

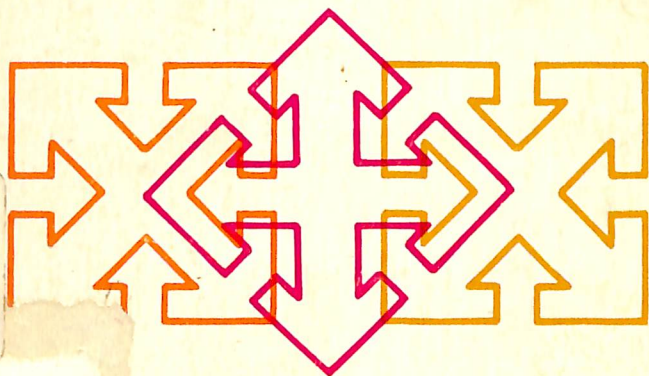
CLASSICS OF DEVOTION



FREEDOM FROM A SELF-CENTERED LIFE / Dying to Self

**Selections From
The Writings Of William Law**

EDITED BY ANDREW MURRAY



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Preface

In the introductory lecture to his "Character and Characteristics of William Law," Dr. Whyte writes, "I wish some student of Law had reprinted for the Christian public the third and practical part of the 'Spirit of Love.'" Elsewhere he speaks of it as A Golden Dialogue. In this issue of the Dialogue I have left out what appeared to have no direct reference to the practical part of the "Spirit of Love." In the notes I have tried to help some readers, who might not at once be able to take in Law's teaching, and might not be ready to give the careful and continued study needed to master his thoughtful style, to see what really the points are that he wishes to open up and enforce.

His chief thoughts are these. The ordinary Christian life is a state of pupilage, in which, under the influence of the teaching of Scripture, mind and heart have to be educated and disciplined, and the will trained and stirred, to seek after a life in which the Spirit of Love really fills and rules the soul. Such a life is possible, but can be received only by the operation of

God, in which our Lord, as the Lamb of God, reveals himself in the heart and takes possession. The great, in fact the one real hindrance to this life of the Spirit of Love within us, is the power of our evil self that poisons our whole nature. The chief object of our time of pupilage, and that on which its length and its issue depend, is that the soul, in its struggle to obey God's law and to overcome this evil self with its tempers, be brought to the confession of its own utter impotence to work deliverance. The only way to deliverance is by a true and entire death to self. The great secret of this death to self—this is really the secret of his teaching and the central thought of the dialogue—the great secret of the death to self, is to be found in a simple helpless turning from self to God. This dying to self is the very perfection of faith in Christ as the Lamb of God. At first sight it does not appear how this can bring such a wonderful deliverance from self, or lead to Christ's rising in the soul with the light of heaven and the full birth of the Spirit of Love. But as he expounds the truth, and shows how in the humility of the Lamb of God lay the secret of the work He did, and the salvation He gives, and how the sinking down before God in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God is the very perfection of faith in Christ, and the one only condition of God's doing His work in us, we are compelled to acknowledge that here is indeed the place of blessing.

A great deal has been said against the use of terms like The Higher Life, and A Second

Blessing. In Law one finds nothing of such language, but of the deep truth of which they are the, perhaps defective, expression his whole book is full. The points on which so much stress is laid in what is called Keswick Teaching, stand prominently out in his whole argument. The low state of the average life of the believer, the cause of all failure as coming from self-confidence, the need of an entire surrender of the whole being to the operation of God, the call to turn to Christ in faith as the one and sure deliverer from the power of self, the divine certainty of a better life for all who will in self-despair trust Christ for it, and the heavenly joy of a life in which the Spirit of Love fills the heart—these truths are common property. What appears to make Law's putting of the truth of special value is the way in which he shows how humility and utter self-despair, with the resignation to God's mighty working in simple faith, is the infallible way to be delivered from self and have the Spirit of Love fill the heart.

Some may object to the title "Dying to Self." I have tried in Appendix A to explain my view of it as connected with our being dead to sin in Christ.

I pray that the blessing and help his teaching has been to myself may be shared by many, and that this little book may be used of God to open up the exceeding riches of His grace in Christ Jesus.

Wellington
July 11, 1898

Andrew Murray

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Introduction

Before commencing our study of this dialogue, it may be well to point out the place it has in the work of which it is a part.

Law's book on the Spirit of Love consists of two parts. In the first part he gives a summary, which he works out more fully in the second. He begins with God as the origin of all love, because He is *an eternal and immutable will to all goodness*. Let the reader hold fast this definition of the nature of God. It is one of Law's axioms from which he makes two important deductions: that in virtue of His very nature, God delights to give all goodness, happiness, and blessing, and can give nothing else; and that there can be no possible good in any creature but what God gives. All that Scripture teaches us of dependence upon God and faith in Him depends upon these two primary truths.

Because this love in God is the original of all love in the creature, love can be nothing in us but what it is in God, *a will to all goodness toward others at all times and on all occasions*.

And this Spirit of Love is not really yours till it is the spirit of your life, till you live freely, willingly, universally according to it. The Spirit of Love can do nothing but love, wherever it is, and whatever is done to it, because it is the truth and reality of God in the soul.

Thus love is the one only bond of union between God and the creature. As the will to all goodness is the whole nature of God, so it must be the whole nature of every service or religion that can be acceptable to Him.

All sin is nothing but the spirit of the creature turned from the universality of love to some self-seeking or own will in created things.

It is this self that crucified Christ, the Lord God. It is from this self sinful man must be purified. And there is no way of being thus purified but by dying to self and having the Spirit of Love born in us. This is the absolute necessity of the gospel doctrine of the cross, viz., of dying to self as the one only way to life in God.

In the second part there are three dialogues. In the first the twofold life of the creature is laid open, as it either exists for that for which it was created, to receive and manifest the goodness of God, or as it is in itself, without God. And so, because goodness and happiness are absolutely inseparable from God, and can be nowhere but in God, *the life of God in union with the creaturely life* is the one only possibility of goodness and happiness in any creature, whether in heaven or earth.

To this end a perpetual, always acting opera-

tion of the Spirit of God within us is absolutely necessary. The holiness of the Christian is not an occasional thing that begins or ends, or is only for a certain time, or place, or action, but is the holiness of that which is *always alive and stirring in us*, namely, of our thoughts, wills, desires, and affections. If our thoughts and affections are to be always holy and good, then the Holy and Good Spirit of God is to be *always operating* as a principle of life within us.

The kingdom of heaven must be all within us, or it never can possibly belong to us. Goodness, piety, holiness can be ours only as *thinking, willing, and desiring are ours, by being in us as a power of heaven in the birth and growth of our own life.*

And now, since the one work of Christ as your Redeemer is only this, to take from the earthly life of flesh and blood its usurped power, all you have to do or can do is to resist, and, as far as you can, renounce the evil tempers and workings of your own evil nature. You want no other deliverance but from *the power of your earthly self.* Nothing that we do is bad, but because it *resists the working and power of God within us*; and nothing that we do can be good, but because it *conforms to the Spirit of God within us.* And thus you see your salvation consists *wholly and solely in the life of God, or Christ as God, quickened and born again in you; in other words, in the restoration and perfect union of the first twofold life in humanity.*

In the second dialogue Law explains the

way of salvation through Jesus Christ. He points out how, as the second Adam, He could be the parent of a new humanity. He had to enter into our state, and, in its weakness and sufferings, pass through that which we needed to pass through in giving up and departing from the life of fallen nature. He could not show that He was not of this world, that He lived in the perfection of the first man, but by showing that *all the good of this earthly life was renounced by Him*, and that *all the evil which the world, the malice of men or devils, could bring upon Him, could not hinder His living wholly and solely to God*, and doing His will with the same fullness as it is done in heaven. Wonder not, then, that the true followers of Christ, the saints of every age, have so gloried in the cross of Christ, have desired nothing so much as to be partakers of it, to live in constant union with it.

It is this whole process of Jesus Christ, through which He passed, and through which He leads us, that is the only possible means that heaven or earth can afford to save man from himself. And thus the sufferings and death of Christ are not only consistent with the doctrine of a God all love, but are the fullest and most absolute proof of it.

At the close of this argument Eusebius answers, "I am now in full possession of this most glorious truth, that God is mere love, the most glorious truth that can possess and edify the heart of man. I want to return home, and enjoy my Bible, and delight myself with reading it

in the comfortable light in which you have set the whole ground and nature of our redemption. Therefore, dear Theophilus, adieu! God is love, and he that hath learnt to live in the Spirit of Love hath learnt to live and dwell in God.

Theophilus.—God prosper the spark of heaven in your soul. But, before you leave me, I beg one more conversation, to be on the practical part of the Spirit of Love; that so doctrine and practice, hearing and doing, may go hand in hand.

The Third Dialogue

It may help us to see where Law wants to lead us in this dialogue, treating of the practical application of his teaching, and how he proposes to reach the goal if we take a survey of his line of argument. The dialogue may be divided into four parts. In the first, he points out to his friends the immense difference between intellectual and spiritual apprehension, between the delightful impression that can be made by an insight into a truth and its actual possession. Anyone in a hurry to come to Law's teaching about dying to self might pass over this portion and think that he missed nothing of the real argument. That would be perfectly true. And yet he might miss what is of far more importance than the argument—the right spirit in which to approach, and in which alone to profit by it, so as to obtain an entrance into the blessed life he speaks of. Because the dying to self and the living to God is the exchange of one life

for another, the losing the one to gain the other, he makes plain in the second part how the difference between light and darkness is the image of the intense, irreconcilable, and eternal difference between the life of God and the life of self. It is only when this is fully believed that there can be even the beginning of the capacity to understand what dying to self is. After having thus prepared his reader, the third part unfolds the simple but wonderful secret of dying to self as the one infallible way to what constitutes true salvation—the life of God restored in man.

The fourth part treats of the actual enjoyment of this blessing.

PART ONE

Intellectual and Spiritual Apprehension

1. The Difference Between Admiring and Possessing

Eusebius.—You have shown great goodwill towards us, Theophilus, in desiring another meeting before we leave you. But yet I seem to myself to have no need of that which you have proposed by this day's conversation. For this doctrine of the Spirit of Love cannot have more power over me, or be more deeply rooted in me, than it is already. It has so gained and gotten possession of my whole heart that everything else must be under its dominion. I can do nothing else but love; it is my whole nature; I have no taste for anything else. Can this matter be carried higher in practice?

Theophilus.—No higher, Eusebius. And were this the true state of your heart, you would bid fair to leave the world as Elijah did; or, like

Enoch, to have it said of you, that you lived wholly to love, and were not. For were there nothing but this divine love alive in you, your be-fallen flesh and blood would be in danger of being quite burnt up by it. What you have said of yourself, you have spoken in great sincerity, but in a total ignorance of yourself, and the true nature of the Spirit of divine Love. You are as yet only *charmed* with the sight, or rather the sound, of it; *its real birth* is as yet unfelt and unfound in you. Your natural complexion has a great deal of the animal meekness and softness of the lamb and the dove, your blood and spirit are of this turn; and therefore a God all love and a religion all love, *quite transport you*. You are *so delighted* with it that you fancy you have nothing in you but this God and religion of love. But, my friend, bear with me, if I tell you that all this is only the good part of the spirit of this bestial world in you, and may be in any unregenerate man that is of your complexion. It is so far from being a genuine fruit of divine love, that, if it be not well looked to, it may prove a real hindrance of it, as it often-times does, by its appearing to be that which it is not.

You have quite forgotten all that was said in the letter to you on the Spirit of Love, that it is *a birth in the soul* that can only come forth in its proper time and place and from its proper causes. Now nothing *that is a birth* can be taken in or brought into the soul by any notional conception or *delightful apprehension* of it. You may

love it as much as you please, think it *the most charming thing in the world*, fancy everything but dross and dung in comparison of it, and yet have no more of *its birth* in you than the blind man has of that light of which he has a most *charming notion*. His blindness still continues the same; he is at the same distance from the light, because light can only be had by *a birth of itself* in seeing eyes. It is thus with the Spirit of Love; *it is nowhere but where it rises up as a birth*.

Commentary

The great message Law has in this book is that the Spirit of Love can only come into us as a divine birth, by which it becomes our very life, making love natural to us. The great hindrance in the way of those who are in earnest in seeking it is that they get deceived and delight themselves with what is not the actual possession of that which they admire. A beautiful picture of a landscape on our wall may be a daily feast, while we never think of possessing the property. Even so, beautiful views and impressions of heavenly things, and specially of a life in the Spirit of Love, may occupy and gratify us, while in practice we are very far from possessing them.

Law's deep spiritual insight had taught him that here was to be found, in a multitude of cases, the cause of failure in the spiritual life. Every minister who asks earnestly why the preaching of the Word to believers does not work

more effectually to produce humble, holy, heavenly living has found one of his chief answers here. Men are delighted, and, as they think, greatly edified by the clear and striking setting forth of spiritual truth, while they never know that it demands the surrender of the whole life and will, the actual death to the world and to self if these truths are really to become their personal possession. They need to be taught, and it is no easy lesson to teach or to learn, that the mind can do nothing but form pictures and images of divine things. It is only by God's direct operation, waited on and allowed to work in us, that the original of the picture, the substance and reality of which the image was a shadow, can become an actual possession.

Study Law's portrait and treatment of Eusebius. He was so filled with admiration and delight of what he had heard of love in God and in us that he did not think it could have more power than it had already; he was sure it had permeated his whole heart. Theophilus shows him his mistake; because he was delighted with the thoughts, he fancied that he was filled with God and His love. He was still entirely ignorant of what was meant by, and needed for, the birth of love within the soul.

This is the lesson this golden dialogue offers to teach us. It offers to lead us to the place where the Spirit of Love can be our life and can have its abiding rule in us. As it sets open the gate, it gives us the one solemn warning: Beware of thinking that when you understand

and approve of and enjoy the teaching, when it brings you light and pleasure, and calls forth new sentiments and energies—beware of thinking you possess it. All this lies in the region of thought and feeling. It is only by a divine birth ruling your very being and nature that you really can possess it.

