

Divine Love

Manifested and Experienced

W. FERGUSON



STOW HILL BIBLE AND TRACT DEPOT
25 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4

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from the “New Translation,” by J. N. Darby.*

DIVINE LOVE AND DIVINE LIGHT

The apostle John tells us that "God is love." 1 John iv, 8, 16. A simple but profound statement disclosing that which God is in His nature. Behind His attributes such as power, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, faithfulness, truth and mercy, there is God Himself and in His nature He is love.

John also tells us that "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." John i, 18. The Word, who was with God in the beginning, and who was God, became flesh and dwelt among men, bringing into the world this wonderful light. Emphasis is laid upon the universal bearing of the testimony. "In him was life and the life was the light of men." "The true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens [or sheds its light on] every man." John i, 4, 9. He could say "I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John viii, 12. Although the light which Christ brought into the world was the manifestation of God as love, yet it necessarily exposed the true state of men in their moral distance from God under the power of sin, for "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." 1 John i, 5.

The effect consequently of His coming into the world, was to disclose the terrible character of the moral darkness in which men were involved. "He was in the world and the world had its being through him, and the world knew him not." Even the

Jewish nation although for centuries it had been the subject of divine culture as seen in the Old Testament under the law and the prophets, was proved to be under the same condemnation as men generally, for He came to His own and His own received Him not. John i, 10, 11. "This is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light, for their works were evil. For everyone that does evil hates the light." John iii, 19, 20. The Lord told His disciples that the result of His ministry both in His words and in His works, was that men had seen and hated both Him and His Father. John xv, 22-24.

In the rejection of Christ the irremediable character of sinful flesh was fully exposed. This was not only the exposure of man's sinful works, but of his sinful state. It agrees with the conclusion reached by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans, chap. viii, 7-8. Whether in Jew or in Gentile, "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God; for neither indeed can it be: and they that are in flesh cannot please God." The result of this exposure is anticipated from the outset of John's gospel.

The great problem that sin had raised was now fully apparent and it seemed, humanly speaking, to be insoluble. Only the resources of divine wisdom could meet the situation. It involved a twofold necessity; the work of Christ *for men* in His death on the cross that they might be redeemed and reconciled to God, and also a divine work *in men*, in those who have been born of God. The latter will be considered in a subsequent section.

The love of God as a term which is found in Scripture is popularly known in Christendom, but man in his natural condition, having no true knowledge either of God or of his own state as a sinner, has consequently no understanding of divine love. If he reasons about it without exercise of conscience, he

will falsify the character of God by supposing that He thinks as lightly of sin as the natural man himself does, and that God's love means that He will overlook men's sins and will be too gracious to deal with anyone in judgment.

The true significance of the love of God is only known by believers who are divinely taught. The more we know of the deep meaning of the cross of Christ, the more our hearts can appreciate the depths of divine love.

On man's side the crucifixion of Christ was the final expression of his utter rejection of God come down in grace, but on the divine side the whole question of sin and sins was dealt with sacrificially in the vicarious sufferings and death of Christ, in devoted obedience to God whose will He came to do.

THE NECESSITY FOR THE DEATH OF CHRIST

In view of the erroneous ideas as to divine love which are widely current in the Christian profession, it may be well at this point to refer to some of the scriptures which state clearly and definitely the necessity for the death of Christ, and what it has effected in the accomplishment of the will of God, and in meeting our need as sinners, for only in the solution of the moral questions which sin had raised, could sinful men have any true knowledge of God as love.

In the 24th chapter of Luke, the risen Lord met the difficulty as to His crucifixion, felt by the two disciples who were returning with sad hearts to Emmaus, by rebuking their unbelief in the testimony of the prophets, saying, "*Ought not* the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory"? Afterwards He reminded the company of disciples gathered together at Jerusalem, of what He had told

them before His death, "that all that is written concerning me in the law of Moses and prophets and psalms *must* be fulfilled. Then he opened their understanding to understand the scriptures, and said to them, Thus it is written, and thus *it behoved* the Christ to suffer, and to rise from among the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem." In John iii, 14, the Lord told Nicodemus that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness thus *must* the Son of man be lifted up." In Acts xvii, 3, we find that Paul's custom was to teach in the synagogues from the Old Testament scriptures, "that the Christ *must* have suffered and risen up from among the dead." These quotations call our attention to the importance of the Old Testament scriptures both in their typical teaching and in their prophetic testimony in relation to the necessity for the sufferings and death of Christ.

The following New Testament scriptures witness to the efficacy of Christ's work in dealing with the *guilt of sins*. "Christ has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." 1 Peter iii, 18. "Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." 1 Peter ii, 24. "Christ died for our sins." 1 Cor. xv, 3. "God commends his love to us, in that we being still sinners Christ has died for us." Rom. v, 8. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins." 1 John iv, 10. "He is the propitiation for our sins; but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world." 1 John ii, 2. The one mediator between God and men is "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." 1 Tim. ii, 5.

The way in which God has dealt with the *sinful state* of man is seen in the following quotations. "God having sent his own Son in likeness of flesh of sin and for sin has condemned sin in the flesh." Rom. viii, 3. Christ "who knew not sin he [God]

has made sin for us." 2 Cor. v, 21. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." John i, 29. "Now once in the consummation of the ages he [Christ] has been manifested for the putting away of sin by his sacrifice." Heb. ix, 26. In the bearing by Christ of the judgment due to sin, every divine attribute was vindicated, and God was glorified as to all the dishonour sin had brought in. When Judas went out on the night of the betrayal, Jesus anticipating the cross said, "Now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in him." John xiii, 31.

The sinful man of Adam's order who was under judgment was removed sacrificially for God in the death of the sinless One. In the accomplishment of the will of God, Christ laid down His life; the shedding of His blood being the witness of His death. This was the fulfilment of the sacrificial types of the Old Testament. "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul." Leviticus xvii, 11.

In the light of this we can understand something of the meaning of scriptures which speak of the value and efficacy of the blood of Christ. "This is my blood, that of the new Covenant, that shed for many for remission of sins." Matt. xxvi, 28. "Whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood." Rom. iii, 25. "Having been now justified in the power [or virtue] of his blood." Rom. v, 9. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of offences." Eph. i, 7. "Having made peace by the blood of his cross." Col. i, 20. "Without blood-shedding there is no remission." Heb. ix, 22. "Having boldness for entering into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus." Heb. x, 19. "Redeemed by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." 1 Peter i, 18-19. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John i, 7.

