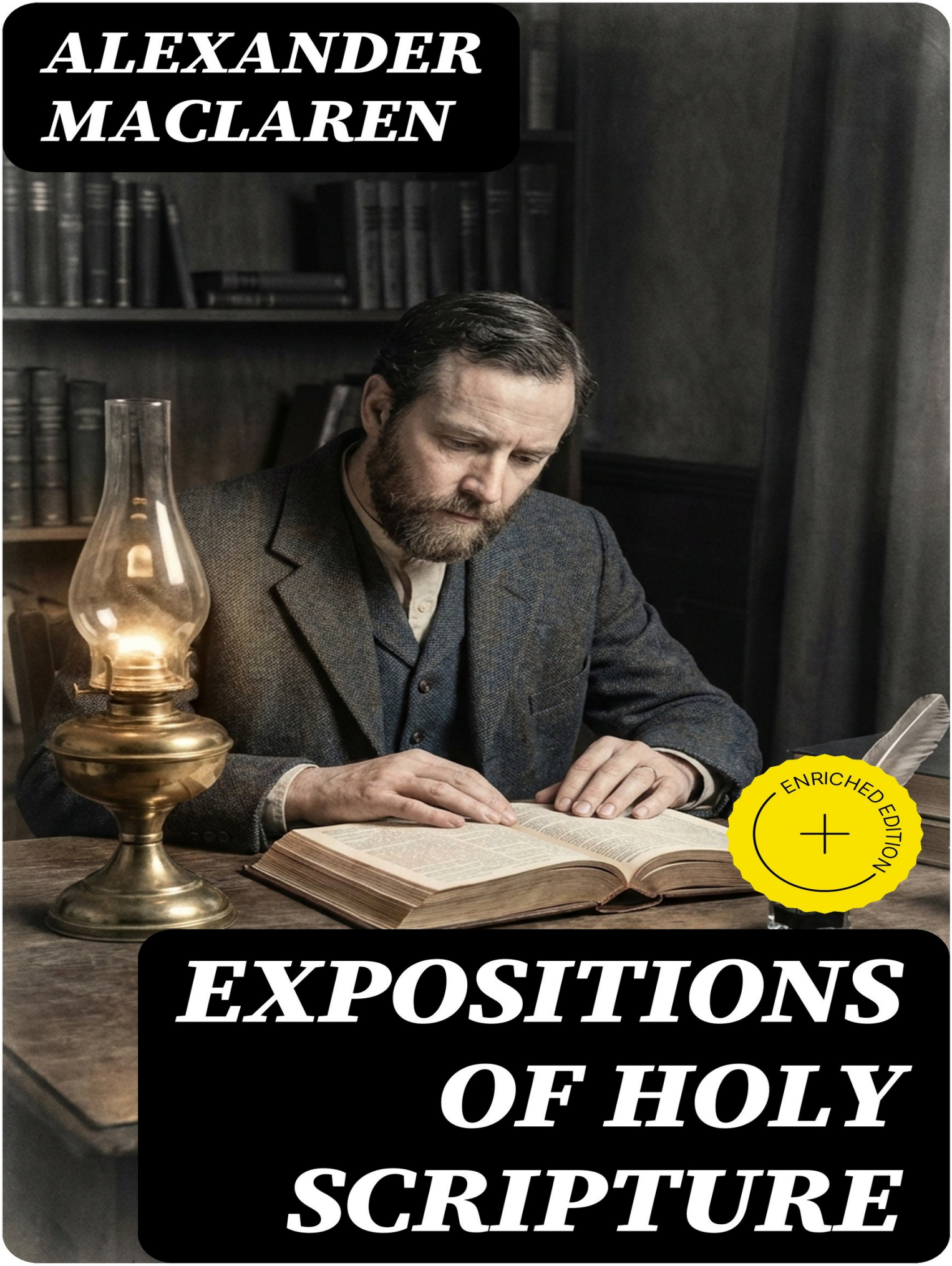
ALEXANDER MACLAREN



EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Alexander Maclaren

Expositions of Holy Scripture

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Miles Fenner

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Introduction

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This single-author collection, Expositions of Holy Scripture, presents Alexander Maclaren’s sustained engagements with selected New Testament letters. Drawn from his multi-volume expository work, the present contents concentrate on II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, and First Timothy. The pieces proceed passage by passage and are titled to indicate their doctrinal and practical focus. The aim is neither to produce an academic commentary nor a miscellany of detached meditations, but to read the sacred text closely and press its claims upon conscience. The selection preserves Maclaren’s method of consecutive exposition while enabling readers to meet the distinctive burdens of each epistle.

These writings are sermons and homilies shaped for public hearing and later revised for the page. They may also be read as expository essays, since they argue, define, and apply rather than narrate. There are no novels or dramatic pieces here, nor private letters or diaries, but the tone remains personal, pastoral, and urgent. Each exposition is anchored in a particular passage, advances an interpretive thesis, and unfolds practical inferences for faith and conduct. Their titles—ranging from themes of hope, holiness, generosity, and perseverance—signal the movement from text to truth to life that characterizes Maclaren’s preaching craft.

The unifying themes are those of apostolic Christianity: the grace of God in Christ, the call to holiness, the life of the

Spirit, and the formation of a community marked by love and hope. In the II Corinthians group, suffering and strength, loss and enrichment, sorrow and repentance are set in fruitful contrast. Galatians develops liberty through faith and the ethical fruit that follows. Across Philippians and Colossians, joy, unity, and the supremacy of Christ take center stage. The Thessalonian expositions nurture steadfastness under eschatological hope, while First Timothy addresses ordered worship, witness, and the pursuit of the truly life-giving.

