



“GOD IS LIGHT”


1 John 1:5

The two passages which we meet in 1 John— “*God is Light*”—“*God is Love*”, are, what I judge we may call **parent** truths. Following the divine revelation from beginning to end, they will be found to form the whole of it—the two lines by which the texture of the divine counsels has been woven. To effect the results of combined “light” and “love,” that is, of *perfect purity* and *perfect goodness*, is the secret that quickens and fills the scene throughout. All is light and love, for all is serving the display of God Himself, and “*God is Light*” and “*God is Love*”—perfect in purity and perfect in goodness.

I would now, for a little, trace the expressions of the truth, “*God is Light*” as they shew themselves along the current of the divine revelations, desiring to have the soul humbled, and yet also raised and gladdened by such meditations.

The Beginning

At the beginning we get the strongest expression of the holiness and righteousness of God. “*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*” Here the Lord attaches to the first commission of evil nothing less than complete separation from Himself; for He is the *living* God. As such He had just shewn Himself, He had just become the source of



all that in that moment was surrounding Him in earth, air and seas. He was the living and life-giving God, and, therefore, a state of death was a state of separation from Him. It is this state of death and separation announced to be the sure and immediate doom of the creature on the moment of his commission of evil. What a strong assertion, thus, at the very outset, of the purity of God, of the great truth that "*God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all*". The creature becomes the child of evil, a child of darkness, must at once be an exile from Him; "*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*"

Light Ever Remains

Thus does the blessed One at once display Himself. And everything afterwards is but a brightening of this; a sealing afresh of the first impression that "*God is Light.*" We may see also, and fully grant it, that "love" will have its way—that is true and necessary—but "light" will not give way. In all revealed counsels, in all places and dispensations, it asserts its equal place.

When sin enters, we see this. We read it as distinctly in the *promise* made to man in guilt, as we read it before in the *threat* made to man in innocency. Whatever shape the word takes from the altered condition of its object, still it clearly comes forth from Him, who is equally, and perfectly,

both “light” and “love”



Light and Love Existing Together

“*It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel,*” is now said by the Lord God to the serpent about the woman’s seed. That is, God will provide a way whereby He can be “*just*” and yet the “*Justifier*” of sinners. All the claims of “light” or righteousness shall be honoured, and all the desires of “love” shall be gratified. Such is the interpretation of this first promise of God after sin had entered. Clearly indeed does it announce, in a way of excellent wisdom, which surely passes all thought, that He is both “light” and “love” and that each must be glorified!

Man shall be redeemed, the serpent’s head shall be bruised, because “*God is Love*”; but the penalty of sin shall be endured, or the heel of the woman’s seed shall be bruised, because “*God is Light*”.

Light and Love Acting in a Sinful World



This is surely a full and blessed expression of God! And just for the same reason (because “*God is Light*”) from henceforth we see Him a stranger in the place which sin or death has entered. Man’s habitation has become defiled. The ground is cursed because of sin, and God cannot be at home here, He becomes a stranger in His own creation. He visits the earth for the comfort and guidance of His people because



He is “love”. “*The Lord went His way as soon as He had left communing with Abraham*” (Gen. 28). Quite according to this sanctity of the divine feet, which could not rest on a soiled footstool, we find, in process of time (or rather in the progress of His dispensations), when He is about to assume Canaan for His dwelling-place. The sword of Joshua, the servant of God, who is “light”, rids it of its old corrupters. Cities are made a curse to the Lord. The fruit of cattle, fields, and trees, are all circumcised, as it were, or purified by various ordinances. Israel themselves coming into their inheritance a redeemed people. All, after its manner, is thus cleansed, ere the Lord can dwell there, for the voice still is, “*What communion has light with darkness?*”—“*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*”.

Light and Love Acting in View of Failure



So, when all is settled in the land, it is sanctity that is marked still—“*Holiness to the Lord*” is read everywhere. Approach to God is by a path most jealously consecrated. He is Himself withdrawn into that place which is called “*the holiest of all*”, and the whole way into that sanctuary is marked by testimonies to the jealous unmitigated holiness of the Lord. All tells of “love” in providing a way at all—but the character of the way equally tells us of “light”. The banished ones can return, but they learn that iniquity cannot enter with



them. The least stain must be removed, the touch of a grave, or even a bone (symptoms of death, and therefore of sin), though by accident, had to send the worshippers to the purifying water ere they could approach the Lord (Num. 19). “Love” **provided** this water but “light” **required** that it should be used. And so, the place the ordinances that furnished and animated it, the worshipper who used it—all still told with one consent, and that, too, clear, full, and unbroken, that “*God is Light*”.

