because of his imperfections. We must remember the Lord dwells in the

weak vessel also, and honors him with his presence. If Christ regards him worthy of kindness and affection, and extends to him the same privilege in himself that we enjoy, we should bow before that weak one, honoring him as the living temple of our Lord, the seat of his presence. What matters to us the insignificance of the seat the Lord chooses? If it is not too humble to be honored with his presence, why should we his servants not honor it?

*"In diligence not slothful."*

39. "Diligence" here implies every form of righteous work and business that occupies us. Paul requires us to be diligent, skillful and active. We are not to proceed as do they who undertake one thing today, and tomorrow, another, confining themselves to nothing and soon growing weary and indolent. For instance, some readily and very zealously engage in a good work, such as praying, reading, fasting, giving, serving, disciplining the body. But after two or three attempts they become indolent and fail to accomplish the undertaking. Their ardor subsides with the gratification of their curiosity. Such people become unstable and weak. So Paul enjoins to be

*"Fervent in spirit."*

40. A weak and somewhat curious disposition may undertake with fervor, being ready to accomplish everything at once; but in the very start it becomes faint and weak, and voluntarily yields. It becomes silent when opposition, disaffection and persecution must be encountered. The fervor that does not persevere in spiritual matters is carnal. Spiritual fervor increases with undertaking and effort. It is the nature of spirit not to know weariness. Spirit grows faint and weary only by idleness. Laboring, it increases in strength. Particularly does it gain in fervor through persecution and opposition. So it perseveres, and accomplishes its projects, even though the gates of hell oppose.

*"Serving the Lord."* (Adapt yourselves to the time.)

41. Some renderings read, "Serve the Lord," for in the Greek "Kairos" and "Kyrios" sound much alike. One means "Time," the other "Lord." I am undecided which is preferable. "Serve the time" – adapt yourselves to the time" – would be apt. And "Serve the Lord" would not be a bad construction. Let each choose for himself. To serve the Lord means to let all our acts be done as unto the Lord himself, in the effort to serve him, not seeking our own honor, and not neglecting our duty for fear of men or because of their favors; it means to follow the spirit of Nehemiah's declaration when the temple was being built (Neh 2, 20) – We are servants of the God of Heaven. Such was the reply of the Jews to those who attempted to hinder them. Practically, the Jews said: "We do not serve ourselves. Our service is not designed for our own honor, but for the honor of the God of Heaven." I shall, however, adhere to the rendering, "Adapt yourselves to the time." It is equivalent to saying: Direct yourselves according to the time. That is, employ it well; be seasonable, in keeping with Solomon's words (Ec 3, 3-4): "A time to break

down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh,” etc. There is a time for everything. The thought is, Exercise your privileges, confining yourself to no particular time; be able to do the duty that presents itself, as Psalm 1, 3 suggests: *“He shall be like a tree . . . that bringeth forth its fruit in its season.”*

42. This valuable and excellent doctrine militates against the self-righteous, who confine themselves to set times, to the extent of making the time conform to them and adapt itself to their convenience. They observe particular hours for praying, for eating, for drinking. Should you, in dire need of aid, approach one of them, you might perish before he would disengage himself to assist you. Note, the self-righteous man does not adapt himself to the time – does not rise to the occasion as he should. The opportunity to perform a work of love, he permits to pass. The time must be suited to him – which will never be. No opportunity to do good ever presents itself to this class, for they are so absorbed in themselves as to permit every such occasion to pass. Nor are they seasonable in things concerning themselves. They laugh when they should weep; they are gloomy when they should rejoice; they flatter when censure is due. All their efforts are untimely. It is their fortune to miss every opportunity in consequence of confining their endeavors to certain times. This is the way of the world.

*“Rejoicing in hope.”*

43. Here is an occasion, truly, when we should be timely. The ungodly rejoice when satiate with wealth, honor and ease, but are filled with gloom at a change in the weather. Their joy is untimely as well as their grief. They rejoice when they should grieve, and grieve when they should rejoice. But Christians are capable of rejoicing, not in ease and temporal advantage, but in God. They rejoice most when their worldly condition is worst. The farther earthly advantages are removed, the nearer is God with his eternal blessings. Paul enumerates joy among the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5, 22); the flesh knows not such pleasure. In Romans 14, 17, he speaks of *“joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

*“Patient in tribulation.”*

44. Throughout the Gospel we are taught that Christians must endure crosses and evil days. Hence the Gospel arms us with divine armor, and that alone. That is, it teaches us, not how to avert temporal ills and to enjoy peace, but how to endure and conquer these ills. We are not to oppose and try to avert them, but patiently to endure them until they wear themselves out upon us, and lose their power; as ocean waves, dashing against the shore, recede and vanish of their own accord. Not yielding, but perseverance, shall win here. But of this topic we have treated during the Advent season.

