

THE KINDNESS, HUMILITY AND PATIENCE OF LOVE

"God is Love." – 1 John 4:8.

IN THE SCRIPTURES the word love is used to express the complete whole of the grand and glorious qualities which make up the perfection of Jehovah. God is the personification of Love. To whatever extent any one possesses this quality of Love to that extent he has character-likeness to God. Whoever is fully in God's likeness may be said to be Love; for Love is the great principle which represents most fully the Divine character.

"God is Love," our Lord Jesus is Love; and when the Church is perfect, each member of the Body will also be Love. This great principle will have full control of all that we do and say, even as now it has control in the hearts of the Lord's people, despite the weaknesses of the flesh, which prevent its full expression. When all the imperfection is taken away, those who attain the prize of our glorious high calling will have the image of God, the image of the Lord. The hope of attaining the likeness of the Divine character is the great ambition which inspires us to faithfulness of endeavor.

Incidentally, it may be remarked that faith, hope and love are fruits of the Holy Spirit. Although every good and perfect gift comes from the Father (James 1:17), nevertheless, there is a difference between a "gift" and a "fruit." Possession of a gift may be acquired immediately, but a fruit requires time in which to develop. So with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Here we see displayed the Wisdom of God. Development is a gradual work. With those who have that earnest desire and determined zeal for righteousness which God wishes them to have, every word and every act has something to do with the development of this quality of Love. Our Heavenly Father does not expect us to acquire perfection of

love in the flesh, for its weaknesses and imperfections will not permit us to do so; but He expects to find in those who will be members of the Body of Christ that earnestness of spirit and faithful endeavor which demonstrate that if they had perfect bodies they would always manifest love.

In order to reach this degree of development of character, we must not live after the flesh, the old creature, but must train our minds to desire only those things which are true, pure, loving and good. In this sense of the word we are to be copies of our Lord Jesus Christ.

KINDNESS NOT ALWAYS LOVE

The followers of Christ have consecrated their own wills and have been begotten of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Love; for it is the Spirit of God, who is Love. Therefore their sentiment toward one another must be one of loving interest. Perhaps they are not always wise in knowing how to exercise loving-kindness; sometimes their fallen nature may lead them to think that a certain course of action would be the loving one, when it is the very reverse – the wrong course. Hence we need to be on the alert to perceive to what extent we are using the spirit of a sound mind in our conduct and in our dealings with one another.

A person might manifest kindness in word and act without having the right motive. Sometimes kindness is prompted by motives other than love. It might be for selfish reasons, or for the purpose of entrapping another to his disadvantage. This form of fraud has become so common as to cause no particular comment.

The Christian's experience is a continual schooling. Daily we are learning more and more about ourselves and about the Wisdom and Justice of God. As we learn these lessons day by day, we are learning more to reprobate and correct in ourselves. In thus discovering our own imperfections, we should learn, as a matter of course, not to expect perfection in others; and we should give them credit for doing their best

to exemplify the highest ideals [R5124 : page 338] which they have in respect to the unity and perfection required for membership in the Body of Christ.

Love is always kind; Love cannot wilfully injure another. The parent who loves his child will not do anything to harm that child. He might sometimes make a mistake and punish the child unjustly, but the motive behind a loving parent's action will always be kind and true.

Love might sometimes be regarded as unkind, for the principles governing the actions of the individual might be misunderstood. When our Heavenly Father forbade Adam and Eve to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, He had a wise reason for so doing. No doubt He would have eventually permitted them to partake of that fruit; but it was kindness on His part to keep them in ignorance of that fact. Thinking God to be unkind, ungenerous toward them, Eve thought to obtain her *rights*. So with us. If our Heavenly Father's kindness is not always understood, we may not be surprised if we have a similar experience. Although our spirit, or motive, may be right, yet we may not always have the ability to manifest it; and so we must make due allowance when others misunderstand us.

THE POWER OF INDWELLING LOVE

Man was originally made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27); but by reason of the fall of Adam, his balance of mind has been destroyed. Those who have the mind, or will of Christ are able to overcome some of the inequalities of their natural disposition and to think soberly of their own knowledge and ignorance and of that of others. This ability to appreciate the true state of affairs is the secret of much of our blessing in the Lord.

When we see others who have a smaller appreciation of justice than we have and who do things contrary to the principles of righteousness, we rejoice that we know better and are able to do better than they. The spirit of a sound mind shows us that we have more ability along some

lines than have some others, and that others have more ability along some lines than we. Because of the fall of man, all are weak in one direction or another. The knowledge of the imperfect condition of humanity should humble us rather than puff us up.

