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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

## Notes of Recent Exposition.

Is it still possible to pray for rain?

There are those who tell us it is possible still but it will not be possible long. It is possible still, they say, because the laws which govern the weather are not all ascertained yet. But they are being gradually discovered. And when they are all discovered we shall be able to predict the rain as certainly as we predict an eclipse of the sun. Then it will not be possible to pray for rain.

Mr. S. A. McDowall, in his new book on *Evolution and Spiritual Life* (Cambridge: At the University Press; 6s. net), discusses the possibility of prayer for rain. He does not use that argument. He sees some difficulties in the way of prayer for rain. But they have nothing to do with the laws of nature. They are not scientific; they are philosophical, as are all the problems that we are now most perplexed with.

Some things are clear. It is clear that our mind affects our body—influences and modifies it directly. It is also clear that our mind *may* mediate a change in matter outside our own body. Whereupon a third thing is clear—that no distinction can be drawn between answers to prayer involving mind and answers to prayer involving matter.

But there are two kinds of matter. There is matter which is animated by mind, and there is matter which is not animated by mind. We may be able to influence the body of another because it is animated by its own mind. Can we also influence the clouds which are not so animated? We may by prayer be able to raise another from a bed of sickness. Can we also darken the sky with clouds and bring down rain on the thirsty land?

The answer is that we should never dream of such a thing. It is not to the clouds we pray, any more than it is to our sick friend's body. It is to God, the healer of the one, the upholder of the other. Mr. McDowall sticks to matter, because, to his philosophical mind, matter is God's self-limitation. 'Without irreverence,' he calls it 'the material Body of the Immanent God' and says that it 'constitutes part of His immediate experience.' To interfere with the rain is therefore to interfere with the will of God which originally brought about the self-limitation.

Well, after all, he comes to the will of God, as we must always come. It is not whether we can influence matter, with or without mind, directly or indirectly. That is not prayer. It is whether we can influence the will of God. If prayer cannot do that, it can do nothing. If it can do that, it can do all things.

Now it is impossible to see how prayer can influence the will of God. But it is quite certain that it does so. What do we mean by influencing God's will? We possibly mean no more, but we certainly mean no less, than that which the Syrophœnician woman accomplished with the will of Christ. To say that that woman did not influence the will of Christ is to say that 'He was pretending all the time.' Why it had to be done, we cannot tell. Nor can we tell how she did it, except that she did it by the greatness of her faith. But so it is always. 'Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive' (Mt $21^{21.22}$).

Professor E. A. SONNENSCHEIN, of the University of Birmingham, is not content with the Golden Rule as men understand it. He is quite content with it as he understands it himself. But he has been asking his friends how they understand it—'several clergymen and laymen'—and they have all given him the same answer. They do not understand it aright.

It is only recently that Professor SONNENSCHEIN came to understand it aright himself. For over half a century he misunderstood it. He is astonished at himself. He is astonished at the whole Christian world. For nearly two thousand years, he says, we have been preoccupied with the subject, and we do not understand it yet.

The Golden Rule is given in the Gospels twice. It is given by St. Matthew ($7^{12}$) in this form: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.' And it is given by St. Luke ($6^{31}$) in this form: 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.' It seems very easily understood. But the meaning which Professor SONNENSCHEIN took out of it for more than fifty years, and which all his friends take out of it still, is wrong. That meaning is that we are bidden to do to others what we should wish them to do to us, if our positions were reversed; that is to say, if we were in their place and they in ours. And that is not the right meaning.

That could not be the right meaning. For look how it would work out. 'A beggar in the street asks me for money: I ought to give it, because I, if I were in the same situation, should wish another person so to behave towards me, and my hypothetical wish is an index of the wishes of the beggar. An *employé* asks for a rise in his wages: I ought to grant it, because his wish is only what I myself should wish in the same circumstances. An enemy country wishes that we should not make energetic efforts to repel its attacks: we ought to abstain, because if our positions were reversed there is nothing that we should desire more than inactivity on the part of *our* enemies.'

Did Christ teach that? Professor SONNENSCHEIN has no hesitation in answering that He did not. The last example settles it. There are three examples, the beggar, the *employé*, and the enemy. At an earlier period in our national life the example that would have settled it would have been the beggar. At a later period the *employé*. But at the present time the example that settles it is the enemy. It is inconceivable to Professor SONNENSCHEIN that our Lord should have asked the Belgians to lie low and let the Germans pass through their country to the conquest of France.

