

THE THOUGHTFULNESS OF DIVINE LOVE.

I JOHN iv. 16.

This passage is one of much beauty and comfort to the earnest and lowly soul, for it presents to us God, thinking of us from our state of utter sinfulness on to judgment itself, and displays His love from beginning to end.

In general, the epistle presents us Divine life, that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested here below in the person of the Lord Jesus, communicated to others, that thing, as it is said, which is true in Him and in us.

The Gospel of John, besides the doctrine of the Comforter, presents to us God manifested in the Son, and life in Himself; the Epistle, life communicated to us, and that life known in its fruits of love to the brethren, and obedience or practical righteousness.

In the passage before us, love is especially the subject, and first love as partaking of the nature of Him who is love. He that loveth is born of God and knows God; partakes of the nature and knows Him who is it, as partaker of it.

Possession of a nature, (and without possessing it is impossible,) makes us know what that nature is, what the being is who has that nature. A mere animal does not know what a man is, his way of thinking, feeling; a man knows what a man is.

What an angel is, save as the part of connection with God necessarily reveals some elements of his nature, he does not know. He that loves, knows God, for he is born of Him, being partaker of the divine nature: a blessed truth, the spring (righteousness being introduced,) of eternal joy and infinite delight.

But when we come to the practice down here, we find difficulty in it. I love the brethren: what coldness after all, often self has come in, and I fail in love. I cannot trust my own heart a minute. Can I really say I am born of God and know God when I find so much in a treacherous heart that belies after all what I desire? I hope, I fear—there is no liberty of spirit. And it is so far well; but, therefore, the blessed Spirit gives us the knowledge of love from another side, and where it is perfect: in God Himself, His ways and dealings. In this the love of God is *manifested* towards us, in our case. But let me briefly analyse the passage, that we may seize its completeness and bearing. First, in verses 9, 10, God's love to the sinner; verse 12, the enjoyment of His love in the saint; and 17, perfected in the boldness it gives us for the day of judgment.

First, His love to us as sinners. The eternal object of God's delight, His only begotten Son, was sent in blessing to us, and with this two fold object—first the positive blessing, what is given, that we might live through Him. We were dead in sin, God gives us a new life—a divine life. We no

longer live through Adam, but through the Son of God. He that hath the Son hath life. Our existence towards God is divine life in Christ. God has thought of our ruin in love, and given us eternal life in His Son.

But we were guilty also, as responsible beings before Him. Here His love has met us. He has given His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is not law, nor duty, though it was there, but because it was there, ruin, failure, and condemnation. But love is not in that we love God; (which is what we have to look for in our hearts if we seek the proof of life there, but then really under law), that law required, and rightly—but in that God loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is not requiring what we ought to be from us, just as this is, but putting away, making a holy propitiation for our sins. We were dead in sins, and He gives us life. We were guilty, and He has given Him to make propitiation for our sins. He has met our whole case, in both its aspects as sinners. Now the love of God is known, the heart free, the conscience purged, He can exhort us to love one another.

Now we have to do with a saint, and he has more privileges than being forgiven and having life. No man has seen God. How know Him, even if we have a life and nature which capacitates us thereto? know Him as an object fully before our souls, and so known. Before the world this was in Christ personally present revealing Him (see John i. 18),

and He was rejected. But how in us? If we love one another *God dwelleth in us*, and His love is perfected in us. Here is the saints privilege. He enjoys the love of God, poured out in his own soul. God dwells in him by His Spirit, and makes His presence known in infinite and enjoyed love, but as dwelling in the believer. It is not still that we love Him, but that His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us. It is in our hearts, but what is there is the love of God, known and enjoyed by His own presence. If God thus dwells in us—which we know, because He has given us of His Spirit, and sheds that love by His very presence abroad in our hearts—we may well say perfected in love, for what more perfect exercise and display of it in *communication* to us than His dwelling in us Himself, who is it perfectly, and sheds it abroad in our hearts by His presence; but even this looks out when the proof of it is to be given. We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. You cannot separate the enjoyment of God's love in us by His presence, from that in which it has been perfectly displayed in His own work to His own glory. And this portion of the Christian is not a special or extraordinary proof of progress. It is the Christian state. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God. For God, if He dwell in us, is infinite, and we dwell in Him, feel surrounded, and are, by His goodness, love, power,

so that our abode and rest is in Him, and in the fulness of His love. All this may be realised in different degrees, but it belongs to every one that confesseth JESUS, the lowly man, to be the Son of God. Of course, he does not speak of hypocrites.