Maclaren’s stylistic signature is clarity joined to urgency. He moves with disciplined progression from textual observation to doctrinal synthesis and then to pointed application. Technical questions are handled sparingly and only to illuminate the flow of the passage; he prefers transparent language over specialist debate. Antithesis and parallelism sharpen moral choices, and a steady Christocentric focus governs argument and appeal. The sermons are rich in analysis rather than anecdote, and their images arise from Scripture’s own metaphors. The result is expository preaching that is accessible without being shallow, warm without sentimentality, and exact without pedantry.

Readers will find, within II Corinthians, meditations on ministry, consolation, generous giving, and the paradox of strength in weakness. Galatians turns to the contrast between external badges and living faith, the work of the Spirit, and the communal task of bearing burdens. Philippians foregrounds prayer, unity, perseverance, and the pattern of Christ’s self-giving. Colossians asserts the sufficiency of Christ and the ethical consequences of being raised with him. The Thessalonian pieces encourage alertness, mutual edification, and comfort in bereavement. First Timothy concentrates on sound teaching, prayerful life,

disciplined service, and conduct befitting those who seek what endures.

The ongoing significance of these expositions lies in their union of reverent interpretation and practical counsel. Preachers will recognize a model of homiletic architecture: clear aims, textual fidelity, doctrinal proportion, and concrete appeal. Devotional readers gain guidance for prayer and discipleship fitted to the contours of each epistle. Students of nineteenth-century British preaching can observe how a leading Baptist minister sustained close engagement with Scripture while avoiding controversy for its own sake. The pieces neither chase novelty nor flatten difficulty; they patiently unfold the text’s argument and summon readers to obedience, hope, and charity.

This edition offers essential sections of Expositions of Holy Scripture in a compact compass, preserving the sequence and titles by which Maclaren organized his work. It is suited to reading straight through alongside the biblical text or to selective consultation by theme. The unifying thread is a steady insistence that doctrine and duty belong together, and that the gospel forms character and community. Here the voice is pastoral rather than academic, confident that Scripture, carefully opened, carries its own persuasions. Readers are invited to thoughtful, prayerful engagement that aims not merely at information, but at transformed living.