Light and Love Acting in View of the Law

I speak not more particularly here of all this service in Israel of old; it is well known to bear this witness. I would now observe that the law or covenant, which was established at the same time, bore the like testimony. For if man, in the confidence of his heart, will approach God by the law, and not by “*the shadows of good things to come*”, or the witness of grace, he must still learn that “*God is Light*”: and therefore, “*cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*”. The Lord is perfect in righteousness and holiness, and cannot abate one ray of His glory to accommodate it to man’s injured and abated capacities. If man will stand before Him in himself, as on Mount Sinai, and not at the door of the sanctuary, he must bring with him that “light” of righteousness and holiness





which alone is worthy of the divine presence; he must *continue* in *all* things written in that law, which was “*holy, just, and good*”. Nothing less could answer the requisition of Him who is “*light*”.

This is the strong witness of the law to that great truth we are following through the Scriptures, as before we listened to the same from the services which accompanied the law. The voice of the words from the top of Sinai, and the voice of the sanctuary at the foot of it, equally, though differently, uttered this truth— “*God is Light*”. And still we shall find that as the blessed One advances in dispensing the knowledge of Himself and His counsels, whether by His hand or by His Spirit, that is, whether by His providence or by His word, it is all the same.

Light and Love in View of Scattering and Captivity

Israel’s captivity becomes the witness in its day. The people had not continued in the “*all things*” of the law. They had not reflected the “*light*” as the exile of Adam from Eden had told it before. “*Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away?*” says Jehovah to Israel, “*or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away*”. “*What communion has light with darkness?*” we may again ask. Iniquity



and transgressions must estrange from God. If Israel walk in the darkness of corrupted nature, they must walk, outside the presence of God.



Such is the testimony of the divine hand in the scattering of Israel. Such was the testimony of all the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, against a disobedient people. And such, again, the witness of the Baptist, in due time, after this captivity and scattering. All is harmony. The ministry of John the Baptist addresses Israel with this truth, that “*God is Light*” for it finds them in evil, and summons them to repent, or never to count on taking the place of “children unto Abraham”, that is, of the people of God.

All this testimony is complete. Whatever witness speaks, it is still to the same purpose, it tells that “*God is Light*”. The threat in Eden, the promise after sin, the ordinances, the law, the settlement at first, and then the dispersion of Israel, the ministry of the prophets and of the Baptist, all tell this, and with equal clearness, though, of course, in different style.

Light and Love Viewed in the Perfect Man



But we now reach the testimony of another witness (the most affecting of all), the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

All He did was a reflection of God; and all, too, was



“light” and “love”. They were mingling their beams, and forming that perfect element in which He lived and moved on this earth of ours. He was “*God manifest in the flesh*”. The divine glory shone in His face. Here dwelt “*the fullness of the Godhead bodily*”, and all that emanated was either “light” or “love”. The Son of God acted on the principles of the first promise, which I have already considered. He consented to be bruised in His own heel, because of **righteousness**, because “*God is Light*”; but He undertook to bruise the enemy’s head, because of **grace**, because “*God is Love*”. This was declared in His death more particularly; but generally, too, in all His previous life. All told of “light” and “love”, or reflected “*righteousness and peace*”, “*mercy and truth*” in mingled rays. He vindicated light and dispensed love. In all that He did this was traced; and His death was the eminent and meritorious assertion of it. For need I say how gloriously the cross of Christ publishes the truth, that “*God is Light*”, and that “*God is Love*”

It was, indeed, the precious, wondrous witness of this. To *understand* the cross is, in other words, to understand that it does bear this witness to us as sinners.. But in His teaching, the Lord bore the same testimony. If we look at His life, or His ministry, whether we listen to the voice of His ways or His words, we may say, as the apostle does say of it





all, “*This then is the message which we have heard of Him—that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*”.

Light and Love Viewed in the Holy Spirit’s Teachings

Such was the life and the doctrine of the Son. And when His witness to “light” and “love” was over, the Holy Ghost held up exactly the same, though in a different form. His teachings by the apostles in their epistles unfold new mysteries, but all asserts these truths. “Love” is dispensed, but “light” is still vindicated also. The thought of “*the doctrine of Christ*” admitting any darkness or evil was a stranger to the mind of the Spirit; the apostle, who spake as from him, stands amazed at the conception of it. “*Know ye not,*” says he, “*that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?—that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6). And in another place the same apostle assumes that if any have “*learnt Christ*”, if any have “*heard Him*”, and “*have been taught by Him*”, they must have learnt to put off the former conversation corrupted by lusts (Eph. 4).