2. *The Spirit of Love and the Price to Be Paid for Its Possession*

Eusebius.—But if I have come no farther than this, what good have I from *giving in so heartily to all* that you have said of this doctrine? And to what end have you taken so much pains to assert and establish it?

Theophilus.—Your error lies in this: you confound two things which are entirely distinct from each other. You make no difference between *the doctrine* that only sets forth the nature, excellency, and necessity of the Spirit of Love, and *the Spirit of Love itself*; which yet are two things so different, that you may be quite full of the former, and at the same time quite empty of the latter. I have said everything that I could to show you the truth, excellency, and necessity of the Spirit of Love: it is of infinite importance to you to be well established in the belief of this doctrine. But all that I have said of it is only to induce and encourage you to buy it at its own price, and to give all that for it which alone can purchase it. But if you think (as you plainly do) that you have it because you are *so highly pleased* with that which you have heard

of it, you only embrace the shadow, instead of the substance, of that which you ought to have.

Eusebius.—What is the price that I must give for it?

Theophilus.—You must give up all that you are and all that you have from fallen Adam; for all that you are and have from him is that life of flesh and blood which cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Adam, after his fall, had nothing that was good in him, nothing that could inherit an eternal life in heaven, but the bruiser of the serpent, or the seed of the Son of God, that was spoken into him. Everything else in him was devoted to death that this incorruptible seed of the Word might grow up into a new name in Christ Jesus.

Eusebius.—Now, proceed as you please to lay open all my defects, in the Spirit of Love; for I am earnestly desirous of being set right in so important a matter.

Theogenes.—Let me first observe to Theophilus that I am afraid the matter is much worse with me than it is with you. For though this doctrine seems to have all my heart, as it is a doctrine; yet I am continually thrown out of it in practice, and find myself daily under the power of my old tempers and passions as I was before I was so full of this doctrine.

Commentary

Eusebius cannot understand what Theophilus means. He has accepted the teaching so heartily, and feels so ready to live it out, that

he cannot imagine what is lacking. He has never learned that one may be full of the doctrine of love and yet without its spirit. He does not know that all teaching about spiritual truth is only a fingerpost pointing the way to something that has to be purchased at a great price, and that all the pleasure the teaching gives is only to lure us on to pay the price needed to secure the treasure.

The parable of the treasure in the field is a favorite one with Law. He points out how the man who found the treasure rejoiced over it before it was his, and how, if he had not sold all to buy the field, it would have availed him little. The joy of discovering the treasure is the happiness which an insight into the beauty of divine truth brings. It may be renewed every Sabbath as we listen to gospel preaching, and every day as we study our Bible, and yet leave us as poor as we were. Never imagine that the pleasure we have in the Word is a guarantee that it is being a blessing to us. This is not so; but till we pay the price, only as we daily pay the price, will the truth in its power, will the Spirit of Love, really be ours.

And what is the price? "You must give up all that you are, and all that you have from fallen Adam." The Spirit of Love is a new life; nothing less than giving up all our own life is the price to be paid. We have here, at the very opening, the dying to self made the one condition of the actual enjoyment of the life of God. We are not meant ever to live the mixed life in

which the old man has the upper hand. The Spirit of Love waits to fill us as soon as we are ready to buy without holding back part of the price.

You must give up all—all you *have* and all you *are* from fallen Adam. That is meant literally. All we are and have from Adam is sinful: it must all be given up. Our very life, Christ said, must be hated, must be lost. Before a man consents to this, it needs divine teaching to make him see that all our natural life is indeed so incurably evil as to need being given up and parted with. When he does see and consent to this, it needs time and divine teaching to show him what giving up all, this dying to self, really means. When he sees and consents to this, it needs divine teaching to bring him to believe that, if he pays the price, the hidden treasure of a nature that can love, that always will love, is to be found.

If we want to learn these lessons and get possession, let us beware, above all else, of taking our delight in the discovery of the treasure for possession, lest we have to complain with Theogenes: "Though this doctrine seems to have all my heart, . . . yet I am continually thrown out of it in practice, and find myself daily under the power of my old tempers and passions as I was before I was so full of it."

3. *Two Ways of Seeking Goodness*

Theophilus.—You are to know, my friends, that every kind of virtue and goodness may be brought into us by two different ways. They may

be *taught us outwardly* by men, by rules and precepts; and they may be *inwardly born* in us, as *the genuine birth of our own renewed spirit*. In the former way, as we learn them only from men, by rules and documents of instruction, they at best only change our outward behavior, and leave our heart in its natural state, only putting our passions under a forced restraint, which will occasionally break forth in spite of the dead letter of precept and doctrine. Now this way of learning and attaining goodness, though thus imperfect, is yet *absolutely necessary in the nature of the thing*, and must first have its time, and place, and work in us; yet it is only for a time, as the law was a schoolmaster to the gospel. We must first be babes in doctrine, as well as in strength, before we can be men. But of all this outward instruction, whether from good men or the letter of Scripture, it must be said, as the Apostle saith of the law, that "it maketh nothing perfect"; and yet is highly necessary in order to perfection.

The true perfection and profitableness of the holy written Word of God is fully set forth by St. Paul to Timothy: "From a child (saith he) thou hast known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, which is by faith in Christ Jesus." Now these Scriptures were the Law and the Prophets, for Timothy had known no other from his youth. And as they, so all other Scriptures since, have no other good or benefit in them but as they lead and direct us to a *salvation that is not to be had in them-*

selves but from faith in Christ Jesus. Their teaching is only *to teach us where to seek and to find* the fountain and source of all light and knowledge.

Of the Law, saith the Apostle, "it was a schoolmaster to Christ"; of the Prophets, he said the same: "Ye have (says he) a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar ariseth in your hearts." The same thing is to be affirmed of the letter of the New Testament; it is but our schoolmaster unto Christ, a light like that of prophecy, to which we are to take great heed until Christ, as the dawning of the day, or the daystar, ariseth in our hearts. Nor can the thing possibly be otherwise. No instruction that comes under the form of words can do more for us than sounds and words can do. They can *only direct us to something that is better than themselves*, that can be the true light, life, spirit, and power of holiness in us.

Eusebius.—I cannot deny what you say, and yet it seems to me to derogate from Scripture.

Theophilus.—Would you then have me to say that the written Word of God is that Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever; that Word of God which is the wisdom and power of God; that Word which was with God, which was God, by whom all things were made; that Word of God which was made flesh for the redemption of the world; that Word of God, of which we

must be born again; that Word which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world"; that Word which in Christ Jesus "is become wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification in us"; would you have me say that all this is to be understood of the written Word of God? But if this cannot possibly be, then all that I have said is granted, namely, that Jesus alone is that Word of God that can be the light, life, and salvation of fallen man. Or how is it possible more to exalt the letter of Scripture than by owning it to be a true, outward, verbal direction to the one only true light and salvation of man?

Suppose you had been a true disciple of John the Baptist, whose only office was to prepare the way to Christ, how could you have more magnified his office or declared your fidelity to him than by *going from his teaching to be taught by that Christ* to whom he directed you? The Baptist was, indeed, a "burning and a shining light," and so are the Holy Scriptures; but "he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

What a folly it would be to say that you had undervalued the office and character of John the Baptist because he was not allowed to be the light itself, but only a true witness of it, and guide to it. Now if you can show that the written Word in the Bible can have any other or higher office or power than such a ministerial one as the Baptist had, I am ready to hear you.

Commentary

Theophilus had brought his friends to see the difference between intellectual and spiritual apprehension, between the joy of finding a treasure and the deeper joy of possessing it; and also, what was of more importance, to admit that they did not yet possess the Spirit of Love. He now proceeds to show them what their present state is, both as regards that which is good and desirable in it, and that which is still wanting in it.

In all education there are two ways of leading men in the path of truth and virtue. The one is by outward instruction and authority, seeking to inculcate self-control, to foster habits, and to waken desires. The other is by inspiration, when the teacher is able to breathe into his pupil the very disposition that animates himself. God deals no other way in the education of His people or the individual Christian. First came the law to prepare the way; then came grace and truth, the power and reality of the divine life in Christ Jesus. In the individual believer the process is the same. The new birth brings him as a child into a state of grace in which he is shown what the stature of the perfect man in Christ is, is taught to desire and to strive after it, and is led on to expect and receive it. The deadly mistake in the life of most Christians is that they rest content with the preparatory stage and either do not believe in the prospect of spiritual maturity that is held out, or are not willing to pay the price needed to obtain it.

Law makes very clear how we are to regard this preparatory stage. On the one hand, it is imperfect and not to be rested in, however delightful its glimpses and foretastes of the better state. On the other, it is necessary, even indispensable, to perfection. He points out how the Scriptures have their great value from this double point of view. While they teach and discipline and strengthen and influence us, they always point away from themselves to a salvation which they cannot give, but is only to be had from God himself. Their teaching only serves to direct us to what they cannot give us, to lead us to Him who gives the true spiritual teaching. "They direct us to what is better than themselves, that can be the true life, light, spirit, and power of holiness in us."

In answer to the scruple that this appears to derogate from Scripture, we are reminded of the difference between Christ, the living Word, and the letter of Scripture. We are told that this is the very way to exalt Scripture when we own it to be the faithful and only direction to Him who is the true light of men. Just as the highest honor a disciple of John the Baptist could confer on his teacher was to leave him and go to Christ, so the Scriptures, the more we study and rejoice in them, will only have their full effect upon us as they daily point us to Christ. They can awaken us to desire and obedience and diligence and faith; it is Christ himself whom faith receives, who becomes within us the life and the light of our souls.

Blessed is the man who uses diligently the means of grace and submits faithfully to all the teaching of the Word, and gratefully accepts all the refreshings of his minority as a training for the life and the work of his spiritual manhood. Let us use all outward instruction as the guide to that which it ever points to—the birth of the Spirit of Love within us.

There is a solemn and very urgent need of applying all this to our daily Bible reading and to all the preaching we hear. It is possible to be most diligent and even successful in our Bible study, and yet to miss the real blessing it is meant to bring. Scripture ever points us away from itself to the living Word, Christ Jesus, who waits to be formed within us, and to the blessed Spirit who is within us, and is alone able to make what we read or hear “truth in the inward part.” The Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration the Word was written, and by whose inspiration alone the Word can become life within us, who, as the spirit of truth, is himself the truth, the power, the life of all that is in the word, dwells within you. Turn with each thought of divine things, with each word of God you would fain spiritually apprehend, turn inward and wait quietly in the faith that the true divine Teacher can make it true to you, can make it live in you. Let your heart open to Him in the quiet confession of the insufficiency of your understanding, in the quiet faith of His hidden but sure and almighty teaching. So will you find truth and grace, and all goodness, not by

human thought and feeling, but by the birth and power of a divine life within you, giving you the very things, the actual realities, of what the word speaks of.

4. *The Inward Birth of Goodness in the Soul*

Theophilus.—Now if you can show that the written word in the Bible can have any other or higher office or power than such a ministerial one as the Baptist had, I am ready to hear you.

Eusebius.—There is no possibility of doing that.

Theophilus.—But if that is not possible to be done, then you are come to the full proof of this point, viz., that there are two ways of attaining knowledge, goodness, virtue, etc., the one by the ministry of *outward, verbal instruction*, either by men or books, and the other by an *inward birth of divine light*, goodness, and virtue in our own renewed spirit; and that the former is only in order to the latter, and of no benefit to us, but as it carries us *farther than itself*, to be united in heart and spirit with the Light, and Word, and Spirit of God. Just as the Baptist had been of no benefit to his disciples unless he had been their guide *from himself to Christ*.

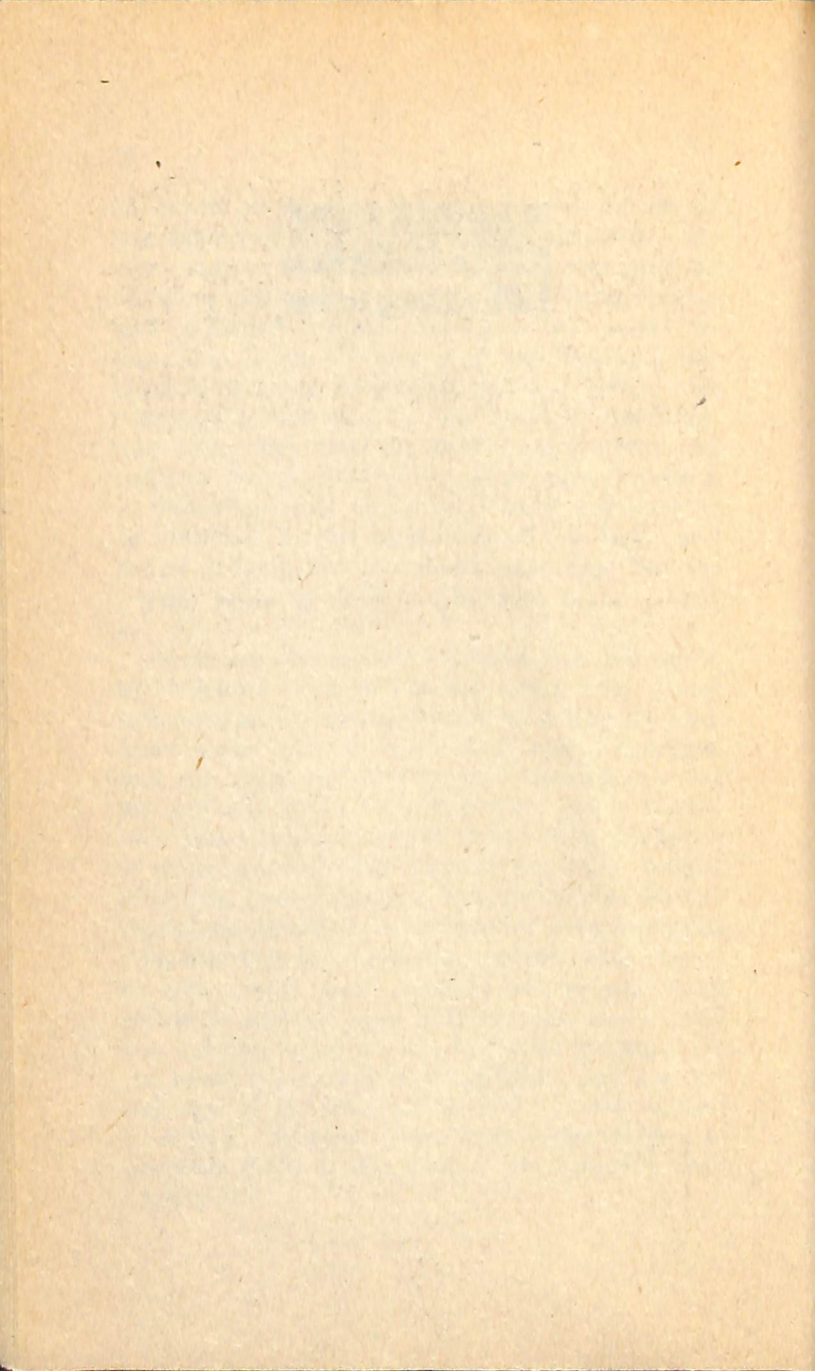
But to come now closer to our subject in hand.

