

VARYING DEGREES OF LOVE

THE article in a recent number of this journal entitled, "There Is a Sin Unto Death," appears to have created a very profound impression upon many of our readers. We are glad of this: "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." The central thought of that article suggested that possibly in the past we had underestimated the number who will eventually be remanded to the Second Death by the great Judge. It calls attention to the fact that none could reasonably and properly be acceptable to God and receive his blessing of eternal life except as they should first attain his character likeness. Because "God is love" this is the standard for all whom he will acknowledge as his children on either the heavenly or the earthly plane of perfect existence. The Divine Law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind and strength and thy neighbor as thyself," must be fully complied with. The Church of this Gospel Age must reach this glorious standard in the spirit of their minds, in their hearts; the imperfections of their flesh being covered by the grace of God through their faith in Christ. The world during the Millennial Age must reach the standard of that perfect law actually. More than this, after the standard or mark is reached the Lord demands that character in harmony with this standard shall become fixed. To accomplish this, besetments and trials and testings are permitted and are especially severe, crucial, after this mark has been attained. "The Lord your God doth prove you, whether you do love the Lord your God with all your heart or no."

These premises our readers in general will recognize as sound, Scriptural and logical. It follows, therefore, that all who do not attain this standard of character cannot have the gift of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Fortunately this trial for life or death eternal is not now upon the world of mankind in

general, but only upon the Church. Nor is it upon the Church nominal, but merely upon those believers who have made consecration of themselves and been begotten of the holy Spirit. If these shall fall away, "There remaineth no more sacrifice for their sins," the Apostle declares. Let us be glad that it is not ours to judge the hearts of our brethren. We are glad to wish well to all and to hope that the great Judge may see grounds for excusing many of the blemishes of the brethren, which are manifest to us, and of our blemishes manifest to them. The Scriptures declare that the Lord judgeth the heart and not the outward appearance. It is ours, therefore, to hope all things favorable and to even doubt nothing, except as we may see evil fruitage in those claiming to be brethren – fruitage of conduct and spirit positively contrary to the Word and Spirit of the Lord. Even then we are not to bring against them any railing accusation, but to leave them in the Lord's hands.

With our most generous thoughts, however, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that not many amongst the Lord's professedly consecrated followers give strong evidence of being at the *mark of perfect love* toward God and their fellow-beings. The Apostle intimates that for such we should fear and, bringing home the lesson, we should fear for ourselves – "Let us fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest any of us should seem to come short of it." – Heb. 4:1.

In view of the strictness of this Divine test and our own inability to see it lived up to by many and our carefulness [R4479 : page 286] and fear for ourselves, we can only hope that the great majority of professed Christians have never really been spirit-begotten and are not, therefore, subject to this searching test of character in the present life. Indeed, it seems rather remarkable that some of those who recently have "gone out from among us because they are not of us," seem to have their contention, partially at least, along these very lines: they dispute that any are

spirit-begotten, or that God has made the path to glory a narrow one of self-sacrifice, or that the sufferings of Christ, the Head, are to be shared by the Church, the members of his Body. Such a position on the part of those once begotten of the holy Spirit and who have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the coming age would seem to indicate a blindness which would imply the loss of the illumination of the holy Spirit, as they had once enjoyed it. And this would imply the Second Death. Let us prefer, however, to suppose that they never were really enlightened – never were really begotten of the holy Spirit; that they had merely made a consecration to God to live moral lives and to forward his cause – without making a full surrender in the proper Scriptural manner – laying down life and everything at the Lord's feet, "presenting their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God and their reasonable service." Instead of understanding spiritual things they may merely have been repeating spiritual precepts, without true comprehension.