*“Continuing stedfastly in prayer.”*

45. Prayer has been sufficiently defined in the third epistle for Advent. Paul does not allude to babbling out of prayer-books, nor to bawling in the Church. You will never

offer true prayer from a book. To be sure, you may, by reading a prayer, learn how and what to pray, and have your devotion enkindled; but real prayer must proceed spontaneously from the heart, not in prescribed words; the language must be dictated by the fervor of the soul. Paul particularly specifies that we are to be "stedfast in prayer." In other words, we should not become remiss, even though we do not immediately receive what we ask. The chief thing in prayer is faith. Faith relies on God's promise to hear its petition. It may not receive at once what it is confident of receiving; but it waits, and though for a time there may be indications of failure, yet the petition is granted. Christ gives striking illustrations of such perseverance in the parable of the wicked judge (Lk 18), and in that of the friend's importunity (Lk 11). He everywhere teaches the necessity of faith in prayer. "*Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive,*" Mt 21, 22. And again, "*Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?*" Mt 7, 9.

*"Communicating to the necessities of the saints."*

46. The meaning of this injunction is shamefully perverted. In our necessities we daily seek the assistance of saints. Hence the numerous institutions, altars and services to these, everywhere in the world. Paul's teaching, however, is that we are to "communicate to the necessity of the saints." Since we ignore the sanctified ones of this life who need our assistance, we are well rewarded by having to go to the dead to solicit aid in our necessities. Paul means the saints on earth – the Christians. He calls them saints out of respect to the Word of God and his grace, which, in faith, renders them holy without works.

47. It would be a great shame, a blasphemy, for a Christian to deny that he is holy. It would be equivalent to denying the holiness of the blood of Christ, of the Word, the Spirit, the grace of God, and of God himself. And all these God has applied to or conferred upon the Christian to render him holy. Paul does not hesitate to call himself a saint (Eph 3, 8): "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given." And (1 Tim 5, 10) he would relieve widows who washed the feet of the saints. It is also said in Psalm 86, 2, "Preserve my soul; for I am godly [holy]." Peter, too (1 Pet 1, 16), quoting from Moses, speaks God's message, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy." The word "holy" in the Scriptures has reference only to the living. But we have had books other than the Scriptures to read. Consequently we have been led by our seducers into the humiliating wickedness of calling holy only the dead, and regarding it the highest presumption to apply the term to ourselves. At the same time we are all desirous of being called "Christians," a sublimer title than "holy"; for Christ is perfect holiness, and Christians are named after Christ – after perfect holiness. The shameful abomination known as "the exaltation of saints" is responsible for the deplorable error here. The Pope's influence has created the belief that only they are holy who are dead, or whose works have exalted them to the honor of the title. But how often is the devil exalted as a saint, and how often we regard them saints who are of hell!



48. Paul's design in mentioning *"the necessities of the saints"* is to teach and move us to do as much for Christians as we are inclined to do for the saints of heaven; to regard such ministrations as precious service, for so it is. He commends to us the real saints – those in want; who are of saintly character, though they may be forsaken, hungry, naked, imprisoned, half-dead, regarded by the world as ungodly evil-doers deserving of every form of misfortune; who, unable to help themselves, need assistance. They differ much from those saints whose help we, staring heavenward, implore. It is the poor Christians whom Christ will array on the last day, saying, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me." Mt 25, 40. Then they who so ostentatiously served the blessed of heaven must stand shamed and afraid in the presence of those whom in this life they scorned to respect as they should. Nor will the saints whom they bound themselves to serve, and whom they worshiped, avail them anything.

