

FREE GRACE A MOTIVE FOR FREE GIVING NO. 1542

A SERMON
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(ON BEHALF OF THE FREE HOSPITALS OF LONDON.)

*“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us,
and has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,
comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”
2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.*

THE Thessalonian saints had been much persecuted and afflicted, and they had exhibited great faith, so much so that Paul says, “We ourselves glory in you in the church of God for your patience and faith.” As if they had not enough trouble coming from the outside, there sprang up in their midst certain hot-headed teachers who declared that the day of Christ was immediately at hand. The coming of the Lord is the grandest hope of the church, and it is an evidence of the extreme power of error to poison and pervert truth that a hope which is our brightest consolation can be so twisted as to cause the saints to be “shaken in mind” and troubled.

So it appears to have been with the Thessalonians. They were perplexed with mysterious rumors which the zealots probably supported by a misinterpretation of the apostle's own language in his former letter to them. It would appear that they were tempted to leave their regular habits of life, and some of them even neglected their business upon the theory that there was no need to attend to it, because the world was so speedily to be at an end.

This gave an occasion for “busybodies” to cease from working, and create great disquietude among the more sober members and therefore Paul wrote them this second letter, with the earnest intent that they might be established in the truth and kept from evil, that disorderly walking might be repressed, and that the church might be at peace. Paul felt that it was of the utmost importance that this honorable church should be at rest, and should not lack consolation, either as to its bitter persecutions or its internal difficulties.

My subject this morning leads me to make this the first point to be dwelt upon—*it is most important that believers should enjoy consolation.* When I have for a while spoken upon that, I would with delight expatiate upon the fact that *this consolation is most freely provided and bestowed in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and it is from this subject that I purpose to draw a practical inference which may help the collection for the hospitals, namely, that the freeness with which *these consolations are given to us should lead us to a holy benevolence towards others who need consolation.*

I. First, then, IT IS OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD ENJOY CONSOLATION.

We must not say that it does not matter whether we are doubting or believing, whether we are sighing or rejoicing, it does matter a great deal. Every commander knows that if he has not his soldiers in good heart, there may be a great many of them, and they may be well trained for war, but the battle is not likely to be won. Courage is essential to valor. Much depends upon the case in which a man finds himself upon the eve of conflict. If the soldier has no stomach for the fight, as our forefathers were wont to say, he will make a sorry display when the tug of war comes on.

The Lord delights not to see His people with their heads hanging down like bulrushes, depressed and dismayed. His word to them is, “Be strong; fear not.” He is “the blessed God,” and He would have those

who know His glorious Gospel to live a life of blessedness, that they may the better serve Him. Does not His Spirit say, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”? Has He not given the Comforter, that He may continually console us? Believers will far better answer the Lord’s purpose, and bring more glory to His name, if they are filled with peace and joy in believing, than they will if they yield to despondency, for the Scripture says, “The joy of the LORD is your strength.”

I am sure that the Lord would have us be of good courage, for its importance *is implied in the very existence of our text*. It is the prayer of an inspired man. Paul wrote not only at the dictate of brotherly love, but under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, when he penned this prayer, “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” The Holy Spirit moved the man of God to breathe this desire, and to put it on record, that it might be the desire of all good men as long as ever the epistle should be read, and that all Christian men should value consolation, even as it was valued by one who was a tender lover of the flock of Christ. It would be great presumption on our part lightly to esteem that which was a prime matter of concern with so instructed and experienced a teacher as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul puts this prayer into a very remarkable shape, to my mind it is expressed in a deeply solemn form, for he writes, “Now our Lord Jesus Christ *himself*.” Was there need for that word “Himself”? Does it not make it very emphatic that he seems to call upon the Lord Jesus to give them comfort, not by any intermediate agency, but in His own person and by His own power. It is so essential that we should be comforted that Jesus, even our own Lord Jesus Christ, is entreated Himself to become the consolation of His people. Is not that a weighty matter which leads the reverent heart of Paul thus to plead? Nor is this all, for he goes on to say, “and God, even our Father,” as if God the Father Himself must undertake the work of cheering His people, so needful was it that they should be at rest. No one else could give them such comfort as they required, but God could do it, and therefore “God, even our Father” must be specially invoked.

