

XXII.

Love and the Comforter.

“By the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned.”—2 Cor. vi. 6.

532

The question is, “In what sense is the *pouring out of Love* an ever-continued, never-finished work?”

Love is here taken in its highest, purest sense. Love which gives its goods to the poor and its body to be burned is out of the question. St. Paul declares that one may do these things and still be nothing more than a sounding brass, utterly devoid of the least spark of the true and real Love.

In 2 Cor. vi. 6 the apostle mentions the motives of his zeal for the cause of Christ; and it is remarkable that among them he mentions these three, in the following order: “By *goodness*, by the *Holy Ghost*, by *love unfeigned*.” Goodness indicates general benevolence and readiness to sacrifice; of these we find among worldly men many examples that make us ashamed. Then comes the stimulating and animating influences of the Holy Spirit; lastly, Love unfeigned which is the true, real, and divine Love.

In his hymn of eternal Love the apostle gives us an exquisite delineation of this “Love unfeigned;” which shall not cease to command the admiration of the saints on earth as long as taste for heavenly melodies shall dwell in their hearts:

“Love suffereth long and is kind; Love envieth not; Love vaunted not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is Love.” (1 Cor. xiii. 4-8, 12-13)

This teaches how the Holy Spirit performs His work of Love. And so, says the apostle, must the fruit of His work be in our hearts. Very well; if such is the glorious fruit of His work and men know the tree by its fruit, may we not conclude that this is but the description of His own work of Love?

533

The means employed by the Holy Spirit in the shedding abroad of the Love of God in our hearts is simply *Love*. By loving us He teaches love. By applying love to us, by expending love upon us, He inculcates love on us. It is the Love of the Holy Spirit whereby the shedding abroad of love in our hearts has become possible. As, according to 1 Cor. xiii., Love ought to manifest itself in our lives, so has the Holy Spirit wrought it in our hearts. With endless longsuffering and touching kindness He sought to win us. Of the love which we gave to the Father and the Son He was never envious, but rejoiced in it. His Love never made a display of us by leading us into unendurable temptations. It never impressed us as being self-seeking,

but always as *ministering* love. It ever accommodated itself to the needs and conditions of our hearts. However much grieved, it was never provoked. It never misunderstood or suspected us, but ever stimulated us to new hope. Wherefore it rejoiced not in iniquity to sanctify it, but when the truth prevailed in us. And when we had strayed and done wrong, it covered the wrong whispering in our ear that it still believed and hoped all good things of us. Wherefore it endured in us all evil, all unloveliness, all contradictions. It failed us not as a lamp that goes out in the dark. The Love of the Holy Spirit *never faileth*. And while we enjoy here all its sweetness and tenderness, it prophesies that only hereafter it will manifest the fulness of its brightness and glory, for on earth it is only known in part. Its perfect bliss shall appear only when, looking no more by means of the glass at the phenomenal, we shall behold the eternal verities. For whatever may fail, being among all our spiritual blessings the highest, the richest, and therefore the *greatest*, Love shall abide forever.

In this way we begin to understand something of *Comfort*. Christ calls the Holy Spirit the “Comforter.” He says: “I will send you *another* Comforter, and *He will abide with you forever.*” (John xiv. 16)

This does not refer to the “only comfort in life and death,” for that consists in “that I am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ” (Heid. Cat., q. 1). Christ speaks, not of comfort, but of the *Comforter*. Not a thing, an event, or a fact, such as the paying of the ransom of Calvary, but of a Person, who by His personal appearance actually comes to comfort us. Overwhelmed by distress and sorrow, we have not lost the *comfort*, for nothing can come to us without the will of our heavenly Father; but we may have lost the *Comforter*. It is one thing to be watching by the bedside of my sick child, and to remember that even this affliction may be to God’s glory and a blessing to the child; and quite another when a faithful parent enters the room, and seeing my tears wipes them away; reading my sorrow seeks to drive it from my heart; with the warmth of his love cherishing me in the coldness of my desolation; and leaning my head against his breast looks me hopefully in the eye; and smoothing my brow, with holy animation, points me to heaven, inspiring me with trust in my heavenly Father:

