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## **The Greatest of These Is Love**

*“And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love”-1 Cor 13:13.*

In the above text the Apostle makes mention of the necessary qualities that characterise the life of the Christian. These are faith, hope, and love. Over and over again in his epistles he emphasises the importance of all three of these qualities, and shows that love is the greatest of the three. When the Apostle desires to describe all those elements that make up the ideal character, he uses the word “love”; when he desires to point out a single principle, which, if applied in the daily life of the Christian, will be a simple rule of conduct, he calls it “love.” “Now the end of the commandment is love, out of a pure heart.” “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law.”

One has thus most eloquently described this Divine quality as a principle of conduct – “Love is the substance of all righteousness, holiness, duty and obedience . . . It is the simple principle which constitutes the key to everything in the Christian life. It takes all the complexity out of life, and reduces duty to one simple, primal element of love; to love God and our fellow-men, and everything else will take care of itself. In human machinery, simplicity is the essence of power, and the secret of **success**. In God’s great mechanism of morals and of holiness, there are two simple principles, like the poles on which this globe turns. The one is faith, the other is love, and like the poles they are true and fixed, whence all life revolves, like the great globe upon its axis, with unbroken uniformity and unwavering tranquillity.”

Love is one of the great influential attributes of God’s character. It is the inspiring motive that moves Him in dealing with His creatures. Even in man’s intercourse with his fellow-men, it is the highest, the most powerful, as a motive of conduct or a principle of action. It has been truly said that “Love will accomplish anything that it undertakes. Love will make any burden light, any task easy.”

Love made Paul’s privations like the flight of eagles’ wings. Love sends out the missionary without any personal interest on earth, to labour and suffer and die in some far distant country, in the very luxury of self-sacrifice and joy. Love will prompt what money could not buy, what force could not constrain, what interest could not urge. Therefore, God has wisely made it the main-spring of conduct, just because it has in it an impulsive force that will lift us to infinite service, and make obedience a delight.”

### **LOVE’S FRUITAGE**

In the chapter preceding (1 Cor. 12) the Apostle has been speaking of the miraculous gifts of power that were poured out upon the early Church. In Chapter 13, he is contrasting these gifts of power with this greatest of all gifts, Love. However, the possession of these powers does not in itself give evidence of character. The Apostle says – “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” How solemnly true it is, says one – “Without love eloquence is vain. Even the gift of tongues is empty and hollow. Even the highest wisdom and the most supernatural light are cold and dead. Even the faith that could remove mountains is barren of real spiritual joy. Yes, even the liberality that can give millions, and the sacrifice that could give life, bring no return to the heart untouched by heavenly Love.

There may be much without love, much that even God may bless to others; but it profiteth us nothing if we have not heavenly charity (love). We do not say that one may have mighty faith without any love; but the faith may be out of proportion to the love, and where this is so, the work will be ultimately blighted and disappointing. Even the greatest sacrifices may be but another form of selfishness, and may have recompense in the glory that they win, or the gratification of intellectual pride, or determined self-will. Love alone is the substance of

things, and the spring of joy and gladness, and perennial life and fruitfulness.”

We might be able to understand theoretically what Divine love in the soul is, and eloquently describe how one ought to act who possesses it; we might be able, even, to detect that slightest imperfection in its manifestation in another, and yet not possess it ourselves. It is possible to be so blind as not to see in our own lives our great deficiency in this greatest of all gifts. On the other hand, it is possible that one may lack all the gifts that make success in the world possible, he may be very deficient in a knowledge of God’s Word, possessing only so much as is required to make one a Christian, and yet be the possessor of this grace of all graces.

### **LOVE EXHIBITED**

This love is exhibited in its greatest degree amongst those who have experienced His favour and have come to love God – those truly His children. “This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you” – John 15:12. “By this shall all men that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another” – John 13:35. “We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” “By this we have known love, because he (Christ) laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” – 1 John 3:16.

