

SEPARATION FROM EVIL  
THE PRINCIPLE,  
AND  
GRACE THE POWER,  
OF  
UNITY.

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**T**HE need of union is felt now by every right-minded Christian. The power of evil is felt by all. Its pressure comes too near home, its rapid and gigantic strides are too evident and affect too nearly the particular feelings which characterise distinctively every class of Christians, to allow them to be blind to it, however little they may appreciate its true bearing and character. Better and holier feelings too arouse them to the sense of common danger, and (as far as it is entrusted to man's responsibility) the danger in which the cause of God is from those who never did and never would spare it. And wherever the Spirit of God acts, so as to make the saints value grace and truth, it tends to union, because there is but one Spirit, one truth, and one body.

The feelings which the sense of the progress of evil produces may be different. Some (though they are but few) may yet trust to the bulwarks they have long

looked at, but which had their force only in a respect for them which exists no longer. Others may trust to a fancied force of truth, which it has never exerted but in a little flock, because God and the work of His Spirit were there; others, to a union which never yet was the instrument of power on the side of good (that is, a union by concord and agreement); while others may feel bound to abstain from such an agreed union, by reason of previously subsisting obligations or prepossessions, so that the union tends to form only a party.

But the sense of danger is universal. That which was long mocked at as a theory is now too practically felt to be denied; though the apprehensions of the word, which made those who were subjected to that mockery foresee the evil, may be rejected and slighted still. But this state of things produces difficulties and dangers of a peculiar kind to the saints, and leads to the inquiry, where the path of the saint is, and where true union is to be found. From the very blessedness and desirableness of union, there is danger of those who have long truly felt its value, and the obligation that lay on the saints to maintain it, being led to follow the impulse of such as refused to see it when it was spoken of from the word, and to abandon the very principles and path which their own clearer apprehension of the word of God led them to embrace from it, as foreseeing the coming storm. They learn from that precious word that it was coming; and, while calmly studying it in the word, saw the path marked out there for the believer in such, and indeed, in every time. It is now pressed upon them to desert it for that suggested to men's minds by the pressure of the anxieties they anticipated, but

which, though there may be an impulse of good in it, the word of God itself did not furnish when inquired into in peace. But is this the path of the saints?—to turn from that which generally rejected intelligence of the word afforded them to pursue the light of those who would not see? This, however, is not the only danger; nor is it my object to dwell on the dangers, but the remedy.

There is a constant tendency in the mind to fall into sectarianism, and to make a basis of union of the opposite of what I have here just alluded to; that is, of a system of some kind or other to which the mind is attached, and round which saints or others are gathered; and this, assuming itself to be based on a true principle of unity, regards as schism whatever separates from itself, attaching the name of unity to what is not God's centre and plan of unity. Wherever this is the case, it will be found that the doctrine of unity becomes a sanction for some kind of moral evil, for something contrary to the word of God; and the authority of God Himself, which is attached to the idea of unity, becomes, through the instrumentality of this latter thought, a means of engaging the saints to continue in evil. Moreover continuance in this evil is enforced by all the difficulty which unbelief finds to separate from that in which it is settled, and where the natural heart finds its ties and, generally, temporal interests the sphere of their support. Now unity is a divine doctrine and principle; but as evil is possible, wherever unity is taken by itself so as to be a conclusive authority, wherever evil does enter the conclusive obligation of unity binds to the evil, because the unity

where the evil is is not to be broken. Of this we have a flagrant example in Romanism. There the unity of the church is the grand basis of argument; and it has been the ground of keeping the world, we may say, in every sanctioned enormity, and made the name of Christianity its warrant—an authority to bind souls to evil, till the name itself became shameful to the natural conscience of man.

The plea of unity may then be in a measure the atitudinarianism which flows from the absence of principle; it may be the narrowness of a sect formed on an idea; or, it may be, as taken by itself, the claim to be the church of God, and hence in principle secure as much indifference to evil as it is the convenience of the body or its rulers to allow, or is in the power of Satan to drag them into. If the name of unity then be so powerful in itself, and in virtue of blessings withal which God Himself has attached to it, it behoves us well to understand what the unity He owns really is. This it is I would propose to inquire into, acknowledging the desire for it to be a good thing, and many of the attempts at it to contain in them elements of godly feeling, even when the means may not carry conviction to the judgment as being those of God.

