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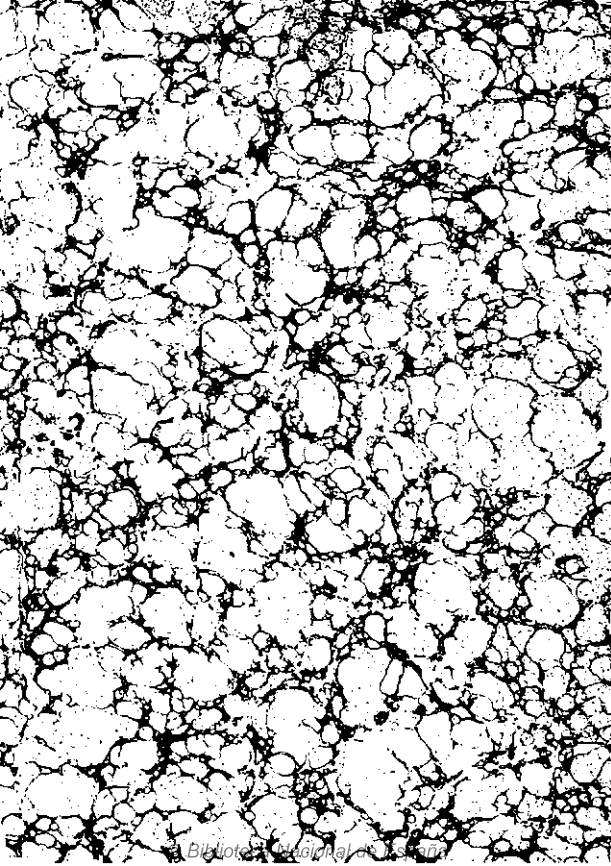
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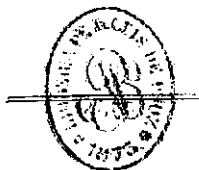


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THE
FATHER AND PRODIGAL:

BEING THE
Substance of a Lecture

ON
LUKE XV.



LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOHN B. BATEMAN,
1, IVY-LANE, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

M.DCCC.XLIV.

THE
FATHER AND PRODIGAL.

It is a wonderfully blessed thing to have one who could so well manifest God,—not only in His words, but in His works and ways—as the Lord Jesus.

We may look at the sin of man—at our sins—as a question to be judged of in the light of righteousness before God, and most important it is; but still in one sense, God moves above all the evil, and asserts His right to shew what HE is. And blessed is it for us, that God will be God in spite of sin. God is love; and if He will be God, He must be love, in spite of all the reasonings of man's corrupt heart against Him. God will act upon, what I may call the feelings of *His heart*, and make them find their way into the heart of men. (And that is the reason why there is such a freshness in certain passages of the word.)

of God, however often we recur to them; because God especially reveals Himself in them. God never fails:—the moment He speaks and reveals Himself, we have the full blessedness of what He is. It is *Himself* who has come forth with power to our hearts—the blessed God. He will take no character from man. He has to deal with sin, and shew what it is, and how He has put it away; but still above and through all He will manifest *Himself*. Now this is where our hearts get rest. We have the privilege to have done with ourselves in the house and bosom of God.

Man could not have borne the manifestation of God in the brightness of glory; so He hid it in grace in the person of the Son of Man. He clothed Himself in flesh; but the effect of the wicked and heartless reasonings of man's corrupt judgment was this;—it forced Him to shew Himself what He really was as God. When He presented Himself as Messiah, the Son of Man, the fulfiller of the law, and the like, this was not all the fulness of God. Man was always rejecting, constantly finding fault,

carping at certain things with which He could not agree; but thus pressing upon and urging Christ, only forced Him to reveal Himself more fully, pressing out from Him what He really was.

In the chapters which exhibit this, the soul is arrested, and finds itself with unhesitating certainty in the presence of God Himself—in the presence of Love. There we get rest and peace.