Historical Context

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Alexander Maclaren (1826–1910), a Scottish-born Baptist minister, preached for decades in industrial Manchester (1858–1903), shaping the expository sermons later gathered as Expositions of Holy Scripture. The city's cotton mills, slums, and civic philanthropy framed his readings of Paul, especially in II Corinthians, with its paradox of power in weakness and appeals for generosity. During the Lancashire Cotton Famine (1861–65), churches organized relief for unemployed workers, and themes like "Giving and Asking," "All Grace Abounding," and "God's Unspeakable Gift" resonated with a culture balancing charity and self-help. Maclaren's pastoral focus reflected the urban congregation's anxieties, sorrows, and aspirations under rapid industrial change.

Victorian Nonconformity prized earnest preaching and moral seriousness, and Maclaren stood alongside figures like Charles H. Spurgeon in shaping evangelical homiletics. The Moody and Sankey revival campaigns in Britain (1873–75) reinforced emphases on conversion, assurance, and practical holiness that echo through headings such as "Hope and Holiness," "Strength in Weakness," and "A Militant Message." Simultaneously, the emerging "Nonconformist conscience" linked personal piety to public reform, encouraging believers to view spiritual warfare as social engagement. Maclaren's expositions cultivated interior devotion while urging disciplined conduct, presenting Pauline imperatives as resources for temperance work,

missionary zeal, and the everyday resilience required by urban congregants.

The late nineteenth century’s intellectual upheavals shaped the reception of these sermons. Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859) and German higher criticism, represented by scholars such as Julius Wellhausen, unsettled traditional readings of Scripture and questioned apostolic authorship in places. Maclaren, though well-read, avoided polemics and modeled a pastoral hermeneutic that privileged the text’s moral and Christological center—captured in titles like “Simplicity Towards Christ.” By stressing experiential faith, ethical transformation, and clarity of exposition, he offered an alternative to both skepticism and speculative theology. His approach reassured congregations seeking steady guidance amid debates on inspiration, miracles, and historical reconstructions.

Expanding literacy after the Elementary Education Act of 1870, together with cheaper printing and vigorous religious presses, widened the audience for expository literature. Maclaren’s carefully crafted sermons, first heard in Manchester and elsewhere, circulated as readable essays for laypeople, teachers, and ministers. The boom in Sunday schools and midweek Bible classes created demand for practical treatments of stewardship and service, reflected in pieces like “Doing Good to All” and “Gifts Given, Seed Sown.” British missionary societies—Baptist, London, and Church Missionary among them—made generosity a hallmark of piety, and Maclaren’s Pauline appeals for cheerful giving paralleled nationwide subscription drives and missionary deputations.

In the decades after the Oxford Movement (from 1833), English religious life wrestled with ritualism and authority. Among Nonconformists, debates about state churches and

sacramentalism sharpened interest in Paul’s argument in Galatians for justification by faith. Maclaren’s treatments —“What Makes a Christian: Circumcision or Faith?” and “The Owner’s Brand”—aligned with Free Church emphases on conscience, conversion, and the primacy of the gospel over external badges. Yet he framed liberty as life in the Spirit, not license, moving naturally to themes like “Walk in the Spirit” and “The Fruit of the Spirit.” Thus doctrinal polemic yielded to pastoral formation within a culture of contested ecclesial identities.

Maclaren’s readings of Philippians drew power from contemporary discussions of citizenship, loyalty, and suffering during Britain’s imperial zenith and crises such as the South African War (1899–1902). Titles like “A Prisoner’s Triumph,” “Citizens of Heaven,” and “A Plea for Unity” translated Paul’s prison epistle into guidance for believers navigating patriotic fervor, dissent, and denominational rivalry. Free Church councils (founded 1896) encouraged cooperative witness, and Maclaren’s exhortations toward unity without uniformity found a ready audience. By holding together joy, humility, and sacrificial service, his preaching addressed social strains in booming cities while relativizing national glory before the lordship of Christ.

