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"And how can they hear without a preacher?"—ST. PAUL.

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GOD'S LOVE.

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TEXT.—“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost (which is) given unto us.”—Romans v: 5.

MR. Spurgeon, of London, in a short meditation on the words, “With loving kindness have I drawn thee,” supposes the Master coming one night to the door of a man’s heart and knocking with the iron hand of the law. The door shakes and trembles on its hinges, but the man piles every piece of furniture that he can find against the door and says to himself, “I will not admit the man.”

The Master turns away, but by and by He comes back, and with His own soft hand, using most that part where the nail had entered, He knocks again—oh, so softly and tenderly! This time the door does not shake, but, strange to say, it opens, and here upon his knees the once unwilling host is found, rejoicing to receive his guest. “Come in, come in; Thou hast knocked so that my heart is moved for Thee. I could not think of Thy pierced hand leaving its blood mark on my door, and of Thy going away houseless. Thy head is filled with dew and Thy locks with the drops of the night. I yield—I yield.” So, he adds, in every case, loving kindness wins the day. What Moses with the tables of stone could never do Christ does with His pierced hand.

Let this be our introduction to the study of the morning. After awhile we must notice how the text stands related to the earlier verses of the chapter. Meanwhile we take it precisely as it lies before us, and pass reverently from phrase to phrase, asking the meaning of each and their relation to each other. For the text defies analysis other than its own. Its

parts are fitted to each other by Him whose name is in it, and who alone can make us know and believe that God loves us and is ever present to breathe His love into our hearts.

The love of God.

“The love of God,” with which our text begins, is His love for us, not ours for Him. Yet our love for God follows the knowledge and belief of His love for us as surely as light and warmth, the rising of the sun, or blossoming and fruitage the summer’s heat, and more surely than child love parental love.

It is a turning point in one’s life when his blind, hard, loveless heart receives the sweet light and living warmth of the great truth that God loves him. And the love is not the love of one Person of the Godhead only, or of one more than of the others. God is self-revealed as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. As such He loves, and His love is all pervasive of Himself, even as ours is of ourselves. His love pledges His very being, perfections, character and resources. In giving it to us He gives Himself. To every one who believes He says, “I will be his God,” and even God can say no greater thing than this.

Can you comprehend such love? Not till you can comprehend God in His greatness, His attributes, His character, His resources, His purposes, His glory, and not till you know yourself in your capacity, your character, your responsibility, your immortality, your need and your helplessness.

It is the wonder of all wonders that

God, whom we treat so ill, should love us after we have marred His image, even as He loved before it was marred; and that He should love us back to His heart and household and heaven.

God reveals himself.

It must be our great concern in this life to find out, by proper searching, what kind of a being God is, that we may set a true value on His love for us and yield an answering love.

God is immanent in all nature, the product of His will. By means of it He reveals His presence, His care and His love. And so Jesus bids us take daily lessons from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. From them we are to learn how unreasonable and hurtful and sinful it is to have divided and distracted minds--about what we shall eat and what we shall drink and wherewithal we shall be clothed--since to our Heavenly Father we are dearer than the birds and lilies which He feeds and clothes.

He is revealed in His all comprehensive providence, preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions, in holiness, wisdom and power. Therefore, we are to cast all our care upon Him, assured that He careth for us.

But not by the revelation of Himself in nature and providence only could our God make us know and believe the love He hath for us. And so he has superadded the revelations of Himself in Jesus Christ, and in the redemption purchased by Christ. This it is, in the promise of it, the preparation for it, the execution of it and the application of it to us as individual sinners and enemies of God by wicked works, that supplements and surpasses all other proofs of love. We do not wonder that all the holy angels were summoned to worship the First Begotten when He was brought into the world. Nor can we wonder that lost angels hated Him and envied men in whose nature and for whose salvation God's well-beloved Son came to suffer the just for the unjust, to bring them unto God. The story is old, yet ever new. It is the love of God, manifested in this last way, that

is celebrated in words of richer meaning than any other in all the Bible. Taken together, they are the living heart of the Book of books. Happily they are so familiar to loving hearts that mere catchwords at once suggest them in their fullness. "God so loved the world"—who cannot complete that sentence? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers"—what a catalogue of hindering forces—"shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let this suffice in exposition of the first phrase.

Is shed abroad.

Pass to the second—"Is shed abroad." The figure is not that of light from a central sun, but rather that of water from a fountain swelling to a river. The word is freely used in relation to the blood of Christ shed for many for the remission of sins; in relation to the Holy Spirit poured out upon all flesh, and to water bursting from a fountain and streaming out in lavish abundance.