So, also, he interprets the grace that brings salvation, as that which teaches the *denial* of ungodliness and worldly lusts, and the living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2). And thus, though it be now grace or salvation,





and not law, that is published, it is with equal sureness and distinction, a witness that “*God is Light*”.

The apostles teach us that our “Saviour” is also our “Lord”, a doctrine which secures the honour of the same indestructible truth. The hand which has *rescued* us is ever asserting its *dominion* over us and we know that it is a *clean and a holy hand*.

Light and Love Viewed as Perfectly Woven Together



But we must not multiply testimonies to this most plain fact from the words of the Spirit in the apostles. I would only add that the epistle from whence we take the words “*God is Light*” and “*God is Love*” (1 John) makes it its business, as it were, to weave these two truths together. All the thoughts of the Holy Ghost seem to pass and repass between them. They are the great *tests* of saintly standing and character, as the chewing of the cud and the cleaving of the hoof were the notes of cleanness in animals under the law. Consequently it is there written, “*Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*” And why so? Because “*God is Light*” and “*God is Love*”, therefore he who doeth not righteousness cannot be of Him who is “light”, neither can he who loveth not his brother be of Him who is “love”. So it is also written. These are the constant thoughts of the Spirit in this epistle, that “*God is*



Light” and “*God is Love*”, quickens and fills the pen of the ready writer throughout.

Such, then, is the teaching of the Holy Ghost. He sustains unbroken the testimony that “God is light”. But as the Son, not only by His teaching, but in His life and person, as we were observing, bore witness to this truth, so does His *indwelling* in the saints. The saints are His temples now. But He dwells in those temples as a “*Holy Spirit*”, grieved by any contradiction, *any practical contradiction*, of the truth that “*God is Light*” (see Eph. 4:30).

How perfect this all is! The Son, and the Holy Ghost, each in the day of His manifestation maintains the same blessed testimony, both by deed and by word. And we have only to add, that the glory, by and by, will keep up the same. The glory which is to close and crown all, will tell the same most precious and excellent truth—that “*God is Light*” and that “*God is Love*”, striking that note with such a hand as shall cause it to vibrate for ever. The sabbath, or the rest itself of all who have trusted in Jesus, will tell, that “God is love”: the entrance into that rest, and the element that surrounds it, that “God is light”. For the earth, which will be the footstool in the age of the glory, must be purged of its corrupters ere the glory can return and dwell there; as we saw of old, that Canaan and all that belonged to it was cleansed ere the Lord



of the tribes would make it His inheritance. And when it is thus purged it will be kept clean. *“I will early destroy all the wicked of the land”*, says the Lord of the earth in the days of its glory, *“that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord”*.

And so as to the upper house, or the throne, or heavenly glory, nothing can be allowed even to approach that can in any way defile. *“They shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations to it”*. *“Without are dogs, etc.”*. Beyond the sphere which the glory fills must recede all that is unclean, all that is the contradiction of “light”. For the darkness will then be *outer* darkness.

Thus, indeed, from the garden of Eden up to the glory, we get the constant witness, in all the ways of His hand, and in all the revelations of His mind, that *“God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all”*.



“GOD IS LOVE”



1 John 4:8–16

I have previously considered St. John’s words, “God is Light”, calling that a *parent truth*, and have considered its fruit or results. “God is Love” is, in like manner a *parent truth*; and I would now desire to also trace its path through the Scripture, according to my small measure. But who is sufficient for such a theme? I would, trusting the Spirit’s direction and control, pursue it a little, though this has been somewhat anticipated in the previous meditation.

Love Displayed in Creation

At creation God was shown to be “love”—the garden told that by the testimony of all that was there, so that I speak not particularly of it. But so was it afterwards, when that garden of delight was forfeited.

We read in 2 Cor. 3 that the law was a dispensation that was to be “*done away*”; and in Heb. 8 that it was not “*faultless*”. These passages strikingly tell us that the law was not altogether according to God’s mind, that He could not *rest* in it. Not that it was faulty in itself; we know that it was “*holy, just, and good*”—as fully answerable to *its purpose* as the gospel; but still found fault with, because not altogether according to God. And this can be at once understood; for





“*God is love*”. There the secret appears. The law could not possibly meet Him, for it gave no occasion to His showing Himself, or to His acting agreeably with His nature. It must, therefore, be “*done away*”.