The misunderstanding, says Professor SONNENSCHEIN, is due to the English translation. And if Professor SONNENSCHEIN had done nothing else by his article in the *Hibbert Journal* for July than draw our attention to the English word that has caused the misunderstanding, he would still have rendered us a considerable service. For we have no idea, any of us, how greatly we are at the mercy of the English of our Bible, or how disas-

trously. The Revisers had a chance to help us. They did not take it. Possibly they did not see the necessity. It is not that the Greek or the Hebrew is mistranslated in the Authorized Version. It is not so often mistranslated as we think. Nor is it that certain words used in that version are now quite obsolete and unintelligible to us. It is that ever so many words have changed their meaning and we do not observe it. We pass over them unsuspectingly, and misunderstand the import of the whole passage or precept. That is what has happened with the Golden Rule.

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The word is *would*. 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you.' That 'would,' says Professor SONNENSCHEIN, suggests an 'if' coming after it. It is a conditional. We say in our minds, 'Whatsoever ye would, if ye were in their place.' But it is not a conditional. At the time when the Authorized Version was made it was a simple indicative. It stood for 'whatsoever ye wish.' It was a legitimate and accurately idiomatic translation of the words in the Greek, whether those words are St. Matthew's (ὅσα ἂν θέλητε) or St. Luke's (καθὼς θέλετε).

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There is no question of putting ourselves in the place of some one else. It is 'whatsoever we desire' in our own place. And what do we desire? Speaking generally, we desire good. We desire good in our own place, as we are; and the higher we are the truer is the good we desire. We do not desire that which the mendicant desires, which is probably not good for him and is certainly not good for us. We do not desire that which the workman desires, which may or may not be good for him, but is certainly not good for us if we are not workmen. And we do not desire that which the enemy desires, free passage through our country. Such free passage may be good for the enemy demanding it; we do not believe that it is for our good; and we know that it is not for the good of the world.

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Was the Apostle Thomas a doubter?

It is not very many years since the question would have been received with ridicule. Of course he was a doubter. What else was he?

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Then Tennyson wrote: 'There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.' Whereupon there came a revolution in men's minds concerning the Apostle Thomas. He might still be a doubter, but he 'doubted well.'

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He doubted well. The phrase is Plato's. The present Bishop of London found it there and applied it to Thomas. There are doubters who do not doubt well. There is the indifferent (and probably supercilious) doubter; and there is the superficial self-satisfied doubter. Thomas was not an indifferent doubter. 'I remember,' says the Bishop of London, 'talking to a nice young fellow in Bethnal Green. "Well, now," I said, "what do you think about religion?" "Well, Mr. Ingram," he replied, "to tell you the truth, I never think of it from one end of the year to the other." 'He was a Bethnal Green boy,' continues the Bishop, 'hardly grown up. We cannot blame him; he was never brought up to anything better, but we taught him something better later on.'

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That is very likely. For the indifferent doubter is not so difficult to teach as is the superficial talkative doubter. Bacon says: 'A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds round about to religion.' The superficial talking doubter has often a little philosophy, but he rarely proceeds to depth in it. He has no time; so much has he to say about his atheism. He has no inclination; so satisfied is he to have a little philosophy—the greater number have none.

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The indifferent doubter and the superficial doubter are both dishonest, the one with himself, the other with us. There is also the honest doubter. And now we are all agreed that if Thomas was a doubter at all, he was an honest doubter. Why was he an honest doubter? Some

say that he doubted with the head while his heart was right. Others say that he doubted with the heart, while his head was right. And some say that he doubted with head and heart both; but he was an honest doubter still.

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He doubted with his head. So says ROBERTSON of Brighton. 'There is a class of men,' he says, 'whose reflective powers are stronger than their susceptive: they think out truth—they do not feel it out. Often highly gifted and powerful minds, they cannot rest till they have made all their grounds certain: they do not feel safe as long as there is one possibility of delusion left: they prove all things. Such a man was Thomas. He has well been called the rationalist among the apostles.'