It will be seen from this last quotation that the love required of true Christians one for another is the same kind as that exhibited by Christ Himself and is expressed in the words – “We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” This is a greater love than that which was required by the Law. That required by the Law is stated to be – “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Our Lord’s course in the sacrifice of Himself on our behalf, transcends anything required of the Law – in giving His life a ransom for many, He did more than was required by the Law. It is for this reason that it is designated a sacrifice. To do the whole law was His duty; but when He went beyond this and gave His life a ransom-price for mankind, that was a sacrifice, and, as a sacrifice, it was appreciated by the Father, and especially rewarded with more than everlasting life. And the same rule applies to us (His followers); “For as he was, so are we in this world, leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps.”

### **A PORTRAIT OF LOVE**

In the Epistle to the Corinthians – 1 Cor. 13 –we have what may be properly termed a portrait or picture of heavenly love in action; in other words, a portrait of its conduct towards others. These words of Paul may be said to be an analysis of love. As we consider this wonderful analysis of the God-given character of love, it will be noticed that the Apostle describes it in its passive, its active, and its negative qualities, or aspects. By the passive quality of love is meant that quality that enables one to receive injury or suffering without resistance – to passively submit to wrong or injury done, or supposed to have been done to us, and also to patiently submit to the trials, the adversities of life. Three passive characteristics are mentioned:

1. “Love suffers long” (v.4).
2. “Love beareth all things” (v.7).
3. “Love endureth all things” (v.7).

It will be noticed that these passive qualities are the first and last elements mentioned by Paul. Love is first represented by the inspired Apostle as stepping on to the stage of life’s suffering–indeed, “suffering long”; the last view that we have of her in this picture as she passes off the stage, is “bearing all things, enduring all things.” One has thus most eloquently described this passive quality of heavenly love as it is exhibited in its relation to the various difficulties, trials and besetments that are inevitably encountered in this present life – “Heavenly love is introduced to us with meek and bowed head, suffering long; and as she leaves our view, she is still drooping under yet heavier burdens, while her face wears the holy light of unconquerable patience, ‘enduring all things.’ Between these two features: suffering long, and enduring all things: lie all the other lineaments in the face of Love.”

The long-suffering shows its capacity for continual forbearance, or patience under provocation. The “bearing all things”, seems to have reference to suffering wrong without exhibiting resentment, or without interfering – to bear patiently neglect or indignities. Enduring all things seems to have reference to the trials that come in the providence of God – trials that come in connection with serving the Master and His cause. There are, however, two ways of bearing or enduring trial. One is the Stoic’s way, which is to “grin and bear it”, the other is the Christian’s way, the way of love, to sing and bear it.

One writer has thus expressed it – “One is to be ever conscious of how much we are enduring, the other is to be so lifted above it that we almost forget that we are enduring anything, and are so occupied with others that we forget the pressure (of suffering) in the love. That devoted wife who ministers to her suffering husband, night after night, is so full of concern for him, that it never occurs to her that she is losing her rest and risking her life; and it is only afterwards, when the sacrifice has been completely made, that she awakes to realise how much she has endured, So He endured the cross, despising the shame, in the joy of love, leaving us an exam-

ple that we should follow in His steps.”

There are two kinds of trials and tribulations that come to the Christian. One kind includes those that come in the common course of life – the trials that are common to all. To such the Apostle makes reference when referring to their beneficial effect upon Christians. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.” Another kind of trials is that which comes because of faithfulness in the service of the Master. Of such were those of Paul and Silas. We read of them that, “When they (the magistrates) had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the gaoler to keep them safely, who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at mid-night Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God” –Acts 16:23-25. There is nothing that can give greater joy to the true Christian, than to know that he is suffering for his Master.

### **LOVE IN OPERATION**

The Apostle next mentions the active qualities of this heavenly love. We find that there are four:

1. “Love is kind” (v.4)
2. “Love rejoiceth in the truth.” (v.6).
3. “Love believeth all things.” (v.7).
4. “Love hopeth all things.” (v.7).

First the Apostle says, “Love is kind.” The word kind is from the word kin, As used here, it means that one who possesses this heavenly love will treat another as a dear relative, a member of the same family. In one sense it may be said that Love takes all into the family circle of God, and treats them as being closely related to her in that all are objects of God’s love – “For God so loved the world.”