From this twofold light or teaching there necessarily arises a *twofold state of virtue and goodness*. For such as the teacher or teaching is, such is the state and manner of the goodness that can be had from it. Every effect must

be according to the cause that produces it. If you learn virtue and goodness only from outward means, from men or books, you may be virtuous and good according to time, place, and outward forms; you may *do works of humility, works of love and benevolence*, use times and forms of prayer. All this virtue and goodness is suitable to this kind of teaching, and may very well be had from it. But *the spirit of prayer, the spirit of love, and the spirit of humility*, or of any other virtue, are only to be attained by the operation of the light and Spirit of God, not outwardly teaching, but *inwardly bringing forth a new-born spirit within us*.

And now, let me tell you both that it is much to be feared that you as yet stand only under this outward teaching; your good works are only done under obedience to such rules, precepts, and doctrines *as your reason assents to*, but are *not the fruits of a new-born spirit within you*. But till you are thus renewed in the spirit of your minds, your virtues are only taught practices, grafted upon a corrupt bottom. Everything you do will be *a mixture of good and bad*; your humility will help you to pride, your charity to others will give nourishment to your own self-love, and as your prayers increase, so will the opinion of your own sanctity. Because till the heart is purified to the bottom, and has felt the axe at the root of its evil (which cannot be done by outward instruction), everything that proceeds from it partakes of its impurity and corruption.

**FREEDOM FROM
A SELF-CENTERED
LIFE / Dying to Self**



FREEDOM FROM A SELF-CENTERED LIFE / Dying to Self

**Selections From
The Writings Of William Law**

EDITED BY ANDREW MURRAY

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Preface

In the introductory lecture to his "Character and Characteristics of William Law," Dr. Whyte writes, "I wish some student of Law had reprinted for the Christian public the third and practical part of the 'Spirit of Love.'" Elsewhere he speaks of it as A Golden Dialogue. In this issue of the Dialogue I have left out what appeared to have no direct reference to the practical part of the "Spirit of Love." In the notes I have tried to help some readers, who might not at once be able to take in Law's teaching, and might not be ready to give the careful and continued study needed to master his thoughtful style, to see what really the points are that he wishes to open up and enforce.

His chief thoughts are these. The ordinary Christian life is a state of pupilage, in which, under the influence of the teaching of Scripture, mind and heart have to be educated and disciplined, and the will trained and stirred, to seek after a life in which the Spirit of Love really fills and rules the soul. Such a life is possible, but can be received only by the operation of

God, in which our Lord, as the Lamb of God, reveals himself in the heart and takes possession. The great, in fact the one real hindrance to this life of the Spirit of Love within us, is the power of our evil self that poisons our whole nature. The chief object of our time of pupilage, and that on which its length and its issue depend, is that the soul, in its struggle to obey God's law and to overcome this evil self with its tempers, be brought to the confession of its own utter impotence to work deliverance. The only way to deliverance is by a true and entire death to self. The great secret of this death to self—this is really the secret of his teaching and the central thought of the dialogue—the great secret of the death to self, is to be found in a simple helpless turning from self to God. This dying to self is the very perfection of faith in Christ as the Lamb of God. At first sight it does not appear how this can bring such a wonderful deliverance from self, or lead to Christ's rising in the soul with the light of heaven and the full birth of the Spirit of Love. But as he expounds the truth, and shows how in the humility of the Lamb of God lay the secret of the work He did, and the salvation He gives, and how the sinking down before God in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God is the very perfection of faith in Christ, and the one only condition of God's doing His work in us, we are compelled to acknowledge that here is indeed the place of blessing.

A great deal has been said against the use of terms like *The Higher Life*, and *A Second*

Blessing. In Law one finds nothing of such language, but of the deep truth of which they are the, perhaps defective, expression his whole book is full. The points on which so much stress is laid in what is called Keswick Teaching, stand prominently out in his whole argument. The low state of the average life of the believer, the cause of all failure as coming from self-confidence, the need of an entire surrender of the whole being to the operation of God, the call to turn to Christ in faith as the one and sure deliverer from the power of self, the divine certainty of a better life for all who will in self-despair trust Christ for it, and the heavenly joy of a life in which the Spirit of Love fills the heart—these truths are common property. What appears to make Law's putting of the truth of special value is the way in which he shows how humility and utter self-despair, with the resignation to God's mighty working in simple faith, is the infallible way to be delivered from self and have the Spirit of Love fill the heart.

Some may object to the title "Dying to Self." I have tried in Appendix A to explain my view of it as connected with our being dead to sin in Christ.

I pray that the blessing and help his teaching has been to myself may be shared by many, and that this little book may be used of God to open up the exceeding riches of His grace in Christ Jesus.

Wellington
July 11, 1898

Andrew Murray

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Introduction

Before commencing our study of this dialogue, it may be well to point out the place it has in the work of which it is a part.

Law's book on the Spirit of Love consists of two parts. In the first part he gives a summary, which he works out more fully in the second. He begins with God as the origin of all love, because He is *an eternal and immutable will to all goodness*. Let the reader hold fast this definition of the nature of God. It is one of Law's axioms from which he makes two important deductions: that in virtue of His very nature, God delights to give all goodness, happiness, and blessing, and can give nothing else; and that there can be no possible good in any creature but what God gives. All that Scripture teaches us of dependence upon God and faith in Him depends upon these two primary truths.

Because this love in God is the original of all love in the creature, love can be nothing in us but what it is in God, *a will to all goodness toward others at all times and on all occasions*.

And this Spirit of Love is not really yours till it is the spirit of your life, till you live freely, willingly, universally according to it. The Spirit of Love can do nothing but love, wherever it is, and whatever is done to it, because it is the truth and reality of God in the soul.

Thus love is the one only bond of union between God and the creature. As the will to all goodness is the whole nature of God, so it must be the whole nature of every service or religion that can be acceptable to Him.

All sin is nothing but the spirit of the creature turned from the universality of love to some self-seeking or own will in created things.

It is this self that crucified Christ, the Lord God. It is from this self sinful man must be purified. And there is no way of being thus purified but by dying to self and having the Spirit of Love born in us. This is the absolute necessity of the gospel doctrine of the cross, viz., of dying to self as the one only way to life in God.

In the second part there are three dialogues. In the first the twofold life of the creature is laid open, as it either exists for that for which it was created, to receive and manifest the goodness of God, or as it is in itself, without God. And so, because goodness and happiness are absolutely inseparable from God, and can be nowhere but in God, *the life of God in union with the creaturely life* is the one only possibility of goodness and happiness in any creature, whether in heaven or earth.

To this end a perpetual, always acting opera-

tion of the Spirit of God within us is absolutely necessary. The holiness of the Christian is not an occasional thing that begins or ends, or is only for a certain time, or place, or action, but is the holiness of that which is *always alive and stirring in us*, namely, of our thoughts, wills, desires, and affections. If our thoughts and affections are to be always holy and good, then the Holy and Good Spirit of God is to be *always operating* as a principle of life within us.

The kingdom of heaven must be all within us, or it never can possibly belong to us. Goodness, piety, holiness can be ours only as *thinking, willing, and desiring are ours, by being in us as a power of heaven in the birth and growth of our own life.*

And now, since the one work of Christ as your Redeemer is only this, to take from the earthly life of flesh and blood its usurped power, all you have to do or can do is to resist, and, as far as you can, renounce the evil tempers and workings of your own evil nature. You want no other deliverance but from *the power of your earthly self*. Nothing that we do is bad, but because it *resists the working and power of God within us*; and nothing that we do can be good, but because it *conforms to the Spirit of God within us*. And thus you see your salvation consists *wholly and solely in the life of God*, or Christ as God, quickened and born again in you; in other words, in the restoration and perfect union of the first twofold life in humanity.

In the second dialogue Law explains the

way of salvation through Jesus Christ. He points out how, as the second Adam, He could be the parent of a new humanity. He had to enter into our state, and, in its weakness and sufferings, pass through that which we needed to pass through in giving up and departing from the life of fallen nature. He could not show that He was not of this world, that He lived in the perfection of the first man, but by showing that *all the good of this earthly life was renounced by Him*, and that *all the evil which the world, the malice of men or devils, could bring upon Him, could not hinder His living wholly and solely to God*, and doing His will with the same fullness as it is done in heaven. Wonder not, then, that the true followers of Christ, the saints of every age, have so gloried in the cross of Christ, have desired nothing so much as to be partakers of it, to live in constant union with it.

It is this whole process of Jesus Christ, through which He passed, and through which He leads us, that is the only possible means that heaven or earth can afford to save man from himself. And thus the sufferings and death of Christ are not only consistent with the doctrine of a God all love, but are the fullest and most absolute proof of it.

At the close of this argument Eusebius answers, "I am now in full possession of this most glorious truth, that God is mere love, the most glorious truth that can possess and edify the heart of man. I want to return home, and enjoy my Bible, and delight myself with reading it

in the comfortable light in which you have set the whole ground and nature of our redemption. Therefore, dear Theophilus, adieu! God is love, and he that hath learnt to live in the Spirit of Love hath learnt to live and dwell in God.

Theophilus.—God prosper the spark of heaven in your soul. But, before you leave me, I beg one more conversation, to be on the practical part of the Spirit of Love; that so doctrine and practice, hearing and doing, may go hand in hand.

The Third Dialogue

It may help us to see where Law wants to lead us in this dialogue, treating of the practical application of his teaching, and how he proposes to reach the goal if we take a survey of his line of argument. The dialogue may be divided into four parts. In the first, he points out to his friends the immense difference between intellectual and spiritual apprehension, between the delightful impression that can be made by an insight into a truth and its actual possession. Anyone in a hurry to come to Law's teaching about dying to self might pass over this portion and think that he missed nothing of the real argument. That would be perfectly true. And yet he might miss what is of far more importance than the argument—the right spirit in which to approach, and in which alone to profit by it, so as to obtain an entrance into the blessed life he speaks of. Because the dying to self and the living to God is the exchange of one life

for another, the losing the one to gain the other, he makes plain in the second part how the difference between light and darkness is the image of the intense, irreconcilable, and eternal difference between the life of God and the life of self. It is only when this is fully believed that there can be even the beginning of the capacity to understand what dying to self is. After having thus prepared his reader, the third part unfolds the simple but wonderful secret of dying to self as the one infallible way to what constitutes true salvation—the life of God restored in man.

The fourth part treats of the actual enjoyment of this blessing.

PART ONE

Intellectual and Spiritual Apprehension

1. The Difference Between Admiring and Possessing

Eusebius.—You have shown great goodwill towards us, Theophilus, in desiring another meeting before we leave you. But yet I seem to myself to have no need of that which you have proposed by this day's conversation. For this doctrine of the Spirit of Love cannot have more power over me, or be more deeply rooted in me, than it is already. It has so gained and gotten possession of my whole heart that everything else must be under its dominion. I can do nothing else but love; it is my whole nature; I have no taste for anything else. Can this matter be carried higher in practice?

Theophilus.—No higher, Eusebius. And were this the true state of your heart, you would bid fair to leave the world as Elijah did; or, like

Enoch, to have it said of you, that you lived wholly to love, and were not. For were there nothing but this divine love alive in you, your be-fallen flesh and blood would be in danger of being quite burnt up by it. What you have said of yourself, you have spoken in great sincerity, but in a total ignorance of yourself, and the true nature of the Spirit of divine Love. You are as yet only *charmed* with the sight, or rather the sound, of it; *its real birth* is as yet unfelt and unfound in you. Your natural complexion has a great deal of the animal meekness and softness of the lamb and the dove, your blood and spirit are of this turn; and therefore a God all love and a religion all love, *quite transport you*. You are *so delighted* with it that you fancy you have nothing in you but this God and religion of love. But, my friend, bear with me, if I tell you that all this is only the good part of the spirit of this bestial world in you, and may be in any unregenerate man that is of your complexion. It is so far from being a genuine fruit of divine love, that, if it be not well looked to, it may prove a real hindrance of it, as it oftentimes does, by its appearing to be that which it is not.

You have quite forgotten all that was said in the letter to you on the Spirit of Love, that it is *a birth in the soul* that can only come forth in its proper time and place and from its proper causes. Now nothing *that is a birth* can be taken in or brought into the soul by any notional conception or *delightful apprehension* of it. You may

love it as much as you please, think it *the most charming thing in the world*, fancy everything but dross and dung in comparison of it, and yet have no more *of its birth* in you than the blind man has of that light of which he has a most *charming notion*. His blindness still continues the same; he is at the same distance from the light, because light can only be had by *a birth of itself* in seeing eyes. It is thus with the Spirit of Love; *it is nowhere but where it rises up as a birth*.