Colossians and Thessalonians offered Maclaren means to answer both speculative mysticism and fevered apocalypticism. Late Victorian fascination with spiritualism and Theosophy (organized in 1875) made Colossians’ Christological supremacy—reflected in “All Power” and “Risen with Christ”—pastorally relevant as a corrective to syncretic curiosities. At the same time, prophetic conferences and popular premillennial movements encouraged date-setting and anxiety. Maclaren’s essays on Thessalonians—“God’s Trumpet,” “The Work and Armour of the Children of the Day,” and “Worthy of Your Calling”—

favored sober watchfulness and ethical readiness over prediction. He redirected hope toward steadfast labor, mutual edification, and peace rooted in the Lord’s promised return.

The Pastoral Epistles, especially First Timothy, resonated as Nonconformist churches professionalized ministry and expanded urban outreach. With the Baptist Union’s late-nineteenth-century consolidation and growing training colleges, questions of order, teaching, and godliness pressed upon congregations. Maclaren’s pieces—“Where and How to Pray,” “Spiritual Athletics,” and “The Conduct That Secures the Real Life”—combined doctrinal fidelity with practical discipline, echoing contemporary “muscular Christianity” while remaining warmly evangelical. Issued in collected form near his retirement and death (1903–1910), these expositions were welcomed across denominational lines. They offered a steady, text-centered piety to readers negotiating modernity’s opportunities and trials without surrendering apostolic convictions.

Synopsis (Selection)

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Expositions of Holy Scripture (Collection Overview)

Across the collection, Maclaren blends close textual reading with crisp structure and memorable contrasts to translate Pauline theology into devotional and ethical counsel.

Recurring motifs include Christ-centered grace empowering effort, joy amid suffering, unity through humility, and the Spirit's fruit as the visible brand of Christian belonging.

II Corinthians

These expositions trace how grace reshapes weakness, sorrow, and generosity, moving from godly repentance to openhanded giving and the paradox of strength in weakness.

In a warm yet incisive pastoral voice, Maclaren urges single-hearted devotion and self-giving love, using vivid antitheses (rich yet poor, willing yet not doing) to turn doctrine into lived holiness.

Galatians

Maclaren champions freedom in Christ over the bondage of law, clarifying justification by faith, adoption, and Spirit-led life that bears tangible fruit.

With urgent clarity, he unmasks false enchantments and re-roots identity in belonging to Christ, turning controversy into constructive guidance for mutual care and everyday goodness.

Philippians

He reads Philippians as joy under pressure, unfolding Christ’s descent and exaltation, partnership in the gospel, and sanctification through imitation and grace-empowered effort.

Affectionate yet exacting, these messages call for unity, disciplined thought, generous reciprocity, and perseverance that counts all loss as gain in knowing Christ.

Colossians

These addresses exalt the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ, from gospel hope and shared inheritance to seeking things above and growing in maturity.

Balancing doctrinal sweep with practical renovation without and within, Maclaren frames progress as gratitude-fueled endeavor empowered by divine power and guarded against error.

I Thessalonians

Maclaren centers on faith, love, and hope embodied in work, holiness, and mutual upbuilding amid affliction.

He weds watchful expectation of Christ’s return to patient attention to small duties, shaping calm, industrious piety sustained by constant prayer.

II Thessalonians

These sermons steady anxious believers with the promise of sharing Christ’s glory and the call to walk worthily through trials.

They balance consolation with correction, directing hearts toward divine peace, durable hope, and orderly perseverance.

I Timothy

Addressed to a young pastor, these homilies distill the gospel’s aim—love from a pure heart—into counsel on doctrine, prayer, witness, and disciplined godliness.

In brisk, practical strokes, Maclaren contrasts counterfeit religion with the real life, rallying leaders to courageous confession, public integrity, and strenuous spiritual training.

