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BALANCING EARTHLY GOOD WITH DIVINE FAVOR.

**"Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall
praise thee." – Psa. 63:3.**

LOVING-KINDNESS, in our text, has the signification of favor. The Prophet, in speaking, represents the Church – the Christ, Head and body. The words are applicable to no others. None but the saints esteem divine favor more precious, more valuable, than the present life – than earthly good things. If we ask the world to balance this matter, to weigh on one side of the balances earthly interests, earthly pleasures, family ties, social position, pride, worldly aspirations, and to put on the other side of the balance divine favor, the reply would be that the earthly good things have all the weight; and that divine favor has none, for the worldly know little or nothing respecting divine favor. They have indeed heard that some people believe in a God, believe in his providential care, believe in his love, believe in a future life, etc., but as for themselves they conclude that such things may be, while the earthly things are certainties; and they would not think for a moment of exchanging present certainties for unknown and intangible matters, called divine favor. [R2851 : page 243]

If we even ask the average nominal Christian to weigh this matter, and tell us if willing to exchange, – putting in the one side of the balance all the good things, hopes, ambitions, family ties, social position, churchianity, petty office and esteem of men, and putting into the other side of the scale God's favor, – he will hesitate and eventually decide that he will do nothing of the kind. The reason with many is that they do not appreciate divine favor. They have heard and believed certain things respecting the Almighty, some of them true and some of them false; and the

misrepresentations of God's character have so neutralized and offset and made non-effective the truths which they have learned, that they lack *confidence* in the unseen: with such, worldly interests outweigh appreciation of divine favor ten to one. The truths they learned were respecting God's love and his gracious provision for his fallen creatures through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and that he willeth not the death of him that dieth, but would that all should turn unto him and live, in the enjoyment of endless blessing.

These truths are found in the sure Word of God; the untruths which they have learned came from a human source, or rather more remotely, from the great Adversary himself, Satan, "the god of this world," as the Apostle calls him. As he tells us, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not" – blinded them to the real character and plan of Jehovah, and deluded them into thinking of him most unkindly, most disreputably, we might almost say most blasphemously. He has blinded them into thinking that the Almighty, while declaring that he has all power, has declared also that he will exercise this power beneficially only over a mere handful of earth's teeming millions – that he will take out this sample to show his power and what he could have done for all if he had wanted to, and exercise his power in hurling the great mass of his creation into eternal torment; – that he made provision to this end before the creation of mankind, – prepared a great and awful place of torture, – prepared the fuel for eternity, – and prepared the devils to see that nothing was lacking in the worst form of torture.

Is it any wonder that those who have thus received human traditions instead of the Word of God, those who believe such terrible things respecting the **[R2851 : page 244]** Creator and his plans, things which outrank in cruelty the doctrines of the heathen, received from the same Satanic source, should doubt the love of such a God? It is no wonder that such find themselves

unable to reconcile such human theories with the plain Scriptural declaration that God is love, very pitiful, very merciful, and that his mercy endureth forever; and that he doth not willingly afflict the children of men. The two thoughts are in violent conflict; the one represents God as loving and kind; the other represents him as a demon of the worst imaginable character; and it is no wonder that those who have in their minds this mixture of human traditions which make void the Word of God, are unable to see God from the right standpoint implied in our text – unable to see his loving kindness, so great, so good, so beneficent, toward all of his creatures, – unable to reconcile such human theory with the Scriptural declaration, that Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man, and that this grace of God in Christ is yet to be testified in due time to every creature, and that thus all are eventually to come to a knowledge of the truth, and thus all eventually to have an opportunity for life everlasting. – 1 Tim. 2:4.

Is it any wonder that those who entertain so mixed a conception of the Almighty's character, when they attempt to balance the loving favor of God with earthly good things, find that the scale weighs down toward the earthly things, because, altho they appreciate some features of the divine character, these are practically neutralized by such misrepresentations of the Adversary through false theories. Well does the Apostle explain the object of this blindness on the part of Satan, saying, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Cor. 4:4.) Ah yes, here it is! The goodness of God, the loving kindness of God, God's favor, does not shine into the hearts of many, and while it does shine a little into some hearts, thick darkness of error hinders their hearts from receiving the full benefit of the light, and its blessing and joy. Such as are in this position find it impossible to love the Lord with all their heart, with all their mind, with all their being, with

all their strength; because from all that they know of him, through this false representation of his character, he is not worthy of much love. The fear of the Lord might operate upon them under such circumstances, and might be balanced against the world and its good things, but his "loving kindness" has comparatively little weight in their lives.