Humility of mind comes only after the attainment of considerable knowledge of Christ. Knowledge puffs up because of selfishness of heart, because we are more likely to be conscious of our own good qualities than of those of others. Hence those born with less selfishness have less to contend with, and those born with more of it have more to contend with; and in proportion as we have the Spirit of Christ, we are able to overcome the tendency to be puffed up with what little knowledge we possess. Indwelling love has the power to build up, to strengthen character, and to counteract the wrong effect of the fallen human nature.

PROPER AND IMPROPER CAUSES OF PROVOCATION

The whole world has a tendency to recognize the principles of Justice. Even those whose conduct toward others is far from just, seem to crave an opportunity to fight against injustice, provided that the case is not one with which they are identified. This inclination often manifests itself in acts of violence, as when mobs vent their anger against some poor sinner who has done something to provoke their wrath. The least virulent amongst them have perhaps done wrong also, yet they seize the opportunity to show their indignation against wrongdoing and seem to take delight in punishing the offender.

The Lord's people should not possess this spirit of intolerance. We should have patience, sympathy and endurance when things go wrong, and should make due allowance for those who are transgressors. The more we possess of the spirit of patience, the more we have of the spirit of forbearance and the more difficult it is to arouse us to anger. Wherever the spirit of love prevails, its possessor is not easily moved to do or say anything unkind or unjust. Love makes us very patient with

those with whom we are associated; it is anxious to throw the mantle of charity over everything that seems to be wrong.

Love would have us remember that while another may be in *error*, it does not follow that he is at *fault*. He may not have understood a matter correctly or his judgment may not have been the best, owing to inherited weakness over which he has no control. Before condemning any one we should make sure that he is *at fault*. Justice demands that we do no less than investigate before we condemn. Love urges us to be as merciful in the case as is possible.

God is the very personification of Love, yet the Scriptures tell us that He has been provoked at different [R5125 : page 338] times. While passing through the wilderness, the children of Israel aroused His indignation repeatedly. (Psa. 78:40,56; 95:7-11.) The idolatrous tendencies of that nation brought Divine wrath upon them and sent them into captivity to Babylon. (Jer. 7:17-20.) Finally, their rejection and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ brought upon them "wrath to the uttermost" and caused their dispersion into all parts of the earth.

RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION A PROPER FEELING

The Lord's people are not to be of that immovable kind that cannot feel any resentment of injustice. Lack of ability to have just indignation would imply lack of morals and of harmony with God. Of our Lord Jesus it is written that when He beheld the unrighteous condition of the rulers of His people, and saw the injustice of their conduct, He "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3:5.) Like Him, we should be wholly out of sympathy with everything not in harmony with God.

We are to love righteousness and hate iniquity. This word *iniquity*, which means the very opposite of Love, is a strong expression. A person who is indifferent to matters of right and wrong is indifferent to the character of God, who is in opposition to all forms of iniquity. Of our Lord, the Scriptures say, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest

wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." (Psa. 45:7.) All who are cultivating character pleasing to God, all who are endeavoring to become exact copies of His dear Son, should put away every impurity, everything not right. Whatever is wrong should always be opposed by our new minds.

On the other hand, if we have Love as the Lord has it, we shall hate the *wrong*, but not the *individual* who does wrong. In proportion as love controls our minds and hearts, we shall feel sympathy for those who are in iniquity, for we remember that the race of mankind are fallen from their original perfection. We should think that to do evil is not their intention, their will, but that they are suffering from an iniquitous disease. Love is patient and tries to find extenuating circumstances and conditions. It seeks to help the evil-doer and is not easily provoked to anger.

But the word "provoke" signifies *to incite to*; in another place the Apostle says, "Provoke one another to Love and good works." (Heb. 10:24.) Love should say and do those things that will incite to loving words rather **[R5125 : page 339]** than stir up bitterness, which leads to anger, wrath, malice, strife and evil-speaking." (Eph. 4:31,32.) In other words, it is much better to be a peacemaker than a strife-maker. Yet we are not to have *peace* at *any price*; rather we should have peace, if possible, where *principle* is not involved. We should stir up strife only where some good is sure to result.