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He doubted with his heart. So says Dr. J. D. JONES. 'The doubt of Thomas,' he says, 'sprang not from his head, but from his heart; it was the result not of intellectual difficulty, but of great sorrow. There is no analogy or kinship, therefore, between the doubt of Thomas and the speculative doubt of our own day, caused as that is by intellectual and philosophical difficulties. If you want to find the true analogy to this despair of Thomas, visit some home where "in the shadow of a great affliction a soul sits dumb."'

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And he doubted with both head and heart. So says Dr. A. H. DRYSDALE. He says: 'If we read his idiosyncrasy aright, there was in him a special sort of twin-nature: both a masculine and a feminine element; a keen intellect combined with a tender and delicate susceptibility, not often found together, save in exceptionally gifted souls. For Thomas was not a hard and cold being, like many in whom the critical faculty predominates. There are those in whom emotion is stronger than their understanding, who are led by feeling more than by thinking, and simple even to credulity—ready to believe to the verge of superstition; on the other hand, there are some whose reflective powers are much greater than their emotional nature and who are apt to be somewhat apathetic therefore, or aloof in their attachments. To neither of these classes does Thomas belong, or rather he combines both of them in himself in rare and unusual proportions.'

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Now, it may not be easy to reconcile all these ideas. But there are contradictions in most of us, and the science of psychology is yet in its infancy. About one thing, however, all the interpreters of Thomas are agreed, and it is the essential thing. With all his doubting, he never wavered in his loyalty. He loved Jesus from the first, and he loved Him to the last. Then let his doubt be of the head or of the heart or of the whole personality, it went down at last before the rush of the river of his affection. It was Thomas who gave John the word he was waiting for, and enabled him to bring his Gospel to an end.

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But no sooner had men discovered that Thomas doubted well than some of them began to go a step beyond, and wonder if he doubted at all. Some of the most recent preachers who have preached and published on Thomas believe that a great injustice is done to him in calling him a doubter. It is an injustice from which he has suffered far too long, they say, and they use strong language to do away with it.

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Why was he ever called a doubter? Plainly because he doubted the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He said, 'Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.'

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'But we have to remember,' says Dr. ADENEY, 'that he was the only one who had not seen the risen Christ. For anything we know to the contrary, if he had been present, he would have been convinced; and, for anything we know to the contrary, if any one of the others had been absent, that disciple would have been equally sceptical. As it is, none of them had believed the reports of previous appearances. What the women said

appeared to them all but idle tales, and the appearance to Peter had only filled the rest with perplexity. It was Christ's appearance to them that convinced the eleven; on the next occasion, Thomas being present, he too was convinced.'

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The force of this is undeniable. If Thomas had been present on the first appearance of Jesus to the Eleven, he might have been as firmly convinced of the reality of the resurrection as any of them. But that only throws the objection back a step. Why was he not there? Dr. ADENEY answers that we cannot tell. And that is quite true. But we can conjecture.

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Now it is a curious circumstance that whenever men began to conjecture why Thomas 'was not with them,' they found that it would not do to say, Because he was a doubter. They were all doubters regarding the resurrection, and there could be no difference of degree of doubt among them, so absolute was it all round. When He did appear, they were all amazed; and again you could not tell which of them was most amazed. If doubt of the resurrection kept Thomas away, nobody would have been present. Why then was Thomas not with them?

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The answer introduces us to a new opinion about Thomas. He was not with them because he was a pessimist. So say many expositors and preachers. Some say that he was a pessimist because he was a doubter. Some say that he was a doubter because he was a pessimist. And some say that he was only a pessimist and not properly a doubter at all. But they all say that the real reason why he was not with the rest of the apostles on their first meeting with Jesus was that, being of a melancholy temperament, he was utterly cast down by what had happened, and had gone away to brood over his sorrow alone.

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Some preachers draw impressive pictures of Thomas in his solitude. But they draw them of their own imagination. There is no evidence. The reason why they call in their imagination so confidently is that they have already discovered the pessimist in another event. It is the event of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Jesus had retired from Jerusalem when the message came that Lazarus was sick. And when He intimated to the disciples His intention of returning to its neighbourhood, they were not a little alarmed. 'Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?' And when He persisted, it was Thomas who said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

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Whereupon Prebendary CALTHROP speaks of his 'despondent character' and 'what we may perhaps call his pessimistic bias'; and Dr. George MATHESON tells us that 'there are two classes of minds which habitually stand in the post of outlook—the man of the laurel and the man of the cypress. The first sees the world as rose-coloured. It is all brightness, all beauty, all glory—a scene of splendid possibilities which is waiting to open for him its gates of gold. The second, on the other hand, approaches it with dismay. To him the prospect looks all dark. He is a pessimist previous to experience. He is sure he will never succeed. He is sure the gate will not open when he tries it. He feels that he has nothing to expect from life. He hangs his harp upon a willow, and goes forth to sow in tears.'

