**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-072**. **THE GIFTS OF THE PRESENT CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."*

*John 14:20-21*

We have heard our Lord in the previous verse unveiling His deepest and strongest encouragements to His downcast followers. These were: His presence with them, their true sight of Him, and their participation in His life. The first part of our present text is closely connected with these, for it gives us their upshot and consequence. Because Christ's true disciple is conscious of Christ's presence, sees Him with the eyes of his spirit, and draws life from Him, therefore he will know by experience the deep truths of Christ's indwelling at once in the Father and in His servant, and of His servant's indwelling in Him. Our Lord had just previously been exhorting His disciples to believe that He was in the Father and the Father in Him; and had been gently wondering at the slowness of their faith. Now He tells them that, when He is gone, their spiritual stature will be so increased as that they shall know the thing which, with Him by their side, they found it so hard to believe.

The second part of our present text is the close of this whole section of our Lord's discourse, and in it He urges the requirement of practical obedience, as the sign and test of love, and as the condition of receiving these high and wonderful things of which He has been speaking. He has been unveiling spiritual blessings, which may seem recondite and up in the clouds, and which, as a matter of fact, have often been perverted into dreamy mysticisms of a most immoral and unpractical kind. And so He brings us sharp back again here to very plain truths, and would teach us that all these lofty and ineffable gifts of which He has been dimly speaking are to be reached only by the commonplace road of honest obedience and simple conformity to His commandments. In these last words of my text, He administers the antidote and the check to the possible abuses of the great things which He has been saying.

**I. Note, then, first, the knowledge that comes with the Christ who comes.**

At that daycovers the whole period of which He has been speaking, between His withdrawal from the disciples and His final corporeal coming to judgment--that great day of which generations are but the moments. In it the men who love Him are to have His presence, His vision, His life, and because they have, Ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you, The principle that underlies these wonderful words is that Christian experience is the best teacher of fundamental Christian truth. Observe with what decision, and with what strange boldness, our Lord carries that principle into regions where we might suppose at first sight that it was altogether inapplicable. Ye shall know that I am in My Father. How can such a thing as the relation between Christ and God ever be a matter of consciousness to us here upon earth? Must it not always be a truth that we must take on trust and believe because we have been told it, without having any verification in ourselves? Not so; remember what has gone before. If a man has the consciousness of Christ's presence with Him, sees Him with the true inward eye, which is the only real organ of real vision, and is drawing from Him, moment by moment, His own high and immortal life, then is it not true that this man's experiences are of such a sort as to be utterly inexplicable, except on the ground that they come from a divine source? If I have these experiences I know that it is Jesus Christ who gives them, and I know that He could not give them, if He did not dwell in God and were not divine. These new influences, this revolution in my being, this healing, constraining, cleansing touch, these calming, gladdening, elevating powers, these new hopes, these reversed desires, loving all to which I was formerly indifferent, and growing dead to all that formerly appealed most strongly to me; all these things bear upon their very front the signature that they are wrought by a divine hand, and as sure as I am of my own Christian consciousness, so sure am I that all its experiences proclaim their Author, and that Christ who gives me them is in God. Ye shall know that I am in My Father.

The New Testament, as I read it, is full at every point of the divinity of Jesus Christ; and many profound and learned arguments on that subject have been urged by theologians, and these are all well and needful in their places, but the true way to be sure of it is to have Him dwelling with us and working in us; and then what was an article of belief becomes an article of knowledge, and we know Him to be our Saviour and the Son of God.

In like manner, and yet more obviously, the other elements of this knowledge which Christ promises here may be shown to flow naturally and necessarily from Christian experiences. That ye are in Me, and I in you,--if a Christian man carries the consciousness of Christ's presence, and has Him as a Sun in his darkness, and as a Life-source feeding his deadness with life, then he knows with a consciousness which is irrefragable that Jesus Christ is in him, for he feels His touch; and he knows that he is in Christ, for he is aware of the power that girdles him, and in which he has peace and righteousness and all.