Kindness is defined as a disposition to do good to others, a disposition to make them happy by granting their requests, supplying their wants, or assisting them in distress. It expresses tenderness or goodness of nature, benevolence. “Its manner is gracious, its tone affectionate, its expression gentle, its whole bearing is cordial, it is full of considerate and thoughtful service.”

The Apostle tells us next that, “Love rejoiceth in the truth,” that is, rejoiceth when the truth is honored, or when it prospers, no matter what agency may be employed in its furtherance. It can rejoice in the work of Christ being done by others as well as that being done by itself, and by whatever means the cause of Christ is being promoted. It can say with Paul – “Therein do I rejoice, yea and I will rejoice.” Its interest reaches beyond its own parish and its own little circle. It is in full sympathy with every movement that can promote the cause of righteousness in the world. It longs and prays for the spread of the truth until every creature shall know of God and His great salvation.

“Love believeth all things,” is the next active quality of love. This does not mean that love believes everything it hears, but rather that it believes when things seem all contrary to love. It puts the best construction possible upon another’s conduct. It says, I cannot see the heart, perhaps the new nature has been overcome for a time. Love is always eager to believe the best possible of another. It believes that God is love, even when His severe providences would, to the natural mind, seem to indicate the contrary. It says, “He doeth all things well, sometime we’ll understand.” Those who have come to a knowledge of God’s Plan are enabled to understand the mystery of permitted evil of human suffering and can see that all things will ultimately show that God is love.

“Love hopeth all things.” This may mean that when faith fails, or when one is compelled to believe the worst about another and naturally would turn away from him, hope comes to the rescue, and says, “It is not as it should be, but I trust, I hope it will be yet.” Love hopes to the end. Those who experience this love from another – “the love that will not let me go” – desire in turn themselves to bestow it upon those who are weak and erring.

### **Who is sufficient**

*(2 Cor.2:16)*

Grant skill each sacred theme to trace,  
With loving voice and glowing tongue.  
As when upon Thy words of grace  
The wondering crowds enraptured hung.

Give strength, blest Saviour, in Thy might;  
Illuminate our hearts, and we,  
Transformed into Thine image bright,  
Shall teach and love and live. like Thee.

## LOVE'S NEGATIVES

It is very helpful in our endeavours to develop this love Divine, to note how much of this God-like character of love is displayed in what we are not, and what we do not. The first and paramount requirement of discipleship is that of self-denial. Self-denial is sometimes described as simply saying “no” to oneself. “If any man will be my disciple let him deny self, etc.” Self denial has sometimes been described as a great “not” laid across the pathway of the human nature. We find eight characteristics, or “nots”, mentioned:

1. “Love envieth not.” (v.4)
2. “Love vaunteth not itself.” (v.4)
3. “Love is not puffed up.” (v.4)
4. “Love behaveth not unseemly.” (v.5)
5. “Love seeketh not her own.” (v.5)
6. “Love is not provoked.” (v.5)
7. “Love thinketh no evil.” (v.5)
8. “Love rejoiceth not in iniquity.” (v.6)

The first we notice is, that “love envies not.” (v.4) This has been well called, the innocency or guilelessness of love. Envy is defined as pain, uneasiness, mortification, or discontent at superior excellence, reputation, or happiness enjoyed by another. It is accompanied often with a wish to depreciate the person, and with pleasure in seeing the person depressed or humiliated.

Envy results from pride, ambition, or earthly love mortified that another has obtained what we have a strong desire to possess. Love is not jealous or unhappy at another’s success or achievements, even though that success be along a line that rivals it. Love is glad even to step down and to let another take the place of honor or preference, and itself to vanish out of sight. Love can rejoice in the good of others as heartily as in its own, and it can “thank God for the graces, the services, and the recompense of others as freely as for its own.”

The second negative quality of love, is described in the words – “Love vaunteth not itself.” (v.4). This has been well called the modesty of love. Vaunting oneself means vainly boasting, ostentatiously setting forth what one is or has. It is the offspring of conceit. It may be described as a desire to display, a desire to court the good opinion of others. It does not refer to pride, but something lower than pride – vanity. The vain person has often a very low opinion of himself, and for this very reason desires others to have a higher opinion of his worth than he deserves. He desires to make use of all resources available in creating a reputation beyond his real worth. The desire for display is contrary to the law of love. Anything we do with the consciousness of being noticed, with a desire for the praise of men, is a very low form of selfishness.