Theologians who have attempted to deal with the subject of the atoning work of Christ from a merely intellectual point of view, have entirely failed to understand the scriptures which speak of it, and they have endeavoured in vain to explain away the witness both of the Old and the New Testaments in relation to the blood and the cross of Christ. The truth as to Christ crucified is still an offence to the religious legalist represented by the Jew, and it is foolishness to the intellectual man represented by the Greek; 1 Cor. i. The believer who has been convicted of sin has no difficulty in this regard, for he finds rest and peace of conscience and heart and the settlement of every question between his soul and God, in believing the divine testimony concerning the abiding value of the work of Christ in the accomplishment of the will of God. It is in this way that we make our first approach to a true knowledge of the love of God in its wonderful depths.

Scripture presents divine love from different points of view and for intelligent understanding it is needful that we should distinguish them. In the following sections some of the leading aspects are briefly considered.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN ITS UNIVERSAL BEARING TOWARDS THE WORLD

Perhaps the most generally known verse of Scripture speaking of the love of God is John iii, 16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him may not perish but have life eternal." This remarkable statement gives us the widest bearing of the manifestation of divine love. It is universal, without limitation or distinction of nation or class, the testimony going out world-wide to whosoever believes.

The verse is very often quoted without any refer-

ence to its close connection with the preceding context: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus *must* the Son of man be lifted up"; and there are many Christians who have little entered into the profound teaching of this remarkable type of the crucifixion of Christ.

The incident referred to in Numbers xxi, occurred towards the end of the forty years' journeyings of the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was a time of crisis in their history. Their experience of God's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and His care and goodness in providing for their needs, and His longsuffering patience in His dealings with them during this period, when their obedience was being tested under the law, only resulted in a full demonstration of the persistence in them of "a wicked heart of unbelief in turning away from the living God." Heb. iii, 12. They murmured against God and against Moses, and they loathed the divine provision of manna for their daily food. This brought upon them the judgment of the fiery serpents, whose bite was causing the death of the people. In their perishing condition they confessed their sin, and the prayer of Moses on their behalf was answered by God showing him His way of meeting the situation. Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole and every one who was bitten and looked upon the serpent of brass lived. The history of the people of Israel has proved what man in the flesh is under the most favourable conditions, when tested under divine culture, and therefore it has a universal bearing; 1 Cor. x, 11.

In the fulfilment of the type of the brazen serpent in its bearing upon mankind generally, we learn that it was necessary for the Lord Jesus as the Son of man to be lifted up on the cross and to take upon Himself the whole question of the sinful state of men; He the sinless One being made sin in order that sin in the flesh (traced back to its source in the serpent

of Genesis iii) might be condemned sacrificially in His crucifixion and death. See also Romans viii, 3.

If John iii, 14 shows that this was required because of the state of men, verse 16 tells us that it was also necessary because of the love of God. "Thus must the Son of man be lifted up" . . . "for God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." On the one hand a perishing world, and on the other the blessing of eternal life, the gift of the love of God to whosoever believes on the One who is both Son of man and Son of God.

There is an attractiveness and magnificence in the wide scope of these verses which have been felt by Christians generally, in many cases long before they have entered intelligently into their full significance, showing how God has dealt with the condition of men universally as perishing, and also the greatness of what was in His heart towards them in giving His Son.

John tells us that the object of the signs recorded in the gospel is that "ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have *life* in his name"; chap. xx, 31. That death however might be annulled and life brought in, it was necessary that the sin question should be dealt with, for it was by sin that man became subject to death. Therefore after the personal glory of the Son had been shown in chapter i, He is presented as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and as the Son of man who must be lifted up.

The question raised by the entry of sin into the world in Genesis iii, with which the law of Moses had not been able to deal, owing to the character of sinful flesh, was now solved by the lifting up of the Son of man. On the ground of accomplished righteousness established by His death, the way to the tree of life, which had been guarded by the flaming sword of the cherubim, is now open to all who believe. They live in the light of the love of God which has

been revealed in its fulness by the Son; and they are maintained in the realisation of unfailing satisfaction and joy in the blessing of eternal life, as the living water springs up in them (John iv), and as they feed upon the living bread which came down from heaven; chap. vi. Further unfoldings of divine love in the latter part of John's gospel will come before us in a later section.

In the gospel of John we see that along with the light of divine testimony going out world-wide and the necessity of the death of Christ, there is also emphasised the necessity of a divine work in men, an entirely new beginning, a new birth, not of the flesh but of the Spirit; chap. iii, 6. Those who are born of God come to light in receiving Christ and believing on His name, and to these He gives the right to take the place of children of God; chap. i, 13. Some further remarks as to these two lines of truth will be made in considering John's first epistle.

In view of the question sometimes raised as to the meaning of "the world" (Greek, *kosmos*) in John's writings, it may be well to point out that the context in each case generally suffices to make clear whether it refers to the place, the people, or the world-system. For example it is clearly the place in John xiii, 1 and xvii, 11; the people in John iii, 16; xvii, 21 and 1 John ii, 2, the whole world in contrast to limitations such as the Jewish people; and the system with its prince or ruler in John xii, 31; the moral elements making up the sinful world-system being seen in 1 John ii, 15-17. This system has been likened to a ship condemned and about to go down under the judgment of God, but during the present period of grace, there is salvation and life offered freely to every person on board who believes the testimony of God concerning His Son presented to men in the gospel. The Lord Jesus consequent on His death is now the Head and centre of the divine system, and draws all to Him without distinction of nation

or class; John xii, 32; but persistence in unbelief involves both Jews and Gentiles in the same condemnation, as having common part in the world-system of which Satan is the ruler, for from this point of view in contrast to the family of God, "the whole world lies in the wicked one"; 1 John 5, 19.

DIVINE LOVE AS TAUGHT IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLE PAUL

The epistles being addressed directly to believers, their teaching as to divine love refers not only to its presentation objectively, but also to its being experimentally known and enjoyed. Paul's epistle to the Romans was written to establish believers in the truth of the Gospel of God. It is noticeable that he begins by demonstrating the responsibility and guilt of all men, whether Gentiles or Jews, in order that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world be subject to the judgment of God. He then develops the teaching of the Gospel, prominence being given in the first place to righteousness as being its fundamental basis. Through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, there is free justification *for all*. God has set Him forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood, for the showing forth of His righteousness, so that He should be just in justifying the believer. The righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel and seen in the death of Christ, instead of being against men is in their favour. Jesus our Lord who was delivered to death for our offences has been raised by the power of God from among the dead for our justification.

This is shown in the first four chapters, and the result as known in the experience of believers is seen in the beginning of chapter v: Justified by faith, they have peace with God, also access into divine favour, and they boast in hope of the glory of God.

In the development of the apostle's teaching thus far, God is known to believers in His righteousness, grace, and power. In verse 5 of chapter v we come to the source of the Gospel as originating in the love of God, and this as known experimentally, being shed abroad (or poured out) in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. This gives full assurance of hope, and enables us to endure steadfastly as we meet with tribulation in our pathway through this world, corresponding with the type of the wilderness in the history of the children of Israel. It should be noticed, however, that the epistle contemplates what should be the *true character* of the Christian believer's normal experience in the wilderness according to God, in contrast to the warning of Israel's failure through unbelief as seen in Hebrews iii and iv.

