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TRAINING OUR AFFECTIONS HEAVENWARD

**"Set your affection on things Above, not on things on the earth."
– Colossians 3:2.**

IN THE natural make-up of humanity there is a certain tendency which we all recognize as a sort of mental sacrilege, although we are unable to philosophize upon it or to explain it. So surely as we are men and women we have certain impulses of affection, certain powers that go out toward other creatures, other things; and it is very important that we see where they are tending; otherwise they will lead to idolatry. Just as the little tendrils of a vine will take hold of whatever is within reach, so our affections go out to various earthly objects; and they need to be pruned and trained, just as a vine needs to be. When you desire to have your vine grow a certain way, you turn it in the proper direction, tie it if need be, and see that its tendrils take hold of the proper supports.

VARIOUS WORLDLY OBJECTS OF AFFECTION

Thus it is with each of us. These affections are proper, they are good; but they need guiding, training. If we did not have these affections, we could not love God. We must have them in order to a proper balance of character. Without them we could not hold together. The need for their proper guidance is manifest when we see some lady setting her affections on a little dog, giving it much time, care, choice food, etc. Some of the wealthy set their affections on poodle dogs, bull dogs, bird dogs or Angora cats. Some make pets of Canary birds, rabbits, white mice, etc. They spend upon those pets much valuable time, thought and care that might be much better spent in other ways – often treating them as if they [R5906 : page 163] were children, and lavishing as much affection upon them as if they were human. Some do the same with flowers.

Although we believe in having a very kindly feeling toward dumb animals, and although we greatly admire flowers, yet we hold that as the Lord's people we should not treat any of these as if they were human beings, nor set our affections upon them to our injury and the neglect of much more important things. There are plenty of children to care for; and we should not put flowers, dogs and toys in place of them. Although it is very proper for us to think how good is our Heavenly Father to give us all these things for pleasure, yet we should be on guard that we do not set our affections upon them and give them too large a place in our hearts. Where people do this, something valuable has been lost in their lives. If they are grown people, perhaps it would have been better if they had had children, rather than to set their love upon dogs and cats, and to waste precious time upon them.

As we look out upon the world of mankind, we see that some are much better balanced than others. We sympathize with the world; for most of them do not know the Lord. They are not Christians. Very many of them have poor, meager lives with little to fill their hearts and to brighten and enlarge their mental horizon. Many who spend little or no time upon pets, set their affections and thoughts upon a home. It is a great pleasure to them to be able to say, "I have a good home of my own." This longing for home is a natural craving of our beings. Phrenologists call this natural trait, inhabitiveness – love of habitation. But we are not to permit our affections to center even here. As children of God we should have far higher aspirations than the world has.

Many set their hearts upon having a large bank account. We have known people whose minds are so unbalanced that they would do almost anything to secure a good bank account. And when this is gained, they still are not satisfied. They continue to grasp after more, often resorting to very questionable or very dishonest methods to gain their ends. Such people are mentally and morally deranged. But we are to remember that the human family in their fallen condition

are all more or less deranged. Only a thorough and radical course of treatment can remove the difficulty. The Lord alone can cure the malady that affects the entire human race.

LEGITIMATE AFFECTIONS LIABLE TO PERVERSION

There are still higher affections than those we have named which are also dangerous unless properly trained and guided. These are the affections of man for woman, woman for man, man for man, woman for woman, etc. All this is proper, of course, but we are to avoid inordinate affections, and are to have only that which is ordinary – that is, reasonable, proper. We are to beware of going to extremes. In His Word God has given us the proper outlines of conduct for His children; and we can know these only when we study His directions. Otherwise we are sure to take a wrong course. "Set not your affection on things on the earth."

It is God's arrangement that even husbands and wives should not set their affections too much upon each other. Thus the Apostle Paul enjoins, "The time is short; it remaineth that they that have wives be as though they had none." (1 Corinthians 7:29.) The intimation seems to be that we should not reckon our earthly relationships as being the highest and best of all things. It is a great thing to have each other's support in the trials and difficulties **[R5906 : page 164]** of life. We are not wishing to say anything to weaken this blessed bond. But it should be held in accordance with knowledge of and in harmony with God's Word. It should not be permitted to be in any wise a hindrance to our running the Heavenly race successfully. It should not become an earth-born cloud to veil from us the Father's face and approval.

By natural tendency we would all be inclined to go wrong; therefore we need to give careful heed to the admonition to set our affection on things Above. Let each of us look around carefully and sweep before our own doors. We are not here simply to have a good time. We are here for the purpose of learning certain principles, certain lessons that the Lord would have us learn, so that we may

more than ever shape our lives in harmony therewith, that we may be able to see all the things of life from God's viewpoint. God's Word does not go into every detail of life; but it lays down important principles that touch our lives at every point; and it is for us to learn more and more how to apply these principles, to see what we need to restrain, what we need to cultivate, etc. The Lord wishes us to be intelligent children.

