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THE KINDNESS OF GOD.

EPHESIANS ii. 5, 7.

DEAR READER,

HAVE you ever thought of the object which God has in view in shewing kindness?—Think of it, for unspeakable blessing is involved in it. It is to “shew forth the exceeding riches of His grace.” But first look for a moment at the testimony of the word as to the present condition of the world. It is lying in wickedness, (1 John v. 18.) It has rejected and crucified Jesus, (Acts iv. 26, 27,) and is now lying under the sentence of judgment (John xii. 31); and such is the position of every individual in it. Each one is ruined and lost, and at enmity with God, (Rom. viii. 7.) Now this being the state of man, God takes occasion to display the riches of His grace, by shewing kindness to those dead in trespasses and sins. He quickens them, raises them up together, and makes them sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, “that in the ages to come he might shew forth the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. ii. 7.)

But God is holy and just: His holiness must therefore be guarded, and His justice satisfied before His kindness can flow out to sinners. Now mark here, dear reader, the love of Jesus. He, in order to effect this, made Himself of no reputation (Phil. ii. 7), and He came here Himself into the midst of the misery and ruin into which man by his sin had been plunged. Here He was found in the form of a servant, and in fashion as a man (Phil. ii. 7, 8). Here He was brought into the dust of death (Ps. xxii. 15). Here as the willing sacrifice He poured out His blood and offered up His life to God. But He who was dead is alive again, and now in resurrection, He stands far above the ruin and misery of the old creation, there to associate lost sinners with Himself in His own glorious portion above. How truly marvellous is this love! Jesus thus first comes and takes the place of the sinner here below, in order that He may take the sinner up into His own place in the glory above! (John xvii. 22.)

But now mark in this, how opposite are the ways of God to those of man. Man thinks he shews his kindness when he does a favour to a *friend*, but God in the Gospel blesses His enemies, (Rom. v. 12.) There are angels who have never sinned, but these are not the suited subjects of redemption. In redemption God comes down to the lowest and worst of His creatures, and none can be found a greater distance from God than



man. But God's purpose is *to display the exceeding riches of His grace ; and the worse the character, the lower the condition of those blessed, the more fully of necessity is grace displayed.* Man, therefore, I say again is the very subject suited for this, and that just because of the wretchedness of his condition, and the unexampled hatefulness of his sin: *No one therefore, be he ever so vile, can be out of the reach of that kindness which has the display of God's grace for its object.* Yea, if one could be found who had all the accumulated load of the world's guilt upon himself, God would only find in such an one a fitting subject for the display of the riches of His grace. But think of this, dear reader, your sin (which perhaps you have looked upon as the hindrance to your being blessed at all,) is the only thing which can really introduce you to Jesus—Jesus is a Saviour, and therefore has to do alone with sinners, (Mark ii. 16, 17.) Such as the 'Pharisee' and the Elder Brother may be passed by ; but the sin of one who is an outcast from society, an owned and published sinner in this world, is only looked upon by Jesus, as that which affords Him the occasion for the display of God's grace and goodness in forgiving it.—Read Luke vii. 36, 50.

But think again, I pray you, how wide the door of blessing is which this opens to poor lost sinners ; for where is the limit to the blessing which the sinner who takes the place and character of a return-

ing prodigal may look for at the hand of Jesus *when God is shewing kindness in order to display His grace.* And yet how slow is the awakened soul in apprehending this. He, still occupied about his own necessities as a sinner, too often thinks that because his thoughts about the blessing he seeks from God are bounded by the estimate he has formed of his own need, that God's thoughts in bestowing it must necessarily be so too. But if God proposes in the Gospel to shew Himself by the exercise of His own unspeakable grace and goodness, who are we, that we should set a limit to the blessing which God shall give us? God blesses poor sinners according to their need. The measure of the blessing which the Gospel presents to me as a sinner can only be found in the measure of the grace and goodness of God. Let none then think that he shews humility in hesitating to take the high place of blessing into which the Gospel calls him. Dear Reader, *God is now shewing kindness in order to show his grace.* Would you then do otherwise than suffer him to take His own way in this? His way is freely to blot out all your sins by the blood shed upon the cross, to associate you with Jesus Himself, and bless you with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Him. (Eph. i. 3.)

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN

DEAR READER,—I dare say you call yourself a Christian: whether you are right, or whether you are wrong, God knoweth. I would pray that you may be led to compare with the truth of God's word, the reason you have for calling yourself so. If you have no good reason, it may be a great blessing that you should be taught it before it is too late; and if you are indeed a Christian, the diligent inquiry, in the name of the Lord, will bring more peace and blessing to your own soul.

And now, *What is a Christian?*—A sinner chosen in Jesus before the foundation of the world (Eph. i. 4). Called by the grace of God to have Jesus revealed in him (Gal. i. 15, 16). Saved by grace through faith, and that not of himself; it is the gift of God (Eph. ii. 8). Redeemed through the blood of Jesus (Eph. i. 7). Washed from his sins in the blood of Jesus (Rev. i. 5). Justified by the blood of Jesus (Rom. v. 9). Once an enemy, but now reconciled to God, through the death of his Son (Rom. v. 10). Delivered by the Lord Jesus from the wrath to come (1 Thes. i. 10). Quickened together with Christ from being dead in sin (Eph. ii. 5). Raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. ii. 6). A child of God through Jesus Christ (Eph. i. 5). An heir of God, and joint heir with Christ (Rom. viii. 17). A king, to sit with Jesus on his throne (Rev. i. 6).

