

## “The Knowledge of God”

by Dr. E.W. Bullinger

“It is quite one of the “signs of the times” that the Godhead is becoming a subject of discussion; and the doctrines connected with the Trinity and the Virgin birth, are considered as open questions, not affecting the standing or faith of a Christian. But there is another question which lies beneath this. The real question is: How many of us really know the God whom we worship? Is it not the case with very many that it is “the unknown God?”

The true knowledge of God lies at the foundation of the revelation of the Mystery. Hence it is the great keynote of the Epistle to the Ephesians; and is the link which unites the three Prison-Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians), and binds them to the Epistles to the Thessalonians where, in that typical Church (1 Thessalonians 1:7, RV), we see the wonderful effect produced by the true knowledge of God in heart and life.

In the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Corinthians it is the knowledge of man which is made known; but in the Prison-Epistles it is the knowledge of God which is revealed. In the former three it is man, and how he is justified. In the latter three it is God, and how He is revealed.

Hence, one of the blessings enumerated in Ephesians is that God “hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery (or the secret) of His will”; which means His secret purpose (vv. 8, 9): and the measure of this blessing is declared to “according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself” (vv. 9, 10).

This knowledge of God is to be obtained, not by reasoning, but by revelation; not by intellectual attainment, but by God’s gift.

Hence the prayer that follows on this is that “God... may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM” (v.17).

In the Epistle to the Philippians, which is reproof for failure in respect of Ephesian teaching, the opening prayer is that their love to one another as members of the one Body “may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phil. 1:9).

This full knowledge of God is revealed and found only in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence in Phil. 3:10 the Apostle declares that between our being “found in HIM” in regeneration grace, and our being made like HIM in resurrection glory, our whole time is to be filled up with the pursuance of one thing, and that is still Christ, and is expressed in the strong desire “that I may get to know HIM” (v. 10).

In Colossians we have the same prayer as in Ephesians 1:17, but it is in its blessed object and effect on ourselves. “I Pray,” the Apostle says, “that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (v. 9).

- Why?
- “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (v. 10).

Thus, not only is our walk secured, but all the wondrous truths connected

with the Mystery are bound up in the true knowledge of God.

But, how are we to get to know Him? Who can tell us? When we come to this, which is the root of the whole matter, every thing and every man fails us. Articles, Creeds, and Confessions of Faith alike fail to give us this full knowledge of God which is so essential to our faith and walk. They are all only man's impressions, inferences, and conclusions drawn from Scripture; and have themselves to be judged by Scripture. Whatever of truth there may be in them; or however useful, or even necessary, they may be in their proper place, *they can never take the place of the Word of God*. Only in the person of the Living Word, and in the pages of the Written Word, can we get to know God.

We do not, therefore, now propose to discuss doctrines, or to use any non-scriptural expressions; not even such words as "Trinity" or "Unity", or Ecclesiastical terminology. These are the things which divide the members of the One Body, instead of uniting them. These introduce the seeds of strife and contention. These have been the causes of controversies and martyrdoms. But, if we confine ourselves to the Word of God, and that alone, both writer and readers may, and will, all learn together what God has revealed concerning Himself. We shall not seek to draw any conclusions, or to discuss or revise any creeds. We shall give only the evidence of Scripture in the words of Scripture; and use only Scriptural terminology. What we have to do in this matter is not to teach, but to learn; not to consider doctrines, but facts; and not to resort to reasoning, but to revelation. It is not a question of our understanding what God may mean, but of believing what He has said.

As to our understanding, it is very limited, even as to the natural things of this world. Our hearing is limited; our eyesight is limited. All things great or small, high or low, distant or near, are all only *relative*; they are all matters of degree. It is the same with the words as well as with the works of God. Whatever line of study we may pursue; whatever work of creation we may study; whatever subject or doctrine we may take up, we go on until we come to the end of human understanding - we reach the limit of intellectual power. We come, as it were, to a wall of adamant which we can neither pierce, nor pass, nor climb; and we return with these words impressed upon our hearts - "We know in part". If this be so in our study of the works and words of God, how much more must it be so in our efforts to get to know God Himself.

In revealing Himself at all He has, at once, to condescend to our capacities. He has to use language which must be understandable by us; but which can never fully reveal Himself; for that which is finite can never explain the Infinite, hence, God must necessarily (by figure of speech called *Anthropopatheia*) speak of Himself as a man, for so only could we comprehend. Hence, both as to person and actions, everything is spoken of after the manner of men. This is why we read of His "nostrils". His "bosom", and of His repenting, and of other human actions. But all these are only Figures of speech by which we can alone obtain an idea of the reality. It is for the same reason perhaps that He speaks of Himself as being three separate Persons; for with our finite capacities we can never comprehend the infinite.

We must therefore take the Scripture language, and, instead of reasoning about the literal words, we must rejoice in the truths that are revealed.

Though we may not be able to understand them or explain them; we are, by grace, enabled to believe them and experience them.”

Man was once wholly ignorant as to what *light* is. And ignorant infidels ridiculed the idea of light being created before the sun. but since the discovery of the Prism and, more recently, by it of what are called, and known as, the X-rays, and the N-rays, and Radium, all theories about light have been cast into the melting-pot; and no scientist would, to-day, venture to define the nature of *light*. “God is light.” This metaphor explains to us that light represents God. And when, in the absolute darkness of a specially-darkened chamber, we recently saw, after the eye had got accustomed to the darkness (which was a long time), we saw the shining forth of a piece of radium, a thousandth part of a millimetre: then, in the silence of that darkened chamber one felt almost in the presence of God. There it shone in all its glory and solitude; and there it is shining still. And the man of science, who allowed us to see it, confessed that these were his own feelings.