Commentary

The great message Law has in this book is that the Spirit of Love can only come into us as a divine birth, by which it becomes our very life, making love natural to us. The great hindrance in the way of those who are in earnest in seeking it is that they get deceived and delight themselves with what is not the actual possession of that which they admire. A beautiful picture of a landscape on our wall may be a daily feast, while we never think of possessing the property. Even so, beautiful views and impressions of heavenly things, and specially of a life in the Spirit of Love, may occupy and gratify us, while in practice we are very far from possessing them.

Law's deep spiritual insight had taught him that here was to be found, in a multitude of cases, the cause of failure in the spiritual life. Every minister who asks earnestly why the preaching of the Word to believers does not work

more effectually to produce humble, holy, heavenly living has found one of his chief answers here. Men are delighted, and, as they think, greatly edified by the clear and striking setting forth of spiritual truth, while they never know that it demands the surrender of the whole life and will, the actual death to the world and to self if these truths are really to become their personal possession. They need to be taught, and it is no easy lesson to teach or to learn, that the mind can do nothing but form pictures and images of divine things. It is only by God's direct operation, waited on and allowed to work in us, that the original of the picture, the substance and reality of which the image was a shadow, can become an actual possession.

Study Law's portrait and treatment of Eusebius. He was so filled with admiration and delight of what he had heard of love in God and in us that he did not think it could have more power than it had already; he was sure it had permeated his whole heart. Theophilus shows him his mistake; because he was delighted with the thoughts, he fancied that he was filled with God and His love. He was still entirely ignorant of what was meant by, and needed for, the birth of love within the soul.

This is the lesson this golden dialogue offers to teach us. It offers to lead us to the place where the Spirit of Love can be our life and can have its abiding rule in us. As it sets open the gate, it gives us the one solemn warning: Beware of thinking that when you understand

and approve of and enjoy the teaching, when it brings you light and pleasure, and calls forth new sentiments and energies—beware of thinking you possess it. All this lies in the region of thought and feeling. It is only by a divine birth ruling your very being and nature that you really can possess it.

2. *The Spirit of Love and the Price to Be Paid for Its Possession*

Eusebius.—But if I have come no farther than this, what good have I from *giving in so heartily to all* that you have said of this doctrine? And to what end have you taken so much pains to assert and establish it?

Theophilus.—Your error lies in this: you confound two things which are entirely distinct from each other. You make no difference between *the doctrine* that only sets forth the nature, excellency, and necessity of the Spirit of Love, and *the Spirit of Love itself*; which yet are two things so different, that you may be quite full of the former, and at the same time quite empty of the latter. I have said everything that I could to show you the truth, excellency, and necessity of the Spirit of Love: it is of infinite importance to you to be well established in the belief of this doctrine. But all that I have said of it is only to induce and encourage you to buy it at its own price, and to give all that for it which alone can purchase it. But if you think (as you plainly do) that you have it because you are *so highly pleased* with that which you have heard

of it, you only embrace the shadow, instead of the substance, of that which you ought to have.

Eusebius.—What is the price that I must give for it?

Theophilus.—You must give up all that you are and all that you have from fallen Adam; for all that you are and have from him is that life of flesh and blood which cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Adam, after his fall, had nothing that was good in him, nothing that could inherit an eternal life in heaven, but the bruiser of the serpent, or the seed of the Son of God, that was spoken into him. Everything else in him was devoted to death that this incorruptible seed of the Word might grow up into a new name in Christ Jesus.

Eusebius.—Now, proceed as you please to lay open all my defects, in the Spirit of Love; for I am earnestly desirous of being set right in so important a matter.

Theogenes.—Let me first observe to Theophilus that I am afraid the matter is much worse with me than it is with you. For though this doctrine seems to have all my heart, as it is a doctrine; yet I am continually thrown out of it in practice, and find myself daily under the power of my old tempers and passions as I was before I was so full of this doctrine.

Commentary

Eusebius cannot understand what Theophilus means. He has accepted the teaching so heartily, and feels so ready to live it out, that

he cannot imagine what is lacking. He has never learned that one may be full of the doctrine of love and yet without its spirit. He does not know that all teaching about spiritual truth is only a fingerpost pointing the way to something that has to be purchased at a great price, and that all the pleasure the teaching gives is only to lure us on to pay the price needed to secure the treasure.

The parable of the treasure in the field is a favorite one with Law. He points out how the man who found the treasure rejoiced over it before it was his, and how, if he had not sold all to buy the field, it would have availed him little. The joy of discovering the treasure is the happiness which an insight into the beauty of divine truth brings. It may be renewed every Sabbath as we listen to gospel preaching, and every day as we study our Bible, and yet leave us as poor as we were. Never imagine that the pleasure we have in the Word is a guarantee that it is being a blessing to us. This is not so; but till we pay the price, only as we daily pay the price, will the truth in its power, will the Spirit of Love, really be ours.

And what is the price? "You must give up all that you are, and all that you have from fallen Adam." The Spirit of Love is a new life; nothing less than giving up all our own life is the price to be paid. We have here, at the very opening, the dying to self made the one condition of the actual enjoyment of the life of God. We are not meant ever to live the mixed life in

which the old man has the upper hand. The Spirit of Love waits to fill us as soon as we are ready to buy without holding back part of the price.

You must give up all—all you *have* and all you *are* from fallen Adam. That is meant literally. All we are and have from Adam is sinful: it must all be given up. Our very life, Christ said, must be hated, must be lost. Before a man consents to this, it needs divine teaching to make him see that all our natural life is indeed so incurably evil as to need being given up and parted with. When he does see and consent to this, it needs time and divine teaching to show him what giving up all, this dying to self, really means. When he sees and consents to this, it needs divine teaching to bring him to believe that, if he pays the price, the hidden treasure of a nature that can love, that always will love, is to be found.

If we want to learn these lessons and get possession, let us beware, above all else, of taking our delight in the discovery of the treasure for possession, lest we have to complain with Theogenes: "Though this doctrine seems to have all my heart, . . . yet I am continually thrown out of it in practice, and find myself daily under the power of my old tempers and passions as I was before I was so full of it."

3. *Two Ways of Seeking Goodness*

Theophilus.—You are to know, my friends, that every kind of virtue and goodness may be brought into us by two different ways. They may

be *taught us outwardly* by men, by rules and precepts; and they may be *inwardly born* in us, as *the genuine birth of our own renewed spirit*. In the former way, as we learn them only from men, by rules and documents of instruction, they at best only change our outward behavior, and leave our heart in its natural state, only putting our passions under a forced restraint, which will occasionally break forth in spite of the dead letter of precept and doctrine. Now this way of learning and attaining goodness, though thus imperfect, is yet *absolutely necessary in the nature of the thing*, and must first have its time, and place, and work in us; yet it is only for a time, as the law was a schoolmaster to the gospel. We must first be babes in doctrine, as well as in strength, before we can be men. But of all this outward instruction, whether from good men or the letter of Scripture, it must be said, as the Apostle saith of the law, that "it maketh nothing perfect"; and yet is highly necessary in order to perfection.

The true perfection and profitableness of the holy written Word of God is fully set forth by St. Paul to Timothy: "From a child (saith he) thou hast known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, which is by faith in Christ Jesus." Now these Scriptures were the Law and the Prophets, for Timothy had known no other from his youth. And as they, so all other Scriptures since, have no other good or benefit in them but as they lead and direct us to *a salvation that is not to be had in them-*

selves but from faith in Christ Jesus. Their teaching is only *to teach us where to seek and to find* the fountain and source of all light and knowledge.

Of the Law, saith the Apostle, "it was a schoolmaster to Christ"; of the Prophets, he said the same: "Ye have (says he) a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the daystar ariseth in your hearts." The same thing is to be affirmed of the letter of the New Testament; it is but our schoolmaster unto Christ, a light like that of prophecy, to which we are to take great heed until Christ, as the dawning of the day, or the daystar, ariseth in our hearts. Nor can the thing possibly be otherwise. No instruction that comes under the form of words can do more for us than sounds and words can do. They can *only direct us to something that is better than themselves*, that can be the true light, life, spirit, and power of holiness in us.

Eusebius.—I cannot deny what you say, and yet it seems to me to derogate from Scripture.

Theophilus.—Would you then have me to say that the written Word of God is that Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever; that Word of God which is the wisdom and power of God; that Word which was with God, which was God, by whom all things were made; that Word of God which was made flesh for the redemption of the world; that Word of God, of which we

must be born again; that Word which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world"; that Word which in Christ Jesus "is become wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification in us"; would you have me say that all this is to be understood of the written Word of God? But if this cannot possibly be, then all that I have said is granted, namely, that Jesus alone is that Word of God that can be the light, life, and salvation of fallen man. Or how is it possible more to exalt the letter of Scripture than by owning it to be a true, outward, verbal direction to the one only true light and salvation of man?

Suppose you had been a true disciple of John the Baptist, whose only office was to prepare the way to Christ, how could you have more magnified his office or declared your fidelity to him than by *going from his teaching to be taught by that Christ* to whom he directed you? The Baptist was, indeed, a "burning and a shining light," and so are the Holy Scriptures; but "he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

What a folly it would be to say that you had undervalued the office and character of John the Baptist because he was not allowed to be the light itself, but only a true witness of it, and guide to it. Now if you can show that the written Word in the Bible can have any other or higher office or power than such a ministerial one as the Baptist had, I am ready to hear you.

Commentary

Theophilus had brought his friends to see the difference between intellectual and spiritual apprehension, between the joy of finding a treasure and the deeper joy of possessing it; and also, what was of more importance, to admit that they did not yet possess the Spirit of Love. He now proceeds to show them what their present state is, both as regards that which is good and desirable in it, and that which is still wanting in it.

In all education there are two ways of leading men in the path of truth and virtue. The one is by outward instruction and authority, seeking to inculcate self-control, to foster habits, and to waken desires. The other is by inspiration, when the teacher is able to breathe into his pupil the very disposition that animates himself. God deals no other way in the education of His people or the individual Christian. First came the law to prepare the way; then came grace and truth, the power and reality of the divine life in Christ Jesus. In the individual believer the process is the same. The new birth brings him as a child into a state of grace in which he is shown what the stature of the perfect man in Christ is, is taught to desire and to strive after it, and is led on to expect and receive it. The deadly mistake in the life of most Christians is that they rest content with the preparatory stage and either do not believe in the prospect of spiritual maturity that is held out, or are not willing to pay the price needed to obtain it.

Law makes very clear how we are to regard this preparatory stage. On the one hand, it is imperfect and not to be rested in, however delightful its glimpses and foretastes of the better state. On the other, it is necessary, even indispensable, to perfection. He points out how the Scriptures have their great value from this double point of view. While they teach and discipline and strengthen and influence us, they always point away from themselves to a salvation which they cannot give, but is only to be had from God himself. Their teaching only serves to direct us to what they cannot give us, to lead us to Him who gives the true spiritual teaching. "They direct us to what is better than themselves, that can be the true life, light, spirit, and power of holiness in us."

In answer to the scruple that this appears to derogate from Scripture, we are reminded of the difference between Christ, the living Word, and the letter of Scripture. We are told that this is the very way to exalt Scripture when we own it to be the faithful and only direction to Him who is the true light of men. Just as the highest honor a disciple of John the Baptist could confer on his teacher was to leave him and go to Christ, so the Scriptures, the more we study and rejoice in them, will only have their full effect upon us as they daily point us to Christ. They can awaken us to desire and obedience and diligence and faith; it is Christ himself whom faith receives, who becomes within us the life and the light of our souls.

Blessed is the man who uses diligently the means of grace and submits faithfully to all the teaching of the Word, and gratefully accepts all the refreshings of his minority as a training for the life and the work of his spiritual manhood. Let us use all outward instruction as the guide to that which it ever points to—the birth of the Spirit of Love within us.

There is a solemn and very urgent need of applying all this to our daily Bible reading and to all the preaching we hear. It is possible to be most diligent and even successful in our Bible study, and yet to miss the real blessing it is meant to bring. Scripture ever points us away from itself to the living Word, Christ Jesus, who waits to be formed within us, and to the blessed Spirit who is within us, and is alone able to make what we read or hear "truth in the inward part." The Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration the Word was written, and by whose inspiration alone the Word can become life within us, who, as the spirit of truth, is himself the truth, the power, the life of all that is in the word, dwells within you. Turn with each thought of divine things, with each word of God you would fain spiritually apprehend, turn inward and wait quietly in the faith that the true divine Teacher can make it true to you, can make it live in you. Let your heart open to Him in the quiet confession of the insufficiency of your understanding, in the quiet faith of His hidden but sure and almighty teaching. So will you find truth and grace, and all goodness, not by

human thought and feeling, but by the birth and power of a divine life within you, giving you the very things, the actual realities, of what the word speaks of.

4. *The Inward Birth of Goodness in the Soul*

Theophilus.—Now if you can show that the written word in the Bible can have any other or higher office or power than such a ministerial one as the Baptist had, I am ready to hear you.

Eusebius.—There is no possibility of doing that.

Theophilus.—But if that is not possible to be done, then you are come to the full proof of this point, viz., that there are two ways of attaining knowledge, goodness, virtue, etc., the one by the ministry of *outward, verbal instruction*, either by men or books, and the other by an *inward birth of divine light*, goodness, and virtue in our own renewed spirit; and that the former is only in order to the latter, and of no benefit to us, but as it carries us *farther than itself*, to be united in heart and spirit with the Light, and Word, and Spirit of God. Just as the Baptist had been of no benefit to his disciples unless he had been their guide *from himself to Christ*.

But to come now closer to our subject in hand.