Expositions of Holy Scripture

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II. CORINTHIANS

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HOPE AND HOLINESS

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> Having therefore these promises… let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.'—2 Cor. vii. 1.

It is often made a charge against professing Christians that their religion has very little to do with common morality. The taunt has sharpened multitudes of gibes and been echoed in all sorts of tones: it is very often too true and perfectly just, but if ever it is, let it be distinctly understood that it is not so because of Christian men's religion but in spite of it. Their bitterest enemy does not condemn them half so emphatically as their own religion does: the sharpest censure of others is not so sharp as the rebukes of the New Testament. If there is one thing which it insists upon more than another, it is that religion without morality is nothing—that the one test to which, after all, every man must submit is, what sort of character has he and how has he behaved—is he pure or foul? All high-flown pretension, all fervid emotion has at last to face the question which little children ask, 'Was he a good man?'

The Apostle has been speaking about very high and mystical truths, about all Christians being the temple of God, about God dwelling in men, about men and women being His sons and daughters; these are the very truths on which so often fervid imaginations have built up a mystical piety that had little to do with the common rules of right and wrong. But Paul keeps true to the intensely practical purpose of his preaching and brings his heroes down to the

prosaic earth with the homely common sense of this far-reaching exhortation, which he gives as the fitting conclusion for such celestial visions.

I. A Christian life should be a life of constant self-purifying.

This epistle is addressed to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the *saints* which are in all Achaia.

Looking out over that wide region, Paul saw scattered over godless masses a little dispersed company to each of whom the sacred name of Saint applied. They had been deeply stained with the vices of their age and place, and after a black list of criminals he had had to say to them 'such were some of you,' and he lays his finger on the miracle that had changed them and hesitates not to say of them all, 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.'

The first thing, then, that every Christian has is a cleansing which accompanies forgiveness, and however his garment may have been 'spotted by the flesh,' it is 'washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.' Strange cleansing by which black stains melt out of garments plunged in red blood! With the cleansing of forgiveness and justification comes, wherever they come, the gift of the Holy Spirit—a new life springing up within the old life, and untouched by any contact with its evils. These gifts belong universally to the initial stage of the Christian life and require for their possession only the receptiveness of faith. They admit of no co-operation of human effort, and to possess them men have only to 'take the things that are freely given to them of God.' But of the subsequent stages of the Christian life, the laborious and constant effort to develop and apply that free gift is as essential as, in the

earliest stage, it is worse than useless. The gift received has to be wrought into the very substance of the soul, and to be wrought out in all the endless varieties of life and conduct. Christians are cleansed to begin with, but they have still daily to cleanse themselves: the leaven is hid in the three measures of meal, but ''tis a life-long task till the lump be leavened,' and no man, even though he has the life that was in Jesus within him, will grow up 'into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' unless, by patient and persistent effort, he is ever pressing on to 'the things that are before' and daily striving to draw nearer to the prize of his high calling. We are cleansed, but we have still to cleanse ourselves.

Yet another paradox attaches to the Christian life, inasmuch as God cleanses us, but we have to cleanse ourselves. The great truth that the spirit of God in a man is the fontal source of all his goodness, and that Christ's righteousness is given to us, is no pillow on which to rest an idle head, but should rather be a trumpet-call to effort which is thereby made certain of success. If we were left to the task of self-purifying by our own efforts we might well fling it up as impossible. It is as easy for a man to lift himself from the ground by gripping his own shoulders as it is for us to rise to greater heights of moral conduct by our own efforts; but if we can believe that God gives the impulse after purity, and the vision of what purity is, and imparts the power of attaining it, strengthening at once our dim sight and stirring our feeble desires and energising our crippled limbs, then we can 'run with patience the race that is set before us.'

