

## A NECESSARY ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

**“Making mention of thee at my prayers . . . that thy participation in the faith should become operative in the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in us towards Christ Jesus.”—PHILEMON 4, 6, N.T.**

**T**HE grace that the Apostle desired for Philemon shone brightly in his own conduct, as evidenced by his epistles. He was ready with the “ acknowledgment of every good thing ” before ever referring to the faults which needed correction.

He would praise the rich and worldly Corinthians, that they came behind in no gift, being enriched by Christ in all utterance and in all knowledge, before he exposes the evil that was corrupting their spiritual life ; and he thanks God on every remembrance of the Philippians before hinting at a want of harmony between two of their number.

And now, at the close of the dispensation of grace, can we say that such acknowledgment is less necessary than at the beginning, or think that in our day it is well to rebuke the evil without any recognition of the good ?

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Surely the acknowledgment is still needed, in the first place, BECAUSE GOD MAKES IT.

He overlooks no right desire, nor forgets any true endeavour. Every little bit of faithfulness on the part of the least of His own has its reward from Him. Even where the darkness is greatest, and the fogs of human tradition have almost obscured the revelation of His will, the conduct that is ruled by the smallest ray of light will not lose its reward.

So often are we preoccupied with the presence of some evil things, that we are scarcely able for the acknowledgment of *any* good in our brethren ; and then we think it strange when they are largely used of God in His service. Perhaps they are grossly ignorant of truth, full of erroneous notions or faulty methods, and yet they are owned of God in blessing to hundreds. We may say that God is sovereign, but that does not explain the case, for He is not capricious to bestow His rewards where they are least deserved. Let us look a little closer and see if there be not *some good thing* that has escaped our notice, which will account for the divine approval and put us to shame.

It may be their much faithfulness to little light contrasting favourably with our less faithfulness to greater light that explains the circumstance ; or it may be that in their simplicity and gratitude they have “ loved

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much," and God has owned it, while we have despised them for their little intelligence.

We should acknowledge the good in others, too, BECAUSE WE COMMONLY ACKNOWLEDGE IT IN OURSELVES and look with leniency on our own failings. We take for granted that God will give us credit for our sincerity, even though, perhaps, we forget to give others credit for theirs. While indifference to evil is never right, there may often be much need for longsuffering and forbearance regarding it.

Again, the acknowledgment is necessary, BECAUSE THOSE WHO LOVE THEM MAKE IT, and cannot help doing so. Love does not overlook the least thing that is worthy of praise, while it grieves over the smallest fault.

Were we living in the power of the Philadelphian testimony, "love of the brethren," wherever found and however named, would characterize us, but if we look round on the believers who live in the same town with us, may we not have cause to consider how we have endeavoured to "assure them of our love"? Is there not a danger of our Christian affection being withered and narrowed down to the little limits of a party, instead of embracing every child of God? Or does our love to some show itself only in avoiding them because of their errors, instead of going on with them as far as God does because of their good?

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Not only love, but righteousness and truth require the acknowledgment. If we dwell upon the faults and ignore the virtues of our brethren, our judgment is not only uncharitable, but it is both unrighteous and false. And yet how easily we are betrayed into these uncharitable reckonings !

One effect of this acknowledgment would be the *expansion of our own affections*. We should not be straitened and cramped like those who look upon others in a censorious spirit, taking knowledge of them more by their failings than by their faithfulness.

It would lead also to our being *less misunderstood and less misjudged*. We feel aggrieved when our motives and aims are misinterpreted, but if we have not made the necessary "acknowledgment of every good thing" in others, we may be only reaping what we have sowed.

Then, too, the measure in which our love acknowledges the good in our brethren will be *the measure in which we are able to correct their error*. Casting out the beam of censoriousness from our own eye, we shall see how to remove—not merely to point out—the mote in our brother's eye.

The inspired allusion to Lot in Peter's second Epistle gives us a touching instance of the divine acknowledgment of every good thing.

□ The story of Lot's life, as sketched in Genesis,

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affords little that we can admire. It is the history of one who soon left the path of faith, and sank lower and lower spiritually, through backsliding, world-bordering, expediency, disgrace and ruin, to a shameful end. We turn with disgust from the story, warned rather than edified, and perhaps may be ready to declare that there was no good thing in such a man.

Yet after nigh two thousand years the Spirit of God can pick out, from the rubbish-heap of that wasted life, the one bright jewel that the mind of heaven had seen amid the corruptions of Sodom. We learn that Lot "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds"; and though the hay and stubble of his self-willed course is consumed by the fire of judgment, this one bright trait of his character is placed on record for our instruction. Neither is one word added about his faults. Calvary's cross comes between Genesis and Peter's Epistle, and the atoning blood has blotted out the whole dark story of his sin.

May we learn from this to look at others in the garments of their salvation, and, knowing how redemption's work has met their failure and ours, be free and happy in the acknowledgment of every good thing about them.

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