

II.

The Work of Grace a Unit.

“Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.”— *Rom. v. 5.*

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The final end of all God’s ways is that He may be all in all. He can not cease from working until He has entered the souls of individual men. He thirsts after the creature’s love. In man’s love for God He desires to see the virtues of His own love glorified. And love must spring from man’s personal being, which has its seat in the heart.

The work of grace exhibited in the eternal counsel can never be sufficiently praised. From Paradise to Patmos, revealed to prophets and apostles, it is transcendently rich and glorious. Prepared in Immanuel, who ascended on high, who has received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them, it exceeds the praise of men and angels. And yet its highest glory and majesty appear only when, overcoming the rebellious, operating in the soul, it causes its light so to shine that men, seeing it, glorify the Father which is in heaven.

Hence the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the crowning event of all the great events of salvation, because it reveals *subjectively, i.e.* in individual persons, the grace revealed hitherto objectively.

Assuredly in the days of the Old Covenant saving grace wrought in individuals, but it always bore a preliminary and special character. Old-Covenant believers “received not the promise, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (*Heb. xi. 39, 40*) And the dispensation of personal salvation, in its normal character, began only when, the work of reconciliation being finished, Immanuel risen, the other Comforter had come inwardly to enrich the members of the Body of Christ.

Hence the purpose of the Triune God steadily urges to this glorious consummation. The divine compassion can not cease from working so long as the work of saving the individual soul is not begun. In all the preparatory work God aims persistently at His elect; not only after the fall, but even before creation, His wisdom rejoiced in His earthly world, and “His delights were with the sons of men.” (*Prov. viii. 31*) From eternity He foreknows all in whom His glorious light shall once be kindled. They are no strangers to Him, discovered only after the lapse of ages, upon examination either to be passed by as unprofitable, or to be wrought upon as proper and useful subjects, according to their respective merits; no, our faithful Covenant God never stands as a stranger before any of His creatures. He created them all and ordained how they should be created; they are not first created, then ordained; but ordained, then created. Even then the creature is not independent of the Lord, but *before* there is a word upon his tongue He knoweth it altogether; not by information of what already existed, but by divine knowledge of what was to come. Even the relations of cause and effect

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connecting the various parts of his life lie naked and open before Him; nothing is hid from Him; and much more intimately than man knows himself, God knows him.

The waters of salvation descending from the mountain-tops of God's holiness do not flow toward unknown fields, but their channel is prepared, and leaping over the mountain-sides they greet the acres below which they are to water.

Hence, altho clearness demands divisions and subdivisions in the work of grace, yet they do not actually exist; the work of grace is a *unit*, it is one eternal, uninterrupted act, proceeding from the womb of eternity, unceasingly moving toward the consummation of the glory of the children of God which shall be revealed in the great and notable Day of the Lord. For instance, altho in the moment of regeneration God calleth the things that are not, with all that they contain as in a germ, yet it should not be represented as tho He had neglected that soul for twenty or thirty years. For even this apparent neglect. is a divine work. Constrained by His love He would rather have turned to His chosen but lost creature immediately, to seek and save it. But He refrained Himself, if we may so express it; for this very neglect, this hiding of His countenance works together as a means of grace, in the hour of love, to make grace efficient in that soul.

Hence the salvation of a soul in its personal being is an eternal, uninterrupted, continuous act, whose starting-point lies in the decree whose end is in the glorification before the throne. It contains nothing formal or mechanical. There is not a period of eighteen centuries first, during which God is occupied with the preparation of objective grace, without a single gracious work in individual souls. Neither is there salvation prepared only for possible souls whose salvation was still uncertain. Nay, the love of God never works toward the *unknown*. He is perfect, and His way is perfect; hence His love, always bears the high and holy mark of proceeding from heart to heart, from person to person, knowing and reading one with perfect knowledge. During all the day while Cain was being judged; while Noah and his eight were safe in the ark; while Abraham was called, and Moses talked with Jehovah face to face; while the seers were prophesying, the Baptist appeared in public, Jesus ascended Calvary, and St. John was seeing visions—throughout all those ages God foreknew us (if we are His own), the pressure of His love went out steadily toward us, He called us before we were, in order that we might come into being, and when we had come into being, He led us all our days. Even when we rebelled against Him and He turned. His face from us, even then He led us as our true and faithful Shepherd. Surely all things *must* work together for good to them that love God, even the lives and characters of their ancestor—for they are the called according to His purpose.

Instead of being cold and formal, it is rather one act of love, energizing, pouring forth, shedding itself abroad. From its fountain-head on the highest mountains, traversing many highlands before it can reach you, divine love flows on, ever restless, until it pours itself forth into *your soul*. Hence the apostle boasts that at last love had attained this blessed end

in his person and in Rome's beloved church. "Now we have peace with God, *because* the love of God (moving toward us from eternity) at last has reached us, and is now *shed abroad in our heart.*"

And this does not mean that now we possess a pure love of our own, but that *the love of God* for His elect, having descended from on high and overcome every obstacle, has poured itself into the deep bed of our regenerated hearts. And to this He adds the grace of making the soul understand, drink, and taste of that love. And when in contrition and shamefacedness the soul loses itself in love's delights and in the adorations of its eternal compassion, then His glory shines with greater brightness, and His rejoicings with the children of men are complete.

