

## SEEING THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY.

Preached at Galeed, Brighton,  
Lord's Day September 21st, 1941. (Forenoon)

*"For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face."*

1 Cor. xiii. 12.

The Corinthian Church, like many of the other churches of Christ, had imperfect views of the character and use of spiritual gifts. There is a tendency to under-estimate the importance of these gifts, just as there is a tendency to over-estimate them; and certainly many seem to forget that these gifts are sovereignly given and graciously bestowed. They are not within our power to command, nor are they within our ability to use if God has withheld them. For the purpose of removing misunderstanding and setting in a Scriptural light the nature of these gifts, the apostle wrote as we have read this morning. There he shows the sovereignty in the gifts of the Holy Spirit Who gives severally, as He will; their interdependence, just as different members of the body are dependent upon each other and work together for a common end. Moreover he shows that these gifts when rightly used and when properly recognised are for the glory of Christ, and are for the benefit of the church. In concluding his remarks on that subject he said, "But covet earnestly the best gifts." There would seem to have been a tendency in these Corinthian believers to have put a value far beyond what was proper upon certain spectacular gifts which would feed their pride and attract attention to themselves. He exhorts them rather to covet earnestly, to desire fervently, the best gifts, gifts which are useful in the interests of Christ's people and for the furtherance of His truth..

We may recollect that spiritual gifts, as spiritual blessings, are to be received in a way of favour and waiting upon God. "Yet," he said, "I show you a more excellent way." At the first it might seem that the apostle meant that he showed them a way more excellent than seeking the better and spiritual gifts; but that would be to the disparagement of those gifts which he counselled them to earnestly desire. It rather means that the apostle would show unto them a more excellent way in which these gifts could be better used and seen in a more gracious light, and he proceeded to speak to them of love. He showed

them in the first place that whatever gifts they possessed, if they were destitute of love they had nothing at all. The love that the apostle speaks of is not a carnal, sentimental love, but love which is the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of the Saviour's love being shed abroad in the heart by the power and operation of the Spirit. This holy, gracious principle of love in the soul ennoble the weakest gift and enhances the most valuable gift. Without it our gifts are poverty itself.

Having spoken to this purpose he concludes the chapter from which I have read the text by saying, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." According to the apostle's argument, which is consistent with the experience of every believer, faith and hope, with love, are essential to our present experience. We cannot see clearly, cannot comprehend fully, cannot understand absolutely every matter relating to our eternal peace; but we hope and believe in the Person and work of Christ. Faith is that secret principle which brings a poor sinner and a precious Saviour into living, experimental contact and benefit, while hope is of immense benefit to the believer as an anchor to his soul, while he hopes to experience what he believes to exist in the covenant of God's free grace. But when our faith is lost in sight, when the child of God is so graciously satisfied in the divine presence of his Saviour that he has nothing to hope for, love will still remain; not in its present, imperfect exercises but as glorified, perfected, enlarged by an everlasting vision of the adorable Redeemer in all the glories of heaven. Love will then be seen in heaven to be the choicest of all the gifts that God has given us, better by far than those temporal gifts which we sometimes over-estimate, but which we sometimes under-value as well. Hart has very beautifully said,

"The little too that's known,  
Which children-like we boast,  
Will fade like glow-worms in the sun,  
Or drops in ocean lost.

But love shall still remain,  
Its glories cannot cease;  
No other change shall that sustain  
Save only to increase."

In this connection the apostle said, as I have read for a text, "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face." It is a statement of the greatest importance and consolation to true believers. It is a statement of a very great and blessed truth. He says, "Now we see through a glass darkly." If it could be said of you and me, through God's mercy and His operations of grace, that we see, however imperfectly, what a mercy it is. To be able to see even faintly the glories of Christ, the excellencies of redemption, the benefit of God's salvation, the good things God has promised to them that love Him, is an unspeakable favour indeed. We often wish that we could see clearer than we do, and it is quite possible that we may lose the comfort of what we see by failing to appreciate the grace and favour of our God in giving us to see at all. To have a sight of one's self is very humbling, very distressing, but is necessary in order to empty us and show us our dependence upon the atoning merit of God's dear Son. But O to be blessed with a sight, however faintly and feebly, of Him Whose Name is Jesus, Whose grace is omnipotent, Whose blood cleanses guilty, repenting sinners! To see in ever so little a measure something of the glory of truth and something of our own utter unworthiness, is a benefit which we can only ascribe to the Holy Spirit Whose grace is communicated to the church. Sinners by nature have no spiritual sight or conception of the things which belong to the peace of God's people; they have no conception of the solemn and inexpressible reality of death, of judgment and eternity. And such was our case, and such would still have been our case, if God had not had mercy upon us. As Mc Cheyne said,

"I once was a stranger to grace and to God,  
I knew not my danger and felt not my load;  
While friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree  
Jehovah Tsid-kenu was nothing to me."

I would then repeat, if God has given us a little sight of what we need and where that need is to be supplied everlastingly, it is a benefit indeed. And the same gracious God Who in creation said, "Let there be light", commands by the Holy Spirit that light should shine sovereignly and effectually in the experience of every sinner, revealing in the face of Jesus Christ the glory of God. This glory which He reveals in the Person and work of

Christ is a glory which is good to behold. In heaven we shall see it clearly, but it is a feature of the work of grace to reveal it sufficiently and savingly to His people in the wilderness. We see not only our ruin, not only that we are shut up to the mercy of God and a precious Christ, but we see a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness; a foundation laid in the Person and work of Christ revealed in our conscience; see, however faintly, the covenant ordered in all things and sure; a suffering, crucified but glorified Redeemer; see Him in all the prevalence of His intercession, in His Headship of the church, in His vital interest and concern in the work of grace in the hearts of each of His people. We see through divine teaching that God's truth is consistent with Himself, that while we are in tribulation we are not deserted and while God triumphs over sin through the blood of Christ He will never allow us to trifle with it or to think lightly of it. He shows us that in comparison with the glory of Christ everything else is an unsatisfying shadow that fleeth away.

