

ON DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS

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"If ye love me, keep my commandments; And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, the he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, (not Iscariot,) Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." --John 14:15-17; 21-23

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." --2 Cor. 6:17, 18, and 7:1

In remarking upon these verses it is not my design to dwell upon all the thoughts they present or might suggest. I shall aim to illustrate,

- I. The conditions of acceptance with God as here developed.
- II. The conditions of hearty obedience to God.
- III. The conditions of Divine manifestations.
- IV. What is implied in these manifestations.

I. The conditions of acceptance with God.

This topic has been recently dwelt upon at considerable length in your hearing, and it has been shown most conclusively that the once unalterable condition of acceptance with God is entire obedience to his law. You must fully set your heart to obey God in all things--at all times--under all circumstances--you must in fact obey the whole law of God in spirit; that is--it must be the supreme, fixed, strong purpose of your soul to do all the will of God.

This is undoubtedly assumed in our texts, especially in the one from 2 Corinthians. In the context the Apostle urges the church at Corinth not to connect themselves unequally with unbelievers, urging as a reason that sin can have no fellowship with holiness; the temple of God no agreement with idols; "for ye," said he, "are the temple of the living God, for God has promised to dwell and walk in you;" and the condition of this promise is that you come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; then God will receive you, and will be a father unto you and ye his sons and daughters. Dropping the borrowed language of the Old Testament, the Apostle goes on to give in his own language what he understands to be the import of these promises and of their conditions. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." These therefore are the conditions of God's dwelling in us--cleansing ourselves from all filthiness--perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Becoming pure in heart and life--renouncing all filthiness of either the flesh or the spirit;--this and nothing less than this can be the condition of acceptance with God.

This same truth is also plainly implied and taught in the passage from John's gospel. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. Then will I pray the Father and he will give you the Comforter &c." So again, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him." Obedience and love, evermore inseparable, are here made the condition of the divine favor.

So every where throughout the Bible we are taught that God accepts only those who fully and most heartily obey him.

Indeed it cannot possibly be otherwise. The nature of God forbids that it should be. What! God accept a rebellious spirit and own him as his child! God smile on a heart still sinning! This were to subvert his throne, and abolish all moral distinctions in his kingdom! This were to treat sin and holiness alike, and show that he regards neither! This is just as impossible as for God to cease to be holy!

It must be therefore that God makes sincere and full-hearted obedience the one unalterable condition of his favor. It would be infinitely dishonorable to him to accept anything less.

The same truth is implied in making repentance a condition of being accepted of God. For repentance is nothing else than a hearty turning away from all sin to the full-hearted love and service of God.

II. We must next inquire for the conditions of rendering this obedience.

Full obedience, we have seen, is the condition of God's favor; but we have still to look for the conditions of this obedience itself. How shall we obey? Under what influence and motives and efforts may we hope to yield this obedience?

1. Faith. It has often struck my mind forcibly in reading the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans that the Apostle is here illustrating the impossibility of obeying the law of God without faith in Christ; not the impossibility of obeying it at all; but of obeying it under legal motives. Hence he shows that the law when it comes in contact with a depraved heart, the cross not being present, only provokes resistance and stirs up the depths of the heart's depravity. And the utmost that can be effected is to elicit ineffectual struggles between the reason and conscience on the one hand, and imperious lusts on the other. But faith coming in gives the victory.

Such is manifestly the strain of his illustration in these chapters.

Again in Hebrews 11:6, we read that without faith it is impossible to please God. This is a most concise and explicit assertion to our point.

Galatians 5:6 teaches that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails any thing; but faith (alone avails) which works by love." That faith which becomes efficient through love is the capital thing in the gospel scheme. This avails; nothing else does or can.

In Acts 5:9 we have a passage strikingly in point. Peter is there testifying before the great council at Jerusalem, as to the manner in which the Gentile converts were sanctified. He says, God gave them the Holy Ghost even as he did us, and "put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith." By faith then did they come into a state of purity of heart and thus sincerely and fully obey God.

To the same purport is Acts 26:18 where the Lord appears to Paul and commissions him to go to the Gentiles and "open their eyes...that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified--(how) by faith that is in me." On this point then we see that the testimony of scripture is ample and explicit.

III. We are next to notice the conditions on which God and Christ will manifest themselves unto the soul.

This is expressly stated in the passage taken from the gospel of John. The entire scope of this passage is worthy of consideration. Christ was about to leave his disciples by his own death and ascension to heaven. Yet he bids his disciples not to grieve--tells them that he will come again,--yea come himself, with the Father, and take up his abode with them. The world, says he, shall not see me in these visitations and indwelling of my presence with you, but ye shall see me. How, asks Thomas, how can this be that thou wilt show thyself unto us, and yet the world shall not see thee? Then comes the explanatory answer. "If a man love me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Love, therefore, leading the Christian to keep Christ's words--that is, love prompting and securing full obedience--these are the conditions, as here revealed.