But far short of this wonderful modern discovery, it has long been known that the rays of LIGHT are threefold. We have the *Heat* rays, which are felt but not seen. We have the *Light* rays, which are seen and not felt, and we have the *Actinic* ray, which are known only by the effects of their chemical action (as in Photography), being neither seen nor felt.

Even so it is with VAPOUR. We have it, *invisible* in the air, *visible* in the form of water, *experienced* in its effects.

In Numbers 6:24-26 we read, in the Aaronic BLESSING, the same threefold reference -

- “JEHOVAH bless thee and keep thee.
- “JEHOVAH make His face shine upon thee.
- “JEHOVAH lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.”

In Isaiah 6:3 we have the same threefold reference in the cry of the SERAPHIM :-

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is Jehovah Sabaoth: the whole earth is full of His glory.”

This is exactly what we see in Revelation. When we come to the Word of God, we have GOD the Giver of the Word: the Word given (CHRIST the Living Word), and the written Word revealed by the SPIRIT, and communicated by Him to our hearts.

Now there are two ways in which we may pursue this study of the revelation of the knowledge of God. We may take separate single passages of Scripture in which the Father, Son, and Spirit are all mentioned in relation to their respective activities, and we may afterward take separate *subjects*, and then see how, in three different and unconnected passages, these activities of Father, Son, and Spirit are set forth.

Let us first confine ourselves to the consideration of single passages, with the three activities of God. We avoid the use of the Latin word “Person”, because it is not Biblical, and is calculated to introduce ideas into Scripture, and thus hinder us in drawing our knowledge out of the Scripture.

In these Scripture statements the Three are revealed in many ways, and in

various order.

1. As to God's Covenant

In Haggai 2:5 we read: "According to the WORD that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my SPIRIT remaineth with you; fear ye not."

2. As to Creation

In Psalm 33:6 we read: "By the WORD of JEHOVAH were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the BREATH ( or Spirit) of His mouth."

3. As to the Commission of the Messiah

In Isaiah 48:16 we read: "And now, ADONAI JEHOVAH, and His SPIRIT, hath sent ME."

4. As to Incarnation

In Luke 1:35 we read: "PNEUMA HAGION shall come upon thee, and the power of THE HIGHEST shall overshadow thee: therefore that holy thing which shall be begotten also shall be called God's SON."

5. As to His Baptism

We read in Matthew 3:16,17 how He was consecrated for His office of prophet: the SPIRIT of God descending upon Him; and the voice of the FATHER, saying "This is My beloved SON."

6. As to Crucifixion

In Hebrews 9:14 we read: "How much more shall the blood of CHRIST, who through the Eternal SPIRIT offered Himself without spot to GOD, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

7. As to Christ's Ministry

In Acts 10:38 it is revealed, by the lips of Peter, "How GOD anointed JESUS of Nazareth with PNEUMA HAGION and with power."

8. As to the Promise of the Comforter

In John 14:26 we have "The Comforter, who is the HOLY GHOST, whom the FATHER shall send in MY name, he shall teach you all things."

And in John 16:16 we have the same truth: "HE (the Spirit) shall glorify ME, for he shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the FATHER hath are Mine; therefore, said I, that He (the Spirit) shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you."

Yes, "all things". All things revealed later by Him in the Epistles specially addressed to the Church of Christ, which is His Body. All things essential to the members of that Body for their salvation and instruction; all things necessary for their safe conduct to glory shall be taught in the school of

spiritual experience by the promised Spirit of God, for the benefit and the blessing of all who have been given to Christ by the Father.

#### 9. As to the Provision made for God's Children

In Romans 8:16,17 we learn what wonderful provision is made for the teaching and training of the living children of God: "The SPIRIT Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of GOD; and, if children, then heirs - heirs of God, and joint heirs with CHRIST."

#### 10. As to the New Standing of God's Children

In telling us how the sanctification and justification of His people are secured, we have the revelation of the same God in 1 Corinthians 6:11. After speaking of the vileness of those who had been taken out of nature's dark pit of mire and clay, the apostle says: "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the LORD JESUS, and by the SPIRIT of our GOD."

#### 11. As to the Experience of God's Children

In every part and stage of a divinely wrought experience the same God is revealed as being engaged. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:21,22: "Now He who established us with you in CHRIST, and hath anointed us, is GOD; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the SPIRIT in our hearts."

#### 12. As to the Workings of the New Nature

In the heavenward aspirations of the new nature we see the same God working and securing them. In Galatians 4:6 we read: "And because ye are sons, GOD hath sent forth the SPIRIT of His SON into your hearts, crying, Abba [ie., my] FATHER." Here the gift of the Sonship spirit implies the Giver, the Holy Spirit.

#### 13. As to their access to God

In expressing the nearness to which they were brought who had once been "far off", we are told in Ephesians 2:18, "For through HIM (Christ; see v. 16,17) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access by one SPIRIT unto the FATHER."

#### 14. As to the Activities of the New Nature

In Philippians 3:3 the New nature by which we worship and serve God implies the Holy Spirit, the Giver. "We are the circumcision, who serve (or worship) by GOD'S SPIRIT, and rejoice in CHRIST JESUS, and have no confidence in the flesh." Here we learn that it is only by the New nature, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, that we can worship the Father, or rejoice in Christ Jesus.

#### 15. As to the Calling of God's Children

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14, we learn how the Thessalonian saints owed all their blessings to the Divine work which had been wrought within them: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord,

because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of THE SPIRIT and belief of the truth; whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

#### 16. As to the Election of God’s Children

In 1 Peter 1:2 the election of those believers to whom Peter wrote is declared to be “according to the foreknowledge of God the FATHER, through sanctification by the SPIRIT, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of JESUS CHRIST.”

