

The Sons of God; Their Blessings and Their Privileges

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"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." 1 John 3:1

The life of John, the beloved disciple, was, by the express wisdom and goodness of God, prolonged beyond the space allotted to his fellow apostles. Church history informs us that he lived to be nearly one hundred years old; and Jerome, one of the ancient Church Fathers, as quoted by Milner, records a pleasing incident of him at that advanced period of life, which is so much in harmony with his general character that it seems to deserve our credence better than most of the current traditions concerning him. It is this. When he was too old and infirm to walk, he was carried into the assemblies of the Christians at Ephesus, and there he confined himself to these few simple words of exhortation: "My children, love one another." But I intimated that it was by the express wisdom and goodness of God that his life was so long spared; and now I will tell you my reason for drawing this conclusion. Satan, when he found he could not overthrow the Church of Christ by violence, changed his plan, and sought to subvert it by treachery. He therefore raised up in almost all directions, where there were churches of Christ, a set of vile characters, men erroneous in doctrine and ungodly in life, who sprang up as tares in the fields of wheat. To us it seems scarcely credible that within thirty or forty years after our Lord's death and resurrection there should start up in the churches such characters as Jude and Peter describe with their graphic pens. Hear Jude's description of many members of Christian churches in his day, which, taking the Bible date

of the Epistle, A.D. 66, was but 33 years after the ascension of Jesus—a shorter space of time than I have professed to be a servant of Christ. "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." "These," he adds, "are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." (Jude 4, 12, 13.) What strong, what emphatic language! And yet the Church of Christ at that early period was pestered with these infamous characters. You will find equally strong language concerning them in the second epistle of Peter written about the same time. And even Paul, a year or two before the same period, denounces similar characters in terms not much less severe: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." (Phil. 3:18, 19.) And again: "For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:10, 11, 16.)

Now what a mercy it was that John should have been spared to witness not only the introduction of these ungodly characters into the professing church but their full

development; that he, who had been an eye-witness of the Lord's glory on the mount of transfiguration; who had viewed his agony in the garden; who had stood by him when expiring on the cross, and marked the blood and water gush from his pierced side; who had seen and handled him after the resurrection, and had beheld his ascension from Bethany, should have been spared to witness all these evils introduced into the primitive churches; for he was thus enabled, towards the close of his life, by the grace of God and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to testify, with all the greater power and authority as an eye-witness, against these evils and these errors. The "grievous wolves," for instance, that Paul prophesied should enter in among them at Ephesus (Acts 20:29) were there before his eyes, "not sparing the flock." And so with other churches, such as Pergamos and Thyatira. The men and their evil ways and works were not shadows in the future, like the beast with seven heads and ten horns, but were then living, moving, and working in the churches with all their craft and hypocrisy, all their errors and heresies, all their wantonness and wickedness. God, therefore, preserved him so long in life that, as his last New Testament witness, he might deliver a standing testimony against those errors and evils which afflicted the early churches. If we had a fuller knowledge of these errors and evils we should see that John's testimony was particularly directed against them. We should see why he was specially led in his gospel to testify so plainly to the Deity and eternal Sonship of Jesus, truths which these heretics denied; and to preserve so carefully the exact discourses of the blessed Lord, in which he asserted his essential oneness with the Father as the Son of God, and yet the reality of his flesh and blood as the Son of man. So in his Epistles, and especially in the first and longest of them, we should see how in every verse he denounces some vile error or declares some important truth. Well may we say that upon it are inscribed,

as with a ray of light, these three conspicuous features: truth, holiness, and love. How, for instance, he testifies for the *truth* by setting before us the essential Deity, the eternal Sonship, and the propitiation made for sin by our blessed Lord! How he treats of his advocacy with the Father, as Jesus Christ the righteous, and assures us that his blood cleanseth from all sin! How he denounces error with most trenchant pen, cutting off those who hold it as men devoid of the grace of God, and bidding us take heed of them, and not even receive them into our houses or bid them God speed! And is not *holiness* the very breath of the epistle? How he tells us that he who is blessed with a good hope through grace of seeing Jesus as he is purifies himself even as He is pure. (1 John 3:3.) How he warns us against loving the world or the things that are in the world. (1 John 2:15.) How he seeks to lead us up to have "fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3); declares that "he who saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked;" and lays it down as a practical test of the new birth: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." (1 John 2:29.) Nor need I say with what a glorious flood of heavenly *love* this epistle is bathed. The love of God in Christ to us in sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; the love of Christ in laying down his life for us; the love which we should have to him and to each other—is not this divine and heavenly love in its mountain and its streams, in its communication and in its claims, in its living fruits and practical effects, the very animating breath of the whole epistle? The love of God, softening and melting his heart, seems to have touched his pen as with a double measure of holy force and fire, so that we may almost say, if truth be the body, and holiness the soul, love is the spirit of this blessed epistle.