Now it will be at once admitted that God Himself must be the spring and centre of unity, and that He alone can be in power or title. Any centre of unity outside God must be so far a denial of His Godhead and glory—an independent centre of influence and power. And God is one—the just, true, and only centre of all true unity. Whatever is not dependent on this

is rebellion. But this so simple and (to the Christian) necessary truth clears our way at once. Man's fall is the reverse of this. He was a subordinate creature, an image too of Him that was to come; he would become an independent one; and he is, in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself, whether in the dispersion of several self-will, or in its concentration in the dominion of the man of the earth. But then we must, in consequence of this, go a step farther. God must be a centre in blessing as well as power, when He surrounds Himself with united and morally-intelligent hosts. We may know that He will punish rebellion with everlasting destruction from His presence into the hopelessness of uncentred and selfish individual misery and hatred; but He Himself must be a centre of blessing and holiness, for He is a holy God, and He is love. Indeed, holiness in us, while it is by its nature separation from evil, is just having God, the holy One (who is love too), the object, centre, and spring of our affections. He makes us partakers of His holiness (for He is essentially separate from all evil which He knows as God, though as His contrary); but in us holiness must consist in our affections, thoughts, and conduct being centred in and derived from Him—a place maintained in entire dependence upon Him.

Of the establishment and power of this unity in the Son and Spirit I will speak presently. It is the great and glorious truth itself on which I now insist. This great principle is true even in creation. It was formed in unity, and God its only possible centre. It shall be brought into it yet again, and centred in Christ as its head, even in the Son, by

whom and for whom all things were created (Col. i. 16). It is man's glory (though his ruin as fallen) to be made thus a centre in his place—the image of Him that is to come,\* but alas! his imitation in a state of rebellion in this same place when fallen. I know not—I would venture to say no more—that angels were ever made the centre of any system; but man was. It was his glory to be the lord and centre of this lower world (an associate but dependent Eve, his companion and help in his presence). He was the image and glory of God. His dependence made him look up; and this is true glory and blessedness to all but God. Dependence looks up, and is exalted above itself. Independence must look down (for it cannot in a creature be filled with itself), and is degraded. Dependence is true exaltation in a creature when the object of it is right. The primeval state of man was not holiness in the proper sense of it, because evil was not known. It was not a divine, but it was a blessed creation, state; it was innocence. But this was lost in the assertion of independence. If man became as God, knowing good and evil, it was with a guilty conscience, the slave of the evil he knew, and in an independence he could not sustain himself in, while he had morally lost God to depend on.

With this state (for we must now descend to the present actual question of unity), with man in this state, God has to deal, if true real unity such as He can own is to be attained. Now He must be still the centre.

\* See Eph. i. He has made known to us the mystery of His will; that is, gathering together in one all things in Christ, in whom we have received an inheritance.

It is not therefore in mere creative power. Evil exists. The world is lying in wickedness, and the God of unity is the holy God. Separation therefore, separation from evil, becomes the necessary and sole basis and principle, I do not say the power, of unity. For God must be the centre and power of that unity, and evil exists; and from that corruption they must be separate who are to be in God's unity, for He can have no union with evil. Hence, I repeat, we have this great fundamental principle, that separation from evil is the basis of all true unity. Without this, it is more or less attaching God's authority to evil, and rebellion against His authority; as is all unity independent of Him. It is a sect in its lightest and feeblest forms. In its fullest it is the great apostacy, of which one of the characteristics, as ecclesiastical or secular power, is unity; but unity by subjection of man to what is independent really or openly of God, because it is of His word: not established by subjection to the holy One, according to His word,\* and by the power of the Spirit

\* This is characteristic of the independent unity. I believe that it will be in an openly infidel state, and a manifestation of the power of Satan. But supposing it not open by each, it is clear that subjection to God is shown in subjection to His word. Now the authority of the church is confessedly antecedent to the authority of the word in Romanism, and the saints are not all of them allowed to be the immediate objects of God's own word, nor act upon it—that is, be subject to it. They are to be subject to the church. Let the church allow it or not, this makes no difference. He who allows can hinder—that is, hinder God's addressing the saints. For this is the true question of Protestantism, not man's title to the Bible merely, but God's title to address man directly by His word—more particularly to address each of his own servants, or those professedly such.

working in them that are united, and by His presence which is the personal power of union in the body. But this separation is not yet by judicial power, which separates (not the good from the evil, the precious from the vile, but) the vile from the precious, banishing it from His presence: in judgment binding up the tares in bundles, and casting them into the furnace of fire; gathering out of His kingdom all things that offend, Satan and his angels being himself cast down, and all things thereupon being gathered together in one in Christ, in heaven and in earth. Then the world, not the conscience, will be cleared from evil by the judgment which will not allow it but early cut off all the wicked, not by the power and testimony of the Spirit of God.

