

The Lovingkindness of God

A.W. Pink

WE PROPOSE TO ENGAGE THE READER WITH ANOTHER OF His excellencies—of which every Christian receives innumerable proofs. We turn to a consideration of God's lovingkindness because our aim is to maintain a due proportion in treating of the divine perfections, for all of us are apt to entertain one-sided views of them. A balance must be preserved here (as everywhere), as it appears in those two statements of the divine attributes, "God is light" (I John 1:5), "God is love" (I John 4:8). The sterner, more awe-inspiring aspects of the divine character are offset by the gentler, more winsome ones. It is to our irreparable loss if we dwell exclusively on God's sovereignty and majesty, or His holiness and justice; we need to meditate frequently, though not exclusively, on His goodness and mercy. Nothing short of a full-orbed view of the divine perfections—as revealed in Holy Writ—should satisfy us.

The innumerable blessings on the Christian

Scripture speaks of "the multitude of His lovingkindnesses," and who is capable of numbering them? (Isa 63:7). Said the Psalmist, "How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God!" (36:7). No pen of man, no tongue of angel, can adequately express it. Familiar as this blessed attribute of God's may be to people, it is something entirely peculiar to divine revelation. None of the ancients ever dreamed of investing his "gods" with such endearing perfection as this. None of the objects worshipped by present-day heathen possess gentleness and tenderness; very much the reverse is true, as the hideous features of their idols exhibit. Philosophers regard it as a serious reflection upon the honour of the Absolute to ascribe such qualities to it. But the Scriptures have much to say about God's lovingkindness, or His paternal favor to His people, His tender affection toward them.

The first time this divine perfection is mentioned in the Word is in that wondrous manifestation of Deity to Moses, when Jehovah proclaimed His "Name," i.e., Himself as made known. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exo 34:6), though much more frequently the Hebrew word, *chesed*, is rendered "kindness" and "lovingkindness." In our English Bibles the initial reference, as connected with God, is Psalm 17:7, where David prayed, "Shew Thy marvelous lovingkindness, O Thou that savest by Thy right hand them which put their trust in Thee." Marvelous it is that One so infinitely above us, so inconceivably glorious, so ineffably holy, should not only notice such worms of the earth, but also set His heart upon them, give His Son for them, send His Spirit to indwell them, and so bear with all their imperfections and waywardness as never to remove His lovingkindness from them.

Consider some of the evidences and exercises of this divine attribute unto the saints, "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:4,5). As the previous verse shows, that love was engaged in their behalf before this world came into existence. "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" (I John 4:9), which was His amazing provision for us fallen creatures. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer 31:3), by the quickening operations of My Spirit, by the invincible power of My grace, by creating in you a deep sense of need, by attracting you by My winsomeness. "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:19). Having made us willing in the day of His power to give ourselves to Him, the Lord enters into an everlasting marriage contract with us.

This lovingkindness of the Lord is never removed from His children. To our reason it may *appear* to be so, yet it never is. Since the believer be in Christ, nothing can separate him from the love of God (Rom 8:39). God has solemnly engaged Himself by covenant, and our sins cannot

make it void. God has sworn that if His children keep not His commandments He will “visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” Yet He adds, “Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break” (Psa 89:31-34). Observe the change of number from “their” and “them” to “Him.” The lovingkindness of God toward His people is centered in Christ. Because His exercise of lovingkindness is a covenant engagement it is repeatedly linked to His “truth” (Psa 40:11; 138:2), showing that it proceeds to us by promise. Therefore we should never despair.

“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:10). No, that covenant has been ratified by the blood of its Mediator, by which blood the enmity (occasioned by sin) has been removed and perfect reconciliation effected. God knows the thoughts which He entertains for those embraced in His covenant and who have been reconciled to Him; namely, “thoughts of peace, and not of evil” (Jer 29:11). Therefore we are assured, “The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me” (Psa 42:8). What a word that is! Not merely that the Lord will give or bestow, but command His lovingkindness. It is given by decree, bestowed by royal engagement, as He also commands “deliverances...the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa 44:4; 133:3), which announces that nothing can possibly hinder these bestowments.

The response of the saints

What ought our response to be? First, “Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God as dear children; and walk in love” (Eph 5:1,2). “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness” (Col 3:12). Thus it was with David: “Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in Thy truth” (Psa 26:3). He delighted to ponder it. It refreshed his soul to do so, and it molded his conduct. The more we are occupied with God’s goodness, the more careful we will be about *our obedience*. The constraints of God’s love and grace are more powerful to the regenerate than the terrors of His Law. “How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings” (Psa 36:7).

Second, a sense of this divine perfection strengthens *our faith*, and promotes confidence in God.

Third, it should stimulate *the spirit of worship*. “Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee” (Psa 63:3; cf. 138:2). Fourth, it should be our cordial when depressed. “Let...Thy merciful kindness [same Hebrew word] be for my comfort” (Psa 119:76). It was so with Christ in His anguish (Psa 69:17). Fifth, it should be our plea in prayer, “Quicken me, O LORD, according to Thy lovingkindness” (Psa 119:159). David applied to that divine attribute for new strength and increased vigor. Sixth, we should appeal to it when we have fallen by the wayside. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness” (Psa 51:1). Deal with me according to the gentlest of Thy attributes, make my case an exemplification of Thy tenderness. Seventh, it should be a petition in our evening devotions. “Cause me to hear Thy lovingkindness in the morning” (Psa 143:8). Arouse me with my soul in tune therewith, let my waking thoughts be of Thy goodness.