Without further introduction, I shall at once approach our

text; and I think we may see in it four distinguishing features:

I.—*First, the wondrous love of God:* "Behold, *what manner of love* the Father hath bestowed upon us."

II.—*Secondly, the amazing blessings and privileges* of God's people: "that we should be *called the sons of God.*"

III.—*Thirdly, the gross ignorance* of the world: "therefore *the world knoweth us not.*"

IV.—*Fourthly, the explanation* of the mystery: because it *knew him not.*"

I.—Our text commences with a "Behold." Let us not pass by this; for is it not as if John would summon us to behold a wondrous sight? Is it not as if he would call up our sleeping graces and animate every faculty of our renewed mind, to gaze upon the stupendous miracle which he sets before our eyes? "Behold, what manner of love!" This call upon us to come and look seems to remind us of the various appearances of God in the Old Testament, when he suddenly and unexpectedly manifested himself as a God of love or power; as, for instance, when he appeared to Abraham in a vision of the night with those gracious words: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1.) It may also remind us of the wondrous appearance of the Lord to Moses when he was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, in the desert, when "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush;" and as he drew near to behold the marvellous sight, God spake to him out of the burning bush—wondrous type of the ever-blazing Deity of our gracious Lord, and yet of his pure, unconsumed humanity in the most intimate union with

it! This call of "Behold" seems to remind us also of Ezekiel, when sitting "amongst the captives by the river of Chebar, on a sudden the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God." (Ezek. 1:1.) May it not also call to our mind the vision of Isaiah, when he saw "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple?" (Isai. 6:1), or of Daniel, solitary and mourning by the river Hiddekel, when lifting up his eyes "he looked and beheld a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz?" (Dan. 10:5.) It may also serve to remind us of John himself when in the Isle of Patmos he heard a great voice, and turned and saw one like unto the Son of Man in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. (Rev. 1:10, 13.) As all these appearances were unexpected displays of the Lord in his grace and in his glory, so when holy John says in our text "Behold," it is as if he would rouse up our sleeping graces and bid us behold with eyes of faith and affection a stupendous sight not less marvellous than these appearances of God in the days of old.

Now what is this stupendous sight which John bids us here behold? "*What manner of love* the Father hath bestowed upon us." It is not merely what love, but what "*manner*" of love. Thus he would bid us contemplate the love of God under that particular form and in that peculiar manner in which God has revealed and made it known to the sons of men. In pursuance, then, of this godly counsel, I think we may contemplate this love under these three points of view:—1, In its *nature*; 2, In its *manifestation*; 3, And in its *communication*.

i. Look, then, first, at the love of God in its *nature*—what it is *in itself*, as a pure Fountain, distinct from its streams and effects; and I think we shall see certain peculiar features stamped upon it as such, enabling us to say, "Behold *what*

manner of love."

1. First, it was *self-originating*. Love, if we have any to the Lord and to his people, is God's gift and grace; it does not dwell naturally in our hearts, but its source and spring are from above; but love in the bosom of God dwells in him as one of his glorious, underived perfections. It gushes, therefore, freely out of his bosom, as a river springs out of a mountain side, without any call from earth, without any invitation from man. Whence come three of our noblest rivers—the Rhine, the Rhone, and the Danube? All spring from the bosom of the same mighty Alps, a few leagues only from each other, whence they flow each in its own direction to gladden and fertilise every land to which they come. So the love of God to his people gushes forth from his own bosom unsought, unasked, undeserved, but carrying a blessing wherever it flows.

2. It was also *eternal*. No change can take place in the mind of God. No new plans, no fresh purposes, no unthought-of schemes can enter the mind of him who is One eternal NOW—the great self-existent I AM. His love, therefore, like himself, must be equally *eternal*. It had no beginning, as he had no beginning; and it will have no end, as he had no end. Well may we pause before so stupendous a sight, as Moses at the burning bush, and gather up every faculty of our soul to listen to the words with solemn admiration which he spoke by his prophet: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3.) If, then, you are asked, Why is God's love eternal? all you can answer is, Because it is the love of God who is eternal. And if you are farther asked, "How do you know that God has from all eternity loved you?" all you can reply is, "Because with loving kindness he has drawn me." This is the

solution to the question whether in doctrine or experience; we can give no other.

