

**THE DIVINE HARP ON WHICH THE PRAISES
OF GOD ARE TO BE SOUNDED FOR EVER.**

Oh Lord, we adore Thee and bless Thee,
That we in Thy hands of might
Are the chords whereupon Thou makest
The music of Thy delight ;
Whereon Thou wilt sound for ever
In wondrous and glorious tone,
The Name of Thy Son beloved,
His Name alone.

Angels are a witness rendered to the creative power of God. They excel in strength. We see in them creatures kept by God, so that they have not lost their first estate. Angels desire to fathom the wonderful ways of God with regard to man.

It is from the heart of man, descended to the lowest step in the scale of intelligent beings, resembling, alas! the beasts in his desires, Satan in his pride, a weak slave in his passions ; strong, or at least proud, in his spirit and in his pretensions ; having the knowledge of good and evil, but in a conscience which condemns him ; by reason of sufferings, sighing after something better, but incapable of attaining it ; having the want of some other world than this material one, but fearful of getting to it ; having the feeling that we ought to be in relationship with God, the only Object worthy of an immortal soul, but at an infinite distance from God in his lusts, and animated by such a desire for independence that he is unwilling

to admit God to the only place which becomes Him if He is God, and seeks consequently to prove that there is no God ; it is from the *heart of man*, capable of the highest aspirations, with which his pride feeds itself, and of the most degrading lusts with which however his conscience becomes disgusted ; it is from *the heart of man* that God forms *the divine harp* on which all the harmony of His praises can resound and will resound for evermore !

By the bringing in of grace and the divine power which unfolds itself in a new life communicated to man, and by the manifestation of the Son of God in human nature, fallen man is brought to judge all evil, according to divine affections formed in him by faith, and to enjoy good according to the perfect revelation of good in God Himself manifested in Christ ; while man gives God His place with joy, because He is known as a God of love. Man also takes again the place of dependence—the only one which is suitable for a creature ; but of a dependence which is exercised in the intelligence of all the perfections of God, on which he depends, and depends with joy, as a child on his father, like Christ Himself who has taken this place in order that we may enter into it.



THE GRACE OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

We find that the great aim, all through Scripture, is to connect the soul with God personally. After the fall, it was the voice of the Lord God walking

in the garden that accosted Adam; and it was from the presence of the Lord God that Adam hid himself—and so on;—the personal connection of the soul with God is given in how many instances I need not say, until we reach the culminating point of it in the gospel of glory committed to Paul: “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. iv. 6). Here alone the soul is in true worship. There are other truths and other parts of the testimony for God; dispensational truth; principles, etc., all most important in their place, and valuable as far as they go; but this alone goes the whole way, as it were, and reaches the goal.

I may illustrate what I mean, as to these two lines of truth and testimony, by the prodigal in the Father's house. In order that he might not feel his unsuited condition to the house, the father summoned the servants and directed them to invest him with habiliments indicative and assuring of his high position. Very happy and interesting work for the servants this, and of an order which engages many amongst us now; but, however interesting, it does not reach the *end* of the father's purpose. If the prodigal were only dressed and decorated, and not then conducted into the house of the father, both son and father would have been deprived of the great end of fruition of their reconciliation.

In like manner, in Joshua v., I have all the preparation for possessing the land; and

a skilful servant might educate me earnestly and deeply in one and all of the details, from the circumcision to the corn of the land; but I should lose the real power and conscious title of *entree*, if I had not seen the Captain of the Lord's Host, and, as an unshod worshipper, known that it is *with Him* that I take possession. In 2 Cor. iv. 6, the apostle has been shewing how the reception of the gospel connects us with Christ in glory, as it had thus connected himself at first, when he was taught this gospel, and was enjoined to be a minister and a witness of *the things that he had seen*. Now it was a glorified Christ that he had *seen*; therefore, if any one sees not this light which is the ministration of righteousness, it is not salvation merely that he is rejecting,—but the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face [or person] of Jesus Christ.”