Here we are reminded of a conversation that we once had with a lady. She said, "My husband has made full consecration of himself to the Lord and professes to be begotten of the holy Spirit and to see various teachings in "Millennial Dawn," "Tabernacle Shadows," etc., which, in connection with the Bible, give him a great illumination respecting the Divine will. I, on the contrary, have never made such a consecration, yet I can understand those same spiritual things. How do you account for it?" In reply we outlined the type: the Court of the Tabernacle with its Altar representing faith in the forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice; the Laver representing the putting away of the filth of the flesh, etc. We reminded the lady that the tabernacle stood in this Court yet was separated from it by the first veil or curtain, which represented the death of the human will in complete consecration to the Divine will. We said to her, According to your own statement, you are outside that curtain. You have never yet made a full consecration of your all to the Lord. Your husband has

made such a consecration, has experienced such a death of his will as is represented by passing under that curtain, and he has arisen on the other side of it a New Creature, begotten of the holy Spirit. He tells you what he sees – the golden walls of the Tabernacle proper, the heavy Curtain, or second veil, separating between the Holy and the [R4480 : page 286] Most Holy, the Table of Shewbread, the Golden Candlestick whose light illuminates everything, the Incense Altar from whence proceeds the sacrifice of incense and prayer beyond the Second Vail into the Most Holy to cover the mercy-seat. You give attention to your husband's descriptions of these things; you have them all in mind; yet you do not see in the same particular sense and degree in which he sees. You are trusting to his word, in which you have absolute confidence. He is trusting in the everlasting actualities with which he is directly associated.

May it not be that many more are in this condition than have plainly told us so? Surely we have now come to the time when all who have not made an actual, bona-fide consecration of their lives to the Lord – a full and complete surrender of their wills – will be separated from the consecrated ones. "The Lord your God doth prove you, whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart or no."

"STAR DIFFERETH FROM STAR"

Another question arises: Since it is evident that all must reach the standard of perfect love, in order to attain everlasting life on any plane, what would be the test by which the different degrees of glory will be awarded, as suggested by the Apostle's assurance that, "as star differeth from star in glory," so also will it be in the resurrection of the Church?

We reply that since the very least one admitted to eternal life must have reached the mark of *perfect love*, it follows that these different degrees of reward will represent different degrees of

loving zeal on the part of those after they shall have reached the standard of *perfect love*. For instance, St. Paul was not merely anxious to attain the fruits and graces of the holy Spirit; he was not merely willing to suffer with Christ, if need be; but his zeal led him beyond this – to glory in tribulations also; to rejoice to be accounted worthy to suffer for the cause of his Lord; to rejoice to lay down his life for the brethren. He was not only glad to have fellowship in Christ's sufferings and to drink of his cup, but he had so much zeal that he rejoiced if he could get more than his portion, more than his share. He was on the alert for opportunities for service. If others used them, well. If he could stir up the love and zeal of others, well. But if he found some work undone which he might accomplish, he delighted to do it. Well did he say that we might take him as an example in following after our Lord Jesus. Surely we may conclude that he will be one of the brightest shiners in the heavenly Kingdom and that in following his example we also may become more and more pleasing to our Lord – not by wildly beating the air, but with wisdom and prudence and faithfulness doing those things which the Lord had indicated would be pleasing in his sight, as evidencing our loyalty to him, his brethren and his Truth.

IS LOVE THE ONLY TEST?

Another inquires, "Is love the only test?" We find that some of those who have opposed the Vow and now are gradually becoming more and more opposed to the various features of the Truth are quite bitter, malicious and strifeful; but we know a few of them who at least have a form of meekness and who on this very account seem to exercise the more power to create discord, because some of the friends reason that he or she cannot have forsaken the Lord nor been forsaken by the Lord, else they would not have so kindly a manner. My question is, Is love (gentleness) the sole test of our membership in the Body of Christ?