The prayer is that the Lord Jesus and the Father who are one may join in the most needful work of comforting the hearts of the tried Thessalonian saints. It reminds me of Paul’s solemn benediction in the opening of the epistle, “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This prayer of inspiration, couched in such solemn terms and directed so earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and to God, even our Father, proves the importance and necessity of saints being filled with comfort.

Nor is this the only instance in the epistle where this desire is expressed, for a little farther on, in the third chapter, at the sixteenth verse, we have it in other words but with equal forcefulness, “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.” I do not know that in one single sentence there could be compressed a more intense desire that they may be at peace. “The Lord” is invoked, and He is styled “the Lord of peace,” that all His divine majesty may be seen, and His peace-making power may be displayed. “The Lord of peace” is entreated to give peace, not by His angels nor by His ministers, nor by His providence, but “Himself” to give peace, and this is asked for “always,” “give you peace always.”

Peace in the cool of the evening is not enough, it is needed at all parts of the day, in all the days of the year, in every period of life, in every place, and under all circumstances. The wish is expressed with great breadth in the words, “Give you peace always *by all means*,” if it cannot be brought by one means let it be by another, but somehow or other may you enjoy the peace which the Lord alone can create. I cannot imagine that such a prayer as this would have been placed among the Scriptures of truth, which are to be our guide till the Lord comes, unless it had been of the utmost importance that we should enjoy peace of mind.

The apostle almost hints at one reason for this strong necessity, for in one word he lets us see that it is a vital blessing because *it affects the Christian’s heart*. His expression is, “Comfort your hearts.” It is well to have a strong hand, how else shall we labor? It is well to have a firm tread, how else shall we stand? Yet these are secondary matters as compared with a healthy heart. A disease of the heart is an

injury to the whole man. If anything goes amiss at the fountain the streams of life soon feel it. The entire manhood depends upon the heart, hence the need of comfort for the heart, and the value of the promise, "He shall strengthen your heart." It is a calamity when the springs of action are weakened, and the spirit is made to sink. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Touch the flesh where else you will, but spare the brain and the heart, for these are the man so nearly that he is wounded to the quick when these are hurt. When the spirits begin to sink, then the waters have come in, even into the soul. Hence our Lord said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled."

However your house may be troubled, however your bodily frame may be troubled, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me." Faith upholds the heart and enables the man to bear up under pressure, faith, I say and nothing else. I am sure, dear friends, you will clearly see the need that we should be comforted, because the lack of comfort will grievously affect the action of the heart and mar the entire life-force of our being. See you to it, then, that you lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees, by saying to them that are of a feeble heart, "Be strong, fear not." Ask that the heart may rejoice in God, for then the roughness of the way and the stress of the weather will be matters of small concern.

Brethren beloved, *this confidence is needful to prevent impatience* and other evils. Possibly it was the lack of comfort which led certain of the Thessalonians to preach the immediate coming of the Lord, their impatience excited the wish, and the wish led on to the assertion. When men lose the present comfort of plain Gospel doctrines they are very apt to begin speculating, and in carnal heat foretelling the coming of the Lord. They left that patient waiting which is our duty, for a fevered prophesying which is nowhere encouraged in the Word of God. Hence the apostle said to them in the fifth verse of the third chapter, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

A man does not wait patiently when he is low in spirit and weary at heart. Let a man feel his own heart right with God, and be at peace, and he can quietly wait until Christ comes, even though the Lord shall delay His coming for many a day, but when everything is tossed about, and our hope grows dim, and our fellowship is broken, and our zeal is burning low, we jump at anything which will end the struggle and enable us to avoid further effort. Laziness and despondency lead many to cry, "Why are His chariots so long in coming?" just as idle workmen long for Saturday night. You think time too long and life too long, for you are not happy where your Lord has placed you, and you are eager to rush out of the field of service into the chamber of rest.

This will not do, my brethren, either for you or for me. We must be braced up to further labor. We must receive comfort in our spirit that we may be able patiently to toil on, however long life may be, and however long our Lord may delay, for if not, if we grow impatient, we may resort to rash fanatical action, as I have already shown you that certain Thessalonians did. Under the idea that the Lord was coming they neglected their daily calling, and became busybodies, gadding about from house to house, and loafing upon others who did not pretend to be quite so spiritual. They were mere star-gazers, looking for the advent with their mouths open and their eyes up-turned, being evermore in grievous danger of falling into a ditch. Paul bade them get to work and eat their own bread, quoting himself as an example, for he had wrought with labor and travail night and day that he might not be chargeable to them.