3. But being eternal it must be *infinite*, for God is infinite; and as he is love in name and nature, his love must be the same as all his other gracious and glorious perfections, all of which like himself are infinite. But what a wondrous mercy it is for the Church of God that his love is thus infinite. To see this point more plainly, look at two other perfections of God in their infinity—his wisdom and his power. First look at his *wisdom*, and see how it is displayed on every side in creation. See in what infinite wisdom the Lord has ordained and arranged everything in the visible creation, adapting each part to the other with all the perfection and finish of an exquisite machine. The sun moving in its daily orbit; the moon walking in her midnight brightness; the succession of seasons; the multiplicity of animals upon the face of the earth; each one of them a miracle in its formation, propagation, and provision—what proofs before our eyes do all these daily wonders afford us of the infinite wisdom of God. And do they not also give us equal proofs of his infinite *power*? If, then, his wisdom and his power are thus shown to be infinite, is it not equally true of his *love*? Now the peculiar blessedness of this love as being infinite is that as such it includes all the saints of God in one universal embrace. It is like his wisdom and his power in nature. In creation, there is nothing too great and nothing too small to display the infinite wisdom and power of God. There is as much wisdom and power in the creation of the trunk of a bee as of the trunk of an elephant; in the making of the sting of a wasp as of the claw of a tiger; in the formation of the eye to see the light of the sun as in the formation of the sun to give light to the eye. Now what is true in creation is true in grace; what is true of God's wisdom and power is true of his love. Do but apply this. You may think yourself too insignificant a creature

or too sinful a wretch for God's love to embrace. But as his love is infinite, it embraces with equal strength all the elect of Christ; and if you are so blessed and favoured as to be amongst the number of those whom God from all eternity has loved, his love reaches down to you who are less than the least of all saints as much as his wisdom and his power to the smallest of his creatures.

4. But being infinite, this love is also *inexhaustible*; and this is another blessed object of contemplation in looking at "the manner" of God's love. We should soon have drained it dry were it not an inexhaustible fountain. Look at the millions of God's redeemed family, whether glorified spirits in heaven or still sojourning upon earth, or still to be born in the process of time. How inexhaustibly the love of God has been flowing forth for ages to every one of those countless millions. As an emblem of this inexhaustible love, look at the sun; think of the ages for which it has shone unexhausted and inexhaustible; consider the millions and millions of beams which it has cast upon the earth; the thousands of crops which it has ripened, the millions of fruit it has brought to perfection; and yet it shines still. It shines to day as it shone 6,000 years ago; and it will not cease to shine till he who made it what it is bids it cease to be. So with the love of God: it has shone into the hearts of millions; it has been the spring of all their happiness and the source of all their fruitfulness; their joy in life, their support in death, their bliss in eternity. Their sins have not worn it out, nor their backslidings exhausted it; for its very nature is to be unexhausted, inexhaustible.

5. It is, therefore, *unchangeable*. God does not love to day and hate to morrow. His own words are: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6.) It is most contrary to the revelation which God

has given of himself in the Scripture as "resting in his love" (Zeph. 3:17); as "being of one mind and none can turn him" (Job. 23:13); as "one with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17): to think that after he has once fixed his love upon any of his people, he should repent of that love and take it away from them as being unworthy of it. "The gifts and calling of God," we are expressly told, "are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, God never repents of the gifts of his love and grace, and the calling which is the fruit of them. Did not the Lord know from all eternity what his people would be? Did he not know that, as Moses said to the children of Israel, they would be "a stiff-necked people," provoking him continually to his face? And yet he says of them: "If heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." (Jer. 31:37.) The immutability of his love is the foundation of all our hope; for we well know if our sins and backslidings could turn this love away we soon sink to rise no more. But this is the consolation of the family of God, that his love is as immutable as his own eternal essence. Thus far then have I endeavoured to describe the *nature* of God's love; but O, how weakly and imperfectly have I set it forth!

ii. I now, then, pass onto consider the two other peculiar features of this love, viz., its *manifestation* and its *communication*; and I think I shall do this best by coming at once to the second branch of my subject in which they more conspicuously appear:

II.—*The amazing blessings and privileges* of God's people in being called the sons of God.

i. God loved his people from all eternity, but he loved them

only in Christ. This must ever be borne in mind, or we shall make sad mistakes in this important matter. If God loved you, it is not because he saw anything in you to love. He does not only love you as the mere creature of his hand, for that you share in common with your fellow men; for you must bear in mind that there is a love which God bears to the creatures of his hand distinct from his love in grace. We therefore read: "He loveth the stranger in giving him food and raiment." (Deut. 10:18.) But the love which he has to your soul, whereby he means to make you a partaker of his eternal glory, is not the love which he has to you as the creature of his hand, but the love he has to you as a member of the mystical body of Christ. This is what I mean by the love of God in its *manifestation*. The apostle therefore says: "In this was *manifested* the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If, therefore, sometimes you stand astonished at the love of God, or have ever been incredulous that the love of God should be fixed upon you, as feeling your utter insignificance as well as miserable sinfulness and vileness, you must consider why it is that God has loved you or any other of the human race: it is in his dear Son. It is in his Son that he chose the Church; in his Son that he blessed her with all spiritual blessings; in his Son that he accepted her as without spot or blemish, for she is "accepted in the Beloved." Is not this the clear, indubitable language of the apostle? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. 1:3, 4, 6.) The Church never was

