LOVE CONQUERED BY LOVE.

A SERMON BY A. J. GORDON.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—John ii. 15, 16.

Here are a precept and a principle brought together into mutual and dependent relationship. A precept is powerless unless it has a principle underlying it, and giving it inspiration. A principle is of little value which does not express itself in a precept, and lay a demand upon men for their obedience.

"Love not the world;" is the precept which the apostle announces. "Why may we not love the world?" some one may ask. "Because," is the reply, "it is an unchanging principle that if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This is the foundation on which the precept rests—the law from which it springs.

Let us consider these two elements of the text.

1. The principle, "If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." There are two kinds of love, the divine and the human—the heavenly and the earthly,—and they tend mutually to repel each other from the heart. If you have a vessel filled with water, the moment you begin to force air into it the water is driven out; or if you have a vessel filled with air, and force water into it the air will be displaced. The two elements cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The principle holds just as rigidly true of the affections: love is the servant of the heart; but that servant cannot be running two ways at once. "No man can serve two masters." It cannot be absorbed in two kinds of service at the same time. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." But, it will be asked, "Cannot we love the things of the world temperately and moderately without thereby forfeiting the love of God? My family, my country, my profession, are all things of this world; may I not love these, and still love God?" Most certainly you may—for these affections are kindred, not hostile, to the love of God. These cords of love run parallel with that of divine love, and vibrate in unison with it, like the strings of a harp, so that when one is touched the others thrill. You have only to take up the Bible and read the parallel passages, to see how many harmonious cords the love of God has,—love of neighbor, love of brother, love of parents, love of children,—all taking their tone and their obligation from the love of God. And you can see in a moment's reflection just why these affections are accordant with the love of God, and not hostile to it. It is because they all have self-sacrifice, and not self-love, as their inspiring principle. Love of children, love of country, love of neighbor, all lead us to the giving of what is ours, in order to minister to these objects of affection: hence they cannot be hostile to the love of God, but must be harmonious with it. They cannot be counter currents of affection, but must be tributaries, springing from the same heavenly source, and going to swell the same divine current. Whether our love is contrary to God's, then, depends on this question,—whether self-seeking or self-sacrifice is the controlling principle.

Put these two texts of Scripture together, and see how clearly they show this—"God so loved the world." God loves the world, then, does He? Yes; and with a depth and intensity of affection that no measuring-line can sound. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Man must not love the world, then, do you tell me? And, if he does, the love of the Father is not in him. Strange contradiction this! But listen! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Man loves the world for what the world may give him of pleasure, gain or glory. God loves the world and gives His only Son for its redemption. Here is the infinite difference. Show me the person who so loves the world that he is moved to give his time, his energy, his wealth and his life for its salvation, and I will dare to change the text for him, and write: "If any man so love the world, the love of the Father is in him—even of the Father who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

To love the world, then, for what it can give us of pleasure and gratification, is the thing which is here pointed out as contrary to God. This partakes of the character of selfishness; and selfishness is the root of all sin. So that, as a
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I believe that it is found to be universally true, that self-indulgence of every kind is found to be incompatible with the highest enjoyment of God's love in the soul. The nerves of sensation, the cords of fleshly delight, which the world uses all her art and skill to play upon, for our pleasure, are not the ones, alas! on which God's fingers generally play. Men do not commune with God through self-indulgence. They are not most sensible of God's love when gratifying their love of self. I am simply stating a principle which, I believe, must be universally recognized. Of course, men who are fond of such things try to argue themselves into the notion that the opera and the theatre, the drama and the dance, are ministers of religion, and are more helpful to certain minds, in kindling devotion, than the prayer-meeting and the sermon and the singing of hymns. Perhaps they think so because they are such strangers to the experience of grace, that they confound the intoxication of the senses with the fervors of devotion; and mistake the exaltation of the flesh for the ecstasy of the spirit.

But if worship consists in communion with God, through the Holy Spirit, it certainly is not found in self-indulgence, but in self-renunciation. How significantly the Scriptures speak of worship as "the sacrifice of praise, even the fruit of the lips:" not the sweetness of praise that satisfies the lips with delicious flavors and exquisite delight; but the sacrifice of praise, in which the lips yield the fruit of penitent confession, and lowly and self-accusing worship. Therefore, dare not, O man of the world, contradict God, when He says that the love of this world is contrary to the love of God: do not attempt to disprove it by asserting the identity of the two, and trying to persuade yourself that you are best serving God when you are most gratifying yourself. If your heart has so beguiled and deluded you that you have come to believe in such a notion, then you had better give your heart the lie; and, opening your Bible where it is written, "The friendship of the world is enmity to God," say, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

The principle I believe to be established, beyond all question, that self-indulgence is the greatest enemy to the love of God in the soul— that self-gratification tends to quench the Spirit, as water does to put out fire. Not that the true Christian must be devoid of all pleasure; the very contrary. God has ordained that he should have the highest pleasure out of heaven—the pleasure of giving—the flowing out of the soul's affections in blessing and grace and good-will to men. That is always the direction of the Divine love—from self, not toward self; and because the tide cannot set both ways at once—because the prevailing desire of the heart cannot be, at the same moment, the pleasing of God and the pleasing of self—therefore it is impossible that the love of God and the love of the world should be compatible.