My friend, if you are growing impatient for the day of the Lord, I pray that comfort of heart may cool you. Tomorrow morning take down the shop shutters and sell your goods as if Christ were not coming at all, for should He come you will be all the more fit to meet Him for being engaged in your calling. If I knew that the Lord would come tomorrow I should attend to my regular Monday duties, and on no account leave one of them to go and stand at the window, looking for wonders. Whether the Master comes tomorrow or in a thousand years your wisest course is to follow your calling in His fear and for His sake.

We ought to do our work better under the impression that perhaps He may come and find us at it, but we may not neglect our duty under pretense of His appearing. Of this, however, be sure, you will not patiently wait if you are not happy. You will not go on conscientiously plodding, doing the same work, walking in the same regular way unless your heart is stayed upon God. You will run after this novelty or that if your mind is not resting in Jesus. Hence the devout prayer of our text that God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself may comfort our hearts and establish us in every good word and work.

Once more, I am sure this comfort is eminently desirable, because *it promotes fruitfulness*. The apostle more than hints at this, "Comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work." When we are not happy in the Lord we do not give ourselves heartily to His service. We grow impatient, and then we need the exhortation of the thirteenth verse of the third chapter, "But you, brethren, be not weary in well doing." If we feel that Jesus is ours that all things are working for our good, and that eternal glory is secured to us by a sure covenant, we are moved by gratitude to complete consecration, for the love of Christ constrains us.

Doubts and inquietudes take us off from our Master's work, but when He gives us rest we take His yoke upon us cheerfully, and find in it yet further rest unto our souls. When our hearts sing our hands toil, and we cannot do enough for our Redeeming Lord. Right gladly do we present ourselves as living sacrifices to Him who "loved us and gave Himself for us." Thus, too, we are established in our work, and bound with fresh bonds to it, so that we delight to labor on till He shall come who shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter you into the joy of your Lord."

So it all comes to this. We who are constitutionally despondent, must not give way to depression, we must cry to God to help us by the divine Comforter. We must aim at being cheerful Christians. We have abundant reasons for being cheerful, for the Father Himself loves us, and has given us everlasting consolation in Christ Jesus. Do not let us be so unwise, and so ungrateful, as to neglect these consolations of the Spirit. If the table is sumptuously spread why should we be hungry? If the fountain flows so freely, why should we be thirsty?

Moreover, perhaps, if we wear a dark countenance, we may distress the weak ones in the family of God, it may be that we shall spread the infection of depression among our fellow believers, and this must not be. Let us wear our sackcloth on our loins if we must wear it, but let us not wave it in everybody's face, lest we offend against the generation of the Lord's people. Is it not clear from the Word, brethren, that we shall be damaged if we give way to apprehension and dismay? Is it not apparent that we are invigorated, equipped, and prepared for our Lord's use when we are strong in the Lord and the power of His might? Therefore let us breathe earnestly to God the desire that His everlasting consolation may be laid home to our spirits, and that our hearts may be comforted at this moment.

II. We shall now turn to the second point of our meditation which is this, GOSPEL CONSOLATION IS MOST FREELY BESTOWED.

I want, in the chief place, to call your attention to the manner in which all the way through the freeness of divine consolation is set before us by the apostle.

First, observe that the consolations bestowed upon believers are most free because *they are described as a gift*. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which has loved us, and has *given us* everlasting consolation." The old proverb has it, "Nothing is freer than a gift." Every blessing that we receive from God comes as a gift. We have purchased nothing, what have we to purchase it with? We have earned nothing, what work did we ever do that could deserve everlasting consolation from the hand of the great Lord?

Comfort in Christ is an absolutely free, spontaneous gift of sovereign grace, given not on account of anything we have done, or ever shall do, but because the Lord has a right to do as He wills with His own, therefore does He select unto Himself a people, to whom the free gift of His consolation shall be given. If you have any comfort at this time, my brother, it is God's gift to you. If you do triumph in God, it is God who has given you your holy joy, therefore bless and praise Him from whom such a gift has come.

