

LIFE, LOVE and LIGHT

The Gospel of John and First Epistle of John

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CHAPTER TWO

THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16)
"Having loved His own . . . He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1)

John's Gospel is, as we saw in our previous study, the Gospel of Life, of Love, and of Light.

We found that **"In Him was life"** and that from Him we have received life, first in creation, then in His new creation as we believed upon Him unto eternal life.

For the present study we view it as a Gospel of Love.

Love is back of the Life, as the impelling power for its bestowment. Sixty times the word love occurs in John's Gospel. Then, to get the whole panoramic sweep of John's message, all athrob with a marvelous love, we should include a glimpse of his other writings.

He who leaned upon his Lord's bosom, drank deeply of His love, delighted to designate himself **"the disciple whom Jesus loved,"** how wondrously he has written of love.

Here is a taster's sample, from the Apocalypse, the Epistle, the Gospel:

"Unto Him that loveth us" (Revelation 1:5).

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

"For the Father loveth the Son" (John 5:20).

"For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me" (John 16:27).

I

The Nature of Love

No one would think to describe or dissect love. Like the beauty and fragrance of a flower, when you have dissected it, you have spoiled it. It must be taken as it is.

We may say, however, that of the three - Life, Love and Light - Love is the most personal.

It comes nearest to expressing the real person of GOD - "**God is love.**"

It is through love that we apprehend Him most intimately.

Through His Life we live; through His Light we know; through His Love we abide in intimate union with Himself.

Some one has sought to separate love into two constituent elements: desire and delight. Desire broods over us, longs for us, woos us and claims us as its own; but only that, when so claimed, Delight may rejoice in us and lavish upon us its richest treasures. Such is human love at its best. Such preeminently is the love of GOD.

II The Gift of Love

In the expression of its desire, love delights to give.

Hence the heart of the Gospel: "**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.**"

No one has ever fathomed that verse. All we can do is to contemplate its depths, as though looking into the very heart of GOD.

For the moment let us think of the one expression - "**God so loved . . . that He gave**" (John 3:16a). The one naturally follows the other. It is the one explanation of the Incarnation. GOD loved, so He gave.

What an anomalous thing it is that the people who tamper with the personality of JESUS CHRIST as the Son of GOD talk so loudly and glibly of the Love of GOD. Yet they are denying the one great manifestation of His love, namely, the giving of His Son to be our Saviour - "**Born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them that are under the law**" (Galatians 4:4, 5).

If the Incarnation is not a stupendous reality, if GOD did not take His very own Son from His eternal glory, and "give" Him as told in the Gospel, then the world is robbed of a priceless possession, and the Gospel is rendered insipid and impotent. But if indeed He did thus give His Son, such perversions of the truth malign the love of the GOD of love.

III The Rescue of Love

Now we see love to the rescue, love in its desire. It yearns over its object. It will not see it perish.

It will pay any price for its rescue. Hence, "**God so loved, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.**"

The case is well put in Ephesians 2.

Our estate as perishing ones is described in vv. 1-3:

- dead in trespasses and sins
- separated from GOD
- children of disobedience and therefore of wrath.

But Love comes into the scene and "**Charity [love] never faileth.**"

The whole outlook of life is altered with the next glorious statement: "**But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us**" (vs. 4).

If Love's gift required the Incarnation, the full extent of the gift, going all the way to meet our case and make the rescue, required the Crucifixion. Bethlehem involved Calvary. To rescue us from perishing, He must perish, the Innocent for the guilty. So the High Priest unwittingly prophesied: "**It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not**" (John 11 :50).

To accomplish this purpose Love must give Himself in death. This He did, with the glorious result that we do not need to die.

"Oh, 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,
The love of GOD to me.
It brought my Saviour from above,
To die on Calvary."

IV The Bestowment of Love

"**Should not perish, but have eternal life**" (John 3:16c).

Here is love delighting. "**The Father hath given to the Son to have life in Himself**" (5:26). The Son comes and gives up what He has, gives up His life that we may have it, the life that is eternal. It is Love's supreme bestowment. It could bestow nothing more.

Hence the great sin is unbelief, because it is a sin against GOD and His love, because it wounds Him at His heart. For GOD yearns to bestow eternal life upon men, if only they will let Him.

The way they let Him is by believing. The way they prevent Him is by unbelief.

Our unbelief is sin against Love, against the gracious purposes of Love. It is sin against the remedy Love has brought, against the sharing of GOD's own nature and life which Love longs to bestow. Unbelief leaves us outside the pale of His love leaves us without a remedy.

V The Demand of Love

Now that Love has offered itself and its gift - bestowment of Life has been accepted, Love turns to us, and rightly, with its demands.

This brings us over into John 13. JESUS has now turned from a public ministry of appeal to men to a personal dealing with those who, through acceptance, have become His own, within the circle of His love.

