

"THE BOND OF PERFECTNESS."

"And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." – Col. 3:14.

The Apostle says love is the bond of perfectness; and Jesus said love is the fulfilling of the divine law. Every intelligent being, from the humblest to the most exalted, craves love. The dog craves his master's affection and expresses his delight at every indication of it; a horse and even a cat will return your caresses; the birds reward your love with notes of joy; the lisping infant rewards your love with smiles and caresses. The young want to be loved; the middle aged, in the heat and strife of life's great battle, want the soothing solace of loving sympathy; the aged, weary and worn with the strife of years, want to lean upon the strong arm of love. The angels in all the glory of their higher state want it; our Lord Jesus wants it; and our heavenly Father wants it. We never grow weary of it; nor can we get too much of it.

It is not merely weakness that craves love; but strength and glory want it, too. What is this desirable thing so universally craved by every grade of intelligent being? It is one of those things which pen cannot describe. People may sing about it, and talk about it, and read about it, and write about it, and yet have but a faint idea of its reality. But stop reading and writing and talking for a moment, and call to mind the few living illustrations of love that have chanced to cross your pathway. In the long past years of sunny childhood can you recall the tenderness of Mother's love that covered [R1330 : page 140] your dimpled cheeks with showers of kisses that could not half express the wealth of her affection? And do you not recall the tenderness of Father's care, who patiently toiled and sacrificed, and then delighted to see in you the fruit of his labor? Or perhaps you have tasted the sweets of conjugal love, and have realized in the chosen partner of your life one ready

always to rejoice in your prosperity, to share your burdens and to cheer and urge you on to life's truest and highest attainments.

Or in a dark hour of sorrow and tears some tender hand has soothed your throbbing brow, some kindly ministry has strengthened your weakness, or some timely word of cheer, of counsel and encouragement has inspired you with new zeal for the stern conflict of life. What life has been so barren and drear that no such gleam of sunshine has ever brightened the pathway? Such illustrations give us some idea of what it is to be loved.

Then again consider for a moment the joy of loving – the joy of loving your own sweet child, or the manly glory of your noble husband, or the womanly grace of your devoted wife, or the tender sweetness of your sainted mother, or the ripened glory of your aged father, or the blessed communion of tried and faithful friends – the communion of saints. Then, rising above these earthly loves, some have tasted the sweets of that divine love that surpasseth all other loves. As yet, however, that divine love is only manifest to those who have faith in the divine promises and who walk in obedience to the divine commandments.

Now with these illustrations of what it is to love and to be loved, let our imaginations widen the sphere of this noble virtue, and do we not see that, when it reigns in all hearts, it will prove to be just what the Apostle says it is – viz.: "the bond of perfectness," and the greatest of all the Christian virtues? Indeed he shows that, though we might have all the other virtues combined, yet, lacking this one, we would be as sounding brass and as tinkling cymbals. In fact, the putting on of the other virtues, except as prompted by this virtue, would be mere sham and hypocrisy. Yet with this, though lacking the others to some extent, the heart would prove itself loyal, though the flesh might be weak to perform the dictates of love.

The Lord is saying a great deal for this virtue when he declares that love is the fulfilling of the law; or in other words, that if we had perfect love, we could easily and naturally keep the whole law of God. But here is our difficulty: we cannot love perfectly. Well, the Lord knows that we cannot, but he wants to see us endeavoring to love more and more, and making actual progress in this direction. Paul, too, shows us how love in the heart manifests itself in the outward life. We scarcely need to be told this, for the language of love is natural and its impulses are spontaneous; and yet, because we are not yet perfect in love, Paul's description makes manifest the absurdity of calling that love which is unworthy of the name. He says, "Love suffereth long and is kind. [It is kind even to the unthankful and the unholy, endeavoring to show them by example a more excellent way.] Love envieth not. [It is pleased rather to see another's success.] Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. [There is no pride in love, delighting in display and vain glory: it is rather humble and retiring.] Love doth not behave itself unbecomingly [It is consistent with its profession in all its actions]; seeketh not its own [is not on the alert for self-interest, but more for the interest and blessing of others]; is not easily provoked [endeavors to make due allowance for the weaknesses of others]; thinketh no evil [is slow to impute evil motives, and anxious to see and to foster every good intent]; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth [has no pleasure in either hearing or telling evil tidings, or in evil of any kind, but delights in God's truth and in its fruitage of developed holiness]."

"Love covers all things [makes due allowance for the weaknesses of the flesh]; believes all things [believes in the conquering power of love to help the weak and erring in the struggle against sin]; endures all things" [endures the necessary reproach and trials of faith and patience in the careful endeavor to build up and strengthen the weak].

The child of God who is studiously endeavoring thus to manifest and cultivate the spirit [R1330 : page 141] of love will indeed become more and more like his blessed Master. What contradiction of sinners against himself did he bear! How patiently he bore with the weaknesses and the short-comings of his disciples! And how faithfully he taught them and led them to follow in his steps! There was the perfect pattern of that self-sacrificing love which was set for our imitation.

Well, says one, as he looks into this beautiful law of love, I would like to be fully actuated by such a noble principle, but some people are so despicably mean that I cannot love them. But are you sure you cannot love such people? Is it not rather the sins that you dislike and which ought to be despised by every heart that is truly loyal to God and righteousness? You say it is hard to distinguish between the two; and so it is sometimes, when inherited deformities of character have been fostered and cultivated and even gloried in, as they often are. But here is a way to examine the real disposition of your own heart toward such. Would you cheerfully do them kindness and help them to the extent of your ability to see the error of their way and to overcome it; can you tenderly pray for them and patiently bear with their weaknesses, their ignorance and their lack of development, and try by a noble example to show them a more excellent way? If such be [R1331 : page 141] the case, then it is the sin that you despise, and not the sinner. The sin you should hate, but the sinner, never. Not until God's unerring judgment declares that the sin and the sinner are inseparably linked may love let go its hold upon a brother man.

Love, however, properly differs, both in kind and in degree, according to the worthiness of the object upon which it centers. There is a love of admiration, a love of sympathy and a love of pity. The former is the highest type of love, and is properly bestowed only upon that which is truly lovely and worthy of admiration. On this line our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus

claim our supreme and most ardent affection; and all the good and noble and true of our fellow men, in proportion as they approximate the glorious likeness of God, may also share this love of admiration. Of this same kind is the love of childish innocence; and of this same kind should be the love of conjugal felicity. The chosen life partner should be one beloved in this highest sense; and parental and filial affection should also be established on the same basis, and then the dearest earthly relationship would be akin to the heavenly.

The love of sympathy we can extend to the weakest one that is painfully toiling up the hill of difficulty toward a better life; and affectionately we may reach the sympathizing, helpful hand to such. If we are a step or two in advance of some such on the way, and if we realize a little less difficulty in making the ascent, let us thank God and use our superior vantage ground for the assistance of the weaker ones.

Then there is the love of pity for those so steeped in ignorance and sin as to be unable even to raise their eyes heavenward to catch the first inspiration toward a better life. Would we indeed scorn the degraded, or add another pang to those already so bruised by the fall? Ah, no: love pities the vilest, sympathizes with the weakest and glories in the truest and purest and loveliest of earth and of heaven. Thus our blessed Lord loved supremely our all-glorious Heavenly Father; thus he loved with tenderest sympathy his devoted disciples; and thus he loved with wondrous pity all the fallen sons and daughters of Adam's race, even to the extent of giving his life to redeem them. Let us emulate his example and walk in his footsteps.