#### 17. As to the Hope of God’s Children

In Jude 20, 21, we have the same God revealed (the gift given of the Holy Spirit, implying, of course, the Giver); “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying by the Holy SPIRIT, keep yourselves in the love of GOD, looking for the mercy of our Lord JESUS CHRIST unto eternal life.”

In all these and other similar Scriptures we have not a creed to confess; not a dry doctrine to preach; not a theory to reason about; not a cold dogma to propound; but, Divine Truth for us to feed upon, to live upon, to experience; and Divine facts to rejoice in. We have to do with, and get to know our God, Who reveals Himself as the living God, loving, saving, succouring, keeping, preserving, guiding, and blessing His children with all spiritual blessings. (but these children, alas! instead of getting to know Him, are *taken up with themselves*; they are occupied with their own blessings instead of with the Blessor. Hence it is that they are lost in themselves, and never really get to know the God with Whom they have to do. They will reason about His Person, instead of rejoicing in what He says and resting in what He has done. They thus come to regard Him as a God afar off, instead of as the One Whom we have, and Whom we know; and with Whom we have to do.

With some He is altogether impersonal. Those who know nothing of Him coin a new name for Him, and speak of Him as “Providence”. Thus they lose the blessed fact that He is their Provider. He reveals Himself as the FATHER *for* His people in His eternal love and purpose; the SON *with* His people in present grace and future glory; and the SPIRIT *in* His people, recreating, restoring, and comforting them.

This, however, brings us into another branch of our subject.

#### In Relation To His Children

Having considered the revelation of our God, in what He has made known of Himself, we are now in a position to know how He has revealed Himself in relation to ourselves, as His children. And, if we include Old Testament Scriptures addressed to Israel and not directly to the members of the Church of God in the Epistles, it is because there is a blessed *application* which is infinitely more true of us as God’s children. Thus while the *interpretation* belongs to , and remains true of Israel, it falls far short of what is true, now, of the Church. If that which is spoken of God’s favour to Israel is true; how much more true is it now of the members of the spiritual body of Christ?

Interspersed with dispensational truth and teaching addressed to Israel, and

even to the Gentiles, there are Divine statements which are eternally true independently of all persons and all times. We may not give up these. That would be a very wrong way of dividing the Word of Truth. Therefore, in quoting now and again passages from the Old Testament, it must not be supposed that we are forgetting or neglecting the Divine precept to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

In our former paper we confined ourselves to passages where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all equally engaged in the salvation and blessing of each member of the One Body. But we now wish to approach the subject from another standpoint. Instead of taking one passage with three different statements, we will take one subject or statement, with three different passages of Scripture. For example, as to:

#### (1) The Family of Church of God

1. We have the FATHER blessing it with all spiritual blessings. "ALL," not some; not many; but "all". "All" that He hath wherewith to bless; and "all" that are needful for them to receive. These "blessings" are not entrusted to the keeping (or losing) of the individual members of that One Family, but
2. The SON is revealed as holding all these blessings in inviolable security. They are said to be not in us; but "in Christ" for us (Ephesians 1:3). So that, He as the head of the body, fills "all" the members of the body with "all" blessings as they may need them, and as they are able to bear and to use them (v.23). This is the filling up of the ellipsis, "all in all," which, otherwise, is a meaningless expression. Then we have
3. The SPIRIT revealing and communicating all these blessings to us, and in us, according to the will of the Father and the work of the Son (1 Corinthians 2:10).

#### (2) The Quickening of God's Children

1. The FATHER quickeneth them (John 5:21).
2. The SON quickeneth them (John 5:21). and
3. It is the SPIRIT that quickeneth (John 6:63)

#### (3) The Relationship of God's Children

1. The FATHER says to each one of these, "thou shalt call me my FATHER, and shalt not turn away from me" (Jer. 3:19). And we call Him "Abba", ie., "my Father" (Rom. 8:15).
2. The SON saith, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me" (John 6:37).
3. The SPIRIT assures us that all these are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation!" (1 Peter 1:5).

#### (4) The Teaching and Training of God's Children

1. Of the FATHER, Christ said: "They shall all be taught of God, Everyone therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto Me" (John 6:45).
2. Of the SON it is written: "They came to Him again; and as he was wont, He taught them again" (Mark 10:1).
3. Of the SPIRIT it is written: That the deep things of God can be learned only

“in the words...which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

(5) The Inheritance of God’s Children

1. It is *provided* for them in the purpose of the FATHER; and “predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11).
2. It is *procured* and possessed in the SON “in whom we have obtained an inheritance” (Eph. 1:11). Our right and title to it being only the merits of His righteousness.
3. The SPIRIT is the “earnest of our inheritance”, the seal which we received on believing (Eph. 1:14).

(6) The Searching in and for God’s Children

is similarly spoken of.

1. The FATHER: “O Lord, thou hast searched me out, and known me” (Psalm. 139:1).
- 2, The SON declares: “I am He that searcheth the reins and the heart” (Revelation 2:23).
3. The SPIRIT searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

(7) The Salvation of God’s Children

Oh! what a wonderful work Salvation is. It is a great, grand, definite fact; a work

wrought *out* by the FATHER,  
wrought *for* us by the SON, and  
wrought *in* us by the HOLY SPIRIT.

Salvation is not a mere subject to be preached about; but it is a blessed reality to be enjoyed and experienced. It is not the salvation of man, but “the Salvation of God” (Exodus 14:13; 2 Chronicles 20:17; Jonah 2:9). It is God’s Salvation which He has procured and secured for His people. It is not an “offer” to be bandied about and rejected or accepted by man; but it is an accomplished fact, Divinely purposed, Divinely prepared, and Divinely imparted.