separated in the mind of God from her covenant Head, for she is "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:23.) The love, therefore, which God has to his dear Son reaches and is extended unto all the members of his mystical body. This is blessedly intimated in the intercessory prayer of our Lord: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23); and again: "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26.) The apostle, therefore, says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:4, 5, 6, 7.) Is God "rich in mercy?" It is "in Christ Jesus." Is the love wherewith he loved us great? It is so only in Christ Jesus. When we were dead in sins, did he quicken us? It was "together with Christ." Did he raise us up together and make us sit together in heavenly places? It is "in Christ Jesus." Will he show "in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace?" It will be "in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Christ, then, in his Person and work is the *manifestation* of the love of God—the consecrated channel through which it flows, and by which it is bounded.

Now this brings us to a very important feature in the love of God as thus manifested in the Person and work of his dear Son, which is *redemption*. This is a point which it deeply concerns us experimentally and savingly to know, for it meets us in our lost ruined condition as sinners; and it is as

being in this case that the love of God is specially manifested. You know that in Adam we all sinned and fell from our native purity and innocence. The image of God in which we were created was utterly defaced; we became alienated from the life of God, and sank down before him dead in trespasses and sins. There was a need, therefore, of redemption from this state of alienation and death, guilt and condemnation, and all the other dreadful consequences of the Adam fall. Here love was so singularly manifested. The fall did not forfeit sonship, but it forfeited the image of God; it did not blot the names of the elect out of the Book of Life, but it blotted them all over with the mud and mire of sin; it did not destroy the union which the people of God had with Christ their covenant Head, but it sank the members of his mystical body into a pit of sin and misery, out of which nothing but the incarnation of the Son of God and the propitiation he made by his bloodshedding and death could lift them out. It did not remove or impair the love of God towards the Church of Christ, for that was antecedent to the fall, but it made redemption necessary for its manifestation. It enhanced it, made it more signal and glorious, and displayed in all its lustre the nature of that love which is as strong as death, which many waters of sin could not quench nor all the floods of evil drown. Whatever God was to man, whatever man was to God, sin had come in and separated between them. Sin is so dreadful an evil; it is so loathsome to the eyes of infinite Purity, such an insult to his divine Majesty, such treason to his authority, such a violation of his justice, that whatever the love of God might be to man it could not flow down to him whilst this barrier stood in the way. It must then be removed, or God and man be ever separate. But none could remove this barrier except God's dear Son, and he only by his mediation and death. Hence the necessity and nature of redemption by the bloodshedding of Jesus. To us, then, as sinners there is no manifestation of the

love of God but in the Person and work of his dear Son, for in him there is redemption, and in no other. The apostle therefore says: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7.) But what is the result of this work of redeeming blood? That by it poor guilty sinners obtain the pardon of all their sins; and their sins being pardoned and put away, they obtain access unto God. They are thus reconciled and brought near to their heavenly Father; for sin being removed by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of Christ, there is now no longer a barrier between God and them. Now to obtain a sense of this pardon in his own soul every child of God is made to sigh and cry mightily with prayers and supplications before the throne of grace. He is thus taught the value and blessedness of atoning blood; and as the sufferings, bloodshedding, and death of the Lord Jesus are more and more revealed to his heart, the more simply and unreservedly does he look to the blood of the Lamb to purge his conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Thus the very weight of sin on his conscience makes him enter all the more feelingly and experimentally into the nature of redemption; and it becomes more opened to his view that by his precious bloodshedding and death Jesus redeemed unto God all who believe in his name, put away their sins, and for ever blotted them out. He sees that he silenced the curse of the law by himself being made a curse for us; that he appeased the anger of God due to our transgressions, and fully satisfied the claims of justice, which otherwise would have dragged us to her awful bar, and hurled us for our offences into a deserved hell. A sight and sense of our danger much open the ear to receive instruction; and thus as the work of redemption is more plainly discovered to our spiritual view, and faith is raised up and drawn forth to believe more personally and experimentally what is thus revealed, we get clearer, more abiding, and soul-

transforming views of the love of God in Christ. Despair on the one side and self-righteousness on the other get a deadly wound from a believing sight of the cross; and the soul rejoices in a crucified Christ with trembling. Well may John then say: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." How wondrous in its nature; how gracious in its manifestation; how blessed in its communication. This last is the point to which we are now come, and which I shall attempt to open.

ii. Whatever be the *nature* of the love of God, in all its self-originating, infinite, inexhaustible, and immutable character; or whatever grace there is in its *manifestation* in the Person and work of his dear Son, it is only by its *communication* to our soul that we come to any personal experience of it. It is therefore with this as with all other precious truths of the gospel. Though they are all contained in the Person and work of the Son of God; though they are most blessed realities as unfolded in the word of his grace, there must be a communication of them to our souls that we may believe them, feel their power, and walk in the sweet enjoyment of them.

