

FROM THE INHERITANCE OF OUR FATHERS

Series 35, No. 11

I AM PERSUADED

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

ROBERT MURRAY M'CHEYNE

Living for just twenty-nine years, Robert M'Cheyne (1813–43) was regarded as one of the most saintly and able young ministers of his day. He began teaching himself the Greek alphabet when he was just four years old and went on to become an exemplary student at Edinburgh University and Edinburgh Divinity Hall.

After being licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Annan in 1835, M'Cheyne became an assistant pastor and was ordained the next year to a new charge at Dundee, a largely industrial parish that did not help his delicate health. With a heart for evangelism, he was grieved by the spiritual deadness in many of the Scottish parishes and even considered giving up his charge if the church would set him apart as an evangelist.

In 1838, M'Cheyne was advised to take a lengthy break from his parish work because of his poor health. During this time, he travelled to Israel, stimulating much interest in Jewish missions and leading to pioneer work among Jews in parts of Europe. M'Cheyne then returned to Dundee, where his ministry was remarkably fruitful until he passed away on March 25, 1842, at the age of twenty-nine.

I Am Persuaded

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”

—ROMANS 8:38–39

The comforting and invigorating doctrine of this precious passage is that a soul in Christ cannot be separated from the love of God. But we must observe:

1. All Christless persons are by nature outside of the love of God spoken of.

God has no love of complacency toward unconverted souls. He sees nothing amiable in them, He sees nothing for which He can love them. “What is man, that he

should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" (Job 15:14–16). "The righteous LORD loveth righteousness" (Ps. 11:7). It is His very nature to do so; He cannot but love it wherever He sees it. But there is no righteousness in Christless persons; there is not so much as one clean spot in all their garments. By nature, we are all "as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

Therefore, it is impossible for God to love the unconverted with the love of complacency. He must change His nature and become another God before He can cherish the least spark of esteem for an unconverted soul. But it may be objected, "Did not God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and did not

Christ show great tenderness to sinners when He was on earth?" Yes! We readily admit it, for it is quite true that God loves Christless persons with a love of infinite pity. If you saw a man lying wounded, bleeding and dying, your heart would flow out with compassion all at once. The benevolence of your nature being appealed to, you would love him with the love of pity. But if you found out that he was a wicked, abandoned man, you could not esteem him. Your love of pity would continue; yea, it would be greater than before, but you could not have any love of esteem for him.

Just so is it with God. He saw the whole world lying in wickedness, and every imagination of man's heart only evil continually, and His gracious heart flowed out with pity toward the children of men: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). He is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter

3:9). God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). “I have no pleasure,” says He, “in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). Ah, see what a large heart of pity God had! It embraced “all men.” It embraced “the whole world,” and therefore He provided an infinite and all-sufficient ransom to all which are invited, to which all may come. Jesus, as the expounder of the Father’s heart, says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

But does God *esteem* Christless souls? Ah, no! God would require to change His essential nature and become wicked before He could love unconverted, Christless men with a love of esteem. If He were a wicked God, then He could love wicked men. But so long as He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” (Hab. 1:13), He cannot

have a spark of esteem for sinners, however much they may esteem themselves, or be esteemed by their fellow sinners in the world.

God not only does not see anything to love, but He sees much to hate in Christless persons. In the seventh Psalm it is written, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (v. 11). And again, in the eleventh Psalm, it is written, "The wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" (v. 5). And again, in Psalm 34, "The face of the LORD is against them that do evil" (v. 16). "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). "Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6).

It is a part of the nature of God to love holiness, and to hate wickedness wherever

He sees it. In whatever heart He discovers it, He cannot but hate it. God must cease to be God before He ceases to hate the wickedness of the wicked.

But an objector may say, "If God hates Christless persons on account of their sins, then He can have no pity for them." But why not? He is infinitely just, but He is infinite in compassion too. He must cease to be God before He can cease to be compassionate. "He delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18). Yea, the more He is angry with a soul, the more does He pity that soul, for its case is all the more deplorable in that it has rendered itself obnoxious to His holy displeasure. When Christ was on earth it is said, "He...looked round...with anger" on some sinners, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). Here is the very thing the objector says cannot be. Here is *anger* and *pity* in the same breast. The lightning of just

anger and the tear of compassion were in His eye at the same moment.

This is the very “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Again, when He came near and beheld the city (Jerusalem), He wept over it, and yet said that the things which belong to her peace were hid from her eyes. Here the Savior gave it over to perdition with tears in His eyes and the words of regret upon His lips. This was infinite compassion, and yet infinite indignation. Christ here is the express image of God’s person. “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). God in human nature weeps at the very time He pronounces the holy sentence of wrath.