From this twofold light or teaching there necessarily arises *a twofold state of virtue and goodness*. For such as the teacher or teaching is, such is the state and manner of the goodness that can be had from it. Every effect must

be according to the cause that produces it. If you learn virtue and goodness only from outward means, from men or books, you may be virtuous and good according to time, place, and outward forms; you may *do works of humility, works of love and benevolence*, use times and forms of prayer. All this virtue and goodness is suitable to this kind of teaching, and may very well be had from it. But *the spirit of prayer, the spirit of love, and the spirit of humility*, or of any other virtue, are only to be attained by the operation of the light and Spirit of God, not outwardly teaching, but *inwardly bringing forth a new-born spirit within us*.

And now, let me tell you both that it is much to be feared that you as yet stand only under this outward teaching; your good works are only done under obedience to such rules, precepts, and doctrines *as your reason assents to*, but are *not the fruits of a new-born spirit within you*. But till you are thus renewed in the spirit of your minds, your virtues are only taught practices, grafted upon a corrupt bottom. Everything you do will be *a mixture of good and bad*; your humility will help you to pride, your charity to others will give nourishment to your own self-love, and as your prayers increase, so will the opinion of your own sanctity. Because till the heart is purified to the bottom, and has felt the axe at the root of its evil (which cannot be done by outward instruction), everything that proceeds from it partakes of its impurity and corruption.

Man was created to participate in the life, and the goodness, and blessedness of his God. His fitness or capacity to receive that good was his sense of wanting it and his power of desiring it. Always having that desire satisfied in God would have been his blessedness. In a sense of want continually desiring and desire continually wanting is the misery of man fallen from God. On this account, the fallen creature can do nothing but ever covet, a desire proceeding from the want of its true good; and every envy, because it is a desire that has self for its object; and exalt itself, because it is a desire reaching after a higher state than that in which it is. Covetousness, envy, pride are the three modes in which one and the same restless desire ever manifests itself. And out of these comes a fourth, the wrath or wretchedness of unsatisfied desire. These four constitute the essential elements of self. Amid the vanities and enjoyments of time these desires may be partially gratified, and bring a measure of peace or happiness; when these vanities are removed, the soul finds itself devoured by an insatiable, never-to-be-satisfied desire. It is only in the Christian redemption, and by a birth of a new divine life in the soul through the Spirit of God, that man can be delivered from self and its sins.

Let us see how we have here indeed all the elements of the sin that robs us of our peace. Covetousness is nothing but the incessant going out of our heart in desire after what we may not or cannot have. Envy is the cause of all

the ill-will and resentment and unlovingness that disturbs us, because it cannot allow anything to interfere with its own self-interest. And pride—sad proof of our fall from something better than we are—the seeking something higher than we possess, rebels and exalts itself against all in God or man that will not help to give us the place we seek. Altogether they often, even in the Christian, work out a life of unrest and despair.

This is the darkness of evil-self which the light of God can cast out. But before this can be done, the darkness must be confessed and turned from. The lust, and the envy, and the pride of our nature, with the wretchedness they bring, must be acknowledged; and with that our utter impotence to conquer them or cast them out. The need must be felt of God's light to chase away the darkness of self, of an entirely new life by the Holy Spirit to take the place of the life of self, of an entire death to self to make way for the birth of the Spirit of Love from heaven.

Let us learn the lesson: the fuller the conviction and confession of the darkness, *and its power*, the better prepared we are for the shining of the light of God.

12. The Malignant Nature of Self

Theogenes.—God give a blessing, Theophilus, to your good prayer. And then let me tell you that you have quite satisfied my question about the nature of self. I shall never forget

it, nor can I ever possibly have any doubt of its truth.

You quite surprise me by thus showing me, with so much certainty, how the powers of eternity work in the things of time. Nothing is done on earth but by the unchangeable workings of the same spiritual powers, which work after the same manner both in heaven and in hell. I now sufficiently see how man stands in the midst of heaven and hell, under an absolute necessity of belonging wholly to the one or wholly to the other, as soon as this cover of materiality is taken off from him.

I now see the full truth and certainty of what you said of the nature and power of divine love; viz., "that it is perfect peace and joy, a freedom from all disquiet, making everything to rejoice in itself. That it is the Christ of God, and wherever it comes, it comes as the blessing and happiness of every natural life; as the restorer of every lost perfection; a redeemer from all evil; a fulfiller of all righteousness; and a peace of God which passes all understanding." So that I am now a thousand times more than ever athirst after the Spirit of Love. I am willing to sell all, and buy it; its blessing is so great, and the want of it so dreadful a state, that I am even afraid of lying down in my bed till every working power of my soul is given up to it, wholly possessed and governed by it.

Theophilus.—You have reason for all that you say, Theogenes, for were we truly affected with things as they are our real good, or real

evil, we should be much more afraid of having the serpents of covetousness, envy, pride and wrath well nourished and kept alive within us than of being shut up in a pest-house, or cast into a dungeon of venomous beasts. On the other hand, we should look upon the lofty eloquence and proud virtue of a Cicero but as the blessing of storm and tempest, when compared with the heavenly tranquillity of that meek and lowly heart to which our Redeemer has called us.

I said the serpents of covetousness, envy, pride, and wrath, because they alone are the real, dreadful, original serpents; and all earthly serpents are but transitory, partial, and weak out-births of them. All evil, earthly beasts are but short-lived images or creaturely eruptions of that hellish disorder that is broken out from the fallen spiritual world; and by their manifold variety they show us that multiplicity of evil that lies in the womb of that abyss of dark rage which (*N.B.*) has no maker, but the three first properties of nature, fallen from God and working in their own darkness.

So that all evil, mischievous, ravenous, venomous beasts, though they have no life but what begins in and from this material world, and totally ends at the death of their bodies, yet they have no malignity in their earthly temporary nature but from those same wrathful properties of fallen nature, which live and work in our eternal fallen souls. And, therefore, though they are as different from us as time from eternity, yet wherever we see them, we see so

many infallible proofs of the fall of nature and the reality of hell. For had no hell broken out in spiritual nature, not only no evil beast, but no bestial life, could ever have come into existence.

But to return. I have, I hope, sufficiently opened unto you *the malignant nature of that self* which dwells in and makes up the working life of every creature that has lost its right state in God—viz., that all the evil that was in the first chaos of darkness, or that still is in hell and devils, all the evil that is in material nature and material creatures, whether animate or inanimate, is nothing else, works in and with nothing else, but those first properties of nature, which drive on the life of fallen man in covetousness, envy, pride, and wrath.

Commentary

It is not enough that we know the elements of self, and are thus able to trace every sin to its true root. We need to study self as a whole and to get a right impression of the essential and incurable evil of all that it is and all that comes from it. What Law wants us to realize is that as all goodness comes from God, and points to Him, so all evil, whether as we see it in venomous serpents, or in fallen spirits in hell, or in ourselves, has one origin—the darkness of nature separated from God. The serpents of covetousness, envy, pride, and wrath are the only real serpents, and our terror of harboring them within us ought to be much greater than

any fear we ever could feel of being cast into a dungeon full of venomous beasts.

How little this is believed or realized! And as a consequence, how little the blessing of being delivered from them, and of enjoying the heavenly tranquillity of the meek and lowly heart, is sought after! How many Christians there are from whom the malignity of all that is of self is hidden, and who oftentimes harbor and nourish the evil temper of pride, and envy, and worldliness without any conception of what their real nature is.

If the redemption in Christ is to be appreciated, we need to know the depth of the fall from which it delivers us. We need to know the inherent evil of our own nature. We need to connect all the selfishness and anger, the pride and self-seeking, the desires of the world and the flesh, with their one root—self, turned from God and fallen under the power of the evil one. We need to study that root of evil within us in its oneness with the whole kingdom of darkness, with the power of Satan and the misery of hell, until our whole heart abhors it and seeks, above everything, for deliverance.

What a list of words there is in our language to express the various workings of this sinful self: selfishness, self-assertion, self-confidence, self-pleasing, self-sufficiency, self-seeking. Our loathing of all these forms of sin will depend upon the measure in which we truly believe what we have been taught of self—that it is the power which was given us to turn to God and glorify

Him which instead turned in pride from Him and against Him and set on fire of hell to exalt itself against Him.

We have here our last lesson before we proceed to the great point of the dialogue—the deliverance from self by the dying to it. The need of such an entire deliverance, and at such a price, the desire to seek and obtain it at any price, will neither be understood nor felt until we, in some measure, see that this self is indeed the very serpent that poisons our whole life, until we flee from it and cry for help to have it slain. Until this serpent, and all that is of the seed of the serpent, be known and hated, the Bruiser of the serpent cannot be known, or sought, or loved as He should be.

PART THREE

Of Dying to Self to Live to God

13. Death to Self Not by Own Effort

Theogenes.—I could almost say that you have shown me more than enough of this monster self, though I would not be without this knowledge of it for half the world. But now, sir, what must I do to be saved from the mouth of this lion, for he is the depth of all subtlety, the Satan that deceiveth the whole world. *He can hide himself under all forms of goodness.* He can watch and fast, write and instruct, pray much and preach long, give alms to the poor, visit the sick, and yet often get more life and strength and a more unmoveable abode in these forms of virtue than he has in publicans and sinners.

Enjoin me, therefore, whatever you please. All rules, methods, and practices will be welcome to me if you judge them to be necessary in this matter.

Theophilus.—There is no need of a number of practices or methods in this matter. *For to die to self, or to come from under its power, cannot be done by any active resistance we can make to it by the powers of nature.* For nature can no more overcome or suppress itself than wrath can heal wrath. So long as nature acts, nothing but natural works are brought forth, and therefore the more labor of this kind the more nature is fed and strengthened with its own food.

But the one true way of dying to self is most simple and plain. It wants no arts or methods, no cells, monasteries, or pilgrimages; it is equally practicable by everybody; it is always at hand; it meets you in everything; it is free from all deceit, and is never without success.

Commentary

In this short passage there are two thoughts on which Law dwells repeatedly at length in his writings. The one, that self can hide himself under all forms of goodness, and gets a more unmoveable abode in these forms of virtue than he has in publicans and sinners. This thought ought to alarm us all. Self can watch and fast, pray much and preach long; self can become religious, take pleasure in its duties, and be exceeding diligent in its services. Law wants to lead us to dying to self, but this cannot be until we know what self is. If we do not know to

seek him where he hides in his cloak of religion, all teaching and effort will be vain. We may be ready to die to his pride and sin, and not know that his stronghold is in the temple. Self will even offer to lead and to help us in dying to self. It is only when we begin so to fear his terrible subtlety as to give up all hope of discovering him and bringing him to execution that we shall come to that real dying to self to which Law would fain bring us—a sense of our utter inability to deal with self, a giving up all hope of conquering him, the entire casting of ourselves, in utter despair, on God alone to do the work.

This is what, as a second thought, is more distinctly expressed in a following sentence: To die to self, to come from under its power, cannot be done by any active resistance we can make to it by the powers of nature. How much mortification of self there has been, both in what was external and what appeared more inward; how much of penance and penitence, of scourging and self-loathing, which was nothing but the work of self! It is only when the soul is brought to believe in its own entire and utter impotence to deal directly with this monster that it will begin to get an insight into the absoluteness of the surrender to God and the trust in Him, which is needed if He alone is to do the work for us and in us. Christ conquered sin by dying to it. We died in Him, and are, even as He, dead to it. As we live "always bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus," bearing *His dying* in us,

the dying to self will be real and true. Nothing that we do ourselves can have any good in it, because it is self working in us. The good in us is the work of God's Spirit, and it is all preparatory to that full death to self to which He seeks to bring us, and in which we are entirely yielded up to God to work all in us.

All failures of the Christian life are due to this one thing, that we seek to do in our own strength what God himself by His Spirit alone can work in us. Let us weigh well Law's words: To die to self, to come from under its power, cannot be done by any active resistance we can make to it by the power of nature. To exchange the life of self for the life of God, to come out of the darkness of self into the light of God, is a work we cannot do. It is the man who ceases from self, who sees and accepts in the death of Christ his death to self, and his entrance into the life of God as a gift from heaven, on whom the light of God will rise.

14. *The One True and Immediate Way of Dying to Self*

Theophilus.—If you ask what this one, true, simple, plain, immediate, and unerring way is, it is *the way of patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God*. This is the truth and perfection of dying to self; it is nowhere else, nor possible to be in anything else, but in this state of heart.

Theogenes.—The excellency and perfection of these virtues I readily acknowledge; but alas!

sir, how will this prove the way of overcoming self to be so simple, plain, immediate, and unerring as you speak of? For is it not the doctrine of almost all men and all books, and confirmed by our own woeful experience, that much length of time, and exercise, and variety of practices and methods are necessary, and scarce sufficient, to the attainment of any one of these four virtues?

Theophilus.—When Christ our Saviour was upon the earth, was there anything more simple, plain, immediate, unerring than the way to Him? Did scribes, pharisees, publicans, and sinners want any length of time or exercise of rules and methods before they could have admission to Him or have the benefit of faith in Him?

Theogenes.—I don't understand why you ask this question, nor do I see how it can possibly relate to the matter before us.

Theophilus.—It not only relates to, but is the very heart and truth of the matter before us; it is not appealed to by way of illustration of our subject, but it is our subject itself, only set in a truer and stronger light. For when I refer you to *patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God* as the one simple, plain, immediate, and unerring way of dying to self or being saved from it, I call it so for no other reason but because you can as easily and immediately, without art or method, by the mere turning and faith of your mind, have all the benefit of these virtues, as publicans and sinners

by their turning to Christ could be helped and saved by Him.

Commentary

In the first sentence of the above passage you have a straight answer to the question, What is the true way of dying to self? How can a man be led to understand and desire and find what the death to sin and self in Christ gives him? It is the way of patience, meekness, humility, resignation to God. Dying to self, turning away and ceasing from it, refusing to be led by it, can be effected in no other way but just bowing low before God in the confession of sin and impotence and the patient waiting for His work in us. The whole of the remainder of this dialogue is devoted to the exposition and enforcing of this one lesson. He never wearies of repeating the expression: patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God; in what remains of the dialogue it occurs some thirty times.

Here you have the truth and perfection of dying to self; it is in this state of heart alone that it is to be found.