It is not now the time of this judicial separation of the evil from the good in the world as the field of Christ, by the cutting off and destruction of the wicked. But unity is not therefore given up out of the thoughts of God, nor can He have recognised union with evil. There is one Spirit and one body. He gathers together in one the children of God which were scattered abroad.

And now as to the principle in general:—God is working in the midst of evil to produce a unity of which He is the centre and the spring, and which owns dependently His authority. He does not do it yet by the judicial clearing away of the wicked; He cannot unite with the wicked—have a union which serves them. How can it be then, this union? He separates the called from the evil. “Come out from among them and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. As it is

written, I will walk in them and dwell in them," &c. Now here we have it distinctly set forth. This was God's way of gathering. It was by saying, Come out from among them. He could not have gathered true unity around Him otherwise. Since evil exists, yea, is our natural condition, there cannot be union of which the Holy God is the centre and power but by separation from it. Separation is the first element of unity and union.

We may now inquire a little further into the manner in which this unity is effectuated, on what it is based. There must be an intrinsic power of union holding it together to a centre, as well as a power separating from evil, to form it; and, this centre found, it denies all others. The centre of unity must be a sole and unrivalled centre. The Christian has not long to inquire here. It is Christ, the object of the divine counsel—the manifestation of God Himself—the one only vessel of mediatorial power, entitled to unite creation, as He by whom and for whom all things were made, and the church, as its redeemer, its head, its glory, and its life. And there is this double headship—He is head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. This will be accomplished in its day. For the present we take up the intermediate period, the unity of the church itself, and its unity in the midst of evil.

Now there can be no moral power which can unite away from evil but Christ. He alone, as perfect grace and truth, detects all the evil which separates from God, and from which God separates. He alone can, of God, be the attractive centre which draws together to Himself

all on whom God so acts. God will own no other. There is no other to whom the testimony could be borne, who is morally adequate to concentrate every affection which is of God and towards God. Redemption itself too makes this necessary and evident. There can be but one Redeemer, one to whom a ransomed heart can be given, as well as where a divinely quickened heart can give all its affections, the centre and revelation of the Father's love. He too is the centre of power to do it. In Him all the fulness dwells. Love—and God is love—is known in Him. He is the wisdom of God and the power of God. And yet more than this, He is the separating power of attraction, because He is the manifestation of all this, and the fulfiller of it in the midst of evil; and this is what we poor miserable ones want who are in it; and it is what, if we may so speak, God wants for His separating glory in the midst of evil. Christ sacrificed Himself to set up God in separating love in the midst of evil. There was more than this—a wider scope in this work; but I speak in reference to my present subject now.

Thus Christ becomes not only the centre of unity to the universe in His glorious title of power, but, as the manifest of God, the one owned and set up of the Father, and attractor of man, He becomes a peculiar and special centre of divine affections in man, round which they are gathered as the sole divine centre of unity. For indeed, as the centre—necessarily the sole centre—“he that gathereth not with me scattereth.” And such, as to this point, was the object even, and power of His death :—“I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men upon me.” And more specially He gave Himself “not for that

nation only, but that he might gather together in one the children of God which were scattered abroad." But here again we find this separation of a peculiar people. He gave Himself for us that He might purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. He was the very pattern of the divine life in man, separate from the evil by which it was universally surrounded. He was the friend of publicans and sinners, piping in grace to men by familiar and tender love; but He was ever the separate man. And so He is as the centre and high-priest of the church. "Such a high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"—and, it is added, "made higher than the heavens."

Here, in passing, we may remark that the centre and subject of this unity then is heavenly. A living Christ still became the instrument of maintaining the enmity, being Himself subject to the law of commandments contained in ordinances. Hence, though the divine glory of His person necessarily reached over this wall as a fruitful bough of grace to poor passing Gentiles without (and it could not be otherwise; for where faith was, He could not deny Himself to be God, nor what God was—even love), yet in His regular course, as a man made of a woman, He was made under the law. But by His death He broke down the middle wall of partition, and made both one, and reconciled both in one body unto God—making peace. Hence it is as lifted up, and finally as made higher than the heavens, that He becomes the centre and sole object of unity. Let us remark, in passing, that hence worldliness always destroys unity.

