

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." – John 14:21-23.

IN these words the people of God have set before them the blessed privilege of intimate communion and fellowship with our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, the privilege of a realization of the divine presence, of which the world cannot know, and which realized is an earnest of our inheritance with Christ beyond the veil of the flesh. If we be one with Christ here, his faithfulness is our assurance that nothing can separate us from him now or when we shall have finished our course and proved our faithfulness even unto death. "Who," says Paul, "shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For,...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." – Rom. 8:35-39.

This is the blessed assurance of faith that springs spontaneously from the realization of a present and vital union with Christ. Such fellowship and intimate communion should therefore be the longing desire of every child of God, whose prayer and constant attitude of heart should be, –

"O God, this is my plea, – whate'er the process be,

This love to know."

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It is only in heart-to-heart fellowship that we become truly acquainted with another; and only so can we realize the depth and sweetness of divine love. But the conditions of this fellowship, the *process* by which we may come to really know him in whose favor is life, and his dear Son, our Redeemer and Lord, must not be overlooked. The conditions are that we have and keep the divine commandments. The having and keeping of the commandments, our obedience to the heavenly wisdom, constitute the proof of our love to God. Thus also is proved our love of righteousness; for the law of God is the law of righteousness, commending itself to the highest moral instincts of our nature. To the soul, therefore, that loves righteousness the commandments of the Lord are not grievous (1 John 5:3); for they are the expression of the most exalted virtue, the noblest benevolence, the purest love, and all the beauties of holiness.

In the inspired words of the Lord and the apostles and prophets we have the divine will expressed, explained, illustrated and enforced, line upon line and precept upon precept. And yet, with all this teaching, it is possible, even for the consecrated people of God, to be forgetful hearers and readers of the Word, so that its most explicit directions for daily living, its most faithful warnings against snares and besetments, and its most careful expositions of the principles of righteousness and truth, may avail little or nothing in the education and training of character. "Therefore," says the Apostle, "we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip;...for...how shall we escape [the wrath of God] if we *neglect* so great salvation" – the salvation which comes only through faith and obedience to the Word of the Lord diligently laid up in our hearts, and its principles carefully and prayerfully wrought out in our lives. (Heb. 2:1-3.) The promise of the divine favor and blessing is not to the forgetful, listless hearers who fail to apply their hearts unto

instruction, but to the attentive hearers and faithful doers of the Word.
– James 1:25.

It is not enough, therefore, that we have read the Word of God and gained a general knowledge of its principles and precepts and the plan and purpose of our God: there is yet more, much more, to be learned and done. There must be a daily laying up of its treasures of wisdom and counsel in the heart, and the working out of its principles in the life. "Thy words were found, and I did *eat them*," said one of the saints of old; "and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." (Jer. 15:16.) So must we also feed upon them in our hearts.

Moses, addressing the typical people of God, shows with what carefulness God would have all his people regard his testimonies, saying, "Ye shall lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thine house and upon thy gates." (Deut. 11:18-20.) Joshua also said to them, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein." – Josh. 1:8.

Again we read (Prov. 7:1-3), "My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee. Keep my commandments and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye. Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart."

It is those who thus carefully *lay up* the treasures of divine wisdom that they may in deed and in truth live by them, that truly keep the commandments of God. It is very manifest that our Lord would have us apply not only our heads, but also our hearts, to the instructions of his Word. (Prov. 23:12.) This implies **[R2094 : page 23]** the study of ourselves, as well as of the divine Word, that we may see just what

portions of the Word apply to our individual present necessities. We know that as members of the fallen race we are all afflicted with the malady of sin; and though through faith in Christ, our Redeemer, we are freely forgiven and reckoned of God as free from sin, even this reckoned standing before God, through faith in Christ's merit applied to us, is accorded to us only in view of our hatred of sin, our love of righteousness, and our earnest heart-desire to be pure and holy. It would indeed be a vain thing to trust for eternal life in the imputed righteousness of Christ, and at the same time to love and continue in sin. If any of the world of mankind do so in the next age, they will never reach perfection and eternal life. Accepting first, the favor of redemption through Christ they must then *work out* their salvation by obedience and persevering effort to eradicate sin and put on righteousness. The same principle applies also to the Church now on trial. We should ever bear in mind that justification through faith in Christ does not directly, and beyond all peradventure, insure to the believer eternal life; but it does secure that legal standing before God upon which believers, both of this age and the next, must *work out* their salvation with fear and trembling. – Phil. 2:12.

Having, by faith, accepted this legal standing before God, our subsequent course of life must make manifest our heart-desires to be cleansed from all sin: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may [R2094 : page 24] abound? God forbid;" for if we continue in sin, the grace of God will not abound; and if we give up the struggle against sin and allow it to take possession of our mortal bodies, the grace of God must eventually be withdrawn.

Sin is a disease inherited from our fallen progenitors: it affects one individual in one way and another in another: and even though, through faith in Christ, we are reckoned of God as free from sin, nevertheless the actual tendencies to sin are still present with us. Like the children of Israel, we are led into Canaan (the rest of faith and of the divine favor), but we have still a great work to do in the way of routing the enemies of righteousness long intrenched there; and for this work both

persevering effort and divine grace are needed. While the precious blood of Christ applied by faith is the great atoning remedy for sin whereby we are justified to life, the only restorative remedies are in the law and testimonies of the Word of the Lord, all which would, however, be unavailing except as supplementary to the great atoning remedy; and these must be carefully and prayerfully sought out and applied with persevering effort for our cleansing and healing. To this end it is important also to remember that a correct diagnosis of our case is one of the first essentials to a cure. But who is sufficient for this? – "Who can understand his errors?" who is able to look into his own character and, without prejudice, to mark its defects? Surely none who are intoxicated with the spirit of the world, with pride, or selfishness, or vain glory.

It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul counsels sobriety and humility, saying, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think *soberly*." – Rom. 12:3.

A sober estimate of self is a humiliating, not an exalting, exercise; yet it is healthful and beneficial. It reminds us continually that we are "men of like passions" with other men, and thus enables us not only to strive against our own weaknesses and besetments, but also to sympathize with those of others, and to bear with them as we wish them to bear with us. It makes us continually to realize that our fallen nature gravitates toward sin, and that we must resolutely strive against it or else float with its downward current to destruction.

A sober estimate will remind us too of our mental infirmities; for, however favorably we may compare with some other members of the dying race about us, we are very imbecile as compared with human perfection. How slowly and laboriously does the mind act; how dull are the perceptive faculties; how inert the reasoning powers; how unskilled the judgment; how feebly we discern the great principles of truth, and how stupidly we go about applying them; how repeated are

our blunders and failures, and how tedious and slow our progress! Surely no man, however favorably he may compare with some of his fellows, has anything whereof to boast in a *sober* estimate either of his mental or his moral capacity or development as compared with the standard of perfection.

In a sober estimate of character how painfully manifest are those overestimates of pride and vainglory which are due to the intoxicating spirit of the world! How unlovely it is, how absurd and ridiculous, how mean and contemptible, how vain and foolish! and how effectually it impedes progress toward actual perfection! No man can make commendable progress toward perfection in any direction who does not recognize his shortcomings. If we say we see, our blindness remains; if we say we are wise, our ignorance remains, and our folly is manifest to others while we glory in our shame. – Phil. 3:18,19.

Such is the spirit of this world. It is blind to the highest interests and noblest ends of life; it intoxicates the mind and heart and sends the man staggering along the downward way to destruction, wise only in his own conceit. Against the intoxicating spirit of this world it is the duty of the Christian to set a vigilant guard. He has covenanted to live apart from the world with all its ambitions, pride and vainglory, and apart, too, from its selfishness, greed and strife. Let us, therefore, be sober and watch unto prayer; and let the burden of our prayer be, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults [show them to me that I may put them far from me]. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." – Psa. 19:12-14; 139:23,24.