1. Here, then, we are at once brought to the first work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart in *regeneration*, to make us sons of God by a new and spiritual birth. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." This is the love of God in its first *communication*, for it is bestowed upon us as an act of sovereign grace to make and manifest us to be the sons of God. And do we not see *all* the three Persons of the Godhead in the manner of this love? In the manner of its *nature*, we see the Father; in the manner of its *manifestation*, we see the Son; in the manner of its *communication*, we see the Holy Ghost; and each and all of these three Persons of the Godhead engaged in the

bestowing of this love on the members of the mystical body of Jesus. But the work of the Holy Ghost upon the heart, in *regeneration*, is to manifest us sons of God by making us partakers of a new birth.

2. But this is not enough. There must be the *spirit of adoption*, breathed into our soul by the same Holy Spirit, before we can claim the sweet relationship, for we are sons before we know it, before we feel, or believe, or enjoy it. As the apostle says, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6.) This is the Spirit's witness: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16.) This, therefore, is the greatest and most blessed communication of the love of God, for it is then shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is what few enjoy in its full communication, and they only at special seasons; but some measure of it is necessary before we can see our sonship clearly, or believe in our heart that God is our Father.

iii. But the contemplation of this love in its nature, manifestation, and communication may, with the Lord's help and blessing, lead us more clearly to see the amazing *blessings* and *privileges* which God has conferred upon his people in bestowing upon them this love. John calls upon us to admire it: "Behold, what manner of love;" as if he would hold it up for our special view and spiritual contemplation, that we might be engaged thereby to meditate more deeply upon it, and seek for a more believing and experimental reception of its beauty and blessedness into our inmost spirit. What, then, are some of these amazing *blessings* and *privileges*?

1. The first and the foundation of the whole is to be "*called*

the sons of God." "Called" but by whom? By man? That will little profit us: for many have called themselves and called others sons of God whom the Lord never authorised, whose claim and whose call he never ratified. Some through presumption, and others through ignorance, lay their claim upon God as their Father whom he will never own as his children, but rather say, "Depart from me; I never knew you." But if God call you his son then "all things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Look then next at some of these *blessings* and *privileges* of sonship thus bestowed.

2. If you are a son, you are a *pardoned* son. Christ has borne your sins in his own body on the tree. He has washed you in the fountain of his precious blood, obeyed the law which you have broken, wrought out a robe of righteousness which is freely imputed to you, and in which you stand complete before God.

3. As another blessing and privilege of a son of God, he has *access to his Father's house*. The child, you know, as one of his privileges, enjoys a free entry into his father's house; he does not knock at the door as a stranger, but opens the latch as one of the family. He knows he is welcome there, and that his parents miss him if he does not fill up his place in the house among the other children. So it is with the child of God: he has free access to his Father's house. He does not stand outside as a stranger, or come in as an occasional and not always acceptable visitor, but enters in with the familiarity of a child. But what mean I by his "Father's house?" Do I mean merely what is so commonly called "the house of God"—the place where prayer is wont to be made, the tabernacles below where he sometimes manifests his presence and his power? This is indeed a privilege, and should be a highly valued one; but the house which I mean is

the inner sanctuary of the Lord's presence—that sacred spot of which David speaks: "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91:1); that habitation of which Moses wrote: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psa. 90:1); that holy and heavenly abode which the Lord promised by the prophet: "I will be to them a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." (Ezek. 11:16.) Access to God in our troubles, a refuge in his bosom from every storm—this is the special privilege of a child. To such he speaks in those gracious words: "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." (Isai. 26:20.)

4. The son has also a *seat at the Father's table*. Whatever the food be, be it little or much, be it dainty or homely, the child has a place at his father's board. So it is with these sons of God. God has richly supplied his table with every gospel delicacy: there is bread made from the very finest of the wheat—"the living bread which came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die;" there is honey out of the rock; there is the choicest and sweetest milk to feed the babe; there is strong meat to nourish the man. There is not a single delicacy that can tempt the feeblest appetite, nor the most solid food that can gratify the most insatiable hunger, which God has not spread upon his heavenly table. The sweet promises, the encouraging invitations, the glorious truths, the holy precepts, the solemn ordinances, and, what crowns all, gives life to all, and is the sum and substance of all—the flesh and blood of his dear Son, are the provisions with which God has abundantly blessed Zion. And he who has spread the banquet says, "Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled." (Prov. 9:5.) Nay, Jesus himself proclaims from the head of the table, "Eat, O friends;

drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The child comes as a child; he finds the table spread for him without his care or forethought, without his labour or expense. O how sweet it is when in this childlike spirit we can sit down and eat of heavenly food; when without fear, bondage, or unbelief; without darkness, barrenness and death, we can take up the word of life, and, mixing faith with what we read, sometimes drink the milk, sometimes eat the solid meat, sometimes take a sip of gospel wine, or taste of the honey out of the rock. This spiritual appetite for spiritual food; this sitting under the shadow of Jesus with great delight, and finding his fruit sweet to our taste (Song. 2:3), is a sure testimony of our adoption into the family of God.