The flesh cannot rise up to heaven, nor descend in love to every need. It walks in the separative comparison of self-importance. "I am of Paul," &c. "Are ye not carnal and walk as men?" Paul had not been crucified for them, nor had they been baptized in the name of Paul. They had got down to earth in their minds, and unity was gone. But the glorious heavenly Christ in one word embraced all:—"Why persecutest thou me?"

This separation from all else was more slow among the Jews, as having been outwardly themselves the separated people of God; but, having fully shown what they were, the word to the disciples was, "Let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach." The Lord, when as the great result He would have one flock and one Shepherd, put forth His own sheep and went before them. Indeed we have only to show that unity is God's mind, and separation from evil is the necessary consequence; for it exists as a principle in the calling of God before unity itself. Unity is purpose, and as He is the only rightful centre, it must be the result of holy power; but separation from evil is His very nature. Hence, when He publicly calls Abraham, the words: "Get thee out of thy country, and out of thy kindred, and from thy father's house."

But to continue. From what we have seen, it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ on high is the object round which the church clusters in unity. He is its head and centre. This is the character of their unity, and of their separation from evil—from sinners. Yet they were not to be taken out of the world, but kept

from the evil, and sanctified through the truth, Jesus having set Himself thus apart to this end. Hence, as well as for the public display of the power and glory of the Son of man, the Holy Ghost was sent down to identify the called ones with their heavenly Head, and to separate them from the world in which they were to remain; and the Holy Spirit became thus the centre and power down here of the unity of the church in Christ's name, Christ having broken down the middle wall of partition, reconciling both in one body by the cross. The saints thus gathered in one became the habitation of God through the Spirit. The Holy Ghost Himself became the power and centre of unity (but in the name of Jesus) of a people separated alike from Jew and Gentile, and delivered out of this present evil world into union with their glorious Head. By Peter God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name; and of the Jews there was a remnant according to the election of grace; as St. Paul, one of them, was himself separated from Israel, and from the Gentiles, to whom he was sent.

And so was the constant testimony. "He that saith he hath fellowship with him and walketh in darkness, lieth, and doeth not the truth." Separation from evil is the necessary first principle of communion with Him. Whoever calls it in question is a liar; he is, so far, of the wicked one; he belies the character of God. If unity depends on God, it must be separation from darkness. So with one another. "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." And mark, here there is no limit. It is as God is in the

light. There the blessed Lord has placed us by His precious redemption; and hence by that the whole manner of our walk and union must be formed. We can have no union (as of God) out of it; the Jew could, because his—though separation, and hence the same in principle—yet was only outward in the flesh, and the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest; no, not even for the saints, though in God's counsels doubtless they were to be there through the sacrifice about to be offered. So again one with the other. What fellowship hath light with darkness? Christ with Belial? What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? And then, addressing the saints, the Holy Ghost adds, "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate." Otherwise we provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if we were stronger than He.

Of this unity and fellowship, I may add, the Lord's Supper is the symbol and expression. For we, being many, are all one bread (loaf); for we are all partakers of that one bread. We find there most distinctly that, as the unity of Israel of old was founded on deliverance and calling from the midst of, and maintained separation amongst, the heathens which surrounded them, so the church's unity was based on the power of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, separating a peculiar people out of the world to Christ, and dwelling amongst them; God Himself

thus dwelling and walking amongst them. For there is one Spirit, and one body, as we are called in one hope of our calling. Indeed the very name of Holy Spirit implies it; for holiness is separation from evil.

Whatever failure, moreover, there may be in attainment, the principle and measure of this separation is necessarily the light, as God is in the light; the way into the holiest being made manifest, and the Holy Ghost come down thence to dwell in the church below, and so, in power of heavenly separation, because the indwelling centre and power of unity (just as the Shekinah in Israel), He establishes the holiness of the church and its unity in its separation to God, according to His own nature and the power of that presence. Such is the church, and such is true unity. Nor can the saint recognise, intelligently, any other, though he may own desires and efforts after good in that which is short of it.