And what is true in theory is proved abundantly true in fact. The lovers of the world are never found to be lovers of God. If you can show me such an anomaly as a theater-going Christian, I am certain that, without looking any farther, I can point you to a Christian who rarely goes to the place of prayer, never is found laboring and praying with lost souls, and never knows what it is to have deep and constant communion with God, or a zealous desire to bring men to the knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ. The heart is simply incapable of a divided loyalty. It cannot pay tribute to two masters, or find its highest pleasure in ministry at two hostile altars. If the service of Christ isn't pleasant enough to satisfy you, your love to Christ isn't strong enough to hold you. As Peter coldly denied Christ when warming himself at the fire of the high priest's palace, so the Christian who goes for warmth to the frivolous excitements of worldly pleasure, will be pretty certain to turn away from the Light of life.

And there is another fact which goes very far both to explain and to verify the text, viz.: the inevitable tendency of one affection to absorb and swallow up all others.

You have been thinking to yourself, no doubt, thus: If I cannot be wholly devoted to the world without danger, I can at least divide my attachment proportionally between the world and Christ. But even that does not seem to be practically possible; for whatever we love, we tend to love supremely and exclusively. The affections seem
incapable of being equally divided. It seems impossible to hold the heart in equipoise, with no prevailing tendency in one direction more than another. Hence, if you honestly propose to divide between self and Christ, it is apt to end in Christ getting little or nothing. I speak of what seems an inevitable tendency in practical experience. I saw a farmer, one day as I was passing, chopping down a beautiful elm-tree that stood near his house. I inquired why he was cutting it down. "Because," he answered, "it is stealing all the life and strength out of my garden. It had room enough of its own in which to grow without interference, but I find it has been stretching out its roots, year by year, until they have run completely under my garden and taken all the life and nourishment out of the soil, so that the fruits and flowers have nothing to grow upon; and now I must cut down the tree, or my garden will be ruined."

And have you never realized something like that in your spiritual experience? There is some worldly pleasure of which you are passionately fond: have you not found it absorbing more and more, every year, your interest and thought and time and affection? Has it not more and more sent its roots under your soul, and drunk up the life and nutriment of your heart, till the fruits of divine affection have become meager and stunted, and the flowers of devotion have become pale and colorless and without fragrance? And the Master, seeing all this, proposes to deal with this unprofitable and avaricious affection as the farmer did with the tree. "And now the axe is laid at the root of the tree; therefore, every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." Oh, ye lovers of this world, yield to God's dealing; look to your pleasure and see what profit they have brought you. "What fruit had ye then, in those things whereto ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death." The overshadowing pleasure has been an undermining curse. It has yielded the fruits of sensuous delight, only to bring spiritual barrenness and death to the soul. Decide to let Christ cut down the tree. I speak plainly: I propose no compromise gospel. Christ talks about cutting off a right hand and plucking out the right eye; and so I speak. There can be but one supreme affection on the throne of the heart, as there can be but one supreme Being on the throne of the universe. Choose which you will have to be supreme, and let the others be second to it. If the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge, deserves to be supreme, then accept it, and be content that it shall draw and absorb all the affection of your being into itself, that Christ may be all in all.

2. I speak, secondly, of the precept of the text, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

The principle which I have been explaining shows us the true method of obeying the precept. If love tends to become master of the soul, then the true way to "love not the world," is to get Christ's love in the heart, to overpower the love of earthly things. For a man cannot detach his affections at will from unworthy objects: neither can he center his affections at will upon a worthy object. Therefore, it is perfectly useless to tell a person what he must not love, or what he must love, until he has some controlling motive to determine him. If one's heart and desires are all toward worldly things, you cannot prevent his loving them. He may turn from them, in some spasm of sober reflection; but if his desire is toward them still, it will quickly draw him back again. It is like turning a weather-vane with your hand: for the while you may make it point south, though the wind is blowing north; but as soon as you let go of it it will swing around again, and take the direction of the wind. And even so with love, that indicator of the heart: you may poison and constrain it toward God as strongly as you please; it will not keep that direction if the current of the heart's affections is not really thither. Here, then, is my feeling in regard to amusements, questionable or otherwise — that our relations to them can only be settled rightly, by first settling rightly our relations to God.