So in this chapter He was forced to tell all the truth—that *God would be God*. If there was that which could make God merry and glad, as it is expressed in the parable, (and such was the case in the welcome of the poor prodigal son) He would have His own joy in spite of the objections of men. That is what men object to. They don't deny that God is going to judge men (I do not of course speak of professed infidels,) nor, as a general principle, do they object to God's being righteous, because their pride makes them think they can meet Him on that ground; but the moment He comes to have all His own full joy, and to bring out that which is the joy of heaven,

man begins to object. It must not be *all* of grace—not God dealing with publicans and sinners *thus!* and why not? Because, what then becomes of man's righteousness? Grace makes nothing of man's righteousness;—"there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Christ manifesting the light proved this, and man hated it. The thing that levels down the moral condition of man, bringing in grace to the sinner, is what man cannot bear. It is the setting up of what God is, and the putting down man.

What man is always seeking to do, is to make a difference between the righteousness of one man and another, so that character may be sustained before men. In John viii. we read that Jesus had one brought before Him who by the law was worthy of being stoned—undeniably guilty,—that He might either deny mercy or righteousness. They thought to place Him in this inextricable difficulty. If He should let her off, He would *break the law* of Moses; and again, should He say, "let

her be stoned," He would do no more than Moses had. How did He act? He let law and righteousness have all their course; but "He that is without sin amongst you, let him first cast a stone at her." Conscience begins to work; not rightly it is true, for *their character* was what they cared about; still it would speak; and they get out of the presence of light, because the light made manifest what they were—it proved them sinners. From the eldest to the youngest, all went out. He that had the reputation of the longest standing, was glad to be the first to go away from that eye which penetrated and detected what was within; and they left Jesus with the sinner alone. He will not execute the law; for He came not to judge: "neither do I condemn thee; go, sin no more." That which is produced here is only LOVE.

"Then drew near unto Him the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, *This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.*" And after all it may

seem strange to many, that if God did come down here, He should take no notice of the righteousness of man, but be found in the company of publicans and sinners: why that would upset all the moral righteous thoughts of men: and that is what God has to do, because they are wrongly based.

These parables will shew with what sort of spirit grace is objected to. We have in them this great and blessed thought—*God manifested*.

“I’ll suppose,” He says, “a man in the worst and vilest condition you please; one reduced to the degradation of feeding with swine: but then there’s something still behind all this that I am going to bring out; something which your natural hearts ought to recognize—the *father’s* delight in receiving back a child. The father’s heart would justify itself in its own feelings of kindness, let the condition of the child be what it may.”

After weariness of heart in the world,—after the Lord Jesus had gone through the world and found no place where a

really broken heart could rest;—(He *could* find proud morality, but no place where a poor wearied broken heart could find sympathy and rest, to open it and give it life;)—He came to shew that what could not be found for man anywhere else, could be found in God. This is so blessed! that, after all, the poor wearied heart, wearied with its ways, wearied with the world, *can* find rest in the blessedness of the bosom of the Father: and what it could not do in any other place—tell itself out—now that it has found God, it can. And that in truth of heart too, as we read in Psa. xxxii.,—“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is no guile.*” So long as I am afraid of being blamed, there’s guile in the heart; but the moment that I know that all is forgiven, that nothing but love is drawn out by it, I can tell out all to God. The only thing that produces “truth in the inward parts” is the grace that imputes nothing. That is the secret of God’s

power in setting hearts right with Himself; —“there is forgiveness with Thee that thou shouldest be feared.” There is all the difference between finding a man flying from God by reason of his conscience, and his finding in God what in truth relieves and heals a conscience completely convicted.

All the other is left true. We can't in our actual state, if under the law and acknowledging its righteousness, take it into our own hands. If I take the law to smite you, I must kill myself; it is too sharp to handle. The man who would stone the adulteress, must put his own head under the weight of the blow. “O wretched man that I am!” If I am a *man*, I am undone.

We have three parables presented to us in this chapter. The source of that which is taught in them all is LOVE.

1. The shepherd who *sought* the sheep that was lost.

2. The woman who *sought* the piece of money that was lost.

3. The Father that *received* back again the prodigal son.

In the last it is not a question of seeking, but of the manner of receiving the son when he had come back. There is many a heart that longs to go back, but does not know how it will be received. The Lord Jesus says, the grace and love of God are shewn out first in seeking, and then in the reception. In the first two parables, we have the seeking; in the third, the reception by the Father. One great principle runs through them all; it is the *joy of God* to seek and to receive the sinner. He is acting upon His own character. No doubt it is joy to the sinner to be received, but it is the joy of God to receive him:—‘it is meet that **We** should make merry, and be glad,’—not merely meet that the child should be glad to be in the house.