Some will be in danger of thinking this advice too simple: how can these simple virtues of humility and meekness bring this high attainment—the death of self? Others will think the prescription beyond their reach—they think they need the death to self before they can be humble and meek. Let me beg of all to be patient; as they go on they will see how, if the death to

self be for sinners such as we, and if it is to be wrought in us by the operation of God, the only possible way to it must just be our sinking down into our own helplessness and humbly and patiently resigning ourselves to God to work it in us.

And note especially before you leave the passage that dying to self brings immediate deliverance. If you look back to the first section, you will remember what we found there of two ways of seeking goodness, and a twofold state of goodness, the one of promise and preparation, the other of fulfillment and possession. When Law speaks of the certain and immediate help which Christ can give in this matter, he does so because he knows that this is the best way for wakening desire and drawing us on in that path of preparation which leads to the full birth of the Spirit of Love. He does so because he is going to point us to a Saviour who still says, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"; to a Saviour who, in His infinite power, waits to impart to us all that He won for us by His death to sin and His being made alive unto God. Nothing will so help to awaken strong and urgent desire for deliverance from self; to convince of the sin of our unbelief as the great hindrance in the way; to steady and strengthen our aim after nothing less than just such immediate and definite help as Christ gave to those who came to Him on earth; or to see that we can come to Christ now in the same simplicity of faith, and the same assurance

of help, as once brought the sick and the blind to Him.

Let us learn, whatever our experience be of the power of self, in its sin or its impotence to conquer sin, in its open outbreaks or its hidden power, to see that here is the only cure—at once gently to sink down before God in a humility that confesses its nothingness; in the meekness that bows under and quietly bears the shame we feel: in a patience that waits God's sure deliverance; and a resignation that gives itself entirely to His will, and power, and mercy. As easily and immediately as sinners, by turning to Christ, were saved by Him, will you, by the turning of your heart to them, receive the blessed rest they bring.

15. *The Simplicity of Faith*

Theogenes.—But, good sir, would you have me then believe that my turning and giving up myself to these virtues is as certain and immediate a way of my being directly possessed and blessed by their good power as when sinners turned to Christ to be helped and saved by Him. Surely this is too short a way and has too much of miracle in it to be now expected.

Theophilus.—I would have you strictly to believe all this in the fullest sense of the words. And also to believe that the reasons why you, or anyone else, are for a long time vainly endeavoring after and hardly ever attaining these first-rate virtues is because you seek them in the way they are not to be found, in a multiplicity

of human rules, methods, and contrivances, and not in that simplicity of faith in which those who applied to Christ immediately obtained that which they asked of Him.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." How short, and simple, and certain a way to peace and comfort, from the misery and burden of sin! What becomes now of your length of time, and exercise, your rules, and methods, and round-about ways, to be delivered from self, the power of sin, and find the redeeming power and virtue of Christ? Will you say that turning to Christ in faith was once indeed the way for Jews and heathens to enter into life and be delivered from the power of their sins, but that all this happiness was at an end as soon as Pontius Pilate had nailed this good Redeemer to the cross and so broke off all immediate union and communion between faith and Christ?

What a folly would it be to suppose that Christ, after having finished His great work, overcame death, ascended into heaven, with all power in heaven and on earth, was become less a Saviour and gave less certain and immediate help to those that by faith turn to Him now than when He was clothed with the infirmity of our flesh and blood upon earth? Has He less power after He has conquered than while He was only resisting and fighting with our enemies? Or has He less good will to assist His Church, His own body, now that He is in heaven than He had to assist publicans, sinners, and heathens before

He was glorified as the Redeemer of the world? And yet this must be the case if our simply turning to Him in faith and hope is not as sure a way of obtaining immediate assistance from Him now as when He was upon earth.

When Christ was upon earth, nothing was more simple, plain, immediate, and certain than the way of coming to Him. There was no length of time, no multiplicity of rules or methods to be observed: all who came in the simplicity and humility of a faith that knew it could not help itself, and turned from itself to Him, found immediate access and relief. And now that Christ is in heaven and has taken His place on the throne of grace, there has been no change in the way to come to Him: now that we cannot see Him, more than ever the way to Him, and to be helped by Him, is a way of faith. Faith in Him can bring an immediate and effectual deliverance from self.

When He was upon earth, the miracles that He wrought were for the most part wrought on the body. Now that He has been glorified in heaven and received from the Father the wondrous gift of "all power in heaven and on earth," He waits to work far greater miracles in them who can believe in them. The otherwise altogether incurable disease of the soul, the dominion of self, from this He can deliver them that trust Him for it. So far from His exaltation to the throne having rendered His help less sure, or less accessible, or less free for our faith to claim, it calls us to a confidence and assurance

such as those who were with Him never could have had. Read the third paragraph of the above extract over again, and let your heart be strengthened with the faith that He who is mighty to save can heal your disease, and that faith in Him is the one simple, only, and immediate way to obtain it.

Only, let there be no wrong conception of the way in which this healing of your great disease is to come. Many would fain have that it should come by the death and entire removal of self. This is not the way. The death of self is something very different from the death to self which God's Word holds out to you. When Jesus died to sin, He did not slay sin in the sense of killing and annihilating it. No, sin is still living and reigning in all who submit to it, whether willingly or reluctantly. He died to it so that it had no more power to tempt or persecute Him. You are partakers of His death to sin, and to self, in which sin works; and the healing of your disease which He now gives is the power of His death to sin and His living unto God in such a way that He frees you from the dominion of self, so that you live in Him and His life, dead to it. As sure as those who believed in Him were healed of whatever disease they had, so surely does He still give healing to those who have the courage to trust Him for this wonderful blessing.

And now, whether you have accepted this divine gift of deliverance but still need to have opened up to you what it implies and how you can stand in its full enjoyment, or that you are

longing for some insight into it and the way to possess it, turn at once, even this moment, to Christ as the one only and most certain deliverer from the power of self.

16. *This Way of Dying to Self the Very
Perfection of Faith*

Theogenes.—You seem, sir, to me to have stepped aside from the point in question, which was not whether my turning or giving myself up so Christ in faith in Him would do me as much good as it did to them who turned to Him when He was upon earth, but whether my *turning in faith and desire to patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God* would do all that as fully for me now as faith in Christ did for those who became His disciples.

Theophilus.—I have stuck closely, my friend, to the point before us. Let it be supposed that I had given you a form of prayer in these words: "O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world; or, O Thou bread that comes down from heaven; or, O Thou that art the resurrection and the life, the light and peace of all holy souls, help me to a living faith in Thee." Would you say that this was not a prayer of faith in and to Christ because it did not call Him Jesus or the Son of God? Answer me plainly.

Theogenes.—What can I answer you but that this is a most true and good prayer to Jesus, the Son of the living God? For who else but

He was the Lamb of God and the bread that came down?

Theophilus.—Well answered, my friend. When, therefore, I exhort you to *Give up yourself in faith and hope to patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God*, what else do I do but turn you directly to so much faith and hope in the true Lamb of God? For if I ask you what the Lamb of God is and means, must you not tell me that it is and means *the perfection of patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God*? Can you say it is either more or less than this? Must you not therefore say that a faith of hunger, and thirst, and desire of these virtues is in spirit and truth the one very same thing as a faith of hunger, and thirst, and desire of salvation through the Lamb of God? Consequently, every sincere wish and desire, every inward inclination of your heart that presses after these virtues, and longs to be governed by them, is an immediate, direct application to Christ, is worshipping and falling down before Him, is giving up yourself to Him, and the very perfection of faith in Him.

Commentary

Theogenes asks Theophilus whether he has not changed his line of argument when, for the expression, turning in faith and desire to patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God, he substituted that of faith in Christ. Theophilus answers that he had changed the expression of set purpose. What is Christ, the Lamb

of God, he asks, but the very embodiment of humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God? These were the virtues which constituted Him the Lamb of God, which gave worth to His sufferings, which worked out our salvation, and form a most important part of them; how can anyone desire or receive Christ truly without desiring and receiving these virtues? It is only the heart that really sees them to be the very nature and glory and life of the Lamb of God, that desires them, and turns to Him for them, that can really believe on and receive Him unto salvation.

It was great wisdom in Law thus first to put these virtues, in which dying to self actually consists, and then afterwards lead up to the Lamb of God, in whom they are to be found. How many Christians there are who seek after and trust in a suffering Christ as their atoning Lamb, but who have never sought or accepted the meek and lowly Lamb of God in the moral glory of His Lamb nature to be their life. And yet this is the salvation God offers. The blood of the Lamb has rent the veil and brought us nigh to God that now we might be followers of the Lamb, and He lead us in the path in which He walked, in the very dispositions and tempers which made Him well-pleasing to God. He could never have died to sin had it not been for His humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God. And He cannot possibly make us actually partakers of that blessed death to sin in any way other than by leading us, in meek-

ness and lowliness, to forsake self and give up ourselves to God as His own as He did. In conscious helplessness, as often as self would assert itself, at once to sink down in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God is the very perfection of faith, and at the same time the very perfection of dying to self.

It is this true faith in the Lamb of God that brings us immediate help, as did the faith of the sufferers who came to Him on earth. In one aspect there is indeed a great difference. The bodily healing was something that was given once for all, and rendered a man independent of Christ. He might go and forget Him. The spiritual healing is something infinitely more blessed; it renders a man for every moment dependent on the unceasing immediate contact with his Redeemer. This need, however, of ever-renewed communication of health does not make the fact of the healing less immediate or less certain. The very moment the soul lets go itself and its strength and sinks down in its nothingness into the humility and meekness of Christ, it is at once made whole. His humility and meekness become our life and our hope and our rest. And if we learn to tarry there in the power with which the Lamb will keep those who trust Him, in the power of the death which He died at Jerusalem, the rest will be abiding.

17. *"Learn of Me: I Am Meek and
Lowly of Heart"*

Theophilus.—If you distrust my words, hear

the words of Christ himself: "Learn of me [says He], for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Here you have the plain truth of our two points fully asserted—*first*, that to be *given up to, or stand in desire of, patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God* is strictly the same thing as to learn of Christ, or to have faith in Him. *Secondly*, that this is the one simple, short, and infallible way to overcome or be delivered from all the malignity and burden of self expressed in these words, "And ye shall find rest unto your souls."

And all this because this simple tendency or inward inclination of your heart to *sink down into patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God* is truly giving up all that you are and all that you have from fallen Adam. It is perfectly leaving all that you have to follow and be with Christ. It is your highest act of faith in Him, and love of Him, the most ardent and earnest declaration of your cleaving to Him with all your heart and seeking for no salvation but in Him and from Him. Therefore, all the good and blessing, pardon and deliverance from sin that ever happened to anyone from any kind or degree of faith and hope and application to Christ is sure to be had from *this state of heart, which stands continually turned to Him in a hunger and desire of being led and governed by His spirit of patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God.*

Oh, Theogenes, could I help you to perceive

or feel what good there is in *this state of heart*, you would desire it with more eagerness than the thirsty hart desireth the water-brooks. You would think of nothing, desire nothing, but constantly to live in it. It is a security from all evil and all delusion. This is no difficulty or trial, either of body or mind, no temptation, either within you or without you, but what has its full remedy in *this state of heart*. You have no questions to ask of anybody, no new way that you need inquire after, no oracle that you need to consult; for while you *shut up yourself in patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God*, you are in the very arms of Christ, your whole heart is His dwellingplace, and He lives and works in you as certainly as He lived in and governed that body and soul which He took from the Virgin Mary.

Commentary

When Christ called the weary to come to Him and said He would give them rest, He added, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls." There is a difference between His giving the rest and our finding it. A child asks me if he may have money for something he wishes to buy. I consent and tell him where he can find it in my study. He goes and then returns saying he cannot find it. He had not listened properly to my directions, and so the money I had consented to give he did not find. There are many who come to Christ for rest and yet never find that perfect rest He

promised. The reason is, they do not learn of Him as the meek and lowly One. All our unrest comes from self. When we learn in meekness to bow before what God or man does to us, all our unrest is gone at once. Christ, the meek and lowly One, and His meekness in our heart give perfect rest.

"I am meek and lowly of heart." With these words Christ tells us wherein His power of giving rests and of saving us from the unrest of sin consists. His meekness is His power to save, is the salvation He gives. Learning of Him means learning to be meek and lowly like Him. Self is proud and refuses to bow to God; to bow in meekness before God with Christ, like Christ, in Christ, is the sure and only way of being delivered from self. Let us even now, at once, thus come to Christ and begin to learn of Him. Let every discovery of what self is and does be met at once by this our only hope—learning of Jesus, the meek and lowly One.

Note especially in the above passage the sentence in the second paragraph, "The inward inclination of your heart to sink down into patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God is truly giving up all that you are and all that you have from fallen Adam; it is perfectly leaving all that you have to follow and be with Christ." The whole blessedness of our salvation consists in our being saved from ourselves and what we are through Adam. No exertions or performances of our own can do anything in the least to free us from ourselves or to destroy

self. What other way can there then be to the death to self but the humble, patient yielding ourselves to God to take possession of us and to work in us. When Christ died upon the Cross, what was that death as a death to sin but a meek, patient, humble yielding of himself to God's will and into God's hands, counting on Him to raise Him again? And what can possibly be our death to sin, our participation in Christ's death, our death to self, but the same sinking down before God and abiding and living before Him in that meek and patient resignation, which leaves all to Him to work, which confidently depends and patiently waits upon him.

No wonder Theophilus cries out, "O Theogenes, could I help you to perceive or feel what good there is in this state of heart, you would desire it with more eagerness than the thirsty hart desireth the water-brooks. You would think of nothing, desire nothing, but constantly to live in it."

18. Follow This Christ

Theophilus.—Learn whatever else you will from men and books, or even from Christ himself, besides or without these virtues, and you are only a poor wanderer in a barren wilderness, where no water of life is to be found. For *Christ is nowhere but in these virtues*; and where they are, there is He in His own kingdom. From morning to night let this be the Christ that you follow, and then you will fully escape all the religious delusions that are in the world, and,

what is more, all the delusions of your own selfish heart.