Are we to suppose, then, that there were no saints in the past, because in the past these false ideas of God held full sway amongst his professed children? Are we to suppose that Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, the Wesleys and others, were not saints, and not joint-inheritors with Christ in the Kingdom? No; on the contrary, we presume that these were saints, and that they laid down their lives in the Lord's service; and we merely mention these prominent names as illustrations, and not by way of saying that they were the only saints of their times, and not disputing either that there were saints before them, all through the dark ages, as well as in the primitive Church.

What we do claim, however, is that the mixed theology, which represents God as half love and half devil, never produced the sanctifying effect which we see in the lives of the class we have mentioned. We hold that all those who reached the point of saintship described in our text, and who were able to balance the present life and its earthly good things with the loving favor of God, and to prefer God's favor rather than life, so that they were willing to sacrifice earthly interests, that they might have the divine favor, both as respects the life which now is, and that which is to come, – these never reached this position through their mixed theology, but attained this grand position only in proportion as they were able to forget or ignore the human and Satanic blasphemies respecting the divine character, and to think of God from the standpoint of pure justice and love. Some of them have told us in their writings how terribly this devil-inspired theology weighed upon them; how they found the theory so

antagonistic to all their conceptions of divine justice, mercy and love, that the only thing they could do under the circumstances was to shut the eyes of their minds to the nightmare of hell and devils and torments, and to say to the Lord, O Lord, I cannot understand this, but I accept thee as a very God of love and of justice, and I know that when I shall see thee as thou art, and when I shall see all the works of thy great and wonderful plan, then I shall realize, as I cannot now realize, wherein divine justice and love are compatible with this awful theory of eternal torment for all except the little flock, the elect.

Thus by shutting their eyes to the error, and opening their eyes by faith to the real character of God, substantiated by so many declarations of his Word, the class we refer to, through all the darkness of the dark ages, was indeed enabled to love God supremely, so that they counted not their lives dear unto them, that they might have his favor; they were willing to lay down life and earthly advantages and hopes and favors, that they might have the divine favor now and everlastingly. And if God's people in the past were enabled to triumph in spite of blindness, **[R2851 : page 245]** what shall we say respecting our position today, now that the due time has come for this veil that was spread over all nations to be taken away, so that the true light of the knowledge of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, should shine into our hearts and give us to see through his Word, and freed from human tradition and Satanic misrepresentation, the justice and the loving kindness of our God!

How shall we today balance this question of earthly life and its advantages and privileges and hopes and aims with the favor of God? Well, it will be a test to us, as it has been a test all through the ages. Those who are merely glad to find out that there is no eternal torment, and whose hearts are not touched with the "loving kindness" of God, will go on in the world, rejoicing that they have been delivered from a bondage of error, but not

returning to give glory to God and to offer themselves in his service. And these, alas! are the majority; like the ten lepers who were cleansed by our Lord, of whom only one returned to give thanks and to become a follower of Jesus. Thus the test goes on today, as ever; for the Lord is now seeking only the Kingdom class, only the little flock, and he wishes to have in it only such as love him supremely – only such as, having tasted that the Lord is gracious, desire to and do feast upon his favor, enjoying it, relishing it, appreciating it far beyond any earthly pleasure, any earthly hope, any earthly ambition, any earthly love.

