

A Talk about Disposition

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You are a Christian. You have confessed Christ before the world. You say that Christ is the dearest Friend you have. You say he is the noblest in his character, the fairest in his beauty, the sweetest in his spirit, the gentlest in his disposition, the richest in his beauty — of all things in the universe. But the people around you, the world's people, those who do not know him — have no thought of his beauty. They have not seen him as you have. And you want them to see him as he appears to you, for you want them to love him and trust him and follow him.

Now, have you thought that about the only way you can show others the beauty of your friend Jesus Christ, is in your own life? When astronomers want to let you look at some wonderful star through a great telescope, they have you put your eye to an aperture where you see the star brought down close to you. Just so, people cannot see Jesus, way up in his glory; but you are a telescope in which his beauty is reflected. He shines in your heart, and then your neighbors look at you and see his image in you — just as the astronomer sees the image of the star in his telescope.

Surely, Christians with bad dispositions do not think how repulsive their bad disposition appears in the eyes of others — or they would spare no pains to cure themselves of the fault which so mars their character. Cannot someone invent a looking-glass in which men and women can look at their souls, so as to learn what beings they make of themselves when they allow their old evil nature to show itself in fits of anger, irritability, quarrelsomeness, sulkiness, and other moods of unamiability?

Surely if we love Christ truly, we will not allow ourselves to continue to do him dishonor, in life so unworthy of his dear name. We ought to dread giving any false representation of our Lord, and to strive in all our life to show his gentle love. Whatever we may do for Christ, in gifts to his cause or work in his service — if we fail to live out his life of sweet patience and forbearance, then we fail in an essential part of our duty as Christians.

Now we come to the most important matter. How can we cure our bad dispositions? Or can they be cured at all? Bad disposition is not to be regarded as a mere unfortunate infirmity, over which we may weep bitter tears of sorrow — but which we cannot help. It must be regarded in its true light, as a grievous sin, part of the old bad nature, which is not to be condoned nor allowed to stay in the new life — but which must be cast out. It is just as essential in a Christian life, that one become amiable and sweet-dispositioned, as that one become truthful, honest, pure, just. If a man who has been in the habit of lying, is converted and becomes a Christian, you expect him to put away lying and speak truth. If he has been dishonest, you expect him to become honest. So if he has been bad-dispositioned, he ought to be expected to become good-dispositioned.

Here is what Paul says about it: "Put away all these: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth. . . . Put on . . . as God's elect, holy and beloved — a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do you."

Bad disposition is just as unchristian, as lying or stealing — and we are to strive just as earnestly to get rid of it. No doubt the lesson of good disposition is a hard one to learn, one that cannot be learned in a day. Nevertheless, it is one that we must set ourselves to learn at whatever cost, if we would be worthy disciples of our Lord, worthy children of our Father. It is a lesson, too, that can be learned.

There are many human lives that are like instruments with jangled strings and most discordant keys. None but God could ever have made any music at all on them. But he has taken them in hand, has repaired the broken strings and put the keys in tune — and then sweet music has breathed from them.

There are some who say, "I never can live a truly sweet and gentle life. My disposition is hasty, and my tongue is sharp, and I cannot control either my temper or my tongue. I want to be always kindly and loving — but I cannot." True, so far as you yourself are concerned — but God can take the poor jangled chords and put them all in tune. You remember that sweet word in the Psalm — "He restores my soul." You know what "restore" means; it is taking the broken instrument, all out of tune, giving out only harsh discords when any fingers touch the keys — and putting it in perfect repair, so that it yields the sweet music it was first made to yield. "He restores my soul." That is, the worst dispositioned people may be made gentle and loving in all speech, act and manner, by the renewing and transforming power of divine grace. God can take the jangled keys and put them in tune, if we will but put them into his hand.

But we have something to do ourselves in this work. God does not take out the old nature and put in a new one — as a watchmaker might replace the worn-out works in your watch with new works. He works in us and through us. He shows us the pattern that he wants us to reach. Then he puts into our hearts the desire to be like the pattern. Then as we strive to become like it, he helps us. But we must strive ourselves to be sweet-dispositioned. We must watch the rising anger, and choke it back. We must keep down the ugly dispositions. We must learn to control ourselves, our dispositions, our feelings, our passions, our tongues. We must seek to develop the gentle things — and crowd out the nettles.

You have a little garden spot beside your house. The natural growths for that patch of soil in the spring days, are weeds. Just let it alone — and it will soon be filled with rank noxious weeds. But unless you are a very indolent gardener, you will not let it alone. You will dig out the weeds, and by the summer days, you will have your little garden filled with lovely flowers.

Just so, your heart is a patch of garden-soil. Naturally there grow in it weeds, nettles, briars, thorns. But do you intend to let it yield nothing better than these noxious growths? I hope not. It is your business to cultivate that bit of garden, to dig out the weeds and nettles and briars — and to have sweet flowers blooming there.

Do not blame your religion for your ugly dispositions; your religion will do its part, if you will do yours. But religion is not intended to save us from effort, from striving, from struggle. Religion binds us to God and insures us God's help; but we must help too. We must fight against the ugly dispositions; we must put on the beautiful gentleness, patience, meekness, and kindness of Christ's own life. We must very earnestly try to be Christlike.

Let us not forget that we have but such a little time to be together, and that the things in others that vex and try us so — will seem very small when we stand by the coffins of our friends. Surely, too, the memory of our surly dispositions and our irritable feelings and our sharp words, will give us added pain when all we have left of our dear ones shall be their cold clay or their newly made graves. Let us be earnest, friends, in our effort to put off our bad dispositions, and be like our Master.