In the verses which follow in Romans v emphasis is laid upon the *death* of Christ as the witness to our hearts of the love of God. In chapters iii and iv the death of Christ is seen in its efficacy as establishing God's righteousness and meeting the need of guilty men. Here the wonderful character of God's *love* is seen in relation to the condition of guilt and moral distance in which we were when Christ died for us. "We being still without strength, in due time Christ has died for the ungodly." "God commends his love to us, in that we being still sinners, Christ has died for us." "Being enemies we have been reconciled to God through the death of his Son."

God expressed His love when there was nothing lovable in us. If we ask for the reason, we are thrown back on God Himself. He is love and He loves us because of what He is. That the love of God might reach us in the depth of our need necessitated the death of His Son. Appreciation of His atoning sufferings and death which were anticipated in the agony of Gethsemane, and fully realised when forsaken by God on the cross, has a profound moral effect upon us in the

measure in which we are able to enter into their deep meaning, and the greatness of the cost to God and to Christ. The love which has been thus manifested remains unchanged, and the Holy Spirit makes it a present living reality in our hearts.

The result is that not only are believers established in the knowledge of justification and reconciliation, and the assurance of present and future salvation, but God being known in the depths of His love, we reach the climax of this part of the epistle: "We are making our boast *in God*, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. v, 11.

In the second part of the epistle, chapter v, 12 to the end of chapter viii, we have another side of the Gospel presented, in relation to headship. In contrast to the one man Adam who by disobedience brought in sin and death, attention is called to the one Man Jesus Christ, who is now the divinely appointed Head *for all men*. By His obedience unto death, He has brought in righteousness and life as the free gift of grace towards all. The end in view is that instead of the reign of sin and death, grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord; chap. v, 21.

In chapters vi, vii and viii we see the present results of the appropriation by believers of Christ as Head. In the realisation of identification with Him we are set free from bondage to sin, the law, and the flesh, in order that in liberty and newness of life, in the spirit of the new Covenant, we may serve God in righteousness and holiness. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the power to live and fulfil righteousness. Being indwelt by the Spirit of God believers can be spoken of as having a new state, not in flesh but in spirit, corresponding to the change of headship from Adam to Christ. The Spirit of God leads us in the path of the will of God. We have also received a spirit of sonship whereby we cry "Abba Father";

also the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

In the latter part of chapter viii there is a remarkable contrast between the purpose of God that there is to be a company of sons all conformed to the image of God's Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren, and our actual present condition of infirmity as passing through the wilderness, in mortal bodies part of a groaning creation, and liable to suffer from all kinds of pressure and painful circumstances.

Having the firstfruits of the Spirit we can anticipate with confident hope, the accomplishment of the purpose of God, knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Here the apostle returns to the thought of divine love, but from a different point of view from that seen in chapter v. There we have the greatness of our need and the condition of distance in which the love of God reached us when without strength, ungodly, sinners and enemies. The knowledge of God revealed in righteousness and love, as seen in the death of Christ lays a moral foundation in the soul, and the realisation of deliverance in identification with Christ as the new Head, prepares us for the further light in chapter viii, where we see divine love in relation to the purpose of God.

Believers are here looked upon as loving God in response to His love experimentally known. This brings them to light as being God's elect, foreknown, predestinated to sonship, called, justified, glorified. Every accusing voice is silenced. It is God who justifies His elect. "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who has died, but rather has been also raised up; who is also at the right hand of God; who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Here we see the present activities of the love of Christ in His position as risen and exalted, on behalf of the saints for whom He died.

No conditions of bodily infirmity, or suffering, tribulation or persecution, can separate us from His love. This is the power which has carried Christians through persecution triumphantly, even when put to death for Christ's sake, being reckoned as sheep for the slaughter.

The apostle concludes his unfolding of the Gospel in verses 38 and 39, by affirming his persuasion that no creature in the universe can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That which was accomplished by Christ's death, both for God and for the redeemed, subsists livingly in Him, and as risen and exalted there is now seen in Him, in a new condition of manhood, the full expression of the divine purpose for the saints, that they are destined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. The love of God is known and His purpose is secured and established immutably, in the One who is the same, yesterday and to-day and for ever.

It may be noted that in the epistle to the Hebrews, the same trying circumstances of suffering and persecution met with in the path of faith (chap. x, 32-39) are looked upon as the chastening of God exercised in love towards His sons for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness; "for whom the Lord loves, he chastens." Though a matter of grief for the time, yet as we are rightly exercised taking it from the hand of God, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness; chap. xii, 5-11. Chastening is thus part of the "all things" which work together for good to those who love God.

THE LORD'S SUPPER IN ITS RELATION TO DIVINE LOVE

We have seen in the epistle to the Romans how believers individually come into the knowledge and experience of the love of God, as made known in the

Gospel. The Lord's Supper brings before us a further thought, in relation to what is collective, for the Christian believers came together in assembly in their several localities, on the first day of the week to break bread, as may be seen in Acts xx, 7 and 1 Corinthians xi, 18-20.

When the Holy Spirit came to the company of brethren gathered together at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, the church or assembly was formed, to which the many converts through Peter's preaching having been added, they continued in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers; Acts ii. This was the commencement of the Christian fellowship, communion or partnership, to which all believers are called by God. It is the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; 1 Cor. i, 9.

In Paul's first epistle to the assembly of God in Corinth, we see from his teaching as to the Lord's Supper in chapter xi, that it stands in relation to the local assembly; and also that it is an expression of the Christian fellowship universally; chap. x. Further reference to this epistle will be made later on.

The circumstances connected with the institution of the Lord's Supper as seen in the gospel records, are peculiarly affecting to all lovers of Christ. On the night of His betrayal He came together with His disciples to eat the Passover, the typical significance of which was so soon to receive its fulfilment in His death. He said to them "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"; Luke xxii, 15. The eating of the Passover was followed by the institution of the Supper as a memorial of Himself during the period of His absence, looking beyond His death, resurrection and ascension to the time of His return. "Having taken a loaf when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the

cup, after having supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

It was a deeply affecting moment for the Lord immediately before His suffering and death, and that He should take this occasion for the institution of the Supper as an abiding memorial of Himself, is a deeply affecting consideration for those who love Him. It was intended to maintain a place for Himself in the hearts of His own; that in the freshness and power of responsive affection, they might call Him to mind while they are left in the world where He was despised and rejected; and that they might thus be maintained in fidelity to Him during the period of His absence.