"Why don't you preach against theater-going?" somebody asked me, after intimating that this is an open habit among some professed Christians. "Why don't you preach against Sunday pleasure-driving?" asks another. "And why don't you denounce the sin of Christian men selling liquor, or renting their stores for others to sell it?" asks still a third.
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Well, what is the use to exhort a man against these things if his spiritual instincts are not strong enough to keep him from them? You may, by preaching, produce a momentary change of purpose in regard to them; but a change of heart is the only permanent remedy. I care little to turn a man's face from the theater, if his heart is still there, tugging all the while at his irresolute will, and begging for another indulgence. "A man must have some enjoyment," he says, by way of excuse. To which I reply, "Indeed he must." And if a Christian cannot find enjoyment in the service of God; in the holy delight of prayer and praise and labor for Christ; if he cannot get pleasure in the companionship of Christian brethren, in the study and feeding on the Word of God, what wonder that he should find his pleasure in the glitter and gaiety of the theater, or in the charm and intoxication of the novel. Preach against play-going to such an one! As well exhort the stone not to fall to the earth when detached from the mountain-side. Argument cannot stand against the laws of gravitation. If the love of Christ is not strong enough to hold a Christian in communion with Christ, my preaching, though I were to speak with the tongues of men and of angels, can never be strong enough to hold him away from the theater.

What shall we say, then, on this point? Simply this—that the only cure for such moral disease in the Christian's life, is greater spiritual vitality. A dead Christian can never throw off those remnants of the old man. Nature cannot conquer nature. More life in the Christian's heart is the only thing that can beget more worldliness in the Christian's conduct. A mightier love for the Son of God, to overpower and subdue and lead captive these wayward and truant affections of the natural heart—this is what is needed. Among my native hills, I have seen the dead leaves hanging to a tree all winter long, in spite of sweeping winds and drenching storms and biting frosts; but when the springtime has returned, and the sap has coursed anew along its channels, and new leaves have put forth from the branches, the old have been crowded off inevitably. Death may stand before violence, but it cannot stand before life.

These amusements that minister only to the senses, giving no nurture to the moral or intellectual life, are to the Christian but the dead leaves of that old life with which he professes to have done. Beat them off by violence, by harsh denunciations, by vehement denunciation, we cannot. But, O Christian! if there be one here that has gone back to these rudiments of the world, would that the springtime of a new love and of a quickened conscience might come to you; then how quickly these pleasures would drop from you!

Therefore, I pray you, get more divine love in your souls; come into fuller and warmer communion with Christ. It will be hard to enforce the negative, "Love not the world," except through the action of the positive and powerful impulse of personal affection to Christ. "One love expect another," wrote St. Jerome. Hence, God has given us the most powerful incitement of which we can conceive, for kindling and nourishing a divine affection in our hearts. In Christ crucified, we see love conquering love—the love of God, which gives His only begotten for the world—conquering the love of the sinner, and making him willing to give up the world for that only begotten Son of God. Hence, the Cross has taken a holy revenge on the world. The world crucified Christ; but Paul, looking up to that Cross, exclaims: "By which the world is crucified unto me." So it is, that inveterate appetites for sin, and unconquerable affections for pleasure, are found to disappear, as by magic, when we become absorbed and possessed by the love of Christ. "Where is my old passion for gay amusements—my old love for sinful indulgences?" asks one who is all taken up in adoring and praising the Lord who hath redeemed him.

"What held me like a fetter, seems to have vanished like a snow-flake, in the warmth of this new life." So have I heard many say, as they have told the experience of their new life. That their old evil love may not come back to them, I do not say; it will come back unless the soul be kept full of the heavenly affection.

A spiritual vacuum is no more possible than a physical one. If the love of God becomes exhausted, and the soul emptied of its spiritual delight, then wonder not if the old appetites and
affections come back to repossess the house from which they were once expelled. Only can we be sure of keeping the world out, by keeping Christ within. "When one comes and knocks at my heart," said Luther, "and asks, 'Who lives here?' the reply is, 'Jesus Christ.'" But if some day, dear friends, the world shall knock and be told that Jesus Christ is out, be sure it will lose no time in rushing in and taking fresh possession. God grant that that day may never come to any of us.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." I have showed you how this precept can be kept. Not by the useless striving not to love, but by "the expulsive power of a new affection." But if we refuse this method, God may take another. He may wean us from the world by taking its dearest idols from us. The things of the world, the children of our affection, the riches and pleasures that have held our hearts—must it be that God should have to rend these from us, leaving us to cling to Him with the bleeding affections that have been rent from their idols? Oh, may God spare us from being so rebellious that we shall need such treatment! But then, I remember that, sooner or later, these objects must be removed. For "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Ah! what will it be, if, when we lose the world, we have no Christ to fasten those affections to, which were made for Him and which now, reaching out to Him, find Him not—life forever devoid of a worthy object, because that object was willfully rejected.

CONSECRATION.

BY CHARLES T. RICHARDSON.

Behold, O Lord, the life Thou didst bestow;
I offer Thee thine own; oh, make it Thine!
Let soul and mind and body purer grow,
Till they be Thy life, and no longer mine.

For Thee my hands would work, my lips would speak;
For Thee my ears would hear, my eyes would see;
Thine are the ways my feet would ever seek;
Take me, Lord Christ, and make me like to Thee!

PHILADELPHIA, April, 1879.