## THE

## FREE GIVING OF GOD.

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John iv. 10-26; Ephesians iv. 7.

OU may not at first sight see the connection between these two passages, but the verse I want specially to dwell upon is the one I have read first: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." It is the reply of Jesus to the woman of Sychar, who raised a difficulty to responding to His request. The expression

I want to call your attention to is the "gift of God," or as it should be more correctly rendered the "free giving" of God. How many there are who do not know this! I challenge your hearts, what have you received from God? He is the free giving God.

In the last verse of Galatians ii. we read, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." "In vain" (i.e., gratuitously, for nothing) is the same word as "free giving" here. I will quote the other passage which refers to the Christian; but first let me say, that forgiveness is not receiving anything positive; it is very blessed, but a man deeply in debt who is cleared of debt does not receive anything; the clearing of his debt is not giving him something. He might say, I owe nothing now, but I have not a penny in my pocket. But the free giving of God is to give me something positive.

The passage in Ephesians iv. is for the Christian: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." We have to understand the fourth of John before we can understand the fourth of Ephesians. "gift," in Ephesians iv., is the same word in the original, and signifies "free giving," so that we might read it thus, "To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ's free giving." The great point, however, for each is that you place yourself before Him to receive His free giving.

Now there are certain things which are a necessity for our souls. In chapter iii. we see a man, Nicodemus, who judges as to Christ that He was a teacher come from God. Perhaps someone here has come in to judge the preacher, but the words of the preacher, if spoken in the power of the Holy Ghost, will find you out. Nicodemus came in this

way; but the Lord says, "Ye must be born again"; you cannot understand the things I speak of unless you are born again; for a man has to be born again even to perceive the things of God. New birth is a necessity for man, in order that the grace of God may enter his heart. Take, as an example, the prodigal who went into the far country. Suppose in the far country he had written to his father and said that he had turned over a new leaf, and hoped to live in a better way; would that have brought him to his father? No; and there could not be one step nearer God by such means. What God seeks is that the blessed light of His love should reach our hearts. When the prodigal came to himself he said, "In my father's house is bread enough and to spare." The thought of his father entered his soul. The grace of God has come out to win the confidence of man, and therefore God has to work in the soul to make an avenue, in order that His love may enter there. God has to make a breach in his hard heart, so that the light of His love may shine in. That is effected in new birth, and the first sign of new birth—of the mighty hand of God having wrought—is that the hard casing round the heart of man is broken, a breach is made so that God may be known there.

But there is another necessity, in order that the love of God should shine into the soul, and that is, "The Son of man must be lifted up," so that the love of God and His free giving may be known: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Why is the Son of man lifted up? To meet my need? Yes; but more, to satisfy the exigencies of divine love,

of the heart of God in giving, that man might have eternal life with Him, that he might be brought to God in love. There is no wrath for the one sheltered by the blood of Christ, but the Son of God was given that I might be brought into the light of His love, not only taken out of darkness, not only saved from starvation, but like the prodigal with the arm of the father round his neck.

Man, in order to be brought into the light of God, must have this hard casing round his heart broken—many a one knows the doctrines of grace and yet this may remain unbroken. God works to this end, to make a breach there and let the light of divine love into the heart. In chapter iii. we get the kind of casing round the heart of a Pharisee—one who thought himself competent to judge of the Lord's teaching; but with this woman, in chapter iv., there is

another kind of casing. The Lord asked a drink of water, but to her He was only a Jew. Were the Queen to ask a drink of water, how willingly it would be given, and the vessel treasured from which she drank. But this woman's answer reveals the hard casing that was round her heart. The truth is that when God came here in grace, man did not know Him; but God knows how to break through the crust. She says, I wonder at you, a Jew, asking of me such a thing. The down-stooping of God's love is strange to man, for selfishness is there; but when a heart is brought to know this love it leaps for joy. I do not mean that the providential care of God, which takes notice of sparrows, conveys the light of the love of God that is His goodness - and men are sometimes willing to speak of His providence, and so use it as to shut out the light of the true love of God.