Whether, therefore, the love of God comes to us in the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, or comes in the blood of Christ that cleanseth us from all sin, or comes in the pure water that is poured upon us for cleansing us from the stains and pollutions of our natures and our sins, it is wondrous love—love that will not let us go till we bear the image of the heavenly, in rarer beauty than belonged to God's unfallen children in the Garden of Eden. Hold fast this idea of the free and even lavish pouring forth of God's love upon us for our salvation, and pass at once to the third phrase of the text.

God loves our spirit, soul and body.

"In our hearts." There is confusion I think, in many minds in regard to the meaning and usage of Scriptural terms answering to ourselves, our

persons, the all of each one's self as related to the love and salvation of God. The heart is not a little portion, or less than the whole, of one's self as the object of God's love.

It would be no greater mistake in regard to God's love for us, to say that He loves with part of Himself, or that the Son of God loved us and induced the Father to love us, or that the Holy Spirit came only to assure us that the Father and the Son loved us, leaving us uncertain whether He Himself loved us or not, than to say that the love of God is poured as a river only through certain portions of ourselves—the heart, for instance—as the seat of the affections, but not through the mind that thinks, the conscience that accuses and tortures us, and the will that makes the choices of our lives, to say nothing of the body, in which all these reside.

The simple truth is that a human person is no more divisible than a Divine Person. The Scriptures include even the body in that comprehensive prayer, "And the very God of Peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." These three belong to the one and the self-same person, and it is the person entire that is the object of God's love.

The precious truth, therefore, is that, being justified by faith, as every child of God is, he is in such relation to God that his whole being may be, and should be, flooded with the love of God, even as water from a perennial fountain, growing to a river as it flows, pours through meadows and even a continent, making what it touches live and blossom and bear precious fruit. The waters of Ezekiel's vision issuing from beneath the threshold of God's house eastward, and deepening and broadening to a river that could not be passed over, with many trees on one side and on the other, were a sacred emblem of the mighty love of God in relation to individuals and multitudes. It is the love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, manifested not alone but chiefly in the Person and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. And

Mr. Spurgeon published a great truth in the words already quoted: "Loving kindness wins the day."

The Holy Spirit.

So we come to another and most important phrase of the text. "By the Holy Ghost." The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. I do not need to say here that "the Holy Ghost" is not an influence merely, but a Person. We cannot indeed solve or comprehend the revealed mystery of the threefold personality of the Godhead. If we could find out the Almighty to perfection as to the mode of His existence or any of His attributes we would be His equals. It is enough that we know, and are enabled to believe, His revelation of Himself, as the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. The formula of Christian baptism and the apostolic benediction, in both of which the three are named, and set before us in sacred relations to ourselves and others, are but the combination, in single pregnant sentences, of what is largely written and revealed through the Bible as a whole.

Is it not an amazing proof of God's condescension and of His loving purpose to save us that the Holy Spirit comes to us individually? That He searches our inmost consciousness, which is too deep for us; that He lays open the secret of our hearts and reveals us to ourselves measurably, as He himself knows us; and, what is still better proof of His personality and deity, that He searches all things even the deep things of God, and manifests them to us. How else do we come to know and believe the holiness, the justice, the truth, the power and the purpose of God? And how the love of God, save as He pours it—a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal—through and through our whole being? He persuades us that God's love for us is as real as ours for each other. He helps us apprehend, though we cannot comprehend, its greatness. It is His own love for us; and He surely knows what that is, and how to manifest it. He sets before us the Person, the character, the offices, the life, the teachings, the work, the cross, the

death, the resurrection, the ascension, the power over all flesh, and the second coming of Jesus Christ the Son of God—Emanuel, God with us; and He persuades and enables us to embrace Him as our Saviour, our Lord and our God, as He is offered to us in the Gospel.

His Love a Bond of Union.

The first act of His love and grace and power is uniting us to the person of Jesus Christ in a new creation and by the faith that follows, that we may be justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. Henceforth there is no condemnation, for God, who justifies, is stronger than all that would condemn. But this is only the beginning of His work. He abides with us as the Spirit of truth, and grace, and supplication, and love, and power, and holiness, and of a sound mind. He puts His sevenfold powers at our service; and it seems to require all to make real, and effectual, and all-pervasive the love that God has for us; to open the eyes of our understandings, to correct our misjudgments of God's thoughts and purposes and ways in relation to ourselves and those dearest to us; to allay our fears; to kindle our repentings; to make precious and helpful the ordinances of God's house; to keep the Person and cross of Christ always before us; to sanctify our sorrows; and by all the means at His disposal make us sure that the Almighty and Eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, loves us, has always loved us, and will love us while He lives, and our lives are hid with Christ in Him.