*"Given to hospitality."*

49. Now, Paul specifies concerning the "necessities of the saints" and names the treatment to be accorded them. Not only in word are we to remember them, but in deed, extending hospitality as their necessities demand. "Hospitality" stands for every form of physical aid when occasion calls for it – feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked. In the early days of the Gospel, the apostles and disciples did not sit in palaces, cloisters, institutions, and torture the people with edicts and commands as do the idolatrous bishops today. Pilgrim-like, they went about the country, having no house nor home, no kitchen nor cellar, no particular abiding-place. It was necessary that everywhere hospitality be extended the saints, and service rendered them, that the Gospel might be preached. This was as essential as giving assistance in their distresses and sufferings.

*"Bless them that persecute you."*

50. Incidental to the subject of the saints' necessities, the apostle reminds us we are to conduct ourselves in a Christian manner toward our persecutors, who, to great extent, are to blame for the distresses of the saints. It is well to observe here that we are not merely advised, but commanded, to love our enemies, to do them good and to speak well of them; such conduct is the fruit of the Spirit. We must not believe what we have heretofore been taught – that the admonition comes only to the perfect, and that they are merely counseled to bless their persecutors. Christ teaches (Mt 5, 44) that all Christians are commanded so to do. And to "bless" our persecutors means to desire for them only good in body and soul. For instance, if an enemy detracts from our honor, we should respond, *"God honor you and keep you from disgrace."* Or if one infringe upon our rights, we ought to say, "May God bless and prosper you." On this wise should we do.

*"Bless, and curse not."*

51. This is to be our attitude toward mankind generally, whether persecutors or otherwise. The meaning is: "Not only bless your persecutors, but live without curses for any, with blessings for all; wishing no one evil, but everyone only good." For we are children of blessing; as Peter says: "Hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing." I Pet 3, 9. In our blessing, all the world is blessed – through Christ. "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen 22, 18. It is inconsistent for a Christian to curse even his most bitter enemy and an evil-doer; for he is commanded to bear upon his lips the Gospel. The dove did not bring to Noah in the ark a poisonous branch or a thistle sprig; she brought an olive-leaf in her mouth. Gen 8, 11. The Gospel likewise is simply a gracious, blessed, glad and healing word. It brings only blessing and grace to the whole world. No curse, but pure blessing, goes with the Gospel. The Christian's lips, then, must be lips of blessing, not of cursing. If they curse, they are not the lips of a Christian.

52. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between cursing and censuring or reproving. Reproof and punishment greatly differ from cursing and malediction. To curse means to invoke evil, while censuring carries the thought of displeasure at existing evil, and an effort to remove it. In fact, cursing and censuring are opposed. Cursing invokes evil and misfortune; censure aims to remove them. Christ himself censured, or reproved. He called the Jews a generation of vipers, children of the devil, hypocrites, blind dolts, liars, and so on. He did not curse them to perpetuate their evils; rather he desired the evils removed. Paul does similarly. He says of the sorcerer that he is a child of the devil and full of subtilty. Acts 13, 10. Again, the Spirit reproves the world of sin. Jn 16, 8.

53. But the strong argument is here urged that the saints of the Scriptures not only censured, but cursed. Jacob, the patriarch, cursed his sons Reuben, Simeon and Levi. Gen 49, 7. A great part of the Law of Moses is made up of curses, especially Deut 28, 15. Open cursing is commanded to be pronounced by the people, on Mount Ebal. Deut 27, 13. How much cursing we find in the Psalms, particularly Psalm 109. Again, how David cursed Joab, captain of his host! 2 Sam 3, 29. How bitterly Peter curses Simon (Acts 8, 20): "Thy silver perish with thee." Paul curses the seducers of the Galatians (Gal 5, 12), "I would they were even cut off." And he says (I Cor 16, 22), "If any man loveth not the Lord, let him be anathema." Christ cursed the innocent fig-tree. Mt 21, 19. And Elisha cursed the children of Bethel. 2 Kings 2, 24. What shall we say to these things?

54. I answer: We must distinguish between love and faith. Love must not curse; it must always bless. But faith has power to curse. Faith makes us children of God, and is to us in God's place. Love makes us servants of men, and occupies the place of a servant. Without the Spirit's direction, no one can rightly understand and imitate such examples of cursing. Cursing stands opposed to cursing – the curses of God to the curses of the devil. When the devil, through his followers, resists, destroys, obstructs, the Word of God – the channel of the blessing – the blessing is impeded, and in God's sight a curse rests upon

the blessing. Then it is the office of faith to come out with a curse, desiring the removal of the obstruction that God's blessing may be unhindered.