However, while the Triune God anticipates from before the foundation of the world the ingathering and glorification of the saints, Scripture clearly reveals that this ingathering and glorification is the adorable work of the Holy Spirit. God's love is shed abroad in our hearts by *the Holy Spirit* who is given unto us.

The Scripture gives this work of the Spirit a prominent place; not to the exclusion of the Father and the Son, yet so that this personal work is always effected by the Holy Spirit. And the Scripture puts this so strongly that the Catechism speaks, not incorrectly, of three things in our most holy faith: of God the Father and our Creation, of God the Son and our Redemption, and then only of God the Holy Ghost and our Sanctification. And this is not surprising. For—

First, as we have seen already, in the economy of the Triune God it is the Holy Spirit who comes in closest contact with the creature and fills him. Hence it is His peculiar work to enter man's heart, and in its recesses to proclaim God's grace until he believes.

Second, He brings every work of the Triune God to its consummation. Hence He perfects the work of objective grace by the saving of souls, thus realizing its final purpose.

Third, He quickens life. He hovers over the waters of chaos, and breathes into man the breath of life. In perfect harmony with this, the sinner dead in trespasses and sin can not live except he be quickened by the Spirit of all quickening, whom the Church has always invoked, saying: "Veni, Creator Spiritus."

Fourth, He takes the things of Christ and glorifies Him. The Son does not distribute His treasures, but the Holy Spirit. And since the entire salvation of the redeemed consists in the fact that their dead and withered hearts are joined to Christ, the Source of salvation, we must praise the Holy Spirit for doing it.

Hence in the constraining desire of divine love for the individual salvation of chosen but lost creatures, the work of the Holy Spirit evidently occupies the most conspicuous place. Our knowledge of God is not complete except we know Him as the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But as "no man cometh to the Father but by Me," ([John xiv. 6](#)) and

“no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him,” (Matt. xi. 27) so no man can come to the Son but by the Holy Spirit, and no man can know the Son if the Holy Spirit does not reveal Him unto him.

But this does not imply any separation, even in thought, between the Persons of the Godhead. This would destroy the confession of the Trinity, substituting for it the false confession of tri-theism. Nay, it is eternally the same God subsisting in three Persons. The truth of our confession shines in the very acknowledgment of the unity in the Trinity. The Father is never without the Son, nor the Son without the Father. And the Holy Spirit can never come to us nor work in us except the Father and the Son cooperate with Him.



III.

Analysis Necessary.

“Let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation.” —*Heb. vi. 1.*

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To systematize the work of the Holy Spirit in individuals, we must first consider their spiritual condition *before* conversion.

Misunderstanding concerning this leads to error and confusion. It causes the various operations of the Holy Spirit to be confounded, so that the same terms are used to designate different things. And this confuses one’s own thought, and leads others astray. This is most seriously apparent in ministers who discuss this subject in general terms, artlessly avoid definiteness, and consequently reiterate the same platitudes.

Such preaching makes little or no impression; its monotone is wearisome; it accustoms the ear to repetitions; it lacks stimulus for the inward ear. And the mind, which can not remain inactive with impunity, seeks relief in its own way, often in unbelief, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The words “heart,” “mind,” “soul,” “conscience,” “inward man” are used indiscriminately. There are *frequent* calls for conversion, regeneration, renewing of life, justification, sanctification, and redemption; while the ear has not been accustomed to understand in each of these a special thing and a peculiar revelation of the work of the Holy Spirit. And in the end this chaotic preaching makes it impossible to discuss divine things intelligently, since one initiated and more thoroughly instructed can not be understood.

We solemnly protest especially against the pious appearance that conceals the inward hollowness of this preaching by saying! “My simple Gospel has no room for these hair-splitting distinctions; they savor of the dry scholasticism with which quibbling minds terrify God’s dear children, and bring them under the bondage of the letter. Nay, the Gospel of my Lord must remain to me full of life and spirit: therefore spare me these subtleties.”

And no doubt there is some truth in this. By a dry analysis of soul-refreshing truth, abstract minds often rob simple souls of much comfort and joy. They discuss spiritual things in the mongrel terms of Anglicized Latin, as tho souls could have no part with Christ unless they be experts in the use of these bastard words. Such terrifying of the weak betrays pride and self-exaltation. And a very foolish pride it is, for the boasted knowledge is readily acquired by mere effort of the memory. Such externalizing of the Christian faith is offensive. It substitutes glibness of tongue for genuine piety, and mental justification for that of faith. Thus piety of the heart moves to the head, and instead of the Lord Jesus Christ, Aristotle, the master teacher of dialectics, becomes the savior of souls.

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To plead for such a caricature is far from our purpose. We believe that our salvation depends solely upon God’s work in us, and not upon our testimony; and the little child with stammering lips, but wrought upon by the Holy Spirit, will precede these vain scribes into