It flows *for* us *from* the Will of the Father.  
It flows *to* us *through* the Work of the Son.  
It flows *in* us *by* the Witness of the Holy Spirit.  
This is the teaching of Hebrews 10:7-15.

There we see that

The *will* of the FATHER, is the source of our salvation,  
The *work* of the SON is the channel of it, and  
The *witness* of the SPIRIT is the power of it.

This we have more fully set out in verses 5-15.

In verses 7 and 8 we learn that it was the WILL of the Father that His people who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) should be saved by the WORK of the Son; and that the WITNESS of the

Holy Spirit should reveal this to them in the Word, and in their hearts: and thus be “testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:6).

This tells us that our salvation, as saved sinners, had its origin in the will of God in eternity past. It was no after-thought consequent on man’s fall. “Lo, I come to do THY WILL.” This was written of Christ “in the volume of the book”.

Hence, when He came, this was His one great object. Not to “found a Church”; not even to save us because we were lost, or needed salvation; but because it was *the Father’s will* that His people should be saved. The one recorded utterance of Christ that broke the silence of those thirty years was to bear witness of this great fact. Twelve years rolled by before we have one recorded word; and then eighteen more years passed away before another syllable is recorded. The first and only recorded utterance during those thirty years was addressed to Joseph and Mary: “Wist ye not that I must be about MY FATHER’S BUSINESS?” (Luke 2:49). And when His last words were uttered on the Cross: - “It is FINISHED”, - What was it that was finished but the work which it was the Father’s will that he should do; and the Father’s business that He came to be about? This tells us that our salvation did not depend on “the will of the flesh, or on the will of man, but on the will of God” (John 1:13).

Sinners are often exhorted: “Save your souls”; “Get right with God”; but, alas! what ignorance it displays both of God and of His great salvation. The fact that the will of God is its source sends us back to eternity past, and to the volume of eternity’s book, in which, what is true physically of the natural birth is infinitely more true of the spiritual. So that we can truly say, as saved sinners:

“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect (not *imperfect!*); and in Thy book all my members were written which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them” (Ps. 134:16). In the margin it is: “*What days they should be fashioned.*” Yes, He knew “the days”, “the due time”, in which it should be testified: on the Cross by the Son, and in our hearts by the Spirit. This lifts our salvation entirely out of the hands of man; takes our feet out of the miry clay; and sets them on the rock of God’s will, God’s work, and God’s word.

To carry out that “will”, and accomplish that “work”, and fulfil that “word”, the Son of God came forth from the bosom of the Father. And He accomplished all. This is why “it behoved him to suffer” (Luke 24:46; Hebrews. 2:17). This is why “He must needs go through Samaria” (John 4:4). This is why He must “needs have suffered” (Acts 17:3). He came not to do His own will, but the will of the Father (John 6:38). And He did it. If He did not, then it is useless for us to attempt it; or to try and supplement it wherein His work is deficient!

The channel by which God’s salvation comes to us is “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”(Heb 10:10). And even this body was “prepared” by the Father (v. 5). It is not through the Church, not through the Sacraments; not through any religious rites and ceremonies and ordinances; not through any “works of righteousness which we have done”; not through our prayers or penitence, tears or trials - but “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). And the reality of it all, the means by which we realize this finished salvation, is “the witness of the Holy

Ghost”, in the Word, and in our hearts. “Whereof the Holy Ghost is a witness to us” (Hebrews 10:15). Thus our Salvation is lifted, at once, right out of our hands. The more we consider this the more perfect and complete is the witness and the evidence.

#### (8) The Faith of God’s Children

For if we see that faith is the hand which takes what God gives, then we are left in no doubt about the fact that

- It is the “Gift of God” the Gather (Ephesians 2:8)
- It is the “Grace” of Christ (Galatians 3:22), and
- It is the “Fruit” (Galatians 3:22), and “Word” and “Will” of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 9-11).

Our readers must amplify, and dwell upon, all these three-fold Scriptures, and feed on the precious truths which they reveal. We can only collect and present them: we can do no more, Each must feed upon them for himself. We ourselves are under the same great necessity.

#### (9) The Hope of God’s Children

If we have a good hope through grace,

- It is owing to the Father’s “abundant mercy” (1 Peter 1:3).
- It is Christ Himself “who is our hope” (1 Timothy 1: 1).
- It is “through the power of the Holy Ghost” that it abounds in us (Romans 15:13).

#### (10) The Love of God’s Children

If we speak of love, and if we are the objects of Divine love (Ephesians 1:4), then

- We are loved by the FATHER; for it is His love which is shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5).
- We are loved by the SON who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25, etc.,)
- We are loved by the SPIRIT, by which love we are to strive together in prayer (Romans 15:30).

#### (11) The life of God’s Children

If we possess eternal life, then

- Our *hope* of it is based on the fact that GOD (the Father), that cannot lie, promised it before the world began (Titus 1:2).
- Our *possession* of it is because the life which God hath given to us “is in His SON (1 John 5:11).
- Our *enjoyment* of it is secured to us by the fact that it is wrought in us by the power of the SPIRIT (John 6:63).

#### (2)The Comfort of God’s Children

If we are, in any measure, enabled to enjoy the consolations of the Gospel, it is because the whole Godhead is engaged in our behalf to bring us unto the blessings wherewith we are blessed.

- It is the FATHER of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth His children in all their tribulations (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).
- It is the LORD JESUS CHRIST who was sent on purpose “to comfort all that mourn” and “heal the broken-hearted” (Isaiah 70:2; Luke 4:19).
- It is the HOLY GHOST who gives “rest” to all who walk in “the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:31).

