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LOVE

TO

AN UNSEEN SAVIOUR.

"Whom having not seen ye love."

BY ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

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“Whom having not seen ye love.”—1 PETER i. 8.

The strangers dispersed through Asia Minor, to whom this epistle was addressed, had never seen the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. But having been induced to attend on the ministry of the apostles and evangelists, who represented to them the facts relating to the Saviour of the world, and confirmed their testimony by miraculous signs, they, under the illumination of the Spirit, believed in him; and their faith was accompanied by love to him whom they had not seen. “Whom having not seen, ye love; and in whom believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

It is related of the great Augustine that he was wont to express his regret that he could not see three things which had occurred before his time, namely, “Christ in the flesh, Paul in the pulpit, and Rome in its glory.” As it regards the first of these, it is probable that most Christians have experienced something of the same pious curiosity. We are very naturally inclined to envy the condition of those who were contemporaneous with our Lord; and who is there among living Christians, who would not consent to perform a long pilgrimage to enjoy the sight of this divine Personage, even for an hour? Such a curiosity was felt by many who resided in distant countries, while he was upon earth. Thus, we read, that certain Greeks, no doubt proselytes, as soon as they

arrived at Jerusalem to attend one of the Jewish festivals, began immediately to inquire for him, saying: "We would see Jesus;" and others said, "Where is He?" Earnest search was therefore made for him; and when it was understood that the Lord Jesus was approaching by the way of the Mount of Olives, multitudes went out to meet him; and, for the moment, were filled with enthusiastic affection, and cried out with a loud voice, "Hosannah to the Son of David! Hosannah in the highest!"

But however natural the curiosity may be, there is reason to think that its gratification would be attended with very little benefit. When Christ tabernacled in the flesh, he was seen by unbelievers as well as believers; by bitter enemies as well as by friends. Judas was not in the least benefitted by familiar intercourse with him for several years. He was seen by the chief priests, scribes, and elders, when arraigned before the Sanhedrim; also by the soldiers who apprehended him and bound him. By Pilate, and by Herod and his men of war. By the executioners who scourged him, and then nailed him to the cross; and by the multitudes, who were witnesses of his crucifixion; but the sight of the Saviour had no beneficial effect on any of these. And if Christ should again be manifested (as he will be) to the world, not in humiliation but in glory, unless the Holy Spirit should renew the minds of the beholders, there would be no love to the Saviour generated by the external vision of his majesty. Indeed, when he shall come, "every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him," and the only effect will be that all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. The whole human race shall see Christ on the judgment seat, but only they who believed on him here, will rejoice in his appearance.

A sight of Christ's body is not at all necessary to the exercise of a true faith. This he emphatically taught after his resurrection, in the case of Thomas, who was not with the other apostles when Christ first appeared to them collectively. But eight days after, when Thomas was present, "came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." Then saith he to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but be-

lieving. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God! Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed, Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

It is not even necessary to a true faith, nor auxiliary to it, that a lively image of the Saviour be formed in the imagination. Faith is no fancy. And if the sight of Christ himself, whether in his habiliments of humility, or robes of light and glory, would have no tendency to generate a true faith, then certainly, no picture or painting of Christ—which must be fictitious—ever can afford us any real aid in believing, or in spiritual worship. People are indeed affected and excited by such representations, but these effects have little or no affinity with the true spirit of devotion. They rather hinder than help by turning the attention of the worshipper to an external object, when it should by faith be contemplating the spiritual beauties of the Son of God.

Some, perhaps, may find a difficulty in conceiving how a person never seen can become the object of affection. But a little reflection will make this matter plain. Eminent benefactors are often highly esteemed and loved by those who never saw them. The blind, who never saw their nearest relatives, have as strong affection for their parents, brothers, sisters, and friends, as any others.

If a parent should conceal himself from the view of his children, and yet should often speak to them, giving them lessons of wisdom and piety, and bestowing on them daily favours, would not such parent be loved by dutiful children? Indeed, in all cases where we do see those whom we most highly esteem, it is not the visible bodily frame which is the object of our affection, but the invisible mind which manifests its sentiments and feelings, through the countenance and actions of the body. Where there is rational affection of esteem, founded on the perception of moral worth, the body may change, and its beauty and freshness may be turned into deformity and decrepitude, and yet there shall be no diminution of our esteem. All that is most amiable in the most beautiful face, has relation to the dispositions of the heart, of which the countenance is the expressive index. A person far off and never seen may be loved—therefore a person who really lives in another world may be sincerely loved. God

is necessarily invisible, because he is a pure spirit, but he is supremely loved and adored by all the heavenly hosts.

Love to an unseen Saviour includes a knowledge of his true character. We cannot truly love a being of whom we know nothing. And it will not answer to substitute our own imaginations for the true knowledge of Christ. The word, being the fountain of all truth, must be our guide in thinking of the Saviour. Here Christ is set forth in all his personal and official characters. Here his divine virtues, his discourses, and his patient sufferings are recorded. Many are for turning from the written word to some delusive light which they fancy to be within them. They turn away from the true Christ to a false one, which they have formed to themselves. Be exhorted then, to behold the character of your Lord, as portrayed in his word.

Love to an unseen Saviour is by faith. Faith works by love. Where an object is not seen it must be believed in, otherwise there can be no affection exerted.

Love to an unseen Saviour includes a high veneration and esteem for his character. The sentiment called esteem is known to all. We feel it toward men of excellence; and it is a feeling which we naturally desire to have exercised toward ourselves. When excellence superior to human, and united with great power and wisdom, is found in any person, this esteem rises to reverence. There is experienced a holy awe, and an humble sense of inferiority. This may especially be called, "the religious feeling." It is the emotion of which we are most conscious, when we obtain any clear impressive views of the character of God. Whenever God is felt to be near, this feeling predominates. It is, therefore, often put for the whole of internal religion, and becomes the characteristic of sincere worshippers. They that fear God are, in the language of the Scriptures, the truly pious.

As love to any one includes a desire to come into the presence of the beloved, so especially love to an unseen person is accompanied with an ardent desire, if he cannot be seen, yet to be near him. The believing soul, smitten with the love of Jesus, is full of desires. Like the spouse, its language is, "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? I sought him but I found him not." These desires are not only after the comfortable presence of the Saviour, but after conformity to him,

and after the possession of those gifts by which the person may be enabled to glorify his name. There is no surer characteristic of a sincere lover of Christ, than a habitual desire to be like Christ, and an ardent zeal to promote his glory, and this every sincere soul is conscious of, in some degree. "My soul thirsteth after God, the living God." "When shall I come and appear before God?"

Delight in God is also included in love. Indeed, this may be said to be the very essence of love. It is a holy complacency in Christ. The soul reposes in the contemplation of his character, and enjoys a sweet pleasure. All the traits of his character are pleasing. "He is the chief among ten thousand, and the one altogether lovely." One bright view of his excellence and beauty ravishes the soul with unspeakable delight. "Whom having not seen, ye love, and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Joy and love are twin sisters, and they are very much alike, and cannot be separated. "Delight thyself in God, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart."

"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear."

"His name is like ointment poured forth."

Another exercise of love to Christ is gratitude. The Redeemer is exhibited as a Chief Benefactor. All that is said of him in the Scriptures relates to his grand work of redeeming human sinners. Here we read of his love, his eternal love, which put him on this work of salvation. Here we have the history of his deep humiliation, when he became incarnate in our nature. Here we behold the man of sorrows, the persecuted, despised Nazarene; the man whose visage was more marred than that of any man—burdened with our griefs and sorrows, and at last crucified, in circumstances of overwhelming disgrace and agony. Now, all this love, all this suffering, exhibits the benefactor of man. All other Saviours are eclipsed, when compared with the Son of God. Their services are lost in insignificance, in comparison with his work.

Now as Christ is exhibited as performing the part of a benefactor, in all his mediatorial work, of course the feeling, above all others, which corresponds with his revealed character, is gratitude. Much of the exercise of true religion, therefore, consists in gratitude; and much, very much, of our sin consists in ingratitude. A thankful, penitent heart is, therefore, the frame which becomes us. For such love as that of Christ's there should be an everlasting flow of gratitude from our hearts, and a continual song of praise while we have a being. And this feeling of gratitude, though often sadly deficient now, will hereafter overflow from the redeemed to all eternity, and there shall be a song of praise commenced which shall never cease—"To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

The only inference which I would deduce from the foregoing discourse, is, that if we here love a Saviour whom we have never seen, and whom we can only approach by faith, how strong will be our love when we shall see him face to face, and find ourselves not only in his real presence, but inclosed in his affectionate embrace! And when we see him, we shall be like him, both in soul and body, "for we shall see him as he is." And "beholding his glory we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

God being a Spirit cannot be seen with corporeal eyes, either in this world or the next; but his glory shines illustriously in the face of his Son. And whosoever seeth the Son seeth the Father also, for the Father and Son are one. Here our views of Christ are only by faith, but in heaven we shall see him face to face, and know as we are known. Here our love to the Saviour is feeble, on account of the dimness of our vision, and often interrupted by dark clouds, and earthly affections which draw us away from the contemplation of the character of our Redeemer; but in heaven there will be no interposing obstacles to veil his glory, or counteracting affections to enfeeble or interrupt our perfect love. Happy, happy condition of those who loved a Saviour, whom they never saw, when they shall see him as he is, and be like him. They will never be weary of gazing on his lovely face—they will never cease to give him thanks and praise for his unparalleled, unspeakable love, to which they will forever acknowledge their indebtedness for salvation.

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