The Supper brings Christ's death before us as expressing the greatness of His love, for no one has greater love than to lay down his life for his friends; John xv, 13. It was love that many waters could not quench nor the floods drown; Song of Solomon viii, 7. The loaf and the cup speak of His life laid down, and He desires to be remembered in this way, but in partaking of them as a memorial, it is the living One, whose love remains unchangeably the same, who is called to mind.

In its simplicity the Lord's Supper appeals to the affections of the youngest believer who knows something of the love of Christ, but our appreciation of the depth and fulness of its meaning, continually increases as we grow in the knowledge of Christ and of God and of the divine thoughts in relation to the assembly.

The Lord lays emphasis upon His personal love for His own in saying "*my* body which is given for *you*"; "*my* blood which is poured out for *you*." Knowing the efficacy of His work of redemption and what was accomplished by His sacrificial death, we can be free from ourselves and occupied in heart and mind with the Lord Himself and with that which lay behind His devotedness in giving Himself and

going down into death, not only to meet our need, but that we might know Him in the greatness of His love; as we often sing, In that death all love was centred.

The Lord's word "my body which is given for you," reminds us of what was prophetically spoken in Psalm xl, and quoted from the Septuagint version in Heb. x, "Thou hast prepared me a body." "Lo I come to do thy will." The Lord was here in that body, a dependent Man, living by every word of God. He could say "My food is that I should do the will of him that has sent me, and that I should finish his work"; John iv, 34. Anticipating the cross He said, "I love the Father, and as the Father has commanded me thus I do"; John xiv, 31. Also, "I have glorified *thee* on the earth, I have completed the work which thou gavest me that I should do it"; John xvii, 4. In that body the Lord moved here in love to God and in love to His own. The will of God which He came to accomplish had relation to His people and the Lord went into death that it might be established. All the divine will and pleasure, all the counsel and purpose of divine love was carried through death in the heart of Christ, and now as the risen and ascended Head we see in Him the good pleasure of God's will secured and established for ever.

In taking the cup the Lord said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." This speaks of the new bond which the Lord as Mediator has formed by His death, between God and His people. It refers by way of contrast to the sprinkled blood of the covenant which Jehovah made with Israel at Sinai, whilst it also speaks of the fulfilment of the typical significance of the sacrifices offered there; Exodus xxiv. The terms of the New Covenant as seen in the epistle to the Hebrews, chapters viii and x, are: that God will be known by all His people, that He will put His laws in their hearts

and minds, and their sins He will remember no more. The blood of the New Covenant speaks both of the efficacy of the Lord's death for the remission of sins, and also of its witness to the love of God. God being thus known in the greatness of His love, the Mediator secures for Him a willing people whose hearts and minds are won for God's will in responsive affection.

As Mediator of a better covenant than that of which Moses was mediator, the Lord has now obtained a more excellent ministry than that of Aaron, for He is Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched and not man. He leads in a people who know God and who are of His own order, all of one with the Sanctifier, and whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren, and He sings God's praises in the midst of the assembly; Hebrews ii and viii.

Whilst the Lord's Supper speaks to our hearts of the depths to which divine love went down to reach us, it opens the way as the Lord may lead us, as Head of the assembly, into the full height of that which He has secured for the pleasure and glory of God, for His own satisfaction and joy, and for our eternal blessing.

Having followed in spirit and affection the movements of divine love as seen in Christ going down into death, we see in Him risen and ascended the triumph of love, and as taken into favour in the Beloved and associated with Him in sonship, it is our privilege to be led by Him into all the wealth of spiritual blessings in the heavenlies with which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us according to His eternal purposes of love. This gives a wonderful character to the service of praise and worship of the saints in assembly. The love which has so richly blessed us in and with Christ is further considered in the closing sections.

Reference has already been made to Paul's first

epistle to the Corinthians in which he reminds them that the institution of the Lord's Supper had been received by him from the Lord, and delivered by him to the assembly at Corinth; chap. xi. Here we see its setting in relation to the local assembly, but in a corrective way in view of the divisions and disorder which were manifest amongst them when they came together in assembly. Consequently the apostle is mainly occupied with the public order suited to and necessary for the occasion. He brings before them the significance of eating the bread and drinking the cup, as the announcement by them of the Lord's death until He come, so that anyone doing this in an unworthy manner is guilty in respect of the body and the blood of the Lord, and brings judgment upon himself.

In chapter x there is another reference to the significance of the Lord's Supper as an expression of the Christian fellowship or communion, which some were compromising by association with idolatry and idol sacrifices. The apostle corrects the tendency to looseness of association outside, by insisting upon the exclusive character of the Christian fellowship, which is that of the blood and the body of Christ, in contrast to the fellowship of Israel connected with their altar, and to the heathen nations with their idols. In partaking of the Lord's table we are identified with the death of Christ, as being part of the "one body," and this should govern us not only when together in assembly but at all times, that we may be in accord with the true character of the Christian fellowship, which is not only local but universal, for the assembly is one.

The apostle in dealing correctively with the disorder at Corinth does not develop the thought of love in the chapters we have alluded to, but after dealing in chapter xii with the spiritual constitution of the assembly as one body, and the variety of gifts distributed to various members by the one Spirit,

we find that the whole of chapter xiii is devoted to the importance of love as a way of more surpassing excellence than the possession of the greatest gift. One may have gift, knowledge, and faith, but unless he has love he is nothing. After describing the character and qualities of love, both positively and negatively, the apostle sums them up by saying "Love never fails," and he exhorts the Corinthians while desiring earnestly the greater gifts, to follow after love.

He then develops in chapter xiv the question of order in the exercise of gift, whenever the assembly come together for edification and ministry. There is to be room for prayers, singing, thanksgiving, teaching and especially for the prophetic word in view of edification, encouragement and consolation. These still continue, although speaking with tongues as a sign to unbelievers has ceased. The end in view in everything is edification. For this divine love is needed as the regulator of all activities. The way of love has been fully expressed in the Lord's death, and in normal conditions He brings it powerfully before us when together in assembly to partake of the Supper, which thus becomes spiritual food for us, by which we are enabled as responding to His love to follow Him in the same way.

LIFE AND LOVE AS KNOWN IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

John's epistles were written in view of departure from the truth, many deceivers and false prophets having gone out into the world, resulting in denial of the truth as to the Father and the Son, and in unreal profession as to the knowledge of God. The first epistle is written to those who believe on the name of the Son of God. Firstly that our joy may be full as having part in the Christian fellowship in the

light of God fully revealed, chap. i. Secondly that we may not sin; abiding in Christ the righteous One we are preserved from sin or lawlessness, chap. ii. Thirdly that we may know consciously that we have eternal life, having the witness or testimony in ourselves by the Spirit, chap. v.