"GOD FIRST"

Those who come into harmony with the mind of the Lord have that wisdom from Above, which is first pure, then peaceable, easy of entreatment, full of mercy and good fruits. (James 3:17.) Each of us should scrutinize the affairs of his own life and observe whether to any extent he is *setting* his affections upon earthly objects or things, even upon things which are in themselves right and proper. One cannot love his wife too much, unless he permits her to come into the Lord's place in his heart. If he should love her so much that he would please her rather than the Lord, then he is doing wrong. God must be first. Everything must be subordinate. Everything should be brought into line with this: GOD FIRST – His will, His Plan, His ways.

As husbands and wives, kindred and friends, there is a certain degree of love that is in full harmony with the Heavenly love, the Father's will; and there are other affections or degrees of affection that are not in accordance therewith. Beware of these latter. Every one is imperfect, and each has tendencies whereby he might be led astray. Our great Adversary goeth about seeking whom he may devour. If he could, he would be glad to devour us. The better Christian one is, the better the Adversary would like to get hold of him.

To be a child of God does not mean that we shall be free from all earth-born tendencies. The Apostle points out that there is a continual fight of the New Creature against the old. (Galatians 5:17.) The Heavenly impulses, tendencies and aspirations need to be fought

for; they must be carefully and continually cultivated. Not only must our affections be torn from their earthly props, to which they naturally cling, but they must be trained Heavenward, and be held there by the cords of love and devotion to God. Do not let them gravitate again earthward. There are many things on this earth that are attractive, that are beautiful; but we need not set our hearts upon them. We may see them and admire them; but we must go right along the narrow way. Our hearts are only just so large; and if we fill them with flowers or pets or earthly ambitions or affections, how can there be room for the infinitely more important and beautiful things?

FRUITS, NOT CHIPS, SHOULD FILL OUR MENTAL BASKETS

We all remember the familiar story of the boy who was very fond of reading novels, and whose father wished to impress a valuable lesson upon his mind. One day he said to his son, "John, empty that basket of apples in the corner; then go and fill the basket with chips." The boy did so, and brought in the basket filled with chips. "Now," said the father, "put all the apples also into the basket." The surprised boy said, "Father, I cannot put the apples in while the chips are there." "No," said the father, and your mind is just like that basket. It can hold only so much; and if you fill it with chips, there will be no room for other and better things."

This was a wise father; he gave his son a good suggestion. You and I, as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, should fill our minds with the glorious Heavenly things – the Heavenly hopes, the Heavenly ambitions, the Heavenly affections. All these earthly things are but as chips in comparison. The mind and the heart filled with chips cannot contain the fruits of the Spirit. If we fill our baskets with the Heavenly loves and joys, the spiritual treasures, we shall have that which is transcendentally above any earthly love and joy.

Beware of earthly, spurious love; for it will be a hindrance to the Heavenly love. The two should not be confused and mixed. The

unselfish natural love, which is an element of perfect human nature, will not, if kept in subservience to the Heavenly, interfere with our spiritual interests. The one does not infract or destroy the other. There should be a natural love for husband, wife, children, parents, and the Lord would have this continue; but He would have it in full subjection to the Heavenly things. Here, also, God should be first.

SETTING AFFECTIONS ABOVE A GRADUAL WORK

In our text the Apostle is addressing Christians, the class who are day by day training their affections Heavenward. This matter of *setting* the affections on Heavenly things, however, is something that must be repeated, persevered in; for the affections are inclined to slip off. We have nothing but our old brains with which to do our thinking, and these brains have tendencies toward the flesh. Therefore the necessity arises for a repeated and continual setting of the affections on the things Above, until they become securely fastened there, fixed, established. Heaven is to be our eternal Home, not the earth, not the fleshly condition. All the precious promises center Above. Christ our beloved King is there. We are being prepared to enter soon into Heaven itself, the condition beyond the veil. The glories of the Holiest of all are now ours by faith; and they will soon be ours in reality if we hold fast and continue faithful to our covenant with God.

The Lord has now through His promises given us a foretaste of the good things to come. We have "the earnest of the Spirit." It is like the paying down of a hundred **[R5907 : page 164]** dollars to secure the purchase of a house. The balance remains due, and the buyer does not get the property until this balance is paid. But the earnest money holds the place for him until the full payment is made. By giving us His Holy Spirit God binds the contract into which we have entered with Him. In giving us this advance payment the Lord says, "Now prove to Me how faithfully you will keep your part of the Covenant into which we have entered. You keep your part, and I will keep

Mine." "Faithful is He that calleth us, who also will do it." The only question is whether we shall do our part faithfully; for God will surely do His part.