Now in respect to this knowledge, to this sight which the apostle says we see through a glass darkly, let me remind you that when the apostle speaks thus he is either referring to the mirrors which were then in use, not so highly polished nor so suitable to their purpose as today, or to glass of a pallid character, or to windows made of mica through which it was only possible to see imperfectly. The contrast is made between the imperfect conception we have of a thing as seen reflected in a mirror or seen through such a glass, and when it is seen without a veil between. How true this in relation to our experience! We see as through a glass, reflected as in a mirror. The Word of God both in its doctrines and in its precepts, whether as read, meditated upon or preached; the ordinances of God's house; God's dealings with his people in providence and in grace; every manifestation that God makes of Himself in His Word, in His house, in our hearts, but faintly reflect the inexpressible glory and fulness of these divine realities. It may also be applied to this. By reason of our mortality, our knowledge and conception of spiritual and eternal truths is of necessity limited and often affected by our mortal state here below; and when we consider our sinful propensities, our unbelief, our ingratitude, our love of ease, our shrinking from trouble, it will appear that we see or are persuaded of truth very imperfectly - we see through a glass

darkly. The end of it is beyond our conception, the manner of God's dealings with us so contrary to our own understanding. This is not to the disparagement of the truth, nor is it a reflection upon the wisdom and grace of God, but rather to convince us that, however highly we have been favoured in the things of God, they are but parts of His ways, and how little a portion is heard of Him. We stand at the threshold of everlasting truth; we get a glimpse, not an everlasting view of the things which belong to the Son of God which we hope we shall when we see Him face to face. If we could only bear this truth in mind under the sealing benefit of the Holy Spirit I believe it would be of use to us. It would prevent us, for instance, from resting in our past experience. You cannot be too thankful that God has given you an experience, especially if it is a good experience. It is a mercy to be brought to a point, a mercy not to be cast about with every wind of doctrine; but recollect, the time comes when everything that you have seen and felt will be tried and tested, and you will want present help as well as the comfort of a past experience. And if this truth applies - and it does - it means that there is much more in the doctrine of Christ, much more in the Scriptures of truth, much more in the things of God which you have not realised and which belong to your future experience. It is not possible for us to come to that place where we can be satisfied with our attainments, for we see through a glass darkly.

Again, if we see through a glass darkly, if we have seen and felt such preciousness in the things of God, then how great those glories must be when they are seen without a veil between. When we reflect upon the glories of the Son of God in His divine nature, in His mediatorial capacity and in all the benefits of His grace, and have felt at times they have overwhelmed us and been more than we could grasp, to feel that this is but a glimpse, then the fulness is inexpressible and waits to be revealed.

Again, the application of this truth would go a long way to bring us to a spirit of submission and reconciliation to the will of God. How often some of us have tired ourselves almost to death by striving to understand the ways of God. O for grace to fall at His feet, to tell Him that we see through a glass darkly, but since He has promised that we shall see Him face to face, to ask Him to give us grace to trust ourselves with all that concerns us to His wisdom and to His love; for He sees the end from the

beginning. There are no mysteries with God.

In addition to this, to realise the truth that now we see through a glass darkly will explain a very great deal that it is difficult to understand. We are troubled about the condition of the Church of God, about the future of the cause of Christ, about possible events in the nation and among the nations. Recollect, we see through a glass darkly. It is not possible that we should clearly understand now, and if such is the case, how important it is to have a divine and infallible Teacher! If our knowledge of the truth is imperfect, it is not wisdom in us to trust to ourselves, nor yet the doctrines and opinions of men. We must turn away from these. It will be our mercy to have the assistance of the divine Teacher Who infallibly interprets His holy Word and leads His people in a way which they do not know.

But I want just a word on this last clause, "But then face to face." How much better our dear friend \* with all the saints of God in glory, understands this than we do. They had an inkling of what it meant, but the fulness of it remained to the hour in which God took them out of the body of sin, from all the limitations of mortality and of this life, that they might dwell for ever with their Lord in an unending day where

"Infinite day excludes the night  
And pleasures banish pain." Gadsby, 1022.

The child of God, ransomed, perfected, sees face to face. The hope of this made the Apostle, with many a child of God since, long to be absent from the body, present with the Lord, which is far better. The hope of seeing face to face makes heaven more desirable; it puts heaven in such a light, that it makes poor believers who long to see the truth as it is, long to see their Redeemer, who long to cease from sin, to see face to face. There we shall have perfect understanding; there vision will be uninterrupted:

"Then shall I see, and hear, and know  
All I desired, or wished below;  
And every power find sweet employ  
In that eternal world of joy."

What satisfaction it promises, even as David said, "I shall be

\* See G.S. 1942, pp. 100, 116, 137, & 140.

satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." Said John, "Now are we the sons of God, but 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." Not a veil, not a tear, not a night, nothing that interrupts or troubles now will ever afflict the child of God there. What we cannot think upon with composure here we shall be able to perfectly understand there.

There is a very great deal of secret consolation to mourning people when they reflect that their friends, their relatives in a precious Christ have done with all that is imperfect, and possess perfection in Christ in all his fulness. May God add His blessing, for his Name's sake. Amen.