

and from everlasting to everlasting, God. It was not oversight nor accident that caused the Apostle to place the Saviour's name first in the benediction.

In doing so he reminded his readers that God's salvation has three great elements: mercy, love, and fellowship. The last is its consummation. Man, created in God's image, was intended to be His friend, holding continual and delightful communion with Him. He fell into transgression, and fled from the face of God. The ultimate aim of salvation is the full and blessed restoration of fellowship between God and man. It is here called the 'communion of the Holy Ghost,' that is, fellowship with God through the Spirit. This is the highest attainment, the loftiest possibility of human existence. It is the realization of salvation on earth, its consummation in heaven.

"If any man love me," said the Saviour, "he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and take up our abode with him." He represents Himself as coming to the heart that has shut out God, barred and bolted itself against Divine intrusion. Christ will not force His way in; but He comes and seeks admission. "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me." This is salvation on earth—what is it in heaven? The resting places of the Father's house, the home He has prepared; where they meet at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and walk with Him in white. Spiritual life, first and last, is fellowship with God. It is to know God, not only as an infinite Creator an inscrutable Ruler, a propitiated Judge, but as a Divine Father, gracious and near.

But before there can be such fellowship there must be love. Nothing but love can create true fellowship. Association will not do it. Two men may meet daily for years at the same employment, and not make confidants and friends of each other. No earthly tie can create fellowship without love. Marriage, the closest of earthly bonds, cannot do so. It has lasted in many an instance for half a century or more, and there has been no true fellowship of husband and wife, because there has been no love. We cannot love God as an infinite abstraction, as the Unknowable Absolute, as the Invisible Creator, as the Awful God. We must experience His mercy. We can enjoy His presence. "Depend on me" is the wish of every unregenerate man. We must know that we are pardoned sinners before we can occupy the place of friends of God. The frown of offended justice must change into the smile of reconciliation and love, in our consciousness, before we can have fellowship with the Father. Therefore the Apostle names the Saviour and the Father—mercy and love—before the Divine Spirit and fellowship.

3. This brings before us the third doctrine taught in the benediction:—*That the way of salvation is by the grace of Christ to the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Spirit.* This was another reason why Paul placed Christ's name first. Men must come unto God through Him. The awakened sinner often errs, and his teachers often err in relation to this matter.

With whom has the sinner to deal? Not

with the Almighty Judge, not with the Divine Spirit, but with the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus. Not by attempts to appease righteously offended Omnipotence; not by prayers for the Divine Spirit to do His work; but by coming to Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, are men saved. The first step heavenward is that of the penitent, saying, "I have sinned;" the next, that of the believer, saying, "Thou hast died for me." God's love is revealed through Christ, not only in His word, but by His grace. Not till we have accepted Christ, can we feel that we are accepted through Him. Not till we know we are forgiven and adopted, can we say, "Abba, Father," taking our places and enjoying our privileges as God's dear children, Christ's brethren and sisters, blessed with the comforts of the Holy Ghost, in connection with a hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart.

II. But the Apostolic Benediction may be regarded in another aspect, as

#### A RECORD OF MINISTERIAL EXPERIENCE.

It constitutes the last sentence Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth. There the Apostle had met his best and worst. There he had had his greatest success and his saddest failure; there he had enjoyed his highest popularity and received his cruellest opposition; and all within the bounds of a single Church.

Coming to Corinth from Athens, Paul seems to have been greatly influenced by his recent experience in the latter city. The course he pursued in the one place was quite opposite to that which he had adopted in the other. Instead of addressing himself to the elite of the philosophical and social aristocracy, as he had done on Mars Hill, he seems to have specially sought and found his audience among the plebeian classes, to some of whom he could say afterwards, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." Instead of resorting to profound discussions of abstract principles, conducted with great rhetorical skill, he could say, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God: for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in much weakness, and in fear and much trembling." But the result was that many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. In the Church thus formed there were a few, who, whether converted by Paul or some other Christian preacher, did not find the great apostle of the Gentiles wholly to their taste: they spoke contemptuously of his abilities, presence and style. "His letters," they said, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." In fact they thought themselves better fitted to lead than Paul, and endeavored to supplant his influence by their own. Possibly they viewed the result with satisfaction. Paul did not so regard them. Never did mortal man see so clearly into men's characters, motives and spirit, and never did man deal more faithfully with folly that fancied itself wisdom, and pride and vanity that called themselves religious zeal.

In Paul's 2nd Epistle to the Church at Corinth (our second, but his third), are to be

found some of the most trenchant, incisive things ever addressed to Christian men by Christian teacher. How, then, after deliberately writing these things, could Paul as deliberately pronounce this benediction upon the Church that needed and received such rebukes at his hands? Because both rebuke and benediction were addressed to Christian men, who, though they needed the one, were not interdicted from the other. As he began his 1st Epistle, he ends his last. The one commences with words addressed to those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, the other closes with an invocation of highest blessing in the name of the Divine Trinity; and what lies between is not inconsistent with either beginning or ending. Paul unchristianized, in his judgment or words, no member of the Church at Corinth. He withdrew from none of them his friendship and love. How far matters had gone between them, may be inferred from the fact that, by anticipation, he declines their hospitality. Yet, if they did manifest a spirit he could not approve, and urged a policy he could not sanction; if they did misjudge and asperse him, this might demand plain and sharp dealing in censure of them and in defence of himself; but it did not destroy his belief in their Christianity, nor his regard for their welfare.

He did his duty as a minister of Christ, and still loved as a Christian. I feel as I read this Epistle, that after all Paul loved the Church at Corinth more than any other he had founded. To it alone he addressed three Epistles, and paid three visits. Why did he concern himself so much about this Church? Because it was worth it—yes, and worthy of it. For it contained within it many of the excellent of the earth, humble, devout men and women, seeking not their own things, but Christ's, and esteeming others better than themselves; and possessed gifts and talents and working power which, if union supplanted division, humility pride, and dependence upon the Divine Spirit self-reliance, would cause it to become one of the most influential and useful of Churches.

Paul's experience at Corinth is like a magnified representation or a huge aggregation of an ordinary pastorate. The success and failure, the good and evil, are all on an extraordinary scale. Seldom does any minister in our day do a work that will compare with Paul's work at Corinth, when we duly consider the disadvantages that field presented; and that the only helper was God. Rarely indeed, even with vastly less of personal qualities and achievements to win and secure something different, has any minister of Christ to meet such ingratitude, depreciation, unkindness and injustice as Paul encountered at Corinth. Few indeed are they, who, since Paul's day, have in similar circumstances been called upon to exhibit the forgiving, loving, Christ-like spirit Paul's benediction so triumphantly manifests. And for him then, whoever he may be, that ends a pastorate without being able to utter from his heart, for those with whom he is parting, the Apostolic benediction he has so often pronounced before them.

III. There is one more aspect in which we may regard this benediction:—

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