I have often felt, that, in preaching or teaching, the Person and presence of the Lord was not the chief point set before the soul. By some the gospel is preached by calling on sinners to present Christ to God as an all-sufficient atonement for their sins; others, more enlightened, proclaim the love of God declared in His Son giving eternal life to every believer. But both these fall short of the presentation of God establishing righteousness in His own Son, and through Him; leading the believing prodigal to His own House, and nearness to Himself forever, in full and unbroken joy to *both*. In the two former, though the gain of the

sinner he largely insisted on, *God's* satisfaction—*His* gain, we may say in *His* joy—is not entered on at all. We little comprehend the gospel of the glory of Christ disclosed to Saul of Tarsus, who from *thence* became the witness of *the things that he had seen*. The glory of God became the starting point of the sinner ; as it was also the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Under the law, there were sacrifices, which, however, never saved the transgressors of the law from legal penalties. The gospel preached, even now-a-days, is more the presentation of the sacrifice, proclaimed, I admit, as all-sufficient and satisfactory, and the call on sinners is to approach it ; but this is not presenting to faith God's salvation, because *to Him* the sacrifice is full and endlessly satisfactory ; *His* satisfaction being the great subject-matter presented to faith. The reception of the Prodigal, great as was his rescue, does not derive its chief excellence from the completeness of his safety and the greatness of his deliverance, but from his happy and welcomed nearness to the Father.

We want a gospel which connects us with the presence of God in *His* joy ; and we want an education in *His* word, which would connect us with our Lord personally as the living Transcript of the mind of God.



GOD'S PRECIOUS THINGS.

Our common moral sense of God will tell us that *holiness* and *righteousness* must be precious with Him : " Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever" (Ps. xciii. 5). Purity and truth, and the maintenance of all the cares of order and integrity, must be infinitely according to Him. The conscience will bear this witness.

Faith knows that *His grace* is precious with Him. Faith knows that well. He delighteth in mercy. The gospel provides joy for the Divine mind. Faith understands this about God beyond the thoughts of the conscience or the moral sense that is in us.

The Gospel is the Gospel of the blessed (or happy) God (1 Tim. i. 11). In the eyes of the Lord the feet of the preachers of it on the mountains are beautiful ; and in the eyes of the Lord the garments, the mystic garments of the priests, the ministers of it, in the temple are beautiful— " Glory and beauty" (Rom. x. 15 ; Ex. xxviii. 2 ; Heb. ii. 7)

The Divine mind is thus disclosed to us. We apprehend it, thus far, with certainty. A meek and quiet spirit is, with the Lord, of great price (1 Pet. iii. 4). There is also richest joy before Him in heaven in the grace that welcomes a lost and returned sinner (Luke xv. 7, 10).

But, I ask, are not His *counsels* dear to Him ? Are not the events of his bosom dear to Him ?

The maintenance of righteousness and of godly order is of price to Him. The exercise of grace is joy to Him. Is not the purpose of His wisdom and the secret of His bosom alike dear to Him? Must it not be so? It cannot but be so. In the zeal of enforcing what is right, and in the publishing what is gracious, we may overlook this. Is it so that the Church was a peculiar bosom secret of God before the world was—a mystery kept secret from ages and generations but “hid in God”? (Eph. iii. 4, 5, 9-12; Col. i. 24-26). And can we not give such a thing a place among the things that are precious with Him?

Let us ask the Spirit that so fervently moves the apostle in such a chapter as Eph. i., whether the “hope” and the “calling,” which he there prays that the saints may discover and know, be of great price with God. Would He have the knowledge of it, so important with the saints, were it not high and dear in the thoughts of the mind of Christ?

The Church, as one has observed, opens and clears the volume. We have it shadowed in the man and woman of the Garden of Eden. We have it signalised in the Holy Jerusalem at the very close of the Apocalypse.

It is when the Spirit of Christ in David had for a moment rapidly touched or awakened the mystery, that the worshipper exclaims, “How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!” (Ps. cxxxix.)

It cannot but be so, though our moral judgment or our conscience, and again our common evangelic faith, do not so quickly reach it. We know, as we have said, that godliness is precious with Him. But again, I ask, are not His own eternal counsels, the secrets of His bosom, precious with Him?

Known unto Him are all His works from the foundation of the world. Redemption was no after-thought with Him. He planned it all. All passed in bright review before Him when as yet there was none of them. And all was precious. And the mystery of the Church that has given a body to Christ, and a partner in glory to the Son of His love, lay there the deepest, because the dearest, in the bosom of sovereign and eternal counsels.



RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS.

(Continued from page 100.)