Let me here speak affectionately and faithfully to all Christless persons. I would implore you from this to learn exactly where you stand with regard to God. Let it sink deep into your ears and hearts that He has no love of esteem for

you. He never had, and He never will have, until He sees you in Christ. You see many things in yourself that you admire, and you foolishly think that God will also admire them.

Perhaps you pray a little in secret and read the Word. Perhaps you feel some glowing affection in hearing the preaching of the gospel, and you think all the time that God will look on that and approve it and, as necessary consequence, esteem you on account of it. But learn here that God sees nothing good in it, nothing worthy of His love. If you are out of Christ, you are all loathsome in the sight of the holy God, and your very "righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

Perhaps you are amiable, good-natured, kind, hospitable. Your friends love and admire you, and you think God must also admire you. But learn plainly that God sees nothing to admire in you. He knows you are "wretched, and miserable, and poor,

and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). You do none of all your fancied meritorious deeds out of regard for Him, and nothing will be regarded by Him with complacency, unless done with an eye to His glory. And, being out of His love, you are under His wrath. There is no other alternative. If you are out of His love, you must be under His wrath. You are the creature of His hand and, as a moral agent, God cannot be indifferent to you or to your actions. God is angry with you every day.

The wrath of God abides on you at all times! If you go on a journey, the wrath of God hangs over you all the way! If you go out to work, the wrath of God is hanging around your neck. If you sit down to your daily meals, the wrath of God is close by you! If you sleep, it rests over you all the night long! At any moment it may crush you into hell.

The time is uncertain, but the thing is sure! Whenever God cuts the thread of

life, the wrath that is upon you will do its office. Oh, dear souls, how can you remain in this fearful and perilous condition? Be persuaded now to believe in Jesus, and thereby escape the “wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). Your case is a very melancholy one, but it is not hopeless. God has infinite pity for you. His pity is as infinite as His wrath. He has no pleasure in your dying. He would rather that you would turn and live. He has provided blood enough in Christ to blot out all your sins; and raiment enough to cover your nakedness.

The more He is angry with you on account of your sinfulness, the more He does pity you. Christ strives most after the salvation of *Jerusalem sinners*. The more you have provoked Him, the more ready He is to cover you under His wings. Turn, sinner, turn! God will not always wait. He has said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man” (Gen. 6:3). Give glory to the

Lord your God, before He causes darkness and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and when you look for the light He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.

Then let us learn, secondly:

2. All who are in Christ are in the love of God.

When any sinner is made willing to close with Jesus Christ as a Surety, then it is a righteous thing with God to love that soul with the love of esteem. He sees nothing now to hate in that soul. "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21). When any sinner is persuaded to embrace the Lord Jesus as his Surety, the sufferings of Christ are counted his, and so in Him he has suffered for all his sins already.

When the sinner stood before God in himself, God could not but loathe him; but when the sinner stands before God, not in himself, but in Christ, the Son of

God, then God sees no iniquity in him; his sins have been carried away into a land of forgetfulness, and “cast...into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19). They were once “as scarlet,” they are now “white as snow” (Isa. 1:18); and the sinner begins to sing, “O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me” (Isa. 12:1). “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12).

Anxious sinner, close quickly with Christ. Come out of darkness into “marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). God is angry with you every day, so long as you remain out of Christ; but His anger will be all turned away the moment you consent to be found in the Lord Jesus. God sees something to love in the soul that is in Christ.

When a sinner accepts Christ as his Surety, he accepts not only His sufferings but His obedience too, His infinitely pure

and lovely obedience. This is all put upon the believing sinner. This is the “clothing of wrought gold” (Ps. 45:13), this is the “raiment of needlework” (v. 14). Where God sees that upon the soul of the sinner, He cannot but love him with a love of infinite esteem and divine complacency. “This is my beloved Son,” He says, “in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Just as the sweet-smelling garments of Esau, when put upon Jacob, drew out all the affection of the heart of Isaac, and he said, “The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed” (Gen. 27:27), so do the sweet-smelling garments of Christ—for “all [his] garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia” (Ps. 45:8)—draw out the infinite affection of the heart of God toward the sinner who is “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

Then comes to pass the saying which is written, “He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17);

and again, "The Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27). Anxious sinner, close with the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be in the love of God. There is nothing happier for the soul than to be loved. To be loved even by an affectionate dog is pleasant. To be loved by a child is sweeter. To be loved by wise and good men, that is sweeter still. But, oh, to be loved with the infinite heart of God, that is best of all. Oh, to feel that "God is love" (1 John 4:8)! Sinner, you have seen the midday sun pouring its rays into the bosom of a calm sea, an unceasing shower of golden rays, till the sea becomes a sheet of living gold, till its darkest caves are illuminated, and every gem sparkling with heaven's light. Such is the love of God to the soul of a sinner in Christ, an unceasing, infinite shower of love! Oh, taste and see that the Lord is gracious! Only close with Christ and you will cry out, "God is love!"

