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KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.



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THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

IN the parable of the prodigal son, Luke xv., the Lord Jesus is unfolding the heart of God to the returning sinner; "the knowledge of Him," as the apostle terms it in 2 Corinthians ii. 14, when he thanks "God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of *his knowledge* by us in every place." It is the knowledge of *what He is*—the state in which He can meet the sinner. It is not only His love. True, all springs from that; it is the source of everything. I enjoy the blessing of it—I drink of the stream; but more than this, I know that its origin is in God's own heart, and that it

can never fail. But that is not the point I would consider now, but the *state* of God's heart with regard to the returning sinner. This is a great thing to see. It gives rest and vigour to the soul to know what God is, and the nature of His feeling towards me.

The prodigal comes tremblingly enough, but the fact that there is bread in his father's house encourages him, while, on the father's side, the kiss greets him. "When he was yet a great way off, his father ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." God sends the kiss to me *where I am*, that I may know the thoughts of His heart towards me. We get the same idea with regard to Isaiah (chap. vi.), when the live coal touched his lips. One of the seraphim flew, having a live coal in his hand, and laid it upon his mouth, where he was; and it gave him a distinct intimation of his place with God. It made good to his soul the

state in which God was towards him; how He could receive him. "Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged." Now if I turn to 1 Timothy i. I find that Paul uses the expression, "the blessed God," when he speaks of the glorious gospel committed to his trust, which may be translated more literally, "the gospel of the glory of the *happy* (*μακαριον*) God." That is the mind in which God is towards sinners—happy in receiving them! What a wondrous fact! That was what was committed to Paul; he who was before a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious, says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me *first* Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pat-

tern to them which should believe on him to life everlasting." Note the two *firsts* in this passage. He was the first or chief of sinners, and the first of saints as to the manner of his reception. The first on the list of sinners; that is, there never was a greater, for he was rushing on in direct opposition to the will and heart of God; and the first as to the manner of his reception, he is a "pattern to all them who should believe to life everlasting." Paul is the pattern, and the thing entrusted to him is the gospel of the glory of the *happy* God; and hence, as in the case of the prodigal son, what is presented is, the Father's reception of the sinner; and what the Lord studiously describes in that parable is, the wonderfully happy state of the father's heart in receiving the returning one. Hence the kiss comes to him "a great way off;" and is an unquestionable, unequivocal assurance

of the nature of the reception that awaits him. It is not merely an intimation of how happy *he will be*; but of the happiness of God in having him. It is not that he is looking for the kiss, he has not a thought of it; his thought is all about bread. The kiss surprises him—the father fell on his neck and kissed him. This was a distinct intimation of the state of the father's heart, and how free it was, to come forth and express itself, according to its own will and pleasure. It is not only the love from which it all springs, but the liberty of the father's heart to express that love; and this is the knowledge of God, and what the gospel of the glory of the *happy* God discloses.

Now in 2 Corinthians iii. we find how this has been brought about. The apostle says (ver. 6), "God hath made us able ministers of the new covenant." The terms of the old covenant were that

righteousness was demanded; that of the new, that righteousness is ministered. A distinct revolution has come about. Once it was a ministration of death and condemnation; now there is a ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness; not of the letter, or letterwise, as demanding something of me; "for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life;" therefore he says, "the Lord is that Spirit." Christ is the essence of the whole thing; the beginning and end of everything. See the amazing change. If (says he) the ministration of death, which was to be done away, is glorious (glory is the expression of what God is in His own attributes), how much more glorious must that be which will remain! If the exaction of righteousness was in glory, how much more must the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory!

Let us note the character of this re-

volution which has taken place, for if we do not see it, we shall not understand the gospel of the glory of the happy God. God on mount Sinai demanded righteousness: he was entitled to demand it, but there was none. Now the marvellous thing is, that He ministers righteousness from God's own presence, instead of exacting it from us. We may illustrate this revolution by the difference between my demanding money of a man who is indebted to me, and my filling his purse with gold. Thus it is with the ministration of righteousness. It comes forth from God in glory, maintaining God in His own perfection. It is not that He overlooks the debt, but He has received in Christ satisfaction for the debt; therefore it is not mercy only, but a ministration of righteousness. Now there can be no righteousness unless there be an answer to its first demand, satisfaction for

everything that incurred the judgment of God. Mount Sinai's demand must be perfectly met, before God could minister righteousness. Could I meet it? There is judgment and death on me! How then has it been met? How has God got all He demanded? I will now consider.