Oh what a God we have! Oh what a God to know! How important is the Word which thus reveals Him to us; not in the form of a creed to be rehearsed, but in all the blessed activities put forth

FOR us  
TO us, and  
IN us;

In the provision He has prepared *for us* Himself; conveyed *to us* in Christ; and shed abroad *in us* by the Holy Spirit.

From all this we learn that the Salvation about which the multitude so glibly talk and sing is not some wretched thing to be obtained or produced by us, but is a grand reality.

Wrought FOR us by God the Father.  
Wrought TO us by the Son  
Wrought IN us by God the Holy Ghost

It is a Salvation in which our every want is supplied; our warfare is accomplished, our sin cancelled, our preservation sure, fleshly ordinances abolished, and final triumph assured. It is a Salvation secured by the FATHER’s eternal love, by the SON’s redeeming work, and by the SPIRIT’s regenerating power. It is a Salvation in which GOD THE FATHER is the children’s portion; GOD THE SON is their title to that portion, and GOD THE SPIRIT is the power to read their title clear, and to enjoy their blessed portion. It is Eternal Salvation; for the FATHER will never forsake them (Heb. 13:20), the SON is always with them (Matthew 28:20), and the SPIRIT is ever in them. It is a Salvation which is well called “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 18:26; 19:9; 22:4,22; 24:14), for

- THE FATHER’S voice is heard *behind*, saying: This is the Way; walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21).
- THE SAVIOUR’S voice is heard *before*, saying: “I am the Way, No man cometh unto the Father but by Me” (John 14:6).
- THE SPIRIT’S voice is heard *within*, witnessing of the voice of the Father and of the Father and the Son.

And what is the revelation of this wondrous provision for?

It is all to bring a poor lost sinner unto God. “Through Him (CHRIST), we have access by one SPIRIT unto the FATHER (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12; Romans 5:2).

“Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might BRING US TO GOD” (1 Peter 3:18).

Yes! to GOD. Not to a Church, not to a priest, not to Sacraments, not to Ordinances, not to anything short of Himself. Not only is He “the Way” to

God, but He leads us in the Way; and actually brings us to God. Through Him we, who “were once far off, are now made nigh” (Ephesians 2:13).

“So near, so very near to God,  
Nearer we cannot be;  
For, in the Person of His Son,  
We are as near as He.”

Yes, “through Him”; not through a Church: by one Spirit, not by a sacrament: brought unto the Father, and not unto “a state of salvation”. Yes, “through Him”. through Christ, we have access; and “by one Spirit”. Without the work of Christ the will of the Father would not have been done for us. Without the witness of the Spirit the Father’s grace would not have been known by us; and the Son’s love would have had no charm for us.

Of the Spirit’s witness we sing:-

“And every virtue we possess,  
And every victory won,  
And every thought of holiness  
Are His alone.”

“By one Spirit we both have access”; i.e., both Jew and Gentile. And it is “by one Spirit” that, both “the Son of God” was led through suffering, and “the many sons are brought to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

- The Son was begotten by *pneuma hagion* (Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18).
- He was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord (Isaiah 51:1, Matthew 3:10).
- He was led by the Spirit into trial (Matthew 4:1).
- By the Spirit he cast out devils (Matthew 12:28); and
- By the Spirit He offered Himself to God (Hebrews 9:14).

Even so with the “many sons”,

- They, too, are begotten by the Spirit (John 3:5)
- They, too, are led of the *pneuma* (the new nature) which is begotten by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14).
- All their graces and gifts are the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).
- Their faith is the gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- Their hope is through the power of the Holy Ghost (Romans 15:13).
- Their prayer is by the Spirit (Romans 8:26).

Thus, again, we see how the whole Godhead is revealed, as engaged in procuring and securing the access of all His children unto Himself.

Here we have no presentation of dry doctrine; no assertion of empty dogma; no rehearsing of a lifeless creed; no following of tradition, or production of a theory; but a blessed and glorious and experimental reality.

It is all “through Him”, through Christ, “by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2).

It is in Christ that all our blessings are treasured up: it is through the power of the Spirit that they are conveyed and communicated to us: and it is by the Father’s love they are given to Christ for us.

This is “the grace wherein we stand”.

## **OUR APPREHENSION OF GOD**

### 1. The Spirit’s Direction of the Heart

Now let us see how the two Epistles to the typical “Assembly of the Thessalonians” assume the knowledge of all this precious revelation as the present possession of the saints who were addressed. They are not taught it as a doctrine; but they are to realize it, and experience it, and enjoy it as a prayer.

It is the knowledge of their election by God (1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13), and of His revelation of Himself in Christ by the Spirit, which made those believers so remarkable for holiness of life and for missionary zeal. These two grand facts were the necessary outcome of the possession of all this Divine truth.

This truth, like a precious seed, brought forth this precious fruit. Their holiness of life was not produced by holiness conventions, or by any outward methods of any kind. Their missionary zeal was not produced by missionary Missions or Exhibitions; or by any working upon their natural feelings. But both were the working out of that truth which had been first worked in (Philippians 2:12,13).

The power of such truth as this could not be stifled. It needed only guidance and control. It did not need exciting. It could be produced only by the Word of God received into the heart: and, fed upon there, and assimilated, resulted in spiritual strength, manifested in holiness of life, and witnessed in zeal for God’s service.

It is instructive, therefore, for us to notice the closing prayer on behalf of the “Church of the Thessalonians” (2 Thessalonians 3:5), which sums up their spiritual apprehensions and attainments:-

“The LORD (the Spirit) direct your hearts  
Into the Love of GOD (the Father)  
And into the patience of CHRIST.”

It is the Lord, the Spirit, who is named first, because it is He who directs the “heart”.

Jeremiah’s prayer confesses this:

“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself;  
It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah  
10:23).