So elsewhere throughout the Scriptures. So in our passage from Corinthians. "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and I will receive you." "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;" so shall we realize the fulfillment of those exceeding great and precious promises which pledge us the indwelling presence and manifestations of God.

I have shown that according to the scriptures, faith is the condition of real and full obedience. Of course faith is also a condition of these manifestations. The soul must first believe in Christ and take hold of divine strength for its aid and of divine truth with realizing apprehension, before it will be thoroughly obedient.

Now considering faith as one of the conditions of these divine manifestations, the question may be asked--Must our faith fasten specifically on these promises of manifestations and plead with confidence for this particular blessing before it can be received? This is an interesting and important question.

In answer to it I remark, that this form of faith is not particularly alluded to among the conditions given in either of our texts. Obedience and love--purity of heart and life--are the things there specified.

Yet the general law in the spiritual world is clear and decisive on this point. When God gives a particular promise like this of manifesting himself to his people, he requires specific faith in that promise--a definite laying hold of those very words or at least of the idea of that promise, and a pleading of the faithfulness of God for its fulfillment.

Famine rages in Israel. Drought has parched all the land. The Lord is about to send rain, and to send it in answer to prayer. Yet he simply tells Elijah to go and meet Ahab. Elijah obeys. But we well understand that rain does not come without special prayer. In due season he bows his soul with mighty energy for rain.

There are passages of scripture which plainly show that specific blessings being promised, specific faith must take hold of these promises as a condition of their being given. In Ezekiel 36:37, the Lord having promised to cleanse his people and give them a new heart, declares explicitly--"I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." This is given here as a universal principle of the government of God. So far as we know, the Lord never departs from this principle in his spiritual administration towards his people. Whenever he has promised a blessing either to his church or to individuals, the mere promise does not secure the bestowment; faith must take hold of that promise; you must ask, and ask believing that plighted word of the Lord;--then he gives it and not before. Thus God elicits prayer--makes us prize the blessing and love the Giver.

The conditions then, briefly, of these manifestations are;--full-hearted obedience to all known duty--walking in faith, love and obedience; and taking hold by faith of God's promise for this very blessing. Take hold of this promise and wait earnestly and in confidence, honestly and earnestly meeting every revealed condition. Then shall the blessing be given.

IV. What is implied in Christ's manifesting himself to his people?

It would seem that it must mean something more than is commonly meant by faith; for the word manifest refers our minds rather to sight than to faith. I will do more, Christ seems to say, than make you believe; I will make you see. Your apprehensions of God and of his Son shall be most vivid. It shall be as if you saw with open vision. This shall be more than mere faith.

It is also something more than love--at least more than such love as is implied in keeping God's commandments; for so much as this is a condition of these manifestations; hence must precede them; and therefore cannot be the blessing itself.

We have a clue to the real meaning in the paraphrase which our Lord himself gives. "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." O there must be precious meaning in such words as these. "We will come unto him"--the Father and the Son will come to visit him and reveal themselves to his soul--and this for no transient hour; but "we will take up our abode with him." This must be very like heaven! What more, we might almost ask, would be requisite to make one's bliss like heaven?

What then, ask we again, is implied in these promised manifestations? More of course than giving a man the Bible--and more than making a man understand the Bible. These gifts, great though they be, are never designated in such language as we find in the text. Positively:

(1.) These manifestations imply, the baptism of the Spirit. The context plainly shows that Christ had this in his mind. After giving the promise as in our text, He proceeds to promise the Comforter, to show that he would teach all things and bring those things to their remembrance which Christ had said to them. He would "glorify Christ, for he would receive of Christ's and show it unto them."

(2.) The text shows that the blessing promised, means the indwelling of the Father and of the Son by the Spirit. And this, as I have said is declared to be not a visit merely, but taking up an abode--not as a way-faring man who tarries for a night, but as a resident who makes your house his home.

Let it not be supposed from what I have said that the child of God to whom these manifestations are made, and who received the special baptisms of the Spirit, has of course never had the Spirit before. Let no one imagine that the faith and love and obedience which as I have said must precede these manifestations as their condition, can ever exist without the Spirit. By no means. But there is a higher kind and measure of the Spirit's influence and also a lower. The latter is essential to any sincere faith and love; the former comes only in those glorious manifestations of which our Lord here speaks.

This higher influence is said in our context to be sent by the ascended Savior on those who truly love him and fully keep all his commandments. The disciples plainly had received a lower measure of the Spirit's influence before;--now they receive a higher measure in the baptism of the Spirit.

(3.) Another thing is implied in these manifestations. Christ will actually reveal himself to the mind so that it shall know him in his official character and relations. And there is a deep and precious meaning in this. Often have I been struck with this in my own experience. Some new aspect of the Savior's character, or some new point in his relations comes before my mind with great vividness; I wonder I had not seen this before; I seem not to have been aware that Christ sustained this relation, and I now embrace him in this new relation and rejoice that I find him meeting and supplying one more want of my soul.

Thus for example, when Christ revealed a new feature of his relations to me through these words--"Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Then I saw him not merely an atoning Redeemer, but a Sanctifier--one who came to save his people from sinning. Then my soul knew Christ in this other and more glorious relation. But more of this.

(4.) When Christ manifests himself to the soul, the Christian is rather a knower than a believer. He does indeed believe--but he also more than believes. He not merely believes that Christ died and made atonement, but he is made to know Christ. How natural is the language which a Christian enjoying these manifestations uses so spontaneously--"I believed before, but now I know it." I was often struck with the strong language of Elder Marks on his sick and dying bed. He did not say--"I believe," but "I know." He would sit in his great chair, when he could not lie down, and laugh and then cry, overcome and convulsed

often with deep, unutterable emotions because God was showing him his own blessed truth so that he knew it.

Now in such cases, this strong perception which we call seeing and knowing is not of the body but of the mind. It is not your external eye that sees, but your internal eye. Hence your perceptions are so clear and so vivid.

We here observe that when Christ manifests himself, there is something more than mere belief. There must be belief before this; a belief that begets love and obedience; but when Christ manifests himself by his Spirit, there is something more than this, Christ says, "the world shall not see me, but ye shall see me." Did he mean that he would come again during their life-time in his body, and that they should see this? No; but that he would make such revelations of himself that they should know that they had a personal interview with their Lord. He told them he was going away to heaven, but they need not grieve, for he should return again and show himself. Now did all this mean only that they should have faith in him? Much more than this;--it meant that he would return and show himself and they should know assuredly that Christ was with them.

Again, when Christ manifests himself to the soul, it must be that the mind in some way has an assurance that it is not deceived, and that the manifestation is actual.

I have spoken of personal interviews with Christ. You are aware that in various ages there have been many saints who have asserted that they had interviews with Christ. There were many cases of this before Christ's incarnation. Christ manifested his glory to Moses; to Isaiah--to John in Patmos--to Paul as he himself assures us. And in every age since, there have been those who have supposed themselves to have interviews with Christ. They are wont to say--"I have seen him." I have heard a man in this place say, he had seen Christ. He could not rid himself of the impression that he had truly seen the Lord.

Now on this point I am not going to say that Christ manifests himself to the bodily eyes of the saints, but the revelation is such that they do not know but they see him with their eyes. Perhaps it seems to them altogether as if they did.

I have often in your presence alluded to the circumstances attending my own conversion. When Christ first revealed himself to me, I certainly seemed to see him, and to rush and fall at his feet as really as if I were to turn about now and fall at Br. Mahan's feet. I felt a powerful drawing of soul towards him, as if my very soul would be drawn out of me;--I rushed into a private room and there I seemed to meet him. There--so it seemed--was Jesus--the very Savior!

Now this I do not mention because it is a peculiar case; it occurs or has occurred somewhat frequently in the experience of the people of God. Christians have often felt that they have seen Christ. They have no more question about the fact than about any other. They do not know that they see him with the bodily eye, but their mind sees Christ, and it makes all the impression on the mind of seeing.

Christ does not usually manifest himself so that one sees a form and shape; but so that the soul is perfectly conscious of the presence of Christ. I know a minister who has told me that at one particular period of his life it was frequently just as real to him that Christ was with him as that any man ever was. It seemed to him a matter of consciousness that Christ was present as much as it ever was that another man is present;--as much as if Christ had actually come down from heaven and kept by his side daily. This is Christ's making himself manifest.

It is intimated also that the Father comes and takes up his abode in the soul. This implies that the Holy Ghost reveals both Christ and the Father. Now it is certainly remarkable that in all Christian experience there is such a distinction between the Father and the Son. The Father is revealed as a father; Christ as Savior and Redeemer. The soul seems to know God distinctly in these two relations. It has no misgivings in respect to God's being indeed a father, more than any child has respecting his own earthly father. So also the soul regards Christ as really the Redeemer, and comes to him as such.

