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# **The Army of Christ, Lenten Sermons**

**Keene Martin A**

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# THE ARMY OF CHRIST:

A SERIES OF

## LENTEN SERMONS.

BY THE

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“O ALMIGHTY God, who by Thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to Thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandedst him earnestly to feed Thy flock ; make, we beseech Thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach Thy holy word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

## SERMON I.

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THE ARMY OF CHRIST: ITS DISCIPLINE AND UNIFORM.

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“All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”—  
1 St. PETER, v. 5.

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THE words humble and humility, both in English and in the language of the New Testament, are derived from words, signifying the ground, and refer to the outward gesture, by which that state of mind is usually manifested.

In Eastern countries respect for superiors is shown either by a bow, so profound, that the head nearly touches the ground; or by a complete prostration of the whole body on the earth. And even with ourselves, as the haughty erecting of the head is the way of expressing pride, so is bowing, or in some cases, kneeling, the usual mark of respect and deference. If, then, humility be, as it is, a desirable thing, we

may well wish to be able to take up in this sense words, which we should never desire to be true in the sense in which the Psalmist uttered them—"My soul cleaveth unto the dust." This we should specially desire at this present season of humiliation, when we are called to think upon our sins, and humble ourselves because of them. Thus, to lie low both toward God and toward man is at once a safe and a happy position—nay more, the only safe and happy position. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." It is at the root of half our misery and sin. It cleaves more firmly to us, perhaps, than any other evil, appearing now in one form, now in another, often seeming like an angel of light, but ever bringing along with it unhappiness to its victim, and to those around. In those led by the Spirit of God, its effects are much to be deplored. It mars the work of Divine grace in the heart, eats away many a fair fruit of holiness, and thus brings injury to the Christian and dishonour to his Lord. How earnestly then should we desire and pray to be humble!—humble toward man and toward God. Nothing more frequently and seriously than want of humility hinders the sinner's entrance through the strait gate, and after he has entered checks his pro-



gress in the narrow way that leads to life. May you and I, dear brethren, daily be made more truly humble, and thus more truly happy and holy. May we learn of Him, who was meek and lowly of heart, that so we may find rest to our souls. That which we have brought before us this evening is humility toward man: "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."

I. In the first place, let us consider the direction, "All of you be subject one to another." What are we to understand by words like these? Do they require us to disregard the distinctions of rank and position, appointed by Him who ruleth over all? Is the whole fabric of society to be upset, so that the master may take the place of the servant, the parent of the child, the monarch of the subject? By no means. The very opposite is the lesson taught here, as every where else in Holy Scripture. In the words immediately before the text the Apostle says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." Some have thought that we have here a repetition of the important rule so often repeated in Scripture, that young persons should yield proper respect and obedience to those farther on in life. There is not enough in our days of such deference and respect for

the aged, such as prevailed so widely and so rightly in days gone by. True, old age may not always bring with it wisdom and piety, and other qualities fitted to draw forth esteem and reverence; yet, even then, a deference at least is due to it; but when these things are found, what more noble than an aged saint grown old in the service of Christ, mellowed by the discipline of life, and ripe for the heavenly garner? Truly, "a hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."

It is very evident, however, from the first verses of this chapter, that the word "elder," at least, has not this wide general sense. There the title presbyter, which is shortened into priest in our Prayer Book, evidently belongs to the Christian minister. St. Peter claims a share in that ministry, and exhorts his fellow elders or presbyters, to feed the flock of God with disinterestedness and humility, looking forward to a future reward. If elders are thus the ministers of the Church, the younger must be either its lay members, as some have thought; or else, what seems to me more likely, the junior ministers, whom we call deacons, and who are exhorted to be subject to the presbyters or elders. In other parts of Scripture we meet with similar exhortations to proper sub-

ordination. We find subjects exhorted to be in subjection even to *heathen* kings and governors; wives to be subject to their husbands; children, to their parents; servants, to their masters; so that plainly the direction to all Christians, to be subject one to another, is by no means meant to do away with these distinctions. Indeed, the very word here used, "be subject," would in itself tell us this. It is that used of the discipline of an army. We know of what immense importance such discipline is. The severest penalties are inflicted for breach of it—sometimes even the penalty of death. This is not a wanton sacrifice of life; for in time of war far more lives would be lost were a spirit of insubordination to be tolerated, than are thus sacrificed for the maintenance of discipline. Just such is the view which holy Scripture gives of our state here.

The Church of Christ is spoken of as an army—the Church militant here on earth—every individual in that army being a soldier of the Cross, fighting under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil. The professing visible Church contains within it not only many real, loyal soldiers, who fight their Lord's battles in their Lord's strength, but also, alas! many, very many, who have never fought one hour

against the foe ; but, while wearing Christ's uniform, called by His name, and pledged by most solemn vows to serve Him, bear rebel hearts beneath the Christian uniform, never having become truly at peace with God through Jesus Christ. Now, what is the secret of strength to the true soldiers of the Cross? How shall that comparatively small and feeble band be mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan, and the establishing the kingdom of Christ? The direction of the text supplies the answer—"All of you be subject one to another." In other words, let not the officer surrender his place to the private, nor the private to the officer ; but let each one, while keeping his own place and doing his own duty, be ready in the great conflict to render service to his neighbour, without unduly standing on any false notions of his own dignity and importance, but with an eye only to the final victory of the whole army, and to the honour of the Great Captain of our salvation. Yes, brethren, this is the real secret of happiness, contentment, and victory, both in the Church and in the world. Both as men and as Christians we have too little of this spirit. We are too much wrapped up in the thought of ourselves as individuals, and too