God's Son comes into the world; for thirty years He walks here, the beautiful expression of God in every attitude and circumstance; then comes forth as the servant of God, encounters Satan and every character of contradiction in a world that is hostile to God, exhibits all the beauty and blessedness of divine love to man, meeting every shape and character of grievance, relieving every sore on humanity, bearing their sicknesses and carrying their sorrows; manifesting the Father fully. And what is the issue as far as man is concerned of those thirty-three years in which was exhibited

all the perfection of God in a man? This Blessed One says, "I am alone; I have not brought one to the same level as myself, as a man before God." "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and *die, it abideth alone.*" (See John xii.)

Now mark what must happen! That glorious One—who made everything in the world, by whom the heavens and the earth were created, on all of which the eye of God could rest—must now suffer on the cross for man. After having shewn what the ways of a man ought to be in every minutiae of life, a perfect transcript of the living God in the compass of a man, He must die.

This perfect man must undergo the condemnation of death. He must meet the question of righteousness, in all the terrors of Mount Sinai. And more than that, He not only bears the penalty, but that which incurred the penalty.

“He was made sin for us who knew no sin.” He says, “Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause came I unto this hour.” What a thought! This wondrous, perfect One must be broken up *for me*. He undergoes the judgment of God in His soul, the sense of it, as if He had incurred it, and cries “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

In John xiii. 31 we read, “Now therefore, when Judas was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” It is in the perfect vindication of God in all His nature and attributes in the cross, that the moral glory is perfectly declared; and there also is the complete triumph over Satan and all the combined power of evil. This transcendent moment is of the deepest interest to the soul! There are two things which none but Christ could know, and both impossible

for us to know: one is, that He knew perfectly the nature of the love that was in the Father's heart; and the other, that He knew fully the righteousness of God, and how great the offence done to Him. Now He came to fulfil the righteousness (for He only knew what would meet the mind of God), in order that He might declare the love that He only could fathom. We have a very faint idea of the righteousness or the nature of the offence, and how Christ in everything met the will of God. He endured the demands of God in righteousness in the same moral perfection in which He was, when transfigured on the holy mount, where He was not in relation to sin at all. There He was glorified as the perfect man. As the veil of the holiest, on which were wrought the cherubim in needlework, so beautiful in everything was He to the eye of God, that a voice comes from the excellent

glory, declaring, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." That very Man, then and there glorified, is the one that was crucified for me! On the mount of glory I see Him as the faithful and true Witness, receiving dignity from God. On the cross, I see Him going under the wave of judgment, into distance (my distance) from God for me, bearing it in a like perfection, in such unswerving trust in God, in that terrible moment, inscrutable to us, when His soul was made an offering for sin, and He suffered the just for the unjust.

"Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him." The perfection of moral glory has been reached, and hence the glory of the Father claims Him as its own, even from under the judgment of sin. Glory comes down as the seal of

the work on the cross. It is not here that He goes up to the glory, but the glory comes down (the glory in heaven) to greet the fullest moral glory on earth. "He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father." How wondrously blessed! He was down under judgment, so unique, so honouring to God, so meeting all His righteousness, the nature of its exaction—every atom of it; baffling in holy energy Satan and all the bulls of Bashan in that terrible hour of darkness, and glorifying God so in it, that the Son of man was glorified in the very moment that man was condemned. He is raised out of the death of judgment; taken up from the dead by the glory of the Father; the glory claims Him as its own, and He is set down on the right hand of God!

The One who has fulfilled all righteousness has gone up to the right hand of God. He is the Mediator of the

new covenant, of which He makes us "able ministers." Hence it is that righteousness is now ministered. There is no difficulty in comprehending the ministration of righteousness, if it be seen that it is the man that is changed before God. It is no longer the first Adam, but Christ the Second Man at God's right hand. *To* one there was a ministration of death from Mount Sinai, because there was no righteousness. *From* the other there is a ministration of righteousness, because righteousness has been established in Him risen from the dead. And the knowledge of God is, that He can now come forth as the "happy God," in all the brightness of Himself, and take a poor sinner into connection with this righteous One in glory.

Paul calls it "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, which is hid to them that are lost, and

whom the god of this world hath blinded, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them." It is an immense fact to look up and see righteousness ministered from the glory of God. Have we the sense of it in our souls? Can we say, 'I see the Son of man glorified, the man who was condemned for me? I have to do with Him now?'

Now for an example. Paul was the first, the chief, as to sin; the first as to grace, in its fulness. Saul of Tarsus, irreproachable in man's eye, correct as to the law, was chief of sinners in God's eye. To him God reveals His Son in glory, and expresses to him, without any previous preparation at all, the state He is in towards him. Paul tells his own tale. "At midday, O king [he says], I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun."