Here I might close my remarks, having developed the great though simple principle flowing from the very nature of God—that separation from evil is His principle of unity. But a difficulty, collateral to my main object and subject, presents itself. Supposing evil introduces itself into this one body so formed actually on earth, does the principle still hold good? How, then, can separation from evil maintain unity? And here we touch on the mystery of iniquity. But this principle, flowing from the very nature of God that He is holy, cannot be set aside. Separation from evil is the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances as to conduct and fellowship. But here there is a certain modification

of it. The revealed presence of God is always judicial when it exists, because power against evil is connected with the holiness which rejects it. Thus in Israel God's presence was judicial: His government was there, which did not allow of evil. So, though in another manner, it is in the church. God's presence is judicial there—not of the world, save in testimony, because God is not revealed yet in the world, and hence it plucks up no tares out of that field; but it judges them that are within. Hence the church is to put out from itself the wicked person, and thus maintains its separation from evil. And unity is maintained in the power of the Holy Ghost and a good conscience. And indeed, that the Spirit may not be grieved and the practical blessing lost, saints are exhorted to look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.

And how sweet and blessed is this garden of the Lord, when it is thus maintained, and blooms in the fragrance of Christ's grace! But alas! we know worldliness creeps in, and spiritual power declines: the taste for this blessing is enfeebled, because it is not enjoyed in the power of the Spirit; the spiritual fellowship with Christ, the heavenly Head, decays, and the power which banishes evil out of the church is no longer in living exercise. The body is not sufficiently animated by the Holy Ghost to answer the mind of God. But God will never leave Himself without witness. He brings home the evil to the body by some testimony or other—by the word, or by judgments, or both in succession, to recall it to its spiritual energy, and lead it to maintain His glory and its place. If it refuse to answer to the very nature and character of God, and

the incompatibility of that nature with evil, so that it becomes really a false witness for God, then the first and immutable principle recurs—the evil must be separated from. Further, the unity which is maintained after such separation becomes a testimony to the compatibility of the Holy Ghost and evil; that is, it is in its nature apostacy, it maintains the name and authority of God in His church, and associates it with evil. It is not the professed open apostacy of avowed infidelity, but it is denying God according to the true power of the Holy Ghost, while using His name. This unity is the great power of evil pointed out in the New Testament, connected with the professing church and the form of piety. From such we are to turn away. This power of evil in the church may be discerned spiritually, and left when there is the consciousness of inability to effect any remedy; or if there be an open public testimony, it is then open condemnation to it.

Thus, previous to the Reformation, God gave light to many who maintained a witness to this very evil in the professing church, apart from it: some bore testimony and still remained. When the Reformation came, it was openly and publicly given, and the professing body or Romanism became openly and avowedly apostate, as far as a professing Christian body can, in the Council of Trent. But wherever the body declines the putting away of evil, it becomes in its unity a denier of God's character of holiness, and then separation from the evil is the path of the saint; and the unity he has left is the very greatest evil that can exist where the name of Christ is named. Saints may remain, as they have in Romanism, where there is not power to gather all saints

together ; but the duty of the saint as to it is plain in the first principles of Christianity, though doubtless his faith may be exercised by it. "Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." It is possible that "he that departs from evil may make himself a prey ;" but this of course makes no difference—it is a question of faith. He is in the true power of God's unity.

Thus, then, the word of God affords us the true nature, object, and power of unity ; and in so doing it gives us the measure of it, by which we judge of what pretends to it, and the manner of it, and, moreover, the means of maintaining its fundamental principles according to the nature and power of God, by the Holy Ghost in the conscience, where it may not be realised together in power. Its nature flows from God's (for, of true unity, He must be the centre, and He is holy) ; and He brings us into it by separating us from evil. Its object is Christ. He is the sole centre of the church's unity, objectively, as its head. Its power is the presence of the Holy Ghost down here, sent as the Spirit of truth withal from the Father by Jesus. Its measure is walking in the light, as God is in the light (fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus), and, we may add, through the testimony of the written Word—the apostolic and prophetic word of the New Testament especially. It is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner-stone. The means of maintaining it is putting away evil (judicially, if needed), so as to maintain through the Spirit fellowship with the Father and the Son. If evil

be not put away, then separation from that which does not becomes a matter of conscience. I return, if alone, into the essential and infallible unity of the body in its everlasting principles of union with the head in a holy nature by the Spirit. The path of the saints thus becomes clear. God will secure by eternal power the vindication—not here, perhaps, but before His angels—of them who have rightly owned His nature and truth in Christ Jesus.

