

LIFE, LOVE and LIGHT

The Gospel of John and First Epistle of John

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CHAPTER EIGHT

LOVING AS HE LOVED

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11)

The careful reader of our Epistle will have noted that the Apostle interweaves Love with Light, making the two inseparable, after the manner of his Gospel. His first reference to Love is a reminder of the "**new commandment**" as its standard of expression. Passing on to the Love section of the Epistle, where the word occurs no less than forty-six times in three brief chapters, his thought moves about three chief considerations: Love as it is in GOD; Love as manifested in CHRIST; Love as exemplified in and through His followers.

These three all emerge from the opening sentence:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God" (I John 3:1). Behold: the amazing love of the Father; that love bestowed upon us in the person and work of the Son; resulting in our becoming the children of GOD, His "born ones," partakers of His nature, members of His family, set in the world to show forth the family characteristics.

I

Love at Its Source

We shall never know Love - not human affection or sentiment but love as we have it in the New Testament - till we trace it back to its fountain-head, in the heart and nature of GOD. It is well for us to realize that the Greek word for New Testament "**love**" occurs nowhere in secular literature, and this for the simple reason that this love is known only through the revelation and experience of GOD Himself. In Him:

1. **LOVE IS.** Love has no existence apart from GOD, and GOD has no existence apart from love. Twice John affirms, "**God is love.**" This is saying far more than "God loves." His loving

might be occasional or intermittent. His acts might be actuated by love today, only to change tomorrow. But no! Love is His nature. He cannot deny Himself. He cannot act contrary to Himself. Just as He **"is Light,"** pure and absolute, so He **"is Love,"** unmixed and unalloyed.

2. **LOVE IS IMPARTIAL.** Since loving, with GOD, is an expression of His nature, it is independent of any consideration outside of Himself, such as the attractiveness or deservedness of its object. (This is not to say that there are no qualities in the divine nature other than love; He is always holy, and He is always just, but never to the nullifying of His love.) Hence, He is **"no respecter of persons."** His gifts of love are not bestowed because of personal attraction nor withheld because of ill desert.

So our Lord appeals for a life equally **"without partiality,"** basing His appeal upon the Father's impartial treatment of all and the fact that we are members of His family: **"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"** (Matthew 5:44, 45).

3. **LOVE IS IMPASSIONED.** The Gospel hinges upon one little word, **"so."** GOD not merely loved: **"God so loved the world."** And John's appeal in his Epistle turns upon the same word: **"If God so loved us."**

It was a love that so welled up that it could not contain itself; rather, **"according to the riches of His grace . . . He hath abounded (overflowed) toward us."** Our salvation is the overflow of divine love. We were dead in trespasses and sins, children of disobedience and children of wrath. That we ever ceased to be such we owe to one thing: **"But God . . . for His great love wherewith He loved us"** (Ephesians 2:1-4). How shall we ever tell the wonders of such love to usward!

"Could we with ink the ocean fill,
Were every blade of grass a quill;
Were the whole world of parchment made,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of GOD above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor would the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky."

II Love in CHRIST

CHRIST is GOD, and GOD is Love. JESUS came to manifest the Father. John says of Him: **"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him"** (John 1:18). JESUS says of Himself: **"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"** (John 14:9). Then all that can be said of GOD as Love must be equally true of the Son in the days of His flesh.

In Him:

1. **LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.** If "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son," then the Son, in turn, must give as the case requires, coming "**not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.**" What a costly thing is it to love! GOD the Father paid the price of loving us. GOD the Son paid the price of His love for us. Having given His life for us, He now has the gift of eternal life to give to us.

2. **LOVE IS KIND.** Divine love has this characteristic: GOD is "**kind**" (Luke 6:35). And when that love, realized in human living, is depicted in First Corinthians thirteen, the description begins: "**Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind.**" It was our Lord's love that fulfilled this picture in life. How wonderful His love! How gentle under provocation; how long-suffering in the face of evil; how kind to the weak and weary and erring; how compassionate to the sinful, the sorrowing and the suffering. When will we, His followers, realize that our growth in Christ-likeness waits upon a kindness of life, out of a kindness of spirit, that reflects His love in the heart?