God’s Love and God’s Law

The law could not abide before God. It was not God’s own thing. The promise was such. As the garden and all the condition of things at creation told what God was, so to tell the same, as soon as sin entered, it was the promise that was revealed, and not the law (Gen. 3). The law came in afterwards to serve, it is true, great purposes; but the promise was God’s own thing. And we may just observe, accordingly, that in Deut. 31 and in Gal. 3 (not to mention other Scriptures) God keeps Himself in company with the “song,” and with “the promise,” while “Moses” and “the law” are linked together in both those Scriptures.

But this, rather, by the way. The law was clearly not of God’s mind; and the reason of this, we see, derives itself out of His nature—blessed be His name! But having thus set God with the promise, or having thus learnt that “*God is love*”, we can track His wondrous and excellent path onward. Thus: “*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*”. “*God is love*”. He looked





out upon it according to Himself, and its ruins drew from Him the remedy. He loved a ruined and defiled world, however, in the only way that He could love it, in the only way that He could exercise Himself towards such an object, that is, with the love of pity, and He gave His Son for its relief and rescue.

“God Is Love” in Every Dispensation

Here, then, was the beginning of His way; for “*God is love*”. The stream must be according to the spring. The parent truth determines the produce. We learn the way from the character. And as we follow the stream, it is still the same water. Let dispensations roll on and disclose themselves to us, God is seen in each according to Himself. Great unfoldings both of persons and ministries there may be, but all are One. It may be the Father, it may be the Son, it may be the Holy Ghost that is manifested, but still it is but the unfoldings of God, and “*God is love*”.

Thus the Son, looking back on past dispensations, says, “*My Father worketh hitherto;*” and then, reflecting on the then present one, He adds, “*and I work*”. Similar works, whether in the ministry of “*the Father*” or “*the Son*”. And those works are works of grace, works of pity to sinners, Bethesda healings (John 5). And so the Son, looking forward to still coming dispensations, says, speaking of the Holy




Ghost, “*He will abide with you for ever*”; “*He will take of mine and show it unto you*”; “*He will guide you into all truth*”. He will indeed be the Servant of your need and joy. Herein is love still. All this is God unfolded (to speak after the manner of man), God seen in the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; but all is ‘love’.

God’s Love: Patient, Compassionate, and Complacent

We might notice the trial and the proof of this, and we shall see, as to divine love, its unconquerable patience. For the Father, when He worked, had His grace slighted, or misunderstood, by generation after generation, from Adam to Christ, but still He worked “*hitherto*”. The Son, when He worked in like grace, was refused, and had all indignities and evil to endure, but He loved and laboured to the end, till He was cast out and crucified. The “*Holy Ghost*”, now working, is grieved of the saints, and yet, unfailing, unwearied, abides still the “*Comforter*”, the “*Spirit of truth*”, in them. And thus is it love, and love of the same quality. “*Love never faileth*”. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost minister in equal love, tried variously, but alike unfailing in each, and patient in all.


It is not, however, simply thus in pity and in patience—in pity towards the world or sinners, and in patient forbearing towards believers—that divine love shows and exercises itself: God has sought another way in which to be



among us—in the love of complacency. He has so set His saints before Him, so put them in Christ, so taken counsels about them, and multiplied thoughts about them, as gives Him to look on them without blame or spot, that He may delight in the sight of them and rest in His love. John teaches us to look at this form of love—“*My Father will love him*”. “*I will love him,*” says Jesus of His saint. “*We will come unto him, and make our abode with him*”. This is all the love of complacency, the love of delight: such love is according to the mind of God.

These exercises of God it is indeed happy to look at, we being the objects of them all. And they still keep in memory the great first truth, “*God is love*”; they still tell us whence they flow, and are only the narrower or richer current of the one great divine source. It is love in pity, in patience, in complacency; but it is *love*, and only love, happy and fruitful in its constant though varied exercise.