We must note the thoroughness of the cleansing which the Apostle here enjoins. What is to be got rid of is not this or that defect or vice, but '*all* filthiness of flesh and spirit.' The former, of course, refers primarily to sins of impurity

which in the eyes of the Greeks of Corinth were scarcely sins at all, and the latter to a state of mind when fancy, imagination, and memory were enlisted in the service of evil. Both are rampant in our day as they were in Corinth. Much modern literature and the new gospel of 'Art for Art's sake' minister to both, and every man carries in himself inclinations to either. It is no partial cleansing with which Paul would have us to be satisfied: '*all*' filthiness is to be cast out. Like careful housewives who are never content to cease their scrubbing while a speck remains upon furniture, Christian men are to regard their work as unfinished as long as the least trace of the unclean thing remains in their flesh or in their spirit. The ideal may be far from being realised at any moment, but it is at the peril of the whole sincerity and peacefulness of their lives if they, in the smallest degree, lower the perfection of their ideal in deference to the imperfection of their realisation of it.

It must be abundantly clear from our own experience that any such cleansing is a very long process. No character is made, whether it be good or bad, but by a slow building up: no man becomes most wicked all at once, and no man is sanctified by a wish or at a jump. As long as men are in a world so abounding with temptation, 'he that is washed' will need daily to 'wash his feet' that have been stained in the foul ways of life, if he is to be 'clean every whit.'

As long as the spirit is imprisoned in the body and has it for its instrument there will be need for much effort at purifying. We must be content to overcome one foe at a time, and however strong may be the pilgrim's spirit in us, we must be content to take one step at a time, and to advance by very slow degrees. Nor is it to be forgotten that as we get nearer what we ought to be, we should be more conscious of the things in which we are not what we ought to be. The nearer we get to Jesus Christ, the more will our

consciences be enlightened as to the particulars in which we are still distant from Him. A speck on a polished shield will show plain that would never have been seen on a rusty one. The saint who is nearest God will think more of his sins than the man who is furthest from him. So new work of purifying will open before us as we grow more pure, and this will last as long as life itself.

II. The Christian life is to be not merely a continual getting rid of evil, but a continual becoming good.

Paul here draws a distinction between cleansing ourselves from filthiness and perfecting holiness, and these two, though closely connected and capable of being regarded as being but the positive and negative sides of one process, are in reality different, though in practice the former is never achieved without the latter, nor the latter accomplished without the former. Holiness is more than purity; it is consecration. That is holy which is devoted to God, and a saint is one whose daily effort is to devote his whole self, in all his faculties and nature, thoughts, heart, and will, more and more, to God, and to receive into himself more and more of God.

The purifying which Paul has been enjoining will only be successful in the measure of our consecration, and the consecration will only be genuine in the measure of our purifying. Herein lies the broad and blessed distinction between the world's morality and Christian ethics. The former fails just because it lacks the attitude towards a Person who is the very foundation of Christian morality, and changes a hard and impossible law into love. There is no more futile waste of breath than that of teachers of morality who have no message but Be good! Be good! and no motive by which to urge it but the pleasures of virtue and the disadvantages of vice, but when the vagueness of the abstract thought of goodness solidifies into a living Person

and that Person makes his appeal first to our hearts and bids us love him, and then opens before us the unstained light of his own character and beseeches us to be like him, the repellent becomes attractive: the impossible becomes possible, and 'if ye love Me keep My commandments' becomes a constraining power and a victorious impulse in our lives.

III. The Christian life of purifying and consecration is to be animated by hope and fear.

The Apostle seems to connect hope more immediately with the cleansing, and holiness with the fear of God, but probably both hope and fear are in his mind as the double foundation on which both purity and consecration are to rest, or the double emotion which is to produce them both. These promises refer directly to the immediately preceding words, 'I will be a Father unto you and ye shall be My sons and daughters,' in which all the blessings which God can give or men can receive are fused together in one lustrous and all-comprehensive whole. So all the great truths of the Gospel and all the blessed emotions of sonship which can spring up in a human heart are intended to find their practical result in holy and pure living. For this end God has spoken to us out of the thick darkness; for this end Christ has come into our darkness; for this end He has lived; for this end He died; for this end He rose again; for this end He sends His Spirit and administers the providence of the world. The purpose of all the Divine activity as regards us men is not merely to make us happy, but to make us happy in order that we may be good. He whom what he calls his religion has only saved from the wrath of God and the fear of hell has not learned the alphabet of religion. Unless God's promises evoke men's goodness it will be of little avail that they seem to quicken their hope. Joyful confidence in our sonship is only warranted in the measure in which we are