Fourthly, "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

What relief is here—full immediate relief; the sense of forgiveness accompanying the very act of confession. Silence was broken by confession—no longer is effort made at concealment. The very One whose hand was felt to be so heavy, is

the One to whom the heart is opened and poured out ; " I acknowledged my sin unto Thee. I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord." There is no " creature that is not manifest in His sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do " (Heb. iv. 13). It is a solemn thought that we have to do with God ; and when once this truth gets fast hold on the conscience, the effort at concealment from Him produces the exquisite misery described in the two preceding verses. Confession gives relief, because it at once puts us in the actual place of having to do with God. It practically acknowledges that all things are naked and opened unto His eyes, that He is the rightful and truthful Judge, that what His word says of the evil of our hearts is true. Then is God justified by confession. This is true if God were regarded only in the character of a Judge. But how much more is God justified, when confession is made, under the sense of His love as known in the Gospel of His grace. There is it deepest, and fullest, and most truthful ; then the forgiveness of the iniquity of transgression, leads the same heart and lips which have confessed unto sin, to make confession unto salvation. And in this we find the deepest elements of the character of the saint. He had before but one subject of thought and study ; that was himself : he has now another, the Christ of God. Has he to speak of the first, it is the language of confession, ever deepening as he advances in the knowledge of the

Lord Jesus Christ ; but is he in his proper and happier element, has he to speak of Christ—it is to confess Him as all his salvation and all his desire. How happily do confession and praise unite ; happily because truthfully ; no language is sufficient to express the real degradation of a sinner ; no language sufficient to tell out the grace and glories of the Saviour. And when confession and praise are so united, what fervency they give to prayer and intercession.

Now, I doubt not that a great deal of the trial of spirit to which saints are subject arises from their not exercising themselves in self-judgment and confession, under shelter of the blessed truth of “righteousness without works.” It is the right apprehension of this blessed truth which puts us in the place of self-judgment—a place exceedingly high and wonderful. If God, the Judge of all, has become the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus, is it that they shall make light of sin ? Far from it ; it is that they may judge themselves. The blood of Jesus gives us access into the holiest ; there we are in the light ; there we are in the privileged place where Israel's High Priest could only enter once in the year, but which is ever open to us by Jesus, our great High Priest. Entering into the very presence of God, with unshod feet consciously touching the sand of the desert—there it is we address ourselves to one part of our priestly ministry, self-judgment, separating between the precious and the vile ; judging between things that

differ. We are in the light, and the light in which we are detects that which is inconsistent with itself; and we could not stand there, unless under the shelter of that very blood which has introduced us there; and we learn there more and more the value of that precious blood. We have found in it remission of sins—it has washed us, and keeps us clean. Now, I believe “the uprightness of heart” mentioned in the last verse of this Psalm to be very intimately connected with self-judgment; for this eventually turns us back on the blessedness announced in the Psalm, that the very evil which we have only now detected God doth not impute to us—God has covered it. It is thus that the heart is kept humble, and the conscience tender and lively. I believe the uprightness and honesty of confession which may have been manifested at conversion, is frequently impaired from neglect of self-judgment before God. A saint may become too solicitous about his own character in the eyes of his fellow-saints, or of the world, and thus unconsciously be led to act a part, instead of getting his life strengthened from the Spring and Source of life. There was a truthfulness in the exercise of heart which led first to Christ, but this is impaired when the maintenance of our character becomes our object, instead of Christ. Now, by self-judgment truthfulness is maintained, and our need of Christ in new and various ways becomes manifest. Let the exercise of soul be ever so personally humbling, yet if it leads to Christ, it leads to a larger

apprehension of the blessedness declared in this Psalm : we are really strengthened. At times I marvel at the grace of God in permitting us to judge ourselves. He can never give up His title as " Judge of all ;" we have come to Him as such (Heb. xii. 23), but so completely has He, by His grace, justified us through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, that He would have us arraign ourselves before the judgment-seat, and be the judges of our own selves. The right apprehension of standing in complete righteousness before God in Christ can alone qualify us for this. Self-judgment may have been carried on by us in our ignorance on a different principle—viz., seeking to find some ground in ourselves for acceptance with God. But now it is to search and see how just and holy is the way of God in dealing with us, so as to make us debtors alone to grace, and yet this very grace reigns through righteousness by Jesus Christ ; since redemption displays the holiness, justice and truth of God in strict accordance with His mercy.