Such is a Christian: and is it not a great thing to be a Christian? Yes, dear reader; it is a great thing in Heaven to be a Christian: and surely it is a poor thing on earth to be any thing else. Well! then, are you a Christian? Some people say that it is presumption in any one to say he is; but no, it is not presumption; it is faith to be able to say, I know I am a child of God, because I know I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; for God tells me, that, if I believe, I am his child.

God says in his holy word, "He that believeth on the Son of God, *hath the witness in himself.*" If, then, you believe on the Son of God, it is no presumption to say that you have the witness in yourself. Again, the apostle, by the Spirit of God, says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of

God ; that ye may know that ye have eternal life. If, then, you believe on the name of the Son of God, it is no presumption to know that you *have* eternal life. Could it be put plainer in the Bible than it is? No, it could not ; but man's corrupt heart, that, that is enmity against God, is ready enough to believe about judgment and wrath, but altogether unwilling to believe such wondrous love, as that God should give us his Son to do every thing for us, leaving us nothing to do, but to confess that all is already done, because he has assured us of it. When I know that God *is love*, should I believe any act of love too great for him to do? No : but he that will not believe God's love to be as great as He says it is, is guilty of the sin of making God a liar : " He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1 John v. 10).

O then, dear reader, consider well the foregoing strong statements made on the truth of God's holy word :—If you think that you are not a very great sinner, and that your sins will be pardoned because they are few, you are not a Christian ; but if you know that you are a very great sinner, but that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin, your sins are pardoned, because Jesus has put them away (Heb. ix. 26). If you suppose that your sins are blotted out by any work of holiness that the Spirit of God has produced in your soul, you are not looking to the blood shed upon the cross : or if you suppose that the merit of your faith has put away your sins, you are not a Christian, and you have not faith ; for faith will look at Jesus, not at itself ; but if you believe that Jesus has put away your sins, you are a Christian, for you have faith.

The instant you see what Jesus has done for you, that instant you may be at peace, because all that ever could be done to put away sin has been entirely finished in the one offering of our Lord Jesus Christ. He never was, nor ever will be, offered for sin a second time : and he that believes in his holy name, believes that the one offering is enough (see Heb. ix. 25, 26 ; x. 10—14).

It makes no matter what your former life may have been, up to the moment in which you believe in Jesus ; peace, and instant peace, is then your happy privilege, because you may see that the blood has already blotted out your sins. The jailor at Philippi acted with cruelty towards the disciples of Jesus, and was going to put himself to death immediately before he asked, " What shall I do to be saved?" the only reply was, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house;" and he that very night rejoiced in God, though he trembled with fear when he asked the question (Acts xvi. 23—34). Philip met the Ethiopian ignorant of Jesus, but when, during their drive in the chariot, the truth was made precious to his soul, and that he was able to say, " I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," he then " went his way rejoicing;" for " whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God " (1 John iv. 15). Peace



to a troubled conscience comes from a view of the cross, and not from a growth in holiness. An instant view of the cross gives instant peace—a dim view, little peace—but it is from seeing the cross that peace comes, and from nothing else. This is the way the Holy Spirit gives peace to the conscience, in delivering it from the dread of God's wrath; and to this alone must the most experienced believer ever look back to see his peace and salvation; for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." And O the graciousness of this salvation is beyond all measure!—unsought and unconditional love! the cheerful and free gift of him who loveth a cheerful giver—the full proof of a love which nothing but unbelief can check or resist; for sin cannot. The simple fact that "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us," is the proof that nothing but unbelief can hinder any sinner's participation in all the rich blessings God hath to bestow.

Let not Satan persuade you that you are too great a sinner to find forgiveness; for God says, that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). If you think you are even the chief of sinners, still be not afraid; only believe. The Apostle Paul said, by the Spirit of God, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom *I am chief*." You cannot believe your sins to be too great, if you only believe that Christ was so great as to be able to bear them; and take care that, in magnifying your sins, you do not lessen the love or power of the Lord Jesus Christ; O rather magnify that love that forgave so much; and this will be your blessing; for to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much. And if a poor sinner supposes that his pardon is merely given in dependence on future obedience, then he never can be obedient, because he must walk in such slavish fear that he cannot render the obedience of love: and there can be no service to God but by the sweet constraint of love. The more, then, that God's unceasing, unchangeable love is seen, and shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us, the more constrained will the heart be in its happy service. The heart, where God's love is believed, and therefore received, must return an answer of love; for "we love him because he first loved us."

And how much service are God's dear children called on to render, when thus saved, independent of any service? They are called on to spend a life of service in every thing they do, and in every thing they say: and this is their happy liberty. When of the world, they considered it freedom to live for the world, but bondage to live for Christ; so now, when in Christ, they consider it liberty to live for Christ, but bondage to live for the world. When the Apostle Paul entreats believers to live thus, he says, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren," not by the terrors of God's wrath (for from these *they were already* delivered), but "by the

mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." To live as a Christian, is to have the love of Christ constraining us to live, not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor. v. 15). "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). And inasmuch as we are not our own, but bought with a price, to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20).

And, dear Christian reader, how I feel ashamed at the little return of continued self-denying service of love, from such as we are, to Him who loved and gave himself for us. Had heaven in it any gift so rich as the Son of God? Yet he was freely given for us. And have we any thing now too good and too valuable to serve God with? Could Jesus do more for us than stooping into our degraded humiliation, to lay down his life in love? And is there any service for Jesus now, which he could be honoured in, and which we will not honour him in, because we should make too great a sacrifice? Dear brethren, may we know more of the love of Jesus, that we may know less of the love of ourselves; and see more of the glory of Jesus, that we may see less of the glory of the world; but confess plainly that we are heirs of another country, even an heavenly; and that even the "reproach of Christ is greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," ever looking back to the cross, to see our salvation only in our crucified Redeemer; to whom be blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever.—Amen!

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