But again the Apostle carefully brings us back to look at the love as in God, as displayed towards us. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. Whatever the enjoyment of the love and realization of it, it is always the love in Him, sovereign love, which He hath had to us. We know God. God is love, and he that dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Here, though the love is ever the same, what God is and what He displays to us, yet the order of thought is somewhat different. I am dwelling in love, the enjoyment and consciousness of this love, and its power in exercise towards others. I dwell then in God, for God is love; dwelling in this he dwells in God, for this is what God is. His soul rests, reposes, and confides in Him, surrounded by His goodness, and so as that love is active in his soul, shed abroad and exercised there, God is in him, God being love, and deigning to dwell in us. First it was the fact, God dwells in the saint, and as infinite, the saint in Him. Now as to his enjoyment and privilege he dwells in God; and then as to the activity of love, God dwells in him. The first fact is this state, and the double blessedness of God Himself, and the activity of His love. All this is simple. Rich and eternal and pure life now enjoyed in joying in God

Himself, and exercised as it was in Jesus, in love to His, and every sinner around.

We now come to the *third* step in this blessed chain of love. Herein is love perfected with us, that we might have boldness for the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world. Love has looked on from the time of our sin, looked in and dwelt in us by the way, and now tells the tale of its perfectness for that day, when God's judgment calls all in question but the fruit of His love. But how should this meet the day of judgment? Here love is perfected with us, we are as Christ is, who is the judge; what fear, then? Oh, how has love thought of us, from the state of sins and death right on to judgment, and given us to stand now "in this world" as Christ Himself is before God. Who shall find fault in that! Shall Christ whom we are like, or God whose delight is in Him? We have boldness for the day of judgment. No place in which the Christian is so bold, when he knows his place in Christ. When we stand before His judgment seat we shall be perfectly like Himself; and as He is, so are we *in this world*. Many a sincere person, I mean sincere Christian, does not see this his place in Christ. He may say, I am a poor sinner, and the cross just suits me. Blessedly true. But change the phrase: I am a poor sinner, and the judgment seat just suits me! That will not do. Yet we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. v. 10). There we must be fit for the judge. A dirty man is fit to be washed—a

debtor for one who comes to pay his debts, but a righteous person for a judgment seat; and we have here the measure of this: Christ, who sits to judge, is my righteousness. When I appear there, I shall appear in glory, shall be like Him, bear His image, having been *raised* in glory—my vile body fashioned like His glorious body. Here there is no room for fear. Grace has put the believer in Christ now, and through His work he is accepted in the beloved: as He is so is the believer in this world. How can I fear if I am as Christ? Note, it is not as He *was*. He was without sin, knew no sin even when He was down here. If I say I have none, I deceive myself, and the truth is not in me. But my place before God is in Christ, not in the flesh. There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus. But as He *is*, now He has finished the work and by Himself purged our sins having by one offering perfected for ever those who are sanctified, through the offering of His body once for all, and now as He *is*, so *are* we in this world, accepted in the beloved. I repeat, what room is there for fear? Is not this love, perfect, thoughtful love, that in the place of judgment, there we find perfection? Then, I know I am like the judge, like the Lord in glory, like my Saviour. Gracious love that has thought of my sins, and spiritual death in them; blessed and blessing love, God's dwelling in me; and perfected love, in that I am as Christ, God's own Son, so that where surely fear might be, fear is cast out. Love has made me know now what love has done,

and while it makes me enjoy itself now, God dwells in me and I in Him, makes me look back and see it active when I was a dead sinner, a love that flows from itself out to me, so that I reckon on it, yea, learn its perfectness when I might fear, and find that love had counsels of infinite wonder, to make me as Christ the Son of God, a man in glory, and righteousness of divine perfection, even the one before whose judgment seat I shall stand, like Him, His righteousness mine. Love has left nothing unthought of that could make me exalt God as infinite in grace, and enjoy His goodness in a righteousness which He has made mine. There is no fear in love. Where shall fear find a place, from my state of death in sins up to the judgment seat of Christ? He cannot love me too much, but He cannot love me more, and my heart is at rest.

And note here, though we pass through it, and it is very natural that we should, yet *hope* as to the judgment day is not the true feeling of a believer at all. We hope because we see goodness, and know there is such a thing as redemption; and we fear because we see that there is that in us which cannot stand before the judgment of God. We vacillate, are ill at ease, and when the thought of judgment comes in, there is torment because there is fear. God would not have us so. He would not we should have torment. He would have us walk with Him happy, and in *confidence*. Fear is not confidence. But if we have to be judged, that is, our state decided according to our works in that