Beloved friends, this is a blessed truth! It is the tone that God has raised; and that every heart in heaven responds to. The chord God strikes Himself; heaven echoes it; and so must every heart down here that's tuned by Grace. What discord, then, must self-righteousness produce! Jesus tells forth the joy and grace of God

in thus acting, and puts this in contrast with the feelings of the elder brother—any self-righteous person,—though the description be of the Jews.

It is this note that is sounded from heaven in love, that we read in the heart of Christ down here; and oh, how sweet! In one sense it is more sweet to have it here, than up there. It's down here that this love of God (and it must be if man is to be reached) is astonishing; it's natural in heaven. It's *here*, on *earth*, amongst *us* that God has *manifested* what He is;—that He has delight in saving lost sinners; and angels desire to look into it.

The shepherd puts the sheep upon his shoulders, and he brings it home *rejoicing*; —“Am I not right to seek lost sinners?” Is it not a right thing for God to come among publicans and sinners? This may not suit a moral man, but it suits God; it is His privilege to come amidst sin—to come near to ruined sinners—because He can deliver out of it. The shepherd has the sheep upon his shoulders and rejoices; he charges himself with it; he takes the

whole toil of it. It was as his own interest to do it, because he valued the sheep; it was his, and he brings it home. Thus He presents the shepherd to us. And thus it is with "the Great Shepherd of the sheep." He presents it as His interest to "seek and to save that which is lost:" He even makes it His interest in the sense of love; and He does bring the sheep home *re-joicing*. (There is the strength and power of salvation.) But how does he set about it? We tell people sometimes to seek Christ. Well, in one sense that is right; for it is quite true that "he that seeketh, findeth;" but He never said, "Come unto me," until He had first come to them—come "to seek and to save that which was lost." He did not say it from heaven, for the sinner could not go there; but because the poor sinner could not go to heaven to seek Christ, Christ came to earth to seek him. He does not say to the poor leper, Come up to heaven; but comes down here, and says, "Be thou clean." Had any other laid his hand upon the leper, it would have made him as unclean as himself; but

Christ could touch the power of evil in the leper, and have no contamination, but dispel it. He says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour.....and I will give you rest." It is not to be found here, any more than it was for Noah's dove amidst the deluge. I've tried the world *all through*, and it's a sea of evil without a shore; come to me, and you will find rest. Who but He could have said it?

Well, then, there's another thing in this second parable;—the *painstaking* of this love, in seeking that which has been lost. It is not a sheep, but money in a house. Every thing is done to get the money. She lights the candle, she sweeps the house; she could not stop in the task of love,—diligent, active love, until the piece was found. It was her affair and interest again. And then we have the joy when her possession is recovered; she gives the tone to those around her; others are called in to have communion with it;—"Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost." And that is the way of the Lord. Thus, then, we have the same great prin-

ciple in this parable as in the former. There is the patient activity of love until the result is produced. In the two I see this great common principle. It was the joy of the woman, as of the shepherd. The first great thing was the energetic power and activity of this grace, as well as the good will. There was entire inactivity in the sheep and in the money. The shepherd and the woman alike did all. It is true at the same time that there is a most important work,—an effect produced in the heart of the one who has gone astray and is brought back again; and therefore the third parable, which shows the feelings of the wanderer, and further, the manner of his reception. In a word, we have not only the manner of the workings within, but also the manifestation of the father's heart. It is not the estimate of love in the one brought back, that gives the answer to all his thoughts, but the *manifestation* of the father's own heart. There's this one simple fact;—*the father is on his neck kissing him!* and that tells him what it is.

Here the Lord takes up a case, meeting the objections of the Pharisees to His receiving publicans and sinners. He says, as it were, I'll take the case of a man brought into all the degradation of feeding with swine—(we must remember what swine were to the Jew)—I'll suppose him to be as bad, as worthless as you like; and then I'll shew you what grace is—what God is.

