

The Revelation of God

1 John 4: 9, 16

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It is an immense thing to have a *revelation of God*. I do not mean merely a revelation *from* God, but a revelation of God Himself. God has given us both: revelations, again and again, revelations of the most varied character; revelations in the most suitable order; but, most of all, and specially with the view to this, the revelation of Himself, the revelation of Himself *in this world*.

For little as this world may be, compared with other parts of the creation of God, it is here that man is — here now; and this is a very solemn consideration for you and for me. It is here that we are put to the test as moral beings; here that we are lost or saved.

Men may speculate about other worlds, but no man has any real ground to say that God has ever revealed Himself except here, or indeed that there are others to whom He *would* reveal Himself as He has revealed Himself here. May I go farther, and venture to say this — He never revealed Himself anywhere as He has done here? It is here that He sent His Son; it is here that He sent Him to be a man (unspeakable witness of His grace towards man!), and remember when man was fallen. Not till then was there the very smallest word of it from God, but man was no sooner fallen than He speaks; and now the word that God spoke so long past is become a great substantial fact, which puts every heart, every conscience of every man, woman, and child, completely to the proof. Do I prefer sin to God? Do I prefer my selfishness, my misery, the darkness and guilt of sin, to God and His grace?

For when God did send His Son into the world, it was to deal with sin, it was to deal with Satan, it was to bring in what man could find nowhere, else, LIFE — eternal life! Life that could feel according to God, life that could have pleasure in the presence of God, life that could take delight in the will of God, life capable of knowing and enjoying God! And where was this found? Where is it? Is it in man's heart? In ordinances? Nowhere but in the Son of God! But (wondrous to see now) the Son of God a real man! certainly much more than a man, but a man. He was God from everlasting to everlasting, but He became a MAN. Assuredly He did not cease to be God; nor will He ever cease to be a man! and there it is that God has given in itself the most astonishing pledge and proof that He has no designs against man, nay, that He had the fullest love towards man.

Yet this was what man was so slow to credit. And why so? Most of all because he is a sinner. He has a bad conscience; he is afraid of God. And good reason he has to be afraid of God, as far as he is concerned; the best reason has he if there be none other than he. But there is. There is one man that is

God — I will not say like God. He is never said to be "like God." And I will tell you why. Because He is God. He is said to be the "image of God." He has given me to see what God is. He has brought the very image of God before my heart, before me in *this world*. He is the "image of the invisible God." But He is never called His likeness, for this were to deny His glory. He is God's very transcript. He is the true God and Eternal Life; and this is the One that God sent into the world to save, to save all that believe — not to be a judge, yet He *will* judge. Every man, as man, nay, every man absolutely, must give account — I do not say be judged. Every man as man must be judged, but every soul, every saint even, must give account of all that he has done in the body.

You observe that I have spoken of a difference in these two things, and there is one. It is not understood generally, but I will tell you what and why it is. It is because salvation is not understood! Thanks be to God, people do not lose salvation because they do not understand it. Wretched were it so, that is, if God only blessed according to their measure, but He blesses according to Christ. And is there any measure there? On the contrary, what a fulness, fulness infinite, according to Himself, according to all His grace and His truth.

Such is the Saviour! Is He yours? Do you know Him? Tell me not that He cannot be known. Are you a heathen, or a Jew? You, a Christian, to say that God cannot be known! What sort of Christianity is that? More guilty than Judaism or even heathenism. A heathen, just because he was a heathen, had not the knowledge of God. He had therefore gone after false gods, gods that were no gods. No wonder *he* should say God cannot be known; but even a Jew knew something about God, though he did not know God Himself. And you who take the place of being a "Christian," even if it be on the slenderest confession, be it so! But what Christianity is based upon is this, that God has revealed Himself; yet *you*, you call yourself a "Christian," and do *not* know Him! perishing, in the presence of the richest abundance! dying, although eternal life has come here in the person of the Saviour!

It is for sinners, life has come; not for those who have life. Though I grant that all that can strengthen, all that can fill the heart, all that can guide and bless, is found in that same One who is "Eternal Life." But I ask, For whom was He sent, and for what? Here we have it. "In this was manifested the love of God towards us; in that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." And this is so true that no man can see the Son and believe in the Son, without having eternal life. So this very inspired writer says; and you must remember an inspired writer means one who gives the sure unfailing truth of God. It is impossible for God to lie, and this is the way He speaks in His word. Surely there is One who had the words of God when He was here. He is the Word of God. But the apostle says, "He that knoweth God, heareth us." He could be known, then. The apostles were raised up, they were inspired, for the very purpose of communicating God's word.