The freeness of this gift is seen in every part of it. The consolation given us of God is very complete, but it is as manifestly free as it is evidently perfect. Notice its completeness, I pray you. It covers *the past* with these golden words, “which has loved us,” as for *the present*, it is enriched with this truth, “has given us everlasting consolation,” and as for *the future*, it is glorified with this blessing, “and good hope through grace.”

Here is a triple comfort, a consolation in three worlds, and under each aspect it is a free favor. He “has loved us”—why is this? Come, you wise men, pry into the ancient past, and tell me why God loved His chosen. Stand and gaze as long as you will into the eternal mind, and say to yourself, why did God make this choice of love? The sole reply out of the excellent glory falls from Jesus’ lips, “Even so Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.” Shall not the bridegroom elect his own bride? Shall not the King of kings dispense His favors as He wills? He has loved us “from before the foundation of the world,” a love so ancient cannot have been born of any human cause. Eternal love is a flame enfolding itself, it borrows no fuel from without, but lives upon itself. He says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you,” But why that everlasting love we cannot tell.

Beloved, by divine love the mysterious past is made to glow with the glory of God, its light is like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Once when we looked back into the past we saw the blackness of our guilt, and the hole of the pit from which we were digged, but now we behold a silver stream of mercy flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and we track it to the eternal purpose of love and the covenant of grace. Gaze as you can into light ineffable, but even with the eye of faith all that you can discern in the ages which are past is this word, which has a splendor about it beyond compare—the word, “LOVE.”

In eternity the Lord loved us. Oh, how free is this! How much we owe for it! The past is bright with love, with love most free. As for the *present*, “He has given us everlasting consolation.” We have it now. Christ is His people’s Christ today, the consolation of Israel even now. The pardon of sin is ours, the perfect righteousness of Christ is ours, life in Christ is ours, union to Christ is ours, marriage to Christ is ours. Glory with Christ shall be ours by and by, but even now we have the earnest of it in the Spirit which dwells within us, and shall be with us forever. All this is assuredly a gift, how could it be otherwise? We could never have enjoyed this everlasting consolation today if free grace and dying love had not brought it to us. Bless, then, the Giver.

As for the *future*, what of that? Dark lower the clouds, and the tempest mutters from afar, and we tremble lest in the end of life, when physical force decays, we may be overtaken with a storm in the article of death, but this covers all, we have “good hope through grace.”

The Scriptures of truth have assured us that the great Shepherd will be with us in the valley of death shade, and that after death there is a resurrection, and with our risen body we shall behold the King in His beauty when He shall stand in the latter days upon the earth, and we shall in our perfect manhood dwell forever in His glory. This is so good a hope that it fills all the future with music. This, too, is a gift. There is not a trace of legal claim in it, it comes not by way of reward, but of divine favor. Thus the past, the present, the future, are all rich with the Lord’s own generous gifts, and in nothing can we trace a single consolation to anything but free grace.

Lest we should make any mistake about these consolations coming to us most freely, the apostle mentions One from whose hand they come, from whom nothing has ever come in other manner but that of manifest grace. He mentions, “*our Lord Jesus Christ himself.*” Oh it charms me to think that He should comfort me! When Jesus Christ begins to draw near a man’s soul his joy begins, but when the Lord sets Himself down steadily to console His brethren, I warrant you it is done in heavenly style, for He will not fail nor be discouraged.

He will wash our feet if the weariness be there, He will give His bosom for a pillow to our head if the pain be there. He has said, “I will make all his bed in his sickness,” so that if the woe comes from disease He will cheer us there. He will anoint our eyes with salve if the eyes are failing, and bind up the

broken heart if that is bleeding. Lest we fall He will put underneath us the everlasting arms, and lest we be wounded, He will spread over us the shadow of His wing. He will be all to us that He is in Himself, judge you what that is. His whole being, His Godhead in its grandeur, His humanity in its tenderness He has given to us. He lays Himself out for us, and be you sure of this, He will not leave us comfortless, He will come to us. He is such a blessed sympathizer in all grief, such a mighty helper in all distress, that if He come to our succor, we may be sure that our deliverance will be accomplished.

But brethren, at the sight of our loving Lord we feel that it would be treason to impute His benefits to any motive but that of grace. Is He not full of grace and truth? The law came by Moses, not by Jesus. His coming was not to judge and to censure, “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world,” much less did He send His Son to condemn His people. There will come a day of judgment, but just now the Son of God sits upon His throne to grant pardons, and to give grace to help in times of need, His throne is a throne of grace, and His scepter is that of love. We know that the comforts of the gospel must be graciously free since they are brought to us by Jesus Christ Himself.