For the maintenance of the truth against the enemy's attack a statement of it in terms only would not suffice. It has been livingly manifested in its perfection in a Person; and the apostles have borne witness of it as the life was seen by them from the beginning in the Son, Jesus Christ come in flesh, chap. i. That we might have part in it, involved His death for moral cleansing and for expiation, and now the Spirit bears witness with the water and the blood, that God has given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has the life. The Son being the true God was able to declare Him fully, and He is also the eternal life, which is perfectly expressed in Him as Man for He is fully responsive to the love of God in which He ever lives; chap. v.

The conscious knowledge of the possession of the divine life is realised in the Christian circle, *the family of God*, in the mutual affection of His children. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren"; chap iii, 14.

Some remarks may be made at this point in relation to the two sides of the truth which we noticed in the gospel of John, and which are very prominent in this epistle. On the one hand there is the *light* of divine testimony in the way God has been declared in the Person and in the death of Christ, which shines out universally, for "the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world"; chap iv. This light is presented to faith and is known in experience by the believer. On the other hand there is the *work of God* in those who have been begotten or born of Him—the children of God, who know Him and are made partakers of

the divine nature. The relationship is the gift of the Father's love. They are a new generation deriving their character from God as seen in Christ, whose features are reproduced in them; chap. iii.

The work of Christ *for men* laid the righteous basis for God coming out in favour of men everywhere. "He is the propitiation for our sins, but not for ours alone, but also for the whole world"; chap. ii, 2. In His death we see not only the efficacy of His work in dealing with the question of sin and sins, but we see in it also the manifestation of the love of God. The deeply affecting way in which God has become known to believers in the death of Christ, produces in them responsive affection. "Hereby we have known love, because he has laid down his life for us." His love was dearly proved, and our response must be genuine, "Let us not love with word nor with tongue, but in deed and in truth"; chap. iii, 16-18. This finds practical expression in us as we keep God's commandments and practise the things which are pleasing in His sight; chap. iii, 22-23.

The work of God *in men* effectually secures in them that which is for the divine pleasure. Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God; and everyone that loves and everyone that practises righteousness has been begotten of Him.

John tests the reality of the profession of faith and a claim to know God, by the practical walk of the professor in keeping God's commandments, abiding in Christ and walking as He walked, in obedience, righteousness and love. The same characteristics are also the evidence making manifest that one has been begotten of God. Both lines of truth work out in believers in the same practical results, which are the outcome of divine love, presented objectively in Christ, and produced subjectively in the children of God; that which "is true in him and in you." If one overcomes the world (chap. v. 4-5), this is evidence not only that he has been born of God, but

also that he believes that Jesus is the Son of God. When about to leave the world Jesus said to His disciples "be of good courage, I have overcome the world"; John xvi, 33. Abiding in Him the believer also is enabled to be an overcomer.

It is to be noticed that John sometimes in speaking of divine Persons passes from God to Christ, using the pronouns He and Him, without distinguishing the transition of thought, as in chaps. ii, 28 to iii, 3. God was perfectly expressed in Christ, and indeed the epistle closes with the definite statement that the Son is the true God and eternal life.

The remarkable place which love has in this epistle is especially noticeable in chapter iv from verse 7 to the end, where the word occurs more frequently than in any other part of Scripture. What is emphasised is the reality of the love of God, as seen in the way it has been manifested towards us, and the consequent obligation to love on the part of those who know God. This is particularly developed in relation to the circle of the brethren—the children of God—who should be characterised by mutual affection.

On the part of God there has been a full manifestation of His love in our case, in the sending of His Son so that the whole question of our condition might be dealt with, both as to the state of death in which we had become involved by sin, and also our responsibility as guilty sinners. The Son of God has brought in life for us, and He is the propitiation for our sins; verses 9–10. We have thus come to the knowledge of the love of God towards us, when there was nothing lovable in us to call it forth. This brings us under the obligation to love one another; and he that does not love has not known God, for God is love.

It has often been noticed that verse 12 is a remarkable counterpart to John i, 18. In the gospel the statement that "no one has seen God at any time," is

met by the fact that He has been declared by the only-begotten Son. In the epistle it is met by the statement that "if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." God would thus be known now as seen in His children.

God has given us of His Spirit, so that we may know that we abide in Him in the blessedness of His love, and that He abides in us, forming us in character according to Himself as His love is perfected in us. The testimony thus goes out to the world in a living way, and whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God has his part in the fulness of the divine blessing.

Divine love has been perfected with us, in that which it has wrought for us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Love had in view our whole responsible history, and everything that might have raised a question in the day of judgment, has been met by the propitiation provided for us in the Son, by the love of God, so that even as He, the Son, is, we also are in this world—as clear of the judgment as He is. Thus perfect love seen in Him casts out fear, as we are perfected in the appreciation of His love. "We love because he has first loved us."

The reality of our love to God is tested by our love for the brethren, and these include everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ. On the other hand the proof that we truly love the children of God, is seen when we love God and keep His commandments. Thus the genuine character of divine love is distinguished from that which is merely human social amiability; chap. v, 1-3.

The keynote which runs through the epistle is that the truth as to God who is love, has come into the world in a living way in the Person of the Son who is the true God in contrast to idols, and who is also the true Man Jesus Christ who has brought in life for men, in contrast to the first Adam by whom sin and death entered. Through the death of Christ,

and the work of God in men, and the gift of the Spirit, the truth as to God is to be continued here livingly in believers in the power of divine love. By the true knowledge of God they are enabled to overcome the opposition of the wicked one who is the ruler of the world-system, and his emissaries the anti-christs, deceivers and false prophets.

The object in view is that we should be enabled to realise in conscious knowledge the enjoyment of the divine blessing in a spiritual sphere beyond the reach of death, and also that the gospel testimony of salvation and life for men, "the witness which God has witnessed concerning his Son," should be supported by the character of the divine life seen in the children of God.

THE COMPLACENCY OF DIVINE LOVE

In the section dealing with John iii, 14-16 we considered the universal bearing of the love of God towards the world, manifested in His gift of the Son, that whosoever believes on Him may not perish but have eternal life.

Later in the gospel we have further unfoldings of divine love of a very remarkable character. In chapters xiii to xvii, Jesus about to depart out of this world to the Father, when secluded in the presence of His own for the Passover supper, discloses to them after the traitor had gone out, that the peculiar character of divine love existing between the Father and the Son is to be known and enjoyed by His own, those given to Him by the Father.

The primary application of these wonderful chapters, is to the little company of His disciples who were with Him on the night of His betrayal, in contrast to the world which hated them, and into which He was sending them in testimony; but the whole company of His own was also in the mind of the Lord,

including those who should believe on Him through their word. See chapters x, 16 and xvii, 20.

Earlier in the gospel we read that "the Father loves the Son and has given all things to be in his hand"; chap. iii, 35: and "the Father loves the Son and shows him all things which he himself does"; chap. 5, 20. If we ask the reason for this, the answer surely is, because the Son was lovable. He could say "I do always the things that are pleasing to him"; chap. viii, 29. The disciples contemplated His glory, a glory as of an only-begotten with a father. They also heard a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son in whom I have found my delight." This is the love of complacency.