For to seek to be saved by *patience, meekness, humility of heart, and resignation to God* is truly coming to God through Christ. And when these tempers live and abide in you, as the spirit and aim of your life, then Christ is in you of a truth, and the life that you then lead is not yours but Christ that liveth in you. For this is following Christ with all your power; you cannot possibly make more haste after Him, you can have no other way of walking as He walked, no other way of being like Him, of truly believing in Him, of showing your trust in Him and dependence upon Him, but by *wholly giving up yourself to that which He was, viz., to patience, meekness, humility, and resignation to God.*

Commentary

There are many Christs, even among believers. Some one aspect of His work or person is laid hold of and held up to the neglect of others. Let us see whether this Christ, in His humility and meekness and entire devotion to God, is the Christ we trust in and desire after to live and rule in our hearts, and whether the likeness to Him in this is the salvation we seek. Think often of the great truths which prove this humility of Christ to be indeed the very salvation we need, the only salvation we can find. When God created man, to find his blessedness in entire dependence upon Him, and in receiving all life and goodness each moment from Him, hu-

mility was the one condition of his continuing in that blessed state. When man disobeyed and fell it was self-exaltation that drew him from God and became the ruling power of his life and the cause of all sin and wretchedness. When Christ became man it was to restore in humanity that blessed dependence upon God: by His humble, meek, patient resignation to God to atone for our sin and create anew in us the nature of man before the fall. And so it is not only in the very nature of things that a humble resignation to God is the only way of dying to self, but it is the only salvation Christ has to give and the only way of being partaker of His death and life. Therefore, "from morning to night, let this be the Christ you follow."

From morning to night—you want to begin every day very definitely with an Act of humility, recognizing it as the first duty of the day and of your life to get into the right place of dependence before God, in meek, patient, humble resignation to Him. From morning to night—you need to see that it is not only in your morning devotions, when you ask and expect strength for the day, but through the whole day, for every moment of it, that the clothing of humility is to be worn. Many Christians are seeking the death to self as an attainment in the power of which they can work successfully and regard the meek and humble resignation to God only as the gate or passage through which they enter upon this state. They don't understand that this meekness and lowliness of heart is to be the permanent state of heart in which alone the

death to self can be maintained as much as it was the state in which Christ always lived. The meek and lowly heart was the very root and essence of Christ's being and breathing all the way; it is to be ours too. From morning to night, uninterruptedly and unceasingly, let this be the Christ you follow.

19. *Of Covetousness*

Tell me now, have I enough proved to you the short, simple, and certain way of destroying that body of self which lives and works in the four elements of covetousness, envy, pride, and wrath?

Theogenes.—Enough of all reason. But as to covetousness, I thank God I cannot charge myself with it; it has no power over me—nay, I naturally abhor it. And I also now clearly see why I have been so long struggling in vain against other selfish tempers.

Theophilus.—Permit me, my friend, to remove your mistake. Had covetousness no power over you, you could have no other selfish tempers to struggle against. They are all dead as soon as covetousness has done working in you. You take covetousness to relate only to the wealth of this world. But this is but one single branch of it; its nature is as large as desire, and wherever *selfish desire* is, there is all the evil nature of covetousness.

Now envy, pride, hatred, or wrath can have no possibility of existence in you unless there is some *selfish desire* alive in you that is not

satisfied, not gratified, but resisted, or disappointed. And therefore so long as selfish tempers, whether of envy, uneasiness, complaint, pride, or wrath, are alive in you, you have the fullest proof that all these tempers are born and bred in and from your own covetousness; that is, from that same *selfish bad desire* which, when it is turned to the wealth of this world, is called covetousness. For all these four elements of self, or fallen nature, are tied together in one inseparable band. They mutually generate and are generated from one another. They have but one common life and must all of them live or all die together. This may show you again the absolute necessity of our one simple and certain way of dying to self, and the absolute insufficiency of all human means whatever to effect it.

Commentary

Theogenes congratulates himself that of the four elements of self, there is one at least of which he is free. Covetousness he has always abhorred. Of the other three he confesses that Theophilus has taught him the reason why he had been struggling so long in vain against his selfish tempers. He had never understood before how there is no way of conquering self but by dying to it, and how the only way of dying to it is to live ever in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God.

Theophilus takes occasion to point out a serious mistake, and so to warn us against what

may prove a great danger. We remember how he formerly showed us that desire is the first and highest power in the life of the creature, the sure proof of man's divine origin, with his wonderful capacity of desiring after God, of receiving Him, and being satisfied with Him. When sin mastered him, then desire was turned from God to self and the world, and all his sin and wretchedness consists in a ceaseless desire after that which is not God. We confine the word covetousness to this desire turned towards the world; but it really includes all that desire for honor and self-pleasing which is the cause of envy and pride and every sin against love.

To understand this is of great importance. As we know that all the elements of self have one common root, and that, while some people appear more free from one form of it than others, there is in all the same root of evil, we shall feel the need of having the axe laid to the root of the tree. All the branches have one common life, and must all of them live or die together. It profits little to be freed from one form of sin; dying to self, to all our own life, to have the new life of the Spirit of Love born in us is an absolute necessity.

Theogenes admitted that for lack of this knowledge all his struggling against his selfish tempers had been vain. How many Christians there are for whom it would be well to join with him in the confession. It is right and needful to fight with individual sins and to cultivate individual graces. But when this is rested on as

all that we can do, the mistake is fatal to success. Every rising of sin, every attempt to resist and refuse its allurements, must lead us afresh to remember what the secret root of self is in which it has its strength, and what the only way of being delivered from its power. It is Jesus Christ who takes away sin. As sure and immediate as was the power that went forth out of His earthly life to anyone who but touched the hem of His garment is the help that comes from His glorified life in the power of God's throne into the spirit that trusts Him. As a soul sinks down in humility, meekness, patience, and resignation to God, it proves that it consents to the death of self as utterly sinful and impotent, and sets its hope on Christ alone. No one can thus persevere in the path of humiliation and self-emptying without knowing that there is deliverance, and sooner or later experiencing that the life of Christ does triumph over the life of self and takes its place.

20. *Of Despair of Self*

Theophilus.—For, consider only this, that to be angry at our own anger, to be ashamed of our own pride, and strongly resolve not to be weak, is the upshot of all human endeavors; and yet all this is rather the life than the death of self. There is no help but from a total despair of all human help. When a man is brought to such an inward full conviction as to have no more hope from all human means than he hopes to see with his hands, or hear with his feet,

then it is that he is truly prepared to die to self; that is, to give up all thoughts of having or doing anything that is good *in any other way but that of a meek, humble, patient, total resignation of himself to God*. All that we do before this conviction is in great ignorance of ourselves and full of weakness and impurity. Let our zeal be ever so wonderful, yet if it begins sooner, or proceeds farther, or to any other matter, or in any other way than as it is led and guided by this conviction, it is full of delusion. No repentance, however long or laborious, is conversion to God till it falls into this state. *For God must do all, or all is nothing*. But God cannot do all till all is expected from Him. And all is not expected from Him till, by a true and good despair of every human help, we have no hope, or trust, or longing after *anything but a patient, meek, humble, total resignation to God*.

Commentary

Death to self means a total despair of self—that is, to give up all thoughts of having or doing anything that is good in any other way but that of a meek, humble, patient, total resignation of ourselves to God. All that we do in religion without this conviction is in ignorance of what we are, and is often rather the life than the death of self. When we are ashamed or vexed at our own pride, it is simply because we expected something better of ourselves. When we condemn ourselves for having been angry, it is with the hope of not doing so again. When

we purpose not to sin, it is in a secret hope that by our resolve and strength of will, we may be kept from it. All this is the life of self. What we need is to be brought to the inward full conviction that as little as we can see with our hands, can we of ourselves conquer self or sin. It is this alone which will bring us to that entire dependence upon God and that simple faith in Christ Jesus through which the operation of God's Spirit can proceed freely in us.

God must do all, or all is nothing. God cannot do all till all is expected from Him. And all is not expected from Him till by a true and good despair of every human help, we have no hope, or trust, or longing after anything but a patient, meek, humble resignation of all to God. In these three simple sentences we have the sum of Law's practical theology: there is no true good but what God works himself. In the Son and the Spirit, God has again taken possession of man, to dwell and work in him as before the Fall. The one thing God asks of man is faith—that he expect all good from Him alone. And the one hindrance to a true and a full faith is that the meek, humble, patient, total resignation to God, to His mercy and power, is so little known or sought. It is for the lack of this that self exercises such a mighty malignant power in the believer and the Church.

In the believer. Do let us take a firm hold of this truth, that every failure in the Christian life, every outbreak of evil temper, every disappointment because our prayers and efforts ap-

pear to avail so little, is owed to a secret trust we have placed in the power of self within; and that to be delivered from this power nothing will help but in faith to embrace the Lamb of God with His meekness and lowliness, and to wait before Him in patient resignation to God. That gives immediate help. Persevering in that will make us conquerors. He will bring the Spirit of Love to birth in us.

In the Church. Alas! in its divisions, in its fellowship with the world, in its worldly wisdom, in its pride, men giving and accepting honor in so many of its methods and measures, how much there is that painfully proves that self still reigns within God's temple on earth. In the city of God, the Lamb, Meekness, enthroned in the glory of God, is the temple, and is the light thereof. Shall we not seek for ourselves, and all we can reach, to labor and pray that the humility of Christ may take the place of the pride of self? There is not one grace Christ spake of so often during His earthly life as humility. Let it become the one desire and mark of the true believer. Then alone will the glory of God be seen upon His Church as we bow in the dust at His feet. Wait for all from Him alone, and give Him the glory. Then will the life of self make way for the life of love and the life of God.

21. *The State of the Heart*

Theophilus.—And now, my dear friends, I have brought you to the very place for which

I desired this day's conversation, which was to set your feet upon sure ground with regard to the Spirit of Love. For all that variety of matters through which we have passed has been only a variety of proofs that the Spirit of divine love can have no place or possibility of birth in any fallen creature till it wills and chooses to be dead to all self *in a patient, meek, humble resignation to the good power and mercy of God.*

And from *this state of heart* also it is that the spirit of prayer is borne, which is the desire of the soul turned to God. Stand therefore steadfastly in this will, let nothing else enter into your mind, have no other contrivance, but everywhere, and in everything, to nourish and keep up *this state of heart*. Then your house is built upon a rock; you are safe from all danger; the light of heaven and the love of God will begin their work in you, will bless and sanctify every power of your fallen soul; you will be in a readiness for every kind of virtue and good work, and will know what it is to be led by the Spirit of God.

Commentary

Our Lord Jesus said more than once: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The humbling is our part; the exaltation is God's work. It was so with Christ. He humbled himself; therefore God has highly exalted Him. As we desire and follow after and seek a share in His humility on earth, we shall partake of the spirit and power of His glorified life in heaven; we

shall enter with Him into the love of God. It is in the man who seeks to stand unchangeably fixed in the meekness, humility, patience, and resignation of the Lamb of God upon earth, on whom He will rise as the light of heaven, in whom He will give the full birth of the Spirit of Love. After Christ had, for three years, instructed His disciples in humility, He opened up to them, in the last night, the secret of a love in their heart like the love with which He had loved them. The humility that has and seeks nothing of itself or for itself will be crowned from heaven with the Holy Spirit and the fullness of love.

This humility is to be, not a thing of now and then, not only an act repeated from time to time when we pray or when we see self rising and asserting itself, but a state of the heart, the constant and unceasing disposition in which we live and walk before God and men. "Everywhere and in everything, nourish and keep up this state of heart. Then your house is built upon a rock; the light and the love of God will begin their work in you, will bless and sanctify every power of your fallen soul." Put your trust in Christ Jesus, and learn of Him, the author and giver of all meekness and lowliness of heart. Let this be the Christ you receive into your heart. Let His meekness and lowliness be the salvation you receive through His death on the cross. For it is in this state of a heart conformed to the likeness of Christ's heart that God reveals and proves the power of His salvation.

There are many Christians who forget this. Some identify salvation with pardon of sin; others with sanctification; others with the glory of heaven. They do not understand that the first is only the entrance into it; the second its blessed fruit and proof; the third its full manifestation. Salvation itself is the life of God in the soul, that for which man was created, now restored in Christ Jesus. And the life of God in the soul can be possessed in no other way than as the heart receives the operation of God's Spirit, and the indwelling of Christ, and is thus filled with the fullness of God. And the indwelling of Christ can be ours in no possible way but as we have the mind that was in Him as His humility and meekness live in us. Christ's Spirit and likeness can be in us only as far as it is in our heart. This state of the heart, wrought by the renewing and strengthening of the Spirit in the inner man, a turning from self to God, a sinking down with desire and faith into the humility and meekness of the Lamb of God, our Redeemer, is the one preparation for having the Spirit of Love born in us as the Spirit of our life.

22. Of the Feeling of Impotence

Theogenes.—But, dear Theophilus, though I am so delighted with what you say that I am loath to stop you, yet permit me to mention a fear that rises up in me. Suppose I should find myself so overcome with my own darkness and selfish tempers as not to be able to sink from them into a sensibility of *this meek, humble,*

patient, full resignation to God? What must I then do, or how shall I have the benefit of what you have taught me?

Theophilus.—You are then at the very time and place of receiving the fullest benefit from it and practicing it with the greatest advantage to yourself. For though this patient, meek resignation is to be exercised with regard to all outward things and occurrences of life, yet it chiefly respects our own inward state, the troubles, perplexities, weaknesses, and disorders of our own fallen souls. And to stand *turned to a patient, meek, humble resignation to God* when your own impatience, wrath, pride, and irresignation attacks yourself is a higher and more beneficial performance of this duty than when you stand turned to meekness and patience when attacked by the pride, or wrath, or disorderly passions of other people. I say, *stand turned to this patient, humble resignation*, for this is your true performance of this duty at that time; and though you may have no comfortable sensibility of your performing it, yet in this state you may always have one full proof of the truth and reality of it; and that is, when you seek for help no other way, nor in anything else, neither from men nor books, but wholly give yourself to be helped by the mercy of God. And thus, be your state what it will, you may always have the full benefit of this short and sure way of resigning yourself to God. And the greater the perplexity of your distress is, the nearer you are to the greatest and best relief, provided you have

but *patience to expect it all from God*. For nothing brings you so near to divine relief as the extremity of distress.

