

Response to Divine Love

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The blessings which are the portion of those who trust in Christ, and know Him as their Saviour and Lord, are *in themselves* immense and incomparable; forgiveness, peace with God, reconciliation — the heart free to explore the wealth and blessedness of a realm of glory and eternal life.

Yet, is there not more, much more, than this? As we enjoy the blessings so freely bestowed upon us are not our hearts gladdened as we realize that the blessed God finds pleasure and joy in the bestowing of His goodness, and in an affectionate response to Himself? As part of the creation man was intended to yield pleasure to God (Revelation 4: 11) — how sadly he has failed! — his affection so estranged that he worships "the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." Materialism has in great degree dethroned the blessed God in the hearts of men. How graciously God cared for His earthly people, preserving them, providing for them, ever ready to harken to their cry of need. Yet they forsook Him — how often we read "they forsook the Lord their God and served Him not." The last book of the Old testament records in words, almost incredible in their bearing, the hardness of heart and lack of response to the heart of God as He says to them "I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us? (Malachi 1: 2).

John 13, verse 1, tells us of the continuing love of Jesus — "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the *end*". What love had ever enveloped them as they companied with that precious Saviour — every word and deed — His whole pathway filled with divine compassion. Yet in that upper room were the elements of denial, betrayal and complete forsaking. So marvellously loved, and yet unable to watch with Him one hour! The Ephesian church enjoyed the most profound unfolding of divine love — "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge;" they were blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," yet they left their first love — Christ *Himself* no longer the chief Object of their affections.

Dare we exclude ourselves from this defection? Iniquity *does* already abound, and the love of many "*has waxed cold*," but how blessed as consciously in His presence, owning every failure and shortcoming, and yet saying from the very depths of our being, "Lord, *Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.*" Divine love, that which has brought us into immeasurable joy, is more than an objective truth, blessed indeed as that is as we see its glory and fullness manifested in God Himself, for "God is love." It is more than a doctrine; it is something known and experienced *inwardly*, for "the love of God is shed abroad (poured into) in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Thus we have the capacity — not only to know and enjoy divine love, but in the power of the Holy Spirit, love can be the controlling power of all our movements — including that of response to God for "we love, because He first loved us."

In the gospels there are incidents recorded which must have given some cheer to the heart of the "Man of Sorrows." Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10 received his sight — blessed matter indeed — but his heart was evidently attracted to the One who had so blessed him — he cast away all that he had and "followed Jesus in the way." Did not Bartimaeus yield a joy to the heart of Christ which the young man in the same chapter had failed to do? The affection of the woman in Simon's house (Luke 7); the response of the woman in John 4; the worship of the erstwhile blind man of John 9; the homage of the "tenth" leper who returned to give glory to God; the affection and sacrifice of Mary in John 12, were surely instances, not only of thankfulness for blessings received, but appreciative expressions of *who*

the Blesser was! An outstanding example of this is seen in the action of the demon possessed man of Mark 5. He desired to be *with* the One who had so wonderfully delivered him, but was told to "go . . . and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." His immediate reaction was "to publish . . . how great things *Jesus* had done for him." The lowly Jesus was thus recognised as the LORD — the One in whom is supreme authority.

Beloved brethren, as we appreciate the blessings which are ours through grace, may our hearts go out in adoration and praise to the One through whom they have reached us. *Who David* was seemed to have caused Jonathan's heart to cleave to him. Doubtless he had appreciated — perhaps beyond many — the wonderful victory which had been wrought — but it was the person himself to whom Jonathan was attracted (See 1 Samuel 18: 1). 2 Samuel 1: 26 shews the deep appreciation felt by David for the love which Jonathan had towards him; and in 2 Samuel 9 we see the fragrance of that love abiding still in the thoughts of the king whose kindness towards Mephibosheth was "for Jonathan's sake."

Paul the apostle had a deep appreciation of the blessings which had reached him from the blessed God. Writing to Timothy he speaks of himself, "Who before was a blasphemer and persecutor . . . but *mercy* was shown me — the *grace* of our Lord surpassingly overabounded with faith and *love*, which is in Christ Jesus." As he meditates thus upon the mercy, the grace, the divine love which has reached him, and to the effects of which his life is the witness, he bursts into doxology — "Now to the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible only God, honour and glory to the age of ages. Amen. (1 Timothy 1).

Again in the Ephesian epistle, having spoken of the association he had before conversion with "the children of disobedience" he exclaims — "But God, who is *rich in mercy*, for His *great love* wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins;" and then goes on to speak of "the exceeding *riches of His grace* in His *kindness* toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2). Continuing this precious theme throughout Eph. 3 he again bursts into praise — "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.." He would glory only in the cross (Galatians 6: 14) through the sufferings and victory of which every blessing had reached him, spoiling this world in his view and causing him to say again "as *always*, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1: 20, 21). That this precious response should manifest itself in the lives of others caused him to write to the young converts of Thessalonica — "we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the *good pleasure of His goodness*, and the work of faith with power. That the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1: 11, 12).

As we consider, and enjoy, the blessings which are ours, and as our hearts drink in more and more of the precious Lord Jesus Christ through whom those blessings have reached us, may we join in John's happy doxology "To Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to *Him* be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen." (Revelation 1: 5, 6). Note — the verb "loves" is in the present tense — He *has* washed us from our sins; He *has* made us a kingdom — priests to His God" — these are blessed matters which He *has* accomplished and we are brought into the wonderful gain of them; but His love remains and will remain throughout time to the ages of ages, and, thank God, the response to His love and His glory shall be eternal too.

"I will praise the Name of God with song,
and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.

And it shall please Jehovah . . "

Psalm 69: 30, 31