Given Unto Us.

There is still another phrase of the text, "which is given unto us." The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost "given unto us;" the relative pronoun "which" is not in the original Greek. If it were possible to think of the Holy Ghost apart from the Father and the Son, and of his acting independently of them in all that He does to reveal and manifest to us the love that God hath to us, we might still wonder and rejoice.

But how much more worthy of grateful recognition is the truth that the Holy Ghost, of one substance with the Father and the Son and of the same will, is given for the very purpose of revealing the love to us and bringing us under the saving power. We have only to recall the promises of our Saviour while here to set this truth before us in its full light and preciousness.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

"I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth."

"It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send Him unto you."

He does go away. He is lifted up on the dreadful cross, but He returns and tarries long enough to show Himself alive by many infallible proofs.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost.

And before His final departure He takes all possible pains to fix the minds and hearts of His apostles and friends upon the promise He has given. "He breathes upon the eleven, and says: 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit.'" He leads them out as far as to Bethany, assures them that they shall receive the promise of the Holy Ghost coming upon them, and shall be witnesses to Him.

He is parted from them in the act of giving His final benediction and taken up to heaven; and after ten days of prayer and supplication on their part, with others, men and women, including the brethren and mother of Jesus—a most beautiful truth that the number included his brethren and mother—He sheds forth the pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost.

From that day to this the Holy Ghost has remained upon the earth. We do not need to pray that He shall descend from heaven, as He has done so, and is here, and He will remain until Christ comes the second time with-

out sin unto salvation. His name is given to this ministration under which we live. He is among us, as the Master before Him was as one that serves, and the glory of His ministration dims the glory of all that have gone before.

Wayward children of God we are, if children at all. For this reason we need and have "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." But we have an advocate here, too, the other Advocate, the Comforter, promised by Jesus before He ascended to His Father and our Father, His God and our God. He teaches us how to pray. Wonderful is the testimony of St. Paul on this subject. Recall his words, and let them be as sweetest music in your ears and hearts.

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the word of God." Breathing His own love into our hearts, He teaches us not only how to pray, but how to love and live in joyful expectation of "the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The Sancta Scala.

Thus, brethren, we have passed from phrase to phrase of this familiar and most precious text. But we cannot close our study till we turn a moment to the truths before the text. They are the divine pathway to it. Happily they are an open road, and many know it. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our

hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Every step in this road is toward a higher plane of life and love and benediction. Justification by faith. Peace in believing; peace with God, with self, with others. Access by Christ, the way, into this grace of peace, wherein we stand in His strength.

Joy in the Lord himself, and in hope of the glory of God. He giveth grace and glory, and Jesus claims that we shall see and have His glory, which is excellence of character, condition and even appearance like His own, and with Him where He is.

Wondrous Patience.

But we are not there yet. The shadows and tribulations of the earthly life are upon us and about us. We are in a vale of tears. Here even Jesus wept and bled and died. But here, too, He wrought out a noble destiny for Himself and us. It is enough for the disciple that He be as his Master and the servant as his Lord. Therefore we glory in tribulations; tribulations, limitations, burdens—glory in them, that is, exult with sacred joy in the midst of them and under them. Why? Because they work patience. What is patience? The grace of keeping still under burdens laid upon us by the hand of love, seeing the hand meanwhile and waiting for it to lift from us what it has laid upon us.

"And patient experience," that is, the testing and proving of character and so of relation and likeness to Jesus, who was Himself in all points tempted like as we are, and yet without sin.

"And experience hope." Hope, the desire and expectation of all that God has pledged to us, by promise and by oath. More even than this. Already He has given us His spirit as the earnest of our inheritance, until the reception of the purchased possession. So, too, He has given His beloved Son. And "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." Yea, we are heirs of all things, for we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

There is one step more. Hope, this hope, maketh not ashamed. It is the hope of God's calling. It is our anchor cast within the veil whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus made an high priest forever. Every other hope maketh ashamed; the hope of the hypocrite, the hope of the self-righteous, the hope of the presumptuous.

Horatius Bonar Sings from Glory.

But this hope maketh not ashamed, "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

I bless the Christ of God;
I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lips and heart
I call this Saviour mine.

I praise the God of grace;
I trust His truth and might;
He calls me His, I call Him mine,
My God, my joy, my light.

In Him is only good,
In me is only ill;
My ill but draws His goodness forth
And me He loveth still.

'Tis He who saveth me,
And freely pardon gives;
I love because He loveth me;
I live because He lives.

So Horatius Bonar sung on his way to glory. He is there now and following Christ as he followed and as many others that we have known and loved followed. We shall be there in God's good time, and be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.