In chapter xv, 9-11 the Lord says to His disciples, "As the Father has loved me I also have loved you: abide in my love. If ye shall keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love, as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." The Lord's love for His own is in full accord with His thoughts about them as given to Him by the Father, but our realisation and enjoyment of this peculiarly precious character of divine love, depends upon our abiding in His love, and this is conditional upon our keeping His commandments. It was in this way that the Son kept His Father's commandments, and abode in His love. How affecting for our hearts to consider Him thus! The one who had His place in essential Deity, and was loved before the foundation of the world, took His place as Man here in the form of a servant to do the will of Him that sent Him, and as faithful in His path of obedience as Man, was thus abiding in the enjoyment of His Father's love. Christ's desire for His own is that His joy may be in them and their joy may be full.

The Lord loved them as His friends, and He was about to give the greatest proof of His love in laying down His life for them. He had also taken them into the intimacy of friendship, having made known to

them all things which He had heard from His Father. The same character of love is to be continued here during His absence, in the circle of His own who are to prove they are His friends by keeping His commandments. The commandment which the Lord specially emphasises in these chapters, is that the disciples should love one another as He had loved them; chaps. xiii, 34-35; xv, 12 and 17.

The Lord tells us in chapter xiv that the evidence that we truly love Him is that we keep His commandments, and He challenges each individual disciple as to this in verse 21: "He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; but he that loves me shall be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him." Answering to these conditions the disciple qualifies for the realisation of these wonderful promises. To the enquiry as to how it was that the Lord would manifest Himself thus, He replied in verses 23-24, "If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." We may well challenge our hearts as to how much we have entered into the realisation of this character of divine love; that we should be loved by divine Persons because we are lovable.

As we have already seen, divine love first reached us when there was nothing lovable in us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins." It is because He has first loved us that we now love; 1 John iv. Divine love being thus known and becoming effective in us, we are changed by its transforming power, and features are produced in us which are lovable. Taking character from Christ Himself we keep His commandments, and we treasure His word, the divine communications which He received from the Father.

In John's gospel, chapters xiv to xvi the Lord

dwells much on the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who would abide with the disciples for ever, taking the Lord's place as another Comforter, Advocate or Helper (Greek *parakletos*). He impresses them with the importance of the Spirit's presence. He would teach them all things, bringing to their remembrance all the things Christ had said to them; chap. xiv, 26. The Spirit would also bear witness concerning Him when He had gone to the Father; chap. xv, 26. The Lord had many things to say to them, which they were not able to take in whilst He was with them, but when the Spirit of truth was come He would guide them into all the truth. He would glorify Christ, for He would receive of Christ's things and make them known to the disciples; chap. xvi, 12-15. It was when Christ was glorified with the Father that the Spirit was given. Not until then could the disciples enter into the wonderful truth connected with this new and glorious position of Christ as Man, and their association with Him there.

In considering the Lord's prayer for His own in chapter xvii we should notice how much He dwells upon the fact (in relation to the divine purpose) that they had been given to Him by the Father. "They were thine and thou gavest them me." "They are thine (and all that is mine is thine and all that is thine mine) and I am glorified in them." He anticipated His return to the Father after completing the work He had given Him to do, and He commits the disciples to the Father to keep them in His name, that they might be maintained in unity and be kept from the evil of the world into which they are being sent in testimony. The prayer for unity extends also to those who would believe in Christ through their word, "that they may be all one as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may *believe* that thou has sent me"; verse 21. This is not a mere external unity such as has been attempted by human religious organisations,

but it involves formation in the divine nature, and the saints being united together in love.

Then the Lord anticipates their being perfected in unity when glorified, "that the world may *know* that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me"; verses 22-23. This the world will know when they see the saints glorified with Christ. In glory love displayed.

In verse 24 the Lord still looking on to the future, says "Father as to those whom thou hast given me, I desire that where I am they also may be with me, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me"; a glory peculiar to the Son, which He speaks of as "my glory." It has been given to Him as Man, the One who was loved before the foundation of the world. He desires that His own may behold that glory, with which the Father has distinguished Him in manhood.

In the last two verses of the chapter the Lord returns to the present position of His own in relation to the Father and the Son, in contrast to the world which had not known the Father: "These have known that thou hast sent me. And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known; that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them." The Father's name had already been made known to them by the Lord, and in resurrection He made it known to them again in the message sent through Mary Magdalene. "Go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God"; chap xx, 17. He thus indicated the wonderful circle of divine affections and relationship into which He would lead His own in association with Himself as risen and ascended. The development of this and the disciples' intelligent entrance into it, awaited the coming of the Spirit of truth as the Lord had said in chapter xvi, 12-15. Now that the Spirit has come all is open to us for realisation and enjoyment, and it is the divine pleasure that the saints should enter into it in the

consciousness of the new heavenly position and relationship, that it might thus give character to their worship, practical walk and testimony.

DIVINE LOVE ACCORDING TO THE HEIGHT OF GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

This character of divine love is developed in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, a company for whom he gives thanks, having heard of their love for all the saints. The apostle feels the exceeding greatness of the things of which he writes as may be seen in the remarkable character of his language; such as "the riches of the glory of his [God's] inheritance in the saints"; "the surpassing greatness of his power towards us who believe"; "his great love wherewith he loved us"; "the surpassing riches of his grace"; "the unsearchable riches of the Christ"; "to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge, that ye may be filled to all the fulness of God." He also feels that for the saints to enter into these spiritual realities they needed in addition to his ministry, that they should have divine enlightenment, for which he prays in chapter i; and again in chapter iii that they may be strengthened with power by the Father's Spirit in the inner man.

The notable place which the Spirit has in every chapter of this epistle, reminds us of the Lord's words in John, chapters xiv to xvi, as to the importance for the disciples of the coming of the Spirit, as we saw in the last section. Indeed there is a remarkable connection between the Lord's teaching in these chapters of John's gospel, also His prayer in chapter xvii for those the Father had given Him, leading on to the message to His brethren in chapter xx, 17, and the apostle's teaching in this epistle, as to the wonderful place the assembly has according to the

purpose of God, in relation to the ascended Christ and to His God and Father.

It should be noted that in the teaching of this epistle as to the church or assembly, it is not looked at in its public local administrative setting as in 1 Corinthians; but as a spiritual formation, the outcome of the work of God, as one whole actually existing in the saints now living; or as looking on to the future to its completeness in glory, whether in the world to come or in the eternal state, in the case of chapters i, 22-23; iii, 21; and v, 27. The truth taught in the epistle is to be realised and worked out practically in each local assembly, but as having all the saints, the assembly universally in view.