So also we read in Proverbs 16:9.

“ A man’s heart deviseth his way;  
But the Lord directeth his steps.”

And Proverbs 19:21,

“There are many devices in a man’s heart;  
Nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.”

Here, we have man’s natural heart laid bare; the impotence of man to direct his own heart manifested; and the need of the Lord the Spirit to direct it revealed.

It is this that raises the hostility of the natural man. It is very humbling to be told these truths. It is the very last thing that the natural man will admit. He thinks he can direct his own way. Yes, and in his long prayers he actually *takes upon himself to direct the Lord as to His way*, and as to what He ought to do: even implying that if he had the direction of the affairs of the world and of the church he would soon have things very different from what they are! This cannot be denied: for it may be constantly discerned in prayer-meetings where the flesh bears sway.

Oh, how difficult is the lesson; and how it needs the direction of the Spirit, the Lord of all power and might to bring the natural man down to his knees, and to humble him in the dust. *This is where the very act of prayer is intended to put us*. But man (in his usual perversity) turns this low place into a throne, whence he would fain direct to the Almighty as to what He ought to do! and, giving an onlooker the impression that, if God had half the compassion which those who pray have, all would soon be put right! Such is the arrogance of the old nature even in the child of God. But it is the Lord alone who can lay us low and cause us to cry out -

I am ignorant - teach Thou me.  
I am perplexed - Counsel me.  
I am all astray - Direct thou me.  
I am blind - Enlighten me.  
I am weak - Strengthen me.  
I am deceived - Deliver me.

Here comes in the Divine counsel:

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6)

‘It is the one great work of the Spirit to direct the heart. The Lord’s work is always heart work. Man’s work always has regard to “the outward appearance”. His effort is to direct the life and the walk. Man ever begins at the wrong end. He begins outside, in the vain hope of working inward. He cleanses “the outside of the cup and the platter”, while within all is uncleanness. His aim is to reform the life. He sweeps and garnishes it; but it is only to prepare the heart for the abode of evil spirits (Luke 11:24-26). All this is religion: and it is the one object of religion to direct the flesh: and by the use of Rules and Directories to try and make the flesh bring forth spiritual fruit. But it is all in vain. It is man’s heart that is at fault. It is “not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man... for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders adulteries, fornication, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man” (Matt. 15:11,19,20). This is what man would designate the “teaching of Jesus”. But it is the teaching that the natural man will not have at any price.

Man directs not only his own way, but does his best to direct the ways of all others. His religion belongs to the flesh, and is made up of ordinances on and for the flesh. “Touch not, taste not, handle not”, are “the commandments and doctrines of men”, and sum up his religion.

Oh! how opposite to all this is the direction of the Lord the Spirit. He reveals to us our hearts. He can show us that we are not only lost sinners, but ruined creatures. He shows us our sins and follies, and frailties and infirmities, and weaknesses and errors, and faults and failings. He causes us to mourn over our sins, to be ashamed of our follies, and to hate all evil ways, that we have no desire to find fault with our brethren. He directs our hearts to the righteousness of God which covers us; to the wisdom of Christ which governs us; to the holiness of the Spirit which adorns us; to the power from on high which strengthens us; to the newness of life which animates us.

Man’s religion begins with the flesh; continues in corruption; and ends in death. But the Lord the Spirit directs us to Christ. His work is to glorify Christ (John 16:14). That work begins with Christ in His grace; continues in Christ in His life; and ends with Christ in His glory. It is all to do with the heart, and not with the flesh; with the new heart, and not with the old heart. The old heart is so defiled that it cannot be cleansed; but the new heart, which the Spirit gives, is Divine, and needs no cleansing.

It is with this new heart that man believes unto righteousness (Romans 10:9,10). It is in this new heart that Christ dwells by faith (Ephesians 3:17). It is the new heart which is “in the hand of the Lord, as the divisions of water [are in the hand of the gardener]”. (Proverbs 21:1). It is the new heart, which, having its Head and treasure in heaven, has also its home and seat of government there (Philippians 3:20).

To our great and glorious Head in Heaven the Lord the Spirit, ever directs our hearts. By this we may know whether we are under His Divine direction. By this we may test all that we hear, and all that we read.

The measure in which we are occupied with Christ, and with our completeness in Him, is the measure in which we are “filled by the Spirit”. By this we may test these words which are here written by the writer and read by the reader. The one question is: Do they glorify Christ? “He shall glorify Me”, were the Saviour’s words (John 16:16). By this we may know, discern, and detect the Holy Spirit’s handiwork.

Man’s work will be ever found to direct our thoughts *to ourselves*; it will be always to direct our attention to our walk, or to our acts, or to our experiences; or *to introspection of some kind*. Man’s work will ever end in reasons for glorying in ourselves. But the Spirit’s work will ever glorify Christ, and humble ourselves to all that we read and all that we hear, we have to apply this touchstone. We have to ask the one question: DOES THIS GLORIFY CHRIST? This is the one test. It will never fail to tell us whether we are under the *direction* of the Lord the Spirit, or not. For there are ‘*other spirits*’ who would control us. Yes, ‘control’, that is their own word for their work.

The Corinthian Saints were specially warned against ‘another spirit’, ie., a different spirit, which (thank God) they had not received (2 Corinthians 11:4). This tells us that there are *other spirits at work for our deception and*

*misdirection*. For can such a warning be groundless? Is there no such duty as the “discerning of spirits”, and of “trying or proving the spirits” devolving on us? These spirits would deceive us to-day, even as the old Serpent “beguiled Eve through his subtlety”. Hence the apostle’s fear lest our “minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

We are dealing with realities, not with theories or hypotheses; and these warnings are actually needed in very truth in the present day. They “are written for our learning”. The vast majority of Christians, the moment they see any so-called “revival” work or any spirit-manifestation, immediately jump to the conclusion that it is, and must be divine, and of the Holy Spirit; notwithstanding the fact that there is nothing in the Scripture with which many of these modern extravagancies can be compared. Things are recorded in the Word as the work of the Holy Spirit of God. “Confusion” is seen, of which “it is written”, “God is not the author” (1 Corinthians 14:32,33).