- we have His life, being "**born again.**"
- we have His nature, Love itself. And
- we are His followers, those upon whom He must rely to perpetuate and propagate His life of Love.

So He that "**loveth us**" turns to us and says: "**A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.**"

But He does not make this demand until He has Himself given us an exemplification of His own love, in the humility and self-forgetfulness of mind and heart and life required as love's vehicle. Let us bow our heads and hearts, His unworthy followers, as we read: "**Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself**" (John 13:3, 4). Then, having washed their feet, He said: "**For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you**" (vs. 15).

But He had given us more than an example; He had given us a symbol of the power by which alone we can follow that example. The water in the vessel is the HOLY SPIRIT in these poor vessels of ours, cleansing us from our sin, our pride and our selfishness, that we might answer the demands of His love, keeping His commandment with a real love, the one for the other.

VI The Guarantee of Love

If Love makes its demands upon us, Love is itself the guarantee that that demand will be fully met. "**Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words**" (John 14:23).

Not force, not coercion, not regulation from without; but a quiet, all-sufficient constraint from within - the love of CHRIST.

Of course love works this way.

The marriage altar hears the highest and holiest vows, most binding in character, but they are guaranteed fulfillment because sanctioned by an affection that will put them into practice.

Go into a house of business and instinctively men are watching the clock as its hands draw on toward five. Their work is measured and regulated by set considerations from without; there's a limit they cannot forget. But go into a house that is a home and learn the workings of love. A meal must be prepared; a garment must be mended; a child is sick or needs help. Love works on heedless of the clock - nine, ten, eleven, midnight - unconscious of time, unstinted in sacrifice, unlimited save by its own strength to endure and power to serve. "**Charity never faileth.**"

JESUS rested His whole reliance right there. "**If ye love Me, ye will keep My words.**"

No question about it. JESUS depends upon the love-bond He has woven around our hearts, uniting us to Him. Therefore our responsibility is to keep ourselves in His love. It is our one duty; all else follows.

Hence, Love being such a supreme thing, so at the heart of the Gospel, John fittingly closes with

VII The Probing of Love

Self-reliant Peter has failed and fallen, and though graciously restored, somehow his life is not centered in his Lord. He has taken the others back with him to their fishing boats and nets.

JESUS comes out to the lakeshore and instantly, with the miracle we all recall, turns their minds and hearts again to Himself. They gather about the fire as His breakfast guests. Then He begins to probe their love. He addresses Peter. The others listen and know full well that He means them also.

It is Love that does the probing: "**So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest Thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep**" (21:15-17).

The Love that gave Himself supremely for us is now, with full right of search, saying to us: "Is your love for Me supreme? Does it command you? Has it supplanted '**these things**'?"

- Will it suffice to separate you unto Me the rest of your life?
- Will it prove the fountain of an untiring service the remainder of your appointed days?
- Will it keep you busy, with unmeasured effort, tending My lambs, feeding My sheep?"

If this probing of love comes home to our hearts today, showing us how superficial our reception of His love, how niggardly our response to His love, till we are shamefaced before Him, there is a remedy. Have we ever tried it? - "**the love of the Spirit**" (Romans 15:30), i. e., GOD coming to love in us, through His love poured into our hearts by His Spirit.

It is not for us to try to love GOD, any more than we try to love our wives or husbands, our parents or our children. This is not what He asks of us. He has provided for our loving Him, and therefore serving Him, in and through the Spirit He has Himself given us.

What the world needs is a fresh sight of the sacrificial love of GOD in CHRIST. It needs to see it till its heart, hardened in sin, is broken before it.

Dr. Norman McLeod, the famous Scotch preacher, used to tell a touching story of a Highland mother and her boy, won by sacrificial love.

She was a widow. Taking her babe she started to walk across the mountains, some ten miles, to the home of a relative. A terrible snowstorm suddenly fell upon the hills, and little by little the mother's strength failed. Next day, when men found her body, it was almost stripped of clothing. Her chilled and dying hands had wrapped her own clothing about the child, which was found in a sheltering nook, safe and sound. Years afterward the son of the minister who had conducted the mother's funeral went to Glasgow to preach a preparatory sermon. Somehow he was reminded of the story he had often heard his father tell. Instead of preaching the sermon he had prepared, he simply told the story of the Highland mother's love. A few days later he was summoned to the bed of a dying man. "You do not know me," said the man. "Although I have lived in Glasgow many years, I have never attended a church. The other day I happened to pass your door as the snow came down. I heard the singing and slipped into a back seat. There I heard the story of the widow and her son."

The man paused, his voice was choking, his eyes were filling. "I am that son," he sobbed at last. "Never did I forget my mother's love, but I never saw the love of GOD in giving Himself for me before. GOD made you tell that story. My mother did not die in vain. Her prayer is answered."

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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