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LOVE'S CIRCLE

WITHIN THIS WORLD AND
OUTSIDE IT.

*SUBSTANCE OF AN ADDRESS ON
1 JOHN IV. 19—V. 6.*

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Love's Circle.

(1 JOHN iv. 19—v. 6.)

The blessed Lord is the object, the supreme object of the love of the Father. We feel at once that none but He could have brought to us the love of God and acquainted our hearts with it. That which He knew so well He brought from heaven to earth, and that which He brought He has left here. Though He has gone away He has not taken away from earth the love.

The words I have read touch those in Romans viii., “The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” If I were to think of the love of God apart from the Lord Jesus Christ it is too much to grasp. It is a wonderful ocean

where one would be lost. But though it is infinite I do know Christ Jesus our Lord, and the love of God is in Him.

He has brought down the divine love from heaven, and we find it in Him. Now He has gone back to heaven, and has made a place for us there; but the love has not gone back. "We love Him because He first loved us." The love of God has been brought to us, and free favor shown, and it has drawn out our affections, though we may be ashamed to speak of it because we are so feeble. While we know so much truth how little we love Him; still it comes to our lips, "I do love Him." I remember hearing many years ago of a poor woman in Ireland who had just been converted.

Some one said to her, "Dear sister." She replied, "I don't want any one to call me dear sister; I am too bad for any one but Jesus!" Another said, "Oh, the joy of going to Him, and having it all out with Him, and telling Him how much He loves me!" How blessed to know that He has brought the love of God right close to you, and you cannot help loving Him because He has cast His look of love upon you! I see many whom I have known for years, and you have been held; what has held you? The love of God. He has held your heart to Himself, or a thousand things would have taken it away. Is not that a joy?

I see all the divine affections center in the Son, whom the Father loves. But there is a cir-

cle of divine affections down here now. The Lord is not here now as to bodily presence, and I do not doubt that being up there our hearts are carried up to Him. Still there is a circle down here where the divine affections flow, though it may be feebly, and that is the circle of the saints.

The Song of Solomon is written with regard to Israel, but I just touch one point in it. In chapter v. the bride, or companion, has lost her beloved. She charges the daughters of Jerusalem, if they find her beloved, that they tell him she is sick of love. They ask, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" This leads her to give every grace of her beloved, ending with, "Yea, he is altogether lovely." Then they ask.

“Whither is thy beloved gone?” Surely she can tell, knowing so much about him. She replies, “My beloved is gone down into his garden . . . to gather lilies.” Where would his heart take him? Where was he but among the lilies of his planting?

Now that is a great thing. There is a circle where divine affections are found, and that is among the saints. I know it is spiritually apprehended, but there I shall find the presence of Christ. Where is His heart but with His people? Do you believe that your heavenly relationships are more to you than your earthly ones? Do you keep to the circle of the saints? Do you get to all the meetings you can, not simply for what you get, but because you find Christ's affection flowing there?

New birth is found in 1 John v. 1, not to explain how it is effected, but to tell us whom we are to love. In that day those to whom John wrote particularly, would have said, "A Jew is my brother," not thinking so much of a Gentile. "*Whosoever* believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." In our day there are many distinctions, but here is the great thing. Is one born of God? It does not say, "new born," but "born of God." I think that new birth refers to us and our need, but this refers to God. For my necessity I must be born again; I could not see nor enter into the kingdom of God otherwise. God's necessity required that I should be born of Him. If He is to have anything in this world for Himself He must

produce it. There may be a Jew or a Greek, a bondman or freeman; but I see God has wrought to produce divine affections, and I cannot help loving him, for he is my brother. It is not English loving English, German loving German, rich loving the rich, and poor loving the poor. I love him whatsoever he may be, if God has formed divine affections in the soul.

This lays the ground for the assembly. The death of Christ abolishes everything of the flesh. It is not *our* assembly, but God's. Why am I there? Christ loved me and gave Himself for me; and so with each one; we are together on one ground. Now we have got the circle of divine affections down here, and I ask each to keep there.

I do not want to boast, but after forty-five years' experience, I know what has held me is in a great measure due to the fact that I was never absent from a meeting that I could get to. I do not say it because it was any credit to me, for I could not do without it. Oh, the comfort of getting away from business and among the saints, where the ministry of Christ is found, and the Holy Spirit takes up the saints and binds them together! There is nothing that I value more than the company of the saints, because there I find the divine affections which have been left here on earth.

Now there is another point in verse 4, "our faith" overcomes the world. This is not simply the

faith that comes to Christ, but the christian faith, "*our* faith." We have it in verse 5, "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." In the first verse it is the Christ, God's Man, and believing on Him I refuse every other man, all that is of Adam. My heart turns to God's Man, for He it is who sets forth God to me, and my soul takes in what is of God in Him. Now that blessed Man is God's Son. The fullness of christian faith is that I know Him as Son of God. My first apprehension of Him may be as the Christ. In John iv. He is known as such, in chapter v. He is the Son. This then is our faith, and where does it set us? In a new sphere. In John iii. the Lord said, "We speak that we do know." What

did He speak of? He spoke of a scene from which He came, where He was ever with the Father, and now He brings us apart into it. The Son of God belongs to another scene altogether, the whole sphere of the affections of the Father and the Son. It is not now merely that they have been brought down here, but we are carried up there. He brings us to the place where He is, and that is not this world at all.

So, immediately you get this great fact that He is Son of God, you have, "This is He that came by water and blood." He was declared Son of God in resurrection. You must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, or you have no life.

John v. is the Son of God speak-

ing upon earth, and we are carried into another region by His words, we get another sphere and place where the Son is, as in the affections of the Father and Himself the revelation of the Father. Because He was speaking of these things the one that heard His word morally entered into life. He passed out of death into life. In 1 John v. He is no longer speaking on earth; He is the One who came by water and blood. Then we have the witness of the Spirit, who can testify of that into which Christ has entered. He came in a certain way to us here on earth, but now He has come in another way, by water and blood. He is outside this world altogether, and the Spirit has come down to open out to our affections that scene into which He has gone.

The moment the Lord came back from the cross He put His disciples into His place before the Father. We may little know how to lay hold of it, but that is where He brings us, putting us in the place of sons, and faith enters into it. What is the place that Christ occupies before God, as He lives to Him? Once He was in this poor world. Think where He is now. He lives to God in that scene of divine love and affections. There He places us, as He said, "I ascend to my Father and your Father." Now the Spirit has come down to connect our hearts with all that into which Christ has entered.

There are then these two things: Christ has brought affection down and a circle of divine affection has

been formed here on earth. Then another thing, the world does not suit, and your heart follows Christ to where He is, in the victory over the whole power of sin and judgment. It is a wonderful place, the scene of divine affections, set forth in what the Son is to the Father. He brought those affections here, but what is it in His own home above! Blessed is the knowledge of the love of One who brought divine love down to my heart here, but would not rest satisfied until He took it up to know the love that is there! The Lord only can give our hearts to enter into it. May He do so! T. H. R.