I believe these fundamental principles are deeply needed in this day for the saint who seeks to walk truly and thoroughly with God. Latitudinarian unity it may be painful and trying to keep aloof from. It has an amiable form in general, is in a measure respectable in the religious world, tries nobody's conscience, and allows of everybody's will. It is the more difficult to be decided about, because it is often connected with a true desire of good and is associated with amiable nature. And it seems rigid and narrow and sectarianism to decline so to walk ; but the saint, when he has the light of God, must walk clearly in that. God will vindicate His ways in due time. Love to every saint is a clear duty ; walking in their ways is not. And he that gathers not with Christ scatters. There can be but one unity : confederacy, even for good, is not it, even if it have its form. Unity, professed to be of the church of God, while evil exists and is not put away, is a yet more serious matter. It will always be found to be connected with the clerical principle, because this is needed to maintain unity when the Spirit is not its power, and in fact takes its place, guides, rules, governs in its place, under plea of

priesthood or ministry, owned as a distinct body or separate institution. It would not hold together without this.

The active power that gathers is always grace separation from evil may be called for, but in itself is never a gathering power. Holiness may attract when a soul is in movement of itself; but power to gather is in love working—if you please, faith working by love.

There are two great principles in God's nature owned of all saints—holiness and love. One is the necessity of His nature, imperative in virtue of that nature on all that approach to Him; the other is its energy. God is holy; He is not loving, but love. He is this in the essential fountain of His being. We make Him a judge by sin, for He is holy and has authority; but He is love, and none has made Him such. If there be love anywhere else, it is of God, for God is love. This is the blessed active energy of His being. In the exercise of it, He gathers to Himself for the eternal blessedness of those who are gathered. Its display is in Christ, and Christ Himself is the great power and centre of it. His counsels as to this are the glory of His grace; His applying them to sinners, and the means He employs for it, are the riches of His grace.

Allow me, in passing, before entering on the examination of the point which is now directly my object, to say a word on the sweet passage I have referred to, because it opens out God's full thoughts in bringing into the unity of which that epistle speaks. We are brought in Christ, and God Himself is the centre of the

blessing, and in two characters—His nature and His relationship. The verses I refer to are Eph. i. 3-7. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Lord, when ascending up on high, said, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Only that here the apostle goes on to their unity in Christ. There Christ speaks of them as brethren.

In this double character then, in which God stands to Christ Himself, He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings—none left out—in heavenly places, the best and highest sphere of blessing, where He dwells; not merely sent down to earth, but we taken ourselves up there, and in the best and highest way—in Christ Jesus—save His divine title to sit on the Father’s throne. Wonderful portion! sweet and blessed grace! which becomes simple to us in the measure in which we are accustomed to dwell in the perfect goodness of God, to whom it is natural to be all that He is—who could be no other. In verse 4 we have, “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” according to the glory of the divine nature, introducing into His own presence, in Christ, that which shall be the reflex of itself, according to its eternal purpose; for the church in the thoughts of God (and, I may add, in its life in the Word) is before the world in which it is displayed. Here it is His nature. We are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him in love. God is holy, God is love, and in His ways, when He acts, blameless. Then there is relationship in Christ, and His is that of Son. Hence in Him we are

predestinated to the adoption of children to God Himself, according to His good pleasure, the delight and goodness of His will. This is relationship. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as God. This is the glory of His grace; His own thoughts and purposes, to the praise of which we are. He has shown us grace in the Beloved. But in fact He finds us sinners. He has to put sinners in this place. What a thought! Here His grace shines out in another way. In this same blessed One—Christ the Son—we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins—what we need, in order to enter into the place where we shall be to the praise of the glory of His grace: and this is according to the riches of His grace; for God is displayed in the glory of His grace, and need is met by the riches of grace. Thus we are before God.

What follows in the chapter is the inheritance which belongs to us through this same grace—what is under us. Into this I do not enter, only remarking, as I have elsewhere, that the Holy Ghost is the earnest of the inheritance but not of God's love. This is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given to us. These two relationships of God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will be found to unfold much blessing. They are of frequent occurrence in Scripture.

But, interesting as that subject is, I turn now to the one before me. Nothing can be more true than that holiness is the principle on which Christian fellowship is built; but then the use of truth has to be considered as well as truth itself. Now separation from evil, when right, which I now assume, still distinguishes him who separates from him who does not. This tends to make

one's position important, and to mix it with self. Further, separation from evil may thus become a gathering power, as well as a principle on which gathering takes place. Moreover there is the danger of being occupied with the evil. A person attaches it, perhaps anxiously, to those he has left, to give a clear ground why he has done so. They conceal, cover over, gloss, explain : it is always so where the evil is maintained. He is occupied with proving evil, and proving it against others. This is slippery ground for the heart, to say nothing of danger to love. Some are almost in danger of acquiescing in the evil through the weariness of thinking about it. At all events power is not found here. God separates us surely from evil, but He does not fill the mind when it continues to be thus occupied ; for He is not in the evil. It is quite true that the mind may say, " Let us think of the Lord, and drop it," and get a measure of quiet and comfort ; but in this case the general standard and tone of spiritual life will be infallibly lowered : of this I have not a shadow of doubt.