55. Were one, with imprecation, to invoke God to root out and destroy popery – the order of priests, monks and nuns, together with the cloisters and other institutions, the whole world might well say, Amen. For these the devil's devices curse, condemn and impede everywhere God's Word and his blessing. These things are evils so pernicious, so diabolical, they do not merit our love. The more we serve the ecclesiasts and the more we yield to them, the more obdurate they become. They rant and rage against the Word of God and the Spirit, against faith and love. Such conduct Christ calls blasphemy – sin – against the Holy Spirit – unpardonable sin. Mt. 12, 31. And John says (I Jn. 5, 16), "There is a sin unto death; not concerning this do I say that he should make request." With the ecclesiasts all is lost. They will not accept any love or assistance which does not leave them in their wickedness, does not strengthen and help – even honor and exalt – them in it. Any effort you may make otherwise will but cause them to rage against the Holy Spirit, to blaspheme and curse your teaching, declaring – "It proceeds not from love and fidelity to God, but from the hate, the malice, of the devil. It is not the Word of God, but falsehood. It is the devil's heresy and error."

56. In fact, cursing which contributes only to the service of God is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is enjoined in the first commandment, and is independent of and superior to love. Until God commands us to do a certain good work or obligation so to do. His will transcends all the good works to manifest our love toward our neighbor, we are under no we can do, all the love we can show our neighbor. Even if I could save the entire world in a single day and it were not God's will I should, I would have no right to do it. Therefore, I should not bless, should not perform a good work, should not manifest my love to any, unless it be consistent with the will and command of God. The measure of our love to our neighbors is the Word of God. Likewise, by the first commandment all other commandments are to be measured. We might, in direct violation of the commandments of the second table, were it consistent with God's will and promotive of his honor, obey the first commandment in killing, robbing, taking captive women and children and disobeying father and mother, as did the children of Israel in the case of their heathen enemies. Likewise the Holy Spirit is able to, and does at times, perform works seemingly opposed to all the commandments of God. While apparently there is violation in some respects, it is in reality only of the commandments of the second table, concerning our neighbor. The Spirit's works are in conformity with the first three commandments of the first table, relating to God. Therefore, if you first become a Peter, a Paul, a Jacob, a David, an Elisha, you too may curse in God's name, and with exalted merit in his sight.

"Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep."

57. There may be a direct connection between these two commands and the injunction about "communicating to the necessities of the saints" upon which Paul has been

expatiating, teaching how we are to treat our persecutors, who are largely to blame for the "necessities" of Christians. Yet I am inclined to think he speaks here in an unrelated way, of our duty to make ourselves agreeable to all men, to adapt ourselves to their circumstances, whether good or ill, whether or no they are in want. As common servants, we should minister to mankind in their every condition, that we may persuade them to accept the Gospel. Paul speaks further on this point.

58. Now, if a fellow-man have reason to rejoice, it is not for us to put on a stern countenance, as do the hypocrites, who assume to be somewhat peculiar. Their unnatural seriousness is meant to be indicative of their unrivaled wisdom and holiness, and of the fact that men who rejoice instead of wearing, as they do, a stern look, are fools and sinners. But no, we are to participate in the joy of our fellow-man when that joy is not inconsistent with the will of God. For instance, we should rejoice with the father who joys in the piety and sweetness of his wife, in her health and fruitfulness, and in the obedience and intelligence of his children; and when he is as well off as we are so far as soul, body and character, family and property, are concerned. These are gifts of God. According to Paul (Acts 14, 17), they are given that God may fill our hearts "with food and gladness." Though many such gifts and pleasures are improperly used, they are nevertheless the gifts of God and not to be rejected with a gloomy face as if we dare not, or should not, enjoy them. On the other hand, we ought to weep with our fellow-man when he is in sad circumstances, as we would weep over our own unhappy condition. We read (2 Sam 1, 17; 3, 33) that David lamented for Saul, Jonathan and Abner, and (Phil 2, 27) that Paul was filled with sorrow over the illness of Epaphroditus and grieved as if the affliction were his own.