Comfort is a deposited *treasure* from which I can borrow; it is like the sacrifice of Christ in whom is all my comfort, because, on Calvary He opened to all the house of Israel a fountain for sin and uncleanness. But a comforter is *a person*, who, when I can not go to the fountain nor even see it, goes for me and fills his pitcher and puts the refreshing drops to my burning lips. When Ishmael lay perishing with thirst, his mother’s comfort was near by, in the cleft of the rock from which the water came gushing down; yet with comfort so near he might have died. But when the angel of the Lord appeared and showed her the water, then Hagar had found her *Comforter*.



And such is the Holy Spirit. So long as Jesus walked on earth He was the Comforter of His disciple's. He lifted them when they stumbled; when discouraged and distressed by fear and doubt, He was their faithful Savior and Comforter. But Himself was not comforted. When in Gethsemane, being exceedingly sorrowful even unto death, He asked them for comfort, they could not give it to Him. They were powerless; they slept and could not watch with Him one hour. So He struggled alone, un comforted and comfortless, until an angel came and did what sinners could not do, comforting the Savior in His distress.

When about to depart from the earth, Jesus foreknew how desolate His disciples would be. They were weak, helpless, broken reeds. As the slender vine clings to the oak, so they cling to their Lord. And now, as the tree was to be removed and the vines would lie on the ground a tangled mass, they needed to be comforted as one whom his mother comforts. And were they now to be left as orphans, since He who had comforted them even more tenderly than a mother was to go away? And Jesus answers: "No, I will not leave you orphans, I will send you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."

Thus the deep meaning of Christ's word, that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, naturally discloses itself. Of course, in, order to comfort us He must personally be with us. One can comfort only by means of love. It is the lifting of the too heavy cross from the shoulders, the constant whispering of loving words, the gathering of tears, the patient listening to the complaints of our affliction, the sympathizing with our suffering, the being oppressed with our distresses, the identification with our suffering person. Surely, even a gift can afford comfort; a letter from a distant land can cast a ray of hope into the troubled soul; but to comfort us in such a way that the burden falls from the shoulder, and the soul revives and loves, in its love expecting to rejoice—such comfort we can expect only from the living person who, coming to us with the key to our heart, cherishes us with the warmth of his own soul.

And since no one else can always be with us, wholly enter into our sorrows, fully understand and comfort us with infinite love, therefore is the Holy Spirit the Comforter. He abides with us forever, enters the deep places of every soul, listens to every throb of the heart, is able to relieve us of all our cares, takes all our troubles upon Himself, and by His tender and divinely loving words and sweet communion raises us out of our comfortless condition.

This glorious work of the Holy Spirit must be studied with extreme carefulness.

You can compare it, not to that of the artist who chisels a statue out of marble, but to that of the godly mother who with sacrificing love studies the characters of her children, watches over their souls while they themselves have no thought of it, nurses them in sickness, prays with them and for them so that they might learn to pray for themselves, bends a listening ear to their trifling griefs, and who in and through all this spends the energy of her



soul with warnings and admonitions, now chiding, then caressing, to draw their souls to God.

And yet, even this is no comparison; for all the sacrifices of the godliest mother, and all the comfort wherewith she comforts her children, are utterly nothing compared to the delightful and divine comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, that Comforter, the Holy Ghost, who never ceases to care for God's children, who ever resumes with new animation the weaving of their soul-garments, even tho their wilfulness has broken the threads! On earth there is no suitable comparison for it. In the human life there may be a *type* somewhere; but a *full-sized image* to measure this divine comfort there is not. It is wholly unique, wholly divine, the measure of all other comfort. The comfort wherewith we comfort others has value and significance only when it is bright with the spark, of the divine comfort.