We need to know and clearly recognize our errors, if we would indeed be cleansed from every secret fault. If there be any secret fault in us, what though no human eye might detect it, if we are indeed lovers of righteousness, we will want the cleansing power of the Word applied

to take it away, remembering always that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." – Heb. 4:13.

Yes, it is in the diagnosis of our case that we are most likely to err, and it is here that sobriety of mind and meekness are so much needed. Self-love does not like to admit the faults that are in us, to particularize them and look them squarely in the face with the searchlight of God's Word clearly revealing them. It is much more conducive to complacent ease of mind to generalize, and to overlook particulars; – to say, Yes, I know I am not perfect, etc., etc. But it requires a [R2094 : page 25] great deal more of moral courage to say, Yes, I see now, in the light of God's Word, that I have been selfish, or unkind, or unfaithful to my obligations, or whatever the fault may be. It requires meekness, humility, to admit these things, even to one's self; and still more, to confess them to those who have been injured or grieved by them. Yet how necessary are the recognition and the confession – the proper diagnosis of the case – to the healing. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another," says the Apostle James, "that ye may be healed." (Jas. 5:16.) The recognition and the confession, as well as the prayer, are thus seen to be very important in order that the heart may be in the proper attitude to receive an answer to the prayer.

Careful reflection will show at once how necessary to the cure is a correct diagnosis. For instance, suppose a case of extreme selfishness. For a time it moves along and prospers, and the disease grows worse and worse until, by and by, some of its bitter fruits begin to appear. Now if the patient fails to discern or admit the selfishness, he may regard the bitter fruits of it, not as the penalty for wrong-doing, but as sufferings for righteousness' sake. And with this incorrect diagnosis he may come to the Word of God and take away the wrong remedy. If he should go at all, he will probably look for words of consolation designed for those only who are truly suffering for righteousness' sake. And that will not help his selfishness, but will make it worse: he will go on cultivating the selfishness and take comfort in the promises that are not his; whereas, if he realized and admitted the selfishness, he

would be considering the warnings against it and praying for grace to overcome it; he would be acknowledging it to those concerned, and endeavoring to make amends for it; and in so doing its bitter fruits would begin to wither, the peace of God would come into his heart, his heart would enlarge, and the love of God and of his fellow-men would begin to fill it.

This is what it means to keep the Lord's commandments and to apply our hearts unto instruction. It means, not self-gratification, but self-abnegation, and self-purification: it means that, in meekness and humility, we must deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily, and follow Christ. This is the narrow way; walk ye in it. There is no other way to life, and certainly no other way to the Kingdom, than the way of righteousness, humility and true holiness, and of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose abundant merit, applied by faith, will make up for all our deficiencies that are not wilful. It is those who walk this narrow way that may even now enjoy the sweets of fellowship with the Father and our Lord Jesus and with all who are led of **[R2095 : page 25]** the spirit of God.

Let as many, therefore, as would follow on to know the Lord, whom to know is life eternal, studiously apply their hearts unto instruction, and in meekness and humility receive the ingrafted word, and let it do its purifying work. Hear the exhortation, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded....Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." – James 4:7-10.

Paul speaks of the great profit to the Corinthian Church of their humble recognition of and godly sorrow for sin, saying, "Now I rejoice...that ye sorrowed to repentance;...for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation;...for behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea,

what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge [against the evil]. In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." (2 Cor. 7:9-11.) Such are the results of sober self-examination in the spirit of meekness and prayer and with a view to cleansing our hearts and minds from all the defilements of sin, both small and great. O Lord, keep thy servants in the way of thy commandments, in meekness and soberness, and let the rich reward of divine fellowship be ours, both here and hereafter!

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