3. *God is love, and nothing can separate the soul in Christ from the love of God.*

As we say, "Once Christ's, aye Christ's." Whom He loves, He loves unto the end. None can ever be separated from the love of God who once come into it. There is no quality more precious than permanence. Most of the joys in this world do not last. The flowering of the apple tree is pleasant and lovely when, in the early summer, it comes out with its ten thousand blushing promises; but its blossoms soon fade, are separated, and fall off the tree. The gourd of Jonah was pleasant while it lasted, but he was soon separated from it. It came up in a night and perished in a night.

The sweetest friends are united only to be separated. One may almost see the shroud beneath the wedding garment. The love of the creature is not "an enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34). Sometimes the kindest change and cease to love us, or, at the longest, they die, and we are

separated. But oh, how different is the love of God! It is all enduring good. It is a flame that is never extinguished, the “good part” that cannot be taken away. “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39). This sublime chapter, having opened with a strong declaration of “no condemnation” *in* Christ Jesus, it is fitting that it should close with a declaration equally strong of “no separation” *from* Christ Jesus. It is a delightful and animating theme with which the chapter terminates. The last object it presents to the eye is *Jesus*. The last accents that linger on the ear concern the love of *Jesus*.

It is of great importance that we have a clear apprehension of the apostle’s

leading idea in these concluding verses. He refers to a love from which there is no separation. Of whose love does he speak? The believer's love to Christ? On the contrary, it is Christ's love to the believer. And this view makes all the difference in its influence in our minds. What true satisfaction and real consolation, or, at least, how small its measure, can the believer derive from a contemplation of his love to Christ. It is Christ's love to him that is the source of his comfort.

To whom did Paul originally address this letter? To the saints of the early and suffering age of the Christian church. And this truth, Christ's love to His people, would be just the truth calculated to comfort, and strengthen, and animate them. Let the apostle allure their minds from a contemplation of their love to Christ to a contemplation of Christ's love to them, assuring them upon the strongest grounds that whatever sufferings

they should endure, or by whatever temptations they should be assailed, nothing should prevail to sever them from their interest in the reality, sympathy, and constancy of that love, and he has at once brought them to the most perfect repose. The affection, then, of which the apostle speaks, is the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The love of Christ! Such is our precious theme! Can we ever be weary of it? Its greatness, can we ever know? Its plenitude, can we fully comprehend it? Never. Its depths cannot be fathomed, its dimensions cannot be measured. It passes knowledge. All that Jesus did for His church was but the unfolding and expression of His love. Traveling to Bethlehem, I see love incarnate. Tracking His steps as He went about doing good, I see love laboring. Visiting the house of Bethany, I see love sympathizing. Standing by the grave of Lazarus, I see love weeping.

Entering the gloomy precincts of Gethsemane, I see love sorrowing. Passing on to Calvary, I see love suffering, and bleeding, and expiring. The whole scene of His life is but an unfolding of the deep, and awful, and precious mystery of redeeming love.

The love of the Father! Such, too, is our theme and it is proper that with this truth the chapter should close. "The love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The love of the Father is seen in giving us Christ, in choosing us in Christ, and in blessing us in Him with all spiritual blessings. Indeed, the love of the Father is the fountain of all covenant- and redemption-mercy to the church. It is that "river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4).

How anxious Jesus was to vindicate the love of the Father from all the suspicions and fears of His disciples! "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for

you: for the Father himself loveth you" (John 16:27). "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). To this love we must trace all the blessings which flow to us through the channel of the cross. It is the love of God, exhibited, manifested, and seen in Christ Jesus. Christ is not the originator but the gift of this love; not the cause, but the exponent of it. If we could only see a perfect equality between the Father's love and the Son's love! Then we should be led to trace all His sweet mercies, and all His providential dealings, however trying, painful, and mysterious, to the heart of God; thus, resolving all into that from whence all alike flow, everlasting and unchangeable love.

Now it is from this love that there is *no separation*. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). The apostle had challenged accusation from every foe, and condemnation from every

quarter; but no accuser arose, and no condemnation was pronounced. Standing on the broad basis of Christ's finished work, and of God's full justification, his head was now lifted up in triumph above all his enemies round about. But it is possible that though in the believer's heart there is no fear of *impeachment*, there yet may exist the latent one of *separation*. The aggregate dealings of God with His church, and His individual dealings with His saints, may at times present the appearance of alienated affection, or a lessened sympathy.