Another negative quality mentioned by the Apostle is – “Love is not puffed up” (v.4.) This is well named the humility of love. Love is not puffed up with pride, or swollen with the conceit of its own goodness, importance, attractiveness or achievements. Love has learned not to think of itself more highly than it ought to think. Love looks upon itself as a mere instrument, as a fragile earthen vessel that God may take up and use or that he may lay aside at His will. It has learned to estimate itself as nothing.

“Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, exalted;  
Not I, but Christ, be seen, be known, be heard;  
Not I, but Christ, in every look and action,  
Not I, but Christ, in every thought and word.  
Not I, but Christ, to gently soothe in sorrow;  
Not I, but Christ, to wipe the falling tear;  
Not I, but Christ, to lift the weary burden,

Not I, but Christ, to hush away all fear.  
Oh to be saved from myself, dear Lord,  
Oh to be lost in Thee,  
Oh that it might be no more I,  
But Christ that lives in me.”

### **LOVE’S UNSELFISHNESS**

The next negative quality of love is well denominated the manners or behaviour of love, and is expressed in the words of the Apostle – “Love becometh not itself unseemly.” Love is always good mannered. Love does not act rudely, discourteously. Love does not willingly offend, hurt, or wound another’s feelings. Love is gentle and considerate in her manner. One has said – “It is wonderful how the spiritual qualities will transform the exterior life of even very ignorant and uncultivated people, and how their very manners will change and become lovely and attractive from the power of the heavenly principle within.” Another way of defining this expression would be – Love does not behave itself indecently, unbecomingly. It is even modest in its expressions of its spiritual enjoyments.

The words, “Love seeketh not her own,” may well be termed the aim or central purpose of love. Love never terminates on itself. Human nature is naturally disposed to look first from the standpoint of self and ask, How will this affect me, or mine? Love inverts the order and thinks first, How will this please Him? How, will this help others? To whatever extent, our purpose or aim in life is to gratify ourselves, rather than that of bringing glory to God or of being of benefit to others; to that extent it is deficient in this heavenly love. One who makes it a rule of life to seek the good of others as the Master did, will find that he has discovered the way to possess true happiness, without seeking it, and to at last attain the heavenly Kingdom. “God will pour in to fill the vacuum, as love pours out and produces it.”

Another negative quality of heavenly Love is described in the words – “Love is not provoked.” This has been rightly called the temper of love. Love is always good tempered. The word “easily” is not found in the original manuscript. Love is never provoked, and never fails in anything. Had Christ even once failed in manifesting any of the characteristics of love; had He lost Himself and become sinfully angry; had He been incited to rage, the world would have no Saviour, no Deliverer. Never for one moment in the contest against sin and evil, or in His contact with the most wicked people, did He ever display sinful anger or wrath. In the shame and spitting before the Jewish council, in the smiting by the officers of the high priest, in the terrible anguish and insults of the cross, He did not in one single instance lose His perfect self-control and gentleness; and, as one has truly said – “If Christ be in us, His love will not be provoked even as of old.”

### **LOVE’S FORGIVING POWER**

Still another negative quality of this Love that comes from Heaven is described in the words – “Love thinketh no evil.” This is variously rendered as – “Love does not surmise evil”, “Love imputeth no evil”, “Love keepeth no account of evil.” In harmony with the last rendering, this is named the memory of love. Concerning certain things love has a poor memory, rather it has the ability to forget as well as to forgive. It has no malignant recollections. It does not forgive and cover over the fault of another today, while carefully keeping it in reserve to use tomorrow if something should provoke a reference to it. It drops the past, it forgets the fault and acts as if it had not been. One has thus commented on the expression, “Love keepeth no account of evil”. – “It lays up no rods in pickle, no grudges for future avenging, no memories to be poured out at the next opportunity in bitter words; but for its own sake, as well as for the others, it loves to forget wrong or injury done to it. It refuses to dwell upon it, it keeps no record of offences, it does not get sullen, and stay until it has had its revenge, by a gloomy moroseness, which has made everybody wretched long enough to inflict a reasonable punishment, and then choose to be sweet again. No; but it quickly forgets the fault, smiles through the springing tears, supplants the cloud with the rainbow, gives, like the crushed geranium leaves, sweetness in return for bruising, and still loves on unchanged. It has no account book, no judgement seat; its only business is mercy, gentleness, and pleasing. It is called to bless and curse not, to do good and not evil all its days; to cheer and comfort, sweeten and lift up; but never to depress, to pain, to judge to harm; even the poor sinner and the erring one are the special objects of its tenderness, and it loves to bless them that persecute, and pour coals of fire upon the head of him that wrongs it.”