"Hearth us." One does not pretend to be above the apostles, or to do without the apostles, for we have their writings, but hears them. "He that is not of God heareth not us." And do you hear not the apostles? When you say that God cannot be known, you certainly do not hear the apostles. You never learned that from them. On the contrary, you have learned it from men who speak as of the world, and the world hears them. I do not say they speak "for" the apostles, for they speak against their word, though they may call themselves, ever so much, their successors. And this is exactly the state in which Christendom now is. These high pretensions always go with denying the sure present knowledge of God by faith.

THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM

But let us hear what he says who writes these divine words: "In this was manifested the love of

God towards us, in that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." This was His very object. There was no life here, nor could life be got through any other. It was not enough to point to the Son in heaven; that would not satisfy God. No, God sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him; and it is in this way that souls do live. He sets before us this One, and tells us who the Son of God is, even Jesus — undoubtedly the son of man, but the Son of God, the only-begotten Son of the Father, yet God just as much as His Father. You are a man if you are the son of your father. In a still more glorious, ineffable way was the only-begotten Son of God Son of the Father. And in this also it is that God triumphs, because man had only believed a lie, judging of God by Himself — the sure way to be lost. You cannot by searching find out God. The Son of God, "the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Thus the simplest believer knows the only true God; there is none he knows so well. He is known by my need, by my wants, in His own divine love and skill meeting me where I am and in spite of all that I am.

It is evident that, if the only-begotten Son was sent into the world that we might live through Him, there was no life without Him, for life does not mean mere existence. True, the soul is immortal, but the immortality of the soul does not hinder the soul from being lost. The soul is immortal; and, further, the body will be raised. Oh! it is an awful thought that the body will be raised to be bound to the guilty soul, that both soul and body should prove what it is to have despised God — to have hated Him — and to have proved it by despising the Son. It is not merely for his sins that man is lost, but because he refused this unspeakable love of God who sent His Son. He is too proud, too given up to selfishness; he does not want to give up his sins, above all, he will not be beholden to God; he would rather risk it.

There it is that the Spirit of grace works to touch the conscience of the sinner. Where does he turn then? To the very God he has wronged, avoided, dreaded, hated too. There is no surer proof of hatred than that you never care to see a person's face. Now you who have not the knowledge of God, is not this what you would like best — if you could only be sure you could always escape God; if you could go on as you like, and never face God, never have to give account of your sins? If you could go on with your pursuits, your pleasures, without being cast into hell, would you not like that? You are dead in sins!

But the Spirit of God, when He works, makes the truth quickening. I am a sinner. I am ashamed to think of my sins, ashamed to tell them to God. I feel I have been most guilty. Yet such an one turns by Christ to God. He confesses his guilt, cost what it may. If God were to cast him into hell on the confession of his guilt, it would be just, and man must justify God. He tells it all out to God. He must draw near — the consciously shameful, shameless, guilty soul — and pour out the confession of his sins into the ear of God. And what does God tell out to him? "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, in that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS

Is that all? Most blessed it is, but not all. Then we find immediately in a still fuller way God coming in to that poor soul feeling its state, its incapacity to love God, and it learns, "Herein is love, not that we loved God," but the very reverse. We endeavoured to escape God, we desired not the knowledge of His ways. Such was our wretched history. But "He loved us and sent His Son, the propitiation for our sins." It was not enough "that we might live through Him"; because, if we lived, if we felt what was due to God, if we had a desire to do the will of God, it must be still immense misery,

and constant fear, in the sense of His holiness and of our utter unfitness for His presence.

When there is no life one tries to get rid of God's presence — to drown oneself in pleasure; one turns even duties into ruin by occupying oneself with anything to shut out the sense of having to do with God. But where there is a conscience, one must go to Him. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," said one of old. There is a distinct desire after Him, while one maintains His righteous character. But how little is He known as Saviour, for this is what He is — One who has thoughts of good, and not of evil — One who (when a man thus espouses the cause of God against himself, when he heeds the word that condemns him out and out) sent His Son the propitiation, for my sins! Thus not only does He give a nature that hates sin, but the mighty work of the Lord Jesus Christ is to take away all my guilt out of His sight. Ah! there is love indeed — not merely that I might have spiritual feelings instead of natural religion, not merely that I might groan over my evil, but that I might be justified. And this is secured by the work of Christ's atonement for me. I see it in all its perfection. He sent His Son for me to live, for Him to die! What does He give me in His death? Propitiation for my sins. In this twofold way God has proved His love.