day, (for we shall all stand before the judgment seat), we shall certainly be condemned. Enter not, says the heart that knows what sin, and what flesh is in God's sight—enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord, for in Thy sight *shall no man living be justified*. But the believer has learned this as to himself before the judgment comes, and has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, and knows that redemption is as certain as complete, and divine righteousness as satisfactory, if I may use so feeble a word, as his condemnation was certain. He does not mix up as his portion judgment for sin, and redemption from sin. He owns fully the one and his own deserved condemnation, and believes fully in the other. He does not destroy the force of both by mixing them together. Judgment according to what he is, would, he knows, have been certain condemnation. Divine righteousness, (and we are the righteousness of God in Christ,) is necessary and perfect acceptance. Grace has given it to him, has made it his. As He is, so are we *in this world*, for we have it by faith, we have boldness in the day of judgment, and there is no fear in love, our portion is perfected in this. *Raised in glory*, he is manifested before the judgment seat, but glorified before he is there, his vile body fashioned like Christ's glorious body, by that power which can subdue all things to itself. Knowing then as he is known, he looks back from that blessedness, bearing the image of the heavenly, on the countless ways of love, which has brought a poor

feeble creature, justified through Christ the Lord, all the way along, that he might know himself, and the love which has led, thought of, sustained, borne with, lifted up, and brought there to enjoy and praise, made like the Lord, the love that has done it, and to dwell in a holiness where no evil can enter, and which is only joy, and find Jesus the Lord of Glory, the first born among many brethren. We love him because He first loved us. But oh, how imperfect are all our thoughts of that day. Our part is to dwell in, and think of Christ, to serve Him with an undivided heart here.

“ I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE.”

JOHN VI.

If a person is neither feeding, digesting, nor hungering, he is in an unhealthy condition; if he feeds, and the process of digestion follows in natural order, he hungers again. Just so is it with things of God and the child of God, and in order to health, each of these three operations has its proper time and place.

A man that eats nothing must sink in decay while another who cannot digest his food suffers from a train of attendant maladies, not one of the least (because of the bad effect it has around) is *discontent*; he is discontented with himself, and with all about him. So it is with divine things; if I cannot digest what I have taken, the food does

me no good; not that the fault is in the food, it is *in myself*.

A hungry man does not find fault with his food, because he is hungry, and the plainer the food, the more easy is it of digestion, and even a crust is acceptable to a hungry man. To be complaining of my food is neither hungering, digesting, nor feeding; and a saint in a healthy condition of soul himself, will not be finding fault with others, or with the meetings, he will be helping them both by the flow of health in himself.

It is not a sign of a healthy state for the appetite to need "pampering," or for us to desire that the manna should be made up into pleasant morsels by *natural skill*. (See Num. xi.) It is a sign of health to be hungry, and the soul that digests most regularly is the one you will most frequently find again hungry.

If you see a saint who is never hungry, may you not conclude that something is wrong? If all were right would he not digest? would he not hunger again and again? And if we are in secret with God, we shall be found at that place where food is dispensed.

Only such souls "grow," according to 1 Peter ii. 2, 3, and only such help others. The manna was to be gathered *each day*. Your supplies must come directly from the Lord himself, and what you were supplied with yesterday gives you no power for to-day, and if the Lord did supply us with more than was necessary for each day, such are we that

we should immediately become independent of Him; it would take us out of the path of faith. He does not do this; He will have us dependent on Himself.

This world is as really destitute of food in itself for the redeemed, as was the wilderness for Israel; hence the need of "bread from heaven." Like a humming bird plunged under the water, they have come down into an element that is not only foreign to them, but that ministers death to the soul that imbibes it; and it is by a strength ministered from above, they are enabled to live, because they partake of a suited supply from thence. If I am longing "for cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic," (Num. xi.), I am sighing for Egypt's food, and not for the supplies of God. These feed *the flesh*, while the word feeds the *new man* and judges the flesh, with all its desires,—condemns it, and no longer owns it. "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, even so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." (John vi.) But as Israel needed the manna, so do you and I need a *daily* supply. Be careful that you do not loathe this "light food;" if you do, be assured that your heart has already gone far into the land where *you will* presently be—"among the flesh-pots of Egypt," where you may, alas! "eat bread to the full," but where all you get can only minister to and nourish *the flesh*. "For to be carnally minded is *death*." (Rom. viii.)

JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF FAITH.

HEBREWS XII. 2.

All the witnesses for God spoken of in Hebrews xi. are for our encouragement in the path of faith; but there is a difference between them and Jesus. Accordingly the Apostle here singles Him out of all.

If I see Abraham, who by faith sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, or Isaac, who blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come, or Jacob on his dying bed of blessing and worship, they have all run their race before; but in Jesus we have a far higher witness. Besides, in Him there is the grace to sustain us in the race.

Therefore in looking unto Jesus we get a motive and an unfailing source of strength. We see in Jesus the love which led Him to take this place for us, who, "when he putteth forth his own sheep, goeth before them." For if a race is to be run, we need a fore-runner. And in Jesus we have got one who did run before us, and has become the Captain and Completer of faith, in looking to whom we draw strength into our souls.