### **LOVE TO THE ERRING**

The last characteristic of this negative side of Heavenly love is that – “It rejoiceth not in iniquity.” We do not need to be told that those who possess this Heavenly love are haters of the principle of iniquity. Sin, iniquity, is abhorrent to such. We do not think that this was in the Apostle’s mind when he wrote these words. A characteristic may be referred to here by him that is quite common on the part of the world, a characteristic which Christians are susceptible to if they are not watchful and prayerful, and if they are not partakers of a

large measure of the spirit of Christ, this Heavenly love. His words seem to have reference to one who has been injured, and then the one who has caused the injury has himself suffered retribution, possibly through experiencing the same injury. How strong is the temptation to rejoice and say – “I am glad; he is getting what he deserves because of his treatment of me.” This is not the course of love; no – “Love rejoiceth not in iniquity.” Love is always desirous of returning good for evil.

Another way of interpreting this expression is that – “There is a temptation to feel flattered when we find another doing wrong, especially if it is one who has been longer in the Christian life than we, and from whom we might expect better things. It seems to give a sort of covering to our faults, or at least, a faint excuse; or if not there is a certain sort of Pharisaical triumph that makes us feel that we have got the better of them, and are perhaps a little nearer God . . . Let us be ashamed of such a spirit, and like our Master, let us weep where others fall, even if we have stood. Good Daniel took upon him the faults and sins of his people, and confessed them as his own, and won the recompense of being called the ‘man that was greatly beloved.’ Let us have that love that will blush with shame for our brother’s fault, and for our sister’s false step, that will be so linked with the whole Body of Christ, that if one member suffer, we shall suffer; if one member suffer sin, we shall feel disgraced and defiled and shall find all the strength of our heart flowing out in intercession and restoring love. The most delicate and sacred of love’s ministries is to the erring, and only one who has a very loving heart can deal with the sins of others. Harshness never helps them, censoriousness never heals them, a spirit of judging never uplifts them, but ye which are spiritual restore the one that is overtaken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness. Love always covers the faults of others, by its own sweet disguises, and thus creates the good which it desires in them.”

These eight negative attributes of love, constitute a very large measure of the Christian character. How impressive is the thought that the chief thing we have to do in order to exemplify the Christian profession, is not to do. How often is the case true of us, if we would honor our Lord and Master, and imitate Him, we can best do so by simply keeping still, “holding back the word unspoken, the thought uncherished, the look unexpressed, the deed undone, and maintain a quiet and silent negative, under the pressure of temptation.” Of a certain occasion it is written of our Lord – “He answered them not a word.”

## **FOLLOW AFTER LOVE**

The Apostle concludes his wonderful, Divinely inspired portrait of love in the words of exhortation, “Follow after Love” – 1 Cor. 14:1. The word “follow” would be better rendered “pursue.” The thought contained in the word “pursue” is portrayed in the hunter pursuing his game, or the avaricious man pursuing riches. The meaning is to make the exhibition of this heavenly Love the one great object of our lives. Just as the great inspiring and controlling attribute of God’s character is that of love, as we who understand God’s wonderful Plan for His creatures know, so let the inspiring and controlling attribute of our characters in our dealing with out fellow-men be that of love.