Another thing. These manifestations involve the establishment of the soul's love and confidence. This is no doubt one of the principal designed objects of those manifestations. In the case of the primitive disciples, Christ meant to give them such a hold of the gospel as should prepare them for coming trials;--and should make them knowers and not mere believers.

Another result. Whenever Christ is thus manifested the external evidences of revealed religion have no longer any special force on the mind, comparatively; the minds' reliance is hence-forward chiefly on the internal evidence. I have often thought that if Christ had not revealed himself to me so that my mind took hold powerfully of the internal evidence, and was impressed forcibly by the manifestations to which I have alluded, I should have been an infidel, and should have apostatized utterly. It has often seemed that my natural incredulity is so great that nothing else but this could have kept me from being an infidel. My mind was in the habit of constant agitation under the questions--How do I know that this is so? How do I know but all this is delusion? Satan would often present these difficulties in the strongest light. I would set myself to reason upon them, and could see that according to all the rules of logic, all is clear and certain; yet at the same time I was conscious of such a state of mind that I knew I should not have believed if Christ had not given me conscious and certain manifestations.

These manifestations greatly confirm the mind in its convictions. Religion becomes a matter of experience so that the soul cannot but believe. If Christ manifests himself to the soul once, it can doubt no more. Yet such manifestations may be frequent, and if the conditions are fulfilled, will be.

Light from the scriptures is another result. The promise as applied to us, is that the Spirit shall take of the scriptures and show to us. Persons thus enlightened and privileged see more of the Bible than ever before. They have a new kind of confidence in it. They take up their Bible and find there new things unseen before.

RESULTS.

1. Many professors of religion seem to have lost sight of this truth. It is remarkable to see to what an extent this is true. Perhaps they have lost sight of the strong faith which must precede them; perhaps they conceive of nothing better in religion than a dim hope, and enjoy nothing more. They seem to forget the conditions--"If a man love me, he will keep my sayings, and my Father will love him." In fact some seem to have lost the whole subject.

Again, there are not a few who understand this subject--know that they may have such manifestations; but have got the idea that it means more than it does; or their notions of what it is are entirely vague; they call it perhaps assurance of faith, or assurance of hope. but they fail of attaining because they quite overlook the conditions, or seem to forget that there are any conditions at all. Or as the case may be, they misapprehend the conditions, and set themselves to get it in some antinomian or legal way, and hence fail of any good result.

Others have the idea that obedience itself depends upon divine manifestations, and hence suppose they cannot obey till they get these manifestations. But this is not the Bible view of the subject. Our text says--If a man obey and love--then shall he have the manifestations--then, and not before.

Some set themselves to seek for these manifestations selfishly, for the luxury they may afford. Of course they fail of fulfilling the conditions and seek in vain. To seek these manifestations as some do that they may be distinguished and get honor to themselves, or if their motive be any other than the glory of God, the very seeking is an abomination to God, and will cause him to manifest to such seekers his wrath rather than his glory.

When persons set themselves to seek this blessing selfishly, they are commonly deluded by Satan, and suppose themselves to have obtained some great blessing when they have obtained no spiritual blessing at all. Satan, transformed in appearance to an angel of light deceives such men and makes them believe that God has revealed himself to them, when it is only the devil. This is my opinion as to such cases, and I will tell you why I think so. I have known several instances in which persons have related a most remarkable experience of most astonishing manifestations of God to the mind as they supposed; but the results were a bitter, hard, acrimonious spirit--a spirit of fierce denunciation instead of gentleness and love--a spirit such as the Holy Ghost never begets--but which is the genuine offspring of Satan's manifestations. Forthwith they plunge headlong into the most fantastical and absurd errors, and the most anti-christian practices. And yet in all these things, they will most pertinaciously insist that God is leading them. I have known several who gave up family prayer, and closet prayer, and yet insisted that God led them in all this. By the fruits we may know that it was not God but Satan who induced them to abandon prayer.

This is the history of their case. They learn from the Bible that God promises manifestations; from merely selfish motives they seek this blessing; and God answers them according to their seeking and his promise. They set up the idol of their own selfishness in their hearts, and seeking God thus, He answers them according to their idols as He has said he would. The Lord suffers Satan to deceive them. No wonder they are exceedingly positive and as bitter as they are positive. The hand of Satan is in all this. How else can you account for their state?

Yet let it be well considered--such cases do not at all impair the integrity of these promises, and ought not to shake our confidence in them. The false prophets revealed strange things; yet we know that this was the work of Satan. There were true prophets none the less, and their messages were none the less worthy of confidence. Real prophecies did not fail of coming to pass because Satan deceived some false prophets.