If the woman had known the free giving of God, her heart would have been prepared for the gift. "If thou knewest the free giving of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given." How simple it was, He Himself was the gift of God, and all the free giving of God flows through Him. He had asked, she had not given; He had come into this weary world and He sought refreshment; He said, "Give me to drink." I ask, Have you ever gratified the heart of Christ? How can you? By letting Him fill your heart with the love of God, known in His free giving. We are oftentimes just content with knowing the forgiveness of sins without letting in the love of God. This, indeed, is refreshment to the heart of Christ. We read in the Psalm, "He shall drink of the brook in the way." The poor malefactor refreshed

the heart of Christ; he was absorbed with Christ. A breach was made in that hard heart, and the love of Christ shone in. The free giving of God is exceedingly blessed; what can I do but let Him give, and I receive? It is here said to be "living water." Pardon is free, it clears me from guilt; but here the Lord speaks of living water, the which if a man drink he shall never thirst. The love of God comes down into the soul and the heart says, I have a satisfying portion, the love of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the result is it springs up unto everlasting life. Has the crust of your soul been broken through? has the love of God shone into it? and is your heart enjoying it? People speak of a loving Father who takes care of them all their life, giving them mercies here. The effect of that is to keep the heart down here, but if this love of God fills your heart it

carries you up to that new and divine scene where Christ is, it springs up to everlasting life. The prodigal, when he returned, first had the father's arms around him, then he is drawn into the father's house. The prodigal would never have known love if he had remained in the far country, even though receiving there of the father's bounty so that he should not starve. What we are called to is the joy of heaven. All that can delight the heart of God beams in Christ and is made known to us, the result being that our hearts rise to where He is. Is not this wonderful grace, that God should thus break through the hard crust of the soul—letting His love in so that the heart is attached to Christ?

But there is another point. He says to the woman, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." There is often an inside crust, so to speak, which separates

from God; something a person would not like to make known, something allowed which prevents the heart understanding the free giving of God. Now the Lord puts His finger upon this, and He can read every heart; He had a deep interest in Nathanael when under the fig-tree (see John i. 48), and knew all that was passing in his heart there. Do you believe there is One who is interested in you, and who knows this secret spot, and will let you know that He knows it? He knew it in this woman, and that there was nothing in her but springs of evil: but in Him were springs of good, and He would give her of these; He wanted a place in her heart. There is often in hearts this inner crust as well as the outer; but His grace can deal with all, so that the soul might taste the free giving of God, and rise up to the God who gives—it is His work in souls.

A few words in conclusion as to Ephesians iv. 7. There it has reference to the Christian.

The apostle had been speaking of the wonderful privilege which was theirs in Christ Jesus. He says to these Ephesians in respect to one period of their history, "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now [another period] in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Through Him they had access to the Father by one Spirit. They had been, like the prodigal, far off, and then brought nigh. Now when he comes to chapter iv. he can turn round and say, "Unto every one of us [i.e. to every believer] is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." It is not now forgiveness and

being made nigh, but grace given according to the free giving of Christ. I ask you, fellow-believer, What do you know of this? What do you know of receiving out of His fulness grace upon grace? How blessed to turn away from all our emptiness and find in Christ all that can delight the heart of God; and all that Christ is can thus be formed in our hearts.

I close by putting the two passages together.

It has been said by another, The Lord opened the heart of that poor woman and poured Himself in. He thus got His place in her heart: that is the beginning, when the vessel was opened He poured Himself in. She now has Him, what He is was before her, she did not enter into it all, but she possessed Him, the One who could fill her poor empty heart. Now what He delights in is to bestow grace that the

heart should be formed in Him. Oftentimes the vessel is small, but He can enlarge it according to the measure of His free giving. He would have us to be formed in His love, and He be formed in our souls, that He may have that in us which is responsive to Himself and which shall be to His eternal joy. This is what God is working for, that the light of His love may enter the soul so that it may rise up to Himself. I ask everyone to ponder these things, the free giving of God, and that Christ may have a place in your heart, in order that you may be formed in Him and that He may be formed in you. May the Lord bless His word!

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