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## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF

### Christian Missions—"More Blessed to Give Than to Receive"

### Worldliness is Selfishness, and Selfishness Makes a Man Little, Mean. God is Trying to Work This Out of Us, and Implant the Spirit of Charity and Christ-likeness.

Text:—Acts of the Apostles, Chapter twenty, thirty-fifth verse. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I want us to study this text to-night, because I think it contains the fundamental principle of Christian missions. It is very simple in itself, but far-reaching in its effects. It is the emphasis which our Lord would put upon the human side of God's plan for the world's salvation. It is as if He had said, "It is not enough that I should give myself for the world, it is not enough that God should give His only begotten Son, but in order to experience the blessedness of salvation you must also give."

That Christian missions have done much for the world, no sane man will deny; yet the world has not been the greatest gainer by missions. Missions have saved men, and nations, have led them out of darkness into light, and out of sin into fellowship with God. But the reflex action of missions upon the Church has been a mighty power for good. It has enlarged her sympathies, stimulated her charities, and in every particular made her more Christ-like. It is the world that receives, it is the Church that gives, and "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It does not seem to be necessary in the purposes of God for the salvation of the heathen, that money should lie at the basis of missionary enterprise. If this were so, I do not see why He could not turn the Klondyke upside down, disembowel the diamond mines of South Africa, and pour their wealth into the missionary treasury. "The silver and the gold are mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills; if I were hungry I would not ask thee." You remember when gold and silver were necessary for the perfecting of His worship in Jerusalem, he stirred the whole Persian Empire to its depths to send Ezra across the Arabian desert with some forty-five cart-loads of gold and silver to adorn the temple. But while gold and silver are not a necessity in the economy of God for the salvation of the heathen, I do think they are an absolute necessity for the salvation of the Church. To give is her salvation, to withhold is her ruin, and what is true of the Church as a whole, must be true of the individual members.

It is this side of the missionary question that I want to talk to you with you for a short time to-night. First then, I think it is taken for granted by all Christians, that the outcome of the plan of salvation is the production in individual character of the image and likeness of Jesus Christ, is to so mould and fashion us that we shall have the mind in us that was in Christ Jesus. It is this that gives such point to those passages of Scripture, "I in them and they in me," "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him," "I pray that ye may be filled with all the fullness of God." In fact this is the great new-stream trend of the teaching of the Gospels, that "man shall grow up into the fullness of the stature of the man in Christ Jesus."

This being so, it easily follows that to be a Christian is simply to be Christ-like. It is to catch His genius, His spirit, to love and sacrifice as He did. It is to be not true of the Christian there is no further discussion, he is none of His. Now what are the distinguishing characteristics of Jesus Christ? Listen, "You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich." That is the spirit and genius of Christ, and to possess His spirit is to be Christ-like. "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it," and not withholding the agony and self-sacrifice He could yet say "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is why we are taught to be followers of Christ, imitators if you will, in all these principles of self-sacrifice. But again, Christ was the express image of God. He came into the world to teach us by His life and words and actions, the essential characteristics of His Father. By His daily intercourse with His disciples, He impressed upon them, He seemed to burn into their very souls the thought that God is love, and that, that love manifests itself in self-sacrifice for others. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." So you see the missionary enterprise had its origin and development in the heart and thought of Deity. God loved and gave His only begotten Son, Christ loved and gave Himself. But you say, this is all very well for pure Deity, but how can it be true in human nature? This is what we would expect of God; or of His Son Jesus Christ, but will this love, transplanted into sinful human nature, manifest itself in the same way, will it love and give? Try it, if you will. Do you remember a young man, who in the pride of his strength, went to the Supreme Court in Jerusalem and demanded letters to Damascus that if he found any there believing in Christ, he might bring them bound into Jerusalem to be punished. This young man had been trained in Tarsus a city of Cilicia, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel and could thank his God that he could speak in more tongues than they all. Here him a few years later. "As touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the Church, as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless; but what things were

gain to me, these I count loss for Christ, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, but that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings." What could have happened to this man to so change his conception of things? Simply this. God's love had been poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit, that had been given unto him. He had become a partaker of the Spirit of the Christ until "the love of Christ constrained him." Under its influence he travelled up and down the countries of Asia Minor, passed over into Europe, and at last, some soul he bared his neck to the executioner's axe at Rome. This is how the love of God manifests itself through sinful human nature,—a man giving his all, his life for the world's salvation. Through the whole history of the Church God's love has always manifested itself according to the laws of its nature in prompting men to give and to sacrifice for God's glory and the good of their fellow-men. It was this love of God which moved Luther, Knox, Wesley and Carey in later days. In fact it seems to be a truth, to be a Christian at all is to possess the missionary spirit.

The love of God in the human heart is like the muscle of the human arm, it must be exercised or it will wither and die. The missionary spirit cannot exist long in any Church without exercise. When the Church ceases to manifest her love in concrete action, the love of God in the human soul itself becomes a thing of the past, and the Church becomes nothing more or less than a splendid organization. Like the tomb on the resurrection morn, the stone and the grave clothes are there, but the Christ Himself has gone.

Now let us go back again, over nearly the same ground and see how it looks from nearly the same point of view. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." What was it that moved the heart of Deity to such enormous sacrifice? Was it angels or refined ethical humanity? Most of you have read Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," those of you who have not, have read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you have stood appalled before the depths to which humanity can fall. It was this suffering, sinful, dying humanity that moved the heart of the Eternal to give. It was this "Lo, I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will O God." "He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, for when we were yet without strength in due time Christ died for the ungodly." It is this state of humanity that has ever appealed to the Christ—spirit in the noblest, and prompted it to its noblest giving and self-sacrifice, and has helped it to realize through the ages the truthfulness of the text that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This is what appeals to the Church to-day and demands her noblest efforts. When we look around and see the misery and sin, it ought to stir every Christian principle within us. Our large cities are full of millions of men in the condition of Asia have not yet heard of the historic Christ, or His power to save from sin and lead them into a nobler manhood. Men may say they know nothing about this misery and how can they be moved by it? This may be true, but I think we ought to know. We are not making the best of ourselves, until we do know, for he who brings his Christ-like nature face to face with the sin and agony of the world will realize as he has never done that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is here where the soul grows large, where charity is unfolded and the Christ life in the human soul is seen at its best. It is here where man feels himself akin with the race, and a part of the great whole. It makes him bigger, truer, nobler and enables him to grow up to the fullness of the stature of the man in Christ. It is this principle that Tennyson had in his mind when he said:

"This truth came home on bier and pall I feel it when I sorrow meet, It's better to have loved and lost Than never to have loved at all."

These are the emotions that open the soul, and make it possible for God to fill it with His own fullness. It seems to me that this side of the missionary enterprise has not received due attention from the Church. We give a certain amount for the heathen, in hope that it will do them some good, forgetful of the great fact, that we are receiving more by the gift, than the heathen who receives our money. It is teaching us to be unselfish, to do for others, to pray for others until the spirit of charity dominates our whole natures. Worldliness is selfishness, and selfishness makes a man little, mean, no good to God or humanity. It is this selfishness that God is trying to work out of us, and implant within us the spirit of charity and Christ-likeness. Let us use this missionary enterprise to accomplish within us all that God intended, so that in our sympathy for others, we may realize that it is always "more blessed to give than to receive."

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