It is in this world — in no world but this — that eternal life is given. It is not to any other world but here that Jesus came. We have not the smallest ground to believe that the Son of God ever came, ever died, in any world but this. God is not looking for great people but for wretched sinners. He is not looking for great worlds any more than people, but a sinful earth! He is seeking wretched sinners. But now that the Son is come and I believe in Him, He is my life, and my sins are sent away. Is that not enough? No; He is coming to take me on high. Would you like to be in heaven? No place you would enjoy so little, if in your sins! You would dread it, although you do not like to say so, more than any spot in God's creation. The light, the love, the holiness of God, would be unbearable to you. But God, who has searched you through and through sent His Son. Why? He has but one Son — the only begotten, yet His Son was sent to sinners. He is the "propitiation for our sins." Why fear, if you believe on Him?

The glory of His person is maintained. Take a poor guilty woman caught in the vilest sin. The moment Christ speaks a word, they who had accused her were the first to turn from His presence. Thus the glory of the Lord, the light in His person, is far more confounding than in the law. One ray from Him — they fled from His presence! What will it be with you when you stand to give account of yourself to God? Stand and give account *now*. Faith does not wait for the day of judgment. Those who believe are willing to tell out their sins now. What do they find? Judgment? Life eternal, a new nature, the knowledge and love of God, their sins forgiven. Men say that they believe in the remission of sins. Well, are your sins gone? "Oh no," you will answer. Is there then no such thing as the certainty of the truth? If I do not know them gone, can I say truly that I know God? It is not a question of activity, or depth, of mind. Thank God the gospel is for the poor, and for persons of feeble mind too, for God has saved many such. It has nothing to do with any particular power of this kind; but I will tell you with what it has to do — with my bowing to God's word that condemns me and puts me down as a sinner without life, who yet has his sins; and there they are, crying out for the judgment of God. My being such a sinner is a shame to me, but to believe in His Son is life and glory. Oh, what delight God has in having souls who believe in His Son! Do you suppose it honours God to wait, to hesitate? Do you suppose that not to receive His word is the way to believe? May God give you to hearken, to believe and to know what this is by the Spirit of God! Naturally you are afraid, and indifferent, or hostile, because you are full of self-will and bent upon pleasing yourself; and this with consciousness of sin, with judgment before you, but in presence of God sending His only-begotten Son to bless you in His love if you bow to Him now.

But there are those who receive Christ, and what is the result? They possess the fulness of God's love. Who are they? Every believer. There is no believer that has not life according to it. It may be very feeble — that is, there may be what is of himself which shrouds and enfeebles — and God has His way of taking down all that thus hinders His own work; but I affirm that every soul thus born of God loves God. The apostle does not say 'We ought to love God' because we *do*. It is a necessity of the new nature, of the life of God, in every believer. But he does say, "We ought to love one another" — we love God, but as to one another — well, one sees plenty of faults, and surely (if conscience is in the light of God) most in oneself. Doubtless this hinders, but God has His way of using all for good, while humbling us for our faults. Do you think God loves His children less because they are faulty? You have a child that other people don't think much of, whatever *you* do. But do you love that child less because of its faults? It may be you spoil the poor child. I scarce ever knew a parent that had not his affections, his heart, drawn out by those faults of the child. God loves us, and this love is so real that our faults only draw out the wonderful resources of His love. If you love a child of yours it is thus with you. I do not mean God makes light of anything wrong: but He never turns aside His love, and people who think so do not know God as He has revealed Himself. They have a very feeble knowledge of who and what He is.

HE HATH GIVEN US OF HIS SPIRIT

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us." When Christ was here He was the great witness, and now, wonderful to say, Christians are the witness. Oh, how ashamed of ourselves we ought to be when our levity blots out the testimony God looks for in this world! It is a great deal more than knowing the love. Now if one of us had written these words, he must have been thought most presumptuous. Yet are they true. Hereby we know, "because He hath given us of His Spirit." I admit it is a very strong word, and that no man could have ever said it or gathered it except by divine teaching. The apostle writes it calmly and quietly, as the real truth about the Christian, "because He hath given us of His Spirit."

It is not merely "the Spirit," because the Spirit was given occasionally to persons who were not renewed. Mighty power wrought in people, said to be partakers of the Spirit, who were not born of God. Here it is more than that. "He hath given us of His Spirit" implies, not merely power but communion of nature, and that is the force of the difference. It is what characterises God's own nature, and that is the force of the difference: It is what characterises God's own nature and that in divine power, and this is what belongs to the Christian now. It is not only life. The Lord Jesus is eternal life, and we live by Him. Perhaps there is some soul miserable enough here, who yet has eternal life. If I do not give God credit that He has truly blotted out my sins, I cannot have peace. If I really believe God's love that the Saviour came down for it, why am I still troubled about my sins?