This heavenly love is not earthly in its origin. Indeed, the picture presented in this wonderful description is really that of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is impossible of duplication by imperfect creatures. The only way to obtain this love even measurably is by coming into an actual union with Christ Jesus. It begins to be realised by receiving His spirit, the holy spirit. This is experienced by receiving Christ as Saviour from the condemnation and guilt of sin, and by yielding up our wills entirely to Him. (See Romans 5:1-5)

Then will come the opportunities to exercise this heavenly Love. In the common, everyday affairs of life these opportunities come. It is under these ordinary circumstances and conditions that this new love, this new life, begins to be tested. It is, however, to be tested to the uttermost. On this account we must not think it strange when, in the Divine providence, we are led into most trying and difficult places, in which our own natural love will utterly fail, and we learn the difference between the natural love and the supernatural – the heavenly love. We thus discover our own natural imperfections, our utter weakness, and in this way we learn to trust in Christ to help in our time of need.

We will be brought into places where we will be wronged, ill-treated, unjustly dealt with, or unappreciated, in order that we may learn to love as God, as Christ loves. It is, under such conditions that we will be tempted to say – “It is not required of me to love those who spitefully use me and persecute me and say all manner of evil against me falsely.” And yet we are compelled to admit that this is the way that God and Christ love. This was one of the ways that Christ, our Master, proved that He possessed this love. We may say – “Who is sufficient for these things? Who is equal to such a love?” The answer must be, No one is sufficient of himself. It is here that we must learn the other lesson, the lesson that Paul said he had learned, which is that our sufficiency is secured by an actual, vital union with Christ by faith and obedience.

## **Love of Jesus**

Love of Jesus, all divine,

Fill this longing heart of mine;  
Ceaseless struggling after life,  
Weary with the endless strife.  
Blessed Saviour, lend Thine aid;  
Lift Thou up my fainting head!  
Lead me to my long-sought rest,  
Never more by care opprest.  
Thou alone my trust shall be,  
Thou alone canst comfort me;  
Only, Jesus, let thy grace  
Be my shield and hiding-place;  
Let me know Thy saving power  
In temptation's fiercest hour;  
Then, my Saviour, at Thy side  
Let me evermore abide.  
Thou hast wrought this fond desire,  
And Thou dost with hope inspire;  
Thou dost wean from all below;  
Thee, and Thee alone to know Thou,  
Who hast inspired the cry,  
Thou alone canst satisfy;  
Love of Jesus, all divine,  
Fill this longing heart of mine.

## Kingdom Prospects

*"BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW." REV. 21:5*

Just as Scripture distinguishes between the saved and the lost, and between different classes of the one and of the other, so it also distinguishes between the future portion of the Church of Christ, that of the Jewish people, and that of the nations of the earth. Too many in their thoughts of the future leave out this last; the destiny of the Church of this dispensation figures so largely in their anticipations, that they seem almost to forget that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the *world*," and to lose sight of the blessed prospect that, not only is the present Church to be saved out of the ruined world, to become the Eve of the second Adam, but that the ruined earth itself is yet to be renewed, and to become the happy home of saved nations, who participate in the results of redemption.

The narrowness which sees nothing but the salvation of the Church of this dispensation is born of human selfishness, and not of Divine love; it is founded not on the teaching of Scripture, but on tradition and prejudice. The Bible in this (the Book of Revelation), its last revelation on the subject, plainly teaches that while the peculiar glories of the Church are hers, and hers alone, that while the special privileges of the natural seed of Abraham belong to Israel, and to Israel only, there is yet a blessed future awaiting mankind also under the gracious government of Immanuel; that one of the effects of the completed work of Christ will be to place the saved nations of the eternal Kingdom in a restored paradise, completely delivered from the tempter, and so established in righteousness that the Holy One can take up his abode among them for ever. "He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

The salvation of the Church of this dispensation is not the whole result of the death of Christ. There is to be in addition the establishment for ever of a kingdom of God, in which his will shall be as fully done by men on earth as it is now done by angels in heaven. The consummation, for which we daily pray, is destined to come at last; and holy and happy service, without a flaw and without an interruption, is yet to be rendered to God, not merely by the glorified saints of the new Jerusalem, but by redeemed nations on the earth, who walk for ever in the light of the celestial city.

Such is the sublime vista of the future of our race, and of our earth in the eternal ages, with which Scripture closes.

— *H. Grattan Guinness*

It is this portion that God has elected to give to the human race. And what a glorious portion! Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart,

meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay – not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete. –Revelation 21:4.