Everything on earth was entirely eclipsed. The sun rules the day. The most learned cannot tell the amount of its influence. But now a light from heaven, *above* the brightness of the sun, arrests the career of Saul; and the very One whom he is persecuting is manifested to him *there*, in light that eclipses everything *here*; as he says, "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me." What a magnificent sight! What a display of the happy God! Is not this the kiss? It is the seal of the state God is in, when He can take up the worst sinner down here, and reveal His Son, the eternal life, to him. Previously there was no change in Saul; but God effects the whole change. He comes forth in all His eternal majesty, and manifests His own Son to the chief of sinners. The light is above that of the sun, because He is striking out a new path for Himself, and picks up the worst

sinner on earth and connects him with His Son in glory, who has brought about the revolution of the ministration of righteousness, instead of the ministration of condemnation. The glory is the seal of what His Son has accomplished. In Paul, first, God will shew forth the liberty and happiness of His heart in receiving the sinner.

The thing that is puzzling people is that they add to the gospel exaction of some kind; but if I think there is exaction, I do not believe that the glory has come down and sealed that wondrous work on the cross, and taken the One who bore the judgment out of the judgment that He bore *for me*; that He has been glorified, He who glorified God under judgment *for me*. Christ was glorified out of the condition which we are in, and there He also glorified God.

Christ came to the bottom of my sin and judgment as the whale to Jonah.

Through grace I come up in Him. "We are quickened together, and raised up together, and made sit together in heavenly places in Christ." People's difficulty is, that while all Christians allow that Christ was glorified, they do not see that He was glorified *from under judgment*. If He be glorified out of the judgment of sin, where is the believer but in Him in glory? It is not only that Christ has put away my sin, taken me out of the water, borne judgment for me, but He has done more. He has gone up into glory. Supposing I owed money to a bank, and a friend cleared away my debt, I should be quit indeed; but that would not produce any tie between me and the banker, and I might never enter the bank again, or the bank care to see me. But supposing the bank illuminated, to express its satisfaction that there was nothing between me and it, then there would be a distinct ex-

pression of the bank towards me, and my heart would be assured of its satisfaction. Well, we may say, God, the happy God, now illuminates. The illumination is the testimony to the returning prodigal. The light of the glory is the expression of satisfaction and gladness; and the glory could not be manifested unless righteousness were established.

There will be feebleness, if we do not see that to faith the cross has removed all the offence, and God is glorified therein, and hence He is set at liberty to reveal His Son to the chief of sinners. By faith I have now to do with the One in glory. It is not a question of where it places me, but it gives me a sense of having to do with God in Himself. It is the knowledge of God, therefore it is "eternal life to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." It is not

a cold formal thing, that my debt is paid, my sin gone; but the *Father's house is illuminated*. Can Paul forget the greeting he received? Can the prodigal forget the kiss? The illumination, the glory of that light, shone round about him, and when He could not see for the glory of it, Ananias is sent to him, saying, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee, in the way that thou camest, hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost." If his eyes are opened again on this scene, it is in connection with the Spirit who unites him with Christ in glory, and he can say, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

May the Lord lead souls to see how the revolution has been effected; righteousness entirely met, and that they have to do with the man in glory, the Head

of a new race, who fulfilled righteousness. It is not merely that God forgives my sins, but that He has glorified the One who took them all away, and is thus able to take me up on new ground, and to receive me in a new nature, in the Person who glorified Him under judgment for my sins, and to express His happiness in doing so.

In looking up to God, let us not stop short in saying "I am happy." Can I say, God is happy in having me with Him? He has come forth to receive me to Himself, giving me intimation here of the wondrous reception there is for me in connection with that blessed One who glorified Him here. Do I rejoice before Him in the eternal scene of light and love into which He has brought me? As I do, I understand "the gospel of the glory of the happy God," and it imparts a tone and a character to me which nothing else can.

MY RECEPTION.

YET a great way off He saw me,
Ran to kiss me as I came ;
As I was, my Father loved me,
Loved me in my sin and shame.
Then in bitter grief I told Him,
Of the evil I had done—
Sinned in scorn of Him, my Father ;
Was not meet to be His son.

But I know not if He listened,
For He spake not of my sin ;
He within His house would have me,
Make me meet to enter in.
From the riches of His glory,
Brought His costliest raiment forth,
Brought the ring that sealed His purpose,
Shoes to tread His golden courts.

This the ransomed sinner's story,
All the Father's heart made known :
All His grace to me the sinner,
Told by judgment on His Son—
Told by Him from depths of anguish,
All the Father's love for me :
By the cup, the cross, the darkness,
Measuring what His love must be.