And what other exercise can it have? If it could, it would. But in this complacency, it abides for ever. “*God will rest in His love*” (Zeph. 3:17). Glory, by and by, will be the gift of this love of complacency, as salvation is the gift of His pity now, and the upholding of His saint the fruit of His patience. But beyond this complacency love knows and can know no form more excellent. It will be the element of the





divine presence through endless ages of glory. In it the saints will live and move and have their being for ever, after the love that once pitied them in their sins, and was patient with them in their shortcomings, and “*perfected*” itself towards them in giving them boldness in the very day of judgment, has done its wondrous work.

God’s Love Characterizes His Children

Love, in every trial of it, will have exercised and displayed itself, and then will get its eternal refreshment in the delight and complacency with which it will rest in its object forever. Love has thus determined the character of God’s own way. But we may also see that it equally determines the person and actings of His children; that “*God is love*” is still the great parent truth.

For the saints, or children of God, “*love*” is the divine nature; as it is written, “*Every one that loveth is born of God*”. And again, “*He that loveth not knoweth not God*”. There is no fruit of His energy or spirit, no communion in knowledge with Him, but through love. “*If any man love God, the same is known of Him*”.

And this being so, it appears from the further teaching of the Spirit of God that two things are sought for and expected from us as His children. I mean ‘*confidence*’ and ‘*imitation*’. “*God is love*”, and therefore, in our actings



towards Himself, He cannot possibly accept anything less than confidence. It is the answer love is entitled to, the only answer which, from its nature, it can (shall I say) put up with. Nothing will gratify or satisfy love but love; and in the gospel God is to get it from us. The apostle therefore states this (though we might derive it out of the great parent truth): “*We love Him because He first loved us*”. We do not fear Him, we do not mistrust Him, but we love Him because He has already loved us. “*There is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear*”. Love leaves no room for fear. It cannot dwell in the same house with it. The elements are destructive one of another. If we know that love, perfect love, is dealing with us, we cease to fear. Confidence only is the due answer, as it is the necessary demand of love.

But so in our actions towards others, God cannot approve anything less than *imitation*. And this all the apostles tell us. It might, again I would say, be derived out of the great parent truth; but the Spirit is pleased to state it largely to us. “*If God have so loved us, we ought also to love one another*.” “*If we shut up our bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in us?*” “*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing*”.





God's Love Acting in His Children

In its actings thus, whether upward towards God or outward towards others, love will be found in us, this principle of confidence and of imitation. And the Spirit teaches us that to judge ourselves to be "*lovers of God*" without this confidence and this imitation is practising a deceit in ourselves; for I read these two sentences—"*We love Him because He first loved us*"; "*He who loveth God love his brother also*". The first of these holy sentences tells us this, that we can only love God as knowing that He first loved us; that is, we love Him because we have confidence in His love to us. Were it otherwise, it would be an assumption that our love is greater than God's. If we assert that we have affection towards Him more surely than we are confident He has towards us, it is saying that we are better than God. Therefore, the only true, spiritual, evangelical love of God springs from confidence in His love towards us.

So the second of them tells us, that to assume that we can love God without loving one another is a reflection on God. For how can we think that he will accept the affection of one who has it not for his brother? This would be another way of making ourselves better than God. We would reject such affection ourselves.

How simple, then, those two holy sentences, or







judgments, of the Spirit of God are! How necessarily true, when we consider the great parent truth, so to call it again, that “*God is love*”! We must, therefore, confide in His love ere we can love Him or have affection towards Him ourselves. We must also love others as well as Him, our brethren as well as God.

God’s Love Assures Our Hearts

Thus we get the personal acts of the children, as well as God's own ways, out of this parent truth. We pass into God's place in this way of love. “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*”. “*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*”. By love we know that we are in God’s place, in fellowship with Him. This assures the heart. “*Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him*”. The very character of the place, the very element that fills it, the commandment or voice that is heard there, is this—“*we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another*”. That is that we assure ourselves of God's love to us, and exercise love among ourselves from one to the other. This is the commandment, the ordinance, the character, the element of God's place. And he that keepeth this commandment, the soul that breathes this element, dwelleth in God, and God in him.



This is the region we inhabit. These are the present realms of the saints—“*translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son*”. It will be a region of glory by and by—*His eternal kingdom and glory*. But the elements will dwell together, and fill the whole place. Love is (as I believe another has said) but *hidden glory*—glory will be *manifested love*. Love will be for ever quickening the hidden springs and streams of affection that are known and exercised, and glory will gild the whole scene where these affections flow, and have their happy course for ever and for ever.

Precious and glorious indeed is thus the constant testimony, that “*God is love*” and he that *dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him*.

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