Whether we are living in vice or not, we have all turned our back on God. The young man was as great a sinner when he stepped rich across his father's threshold, as when feeding with the swine in the far country; he had chosen to act independently of God, and that is sin. He reaped the fruits, no doubt, but that's not the question. In one sense, the consequences of his sin were mercies, because they showed him what his sin was.

There then is another point. Man makes a distinction between sinners. So He puts another case, where the sinner is gone, even in man's judgment, to the fullest degree of evil; and shows it does not out-

reach the grace of God—a case which wonderfully exhibits the truth, that “if sin abounds, grace does much more abound.” This young man goes forth (v. 13) to do *his own will*; and this is the secret of all our sin. Our child sins against us—we feel it: we sin against God, and do not feel it. We are all of us big children.

“And there wasted his substance in riotous living.” Any person who lives beyond his means looks rich; so does the sinner, wasting his soul, seem happy.

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat: and *no man gave unto him*.” There’s no giving in the “far country.” Satan *sells* all, and dear—our souls are the price. If you *sell* yourself to the devil, you’ll get husks; he’ll never give you any thing. Would you find a giver, you must come to God. Hearts are not easy in the

world; leave a man for a few hours to himself, and he'll begin to be in want. "He began to be in want," but his will was not touched yet. There are very few hearts that have arrived at a certain time of life, that have not "begun to be in want." They go to seek in pleasure or in vice something to satisfy them; the last thing the world thinks of is God: they do it only when they are convinced that nothing else will do. They never think of the Father's house, for they know it not. If indeed they think of God, it is in judgment, not in grace. So it was with the prodigal.

"When he *came to himself*, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He had not yet understood how he would be received, yet he did understand there was love in that house; the very hired servants had bread enough and

to spare; and he did understand, too, not only that he was hungry, but *perishing with hunger*. All was happiness there; the very servants were happy, and it was all over with him where he was; the need of his condition all told him he must get back;—"I will arise," &c.

Every soul that returns to God, is thus brought to the thought of goodness in God.

I see the same thing in Peter. He goes and falls at the feet of Jesus, and says, "*depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" What an inconsistency! at the feet of Jesus, and yet telling Him to go away. And there is often this apparent inconsistency where there is a work on the conscience and the affections. God becomes necessary to us, and yet conscience says, you are too sinful. Peter felt his worthlessness;—that Jesus was too holy, too righteous to be with such an one as he: and yet he could not help going to Him.

Well, the prodigal goes back, and says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more *worthy*

to be called thy *son*." He did not understand what his father was—what a father's heart was. He was glad to be in the father's house, but still "make me as one of thy hired servants" was his thought. He measured the *father's love* in some little degree by the sense of what he had been, and the evil in which he had been; he thought to get into the place of a *servant*. Now there are a multitude of hearts in this state,—lowering down the standard of what the *Father must do*, to some sort of adaptedness to their fitness—(I am not speaking of positive self-righteousness); they have still the remains of legalism, and would take the place of a servant in the house—"make me as one of thy *hired servants*." But that wont do for the *father*, if it would do for the son: it would be constant misery to the father's heart to have a son in the house as a servant; neither would it be testimony to the servants in the house, as to the father's love. The Father can't have sons in the house as servants; and if His boundless grace brings them, He must show the manner

of the reception to be worthy of a father's love. The prodigal was not yet brought to thorough humbleness—to feel it must be grace or nothing.

The Father does not even give him time to say, "make me as one of thy hired servants!" He lets him say, "I've sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" but no more, for he is on his neck kissing him. How can he say, "Make me a *hired servant*," when he's on his neck, producing consciousness that he was a *son*?

The prodigal's judgment about the father must now be drawn from what the father actually is to him, and not from any abstract reasonings about it. The one was still a father, if the other was not a son. And that's the way of our receiving the gospel of the grace of God. It is not the working of man's mind to think of what I am before God, but the revelation by the Holy Ghost of what the Father is; and if He is a Father, I am a *son*.

I dwell on this because I know there are so many souls who have not, as it

were, received the spirit of adoption fully;—neither knowing what they are as sons in the house of the Father—nor finding their rest in that of the Father.

See again the manner of the reception of the prodigal here. His mind now renewed, he says, “I will arise,” &c. But before he has time to reach the father’s house, and say all this,—“while he was yet a great way off,” we read, the father sees him, and has compassion on him; the son’s path is now lost in the father’s love: the father runs to meet him, falls on his neck and kisses him. There is nothing in the son but confession of unworthiness: we are left, as it were, to discover what were his thoughts and feelings, from our knowledge of what the father was.

So—entirely—is the estimate of salvation: we are left to discover what we are in the love of the Father. The father is on his neck, while all the rags of the far country are upon him. The father does not stop to ask him anything: he knows he has acted very wrongly; he could see that very well. It is no question of fitness in

the son: he's acting for himself—worthily of himself as a *father*. He's on his neck, because the *father* loves to be there.

But he does another thing. The servants are called out to introduce him into the house fittingly, to make merry and be glad. It's the knowledge of the Father's love that makes me feel what I am. But I know my sins are forgiven, and the Father is on my neck kissing me, then the more I know of my sins while I know the Father's love, the happier I am. Suppose a merchant having liabilities which he knows himself unable to meet; he would be afraid to look through his books: but if the debt was discharged, and he had the certainty of an immense fund of riches after all was paid;—if some friend had done it all;—he would no longer be afraid to look at them; the discovery of the extent of his obligation would only enhance the sense of his friend's love. If instead of £1,000, he found his debt had been £10,000, he would say, "Why this is better than I thought;" and if on looking further, he found the amount £100,000;—"Well,

there never was a friend like this friend of mine!"

Grace has put all away; and the whole effect of the discovery of sin when we know forgiveness, is but to enhance the love, and heighten the joy. If the Father is kissing me, the very consciousness that He is doing it while I am in rags, proves what a forgiveness it is. There's not another in the whole world *who would not have thought on my rags, before he was on my neck.*

"But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it," &c. God shews His love towards us as wretched sinners, but then clothes us with Christ. He brings us into the house where the servants are, with nothing less than all the honor He can put upon us. His love welcomes us while in our rags, but here the same love acts in another way. He introduces us into the house as He would have us be there, with His mind expressed

about the value of a son. We read here the description of the fatted calf, the robe, the ring, and the feast. The father's mind was, that a son of HIS was worth that robe, &c; and that it was worthy of him to give it. How little worthy would it have been of a father acting in grace, to keep him as a servant in the house. There are, perhaps, some who would think it humility to be a servant in the house. Now it is not; it is only ignorance of the Father's mind. I read, "that He might shew the *exceeding riches of His grace* in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." Now if you begin at the end—the Father's mind and grace—would it have been worthy of Him to have put us in the house with a constant memorial of our sin and shame—of our former dishonor and degradation? If there was any sense of shame—the merest trace of the far country—would it have been worthy of the Father? No! "The worshipper once purged has no more conscience of sin." The condition that finds its place in God's house must be *worthy of God*. Perhaps

our wretched unbelieving hearts may say, "Ah, that will be quite true when there—when really in the Father's house." Let me ask what faith is. Faith judges as God judges. I see sin in the light of God's holiness. I judge it most truly when I see its opposition to Him, and the dishonor it puts on Him. I learn grace, too, in the *heart of my Father*. He that believes sets to his seal that God is true. Faith is the only thing that gives certainty; reasoning does not. Reasoning may be all quite well for the things of this world; but if God speaks about anything, faith believes; faith sets to its seal, not that *it may be perhaps*, but that *God is true*. Now having this, I am as sure that it is true, as if I was now in heaven. "Abraham believed God"—not in God (though that is also true), but God: he believed that what God had said was true. And this is what we ought to do; the first point is to believe God. What does He tell me if I am a believer in His Son? that my sins and iniquities are remembered no more; and I believe it; and I believe that I have eternal life; it is sin

to doubt it. If I do not believe what He assures me of, I wrong God. It's a sin not to believe myself a son—that I am in God's presence without a spot of sin through the blood of the Lamb. Faith believes this. If it were only my own righteousness, it must be torn to shreds; but it is the blood of the Lamb; and what has that done;—cleansed *half* my sins? The question is, what is God's estimate of the blood? do you think that God limits the efficacy of the blood of Jesus? No! He says, it cleanses from all sin. If we go on to see further, it is—"who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." Is it some of my sins? It is my *sins*. If my soul knows on the one hand the value to God of the blood of the Lamb, I know on the other hand that it all results from the love of the *Father*. It would be an evil thing to doubt this love, as it would have been an evil thing in the prodigal, when the father was kissing him, to say, I've the rags of the far country upon me. Did he *then* think of his rags as a reason why there should not be that expression

of the love which was in the heart of his father. Then when I see the character Christ gives me of what God is towards me as a sinner (and He was forced to do this by the self-righteousness of the pharisees), the doubts of man's heart are silenced before such grace.

Is there one here who would say, Divine grace sanctions sin. Let him read his judgment in the spirit of the elder brother here. Yet let even such an one see how grace speaks to him;—"the father went out and intreated him"—this wretched one—not merely a poor prodigal—but this wretched one who shared not in the general joy. The servants were glad: they say, "*thy brother is come, and thy father has killed for him the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*" All catch the tone but one; and who was he? the man who thought of self and self-righteousness: "therefore came his father out and intreated him."

Take care of that, lest your hearts be turning to sourness the love and grace that God shews to a fellow sinner. "He

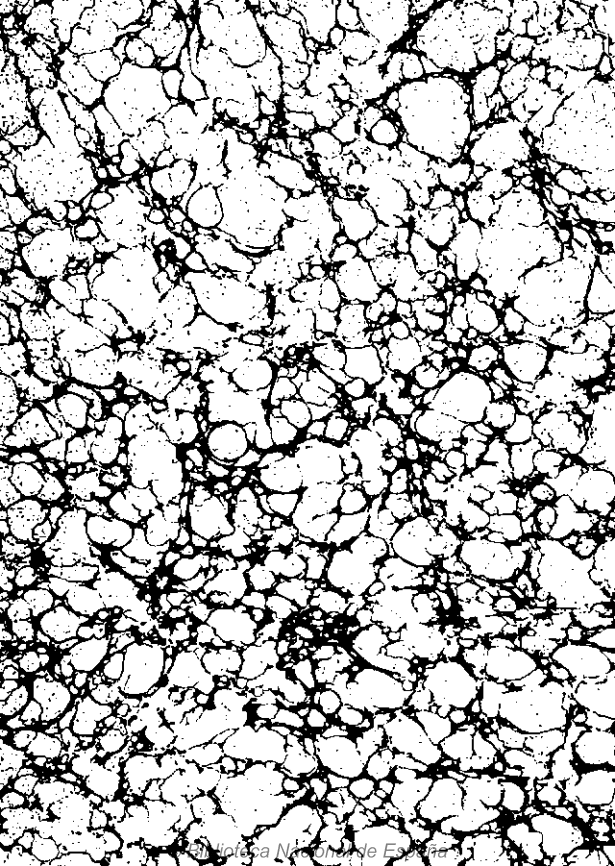
would not go in;" the father reasons with him; "it was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this *thy brother* was dead and is alive again; and was lost and is found." But he remained without, and had none of the happiness and none of the joy, but manifested opposition of heart to the riches of the father's grace.

Do you know God thus? You would know yourselves too? Be it so; it is indeed well; but don't call God's heart in question because of that. How can I know God's heart? Is it by looking into my own heart? No; by learning it in the gift of His Son. The God we have to do with, is the God who has given His Son for sinners; and if we don't know this, we don't know Him at all. Don't be saying to God, make me one of thy hired servants! — service must result from the knowledge of Himself. Don't be putting the estimate of your own hearts on God's goodness. Our hearts have such a tendency, to turn back to legalism, and think it humbleness. The only real humbleness

and strength and blessing, is to forget self in the presence and blessedness of God. We may be brought thither by a humbling process; but it is not in thinking evil of self merely, that we are truly humble: we have the privilege of forgetting ourselves in the manifestation of the love of God and our Father, who is love to us.

The Lord grant you, through Jesus, to know, as poor sinners, God thus revealed in love.







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