In considering the purpose of God as presented in the Ephesian epistle, it is helpful to distinguish it from its presentation in the epistle to the Romans. There as we have already seen the divine purpose is viewed from the side of the wilderness, corresponding to the type of the children of Israel (but apart from their repeated failures) in their journey towards the land of promise. The saints are looked at as part of a groaning creation, but having the first-fruits of the Spirit, and awaiting sonship and the redemption of the body. They look forward in hope to the fulfilment of the divine purpose, and are confident in the meantime, however adverse circumstances may appear, that nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In the epistle to the Ephesians the apostle begins from the divine side with the full height of the purpose of God in relation to the spiritual sphere of blessing in the heavenlies. In the Old Testament the land of promise was the height of the divine purpose of blessing on earth for Israel, but the present heavenly portion of the saints, who are looked at in chapter i, is that they are to be already blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.

The apostle begins this remarkable introduction to the epistle by blessing the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he continues in verses 3 to 14 without a break, in one marvellous sentence filled with the spiritual wealth of the divine blessing which is according to God's eternal purpose that we should be holy and blameless before Him *in love*, having marked us out beforehand for sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself. It is how God has blessed the saints in Christ, that they may be before Him for His pleasure, for the satisfaction of His love, to the praise of the glory of His grace. Nothing less than being taken into favour in His beloved Son would satisfy His thoughts of love towards us. This involves a corresponding state in the saints so that God may be complacent in us as formed in divine love.

We should notice how the apostle along with these thoughts of divine purpose and counsel, touches upon our actual past condition as sinners, but as now having redemption through the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of offences according to the riches of God's grace; and also how the Gentiles have been reached by the gospel of salvation, and having believed have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance, to be actually entered upon when the public heading up of all things in the Christ, fulfils the purpose of God who works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

The apostle's first prayer is that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give the saints the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, being enlightened in the eyes of our heart, so as to know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe.

In the bringing to pass by God of His wonderful purpose, Christ is looked at as having died; and the

operations of God are viewed as beginning from Christ as Man in death, but as raised from the dead by the surpassing greatness of God's power which is also towards us who believe, and set at God's right hand in the heavenlies in the supreme place of exaltation, and given to be Head over all things to the assembly which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all; Ephes. i, 19-23.

The saints are viewed, whether Jews or Gentiles, as all having been dead in offences and sins, but God being rich in mercy because of His great love where-with He loved us, has quickened us (made us live) with Christ, and has raised us up together, and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. The wonderful character of divine love manifested in the death of Christ, becomes the formative power by which the saints are made to live with the risen Christ in responsive affection. We see here both the depth and the height of divine love, which reached us in the depth of our state as dead in sins, and has made us to live spiritually, and has brought us to the full height of the heavenly position, all being the outcome of the riches of God's mercy and the greatness of His love; "that he might display in the coming ages, the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus."

The apostle emphasises, in Ephesians ii, that it is by grace we are saved through faith, not on the principle of works, that no one might boast, for we are God's workmanship having been created in Christ Jesus for a totally new character of good works, seen in Christ Himself.

He again reminds the Gentile believers how they have been brought into this. They were once far off, but in Christ Jesus are now become nigh by the blood of Christ, for He is our peace who has made one both Jew and Gentile, and has annulled the enmity in His flesh, that He might form the two in Himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile

both to God in one body by the cross, having by it slain the enmity. The result of the preaching of the glad tidings of peace to Gentile and Jew, is that through Christ we both have access by one Spirit to the Father; also the Gentile believers are fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God; and are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

The apostle then as intelligent in the mystery of the Christ, proceeds in chapter iii to show the special place given to him in the administration of the wonderful grace of God towards the Gentile nations; to announce among them the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all as to the mystery (that Jew and Gentile should form one body) hidden throughout the ages in God, but now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Spirit; so that through the assembly might be made known even to angelic beings in the heavenlies the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Feeling the greatness of the ministry committed to him, the apostle speaks of himself as less than the least of all saints.

We have then his wonderful prayer to the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He would give the saints according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power by His Spirit *in the inner man*, that the Christ may dwell through faith *in their hearts*, being rooted and founded *in love*, in order to be fully able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; that they may be filled even to all the fulness of God. The apostle feels the need for this divinely given state in the saints, that the Christ in all His greatness (the true Ark of the testimony) the One who brings to pass for God all His purposes of love, may dwell in their hearts

through faith during the present period, before the day of public display, so that they may have ability to apprehend the greatness of the spiritual sphere of blessing, the vastness of the inheritance (in contrast to the length and breadth of the earthly inheritance promised to Abraham in Genesis xiii, 14-17); and to know the love of the Christ which surpasses knowledge; for the devotedness and self sacrifice of His love has won for God the vast universe of bliss, and for the saints a special place in it in association with Himself. A universe of which He is the Head and the centre, and which He will fill with the knowledge of God and with response to His love.

As Man all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily (Col. ii, 9), and the end in view in the apostle's prayer is that the saints may be filled even to all the fulness of God. These are wonderful thoughts, and it is significant that they are communicated to us by way of prayer, corresponding to the Lord's prayer to the Father in John xvii, uttered in the hearing of His own. We may feel how slow we have been and limited in our spiritual capacity to enter into their full meaning, but in praying for spiritual enlargement we are encouraged to know that their accomplishment depends upon the power and wisdom and love of God as seen in Christ, which are so prominent in the epistle. In concluding his prayer the apostle turns to God as the One who is able to bring to completion His eternal purposes of love, though far above all that we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, and he ascribes glory to God in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages.

It is helpful to consider in conjunction with the prayer, the glorious fulfilment of the divine purpose in relation to the assembly, as seen by John in symbolic vision in Revelation xxi. The Holy City is seen from verse 9 coming down from heaven refulgent with the glory of God, in its place of administration

in relation to the world to come; and in verses 1 to 6 as the tabernacle of God, when He dwells with men and all things are made new in the eternal state, when God will be all in all. As we are enabled to view the saints as the workmanship of God, already created in Christ Jesus, according to chapter ii of our epistle, we can understand how the present work of God is forming us in view of the final glorious result.

The last three chapters of the epistle are mainly practical exhortations. The apostle's call for practical unity amongst the saints "bearing with one another *in love*; using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace," is emphasised by the fact that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. This is another instance of the link already noticed between this epistle and the gospel of John. In John x the Lord spoke of bringing in His sheep which were not of the Jewish fold, that there might be one flock and one Shepherd, and in chapter xvii He prayed that all His own may be maintained in unity, one in the Father and the Son, "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." It is the mutuality of love that produces unity according to God; John xiii, 34-35.