The presence of certain individuals is often necessary to produce certain desired results; and these men and women are used in the same way as mediums are used. Doubtless they are often mediums for the work of “another spirit”, which, let us pray God, we may never receive.

Oh, to be directed by God’s own Holy Spirit, the Lord. His direction is utterly opposed to all the designs and desires of the natural mind. He may lead us into trials and experiences in which our creature ruin may be discerned beneath our sinner ruin; and in which our faith shall be proved to be genuine. This direction, here, is the special work of the Lord the Spirit, and yet the whole God head is engaged in it.

Of Jehovah the Father it is said He “will guide thee continually” (Isaiah 48:11).

Of Jehovah-Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, it is said “He guideth me” (Psalm 23:13).

Of Jehovah the Spirit it is declared that “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

Of His people now it is most blessedly true, as it was true of Hezekiah: of whom, and of his people it is written: Thus the Lord saved them...and guided them on every side” (2 Chronicles 32:22).

So that, whether enemies abound, or days be dark, or Satan’s assaults be many, or doubts and fears increase, even then we shall be, and must be, “more than conquerors” through Him who loveth us. And the Lord the Spirit will ever direct our hearts into His love, and not into our infirmities; and we shall say, not “When I sought to know this it was too painful for me” (Ps 45:16). but,

“So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee.  
Thou hast holden me by my right hand.  
Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel,  
And afterwards receive me to glory, Whom have I in heaven but  
Thee?  
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Ps.  
45:22-25).

And we shall say again -

“This God is our God for ever and ever; and He will be our guide even unto death” (Ps. 38:14).

## 2. Into the Love of God

We have seen how the true knowledge of God is revealed only in “The Scriptures of Truth”; and how it is imparted only by the *direction* of the Holy Spirit. He who inspired this revelation in the Word must inspire it in our hearts also; or it can never be experimentally known. Hence the importance of that Scripture which has already engaged our attention (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

“The Lord (the Spirit) direct your heart  
Into the Love of God,  
And into the patient waiting for Christ.”

The love of God is a grand reality. But we can know it only by the *direction* of the Lord the Spirit. Then we learn that this love to us is only in Christ; and, only to us as being in Christ. Out of Christ, “The Lord is a man of war”. Apart from Christ the guilty will be by no means cleared.

It is only misleading the poor world to tell it that “God is love”, unless we tell it that this love is only in Christ. It is preaching only part of the gospel. The good news is that God is “a just God”, and that though He is justice and righteousness itself, yet He is the SAVIOUR of all then that believe His testimony which He has given concerning His Son. He cannot be known apart from the Son.

Hence it is that the direction of the Lord the Spirit is essential to the knowledge of the love of God. It is only as He sheds this love abroad in our hearts that our enmity is slain; and that we are compelled to love Him, because He first loved us (Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:19). As the Lord, the Spirit, directs our hearts into this love of the Father, we learn that IT IS ETERNAL; and hence knew no beginning; and is everlasting and knows no ending. He tells us that we were “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world”. and that this was “in love”, and was “according to the good pleasure of His will”.

We could never have known this but by the further and later revelation of the Spirit in Ephesians 1:4,5. For if we direct our own hearts we always and very naturally, direct them to ourselves; and then, of course, we see no reason why God should love us at all: then we become occupied with ourselves, and sink lower and lower in the slough of despond, until we end in despair. That is the end of our own self-direction. But when the Lord the Spirit directs our hearts, He never directs them to ourselves; no, nor to Himself, nor to His own work in us; but into the love of the Father to us; and the work of the Son for us.

Then it is that we receive His own precious revelation in Ephesians 1:4,5, and willingly confess that if God did not love us before we were born, He has certainly seen nothing in us to draw forth that love since we were born.

As we are thus directed, we are assured again and again that this love is not manifested towards us because of anything we have ever felt or done (Titus

3:5); not because we first loved Him, but because “He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

In the ages of eternity past this love is revealed in its activity as going forth to us, while yet unborn. And after we were born, His care for us was shown while as yet we cared not for Him; and while our hearts were as yet an enmity with Him.

As the Spirit directs our hearts into this love, we learn, further, that IT IS SOVEREIGN: that God never goes out of or beyond Himself for a reason why He should love us. This was so even with Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7,8). How much more must it be so with us? Moreover, this love being to us, in Christ, there is no reason why it should ever change or be withdrawn. The Father is *always* well-pleased with the Son; and the Son does *always* those things which please the Father. If the Father’s love were shown towards us because of what we are in ourselves, the wonder would be, not why it should not be withdrawn, but why it was ever set on us! But, being toward us, in Christ, we can understand why “neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate from the love of God, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:38,39).

We can understand, also, why the Lord Jesus, “having loved His own, loved them unto the end”. To the end of what? Not only to the end of time, but to the end of all their sins and weaknesses, frailties and infirmities, doubts and fears, sorrows and sufferings.

Though we may change a thousand times a day; though our circumstances and feelings and moods may change; though we may err and wander and go astray, yet “He abideth faithful”, “He changeth not”.

Moreover, the Father’s love does not change merely because it is weak, but because it is strong. It sweeps every hindrance out of the way. It breaks down every barrier. It bears with the most impatient and rebellious.