The Song of Songs contains a description of the tender love of Immanuel for His Church: He, the Bridegroom who calls for the bride; she, the bride who pines with love for her God-given Bridegroom. This is, therefore, something entirely different: the love, not of comfort, but of the tenderest, most intimate communion and mutual belonging together; the one not happy without the other; both destined for each other; by the divine ordinance united, and by virtue of that same ordinance wretched unless the one possesses the other. Such is not the Holy Spirit's love in the comforting. The communion of Christ and the Church is for time and eternity; but, the comfort of the Holy Ghost will cease—not His work of love, but that of the comforting. Comfort can be administered only so long as there is one uncomforted and comfortless. So long as Israel must pray to be delivered from iniquities; so long as tears flow; so long as there is bitter sorrow and distress,—so long will the Holy Spirit be our Comforter.

But when sin is ended and misery is no more, when death is abolished and the last sorrow is endured and the last tear wiped away, then, I ask, what remains there for the Holy Spirit to comfort? How could there still be room for a Comforter?

To the question, Why, then, did the Lord say, "I will send you another Comforter, that He may abide with you *forever*"? ([John xiv. 16](#)) I answer with another question: Is it to the honor of a child that, while he cries for his mother's comfort, he forgets her as soon as the sorrow is past? This can not be; this would be a denial of the nature of love. He that is truly comforted entertains for his comforter such intense feeling of gratitude, obligation, and attachment that he can not be silent, but after having enjoyed the comfort craves also the sweetness of love. The same is true regarding the Holy Spirit. When He shall have comforted us from our last distress, and removed us from sorrow forever, then we can not say, "O Holy Spirit, now Thou mayest depart in peace"; but, we shall be constrained to cry, "Oh, refresh and enrich us now with Thy Love forever?"

536

537

This would not be so if sin still dwelled in us; for sin makes one so unthankful and self-sufficient that after having tasted the comfort he can forget the Comforter. But among the blessed there is no ingratitude; but from deep inward compulsion we shall love and laud Him who, with captivating love, has divinely comforted us.

Hence a Comforter who is to depart after having comforted us can not be the Comforter of God's children. Wherefore Jesus assured His disciples: "I will not leave you comfortless. I will send you another Comforter, that He may *abide with you forever.*"

XXIII.

The Greatest of These Is Love.

“The greatest of these is Love.” — *1 Cor. xiii. 13.*


 538

That the *shedding abroad of Love* and the glowing of its fire through the heart is the eternal work of the Holy Spirit, is stated by no one so pithily as by St. Paul in the closing verse of his hymn of Love. Faith, Hope, and Love are God’s most precious gifts; but Love far surpasses the others in preciousness. Compared with all heavenly gifts, Faith, Hope, and Love stand highest, but of these three *Love is the greatest*. All spiritual gifts are precious, and with holy jealousy the apostle covets them, especially the gift of prophesying; but, among the various paths of obtaining spiritual gifts, he knows a way still more excellent, viz., the royal road of Love.

We know that some deny us the right thus to interpret the thirteenth verse; but with little effect. To assert that in the heavenly life faith and hope, like Love, will abide forever, opposes the general teaching of the Scripture, and especially of St. Paul’s course of reasoning. In his Epistle to the Corinthians, he opposes faith to sight, saying, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (*2 Cor. v. 7*); wherefore he can not mean that after all faith shall continue when turned into sight. If faith is the evidence of things *not* seen, how can it continue when we shall see face to face? How is it possible to maintain that St. Paul represents faith as an eternal gift when in the twelfth verse he says, “Then we shall know even as we are known” (*1 Cor. xiii. 12*)? And he makes the same representation with reference to hope, “For we are saved by hope,” adding, “Hope which is seen is no hope, for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?” (*Rom. viii. 24*). Wherefore faith and hope can not be represented as abiding and enduring elements in our spiritual treasure. Neither faith nor hope belongs to the inheritance bequeathed to us by testament. They are springs of spiritual life and joy to us now, because we do not yet possess the inheritance; but when once the inheritance is ours, why should we still care for the will? As proof and earnest that the inheritance can not be lost, the will is very precious to us; but when the inheritance is delivered into our hands it is mere waste paper, and only the inheritance is of value.


 539

Even Drs. Beets and Van Oosterzee, altho they choose to walk in paths somewhat different from those of the fathers, fully concede this point, as their beautiful comments on the last verse of *2 Cor. xiii.* plainly show. Dr. Beets writes: