

Behold! What Manner of Love

by George Muller (1805-1898)

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

—I John 3:1-3

BECAUSE we need again and again to be reminded of the truth contained in these verses, God directs our especial attention to this little portion by prefixing the word, "Behold!" As if He meant to say, "My dear children, the whole of the revealed will of God, the whole of the Holy Scriptures, which I put into your hands, is of importance to be considered, to be pondered and to be read from time to time; but there are certain portions which, by reason of your spiritual infirmity and by reason of the difficulties in which you find ourselves spiritually whilst passing through this vale of tears, you need especially to read from time to time, you need especially to ponder from time to time; and therefore, by reason of your weakness, I direct your attention to such portions."

Now, then, let us ponder, particularly ponder, the truth contained in this little statement made in these three verses. "Behold!" "Look at it carefully, ponder it, pray over it again and again, lay it to heart yet more and more than, up to the present, you have been doing," our Father would say to us! "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God." That is the especial point to which, in the first place, our attention is directed. If God had forgiven us, so that punishment had not come on us on account of our numberless transgressions, and had done no more, this would have been wondrous grace; but He has done far, far, FAR more than this. And therefore it is stated, "What manner of love." The greatness of it, the exceeding greatness of it, the peculiarity of it, that not only has the Lord passed by our numberless transgressions, and forgiven everyone of them, so that we shall not be dealt with according to the thousandth part of the sins of which we have been guilty-nay, not concerning one single sin even, in action, in word, or in thought-but that He makes us His own children, takes us into the Heavenly Family. We, who are by nature rebels against Him, and despise His love, and care not in the least about Him, and manifest this entire dislike and disregard of God day by day by going our own way, doing the things which are hateful to Him-we are not only forgiven, not only shall not be punished for one single sin, out of the many ten thousands of sins of which we have been guilty, in action, or word, or thought, or feeling, or desire, or inclination, but are made His own children, taken into His family, and that not merely in name, but in reality. By the power of the Holy Spirit, through belief in the Gospel, He regenerates us, makes us a new creation in Christ, makes us His very own children. Not merely calls us so, but makes us His very own children. Gives us spiritual life, heavenly life, and thus makes us His very own children.

That is the wondrous grace which we should ponder. That is what God calls upon us to ponder, not to pass by lightly, not to think little about, but to think very, very, very much of, and never let pass out of our mind till we at last get home to glory! This is the "manner of love," the kind of love which "the rather hath bestowed upon us." O Lord! help us to ponder it a thousand times more than as yet we have pondered it. O Lord! help us, by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, to lay it to heart a thousand times more than as yet we have laid it to heart; and grant that, through the consideration of it, through praying over it, through laying it far more abundantly to heart than we have hitherto done, our hearts may be filled with love to Thee and with gratitude in a way in which as yet has not been the case! O grant it to be even so, for Jesus Christ's sake, we entreat Thee. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." Now, here is a good practical point "Bestowed upon us"; and to be able to say, "Bestowed upon me." That is what I, by the grace of God, am able to say. That is what, by the grace of God, many scores here present are able to say. But is everyone able to say it? This is what I desire, this is what I pray that God would grant to everyone here present, that they shall each be able to say, "Hath bestowed on me." O how happy this would make us, how heavenly-minded it would make us, how dead to the world it would make us! And in a little degree it would make us more Christ-like than as yet we have been! "Bestowed upon us." That we sinners, such as we are, rebellious sinners, as we are by nature, should be called the sons of God—more literally and correctly the children of God, for it is a blessing bestowed not merely upon male believers, but on female believers, upon all who love the Lord Jesus, and trust in Him for the salvation of their souls! Therefore, that we should be called the children of God. O precious! unspeakably blessed this, that we belong to the Heavenly Family!

By nature every one of us are just as the Jews were, to whom the Lord Jesus said on one occasion, "Your father is the devil"—"for his works you do; you act according to his mind, you act according to your father the devil." Now, this was not merely true about the Israelites, to whom the Lord was speaking; but it is true regarding us, as we are not believers in the Lord Jesus. We may call ourselves children of God, and we may call God our Father, but it is not true so long as we are not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls; the moment, however, we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, however long, however much we have lived in sin, and however varied our sins, however great they may have been, all is forgiven, we are regenerated through the reception of the Gospel, born again, and verily then are the children of God, and belong to the Heavenly Family!

Then the Holy Ghost by the Apostle adds, "Therefore the world knows us not because it knew Him not." The children are not known because the Father is not known. As long as persons are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they do not know the children of God as children of God! They may know their name, they may know their occupation, they may know where they live, how they are dressed, and such like things which belong to the outward man, and which belong to this present time; but, in so far as they are the children of God, those who themselves are unconverted know not the believers in Jesus, and the reason is given to us here, "Because they know not the Father" of the children. They know not God Almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore they do not really and truly know the children of God as children of God. The divine life cannot be discerned by the ungodly.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God"; "Beloved, now we are the children of God,"-for the same alteration is here to be made. "Now!" This little word, "now," is especially to be considered, to be laid hold of, and to be greatly pondered. It means this, while yet in the body-that is, while still in weakness, beset with many infirmities in many regards, and very ignorant in that state of weakness and helplessness in which to a greater or less degree are all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ-nevertheless we are children of God; for though we are not all like John, who wrote this Epistle, or like Paul, or like Peter, yet, notwithstanding all our many infirmities and weaknesses and failures and shortcomings, as assuredly as we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, we are already, even while yet in the body, really and truly the children of God! A precious truth is this! And on this little word, "now," we have to lay hold by faith, to ponder it in our hearts again and again and again, and not to let it go, nor to suppose that we only become children of God when we die, or when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

Nay, now already are we the children of God. This, as you all at once see, even the youngest of the believers, implies that we have a Father in heaven, and that this our Father in heaven is none other than God Almighty-the God who can do everything, to Whom nothing is impossible. See how precious this is. Our Father can do everything! Therefore, He is infinitely wise; He is infinitely rich, He is infinitely mighty; and His heart is full of infinite love to the weakest and feeblest of the children of God. Therefore, suppose I have pain as to the body, let me go to my Heavenly Father, and speak in all child-like simplicity about it, and ask Him, if it be for His glory and for my real good, and profit, and blessing, that He would graciously be pleased either to entirely remove or else to mitigate the pain, or, while it is necessary that it should last, that He would be pleased to sustain me under it that I may not be overcome by it, and especially that I may not fret, and complain, and murmur, but take it out of His loving hand as a blessing bestowed upon me, which in the end must prove good for me.

If we are in family trial, we should say to ourselves, "This family trial is not only very heavy for me to bear, but it will prove too much if I myself have to bear it; I will commit the matter into the hands of my Heavenly Father, and ask Him that He would be graciously pleased to remove the trial, if it be for His honour and glory and for my real blessing." He is able to do it, for He can do everything, and He has proved the depth of His love in not sparing His only-begotten Son, but delivering Him up for us all.

Then, again, persons in places, or in businesses, or carrying on a profession, find difficulties connected with their trade, connected with their business, connected with their profession. Now, the great point is not to carry the burden ourselves, but to cast it upon the Lord. He is willing to sustain us, willing to help us; and, in doing so, we pass peacefully and quietly through life, we are not inclined to fret, to complain, to murmur, and to be dissatisfied with the dealings of God with us, if we cast the burden upon Him, and not attempt to carry it ourselves!. And this is just what we should do; and this is just one of the many reasons why it is stated here by the Holy Spirit, "Now are we the children of God "-that is, while yet in the body, while yet surrounded by trial and difficulty, while yet finding that conflict is more or less our lot. O this little precious word, "NOW." It contains a vast deal of deeply instructive, instructing truth.

Again, we have now the spiritual conflict, our natural evil tendencies still are in us, though we are regenerated. The old nature is not removed; the old nature remains in us, just as it was before our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true we are regenerated, we are born again; it is true we have spiritual life-but it is also true that the old nature is not dead; the old nature still is in us, and can only be kept down by prayer and meditation and pondering the Word of God, and exercising faith continually. And therefore when trials come with regard to the old, evil, corrupt nature in us, we should spread the matter in all simplicity before God, and say, "My Heavenly Father, I have no strength in myself; but there is almighty power with Thee, and Thine heart is full of love to me, and Thou hast proved Thy wondrous love to me by bringing me to Jesus, and by giving Jesus for me, a poor, miserable, guilty sinner. Now help me in this my spiritual conflict. o let me not be overpowered by this subtlety of the devil, and on account of my spiritual weakness. o help me! help me! help me!" What shall we find? The Lord is willing to help us! The Lord is willing to help us!!

I assure my young brethren and sisters in Christ how He has helped me, now for seventy-one years and five months, times without number, and particularly at the beginning of the divine life in me. On account of the evil habits that I had contracted as an unconverted young man, the ungodly way in which I had been living up to the end of the twentieth year of my life, I found it extremely difficult, though really a child of God and though hating sin and loving holiness, to overcome those evil tendencies which I had contracted.

The appearance was, "O it will never be different, and my prayer will never be answered." But by the grace of God I have rolled my burden on Him, and come to Him again and again. Thus by little and little it came about-and it was by little and little only; it took some time-that these natural evil tendencies were overcome, and God helped me. I mention this particularly for the comfort and encouragement of young, recently converted believers in Christ not to despair, but to expect help from God, for He is able and willing to help them. Never, never, so long as we go to the Lord in our weakness and helplessness, shall we be overpowered; and just because we are the children of God now, therefore the glory will be our portion at last.

It is not that we become children of God when this life is over; nay, while we are in the body, while we are yet here on earth, while we are yet in great weakness and helplessness and great ignorance concerning many things, and while the devil has power over us, while he is not yet cast into the bottomless pit-even now we are the children of God, and shall have help from God just as we need. o how comforting is this word. Therefore let us continually ponder it, and not lose sight of it.

"Beloved now"-in weakness; "now," while the devil has yet so much power; "now," while in such great ignorance-"are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." Though we are now children of God, and, as such, have many privileges and may go continually to God for counsel, for advice, for help, for strength, for deliverance out of difficulties, for being supplied temporally and spiritually according to our need, yet with all this, great as the privileges are which already we enjoy, they are but little in comparison with what we shall have hereafter. Therefore, we have to ponder also this, that while, on one hand,

this word "now" should never be lost sight of, yet on the other hand we should not forget what is written here, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

And what is it that will appear hereafter? What is it that I, poor, worthless worm that I am, shall have hereafter? What is it that I, an ignorant one, shall know hereafter? What is it that in me, a weak one, and an erring one, and a falling one, shall be found hereafter? o this is a deeply important thought. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be"-it is not yet manifested what we shall be. o how will it be as to the body? How will it be as to the soul? How will it be as to our knowledge? How will it be as to our spiritual power? How will it be as to our service for the Lord? o how will it be in every way? An eternal blessing shall be granted to us, henceforth, for ever!

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." When Jesus shall appear we shall be like Him-like Him as to His glorified body, which He has had since His resurrection. Now, any of us who are often in pain as to the body, or finding their weakness and infirmity ever reminding them of their not yet being at home, and not yet having obtained the glorified body, o how precious the consideration that there is a day coming when there will not be found the least particle of uneasiness, nor of pain and suffering and weakness and helplessness, for we shall have a glorified body, exactly such a body as the Lord Jesus Christ has had since His own resurrection. A precious, bright, glorious prospect is this!

And in this body, because it will be such a body as the Lord Jesus Christ has had since His resurrection, we shall know nothing of weariness. At present, we may be able joyfully and gladly to work eight, ten, or twelve hours, sometimes fourteen, or even sixteen hours a day, but at last the weakness comes by reason of yet being in the body of humiliation, and not in the glorified body. But, then, there will be four and twenty hours' work hereafter, and the next day the same, and the next day the same; and thus seven times four and twenty hours every week the ability to work; and thirty days every month the whole day able to work. And thus it will go on, month after month, year after year, one hundred years after the other, one thousand years after the other, one million years after the other, and so throughout eternity. Work, work, work! Constant work to the glory of God in this our glorified body! o what bright, blessed, glorious prospects are these, if the heart enter into them. o how we are gladdened by the consideration of working throughout eternity for God without the least particle of weakness, weariness, and suffering!

But this is only one part of it. The other part is this. We shall be perfectly holy as the Lord Jesus Christ was during the thirty-three years and a half that He was on earth! Never a particle of wrong found in anything that He did, never a particle contrary to the mind of God in anything that He said; never a particle found in all His thoughts, in all His desires, in all His wishes, contrary to the mind of God. Perfectly in conformity to the mind of God everything was found during the whole time that the blessed Saviour was here on earth! And thus it will be with us. We weak ones, feeble ones, shall not be always weak ones, feeble ones, but holy ones, spotless ones, pure ones, lovely ones. Yes, lovely ones! o how lovely! Because the comeliness of Christ is put on us! o how precious these words are; and o, if we bore them

more in mind, if we entered into them, how the heart would be full of peace and joy all the day long and every day.

Now, it is on account of this that the statement is made, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him." We shall be like Him! Notice the reason why! "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is!" More correctly, "For we shall see Him even as He is." That is, we shall perfectly know the Lord Jesus Christ: in all His work and all His offices, not merely know Him as our Judge. In that way the ungodly will have to become acquainted with Him. Every human being, if they are not believers in Christ, will know Him as their Judge, but we shall know Him as our Saviour, as our Brother, as our Friend, as our Husband, as our Bridegroom.

In everyone of the offices which He sustains for the benefit of the Church of God we shall know Him; and, just in proportion as we know the Lord now, we are conformed to Him, we become more and more like Him, even while we are yet in the body. The more acquainted we are with the Lord Jesus Christ, the more are we like Him; and then in the glory we shall know perfectly that Blessed One, and we shall perfectly be like Him! What a bright and blessed prospect this is! So that not only without weakness and weariness, pain and suffering, will our service be throughout all eternity, but completely according to the mind of God, completely in the same spirit in which the Lord Jesus Christ was working while in the body here on earth! Precious, bright, glorious prospects are ours! It is just because the world is so ignorant, so completely ignorant, about all the glorious things which are the portion of the believer in Christ that they care not about the things of God; for were it known what really is the blessed position and portion of a child of God, everybody would seek to know Him, everybody would care about Him, everybody would believe on Him.

Now the last point, "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." First of all, as to the somewhat more correct literal meaning, "Every man"-that is, "everyone"- "that hath this hope in Him." The meaning is not, "Has this hope in himself." That is not the meaning of it; but "has this hope regarding the Lord Jesus Christ," that, through faith in Him, he will be perfectly like Christ in heaven. "Everyone that hath this hope in Him, or regarding Him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure." That is, as in every way truth has the tendency to increase holiness, so here we repeat again the statement. Whosoever has this hope regarding the Lord Jesus, to be made like Him in body and soul; everyone who has this hope regarding Him purifieth himself. It has a tendency to make us increasingly holy, for just as we become acquainted with Christ, and see what God has given us in Him, the more we know of this clearly, distinctly, minutely, and the more fully is holiness increased in us, so that we shall be satisfied with nothing short of this, that we may continually become more and more Christ-like.

We do not attain to it to the full while we are in the body; yet this will be our aim more and more, more and more, more and more to be like Christ. We are not satisfied with this, that we have power over our natural, gross sins; we are not satisfied with this, but only that in spirit, in mind, more and more, we are Christ-like, gentle and loving. O how increasingly we seek to attain to this; earnestly desiring it more and more; in every way seeking to become like Christ.

And though to the full it will never be attained to while in the body, yet it is impossible to say to what a degree we may, even while in the body, become Christ-like.

Now, let this be the great lesson that we learn this evening, that because we are now already children of God, blessing, wonderful blessing, is to be obtained from our Heavenly Father; and that, by reason of the prospect we have before us, it is impossible to say to what a degree we may not become Christ-like. Now, will you who are not believers in Christ always continue in the way in which you have been going on hitherto? Shall there be no alteration? If you continue on the broad way, final destruction will be your portion! Do you long to spend a happy eternity together with the Lord in heaven? O what delight it will be to many at the last to see not one of all who are present here lacking in heaven!

This is a personal interest I have in your spiritual welfare, and out of love to your soul, that I long to meet you in heaven; and O how it would increase our joy and delight in heaven at last to find not one lacking, to find that this our little meditation on the evening of the 11th of April, 1897, was not in vain. O how precious to find it thus at the last! And now, is there anyone present who says, "I will yet have the world; I will yet seek to enjoy the world?" You will not be happy by this determination; be quite sure of that. O I tried your ways for twenty years and five weeks, and all that ever I got was disappointment and increased guilt on the conscience. But when I found Jesus there came real happiness. O such happiness as I cannot describe. That was in the beginning of November, 1825, and I have felt it ever since-only with this difference, that the happiness increased more and more, more and more.

And that is what God is willing to give to you; for I suppose there is not a greater sinner here present than I was, though but twenty years of age, yet God bestowed this wondrous blessing on me; and what He did for me, and what He did for Paul, and what He did for other sinners, He is willing to do for anyone else.

Therefore, O let it be Christ whom you choose, and not the world any longer; for the world never will prove real, but, if continued in, will bring damnation, and only damnation. God grant His blessing, for Jesus Christ's sake.