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Of these two classes the man of the laurel in the New Testament is John; the man of the cypress is Thomas. 'He came to the facts of life with an antecedent prejudice; he uniformly expected from the banquet an inferior menu. It is a great mistake to imagine that the collapse came with the Crucifixion. Strictly speaking, there was no collapse. If I understand the picture aright, it represents the figure of a man who could never stand at his full stature but was always bent towards the ground. It was not from timidity. He was a courageous man, ready to do and dare anything, even when he was most downcast. It was not

from a mean nature. He was a man of the noblest spirit—capable of the most heroic deeds of sacrifice. That which gave him a crouching attitude was simply a constitutional want of hope—a natural inability to take the bright view.'

But the most recent expositors will have none of it. Dr. ADENEY, whom we have already named, rejects the whole pessimistic hypothesis. He says it is unfair to find pessimism in the words, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' 'Is there any evidence,' he asks, 'that the other disciples were a particle more hopeful? Nay, as regards the matter of his saying, was Jesus Himself more hopeful? Jesus had told His friends before this that He would have to die when He went up to Jerusalem. Thomas takes no more gloomy a view of the situation than his Master had taken. Indeed, he simply accepts Christ's own prediction, and bases his proposal upon it. And he was right in his anticipation.'

If Thomas was neither a doubter nor a despairer, what was he? Says Professor GWATKIN: 'He was just what some of our triflers would like to be thought—a sober truthful man who insists on facing the facts he sees before he goes a step further. Such a man is slow to move: no passing enthusiasm can stir him, only the gravest sense of duty. And faith is none the worse for counting the cost before it gives itself to Christ.'

Has Christianity broken down? With the exception of Turkey and Japan, the nations that are engaged in the present war are Christian nations. They are fighting fiercely for the mastery. Some of them are perpetrating atrocities for which it is difficult to find a parallel in all the history of the world. Has Christianity broken down?

The answer, as they say in the House of Commons, is in the negative. No doubt, if the nations that are engaged in the war are Christian nations, Christianity is a failure. But *are* they Christian? When is a nation properly to be called a Christian nation? We may say perhaps when a majority of the members of it are Christians. Is a majority of the people of Germany Christian? Or of Britain? Not in any of the countries engaged in the war can it be claimed that a majority of the inhabitants make even an outward profession of Christianity. It cannot therefore be said that because so many so-called Christian nations are engaged in fierce fighting Christianity has broken down. They are not Christian.

But even if a majority in each country were to be found to profess Christianity, would the nations at war prove the failure of the religion of Christ? Are all those who profess Christianity Christians? What *is* a Christian?

The answer is found in three sentences of the Apostle Paul. The first sentence is: 'Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God' (1 Co $7^{19}$). The second is: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love' (Gal $5^{6}$). And the third is: 'For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature' (Gal $6^{15}$). The answer to the question, What is a Christian? is not found in one of these texts alone. It is found when the three texts are taken together.

In each passage St. Paul states, first of all, certain things which do not prove a man to be a Christian. But we shall pass these by for the present. Our question is, What does prove a man to be a Christian? And the answer of the first text is startling enough to arrest attention. St. Paul's answer is, 'The keeping of the commandments of God.'

And it is the answer of Christ Himself. When the young ruler came running and kneeling, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' Christ's answer was, 'Keep the com-

mandments.' For indeed no other answer can be given. If we keep the commandments of God then are we right with God. He asks no other of us, or can ask. And it is of no moment to inquire, What are the commandments? Any commandments will do, if they are God's. The commandments you are familiar with. 'Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery; honour thy father and thy mother'—those will do. Or, if you prefer it, the summary of the commandments so memorably expressed by one of the prophets, when he said, 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

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But who has done it? In the Westminster Shorter Catechism there is a question which runs: 'Is any man able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God?' And the answer is, 'No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them, in thought, word, and deed.'