There are three characters of judgment with which the saint has to do—self-judgment—the judgment of the church—the judgment of the Lord. These are very distinct in their character. Attention to the first necessarily precludes an individual from falling under the judgment of the church, whose province is to judge those within, while those who are without God judgeth (1 Cor. v. 12, 13). The failure of the church to exercise judgment, in

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its own proper province, on overt acts of evil—such as occurred at Corinth—brings on the judgment of the Lord in some outward and manifest form. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1 Cor. xi. 30). It is equally the province of the church to judge the doctrine of those within. The Lord had it against Thyatira—that Jezebel, which called herself a prophetess, was suffered to teach her seducing doctrine. And the Lord must judge in this case also, if the church tolerates evil doctrine. But the judgment of the Lord is ever supreme, and we are always, individually and collectively, amenable to it. Self-judgment, indeed, would prevent us, as individuals, from falling under the Lord’s judgment in a marked and manifest manner: “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, but when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord” (1 Cor. xi. 31, 32). The rod for wilful disobedience need not be applied, because self-judgment would prevent such outbreaks, the principle of which would have been secretly judged. But although the judgment of the Lord, in the shape of present punishment, would thus be avoided, this does not interfere with the general truth, that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Heb. xii. 6). The difference of the Lord’s dealing, even where there might be outward sorrow, would be very apprehensible to the conscience of those who came under it. To the soul exercised in self-judgment it would

readily be interpreted as the interference of love, the wisdom of which would be discerned. To the careless saint it would be felt as punishment, and regarded as a warning to bring him to a sense of his actual condition. Nor must we forget how much the needed discipline of the Lord is preventive; and this, too, is learned in self-judgment, in the holiest of all. The "thorn in the flesh" might have been interpreted by the apostle very differently from what the Lord intended, had his soul been unexercised before God about it: "Lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. xii.). He had not been so exalted; but there was the unsuspected danger and tendency to be guarded against; and this the apostle discovered, not by revelation, but by exercise of soul before the Lord. And have we not all had occasion, not only to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God for something positively wrong in our ways, but also to justify His love and wisdom in some special discipline the preventive character of which has been taught to us by Himself in the holiest of all? I feel increasingly the importance of deep searching self-judgment, under the shelter of the blessed oracle: "Transgression forgiven—sin covered—iniquity not imputed." I say not that we are always able to interpret the Lord's dealings with us, but I believe self-judgment as to the springs of evil, leading to confession before God, to be the means of attaining this interpretation. God is always right—a simple but deeply practical truth. We put

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God in the right by confession ; and we not only get relief, but we actually learn that God is right, and understand His ways. O if saints did know the toilsome process of self-vindication, and instead of justifying themselves were to justify God, what sorrow would they avoid. And it betrays so much want of confidence in God to be anxious to vindicate ourselves ; as if, after all, it was our own character, and not His grace, which was the real power of blessing. I think we see the design of the apostle in using the word "discern," not simply judge (in the Greek, 1 Cor. xi. 31). If we would "discern" ourselves, we should not be judged. Self-discernment, getting a positive insight into the real moving springs of the activity of the flesh. Who can bear to look too closely into it, unless he know the blessed truth that God had judged the flesh in the cross of Christ : "Our old man has been crucified with Him" (Rom. vi. 6). The new evil which we discern in it God had seen from the beginning, and allows us now to see, that we may justify Him in His total judgment of it. The flesh cannot discern itself—it cannot stand before God. It is by the power of life, communicated directly from Christ, brought into this exercise by the Holy Ghost Himself, that we thus discern ourselves ; and this in the immediate presence of God Himself. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are Spiritually discerned.

But he that is spiritual judgeth all things" (1 Cor. ii. 14, 15). It is a human aphorism that "the proper study of mankind is man," but deeply fallacious. Man knows not himself by studying himself, but by studying God: "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3). It is by this divine science that man really knows himself; not by measuring himself by himself (cf. 2 Cor. x. 12), but by measuring himself by God—by God as He is revealed in and through Christ. And I have often thought that the annals of history dark as they are, or the record of crime black as it is, would not together present such a picture of the depravity of man, as would the secret confessions of saints to God, if they were laid open to us as they are to Him. Nothing but the consciousness of complete justification could ever embolden the saint to confess before God those secret springs of evil which he detects when judging himself immediately in the presence of God. We wonder not at the most devoted saint speaking of himself as the chief of sinners.

"For this shall every one that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely, in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding-place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance."