Holiness is not merely separation from evil, but separation to God from evil. The new nature has not only a nature or intrinsic character as being of God, but an object (for it cannot live on itself)—a positive object—and this is God. Now this changes everything, because it separates from evil, which it abhors therefore when it sees it, because it is filled with good. This does not enfeeble its separation, but makes its abhorrence of evil lively, when it has to be so occupied, and gives another tone to that which is abhorrent to it, the power of good sufficing to put the evil out of mind and sight.

Hence it is holy, calm, and has a substantive character of its own, apart from evil, as well as abhorrent of it. With us this can only be in having an object, because we are and ought to be dependent only so far as we are positively filled with God in Christ. We are occupied with good, and hence holy, for that is holiness; and therefore are easily and discerningly abhorrent from evil without occupying ourselves with it. Such is God's nature. He is essentially good; He delights in it in Himself; and therefore He is abhorrent, in virtue of His goodness, from evil. Hence, when it is in power, love precedes and makes holy, whether it be mutual or the enjoyment of it in the revelation of God (1 Thes. iii. 12, 13).

So in 1 John i. 1-6—"That which was," &c. Now here the separation from evil, walking in the light, in God's revealed character in Christ, in the practical knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, in the truth as it is in Jesus, in whom the life was the light of men, is fully insisted on, with lines as clear and strong as the Holy Ghost alone knows how to make them. He who pretends to fellowship, and does not walk in the knowledge of God according to that knowledge, is a liar and the truth is not in him. But what makes the fellowship? This keeps it pure; but what makes it? The revelation of the blessed object, and centre of it, in Christ. He was speaking of One who had won His own heart, who was the gathering power into fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. He knew by the Holy Ghost, and enjoyed what the Saviour had said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." This was love—infinite,

divine; and, through the Holy Ghost, the witness of it had communion with it and told it out that others might have fellowship with him; and truly his was such. They joined in it. Now this, I apprehend, was gathering power. The object gathered to necessarily involved what follows. So, indeed, he closes the epistle: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The gathering power of good comes before the warning. In enjoying the fellowship that results there must be separation from evil. "This, then, is the message," &c., is the statement that follows.

Holiness then is separation *to* God, if real, as well as *from* evil. Thus alone we are in the light, for God is light. This is true in our first sanctifying: we are brought to God and to know Him. If we come to ourselves, it is, "I will arise and go to my Father;" if it is restoration, "If thou wilt return, return unto me." Hence love comes in, however dimly seen, in all true conversion and restoration. But in the full sense of gathering (that is, to common fellowship), it is clearly the blessed object which reveals that in which we are to have the fellowship which so gathers. We are to have fellowship in something, *i.e.*, with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This, then, must draw hearts to itself, that in their common delight in it their fellowship may exist. So Christ says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Now here was perfect love—entire separation from all

sin, and condemnation of it. "In that he died, he died unto sin once"—separation from the world, and deliverance from the whole power of the enemy, and the scene of it. It is perfect love drawing from everything to itself, showing all was evil, absorbing the soul into what was good in a saving way from evil. But when we follow Him into life, all is gone from which He separated. "In that he liveth, he liveth unto God." He is, in this life, made higher than the heavens; He takes a heavenly place, and our gathering through the cross is to Him there in the good where evil cannot come. There is our communion—entering into the Father's house in spirit; and this is the true character of the assembly—the church—for worship in its full sense. It remembers the cross, it worships (the world left out, and all known in heaven before God).

Thus, what separates from evil, what sanctifies, is the revelation of an object (of course through the Holy Ghost working), which draws the saint to that as good, and thereby reveals evil to him, and makes him judge it in spirit and soul. His knowledge of good and evil then is not a mere uneasy conscience, but sanctification. That is, sanctification is resting by the enlightening of the Holy Ghost on an object, which, by its nature, purifies the affections by being their object—creates them through the power of grace. Even under law it had this form, "Be ye holy, for I am holy;" though, I admit, there it partook necessarily of the character of the dispensation.