The degree of love, the strength of love, may be determined by the ease with which it may be swerved and aroused to opposition or to impatience and anger. We have already seen that there may be times when patience might stand in the way of the real interests of the case and where Love would take steps to correct what seemed to be an apparent evil; but we must remember that balance of mind, or judgment, is not ours by nature. *Perfection of decision* is a quality belonging only to our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Let patience have her perfect work." (James 1:4.) The Father would not be provoked to anger with anything trivial. With us, however, our balance of judgment is so poor that generally we are too hasty. Very few of us take in the full circumstances surrounding ourselves and those with whom we have to do; therefore growth in grace and growth in knowledge will have to do with the degree of love exhibited by each one.

GENEROSITY AND SYMPATHY TO BE CULTIVATED

We are in the School of Christ, the Great Teacher. We have the words of the Heavenly Father, of our Lord Jesus and of the Apostles recorded in the Bible; therefore we should know the difference between right and wrong. On the other hand, we see that sin exists in the world. Mankind are imperfect in mind and morals. This condition is hereditary – the result of Adam's transgression, more than six thousand years ago. Yet with all our advantages of knowledge, we "*cannot* do the things that we would"; consequently, we feel a measure of sympathy for *ourselves*, and we should extend the same measure to others. Indeed, we should be more critical of ourselves than of others, although the Lord's Word says that we are not to judge either ourselves or others. We cannot read the hearts of those around us and therefore are not competent to decide what motives prompt their actions nor what degree of punishment should be meted out to them.

Nevertheless, we are to observe right and wrong conduct among our neighbors. We may know that they have, figuratively speaking, a bad tree and therefore bring forth bad fruit; and we should consider *why* they have a tree that produces such fruitage. Perhaps they were less favorably born than we. Perhaps they have never been in the School of Christ and have never heard the Great Teacher or the Apostles. If so, our sympathy should go out to them and our attitude of mind toward them should be such that we will not be provoked by their shortcomings, but should manifest generosity of heart toward them.

To attain this sympathy and generosity is a part of our instruction in the School of Christ, but we do not learn all pertaining to the subject in a day or a week. We get "here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:10); and if we are following on to know the Lord, our mental discernment will become clearer and our minds will broaden in sympathy for others. Thus we shall become more like our Father in Heaven, for He is kind to the unthankful and just to the unjust, as our Lord pointed out. – Matt. 5:44-48.

PRIDE A CAUSE OF MUCH IRRITABILITY

Undoubtedly the causes for irritability and for being provoked vary in different persons. With some, it is because of a nervous condition of health, which renders them less easily able to control themselves according to the standards which they themselves recognize. With others, the cause of irritability is *pride*. In fact, pride is connected with nearly everything that is injurious to the people of God. Wherever pride exists, the person is susceptible to evil influences from every quarter.

Pride manifests itself in various ways. Sometimes it exhibits itself as *self-esteem*, leading one to think too highly of himself and too lightly of others, even to the extent of imagining himself to be their superior. At other times, pride manifests itself as *approbateness*: anything that conflicts with the *desire to appear well before others* touches a tender spot.

We are not to be indifferent to these things. If we have pride or approbateness, we are to seek to control *it* with the spirit of love and sympathy for others, instead of letting the wrong spirit control *us*. The best way to do this is to practise generosity and to provoke others to love and good works instead of to anger. Let us remember that *humility* is one of the great lessons to be learned in the School of Christ; obedience to the instructions of the Teacher along this line has very much to do with our ever getting into the Kingdom.

One of the best aids to the learning of this important lesson is to learn to judge ourselves – to scrutinize our own motives. If we find that we have acted unjustly toward another, we should go and make amends to the best of our ability; we should properly scourge our own *minds*, and seek to make matters right with the one we have wronged. For a person who is proud or who is sensitive to the good opinion of others, it is very difficult to apologize; but the best thing to do is to set the matter right as speedily as possible, and repeatedly, if necessary. Thus we may have help along the line where we should have it, by overcoming our pride and vanity.

The members of the Body of Christ are all to be copies of God's dear Son. This does not mean that God's dear people will be able always to control their looks and actions and words, but that the heart must recognize this standard and strive to attain to it. Every time a person who has some weakness along this line of pride or vanity will apologize for a wrong done he will by that act show both God and man that his *heart* recognizes the right principle. A great blessing will come to him because of his following very strictly the Divine Word; thus he will gradually overcome his weakness and strengthen his character.

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CALMNESS OF TRUTH

All Truth is calm,
Refuge and Rock and Tower;
The more of Truth the more of calm,
Its calmness is its power.
Truth is not strife,
Nor is to strife allied;
It is the *error* that is *bred*
Of storm, by *rage* and *pride*.
Calmness is Truth,

And Truth is calmness still;
Truth lifts its forehead to the storm,
Like some eternal hill.

– *H. Bonar.*