5. Another privilege of a son is to be *an heir*. "And if children then heirs—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Our sonship does not end with this life, but abides for ever and ever. This indeed is the peculiar blessedness of being a child of God, that death, which puts a final extinguisher on all the hopes and happiness of the children of men, gives him the fulfilment of all his hopes and the consummation of all his happiness; for it places him in possession of "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet.1:4, 5.) In this life we have sometimes sips and tastes of sonship, feeble indeed and interrupted, so that it is with us as Mr. Hart speaks:

"Though thou here receive but little,
Scarce enough
For the proof
Of thy proper title;"

yet are they so far pledges of an inheritance to come. But this life is only an introduction to a better. In this life we are

but children, heirs indeed, but heirs in their minority; but in the life to come, if indeed we are what we profess to be, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, we shall be put into full possession of the eternal inheritance. And what is this? Nothing less than God himself. "Heirs of God," says the apostle. For as the Lord said to Abraham, "I am thy shield and exceeding great reward;" as he said to the Levites, "I am their inheritance," so God himself is the inheritance of his people; yes, he himself in all his glorious perfections. All the love of God, the goodness of God, the holiness of God, all his happiness, bliss, and blessedness, all his might, majesty, and glory, as shining forth in the Person of his dear Son in all the blaze of one eternal, unclouded day—this is the saint's inheritance. Let us not then be weary in well doing; nor faint and tire in running the race set before us, with this prize in view; but press on by faith and prayer to win this eternal and glorious crown.

6. But I must add one more privilege of sonship, and that is *obedience*. If we are children of God, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, it is our privilege to be obedient to the will of our heavenly Father; and that from the heart. It is one of our richest mercies and noblest privileges to render to him, not eye service, the miserable bondage of the slave, but that free obedience which is due to him as Parent from a child. You know the difference between the cheerful obedience of an affectionate daughter or a dutiful son, and the forced obedience of a wretched drudge. One is spontaneous, hearty, affectionate, free, and is accepted as such; the other is extorted by fear, or given with an eye to the wages. Obedience to the precepts of the gospel, doing the will of God from the heart, living to his honour and glory, walking daily in the fear of the Lord, loving his people and seeking their good, and manifesting the power of vital godliness by a meek, quiet, holy life and conversation, are so many blessed

marks and evidences of an adoption into the family of God.

7. *A daily cross*, a path of trial and tribulation, a chastening rod for going astray, a furnace of affliction, purging away the dross and tin, and its fruits, as producing true humility of mind, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, and tenderness of conscience, with much self-loathing and self-abhorrence, godly sorrow for sin, and earnest desires for close and holy communion with God—these are other privileges of sonship, not indeed much prized or coveted by the professors of our day, but blessed marks of a heavenly birth.

In looking at these privileges and comparing your experience with them, you will probably find some to encourage and others to discourage you. We would not be deceived; we would be honest to God and to our own consciences; and as we cannot take to ourselves what the Lord does not give, and our evidences are often obscured or out of sight, the seasons are many when we cannot rise up into the sweet enjoyment of our adoption into the living family.

III.—But I pass on to the third point which I proposed for our consideration, *the gross ignorance of the world as to who or what these sons of God are*: "Therefore the world knoweth us not."

What is meant by "the world" here? All who are not partakers of the grace of God, all who are in their natural state of unregeneracy and death. Some of these belong to the openly profane, others to the professing world. But it is true of each of these worlds that the real character and condition, the state and standing, the joys and sorrows, mercies and miseries, trials and deliverances, hopes and fears, afflictions and consolations of the sons of God are entirely hidden from

their eyes. But we shall see this more clearly by entering a little more fully into what is thus hidden from the world's knowledge and observation.

1. It does not know that they are *sons of God*. It does not know what manner of love God has bestowed on them that they should be called his sons. It believes that God loves all men alike—that any one can be a child of God who will; that God offers himself as a Father to all without any exception, and that those who like to embrace this offer become his children at once. They have no idea that God bestows his love upon any particular persons, and calls them his sons. Nothing more moves their indignation than that a few poor, ignorant, despised people should dare to believe and call themselves the sons of God; as if such a favour peculiarly belonged to them, and to them only. How can therefore the world know them if it begin with denying their heavenly sonship?