In the cross we have these two principles perfectly brought out. Love is clearly shown—the blessed object which draws the heart, yet the most solemn judgment

of and separation from all evil : such is God's perfectness, the foolishness and weakness of God. Divine attraction in love, evil in all its horror and forms perfectly abhorred by him who is attracted and attaches himself to that. The soul goes with sin, as sin, to love, and goes there, because love thus displayed has shown him that it is sin in being made sin for us. This is the power objectively that separates from evil and ends all connection with it. We cannot walk out of darkness but by walking in the light, that is, with God ; and God is love : were He not, we could not walk there.

Then we have other privileges. God's love in Christ is not only an object, but an activity which gathers. Love is relative ; it acts and shows itself. Hence God has acted. Jesus has revealed Him, and we thus know Him to be love and light too. Blessed knowledge ! It is, as given to us in the Word, eternal life ; and this life is occupied with the Father and the Son. But we can equally say that we know this sweet and blessed truth : " My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It is the activity of love which is the power of gathering. He died that He might " gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." Even in Israel : " How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not !" Here we have not only the attractive sanctifying object bringing into fellowship, but the activity of love which acts and gives itself in order to gather. In this we are allowed to have a part. It is this, while sanctifying and maintaining His holiness, reveals God and gathers weary souls.

Now this alone is the proper power of gathering—I do not say the principle on which souls are gathered, for this is clearly holiness, in which alone communion is maintained: else darkness would have fellowship with light. But love gathers; and this is as evident to the Christian as that it gathers to holiness, and on the principle of it. For when would the mind of man separate from and leave the evil in which it lives? Never. Alas! its will and lusts are there; its nature is enmity against God. This is what the presenting of grace in Jesus has so solemnly proved. Law was never given to gather; it was the rule of a people already with God, or a convict of sin. Sin does not gather to God, nor law; and one or other is all man's state unless grace acts. Besides grace alone fully reveals God, and hence without grace that to which we are to be gathered is not manifested. All short of grace is responsibility merely and failure. It is Christ gathers; and hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us.

Indeed, truth itself is never known till grace comes. The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The law told man what he ought to be; it did not tell him what he was. It told him of life if he obeyed, of a curse if he disobeyed; but it did not tell him that God is love. It spoke of responsibility, and said, "Do this, and live." This was perfect in its place, but it told neither what man was nor what God was: this remained concealed, but this is the truth. The truth is not what ought to be, but what is, the reality of all relationships as they are, and the revelation of Him, who, if there are any, must be their centre. Now that could not be told without grace, for man is

a ruined sinner, and God is love. Hence Christ is the truth. For grace, God Himself, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, even, are revealed as they are—what man is in perfection in relation with God, what man's alienation from God, what obedience, what disobedience, what holiness, what sin, what God, what man, what heaven, what earth—nothing but finds itself placed where it is in reference to God, and with the fullest revelation of Himself, while His counsels even are brought out, of which Christ is the centre.

Hence, grace is the acting power, alone capable of revealing truth; for Christ's being here is grace, His working effectual grace. Now the very existence of such an object and such a power would prove gathering into unity; for it must, being divine, gather to itself. But the word of God is plain in John xi. 52. Christ though the truth itself, yet while here, was lonely truth. No new relationship was established on a divine basis for men. Hence presented grace was rejected grace. The corn of wheat abode alone; but, in Christ dying, redemption was accomplished and atonement made. He was no longer "straitened." The grace and truth, shut up (so to speak) into His own heart, could now flow freely forth. The highest love was shown; and sin in man, instead of hindering its application and barring relationship, was that as to which it was displayed.

Thus, therefore, He gathers. Divine righteousness supplants human righteousness, which had been called for but never existed; divine life, mere human life; and God finds His glory in salvation. Grace reigns through righteousness. Now, this it is, by uniting

souls in the power of the Holy Ghost to Jesus, which gathers by the cross (whence the truth is told to us as we are here) to Christ in heaven (who tells us our true place to faith there). This is the love which is acting to bring us into this blessed and heavenly unity—holy too according to the holiness of His presence. Christ's path on earth is the pattern of it below, and in its full measure on the cross. Hence heaven and the cross are correlative. When the blood was brought into the holiest, the body was burnt without the camp. Then gathering into one began. Christ slew the enmity as between Jew and Gentile, and reconciled both in one body to God; and so we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ordinances always separate according to human holiness, grace unites according to divine. The power of unity is grace; and, as man is a sinner and separated from God, the power of gathering is grace—grace manifested in Jesus on the cross and bringing us to God in heaven, and this in Him who is gone there.

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