Our answer is, No and Yes. No, it is not the only test as viewed by the ordinary mind, unguided by the Scriptures. Do we not know worldly people who are very kindly disposed and moral and gentle and patient and generous? Do we not know Christian Scientists and many others, whom we believe to be thoroughly out of relationship to the Lord and entirely cut off from the leadings of his Spirit, possessing these same traits of character – some of them to an admirable degree? From this standpoint we must answer the question negatively and say that more than such a love and willingness must be looked for as a test of character and relationship to the Lord.

But there is another viewpoint given us in the Scriptures, and from it we may answer this question – Yes, Love is the only standard or test of relationship to the Lord and to the brethren. Let us elaborate. Gentleness, meekness and patience are indeed elements of the holy character, the holy mind, which the Lord will develop in us: but they are not the sum of this character which we call love. They are only twigs or branches, as it were, on the great tree of Christian faith and fellowship – twigs and branches which are duplicated to some extent on other trees and on other vines than that of "the Father's righthand planting."

In giving his command the Lord did not specify, first meekness, gentleness, etc., but, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul, and strength." Hence the first test of relationship to the Lord is that of faithfulness to him and to his Word. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." – Isa. 8:20. **[R4480 : page 287]**

So, then, in looking for Christian brotherhood we should begin at the beginning and look for loyalty to God and to our Lord and to the Gospel message and to the brethren. Meekness, gentleness, patience, etc., are commendable qualities in any one, but they prove nothing of themselves. Does not the Apostle call

attention to this when he says that some, with feigned words and smooth speeches, would make merchandise of you; that is to say, would use you for their own advantage, to prosper their own designs and ambitions? Is not this the same thought expressed by another Apostle who exhorts us that we should not love in word merely, but in deed and in truth? (1 John 3:18.) These words intimate that some do love merely in word – feigned words and smooth speeches. The real evidence of the sincerity or truthfulness of our love, as the Apostle points out, is evidenced by our deeds and not merely by smooth words. With the smooth words we should look for that zeal for God and for his Truth which would demonstrate its sincerity by looking out for and serving the interests of the Truth, by evident effort to control words and acts, in harmony with the interests of the Truth. Our Lord Jesus honored the Truth greatly when he made it identically himself, saying, "Me and my Word." Whoever, therefore, honors not the Lord's Word, and serves it not, lacks that evidence of love for the Lord himself.

The Lord puts the least of his disciples as his personal representative, assuring us that kindness done, or evil deeds done, or evil words spoken, in respect to the least of his followers, are counted as said or done to himself. Whoever vows to love the Lord with all his heart, mind, being and strength and to be zealous for his service will of necessity be on the lookout for the Lord's brethren, even the least of them – to honor them, to serve them – and certainly not to stumble them. Whoever, therefore, lends himself to stirring up strife and dissension in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, furnishes this evidence that he has not the Lord's Spirit; that he is "none of his;" that whatever smooth speeches and honeyed words he may use are merely deceptions and do not make known, but on the contrary hide the real sentiments of his heart.

In addition to the honeyed words and smooth speeches some add honeyed deeds and little attentions, in order that they may

have the better opportunity for injecting the poison of asps, which is under their lips. (Rom. 3:13.) These honeyed words and deeds are the baits behind which is fastened the hook of slander, evil-speaking, evil insinuations, etc., by which they foster discord and stir up anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife and other works of the flesh and the devil.

How dwelleth the love of God in these? How love these the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul and strength and their neighbor as themselves? Not at all. They are in the very gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity, as the Apostle declares – however they may measurably deceive their followers and themselves to the contrary.

It is for each of God's people to be so filled with his holy spirit – with love for the Lord and for all the glorious attributes of his character – that he will be proof against such tools of the Adversary and, so far from having fellowship with them he will instinctively shun them, even as the Scriptures declare. We are to "Love righteousness and hate iniquity" and to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." Rather we should reprove them, not necessarily by word, but certainly by conduct, by having no fellowship with them, because we are of another spirit, the spirit of life, the spirit of peace, the spirit of truth, the spirit of brotherhood, the spirit of the Lord.

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