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Sermon Preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday evening, 31st. March, 1935.

"And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified". Acts 20.32.

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This verse is what we might term a benediction given by the Apostle to the Elders of the Church at Ephesus. From the 17th. verse of this chapter, we find that he called the Elders together, "And from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the Church". He then related to them how that while he had sojourned with them, preaching the Kingdom of God, he had been faithful to his charge, and had kept back nothing that was profitable unto them, declaring the whole counsel of God, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. What a great thing to be able to say! The Apostle could say it in relation to his own ministry, but oh! my friends, how some of us seem to fail. Nevertheless, here it is, in respect of the Apostle; he had such a deep affection for the spiritual welfare of those to whom he ministered, that he kept back nothing from them. It was not merely preaching one side of truth; no, he declared the whole counsel of God, and it would seem to centre in this, "I determined", he said, when writing to the Corinthians, "to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified". This was the one glorious aim of the Apostle, to exalt Christ, to lift Him up before the people, in His glorious person and finished work, the sum, substance, and fulness of the glorious gospel. Paul knew it; he had such a knowledge of it by divine revelation, that it was always before him in the exercise of his ministry. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "We preach Christ crucified, to the Greeks, foolishness, and to

the Jews, a stumblingblock, but unto us that are saved, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Here lies, then, the foundation of a true ministry; it is built, as it were, upon Christ. He is the foundation of it, the life, centre, and substance of it; He is the fulness of the Gospel, Alpha and Omega.

Then Paul gives to the Elders of this Ephesian Church a charge, tells them solemnly their duty, and how they are to exercise it, that their ministry is to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. The ministry of the Gospel is to this end in particular, it is for feeding. Said Christ to Peter, "Lovest thou Me?..Feed my sheep...feed my lambs". It would seem today, that the principle end of the ministry lies here, in feeding. It is a means that the Lord uses, to this end, to feed and establish His Church. "Tell me", the Church says, "Tell me, oh, Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon, for why should I be as one that turneth aside, by the flocks of Thy companions?" Why should I be as one outside? Why should I seem just to resemble one that is veiled and hidden? Tell me where. And does He not sometimes make the ministry as a place of feeding to His people? "Feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." He died for her freely, willingly; voluntarily laid down His life for her. What love, I say, what could He do more?

"He groaned, He bled, He died for you,  
What more ye saints, could Jesus do?"

He purchased her, He redeemed her. "Ye are bought with a price, therefore sanctify God in your body and in your spirit which are His."

Now after various warnings, and exhortations in relation to watching, and so forth, he commits them into the hands of God. "Now brethren, I commend you to God." He terms them brethren with himself, places himself, as it were, upon an equal footing with them, though undoubtedly possessing eminently greater gifts, and more grace. He calls them brethren, related to him, "And now

brethren, I commend you to God". He commits, as it were, the whole thing into the hands of God. I commend you to Him. There is no other able to preserve, to protect you, but God. I commend you to Him, He needs no recommendation, but he would, as it were, upon taking leave of them, just commit them into the hands of God. He was about to leave them, with a solid persuasion and conviction that he would never see them again. This was evidently an occasion of great sorrow to them, and these words are therefore exceedingly impressive. I commend you to God, to the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one God. God the Father chose you in eternity; God the Son redeemed you, and laid down His life for you; God the Holy Ghost regenerated and sanctified you; I commend you to Him, to this one God, the only object of all true spiritual worship, the centre of believers' faith, and hope and trust; I commend you to Him.

Perhaps we might say this, in relation to all our exercises and matters which may bear upon us, we would desire to commit them into the Lord's hands. After all that he had said to them, upon taking his leave of them, he thus expresses himself, upon their behalf, I commend you to God. And this he said to the Elders of the Church, to the Ministers of the Church; I commend you to God, Look to Him, who alone is able to give you wisdom, for a faithful discharge of your duty. I commend you to Him who is able to teach you, to give you wisdom, grace, and strength, to live and to walk and to speak. What a great thing it is to have a God to go to with our exercises and our troubles; we may go to Him, He has power, He has wisdom, He has strength; I commend you to God. I would say this to you with respect to any matter, whatever it may be, that may be exercising you, collectively or individually, in any affliction, in any distress, I commend you to God. Creatures cannot help you of themselves; I commend you to God, take your case to Him. Do you need direction in any matter? Do you need the Lord to shine upon your path, to settle a point for you? I commend you to God. Have you

ever found the Lord appear for you in a time of need? Has He not been faithful to you, to His Word, "I will never leave you nor forsake you?" Has He failed you? Is He not worth all your trust? Take your case to Him. He is worthy of our trust of our confidence, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.