2. It does not know *their blessings*. Being ignorant of spiritual things, having no apprehension or comprehension of divine realities, it cannot and therefore does not know those rich, those peculiar blessings with which God has blessed his people in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 1:3.) It knows not, for instance, what it is to be blessed with a sense of God's presence, with a manifestation of his love, with a revelation of his mercy, with a discovery of the Person and work, grace and glory of his dear Son. Nor has it any acquaintance with those special favours that the Lord's people are so earnestly coveting, if they are not in present enjoyment of them. It knows nothing of the breathing of a living soul after God's presence; of its panting after him as the heart panteth after the water-brooks; of its longings to see his power and glory, so as it has seen him in the sanctuary. And as it knows nothing of spiritual prayer and supplication, so it knows nothing of gracious answers. It

knows nothing therefore of the joys of pardoned sin; of the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost; of a deliverance from the curse of the law, the guilt and sting of sin, and the fear of death. It knows nothing of the sweet opening up of the Scriptures of truth with power to the soul; of the application of the promises to the wearied spirit; of access to God in secret supplication through his dear Son; or, in a time of special trial and temptation, obtaining a testimony that the request is heard and registered, and will in due time be granted. It knows nothing of any softening, melting, or moving of the heart under the preached word; of any entrance by faith into the glorious mysteries of the gospel, so as to experience their transforming efficacy, and feel their subduing, sanctifying power and influence. These blessings, and many others—in fact, all the spiritual blessings wherewith God has blessed his people, the world knows not; therefore it knows us not.

3. Nor does the world know the *motives* and *feelings* which guide and actuate the sons of God. It views them as a set of gloomy, morose, melancholy beings, whose tempers are soured by false and exaggerated views of religion; who have pored over the thoughts of hell and heaven till some have frightened themselves into despair, and others have puffed up their vain minds with an imaginary conceit of their being especial favourites of the Almighty. "They are really," it says, "no better than other folks, if so good; but they have such contracted minds, are so obstinate and bigoted with their poor, narrow, prejudiced views, that wherever they come they bring disturbance and confusion." But why this harsh judgment? Because it knows nothing of the spiritual feelings which actuate the child of grace, making him act so differently from the world which thus condemns him; such as *the fear of God* in his heart, "as a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death;" such as the holy *reverence* that

he feels towards the name of the Most High, as deeply impressed upon his spirit; such as the dread of offending the Majesty of heaven by indulging in pleasures which the world calls harmless, but which he knows from the testimony of the word and from his own experience to be fraught with peril to the soul. It knows nothing of what it is to *worship God in spirit and in truth*; and therefore cannot understand why we separate ourselves from all false worship, and will not mingle spiritual service with natural devotion, or join hand in hand with those who serve God with their lips and Satan with their lives. It cannot understand our sight and sense of the exceeding *sinfulness of sin*, and that is the reason why we will not run riot with them in the same course of ungodliness. It does not know with what a solemn weight eternal things rest upon our minds; and that that is the cause why we cannot join with them in pursuing so eagerly the things of the world, and living for time as they do, instead of living for eternity. Being unable to enter into the spiritual motives and gracious feelings which actuate a living soul and the movements of divine life continually stirring in a Christian breast, they naturally judge us from their own point of view, and condemn what they cannot understand. You may place two men upon a mountain top, with a vast and beautiful view before them. One man, dull and prosaic, without one spark of taste for beauty of scenery, resembles a Frenchman of whom I have read, who, when crossing the Alps, shut his eyes and sat shuddering in the carriage, for he could not bear to look upon those dreadful precipices and horrid icy peaks which rose in their silent majesty all around him. O no; he would sooner have been shut up in a miserable *cafe* in Paris than have had all this glorious mountain scenery before his eyes. How impossible for him to understand the feelings of his fellow traveller, some romantic Englishman, who is scarcely able to breathe for very delight and ecstasy. In a similar way, worldly men can no more understand why we can take

pleasure in hearing a long sermon, or reading the word of God, or being upon our knees in secret prayer, or feeling holy delight in the service of the Almighty, than this poor Frenchman could understand the beauty of the Alps, or that any one could take a delight in looking at lake and mountain, wild gorge or rushing waterfall, which made him shiver all over. You may place a horse and a man upon the same hill; whilst the man would be looking at the woods and fields and streams, or, if a Christian man, engaged in prayer and supplication to his divine Maker, the horse would be feeding upon the grass at his feet. So if men cannot enter into the divine feelings of the saints of God, need we wonder that they despise and condemn what they know not? The horse, if it could reason, would say, "What a fool my master is! How he is staring and gaping about! Why does he not sit down and open his basket of provisions, for I know he has it with him, for I carried it, and feed as I do?" So the worldling says, "These poor stupid people, how they are spending their time in going to chapel, and reading the Bible in their gloomy, melancholy way. Religion is all very well; and we ought all to be religious before we die; but they make so much of it. Why don't they enjoy more of life? Why don't they amuse themselves more with its innocent, harmless pleasures; be more gay, cheerful, and companionable, and take more interest in those things which so interest us?" The reason why the world thus wonders at us is because it knows us not, and therefore cannot understand that we have sublimer feelings, nobler pleasures, and more substantial delights than ever entered the soul of a worldling.