The age in which this epistle was penned, was fruitful of suffering to the church of God. And if any period, or any circumstance of her history threatened a severance of the bond which united her to Christ, that was the period, and those were the circumstances. But with a confidence based upon the glorious truth on which he had been descanting, the security of the church of God in Christ,

and with a persuasion inspired by the closer realization of the glory about to burst upon her view, and with the most dauntless courage, he exclaims, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Let us briefly glance at each of these things which may threaten, but which cannot succeed in separating us from the love of God, and from our union with Christ.

Death cannot. Death separates "very friends." Death separates husband and wife, soul and body. Death separates those who, for a lifetime, have shared one another's thoughts and cares. It takes us away from their love; we do not feel that the dead love us; we do not meet with their smile. But death cannot separate

us from the love of God; it only brings us to the full enjoyment of it. Are you in Christ? Do not fear to die, for death will only bring you into the presence of your God, and you shall be a pillar in the house of your God and go no more out. Death cannot separate us from the love of God!

Life cannot. I remember reading of one of David Brainerd's (1718-1747) converts, who, when brought to a full sense of the love of God, cried out, "Oh, blessed Lord, take me away; do let me die, and go to Jesus Christ. I am afraid if I live I shall sin again." She feared that *life* would separate her from the love of God. But no, life cannot, "neither death, nor life." The hope of life is meant. The apostle wrote, as we have remarked, in a peculiarly suffering era of the church, an age of fiery persecution for the gospel's sake. Under these circumstances, life was not infrequently offered on condition of renouncing the gospel and denying

the Savior. This was a strong temptation to apostasy.

When, in suffering times, in full view of the rack, the cross or the stake, life, precious life, with all its sweet attraction and fond ties, was offered, and when a simple renunciation of the cross, and a single embrace of the crucifix, would purchase it back—to some who were weak in faith, such a temptation might be well-nigh irresistible. But it shall not succeed in separating the suffering Christian from the love of Christ.

Nor shall anything connected with life, its trials, its vicissitudes, or its temptations, sever us from God's affection. Thus, both life and death shall but confirm us in the assurance of our inalienable interest in the love of God. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). Are you in Christ? Do not fear to

live. The love of God will still be poured into your heart, and the Spirit of God will be given you. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Neither death, nor life, can separate us from the love of God.

Angels cannot. Good angels cannot, even if they would. But they are all for us. When a soul is joined to Christ, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God" (Luke 15:10); they rejoice that another poor sinner is brought into the love of God, and they would not have us separated. But even if they were against us, our righteousness is above their reach, for the Lord of angels is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). Evil angels cannot. The devil has great power, but he cannot separate a branch of Christ from the love of God. You remember how he tried to separate Peter, and Job, and failed. Christ has overcome. If he could

cast Christ down from the right hand of God, then he would separate us from the love of God; but as long as Christ is there we are safe. Are you in Christ? "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). He and all his legions cannot separate you from "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Principalities and powers cannot. Evil spirits are here meant; but also included here are, not demons merely, but all evil agencies, men of the world, human governments, civil power, all that is hostile to the spiritual interests of Christ's truth and kingdom. Such are often found either powerful engines of spiritual persecutions themselves, or else, by indifference or connivance, sympathizing with abetting the high-handed persecutor. But no human or super-human power shall prevail to impair the interest of God's saints in His love. Have they in a single instance done so? Has God ever forsaken His

people when the Evil Spirit has stirred up ungodly men and despotic governments to rob them of their rights, to fetter their consciences, to imprison or to slay their persons? No, never!

Often such powers have torn the believer from the love of father, and mother, and kindred (Matt. 10:21–22), but they cannot separate us from God, and from his love to us in Christ Jesus. Dear friend, are you in Christ? Oh, make sure, for there may be suffering days yet wherein you will be tried. Be rooted and grounded in Him, and the blasts of persecution will only make the roots of your faith take firmer hold. God will love us “in the fires” (Isa. 24:15). I believe the love of God has often taken away the pains of martyrdom.

Things present cannot. Of things present to the Christians of the apostolic age, some were good and some were evil; some joyous, others sorrowful; just as it is now

among ourselves. And both prosperity and adversity are calculated to draw away the soul from God, but they shall never succeed. Riches, cares, business, houses, lands cannot separate us from the love of God. Ah, these are more dangerous than even persecutions! But are you united to Christ? They shall not prevail, they cannot come between you and God, so as to separate you from His love. Only abide in Christ, and the love of God shall abide in your soul. These things cannot separate you. Indwelling sin, temporary trials, occasional temptations, the momentary suspensions of God's realized love, none of these, or any other thing present, shall separate us from Christ.

Things to come cannot. What lies before us? Who can tell what is "to come"? Shakings among the nations and in the church, sickness, bereavement, temptation, the valley of the shadow of death, all these are things to come. But in Christ we are

safe forever. None of these things shall ever be able to separate those in Christ from the love of God.

No, “nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen.

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