preparedness. The Work and Armour of the Children of the Day and Waking and Sleeping present identity as temporal alignment—daylight ethics lived before dawn. Everlasting Consolation and Good Hope and The Lord of Peace and the Peace of the Lord fold expectation into stability, so that perseverance, mutual support, and honest labor become the recognizable horizon of hope, not timetables or withdrawal.

Philippians integrates future orientation with strenuous present effort. The Race and the Goal and The Soul’s Perfection portray sanctification as pursuit energized by a promised consummation, while Citizens of Heaven locates allegiance beyond imperial frameworks without fostering neglect of earthly obligations. Farewell Words casts legacy as transferable resilience rather than nostalgia. Saving Knowledge and Laid Hold Of and Laying Hold depict assurance dynamically, where being grasped by Christ catalyzes ongoing exertion. Hope operates as traction, guiding priorities, stabilizing affection, and filtering ambition, so that progress becomes expectancy embodied rather than an escape from limits.

Colossians and First Timothy render hope institutional and ethical. The Gospel-Hope and All Power tie inaugurated sovereignty to daily patience and endurance, insisting that the risen status of believers reshapes speech, gratitude, and forgiveness. Christian Progress and Risen with Christ ground reform of habits in resurrection proximity, making future fullness a present pattern. The End of the Commandment and The Gospel of the Glory of the Happy God relocate moral aim within divine blessedness, so that teaching, prayer, and generosity arise from joy’s horizon. Hope becomes a settled climate for doctrine, diligence, and tenderness.

Question 4

What stylistic patterns distinguish Maclaren's doctrinal exposition from his practical exhortations?

Maclaren's doctrinal expositions often proceed by unveiling a center and radiating implications, whereas his practical exhortations arrange steps and safeguards. In The Descent of the Word and The Son Sent, he situates Christ's initiative as the interpretive core, then traces concentric claims for creation, redemption, and worship. The Gospel in Small and The Gospel of the Glory of the Happy God compress breadth into essence. By contrast, Work Out Your Own Salvation, How to Obey an Impossible Injunction, and The Rule of the Road map sequences, offering ordered counsel, danger warnings, and plausible countertendencies.

When exhorting, Maclaren frequently personalizes argument through exemplars and named relationships, while doctrinal sections maintain a wider horizon. Paul and Timothy and Paul and Epaphroditus advance character formation by narrating partnership virtues—courage, reliability, self-forgetfulness—rooted in shared labor. Names in the Book of Life and Not Yours But You translate theology of belonging into interpersonal obligations. Conversely, in The Owner's Brand within Galatians, identity is abstracted into marks before being re-applied. This oscillation sustains relevance: persons embody principles, and principles prevent hero-worship, keeping communities anchored without collapsing into personality-driven norms.

A notable stylistic continuity is his disciplined imagery, which shifts register to match aim. Doctrinal messages favor cosmic and legal metaphors—descent, ascent, inheritance, adoption—creating altitude for contemplation in The Ascent

of Jesus, Thankful for Inheritance, and A Test Case. Practical addresses deploy kinetic figures—athletics, soldiery, roadcraft, sowing and reaping—in Spiritual Athletics, The Work and Armour of the Children of the Day, The Rule of the Road, and Gifts Given, Seed Sown. The cadence follows suit: stately accumulation for doctrine, brisk imperatives for counsel, yet both conclude by returning hearers to prayerful dependence.

Memorable Quotes

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