IV.—But we now come to the *explanation of the mystery*. We need not wonder at the gross ignorance of the world, and that it knows us not, for our text declares, "*it knew him not.*"

The word "him" evidently points to the Lord Jesus Christ; for

when he was in the world, the world knew him not. But we may take the word as applicable also to the Father, for the Father is spoken of in the text: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." What does the world know of the *God and Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ? Has it any fear of his great and glorious name? Has it any faith in him? any love to him? any desire to please him? any dread of displeasing him? Has it any knowledge of the justice of God in condemning, any acquaintance with his mercy in forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin? We know, from the testimony of Scripture and from daily observation, that whilst men are dead in sin, with a veil of unbelief spread over their heart, they do not, indeed cannot, know God; for to know him is a new Covenant blessing: "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jer. 31:34); and it is also eternal life, for "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God." (John 17:3.) They may indeed "profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." (Titus 1:16.) Need we wonder, then, that it knows us not, if it knows him not?

Neither did the world know the *blessed Lord* when he sojourned here below as the very image of the Father. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." They despised his word; they rejected his message; and hated both him and the Father who sent him. They crowned his brow with a crown of thorns, they struck him and buffeted him, and did not spare to spit in his face; they took him beyond the precincts of Jerusalem to the common and abhorred place of execution, and there they nailed him as a malefactor to the accursed tree. And why? Because they knew him not. As the apostle says: "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Cor. 2:8.) If that,

then, was the way in which the world treated God's only begotten Son when he came into it; if the only reception which it gave to the Lord of life and glory was to put him out of the way as an abhorred malefactor, need we wonder if the world that knew him not knows us not? If we are followers of Christ and believers in the Son of God; if we have his mind and image, walk in his footsteps, and are made like unto him by regenerating grace, need we wonder if the world is as ignorant of us as it was of him? Are we to be known and our Master unknown? Are we to be honoured and our Lord despised? Are we to be applauded and our King contemned? Are we to be loved and our Redeemer abhorred? Is the world to treat us better than it treated Christ? But you will say, "This is taking high ground." It is; but can we take lower if we take any at all? We are either children of God, or we are not. If we are, the world knows us not; if we are not, the world knows us and all about us. Some of you, with all your profession, are in that spot. The world knows you; for you are one with it in walk and spirit. It knows, therefore, all about you. Your inward character is not concealed from its keen, observing eyes. The world knows ungodliness, but it does not know godliness; it knows superstition, but, not worshipping God in the spirit; it knows unbelief, but not faith; despondency, but not a good hope through grace; worldly pleasures, but not rejoicing in Christ Jesus; self-confidence, but not having no confidence in the flesh. It knows the love of sin, but not the love of holiness; the fear which hath torment, but not the love which casts it out; the stings and lashes of a guilty conscience, but not the blood of sprinkling to cleanse and heal it. The world, then, will see all through you if you are imbued with its spirit; but if you have the Spirit of Christ, it knoweth you not because it knew him not. Nay, the more you are conformed to the image of Christ, the more you manifest your sonship by your obedience, the more separated you are from the world, the less will it

understand you. If we kept closer to the Lord and walked more in holy obedience to the precepts of the gospel, we should be more misunderstood than even we now are. It is our worldly conformity that makes the world so well to understand many of our movements and actions. But if our movements were more according to the mind of Christ; if we walked more as the Lord walked here below, we should leave the world in greater ignorance of us than we leave it now; for the hidden springs of our life would be more out of its sight, our testimony against it more decided, and our separation from it more complete.

I have laid before you this morning the wondrous love of God. Have you ever felt it? I have brought before you the peculiar blessings and privileges of the sons of God. Have you ever enjoyed them? I have shown you why the world knows them not. Do you feel that you have in your bosom something the world knows not, but which separates you in heart and spirit from it? And I have brought before you the solution of the mystery, and that it is because the world knows neither the Father nor the Son. Do you feel that you have that knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, which is eternal life? May he, if it be his sacred will, give us to know more of his stupendous love; to feel more our interest therein; may he warm our hearts more with his dissolving beams, and bring our life more under its constraining efficacy!