

Love for Christ and Obedience

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"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:21).

In this instance, we shall depart from our customary method of expounding the different clauses of a verse in the order in which they occur; instead, we shall treat this verse more or less topically. That in it which is of such vital importance is the final clause, where the Savior promised to manifest Himself to the obedient believer. Now there is nothing the real Christian desires so much as a personal manifestation of the Lord Jesus. In comparison with this, all other blessings are quite secondary.

In order to simplify, let us ask and attempt to answer three questions: How does the Savior now "manifest" Himself? What are the effects of such manifestation? What are the conditions which I have to meet?

In what way does the Lord Jesus now manifest Himself? It is hardly necessary to say, not corporeally. No longer is the Word made flesh, tabernacling among men. No more does He say, as He said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side" (John 20:27). No longer may He be seen by our physical eyes (1 John 1:1). Nor is the promise of Christ which we are now considering made good through visions. We recall the vision which Jacob had at Bethel, when a ladder was set upon earth, whose top reached unto heaven, upon which the angels of God ascended and descended. We think of that wondrous vision given to Isaiah when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne before which the seraphim cried, "holy, holy, holy." No, it is not in visions or in dreams that the Lord promises to come to His people.

What then? It is a spiritual revelation of Himself to the soul! It is a vivid realization of the Savior's being and nearness, in a deep and abiding sense of His favor and love. "By the power of the Spirit, He makes His Word so luminous, that as we read it, He Himself seems to draw near. The whole biography of Jesus becomes in this way a precious reality. We see His form. We hear His words." It is through the written Word that the incarnate Word "manifests" Himself to the heart!

And what are the effects upon the soul of such a manifestation of Christ. First and foremost, He Himself is made a blessed and glorious reality to us. The one who has been granted such an experience can say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye (the eye of the heart) seeth thee" (Job 42:5). Such a one now discerns the surpassing beauty and glory of His person and exclaims, "Thou art fairer than the children of men." Again: such a manifestation of Christ to the soul assures us of His favor. Now we hear Him saying (through the Scriptures), "As the Father hath loved me, so I have loved you." And now I can respond, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

Another consequence of this manifestation of Christ is "*comfort and support* in trials, especially in those trials, which, on account of their Personal nature, are beyond the reach of human sympathy and love — the trials of desertion and loneliness from which Jesus Himself suffered so keenly; heart trials, domestic trials, secret griefs, too sacred to be breathed in the ears of men — all these trials in which nothing can sustain us but the sympathy which His own presence gives." Just as the Son of God appeared to the three faithful Hebrews in the fiery furnace, so does He now come to those in the place of trial and anguish. So too in the last great trial should we be called upon to pass through it ere the Savior comes. Then to earthly friends we can turn no longer. But we may say with the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Now, let us inquire, What are the terms on which the Savior thus draws near? Surely every Christian reader is most anxious to secure the key to an experience so elevating, so blessed. Listen now to the Savior's words, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." The faith by which we are saved does not destroy the necessity for an obedient walk. "*Faith is the root of which obedience is the beautiful flower and fruit.*" And it is only when faith has issued in obedience, in an obedience which stumbles not at sacrifices and halts not when the way is rough and dark; in an obedience that cheerfully bears the cross and shame — it is only then that this highest promise of the Gospel is fulfilled... When love for the Savior shall lead us to keep His holy Word — lead us to an immediate, unreserved, unhesitating obedience — lead us to say, in the spirit of entire self-surrender and sacrifice, 'Thy will, not mine, be done,' then, farewell to doubt and darkness, to loneliness and sorrow! Then shall

we mourn no more an absent Lord. Then shall we walk as seeing Him who is invisible, triumphant over every fear, victorious over every foe."

This manifestation of Christ is made only to the one who really loves Him, and the proof of love to Him is not by emotional displays but by submission to His will. There is a vast difference between sentiment and practical reality. The Lord will give no direct and special revelation of Himself to those who are in the path of disobedience. "He that hath my commandments," means, hath them at heart. "And keepeth them," that is the real test. We hear, but do we heed? We know, but are we doing His will? "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18)! "And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father."

There are three different senses in which Christians may be considered as objects of the loving favor of the Father and of the Son: as persons *elected* in sovereign grace to eternal life; as persons actually *united* to Christ by believing; and as persons *transformed* by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. It is in this last sense that Christ here speaks. Just as the Father is said to love the Son because of His obedience (John 10:17, 18), so is He said to love the believer for the same reason. It is the love of complacency, as distinguished from the love of compassion. The Father was well pleased with His incarnate Son, and He is well pleased with us when we honor and glorify His Son by obeying His commandments.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

The Lord here repeats that God has fellowship only with those whose hearts welcome Him, who love Him, and whose love is manifested by submission to His Word. Then He loves in return. The Old Testament taught precisely the same thing. "I love them that love me" (Proverbs 8:17). "If a man love me he will keep my word." Let not renewed souls torture themselves by attempting to define too nicely the extent of their "keeping." Let those who are tempted to do so meditate upon John 17:6 — "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy Word." Mark it well that this was said by the Savior in full view of all the infirmities and failures of the disciples and said prior to the day of Pentecost!

To "keep" God's commandments is to obey them, and the primary, fundamental thing in obedience is the desire of the heart, and it is on the heart that God ever looks. *Two things are true of every Christian:* deep down in his heart there is an intense, steady longing and yearning to please God, to do His will, to walk in full accord with His Word. This yearning may be stronger in some than in others, and in each of us it is stronger at some times than at others; nevertheless, it is there! But in the second place, no real Christian *fully realizes* this desire. Every genuine Christian has to say with the apostle Paul, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but *I follow after*, if that I may lay hold of that for which I am laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12). Now we believe that it is this heart-obedience, this inward longing to be fully conformed to His will, this burning desire of the renewed soul, of which Christ here speaks. "If a man love me, he will keep my word."

Every true believer loves Christ; therefore every true believer "keeps" His Word, keeps it in the sense thus defined. Let it be repeated, God looks at the heart; whereas we are constantly occupied with the outward appearance. As we scrutinize our deeds, if we are honest, we have to acknowledge that we have "kept his word" very imperfectly; yea, it seems to us, that we are not entitled to say that we have "kept" it at all. But the Lord looks behind the deeds, and knows the longings within us. The case of Peter in John 21 is a pertinent illustration. When Christ asked him a third time, "Lovest thou me?" His disciple answered, "Lord, thou knowest all things; THOU knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17). My disgraceful actions contradicted my love; my fellow-disciples have good reason to doubt it, but Thou who searchest the heart knowest better. In one sense, it is an intensely solemn and searching thing to remember that nothing can be hidden from Him before whom all things are open and naked; but in another sense it is most blessed and comforting to realize that He can see in my heart what I cannot often discover in my ways, and what my fellow-believers cannot — a real love for Him, a genuine longing to please and glorify Him.

Let not the conclusion be drawn that we are here lapsing into Antinomian laxity, or making it a matter of no moment what our outward lives are like. To borrow words which treat of another subject, "As there was a readiness to will so there should be a performance also" (2 Corinthians 8:11). Though the apostle acknowledged that he had not "already attained," yet he continued to "follow after." Where there is love for Christ, there cannot but be bitter sorrow (as with Peter) when we know that we have grieved Him. And more; there will be a sincere confession of our sins, and confession will be followed by earnest supplication for grace to enable us to do what He has bidden.