Human powers fail to understand it. Divine utterances in human language fail to convey a true and full sense of it to our finite faculties.

We may rejoice in the fact; we may praise God for the revelation of it; we may give thanks for the communication of it; but we cannot apprehend it.

The Spirit Himself, the Giver, is the gift of the Father. Without this gift of the Spirit we should never be directed into the love of the Father, or the preciousness of the Son. By this gift we are directed unto both the one and the other; and into the enjoyment of every needful blessing beside.

All praise and glory be unto the Lord the Spirit for His gracious direction into the love of God, and His blessed assurance that it is ours for ever and for ever. But the direction of the Lord the Spirit is not only into the love of God, but into

### 3. The Patience of Christ

This is the alternative rendering in the A.V. margin; and the rendering in the text of the R.V. Moreover, it is the literal and correct rendering of the Greek.

But this literal rendering of the words does not convey the fullness of their meaning.

The word “patience”, in the Greek, is interesting and instructive. The etymological meaning of the verb is *to remain under*; hence *to endure*, or *sustain*. It occurs seventeen times, and the various ways in which it is rendered will bring out its meaning more fully. It is rendered *abide*, once; *tarry behind*, once; *endure*, 11 times; *take patiently*, twice; *patient*, once; *suffer*, once. Hence the noun (as in the passage we are considering), which occurs 32 times, is rendered *patient continuance*, once; *enduring*, once; *patient waiting*, once; and *patience*, 29 times. Even though we render it *patience*, we cannot eliminate the idea of *waiting* or *endurance*. Indeed, so strong is this underlying thought that it is akin to, if not almost equal to, *hope*. Compare 1 Corinthians 13:18, “Faith, Love, Patience” (i.e., Hope).

The *patient waiting* then, of the A.V., is a rendering which cannot be improved.

Next we note that the construction is exactly the same as in the preceding clause. “The love of God” is *God’s love*, which He has to us. So the patient waiting of Christ must be *Christ’s patient waiting*.

Until the renewed offer of the kingdom (Acts 3:19-21) had been finally rejected (Acts 28:25,26). Christ is seen “standing” (Acts 7:56). But, after the rejection was complete He is stated to have “sat down (Hebrews 10:12,13), “from henceforth expecting till His enemies shall have been placed as a footstool for His feet.” This is “Christ’s patient waiting; and as we are directed by the Lord the Spirit, we shall enter into the full meaning of Christ’s present position SEATED, and at *rest*, with reference to all His work in the procuring our salvation; and *patiently* EXPECTING the realization of all connected with our “blessed hope”.

Hence this direction of the Spirit will include our own endurance and our own patient waiting. Christ’s patience will be reflected in us. It will, like God’s love, be shed abroad in our hearts. Our love is God’s love thus shed abroad; our patience is Christ’s patience; and it is the Spirit’s work to manifest both in our experience, and to direct our hearts into them,. It is a blessed provision for poor impatient believers to be directed into “the patience of Christ”. And it is done by the Spirit opening out to our hearts such a Scripture as Romans 14:3-5, “For even Christ also pleased not Himself; but, according as it standeth written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell on Me’”. For, as many things as were before written for our instruction were written in order that through *patience*, and (through) the comfort which the Scriptures bring, we might have hope. Now the God of (this) patience, and of this comfort, give you to think (or mind) the same thing with one another ACCORDING TO CHRIST JESUS.”

Mark these last words, and the margin of the A.V., “after the example of Jesus Christ”. Ah! there is no example of *patient waiting* like His, and our hearts need directing unto it, because there is so little in it in ourselves. It is not merely the example of His patience when on earth. That was perfect, whether towards His enemies or towards His own disciples, ever so slow to learn. It is not merely His patient waiting for the Father’s will in doing the Father’s business, though this was wonderful. In Matthew 11., when His ministry, from man’s point of view, seemed to end in failure:- in the doubt of

John (vv. 1-6), in the accusation of the people (vv. 16-19), in the unbelief of the cities wherein most of His mighty words were done (vv. 20-24): it is then, and at such a moment, that we read (vv.25,26), “AT THAT TIME Jesus answered (i.e., prayed) and said, ‘Father, I thank Thee.... Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight’.” Here was patient waiting for the Father’s time and the Father’s will.

Ah! what need have we to be directed into such patience as this of Christ’s, when we seem to see no fruit of our labour. But, as we have said, it is not merely such patient waiting as this which is in question here. What must it be now, while seated at the Father’s right hand? What patience must be needed now, while His enemies rejoice in His absence; while the bulk of His people do not believe in His coming at all; and while those who do believe in it know little or nothing of this waiting and expectation of His return, and , by their prayers, imply that He has no compassion or care as to the results of His own work compared with what they have? Their hearts are not directed, either into God’s love or into Christ’s patience, by the Lord the Spirit. They do not know the God whom they preach, or the God to whom they pray.

The God of the Pulpit is -

*An impotent Father,  
An disappointed Christ. and  
A defeated Holy Spirit!*

But the God of the Bible is -

*An almighty Father,  
A satisfied Christ, and  
A victorious Holy Spirit,*

able to break the hardest heart and to subdue the stoutest will.

Oh what need for this direction of the Spirit into a true knowledge of God, which He has revealed in the Scriptures, and manifested in our experience! What need, we repeat, for us to be directed into fellowship with Christ, so that we may know something of what it means to be seated and at rest as to our works, and our peace with God; and hence to have our hearts set free, and at liberty to go forth to Him, “from henceforth expecting” the long looked-for day when we shall be “Received up in Glory”.

May the Lord the Spirit direct our hearts ever more and more into this blessed experience, that we may know what is meant by “the patience of Christ”, and apprehend something of what is meant by our own patient waiting for Christ.

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