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were, 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,' may we have grace from above to be thoughtful and vigilant, and much given to prayer, that we may approve ourselves 'children of God without rebuke,' showing them, clearly and winningly, in blamelessness, earnestness, and beauty of character, our Father's likeness! By inconsistencies in the life of professed children of God with the obvious moral requirements of the gospel, immeasurable harm is done to religion. When piety seems all reserved for the Sabbath and the sanctuary,—when at home there is harshness, and in business frequent evidence of keen and unscrupulous worldliness,—when the declaration, implied in presence at the communion table, that 'the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world,' is followed during the week by a manifestly dominant interest in the vanities and indulgences of the world,—when men and women, who in name 'fear the Lord,' in practice 'serve other gods,'—can the great multitude who, with regard to religion as to everything else, will not study abstract principles, but form their judgments according to embodiments, be expected to think otherwise than that religion is a thing of emptiness, a name merely, altogether devoid of power? 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.'

The thought of responsibility for the power of example, which, as we have seen, is suggested by 'in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,' is explicitly brought out by the apostle in his next clause,—'*among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.*' These words may be taken as an injunction, 'among whom shine ye.' The view of the meaning given by our translators, however, is at least as natural. Paul appears to be, with a little variation, repeating, perhaps consciously, the statement of the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, where He tells His hearers what is their calling as His disciples,—'*Ye are the light of the world*' (Matt. v. 14).

‘Being placed,’ the apostle says, ‘in the midst of godless men and women, you are, according to your profession, the illuminators of these darkened ones, and this by *holding forth to them the word of life*,’—that is, ‘by bringing impressively and winningly before them the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, when received by faith into any soul, shows itself the incorruptible seed of true life, even that life eternal, which is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.’

The original word employed by the apostle here for ‘lights’ is not the form in ordinary use, but one which strictly means ‘light-givers,’ ‘luminaries.’ As it is that found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in the 1st chapter of Genesis, for the ‘lights in the firmament of the heaven,’ it seems probable that the apostle had this image specially in his mind. The Lord Jesus is our spiritual Sun, the ultimate Source of all our light and heat. His followers, like the moon, can but reflect the light which they receive from the Sun; yet when, like the moon at the full, they ‘walk in brightness,’ the darkness around is helpfully dispelled, and many have cause to ‘rejoice in that light.’ To shed this kindly radiance is the vocation of believers. One great end for which, instead of being taken away at once to heaven on accepting Christ, they are left ‘*in the world*,’ is, that the gloom in which sin has enshrouded it may, to some degree, be broken in upon by the beams from their holy character; and that men may be led by the beauty of the lunar rays to open their minds and hearts to the full glorious light of the Sun. This is our calling, Christian brethren, and in a measure all true followers of the Saviour fulfil it; for to believe the gospel is to become ‘light in the Lord.’ ‘But,’ as has been finely said, ‘it is with believers as it is with the new moon in the heavens. There is at first only a sharp and narrow surface of light; and not unfrequently there may be seen, embosomed in the luminous outline, the large dark shadow of the old nature. But the imperfect circle is gradually filled up, till there is presented at last a broad

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and complete surface of light. They appear clothed with the sun.¹

In his statement of the way in which Christians 'shine,'—by 'holding forth the word of life,'—the apostle passes from the image of the luminary, and adopts one somewhat of this kind,—a herald of the King of kings, holding out to public view a scroll, on which is inscribed, in great letters, a proclamation of mercy, a promise of everlasting life to all that believe in Jesus. The primary reference here is evidently, from the tenor of the whole passage, to that proclamation of the truth and power of the gospel which, to all who are willing in any degree to attend, is made by completeness of Christian character,—by the exhibition of spiritual energy and sweetness and patience. Nothing 'holds forth the word of life' more impressively than a life manifestly governed by that word. A Christian of this type is himself a gospel, an 'epistle of Christ,' written in letters so large and fair, that even those who run can scarce but read. Such a distinct Christian life, a life explicit and convincing to all observers as a 'confession of Christ,' is the legitimate fruitage from the seed of truth received by the soul. Scripture knows nothing of invisible religion. 'Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

But to 'hold forth the word of life' implies not merely quiet, consistent beauty of character, but definite action for the extension of the kingdom of Christ. Every believer has heard his Father say, 'Son, go work in my vineyard,' and is in some way busy among the vines. His faith has given him oneness of purpose with Christ,—who died, and who reigns, to overthrow sin. By lip, then, as well as by the eloquence of holy living, the saint endeavours to speak for Christ, as God gives

¹ Dr. Smith, of Biggar.

him ability and opportunity—be it to his little children by his own fireside, or to assembled thousands. He ‘cannot but speak the things’ which grace has taught him, and given him to experience. He delights, too, to send the truth to multitudes whom personally he cannot reach, by aiding in the support of agents for the enlightenment of the darkened at home and abroad. Through them he endeavours to ‘go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,’—and He who ‘seeth the end from the beginning,’ recognises in His servant’s sympathy and prayers and gifts for missions, a true ‘holding forth of the word of life’ everywhere.

Looking back over the clauses, you see now, my brethren, who they are that show themselves ‘children of God without rebuke.’ They are the ‘blameless and single-minded,’ who aim ever to be ‘perfect, even as their Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ Like their Father, too, they are full of the energy of love, ceaseless in beneficent activity, diffusers of genial light and heat, as beseems children of the ‘Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good gift and every perfect gift.’

The passage closes with a reference, most natural and beautiful in the relations which existed between Paul and the Philippians, to his own joy in ministerial success, as an object which he had in view in thus pleading with them to cultivate a lofty Christian character,—an object, too, the thought of which might reasonably be expected, from their great love to him, to serve somewhat as a stimulus to spiritual diligence. ‘Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may approve yourselves children of God without rebuke,—*that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.*’ The apostle had ‘run’ with the eagerness of a racer at the Isthmian or Olympic games,—the prize he sought, the souls of men. He had ‘laboured’ with strenuous and persevering diligence,—the wages he sought, the souls of men. ‘God grant,’ was ever the fervent cry of the noble heart, full of