"I commend you to God, and the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up". The Word of His grace, I should say, in the first place, might be interpreted as meaning Christ Himself. He is the living Word, the everlasting Word, the Son, the Word of God's grace. How can He be that? Because He supplies that grace to His people, communicates it to them. Why is He termed the Word in Scripture? He is called the Word, because it is by Him, the Father speaks. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Christ, Himself, hath declared Him; He was the Word of His grace, He was the Word in the covenant, in speaking of heaven, to the elect of grace. He is the Word now, in speaking comfortably to His people. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, <sup>that</sup> her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Whatever we receive from God, we receive from the Word. He speaks it to us, He is the eternal Word. It is by Him the Father expresses His mind. Our words are the birth of our mind; it can only be by words that we can give expression to, or make known what is in our mind. So it is here. God the Father makes His mind, His purposes, known by His Son, the Word. By Him He speaks, and He is the Word of His grace, because the grace, an act of the grace of God, is in Him. He is the fulness of it, the life of it, the substance of it; and the Apostle commends the Elders of this Ephesian Church to the Word of His grace.

The Word of His grace, may perhaps also be said to imply the gospel of His grace of which Christ is the substance and fulness. What do we need in our circumstances, in our lives, in our souls?

We can find all in the Gospel. There is a fulness there to answer all our needs; I commend you to this. Where can we come to but to this? Where can we find comfort and relief, but here, in the Gospel, the Word of His grace? It is a great thing if we can come to this. You have your case, your exercises; I have mine. What would one say? I commend you to the Word of His grace. Seek what you need there. Is it wisdom, direction, comfort? Seek it here; it is here. What do we need? We need its application. "The Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among the sanctified." It is able to build you up. This building implies several things. First, if it is right building, there must be a foundation. If we are building for eternity, in the exercise of faith, we must build upon a firm foundation. What is that foundation? Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Now all spiritual building in a believer, if it is building rightly, is upon this foundation. Upon Him, and Him alone, our hopes for heaven are built; there is one foundation. "Behold, thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation." You get down there, if you can; you will find the foundation good. There is no strength, no refuge, but that which is to be found in Christ. That is the starting point. I do not know much about building, but a wise builder will always look well to the foundation first. The superstructure may be strong in itself, but if the foundation is not sure and firm, it will not stand. This is a great point, the foundation of our religion, before we begin to build. But the building rises from the foundation, proceeds from it. The building is really that work of grace in a believer's heart, it is the exercise, the life of faith upon the Lord Jesus. Now every view that you may have of Christ draws you to Him. A view of His suitableness, His person, His obedience, His righteousness, His redemption, His intercession, every enlightening view that you receive of the Lord Jesus Christ, will bring you to build your hopes upon Him. There is no foundation

anywhere else. Now this is able to build us up, He is able to do it, to build you up. Then there is that great act of trust, the grace of trust, trusting, relying only upon Christ for the salvation of our souls. This is good building, if you can come with your circumstances, your trial, your affliction, your pain, your sorrow, that distressing ailment you may have to contend with, if you can come with that to the Lord Jesus, and lay it before Him exercise it upon Him, and put your confidence in Him to bring you through, you will find it good building.

What about your experience? Bring it to the light of truth, examine it in the light of truth, which is able to build you up. We need this building, and it may perhaps be said to come into our whole life and experience of the things of God. First there is the foundation, then the superstructure, the establishing. We need to build here, in the way of establishment, in the things of God, being established in doctrine, in a right understanding of what it is. It is important. We are sometimes disposed to think and speak almost exclusively of experience, but we need to be established in true doctrine. All experience, if it is true experience, must come from doctrine; it must flow from it. Experience is really an experience of the doctrine, an application of the doctrine to us. I used at one time, occasionally, to hear mentioned this saying of Luther, "Doctrine is heaven", and I used to be mystified, I could not understand it. Doctrine is heaven. Then one day, the Lord, I believe, came to me and gave me a view of Christ crucified for my sins, and in the sense and experience, and sweetness of that view, I felt the doctrine of the dying work of the Lord Jesus to be heaven to me. I seemed just then to gaze upon His bleeding wounds by faith, and see my heaven there. So I believe when we really have an experience of any doctrine, whatever it may be, that doctrine becomes as heaven in our souls. If ever you are brought in any measure, to view a once crucified Christ, and your interest in His dying and shed blood, you will find this.

One expresses it like this,

"Here it is I find my heaven,  
While upon the Lamb I gaze,  
Love I much, I've much forgiven,  
I'm a miracle of grace."