Then the apostle solemnly adds, “*and God our Father.*” There seems to me to be a peculiar touch of sweetness about this. It is not “God the Father”—which notes His relation to Jesus, but *our* Father, which sets forth His relation to us. We love God the Father, unto the Father be glory forever and ever, but as “our Father” He comes nearer to us, and gladdens our hearts. Now, a father does not pay wages to his children, his gifts to them are freely bestowed out of the love of his fatherly heart. What father expects to be paid for what he does for his sons and daughters?

Thus we see that the everlasting consolations of the gospel, coming to us because we are the children of God, are quite free from anything which makes them a hire or a debt, and they come to us in the freest possible manner, as spontaneous donations of our great Father, whose delight it is to give good gifts to them that ask Him.

Cannot you look up, you desponding ones, at this moment and cry, “Our Father”? Our first hymn greatly refreshed my spirit just now, for I felt very heavy till the Holy Ghost comforted me with it:

*“If in my Father’s love
I share a filial part,
Scud down Thy Spirit, like a dove,
To rest upon my heart.”*

And I felt that I could urge that argument, and in my inmost heart I pleaded it before the Lord—Oh, if I be indeed Your child and You are a Father to me, then deal with me as with a son, and let me feel Your Spirit resting within my bosom, that I may know myself to be Yours beyond a doubt. O how sweet to feel the Spirit’s witness and to cry, “Abba, Father”!

Now, beloved, the spirit of adoption is never a spirit of bondage or legality, it never boasts of human merit, but its one song is “free grace and dying love.” May our Father’s free favor make your hearts to sing concerning this, and I know that this will be your strain—

*“Behold what wondrous grace
The Father has bestow’d
On sinners of a mortal race
To call them sons of God!”*

Look at the text again, and you will see how explicit Paul is upon one point. To make us see the freeness of those consolations which come to God’s troubled people, he writes it, “Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, *which has loved us.*” Divine love is the foundation of our consolation. No everlasting consolation could have visited our hearts if the Father and the Son had not loved us. I always feel inclined to sit down when my ministry causes me to come across the great truth of God’s love to His people, because it is not so much a truth to speak upon with the tongue as to enjoy

in silence in the heart. I can fully understand that God should pity my misery, I can comprehend God's caring for my weakness, but I am filled with sacred amazement when I am told that He *loves* me. Loves me! What can there be in me for the Holy Ghost to love!

Brother, what can there be in you that Jesus should set His heart on you? He has made us, and not we ourselves, does the potter fall in love with his own clay? Will he die to save a broken vessel? There were other creatures far fairer. Why were angels passed by? Wonder of wonders that the Lord should love us poor nobodies, defiled with sin, with such evil tempers and such strange natures, ah me, with such *estranged* natures! which is far worse. That the Lord our God should love us, that Christ should love us so as actually to have died for us, outmiracles all the miracles of His power. Jesus so loved us that He espoused our nature, occupied our dwelling place, the world; took our burden of sin, carried our cross, and laid in our grave!

They say that love is blind: I will not say that our Redeemer's love is of that sort, far rather will I say that it must have been wonderfully quick-sighted love to have been able to perceive anything lovable in us. Yet is His love the source and fountain of all our mercies. He has loved us. Question there can be none that this is free, for love is unpurchaseable, if a man should give all the substance of his house for love it would utterly be contemned. Love goes not in the market, it knows nothing of price or barter, it must go forth unbribed, unhired, or not at all, in any case, and far more in the instance of the eternal love of the great Father and His only-begotten Son. Price and purchase for divine love? Wherein would such an insinuation fall short of blackest blasphemy?

Yet again, observe that as if the apostle feared that we should get away from this doctrine of grace he added, "He has given us everlasting consolation and good hope *through grace*." Some people do not like the sound of that word "grace." It is too Calvinistic. We do not care what you call it, but it is the very best word in the Bible next to the name of God our Savior. It is from the grace of God that all our hope begins. Man as a rebel can never earn anything but damnation through his own merits, grace must reign or man must die. Every blessing that can ever come to condemned sinners such as we are must come because God's great love wills it to come, because "He is gracious and full of compassion." All other roads are broken up, grace alone bridges the chasm, and makes a way for traffic between heaven and earth. Grace reigns in our spiritual comfort, and grace alone, let us glorify God for it.