'But I don't walk as I ought.' Well, my dear friend, let us settle one thing at a time. There is no such encouragement for walk afterwards as that all is secured between God and the soul. The Holy Ghost is given, sealing the person and working in this new divine nature. That is what I call the communion of nature, the Holy Ghost being the power. Now the result of this is, that we not only go to God, but we *dwell in God*. Is not this much more than going to Him in time of trouble? It is not merely occasional visits, nor merely that life is eternal, but as the Holy Ghost, dwells in us, so we dwell in God.

THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD

"And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (ver. 14). That is the effect of being thus blessed of God. We have a special testimony to which we are called. The apostle does not speak about the law; God has put the Christian on an entirely different ground. It is not commandments, though there are commandments that are most suited, because there is a Living Person to obey. There is a Divine Person that has quickened us, sealed us, and come down as power; not merely to cheer us, not merely as Comforter. The Holy Ghost is always the Spirit of power. It is in communion with God, with His mind and His affections; and this is what characterises the Christian. "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." "We have seen" — what a sight! Greater than Moses ever saw! It was never made known till He (the Lord Jesus) came that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Now it is the testimony of every Christian. The believer who does not testify this does not understand Christianity. The truth has been spoiled; there is that which is wrong mixed up with it. Half Jewish, half Christian, are their thoughts; but here it is Christian testimony, that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour," not merely of Israel, but "of the world." No matter how bad, how distant, how dark, the individual sinner might be found, He is the Saviour; and such a Saviour could not be confined to any portion of mankind.

CONFESSING JESUS THE SON OF GOD

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (ver. 15). Whosoever shall confess! Oh, weigh it well, you that have never yet confessed. Here is what will save your soul. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God (not merely shall be saved, but) *God dwelleth in him and he in God.*" Oh, what a wonderful thing! Is this true? Nothing more so. How is it made true? The Holy Ghost has taken His place in that man, that woman, that child. "God dwelleth in him," and as a consequence of it, "he in God." The heart has an abiding rest in God. I am certain of God; I can be certain of no one else. You may have perhaps that most faithful, blameless, devoted friend. Ah, you are not always certain of your friend. There may come the moment when you will be disappointed; but never in God. The simplest Christian knows it. I do not say he may not be foolish and forget, but he knows it is his folly. The apostle is looking at the consequence of thus confessing that Jesus is the Son of God. It is there that God dwells. It was not miraculous outward power, but what was always greater, what could not be seen. "Jesus died and rose again." Is that all? "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

WE HAVE KNOWN AND BELIEVED THE LOVE

"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us" (ver. 16). He goes back to the same great truth. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Now, observe the change of order here.

The reason is this. Where he is speaking of the confession of Christ, the object is to give the soul confidence in Him who fills the soul with His own pure grace. He has received the Spirit. The consequence is that his heart goes out to God. But now he is walking like a Christian; he is dwelling in love. Instead of being occupied with evil he is occupied with love, and dwelling in love. What is the consequence? "He dwelleth in God," he rises above all that is here, and the result is that God puts fresh blessing upon him, working in power, God dwells in him.

Not merely is it the fact of the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, true as it is. First of all, God gives

him the Spirit. God dwells in him and he in God. "Hereby we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." Then, as the effect of that, my heart goes out to Him; I have confidence in Him; I spread out great and small into His bosom. But if I am walking in love, in the midst of all that is calculated to act upon the flesh and distract, God makes me enjoy fresh blessing, acting in me by the Spirit. It is not merely the fact of having the Holy Ghost, but God working in us by it — and not less than this is the Christian's portion. The least Christian should say that God dwells in him and he in God; but the most spiritual cannot rise beyond this, that, as he dwells in God, God dwells in him. This is the privilege of communion, as that is of faith. And if I know the one, I ought to seek the other. If blessed by grace let us walk in the fellowship of His love (Gal. 5: 25).

Oh, may those that confess Jesus to be the Son of God not fear to take their stand, that this is the truth, that this is their portion. Blessed portion! for if God dwells in me, and I in Him, He is training me in that which will be the greatest joy for eternity. Of course then only will all the hindrances be gone, and the circumstances in which we now are; but I am not speaking of circumstances, but of God dwelling in me and I in Him. This is the portion that grace gives to the simplest confessor of Jesus. Fear not then to take it, fear not to confess Him. This honours God if I speak and act upon the truth of God. If this be the case, I can confide in Him for everything. It is not only a hope; it is not merely cherishing desires. It is a great, glorious, divine fact for faith only. It is not that blessedness first, and *then* I believe: I believe first, and then the blessedness comes. Next follows deep enjoyment, which becomes powerful in our dependence on God, and works according to God.

May the Lord bless His own word, both to those who do confess, and to those who have never yet confessed, that Jesus is the Son of God! Amen.

W. K.