So, dear brethren, let us learn what the Christian man's experience ought to be and to do for him. It should change the articles of our creed into elements of our consciousness. It should make all the fundamentals of the Gospel vitally and vividly true; and certified by what has passed within our own spirits We should be able to say: We have the witness in ourselves. And though there will remain much that is uncertain, much in Christian doctrine which is not capable of that clear and all-sufficing verification; much about which we must still depend on the mere teaching of others, or on our own study, the central facts which make the Gospel may all become, by this plain and short path, elements of our very consciousness which stand undeniable to us, whosoever denies them.

Such a direct way to knowledge is reasonable, is in full analogy with the manner by which we attain to the knowledge of everything except the mere external facts, the knowledge of which has arrogated to itself the exclusive name of science, How do you know anything about love? You may read poems and tragedies to the end of time, and you will not understand it until you come under its spell for yourself; and then all the things that men said about it cease to be mere words, because you yourself have experienced the emotion.

He must be loved, ere that to you

He will seem worthy of your love,

and the only way to be sure, with a vital certitude, of Christ, is to take Christ for your very own, and then He comes into your very being, and dwells there quickening, the Sun and the Life.

So, dear brethren, though such certitude arising from experience, which in its nature is the very highest, is not available for other people, the fact that so many millions of men allege that in varying degrees they possess this certitude is available for other people, and there is nothing to be said by the unbeliever to this, the attestation of the Christian consciousness to the truth of the truths which it has tried. Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not. You may jangle as much as you like about the questionable and controversial points that surround the Christian revelation, I do not care in the present connection what answer you give to them. Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. And we may push the war into the enemy's quarters, and say: Why! herein is a marvellous thing, that you that know everything do not know whence this man is, and yet He has opened mine eyes. You want facts; there are some. You want verification; we have verified by experience, and we set to our seals that God is true.

Oh but, you say, this is not a fair account of the way in which Christian men and women generally feel about this matter. Well, all that I can say about that is, so much the worse for the so-called Christian men and women. And if they are Christians, and do not know by this inward experience that Christ is divine and their Saviour, then there is only one of two reasons to be given for it; either their experience is so wretchedly superficial and fragmentary, so rudimentary as to be scarcely worth calling by the name or, having the facts, they have failed to appreciate their significance, and to make their own by reflection the certitudes which are their own.

Brethren, it becomes every Christian man and woman to be able to say, Because I have Christ with me, and see Him, and derive my life from Him, I know that He is in the Father, and I in Him, and He in me. And if you cannot say that, it is your own grasp of Him, or your meditation upon what you have got by your grasp, that is painfully and sinfully defective.

**II. My text speaks of the obedience which is the sign and test of love.**

The words here are substantially equivalent to former words in the chapter which we have already considered, where our Lord says: If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments.

There is, however, a slight difference in the point of view in the two sayings; the former begins with the root and traces it upwards and outwards to its fruits, love blossoming into obedience. Our text reverses the process, and takes the thing by the other end; begins with the fruits and traces them downwards and inwards to the root. He that hath and keepeth My commandments, he it is that loveth Me. The two sayings substantially mean the same thing; but in the one love is put first as the cause of obedience, and in the other obedience is put first, as the certain fruit and sure sign of love. The connection between these and the preceding words is, as I have already pointed out, that our Lord here brings all His lofty promises down to the sharp, practical requirement of obedience, as the only condition on which they can be fulfilled.

So note, and very briefly about this matter, how remarkably our Lord here declares the possession of His commandments to be a sign of love to Him. He that hath, a word which is generally passed over in our reading--He that hath My commandments, He it is that loveth Me. Of course there are two ways of having His commandments; there is having them in the Bible, and there is having them in the heart;--present before my eye, as a law that I ought to obey, or present within my will, as a power that shapes it. And the latter is the only kind of havingthat Christ regards as real and valid. The rest is only preparatory and superficial. Love possesses the knowledge of the loved one's will. Is not that true? Do we not all know how strange is the power of divining desires that goes along with true affection, and how the power, not only of divining, but of treasuring, these desires is the test and the thermometer of our true love? Some of us, perhaps, keep laid away in sacred, secret places tattered, yellow, old bits of paper with the words of a dear one on them, that we would not part with. He that hath My commandmentslaid up in lavender in the deepest recesses of his faithful heart, he it is that loveth Me.