Everlasting consolation is not a blessing given to us as the result of our own works. This is most clear from the last part of our text, for there it is asked that the Lord may comfort our hearts, not because we are established in every good word and work, but that we may be so. All the good works which adorn the Christian character are the result of God's grace, and not the cause of it. Grace is given us in order that we may serve God, not because we do serve God. To make us holy is the object of divine grace, but grace did not wait until it found us holy or it would never have visited us.

To close this part of the subject I would remark that this is the reason why the consolations which God gives us are *everlasting*. Dwell on that word, "everlasting." Do not suffer anyone to fritter away its meaning. You may safely forget that there are certain folks alive who declare that everlasting has not the meaning of endless duration, for it means that or nothing. We have too much personal interest involved in this word to allow it to be toned down into age-lasting or any other miserable sense. We should as soon think that the Bible meant the opposite of what it seems to do as believe that everlasting means something temporary.

He has given us everlasting consolation, and the reason why it is everlasting is because it is founded on the grace of God. If it were built upon our merits it would stand upon a foundation of ice or mist, it would rest on a shadow buttressed by a dream, but if God loved us out of pure grace, and if Jesus Christ has given us consolation out of pure love, and if our whole comfort rests upon the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus, then there is no reason why it should ever pass away unless God's grace can evaporate, which cannot be, since God changes not, but must be forevermore the same. Our Lord Jesus changes not, for He is the "same yesterday, today, and forever."

Ah, you high-fliers, who derive a lofty comfort from your feelings, your happy sensations, your holy works, and your belief that sin is dead in you, fly away as much as you can, you will be brought down one of these days! Like Icarus in the Grecian fable, who flew so high that he melted the wax of his wings and fell, so will it be with all who venture aloft on wings of self-confidence. He who lies humbly at God's feet, conscious of his sin, and mourning over it, and resting for everything upon sovereign grace and free mercy in Christ Jesus, he may keep where he is with safety, for his hope shall never fail him. Let the Lord be magnified for this, He is our rock, and there is no unfaithfulness in Him, and he that rests in Him shall not be ashamed or confused world without end.

III. So far have I brought you, now for our closing point, which is a practical one. Since THESE CONSOLATIONS OF GOD'S LOVE HAVE BEEN SO FREELY BESTOWED UPON US THEY SHOULD LEAD US TO A LIFE OF HOLY BENEVOLENCE.

We ought to be free in our giving to others, since God has been so free in His giving to us. As He has abounded toward us in infinite liberality we ought to abound towards all with whom we come in contact up to the full measure of our ability, in all love and kindness and mercy.

In every benevolent enterprise Christian men should take a hearty interest. Read that seventeenth verse—"Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." I am a man, and being a man, everything that concerns men concerns me. I am a Christian man, and as a follower of Christ, the Son of man, everything that can do good to my fellow-men is a matter in which I delight to take my share.

This should be done in direct actions as well as in words. Read—"Stablish you in every good word and work." Certain of the oldest manuscripts run "In every good work and word," and I suppose in our new translation we shall have it so, and very properly, too. In this case work is probably first, and word next. Some Christian people think that "word" should be everything and work nothing, but the Scriptures are not of their mind. These professors speak a great deal about what they will do, talk a great deal about what other people ought to do, and a great deal more about what others fail to do, and so they go on with word, word, word, and nothing else but word. They do not get as far as "work," but the apostle put work first in this case, as much as to say, "whether you talk about it or not, *do it*. Be stablished in every good work even if you do not get so far as being capable of a multiplicity of words."

Brethren, let us yoke word and work together, every good thing should command our advocacy and secure our aid to the full of our ability. Direct practical assistance should be rendered by us all, since our Lord loves not in word only but in deed and in truth.

This should be done without pressure. No one could lay constraint upon God to bless His people, no pressure was put upon Christ to redeem us, everything as we have shown was spontaneous, sovereign, free. Even so should men give to God out of an overflowing heart. Give to Him as a king gives to a king. How does a king give? Why, as he likes and that is the way to give, to give because you are delighted to give, not because you feel obliged to do it by being overlooked by others, but out of a royal heart which delights in liberal things.