*"Be of the same mind one toward another."*

59. The apostle has previously (verse 10) spoken concerning unity of mind in relation to God-ordained spiritual gifts, counseling that everyone should be content as to the offices and gifts of his fellows. Now Paul speaks of the temporal affairs of men, teaching likewise mutual appreciation of one another's calling and character, offices and works, and that none is to esteem himself better than another because of these. The shoemaker's apprentice has the same Christ with the prince or the king; the woman, the same Christ the man has. While there are various occupations and external distinctions among men, there is but one faith and one Spirit.

60. But this doctrine of Paul has long been dishonored. Princes, lords, nobles, the rich and the powerful, reflect themselves in themselves, thinking they are the only men on earth. Even among their own ranks, one aspires to be more exalted, more noble and upright, than another. Their notions and opinions are almost as diverse as the clouds of heaven. They are not of the same mind concerning external distinctions. One does not esteem another's condition and occupation as significant and as honorable as his own. The individual sentiment apparently is: "My station is the best; all others are revolting." The

clumsy, booted peasant enters the strife. The baker aspires to be better than the barber; the shoemaker, than the bath-keeper. Should one happen to be illegitimately born, he is not eligible to a trade, though he even be holy. Certificates of legitimate birth must be produced, and such is the complex state of society, there are as many beliefs as masters and servants. How can there be unity of mind concerning spiritual offices and blessings with people so at variance upon trivial, contemptible worldly matters? True, there must be the various earthly stations, characters and employments; but it is heathenish, unchristian and worldly for one to entertain the absurd idea that God regards a certain individual a better Christian than another upon the contemptible grounds of his temporal station, and not to perceive that in God's sight these conditions make no inner difference.

61. Indeed, it is not only unchristian, but effeminate and childish, to hold such a view. A woman will win distinction for herself by handling the spindle or the needle more deftly than another, or by adjusting her bonnet more becomingly than her neighbor can; in fact, she may secure prominence by things even more insignificant. To say the least, no woman thinks herself less a woman than any other. The same is true of children; each is best satisfied with its own bread and butter, and thinks its own toy the prettiest; if it does not, it will cry until it gets its prettiest. And so it is with the world: one has more power, another is a better Christian, another is more illustrious; one has more learning, another is more respectable; one is of this lineage, another that. These distinctions are the source of hatred, murder and every form of evil, so tenaciously does each individual adhere to his own notions. Yet, despite their separate and dissimilar opinions, men call themselves Christians.

”Set not your mind on high things.”

62. Here Paul makes clear the preceding injunction. He would restrain men from their unholy conceits. As before stated, every man is best pleased with his own ideas. Hence foolishness pervades the land. One, seeing another honored above himself, is restlessly ambitious to emulate that other. But he acts contrary to both teachings of Paul: Comparing himself to his inferiors or to his equals, he thinks he is far above them, and his own station most honorable. Comparing himself with his superiors, he sees his pretended rank fail; hence he strives to rival them, devoting all his energies to attain the enviable position. Clinging to external distinctions, his changing notions and unstable heart impel him to such ambition and render him dissatisfied with the Christ whom all men possess alike. But what does Paul teach? Not so. He says, ”Set not your mind on what the world values.” His meaning is: ”Distinctions truly must there be in this life – one thing high, another low. Everything cannot be gold, nor can all things be straw. Nevertheless, among men there should be unity of mind in this relation.” God treats men alike. He gives his Word and his Spirit to the lowly as well as to the high. Paul does not use the little word ”mind” undesignedly. ”High things” have their place and they are not pernicious. But to ”mind” them, to be absorbed in them with the whole heart, to be puffed

up with conceit because of our relation to them, enjoying them to the disadvantage of the less favored – this is heathenish.

*”But condescend to things that are lowly.”*

63. In other words: Despise not lowly stations and characters. Say not, they must either be exalted or removed. God uses them; indeed, the world cannot dispense with them. Where would the wealthy and powerful be if there were no poor and humble? As the feet support the body, so the low support the high. The higher class, then, should conduct themselves toward the lowly as the body holds itself with relation to the feet; not ”minding,” or regarding, their lofty station, but conforming to and recognizing with favor the station of the lowly. Legal equality is here made a figure of spiritual things – concerning the aspirations of the heart. Christ conducted himself with humility. He did not deny his own exaltation, but neither was he haughty toward us by reason of it. He did not despise us, but stooped to our wretched condition and raised us by means of his own exalted position.

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