In like manner, our Lord says, the practical obedience to His commandments is the sure sign and test of love. I need not dwell upon that. There are two motives for keeping commandments--one because they are commanded, and one because we love Him that commands. The one is slavery, the other is liberty. The one is like the Arctic regions, cold and barren, the other is like tropical lands, full of warmth and sunshine, glorious and glad fertility.

The form of the sentence suggests how easy it is for people to delude themselves about their love to Jesus Christ. That emphatic he, and the putting first of the character before its root is pointed out, are directed against false pretensions to love. The love that Christ stamps with His hall-mark, and passes as genuine, is no mere emotion, however passionate, however sweet; no mere sentiment, however pure, however deep. The tiniest little rivulet that drives a mill is better than a Niagara that rushes and foams and tumbles idly. And there is much so-called love to Jesus Christ that goes masquerading up and down the world, from which the paint is stripped by the sharp application of the words of my text. Character and conduct are the true demonstrations of Christian love, and it is only love so attested that He accepts.

**III. Lastly, notice the further and sweeter gifts of divine love and manifestation which reward our love and obedience.**

He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. Two things, then, He tells us, are the rich rewards and sparkling crowns with which He crowns our poor love to Him--the love of the Father and the love of the Christ, separate and yet united, and the further manifestation of Christ's sweetness to the waiting heart.

Note, as to the first, the extraordinary boldness of that majestic saying: If a man loves Me, My Father will love him. God regards our love to Jesus Christ as the fulfilling of the law, as equivalent to our supreme love to Himself, as containing in it the germ of all that is pleasing in His sight. And so, upon our hearts, if we love Christ, there falls the benediction of the Father's love. Of course I need not remind you that our Lord here is not beginning at the very beginning of everything; for prior to all men's love to Christ is Christ's love to men, and ours to Him is but the reflection and the echo called forth by His to us. We love Him because He first loved usdigs a story deeper down in the building than the words of my text, which is speaking, not of the process by which a man comes to receive the love of God for the first time, but of the process by which a Christian man grows in his possession of it. That being understood, here is a great lesson. It is not all the same to God whether a man is a scoundrel or a saint. The divine love is over all its works, and embraces every variety of humanity, the most degraded, alien, hostile. But in this generation, as it seems to me, there is great need for preaching that whilst that is gloriously and blessedly true, the other thing is just as true, that to know the deepest depth and to taste the sweetest sweetness of the love of our Father God, there must be in our hearts love to Him whom He has sent, which manifests itself by our obedience. God's love is a moral love; and whilst the sunbeams play upon the ice and melt it sometimes, they flash back from, and rest most graciously and fully on, the rippling stream into which the ice has turned. God loves them that love Him not, but the depths of His heart and the secret, sacred favours of His grace can only be bestowed upon those who in some measure are conformed, and are growingly being conformed, to His likeness in Jesus Christ, and who love Him and obey Him.

And, in like manner, my text tells us that if we wish to know all that it is possible for us here, amidst the clouds, and shadows, and darknesses, to know of that dear Lord, the path to such knowledge is plain. Walk in the way of obedience, and Christ will meet you with the unveiling of more and more of His love. To live what we believe is the sure way to increase its amount. To be faithful to the little is the certain way to inherit the much. And Christ manifests Himself, in all deep and recondite sweetness, gentleness, constraining power, to the men who treasure the partial knowledge as yet possessed, in their loving hearts and obedient wills, and who make a conscience of translating all their knowledge into conduct, and of basing all their conduct on knowledge of Him. He gives us His whole self at the first, but we traverse the breadth of the gift by degrees. He puts Himself into our hands and into our hearts when we humbly trust Him and imperfectly try to love Him. But the flower is but a bud when we get it, and, as we hold it, it opens its petals to the light.

So, if any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine; and if, touched by His divine love and infinite sacrifice for me, I cast my poor self upon Him, and try to love Him back again, and to keep His commandments because I love, then day by day I shall realise more and more of His strong, immortal, all-satisfying love, and see more and more deeply into that Saviour, whose infinite beauties remain unrevealed after all revelation, and to know more and more of whom shall be the Heaven of Heavens yonder, as it is the joy and life of the soul here.