Shall you not do as you will with your own? How can a gracious heart better please itself than by doing good? Give as you would give to a king, for we never give our lowlier possessions to royal personages, we give the best we have if we give them anything. Let it be so in all the services that we render to God, let Him have our best, our noblest, our dearest possessions.

The particular case before us this morning is, to my mind, a very important one, and one which should greatly move all generous spirits. In this great city of near upon four millions of inhabitants, the provision of hospital accommodation is small to a painful degree. In those hospitals which will be helped by the collections of today, I think there are only five thousand five hundred thirty-one beds, or about one for every seven hundred twenty-three persons. Considering the liability of working men to disease and accident, and the great number of the poorer classes, this is a fearfully small preparation for possible necessity.

But this is not the worst, for out of these five thousand beds, as I gather from an admirable paper in *The Lancet*, there are never more than three thousand two hundred thirty-two in daily use, thus diminishing the supply to an appalling extent. These empty beds are very largely made so by the lamentable fact that the hospitals have not the means of using them. The depression in trade has been felt by our free hospitals to such an extent that they live from hand to mouth in a manner which is not honorable to one of the wealthiest cities in the world. The Hospital Sunday Collection has not yet come up to the proper mark, and it is time for ministers to say so, and instruct their people, who if they knew the need would promptly supply it.

The Lancet wisely says that if the sermons of today could be preached in the hospitals themselves, the collections would be doubled. There are many objections to carrying out the suggestion, but I have no doubt the result would be as anticipated. Suppose me, then, to be preaching in one of the great wards and yourselves to be standing among the beds, I know those poor creatures lying near you writhing in pain, and those others grateful for the relief they have received would plead much more forcibly than I can. The sight of suffering is the best argument with benevolence. Look at the rows of sick folk and let your heart be touched.

As the service could not well be held in the hospital, *The Lancet* suggests that the ministers should spend Saturday in going over a hospital. I could not very well do that, but I have tried in my mind vividly to realize the scene, and I think most of you are quite as able to draw the picture as I am, for you have been there to see for yourselves, and some of you have been there as patients to partake for yourselves in hospital benefits.

Picture the wards of mercy, and let every sick person there entreat you to help the funds of these admirable institutions. An exceedingly powerful plea to my mind arises from those empty beds. There they are, two thousand of them! Waiting to be couches of hope to the suffering. Alas, they cannot be filled because there is not the means for providing the people with food and nourishment while they are there. Sorrowful necessity! I cannot endure to think of it. A bed for a sick man rendered useless by some one's meanness! Where is the miser? Surely he is not here!

It would be even more painful to go to the homes where those persons who ought to occupy those empty beds are pining for the want of hospital help, waiting the next turn—which turn may find them in the grave—but which turn would come tomorrow morning if funds were forthcoming. Must they lie there till they are beyond the reach of surgical help because the wealthy of this so-called Christian city cannot spare a little from their luxuries to furnish poor sick humans with nutriment?

O that one with a trumpet tongue could speak to our nobles, our merchants, our traders, our gentlemen of leisure, and bid them consider the sick poor. O that they all knew the exquisite luxury of doing good! I would say to employers, will you let these people lie and pine away for want of medical help, many of them your workmen whose strength has been spent in your trades and handicrafts? Pain is crushing them, and provision is made for their help and cure, as far as it can be made, but it is rendered useless by the want of money to bear the expenses of the patients. Is this to be always so? Is this to remain so for another year? Surely it shall not be.

I ask you, dear friends according as God has entrusted you with this world's wealth, to help the hospitals. I do this with all the greater confidence, because you are believers in the doctrines of free grace. Give freely, for you have received freely. Remember that yesterday and today Jews, Catholics, Protestants, people of all sects have heartily joined in this common effort for suffering humanity, and if those who believe in the free grace of God are behind-hand, nay, if they are not among the foremost in the race, it will be to the dishonor of the glorious Gospel which they profess. The Lord accept your offerings as you now present them! I hear the sound of your gold and silver already, for you are eager in the work of mercy. The collectors are a little too rapid in their work, but I will not restrain them, for it is a fit ending to my discourse that you should hasten to pass from word to work. In so doing may God bless you. Amen.

(The Collections amounted to £257.)

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 THESSALONIANS 1, 2:1-4, 3:13-17**

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—728, 694, 248

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