This class today and at all times has been the same, – of one spirit with their Head. The Apostle Paul voices their sentiments; speaking on this very subject, and weighing the earthly life with the divine favor, he says: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him....That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and [R2852 : page 245] the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain to *the* resurrection of *the* dead." (Phil. 3:7-11.) The Apostle's sentiment is that of all the saints; it is that of all who will be accounted "overcomers," and who will be accounted inheritors of the promise of joint-heirship with Jesus. Nothing short of this will do. We must appreciate the loving favor of God as *better than earthly life*, else we are not worthy of him and not of the kind he is seeking. And it is with all who have the Lord's spirit just as it was with the Apostle; the moment they begin to weigh and contrast fellowship with God and the eternal hopes associated therewith, in contrast with earthly loves and family ties and earthly ambitions and pleasures, the latter all seem to be quite insignificant in comparison, dross as compared to pure gold. And from this

standpoint they gladly renounce all, giving up life itself for the favor of God.

ATTAINING CHRISTIAN MATURITY.

But this full development is not at the beginning of the Christian experience with us, nor was it at the beginning of Paul's experience. It is development attained by growth. At the very beginning, however, it was necessary, before either Paul or we could be accepted at all of the Lord, as begotten of the new nature, that we should first balance the loving favor of God with the earthly good things, and the balance must be settled on the side of divine favor, so that we would give up the other, – earthly life, earthly hopes, earthly aims, earthly pleasures, *consecrating* them to sacrifice, in such measure as may be necessary in order to maintain divine favor and blessing. From the time the scale was thus turned to the Lord's side, and our hearts were consecrated to him, earthly things began to lose their weight and to lose their value, to lose appreciation in our eyes, as our eyes began to open the wider to the heavenly things; and the latter became more and more weighty with us, more and more real, until we could see with the eye of faith him who is invisible to the natural sight, and the crown of glory, and the exceeding great and precious things which God has in reservation for them that love him, and be more and more strengthened thereby. And so with some it may have been after weeks or months or years that they reached the position attained by the Apostle when he wrote, as above, that all earthly things were henceforth but as loss and dross when weighed in comparison with Christ and God's loving kindness or favor toward us in him.

This loving favor of God, so much appreciated by the saints that they consecrate their earthly all to obtain it, is not merely a favor as respects future prospects and hopes – not merely as respects the Kingdom to come and the glory and the honor and

immortality then to be granted to such as are in divine favor, but it extends to the present life. Gradually we come to appreciate fellowship and communion with the Father to such a degree as to produce misery of soul if this communion is interrupted. And this sentiment is beautifully expressed in the hymn which we sometimes sing: –

"Sun of my soul, my Father dear,
I know no night when thou art near;
O let no earth-born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes."

The true child of God will be in such close fellowship with the Father, and with the spirit of truth [R2852 : page 246] and righteousness and love, that anything which would interrupt or hinder this fellowship would be esteemed a calamity, however sweet or precious it might be to the natural man. The new creature is willing rather to cut it off, if it were dear as a right hand; to pluck it out, if it were precious as a right eye; than to allow any earthly thing to intervene between him and the divine loving-favor which he has learned so to enjoy that he considers it better than all the rest of life.

"THEREFORE WILL MY LIPS PRAISE THEE."

Many Christians, confused with the Babylonian din of false, contradictory theories, have felt that they would desire to show forth the Lord's praise; but then to offset this there arises in their minds the terrible errors which, as a great nightmare, darken their souls and hush their lips, so that as a rule few are found ready to speak of the Lord and his matters except those who speak either from a sense of *duty* or from a love of money and worldly position. And so it is that today, were the emoluments of honor and salary taken away, and were it necessary in order to be a minister of Christ to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, and to labor, working with their hands, in some sort of tent-making,

nearly all of the ministers of Babylon would cease preaching. As it is, the ablest and most intelligent of them can only be retained in the service by making it pay them better in money and honor of men than any other occupation which they know of.

On the other hand, those who have tasted of the Lord's grace, those who have come to realize his favor as *better than life*, and who have joyfully laid upon his altar every earthly good thing, and hope and ambition, rejoice to tell the good tidings to others; they rejoice to tell forth the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. The message is too good to keep; they not only do not require to be hired to tell it, but they are willing that the telling of it, and the enjoying of God's favor in connection with the telling, shall cost them something – cost them trouble, cost them money, cost them the loss of earthly friendships, cost the straining if not the breaking of some of home ties, cost the frown of the world and of churchianity; – yes, they rejoice, saying, in the language of the Prophet, "He hath put a new song into my mouth, even the *loving-kindness* of our God!"