And this is the change in human society only. We call to mind also that the earth, which was “made to be inhabited” by such a race of beings, is to be a fit and pleasing abode for them, as represented in the Edenic paradise, in which the representative man was at first placed. Paradise shall be restored. The earth shall no more bring forth thorns and briers, and require the sweat of man's face to yield his bread, but “the earth shall (easily and naturally) yield her increase.” “The desert shall blossom as the rose”; the lower animal creation will be perfect, willing, and obedient servants; nature with all its pleasing variety will call to man from every direction to seek and know the glory and power and love of God; and mind and heart will rejoice in him.

The restless desire for something new, that now prevails, is not a natural but an abnormal condition, due to our imperfection, and to our present unsatisfactory surroundings. It is not Godlike restlessly to crave something new. Most things are old to God; and he rejoices most in those things which are old and perfect. So will it be with man when restored to the image of God. The perfect man will not know or appreciate fully, and hence will not prefer, the glory of spiritual being, because of a different nature, just as fishes and birds, for the same reason, prefer and enjoy each their own nature and element most. Man will be so absorbed and enraptured with the glory that surrounds him on the human plane that he will have no aspiration to, nor preference for, another nature or other conditions than those possessed.

That the Christian Church, the Body of Christ, is an exception to God's general plan for mankind, is evident from the statement that its selection was determined in the divine plan before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4,5), at which time God not only foresaw the fall of the race into sin, but also predetermined the justification, the sanctification and the glorification of this class, which, during the Gospel Age, he has been calling out of the world to be conformed to the image of his Son, to be partakers of the divine nature and to be fellow-heirs with Christ Jesus of the Millennial Kingdom for the establishment of universal righteousness and peace. – Romans 8: 28-31.

– Charles T Russell

### **Jesus Only**

Jesus only! In the shadow  
Of the cloud so chill and dim,  
We are clinging, loving, trusting,  
He with us and we with Him;  
All unseen, though ever nigh,  
Jesus only - all our cry.

Jesus only! In the glory,  
When the shadows all are flown,  
Seeing Him in all His beauty,  
Satisfied with Him alone;  
May we join His ransomed throng,  
Jesus only - all our song!

## **Good Tidings of Great Joy**

(LUKE 2:8-14)

The message of the angels to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem becomes more and more precious to every child of God in proportion as they grow in grace and knowledge. As their ears and eyes of understanding open more widely to the lengths and breadths of God's great Plan of the Ages, that prophetic message is the more highly esteemed as an epitome of the entire Gospel. Nor can our attention be called too frequently to the great event which lies at the foundation of that message - the Saviour's birth.

The angelic message was a prophecy of good things to be accomplished for the Church and the world during the Millennial Age. The Church is to have the first blessing. The First Resurrection is to be composed only

of the blessed and holy who shall live and reign with Christ during the thousand years, when Satan shall be bound, and the good influence of truth and righteousness enlighten the whole earth. (Rev. 20:1-6) The declaration of the Scriptures is that the deliverance of the Church will come early in the morning of the millennial day, as the prophet declares, "God will help her early in the morning." (Psa. 46:5)

But much as we rejoice in the glorious hopes of the gospel set before us who now see, who now rejoice with joy unspeakable, we are glad that the divine mercy and love are of such lengths and breadths and heights and depths as to encompass the whole world of mankind, and provide a blessing for every member of Adam's race through Him who loved us and bought us with His own precious blood.

Truly, the more we see of the Divine Plan for our salvation, which began to take shape in the birth of Jesus, the more we feel like shouting with the angelic choir praises to the God of heaven, thankfulness for His mercy to the children of men. It mattered not that the babe born in Bethlehem was the Saviour only in prospect, that He could not be anointed to do His work until He reached manhood's estate thirty years later. It mattered not that even then it would be necessary for Him to lay down His life gradually during the three and a half years of His earthly ministry, to be finished at Calvary. Nor did it matter that His resurrection was still three days after His death and His ascension forty days later; and that the blessing in general would be deferred for nearly twenty centuries thereafter.

As the angels could sing and rejoice at the first budding of the Divine Plan of Salvation, so also can all who have faith in the ultimate outcome rejoice with joy unspeakable and give praise to God in the highest and to His Son our Lord.