It is doubtful whether such persons are for any considerable time very positive that God is leading them, and that the manifestations they have are from him. Usually God gives them so much light that they might, if they would, see that their leader is not God but Satan. Sometimes under these Satanic hallucinations the mind is thrown from its balance. Such cases are an exception to the remark last made.

Again I remark, it is of vast importance that this doctrine respecting divine manifestations should be fully developed throughout all the church, and especially among all gospel ministers. Suppose that all ministers had these interviews with Christ and lived so near to him--nay rather, had Christ and the Father abiding continually in their hearts;--would they not preach as if they had a Savior and knew him? Would not all their preaching then be full of Christ, and would it not reveal Christ to their hearers? Verily they might then say with John, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

It is one of the greatest difficulties with ministers that they have lost this experience. They do not know Christ by the living experience of their hearts through his presence abiding within them. All that they can say about the gospel of Christ, they say upon mere faith as opposed to the clearer vision of these promised manifestations. All is mere faith and often very dim. O how much better to see Christ and be able to testify from the burning impressions made by such divine visions of Jesus!

It is indeed well to be able really and fully to believe that Christ is with us; but the mind needs greatly to know this and have it in the mind as a living, burning reality, kindling every energy of the soul by its presence and power. Every minister needs this in order to preach with energy and demonstration of the Spirit. The whole church needs it and must have it before she can be clothed again with the glory and power of apostolic days.

Many persons call these divine manifestations, sanctification. But this seems not to be the scriptural view. The Scriptures plainly represent obedience and love as the conditions, and these manifestations as consequent upon their being fulfilled. Of course sanctification precedes as a condition and is not merely an effect. At the same time it is doubtless true that these abiding revelations of Christ to the soul exert a most hallowing agency, and may well be called a spiritual cleansing. They do indeed rectify the sensibility, mightily quickening it towards God and his truth, and thus serve to purify the soul. To the individual Christian they are life from the dead, giving a glorious vitality to all his spiritual apprehensions. If they might only become general, they would be like from the dead to the whole world. If all the church were to come under this influence--if all missionaries went forth with this experience; if it were a universal fact among them that Christ manifested himself among them so that they should know him as they know each other, and be as conscious of his presence and of his guidance too as they ever are of a Christian brother's presence and counsel. O what tremendous power would this give to the whole missionary enterprise!

This gave the early apostles their great power. Driven by fierce persecution, they assemble together; Christ comes among them; the whole place is shaken where they are assembled together; they pray for a bold and fearless spirit that they may preach Christ in the face of scorn and scourging--and they have it. Nothing can daunt such men--and nothing stand before them.

It would be richly instructive to read this portion of the apostle's history with the eye on this point, and see what the results were of having such manifestations as they had on Christ, and such baptisms of the Holy Ghost.

This great blessing should be sought by every Christian. None should rest till he obtains it. Let his object in seeking it be the glory of God and his only; let him know that it is for the glory of God that he should have it, and that he cannot eminently glorify God without it--then let him know that if he will fulfill the conditions the blessing is surely given.

Every Christian is authorized to take this ground and ought to take it at once: If the conditions are within my power, as the Lord liveth, I will have it.

Let me say to those who doubt--this is the course you should pursue, for this will bring you the blessing you want. You need not be afraid to come to Christ and tell him all your difficulties; come in the simplicity and fulness of your heart and say, Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee; thou knowest it is in my heart to know and do all they will; now come and manifest thyself unto me, and take up thine abode in my heart.

You need, brethren, only to seek these blessings with all your heart and you will obtain. I have been greatly struck with the fact that within the circle of my own observation these blessings are obtained of the Lord usually in this manner. Led by the Spirit of the Lord, an individual sets himself with great earnestness to mortify every lust and subdue every sin; he spares not his dearest idol; he loathes and abhors every thing that can separate his soul from his Savior, and puts it utterly away;--this being done his Savior comes and makes his gracious presence manifest. This is just what we might expect from Christ's language. When a Christian puts down every appetite and lust of body or mind that leads the heart away from Christ, and does all this for Christ, then let him know that he may lay hold of this promise of the Savior and say--Lord, I have humbly sought to fulfil all the conditions; now in thy mercy and faithfulness bestow on me the blessing." This is the remedy for doubting.

Then will the Savior come to your soul and reveal his glories. Then he will so attract your soul that you will cry after him in the spirit of adoption, entreating him to reveal himself yet more and more, until you can say--Surely the Lord hath done great things for me whereof I am glad and I will praise him; surely he hath done exceeding abundantly above all that I could ask or think; and to his name be all glory and praise forevermore.