CAREFUL PREPARATION OF THE BRIDAL GARMENTS

When we ponder on earthly things we see that they are not worthy to be compared with the Heavenly things. [R5907 : page 165] But there is danger of spending consecrated time on things that are of less value even than flowers, etc. How much time do you think you should spend in reading the newspapers? How much does this enable you to set your affections on the things above? Each of us is responsible to the Lord for how he uses every moment of his time – God's time. We are not here condemning the reading of important world-news which bears upon the fulfilment of Scripture prophecy. It is not wrong for us to keep in touch with the progress of the great war, for instance, in so far as it is related to the incoming Kingdom. But we do not need to read much to find out what is necessary.

Doubtless if Jesus were here in the flesh now, He would be interested in noting how the world conditions are fulfilling the testimony of the Scriptures. He told us to watch for these fulfilments and to lift up our heads when we saw them coming to pass. But how can we lift up our heads if we do not see them coming to pass? And how can we see them if we do not read that which will give us this necessary information? But we are not to read for entertainment, nor are we to read what is unprofitable to us as New Creatures.

So then, dear brethren and sisters, we see the course we are to pursue. We are to be the Bride of Jehovah's great Son. Therefore we must be very diligent to get everything in readiness for the approaching marriage. When we consider the preparations which an earthly bride makes for her nuptials, we have a good illustration of how important it is for us to have our garments all prepared, our robes spotless, our embroidery-work all completed beforehand. You and I are privileged to have a most important part in the greatest, grandest

wedding ever held. Therefore we should be ready. We who were by nature children of wrath even as others, are now privileged to be cleansed from all defilement by the precious blood of Christ. Daily also we are to wash with the water of the Word. We are to be purified from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and be fitted to become the Bride of our Heavenly King.

This preparation means a continuous work as long as we sojourn in the mortal body. God's great Program has been so arranged as to demonstrate who will be fit to constitute the Bride of His Son. This decision in our case will depend on our diligence in making ourselves ready. If we attend to this most important work properly, we shall have no time to fritter away. We shall have little time for anything else than this one thing. But the proper making of ourselves ready means the helping of others as we have opportunity, especially the brethren who are walking this same Heavenly way with us. We are to lay down our lives for the brethren. This is an important part of our preparation. We are to build up ourselves and also the brethren in the most holy faith.

We hope, then, dear friends, that we are getting ready for the marriage of the Lamb, for our marriage to the Lamb. Something that we may do or fail to do today may have a bearing upon our final readiness. Our minds are the foundation for everything in this matter. The Lord knows that we have imperfect bodies. So the testing will not be as to whether our bodies are perfect, but whether our hearts are perfect. If our heart is perfect before God, we shall bring our words, our actions and our thoughts into harmony with the Law of Love to the extent of our ability. If we see to it that we *keep* our hearts thus loyal, we shall become more and more a copy of God's dear Son, our Heavenly Bridegroom; and we shall enter in due time with exceeding joy into our "house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens." Then our Lord will present us before the Father – the "Bride adorned for her Husband"; He will present us with exceeding joy, BLAMELESS.

Oh, the blessedness of this thought! *Can we be blameless?* If we reach the Kingdom, dear brethren, we shall indeed be blameless! Meantime, our characters are to be blameless here. God would never blame us for things we could not help, but only for the things we could help; and He has made an arrangement whereby if we have made mistakes we can go to the Fountain of cleansing. If we strive to do our best, and if we go daily, or oftener if necessary, to the Mercy Seat for pardon and cleansing, we shall be spotless in the Father's sight; and in His own due time He will give us perfect bodies like our Lord's. Then we shall be perfect in the most absolute sense.

So long as we stay in the imperfect flesh we shall need the Throne of Heavenly Grace. We shall need mercy and assistance from the Lord every day. If we are faithful at heart, our mistakes will help us to be more watchful, more positive, than before. The Lord so arranges His providence as to teach us the necessary lessons. As we grow in the Divine likeness, we shall more and more come to love as God and Christ love – to love character, to love the principles of righteousness. We have never seen God or Christ with our physical eyes, yet we love them above all else. (1 Peter 1:8.) We have never seen the Apostle Paul, or the Apostle John, yet we love them; for we know their characters are lovable and worthy of admiration. We love the personality which shines from their writings, the beauty of their spirit. We love St. Paul because he counted all things but loss and dross that he might win Christ and be found in Him. We are to love whatever is good and noble and worthy, and in proportion as it is so.

What do we love in each other? Is it the shape of the head, the symmetry of the features, the cut or style of the clothing? Oh, no! We love one another in proportion as we see the Master's likeness in each other. If one is much like Jesus, we love such a one all the more. This is the Heavenly, the spiritual love. This is the kind of love which we are to cultivate day by day. All other affections are to be entirely secondary. Let our love and esteem be for the things that are highly

esteemed in the sight of God; let these be more beautiful to us than all else, that we may become like unto our Father in Heaven.