We need building up, then, with respect to the only way whereby we can find peace and rest in our consciences, being established in true doctrine, in the knowledge of doctrine in our souls. "Which is able to build you up", to confirm you in the truth. We need this. And what is able to do it? The Word of His grace. It is able to build us up, to establish us, to confirm us, to preserve us and keep us. It is "able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance". An inheritance is something that relates to the future. An inheritance is ours, by hereditary right, it comes down to us by a right bequeathed to us, and the inheritance here intended is really heaven itself. To that believers possess a right by virtue of their relationship to Jesus Christ. An inheritance is something in the future, laid up in store, prepared, not yet in possession. Now God is able to give us this; if we are joined to Christ we have a right to this inheritance. It may seem difficult to appreciate it, but it is so. We have what I might term a legal right to it, by virtue of our joint heir-ship with Christ. Of every believer it must be said that he is an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ. Therefore he has a right to the inheritance.

What is that inheritance? It is ultimate glory, everlasting glory, an eternal inheritance. This we find spoken of in several places in Holy Scripture; a future inheritance among all them which are sanctified, that is to say, among all those that are chosen, separated in God's eternal covenant decree, and given to Christ. To sanctify is to separate from a common to a particular use. It is, as it were, to dedicate, as the vessels of the Sanctuary were. They were sanctified and separated for holy uses and purposes. Sanctification may be spoken of as in God's covenant purposes. His people were chosen and sanctified there, in the covenant of grace, electing grace given by the Father to Christ. "All that the Father

giveth to Me, shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." Now every comer to Christ is sanctified, in God's decrees and purposes. Every one was known to Him there, in that eternal decree to save. In His mind, fore-seeing all things, He chose them, elected and sanctified them, and gave them to His Son. And there is a sanctification in time, a separation when they are called by His grace, and separated from the world, and brought out of it. What does that but the Word of His grace, in its sanctifying effect in their hearts? "To give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." What a mercy it is then, to be found among this number of chosen, elected persons in Christ. Here is the Gospel, the Word of His grace, which is able, sufficient, full, free, able to build you up, to give you an inheritance, among all them which are sanctified, under this benediction which the Apostle gave to those leaders of the Church at Ephesus. What a word indeed, how comprehensive, how full, how free!

Then he took his solemn leave of them, never to see them again, commending them into the hands of his God. If we are enabled with all our cares, our distresses, our anxieties, and our trials, to go to God, we shall do well. I would advise you here, to take your case, whatever it is to Him. He is wisdom, He is grace; He will exercise His love towards His people, in directing and influencing them. It is a mercy, is it not, to have any light and understanding in regard to the way of salvation, and any experience of the mercy and love of God in Christ, whereby we are brought to some degree of knowledge and establishment in holy things. He is able to build us up. We may feel our weakness, our inconsistency, our liability to fall; but He is able to build us up, and able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think; able to keep us from falling, and present us spotless before the throne of His glory. He is able to do all that we need, able, because He is a divine Person. There are no limitations with God, no matter too great for Him. He is able to bring you through all that may be before you, able to settle your mind, able to give you what you



need, able to give those supplies of His grace, and He is able eventually to bring you into possession of that inheritance.

What will it be to be in heaven? It will be that glory of which we here can have but a very faint glimpse. Believers are called to His eternal glory. This is the inheritance, after they have suffered awhile. It seems sometimes to me, that one of the glories of heaven will be to be absolutely free from the very being of sin. There is no sin there. Here sin seems to come into all things, even our holy things. Sin seems to defile our preaching, our services. Our thoughts are defiled, sin is in everything. But there everything will be pure, it will be glorious, it will be free from all imperfections. There will be no sin, not the least taint of any imperfection, absolutely free, not just from its power, working and influence, but absolutely free from the very being of sin. This will be the inheritance. It is the inheritance laid up in store. It will be this, to dwell in His immediate presence, without a veil between, as one has expressed it, without the weary veil of the flesh between. You get a sight of Him here sometimes, and oh! what a lot it does! If we get a touch it does so much for us, but there we shall see Him as He is, with no sin, no imperfection, but a capacity to dwell in His immediate presence. John saw Him there, the Lamb as it had been slain. John saw Him so. It will be wonderful to enter into that inheritance. He gives to His people an earnest of it, the earnest of the inheritance. One day we shall come into the full possession of it. To have the earnest is very wonderful, the sealing of the Spirit. The sealing of the Spirit is the earnest of the inheritance. And if He gives you the earnest, you will want to enter into it. And this applies to every sanctified one, to them which are sanctified. "And now brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Amen