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Perhaps you do not take your theology from the Shorter Catechism. Perhaps you do not think that it is orthodox theology. It may not be orthodox theology; but it is orthodox practice. For what is orthodoxy? Is it not the theology or the practice of the majority? And here not merely is the majority with the Shorter Catechism, everybody is with it. There is no minority. Once there was for a moment a minority of one. The young ruler said, 'All these have I kept from my youth up.' But in another moment he was undeceived. Jesus took the eighth commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and showed him that he had not kept it, and could not keep it, unless he sold all that he had and gave to the poor.

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There is no way of keeping the commandments of God except by misunderstanding them. It is probable, although we know of only one actual case, that in the time of our Lord there were not a few who thought they had kept them all from their youth up. It was for this reason that He delivered the Sermon on the Mount. For what is the Sermon on the Mount from first to last but an explanation of what is meant by keeping the commandments? 'He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

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In our day the attitude is different. No one with the Sermon on the Mount in his hands is hardy enough to say, 'All these have I kept from my youth up.' The attitude now is that we cannot be expected to keep them, that something less than keeping must be sufficient, and that if we do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God *in a measure* all is bound to be well with us.

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But how can God accept a partial obedience? How can He have fellowship with the half saint who is half a sinner? How can He wink at the breaking of the everlasting laws of righteousness, upon which the very universe is hung, and of which all the commandments are but intelligible expressions? Eternal life is nothing if it is not walking with God; and as somebody asks very pointedly, 'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' We had better accept it at once, however it go against the natural man in us, that to be right with God we must keep the commandments in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount, that is to say, by being 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.' Whereupon we are bound to admit that we cannot do it.

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What then? Then begins the Gospel. For let it now be confessed that there is no Gospel, no Christ, and no Christianity in anything that we have yet said. It is all out of the Old Testament. It is all law. Even the summary of the commandments, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself,' incomparable as it is, and accepted by our Lord, is taken from the Old Testament. Christianity begins when we turn from the first sentence quoted

from St. Paul to the second. What is it that proves a man to be a Christian? It is 'faith working through love.'

Now in that answer we are arrested at once by the introduction of a person. For you cannot have faith in a thing. Who is that person? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to have faith in Christ. And if there are more kinds of faith than one, it is to have that kind of faith which works through love. For the keeping of the commandments still holds. It is not Christianity, but it is accepted by Christ. As He said, He came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Christianity is faith in Christ to the keeping of the commandments, the way of keeping them being through love.

Let us take the sum of the commandments as Christ accepted it: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.' How does faith in Christ make us able to do that? By the offer of Christ Himself. Is He worth loving? Faith tells us that. It tells us what He has done for us. It offers Him to us as He is. We put ourselves among the 'lost' whom He came to seek and to save; we turn for salvation to Him; and at that very moment He meets us with His 'Son, daughter, be of good cheer, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.' Whereupon we see Him as He is, altogether worthy of our love and waiting for it. We love Him, because He first loved us.

Now in loving Christ we love both God and man. As He said, 'He that loveth me, loveth my Father also.' And as we may say, turning other words of His round a little, 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto me, ye do it unto the least of these my brethren.' And what is this but to keep the commandments? For the sum of the commandments (let us say it again) is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.'

This, then, is the Christian, and there is no other. He keeps the commandments. Not in the Old Testament sense of striving to love God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself, and ever failing ignominiously. Still less in the pharisaic sense of taking the commandments one by one and saying, 'All these have I kept,' though there is no emotion of love to God or man in the heart. Such was the elder son of the parable, rude with his father and contemptuous towards his brother. The Christian keeps the commandments because he loves Christ who is both God and man. And he loves Christ because he has rested upon Him alone for salvation.

And such a Christian is a new creature. That is St. Paul's third statement. We call him so, using this very English word. But the English word does not express exactly what the Apostle said. He said 'a new creation.' For that faith which worketh by love is more than a transfiguration. In all outward reflexion, however great the glory reflected, there is the element of instability. The glory of the Christian is not a glory that passes away, as was the glory that blazed in the face of Moses when he came down from the mount. It is more than a transfiguration. It is a creation. As at the beginning God saw all things which He had created, and said, 'Very good'; so now He sees us in our shield and looks upon us in the face of His anointed, and although we still fail of the keeping of many of the commandments taken by themselves, He sees no iniquity in us. We are a new creation, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, and once more He is able to regard His own handiwork, and to say, 'Very good.'