Some one, perhaps, will say this is exaggeration; it will not cost earthly friendships nor home ties; it will bring with it respect and honor of men, and a salary. We answer, No! The Lord's Word is still true; he is still the example to all who will walk in his footsteps. For what did the Master suffer the loss of social position? Why did the Doctors of Divinity of his day, and the notables of the religious people, hide as it were their faces from him? Why did they finally become so embittered against him, and so hate him, that they crucified him? Was it because of evil-doing on his part? Nay, but "he went about doing good." It was because he told the truth – truths which they believed in great measure, but with which they had mixed "traditions of the elders," which blinded them and made them children of darkness. Our Lord gives us the key to the situation when he says, "The darkness hateth the light." The darkness does not hate the light so that it

will not wear a garment of light to deceive, and so the Adversary, in inculcating the darkness of misrepresentation of the divine character, takes care that this false doctrine shall always have associated with it, to some extent, as a sugar-coating, a garment of love and charity also. He associates a blasphemous misrepresentation of the divine character, which teaches that God is hurrying the masses of poor, frail humanity into the hands of demons for eternal torture, with moral platitudes and church-work, and on the other hand satisfies the human cravings for better lives by instituting hospitals, asylums, orphanages, etc., thus giving mankind the suggestion that they are really better than God, for they would care for and assist the poor and the weak and the fallen, while the Almighty would deliver them over to demons and torment, and foreknew and purposed it so from the beginning – this is their theory.

Those who were deluded by Satan at our Lord's first advent so hated the glorious message which he brought, and so hated his purity and truthfulness, that they called him the prince of devils, Beelzebub, and he told his followers that if he was thus treated they must not marvel if they shared a somewhat similar experience. And as his persecutions and oppositions came not from the world, the Gentiles, the heathen, but from the professed holiness people of his time, so all through the dark ages, and at the present time, those opposing the Lord and the truth are not worldly people, but sectarians whom Satan has more than half blinded with his false doctrines and misrepresentations. We are not, therefore, to be surprised that we find it as the Lord declares, that wherever his truth goes it will be like a sword to separate, and that especially in the home and the family. And as he declared, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my sake." – Matt. 10:22.

These experiences are for the very purpose of testing us, as the Lord's experiences were for the purpose of testing him. He

consecrated his life fully and completely at the beginning of his ministry, when he reached thirty years of age, and symbolized his consecration in baptism. So fully did he appreciate the [R2853 : page 247] Heavenly Father's loving kindness and favor that it required not a moment's hesitation for him to decide that it was better than life – to decide to sacrifice the earthly life; and immediately he began to proclaim the truths respecting the divine love and provision. And well he understood from the beginning how this would bring the hatred of nominal professors of Judaism, and that in thus letting his lips praise the Lord he was doing so at the *cost* of his earthly life, and all the blessings and privileges associated therewith.

Likewise with those who walk in Jesus' footsteps in the narrow way; however much it may surprise them, they find that the proclamation of good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people – the loving favor of our God, manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord – told in its fulness, brings the hate, the scorn, the persecution of nominal Christendom of today. Those who love the present life close their lips and refrain from speaking his loving kindness; but those faithful to their covenant, and appreciative of the Lord's favor as "better than life," will show forth his praise at any and every cost of an earthly kind.

The "harvest" message of good tidings which is now revealed to the Lord's consecrated people, by which they discern the loving kindness of God, which they feel they must tell forth to others, not for money, nor for reputation, but at the cost of worldly reputation, at the cost of financial loss, at the cost of home trials and difficulties – this message is the "new song" mentioned by the Prophet, that the Lord has put into the mouths of his consecrated ones. It is the same new song that is mentioned by our Lord in Revelation, which none others might sing except the elect 144,000, who have the Father's name in their foreheads – publicly professed. If others hear of the song they cannot sing

it, because it costs something to sing this song. "Because thy loving favor is better than life [more esteemed by us, more than all of earthly life and its good things] *therefore* will my lips praise thee."