The statement that there is "one body", the body of Christ, leads to the thought of Christ the Head from whom each of the saints has received a measure of grace. The One who descended is the same One who has ascended up above all the heavens that He might fill all things; and He has given special gifts, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of His body; "until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ"; that "holding the truth *in love* we may grow up to Him in all things who is the Head, the Christ; from whom the whole

body fitted together and connected by every joint of supply, according to the working in its measure of each one part, works for itself the increase of the body to its self-building up *in love*"; chap. iv. Not only are special gifts given for the work of the ministry, but to each one of us is given grace, that each one may have his part in the self-building up of the body in love. Christ lives in His body in the power of divine love, and it derives everything from Him who is the Head, in order that it may grow up to Him in all things and so be adequate for the expression of Christ on earth during the period of His absence. In its completeness in the world to come, it will be the full display of Christ as associated with Him in His universal headship, for the assembly which is His body is the fulness of Him who fills all in all; chap. i, 22-23.

The exhortations in the epistle show that this wonderful development of truth is not to be held merely in an abstract or theoretical way, but that it has a practical bearing, and is to find expression in the walk and conduct of the saints in every relation of life, whether in the Christian circle or towards those who are without. We are exhorted "to walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye have been called"; chap. iv, 1; not to walk as the nations in darkness and ignorance of God, but as the truth is in Jesus; having put off the old man and having put on the new man, which according to God is created in true righteousness and holiness (chap iv, 17-24): to be imitators of God as beloved children, and to "walk *in love* even as the Christ loved us and delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour"; chap. v, 2. "Walk as children of light"; chap. v, 8 and "Walk carefully not as unwise but as wise redeeming the time because the days are evil"; chap. v, 15-16.

Indeed so filled is the apostle with the divine thoughts in relation to Christ and His headship of

the assembly, that in exhorting husbands and wives as to their relative duties, he develops in a remarkable way the typical significance of the original institution in Genesis ii. Eve was derived from Adam, out of his "deep sleep," that she might be suited to be united to him; and the wife is to be subject to the husband as her head, even as the Christ is head of the assembly; whilst the husband is to love his wife, as the Christ loved the assembly and delivered Himself up for it.

The antitype necessarily goes beyond what was seen in Adam, for whilst he found the need of a help-mate, his like or counterpart, he had no knowledge or ability as to the supplying of the lack. Christ had the assembly before Him from the outset, with full knowledge as to the divine purpose that as Man He should have a companion in every way suited to Himself in affection and intelligence. He saw the assembly anticipatively, complete in glory as the Holy City (the bride the Lamb's wife) of Revelation xxi, and He loved it and delivered Himself up for it. It had its origin and it takes character from the love which was expressed in the death of Christ. The assembly viewed as now actually existing on earth, is the subject of the present activities of His love in sanctifying and purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any of such things, but that it might be holy and blameless; Ephes. v. 22-33.

This brief consideration of the way divine love is presented in the epistle, may serve to indicate something of its wonderful character in relation to the height of divine purpose as to the assembly. Prayerful meditation on the love of God and the love of Christ in their surpassing greatness, will promote that state of love in the saints which will be for the divine pleasure, and will enable us now in our measure to be true representatives of Christ in testimony.

Attention may be called to the repetition six times in the epistle of the expression "in love" as characterising the state of the saints whether before God, or for spiritual intelligence, or for mutual relations between saints and for practical walk.

It should also be noticed that all the saints forming the assembly are in view in this epistle. Paul had heard of the love of the Ephesians towards all the saints; chap. i, 15. In his prayer to the Father in chapter iii, for the needed spiritual state in the saints, it is that they may be able to apprehend with all the saints, the full extent of the divine inheritance. In the statement in chapter iv of the divine intent of the gifts from the ascended Head for the edifying of the body of Christ, it is until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ; and the whole body is in view as deriving everything from the Head for its self-building up in love. In the call to put on the whole armour of God, for ability to stand against the wiles of the devil, and to maintain the position according to the full height of the apostle's teaching, he closes with the exhortation that continual prayer should be made for all the saints; chap. vi, 18.

The divine thoughts as to the assembly had been obscured and practically lost since apostolic days, and their recovery during the past century, came in concurrent with light from God as to the principle of separation from evil, especially in church associations where human systems do not give the Lord His place as Son over God's house, and do not leave room for the Holy Spirit and His present voice to the assemblies. Comparatively few of the saints have accepted and acted upon this light for guidance in the last days, as given in Paul's second epistle to Timothy chapter ii, 19-22. Those who have done so need grace to be preserved from the tendency to narrowness of outlook, so that this wonderful truth may be held not

only in mutuality of love towards those with whom we are able to walk, but also in affections which have in view all the saints, the whole body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, attention may be called to the importance for us at the present time of the Lord's message in Revelation iii to the assembly in Philadelphia. This has special significance as indicating the moral features of which the Lord approves in a time of general departure from the truth, and it appears to form a link between the wonderful character of the divine thoughts as to the assembly, which we have considered in the epistle to the Ephesians, and the glorious completion of the purpose of God as seen in the Holy City, the bride the Lamb's wife in Revelation xxi.

In the epistles to the seven assemblies (Rev. i to iii) viewed in their prophetic bearing, we have the Lord's searching scrutiny of the various phases in the whole course of the *responsible history* of the assembly, in its public position as a witness bearer symbolised by the seven golden candlesticks. This is generally a history of decline, beginning with the fall at Ephesus in the loss of first love, the call to repentance and the threatened removal of the candlestick, and ending in the boastful lukewarmness and final rejection of Laodicea.

Before the end is reached, however, there is a remarkable recovery, having the character of a return to first love, in the case of the assembly in Philadelphia, where instead of rebuke there is nothing but approval and encouragement. The Lord presents Himself as the Holy and the True, and commends the assembly as having kept His word and not denied His name. The false pretensions of judaising religionists will be exposed, and they will be made to know that Christ has loved the assembly. Because it has

kept the word of His patience, accepting His reproach in the world where He was rejected, and awaiting with expectant hearts the day when He will have His rights in the coming kingdom (Rev. xi, 15), He will keep the assembly out of the hour of trial which is about to come on the whole world. The answer to this present identification with Christ in fidelity to His word, His name and the word of His patience, is seen in the remarkable character of His promise to the overcomer: "him will I make a pillar in the *temple of my God*"; "I will write upon him the *name of my God*, and the name of the *city of my God*, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from *my God*, and *my new name*."

The outlook in this assembly has thus in view, according to the promise to the overcomer, all that is genuine in relation to the work of God in the whole assembly. This will be carried through (notwithstanding the public failure now so manifest in Christendom) and it will come down out of heaven as the Holy City having the glory of God. We may well desire earnestly to have the Lord's present approval, and seek to bear the moral features of the Philadelphian assembly in view of His speedy return. "I come quickly: hold fast what thou hast, that no one take thy crown"; Rev. iii, 11. In response to the presentation of Himself as the bright and morning star, the Spirit and the bride say, Come; Rev. xxii, 17.