3. **LOVE IS UNFAILING.** The description of divine love in human life concludes with the summarizing statement: "**Charity never faileth.**" This was our Lord's love, from first to last. Truly His love, rooted in the divine nature, which is Love, fed by continual communion with His Father, sustained at all times by the indwelling Spirit energizing Him - such love as His never failed. With men and demons doing their worst, under the treachery of betrayal, the trial of cruel mockery, the torture of the cross, Love kept on loving. What a spectacle! The unveiling of GOD who is Love unfailing.

If men did not believe in His deity otherwise, in contemplating the disparity between their love and His, they must say, "**Truly this was the Son of God.**" And we are the followers of such as He! Nay, we are partakers of His nature - which is Love.

III

Love in and through Us

At this point the Apostle lays strong claim upon the Christian for a Life of Love. It is in this respect, above all else, that he "**ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.**" Moreover, no one but the child of GOD is qualified so to walk. And further, such a love-life is the world's supreme need.

1. **LOVE IS THE EVIDENCE OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE.** Our Lord's new commandment that His disciples "**love one another**" is by no means an arbitrary requirement. It is the natural expression of our new relationship. As the "**children of God**" - always the viewpoint of this Epistle - we have a common Father and are sharers alike of His life and nature. The tangible evidence of this invisible family bond is love - for who would not love his own brother? "**We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death**" (I John 3:14). If the love is not there, the life is not there. The absence of love is evidence that we are still "**abiding in death.**" The presence of its opposite, hatred, is evidence that we are capable of murder and to be classed as such (vs. 15). Moreover, love's evidence should be sacrificial, as was His, in a laying down of life for the

brethren (vs. 16), extending to the practical and the substantial, an actual meeting of our brother's need (vs. 17), a loving "**not in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth**" (vs. 18).

2. **LOVE IS THE RESPONSE TO HIS LOVE.** Under commandment to love one another as He loved us, is not such a standard our despair? It is not to be attained by striving after it as an external goal. Not by imitation, but by appropriation. His love is not merely, nor mostly, a standard to live by, but a reservoir to draw upon. "**Herein is love,**" says the Apostle, "**not that we loved God, but that He loved us**" (I John 4:10). Then he proceeds to trace the benefits of that redeeming love for the believer to the Abiding Life, to the fact that "**God dwelleth in him, and he in God**" (vs. 15).

This, then, is the secret of love's experience, a fountain opened in the heart: "**And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him**" (vs. 16).

What a treasure we have in such an inexhaustible supply. GOD is love and He has found a way of pouring Himself into our hearts by His HOLY SPIRIT given unto us (Romans 5:5). The genesis of love, then, is this: "**We love because He first loved us**" (I John 4:19).

3. **LOVE IS THE TEST OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP.** The Apostle cannot leave the matter of Love without laying heavily upon our hearts its utmost seriousness. Do we feel ourselves free to love or hate according to whim? Listen! The test is absolute and unequivocal: "**If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen**" (vs. 20)?

If our love is partial it is not GOD's love. If it makes distinctions, loving some and hating others, it has never drunk at the fountain fed by the divine nature, which is love, irrespective of the object. Left thus to his own native resources, the love that does not go out to "**his brother whom he hath seen**" cannot rise to the height of loving "**God whom he hath not seen.**" Yet the command is clear, and insistent, "**That he who loveth God love his brother also**" (vs. 21). And we are without excuse since, for the keeping of this command, He has made His own love, impartial, uniformly kind and unending, available to us.

"We Ought Also to Love"

As the Apostle bore down upon the disciple of CHRIST with the obligation to "**also walk even as He walked,**" so likewise in the matter of love. See I John 3:16 and 4:11 - the same wording in the Greek: "**we ought also.**" The Gospel is not merely that "**God so loved,**" but that His love so transforms that His children also love as He loved. Without that "**also**" in us, the world is slow to be impressed.

A Buddhist, seeking the truth, complained, "I want to believe in CHRIST, but I have never seen Him in those who profess to follow Him."

In China a dying man, when told the story of JESUS' love, cried with joy, "Ah! I always thought there was a GOD like that, somewhere."

By their reflection of the love of GOD His children should daily evidence their Father to those who know them. The little girl who said, when asked her thought of GOD, "I think He is more like JESUS CHRIST than anyone I know," should have had a dozen friends who "also" reminded her of GOD because of their walking as He walked, loving as He loved.

How His love, that led Him to lay down His life for us, ought to constrain us, in these days of dire need, to lay down our lives also, as the only means whereby that need will be met. "**Behold, what manner of love.**" Behold, until it burns its sacrificial cross into the moral and spiritual fibre of our being.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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