While Abraham and the rest filled up, in their little measure their several places, Christ has filled up the whole course of faith. There is no position that I can be in, no trial whatever that I can endure, but Christ has passed through all and over-

come. Thus I have got one who presents Himself in that character which I need ; and I find in Him one who knows what grace is wanted, and will supply it; for He has overcome, and says to me, " Be of good cheer : I have overcome the world," not, you shall overcome; but, I have overcome. It was so in the case of the blind man, (John ix. 31, &c.,) who was cast out of the synagogue; and why? Because Jesus had been cast out before him. And now we learn, that however rough the storm may be, it does but throw us the more thoroughly on Christ, and thus that which would have been a sore trial does but chase us closer to Him.

Whatever turns our eye away from Christ is but a hindrance to our running the race that is set before us. If Christ has become the object of the soul, let us lay aside every weight. If I am running a race, a cloak, however comfortable, would only hinder and must be got rid of; it is a weight, and would prevent my running. I do not want anything to entangle my feet. If I am looking to Jesus in the appointed race, I must throw the cloak aside: otherwise it would seem strange to throw away so useful a garment. Nay, more; however much encouragement the history of antecedent faithful witnesses in Hebrews xi. may give, our eye must be fixed on Jesus, the true and faithful One. There is not a trial or difficulty that He has not passed through before me, and found His resources in God the Father. He will supply the needed grace to my heart.

There were these two features in the life of Christ down here. First, He exercised constant dependence on His Father: as He said, "I live by the Father." The new man is ever a dependent man. The moment we get out of dependence, we get into the flesh. It is not through our own life (for indeed we have but death) that we really live, but by Christ, through feeding upon Him.

In the highest possible sense, He walked in dependence on the Father, and for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Secondly, His affections were undivided. You never find Christ having any new object revealed to Him so as to induce Him to go on in His path of faithfulness. Paul and Stephen, on the other hand, had the glory revealed to them, which enabled them to endure. For when the heaven was opened to Stephen, the Lord appeared in glory to him, as, afterwards to Saul of Tarsus. But when the heavens were opened on Jesus, there was no object presented to Him, but, on the contrary, He was the object of heaven; the Holy Ghost descends upon Him, and the voice of the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Thus the divine person of the Lord is witnessed to. The Apostle here gets hold of the preciousness of Christ in the lowness into which He has come; but he never loses sight of the glory of Him who has come there. So when I get Christ at the baptism of John, I see Him at the lowest point (save in another way on the cross); and find-

ing Him there, I find all the divine compassion of His heart.

The ear is the gate by which the christian receiveth embassages of the highest aims and holiest purposes, those which God Himself giveth for His own eternal ends, calling His people by glory and virtue; therefore the word of Christ, "take heed how ye hear."

BE IN EARNEST.

Love will infuse into every man the spirit of the Gospel, and will render him an evangelist in his own sphere. Let love to the Saviour—love for souls, be true and fervent, and it will naturally burst forth in earnest entreaties and exertions. It will appeal to souls, plead with them, lay hold of them, agonize for them. It will never forget that with them it is a matter of life and death—of ineffable eternal blessedness, or of unutterable eternal woe. And wherever the Gospel is preached, it will realize the future in the present, and raise the cry in the heart to the God of all grace, that not one soul may go away unimpressed, unblessed, unsaved.

Dear reader, it is true this work is God's work from first to last. Yes, but He will work through *thy* zeal and *thy* energy. Oh! then, let the flame of *thy* love be unquenchable. Be in earnest. Heaven is in earnest. Hell is in earnest. Be thou in deep, deep earnest. The Master wept over a city. Thou hast a world to weep over.

Meditation on the word, and watchfulness unto prayer, are the only means of keeping the soul in that freshness of communion with the Lord, which fits for His service. "*He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.*" Again, it is written, "*If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*" And then, when his own soul has been refreshed, from him shall flow forth "*rivers of living water,*" for the refreshment of others.

Every service we undertake ought to be the result of fresh personal communion with the living Head, the Fountain of all supply. Nothing short of this will meet the need. There must be enjoyed association with the Source of life and blessing, in order to become the channel of life and blessing to others. Ability, however great, gift, however distinct, are not enough without personal communion. Unless we drink ourselves from the fountain-head, our ministries will be dry and profitless.

"I SHALL BE SATISFIED."

Psalm xvii. 15.

Oh! Thou art fair, Lord Jesus,
Fairer than all beside;
Fairer than earth's fair sunshine,
Or ocean's glittering tide—
Fair in Thy shadeless glory,
Fair in Thy changeless love,
Fair in redemption's story,
Fair on the throne above.

But oh! to my soul Thou'rt fairest,
As I muse on the bridal morn,
When the home which Thou preparest
Thy blood-bought shall adorn;
Then, then shall she rise to greet Thee,
Thine own, Thy chosen Bride,
Then, then shall mine eyes behold Thee,
And, *I shall be satisfied.*

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