It is indeed a blessed encouragement to the soul to be assured that there is nothing we may

not tell God. He has done everything to win our confidence, even delivering His "Son for our offences, and raising Him again for our justification." And it is by confession that we practically maintain our confidence in Him. It is because of the connection between confession and forgiveness that every one that is godly can pray unto God in a time when He may be found. If sin fresh discovered in ourselves need not bar access to God—if He does not hide Himself away from us, but is always to be found—what can hinder? And, practically, what does hinder intercourse with God? It is not God Himself. It is not that either a sacrifice or a Priest are to be sought—all is ready. But the unreadiness is in ourselves. There the real hindrance is to be found. We often try anything rather than the right thing. We may become more diligent in outward service—more regular in outward worship—more keen in judging the evil of others—when the one thing needful is confession. It is indeed a bad state of soul, when things most blessed in their place are used by us to interrupt our intercourse with God. God requires truth in the inward parts; and if there be alienation of heart from God, the restoration must be truthful. God must be justified, no blame must be laid on Him, all must be taken on ourselves; and this is just what confession does. He who is godly must regard God as the only Justifier, and must know Him, as ever to be found, even when we have to

go before Him with the confession of iniquity. And is it not in this way that we foil Satan as the accuser? If there be readiness of confession, is there not the consciousness that it is God who justifieth? Who, then, can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? That which the accuser would lay to their charge they have already laid to their own charge before God—and it is forgiven. It is thus, by experience, that the exercised soul knows God Himself as its hiding-place—"Thou art my hiding-place." There may be many ways in which the blessedness of faith in Jesus may be experienced; but I question if any way is more vivid than the difference between hiding ourselves away from God, as Adam did in the garden after he had sinned, and hiding ourselves in God. What a thought it is, that God should present Himself, as He does in the Gospel of His grace, as the only refuge for a sinner; as the alone One who is able to take his part, and can effectually take his part. Is not this one blessed aspect of the glory of God? He makes all His goodness to pass before us, and proclaims His own name as just, yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus—the only God—because He is a just God and a Saviour; and has thus given His challenge that there is no God beside Him; because He is a Saviour God. There is a refuge from the accusations of Satan—from the frowns of the world—from that which is more bitter than either, self-condemnation; and this refuge is in God Himself. He has laid Himself out to us

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as the Depository of our every woe, the Sympathiser with our every care, the One who pitieth every infirmity, the patient Listener to every complaint we have to make against ourselves. All this is learned under the knowledge of the blessedness of the truth of "Righteousness without works;" yea, is comprised in that blessedness. It is confidence in this divine way of righteousness which emboldens us to say, "Thou shalt preserve me from trouble." And is any trouble equal to soul trouble? How few are able to take the honourable place of suffering either for Jesus, or for righteousness' sake! such may rightfully rejoice. But spirit-broken, heart-sick, self-weary, whither can we go? God is our hiding-place; He "comforteth those that are cast down;" He is "the Father of mercies (pitifulnesses) and the God of all comforts." (2 Cor. vii. 6; i. 3); He can make us rejoice out of our sorrow. And surely it is not right for the song of redemption to be sung once only on the shore of the Red Sea, and then the notes of praise to die away, and to be succeeded by murmurings. Alas, it is often so practically; the joy of conversion is frequently followed by murmuring and complaining. The beginning of our confidence is not held fast. The truth of the blessedness of God's imputing righteousness without works is let slip, as though we no longer needed it. Saints have to learn to justify the wisdom of God in redemption in all its fulness, by learning, in the progress of their own experience, that nothing short of it would

meet their need. We do not, as we might expect, find saints singing the new song, new and ever varied, yet in substance the same. And wherefore? Because grace alone can be the ground work of our song; and if the heart be not established in grace, we have no heart for song. But when a saint goes on under the shelter of the blessedness of "righteousness without works," learning it as he goes on his way, how frequent the boast of thanksgiving—"Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." There is a "singing and making melody in the heart to the Lord" (Ephes. v. 19); and this not publicly, but privately in the closet. For great, unquestionably, as is the transition from darkness to light, by faith in Christ Jesus, at the outset, yet, what is the experience of the saint afterwards? Is it not constant deliverances? "He that is our God is the God of salvations" (Ps. lxxviii. 20). It is a happy school into which we are brought to learn God in the character in which He has revealed Himself to us. The history of each individual saint will tell out the same truth—that where "sin abounded grace has superabounded;" and the end of each saint individually will show forth the same truth as the church collectively, "*to the praise of the glory of His grace.*" O that we may be honest and upright in heart with God, and then the marking His ways will issue in frequent songs of deliverance.

(*To be continued, D. V.*)