Commentary

"Suppose I find myself so overcome by my own darkness and selfish temper as not to be able to practice the full resignation to God, what am I to do? What good will the advice you give do me?" The question asked by Theogenes is one that will come to almost everyone who earnestly seeks to walk in the way of dying to self. He will not be long before he feels that he has not in him the humility and meekness he longs for. A sense of his utter impotence casts him down. Instead of feeling meek and humble, he feels the darkness and selfishness of his old nature assert itself. The lesson, with its promised blessing of dying to self fails us, and only leaves us further from humility and resignation than we were before.

Listen to the answer: Now is the very best time for testing the teaching you have received, and receiving the fullest benefit from it. It is not a question of the feelings but of the will. In regard to the virtues in question, Law has used the expressions, "Giving up yourself to"; "Standing in a desire, longing after"; "Standing, turned to, patience, meekness, resignation." We are not at once to look within to feel whether we are meek and humble, or whether we feel able to sink down into humility as we wish. "I

say, stand turned to this patient, humble resignation, for that is wholly leaving and giving up yourself to be helped by the mercy of God."

In the path that leads to God through death to self, this is one of the most important lessons a Christian has to learn. We look within to our own feelings, either to what we feel we have attained of true humility and resignation, or to what we feel of power to sink down into it, and when we discover the opposite of what we long for, we lose hope and strength. Let every Christian learn that it is the will that is the ruling power; that it is the will by which God judges us; that it is the will in which faith has its strength; that it is the will to which the Holy Spirit is given to conquer.

The face of our darkness and selfishness overcoming us, instead of keeping us back, must be our greatest inducement at once to sink down and resign ourselves to God. The desire to do so is accepted by God, and he who perseveres will soon prove that deliverance comes. Read again the two last sentences of the passage and let your very darkness and helplessness ever bring you low before the God whose power and mercy are waiting to help you. Let no lack of feeling, no sense of coldness or sinfulness discourage you. The more helpless you feel, the greater reason for at once turning to Him who alone can take away sin. Humility is the first of all virtues before God; is the only thing that can put us in the way of being helped; and has a divine promise of certain blessing.

23. *Of the Divine Operation*

Theophilus.—And the greater the perplexity of your distress is, the nearer you are to the greatest and best relief, provided you have but *patience to expect it all from God*. For nothing brings you so near to divine relief as the extremity of distress. For the goodness of God hath no other name or nature but the helper of all that wants to be helped. Nothing can possibly hinder your finding this goodness of God, and every other gift and grace that you stand in need of. Nothing can hinder or delay it but your turning from the only fountain of life and living water to some cracked cistern of your own making, to this or that method, opinion, division, or subdivision among Christians, carnally expecting some mighty things, either from Samaria or Jerusalem, Paul or Apollos, which are only and solely to be had by worshipping the Father in spirit and truth, which is then only done when your whole heart, and soul, and spirit trusts wholly and solely *to the operation of that God within you* in whom we live, move, and have our being. And be assured of this, as a most certain truth, that we have neither more nor less *of the divine operation within us*, because of this or that outward form or manner of our life, but just and strictly in that degree, as our faith, and hope, and trust, and dependence upon God is more or less in us.

Commentary

In this passage there is an expression that

must be carefully weighed. It occurs twice. "When your whole heart trusts wholly and solely *to the operation of that God within you*, in whom we live." "We have more or less of the *divine operation within us*, in the degree that our trust and dependence upon God is more or less in us." It is one of Law's favorite expressions in all his later writings. His last book, *An Humble Address to the Clergy*,¹ expounds, and proves, and applies with wonderful power the truth that all our religious goodness is to be had as wholly and solely from God's immediate operation, as we had our first goodness from Him at creation. That that which comforts, and enlightens, and blesses, which gives peace, and joy, and goodness, can be had in no other way but from God's immediate operation in us. He proves that the whole work of redemption in the soul of man is and can be nothing else but the inward, immediate, continual operation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, raising up again in the soul that first life to which our first father died.

Every believer accepts the truth of the operation of God within him, and believes that without it he cannot have the divine life. But this general belief profits little unless we not only understand but with our whole heart believe that this immediate continual operation of God is not one thing along with others through which we are blest, but the one essential thing to which alone

1. *The Power of the Spirit. An Humble Address to the Clergy* by William Law. J. Nisbet & Co.

we owe anything that is to be called religion or goodness.²

It is as this is apprehended that the need will be felt of what is said in one passage—"your whole heart trusting solely and wholly to the operation of God within you." The reasonableness and necessity will be seen of the demand that our whole life should become nothing but a meek, humble, patient resignation to God and His power. And our whole soul will be filled with abhorrence of that self which usurps God's place, professes to do God's work, and robs us of our heavenly birthright: God himself living and working in us.

Let everyone who would be a true Christian ponder deeply the fact that more than he can conceive depends upon his becoming intimately

2. In the *Spirit of Prayer Law* writes: "That thou mayest be more firmly assured that the resignation to and dependence upon the working of God's Spirit within thee is right and sound, I shall lay before thee two great, and fundamental, and infallible truths, which will be as a rock for thy faith to stand on. First, that through all the whole nature of things, *nothing* can do or be a real good to thy soul but the operation of God upon it. Secondly, that all the dispensations of God from the fall of Adam were only for this one end, to fit, prepare, and dispose the soul for the operation of the Spirit of God upon it. These two truths, well and deeply apprehended, put the soul in its right state, in a continual dependence upon God, in a readiness to receive all good from Him. All that is grace, redemption, salvation is nothing else but so much of the life and operation of God found again in the soul."

acquainted with this operation of the Triune God within him; and what is still more, upon his continually experiencing it.

24. *Our Heart the Way to God*

Theophilus.—What a folly, then, to be so often perplexed about the way to God! For *nothing is the way to God but our heart*. God is nowhere else to be found, and the heart itself cannot find Him, or be helped by anything else to find Him but by its own love of Him, faith in Him, dependence upon Him, resignation to Him, and expectation of all from Him.

These are short, but full, articles of true religion, which carry salvation along with them, which make a true and full offering and oblation of our whole nature *to the divine operation*, and also a true and full confession of the Holy Trinity in unity. For, as they look wholly to the Father, as blessing us with *the operation of His own Word and Spirit*, so they truly confess and worship the Holy Trinity of God. And as they ascribe all to, and expect all from, this Deity alone, so they make the truest and best of all confessions, that there is no God but one.

Your foundation standeth sure while you look for all your salvation through the Father, working life in your soul by His own Word and Spirit, which dwell in Him and are one life both in Him and you.

Commentary

“Nothing is the way to God but our heart.”

This is a hard saying. You thought your heart was your great hindrance on the way to God. The state of your heart is your continual sorrow, and almost leads you to despair. How can it be that the heart is the way to God? And yet it is so. Your heart is your life; and your life can be altered only by that which is the real working of your heart. You can know nothing of God, can receive no grace, can experience no working of the divine presence or power, but in the heart. The heart cannot find God but by its own faith *in* Him and expectation of all *from* Him. All our salvation is in the heart. Scripture speaks very awful things of the natural, evil heart, and it says very wonderful and blessed things of the regenerate heart. It is when the penitent sinner listens to Scripture that he learns to know, what he never thought or saw, how evil his heart is. If the believer would listen to and believe what Scripture says of the new heart His Father hath given him, with the Holy Spirit sent into it to dwell in it and to keep it and fit it for everything it has to do, he would understand and rejoice in this word: Our heart is the way to God, because there and there alone, but there most surely, the effectual operation of the Holy Trinity is carried on.

You say you feel or observe so little of this operation within you. I can well believe it. The reason is that it is a divine, hidden working to be accepted in faith before it is felt. And because most Christians do not take time and stillness and trouble in God's presence to give themselves wholly to this working, and to get

the spiritual assurance of its being carried on effectually, they cannot know it. As we said in the last sentence of the previous paragraph, we have more or less of the divine operation within us, just and strictly in that degree as our faith, and trust, and dependence upon God is more or less in us. No wonder, when we take so little trouble to live by the faith of this operation of God, that we know so little of it.

And how is this to be remedied? By ceasing to look at what we can see in our hearts, and concentrating our whole strength upon believing what God is doing there, and waiting to do. Science tells us that however strong the wind is that sweeps the surface of the sea, and however high the waves may run, in the unseen depths below all is perfect calm and rest. It is even so with the new heart. On the surface the winds that blow may raise storms, and in the multitude of our thoughts and doubts, our resolutions and prayers, our efforts and failures, all may be perplexity and darkness. But lower down there is a hidden depth where the Spirit of God dwells and the peace of God reigns. But you do not know it, and have no benefit from it, because you never have let the sounding line of faith down to where the Spirit hides himself from sight. He refuses to discover himself to anything but a childlike, trustful faith. Oh, begin and honor the Holy Spirit and Triune God, as they dwell and work in you, by never thinking of your heart without believing and rejoicing that God is there. God has given you the new heart, cleansed by faith, with the love of God shed abroad by

the indwelling Spirit, amid the surrounding sin that dwells in your flesh. That sin is ever seeking to enter; it does enter and get the upper hand the moment you cease believing and yielding to the divine operation. As often as the motions of sin arise, lose no time in seeking either to condemn or to conquer them, but retire at once into your fortress, the secret place of the Most High, by believing that God through His Spirit is in you. He will mortify the deeds of the body and of the heart, which have been such a weariness to you. You will say, "My heart rejoiceth." I beseech you, as earnestly as you believe in the mighty power of God working in you, believe that your heart is its scene, is His abode and working-place. Let your heart be very sacred, as the palace and temple of the King! You will then say with joy: "Our heart is the way to God."

Now read the passage over again, and say if you do not begin to see better why a meek, humble, patient resignation to God, as a state of heart, is the one condition of really, truly finding and appropriating Christ, is the one only way of dying to self, is the one only way to God himself, and the experience of His presence and power in the soul.

PART FOUR

Of the Life of God in the Soul

25. *The Lamb of God Breathing His Nature into Us*

Theogenes.—I can never thank you enough, Theophilus, for this good and comfortable answer to my scrupulous fear. It seems now as if I could always know how to find full relief in *this humble, meek, patient, total resignation of myself to God*. It is, as you said, a remedy that is always at hand, equally practicable at all times, and never in greater reality than when my own tempers are making war against it in my own heart.

You have quite carried your point with me: *the God of patience, meekness, and love* is the one God of my heart. It is now the whole bent and desire of my soul to seek for all my salvation in and through the merits and mediation of *the meek, humble, patient, resigned, suffering Lamb of God*, who alone hath power to bring forth the blessed birth of these heavenly virtues

in my soul. He is the bread of God that came down from heaven, of which the soul must eat, or perish and pine in everlasting hunger. He is the eternal love and meekness that left the bosom of His Father to be himself *the resurrection of meekness and love* in all the darkened, wrathful souls of fallen men. What a comfort it is to think that this Lamb of God, Son of the Father, light of the world, who is the glory of heaven and the joy of angels, is as near to us, as truly in the midst of us, as He is in the midst of heaven! And that not a thought, look, and desire of our heart that presses towards Him, longing to catch, as it were, one small spark of His heavenly nature, but is in as sure a way of finding Him, touching Him, and drawing virtue from Him as the woman who was healed by longing to touch the border of His garment.

Commentary

In some previous passages we saw how closely Christ and the virtues which accompany the death to self are connected. We saw that the desire after these virtues is a desire after Him in whom alone they are found, is a turning to Him with the desire of being led and governed by His Spirit of meekness, humility, and resignation to God. We are now led a step farther. Theogenes sees that God is the God of patience, meekness, and love, and says, "It is now bent and desire of my heart to seek for all my salvation through the merits and mediation of the meek,

humble, patient, resigned, suffering Lamb of God, *who alone hath power to bring forth the blessed birth of these virtues in my soul.*" All the teaching about turning to these virtues, and so dying to self, was only to show the soul what was needed to waken desire, and so prepare for a living, true faith in the Lamb of God and what He has to impart to us.

Christ not only died for sin as a guilt, but to sin as a power. It came to Him with its temptation, its promises, and its threats. He resisted unto blood. In its rage it slew Him. He died to it and all its power. He was forever beyond its reach. Just as Adam—and in him we—died to God and heaven when he rejected them, so in Christ and with Christ we died to sin and its power. It is only as, by a faith wrought by the Holy Spirit, we accept God's declaration that we are dead to sin in Christ, and reckon ourselves to be so, that we are able to take up the true position towards sin, as those who know they are delivered from its power. In this lies hidden the secret of true holiness.

And what, now, was the disposition that animated Christ in His death, the spirit that gave it its worth and power and made it a death of sin? It was the humility that bowed under the curse of sin, the meekness that bore all God and man laid on Him, the patience that let God take His own time, the resignation in perfect obedience to His will and love. Through this alone it was that He died to sin and rose to live to God. And it is through this spirit alone

that the death to sin in Christ enters and masters the believer's life. At creation man was made to live in humble dependence on God. In the fall this was the one thing that he lost—his self-assertion ruined him. In redemption this was the one thing he needed, to be brought back to this blessed place of humility and resignation to God. In Christ this was the one thing by which and for which He saved us, as the meek and lowly Lamb of God. He wrought out for us, and by His own Spirit made us partakers of, a human nature of which humility was the chief glory.

And every believer who is seeking to apprehend Christ in the power of His death to sin, or has apprehended it and longs to know its power, has ever, before everything else, in all His intercourse with God, just to sink down in humility and meekness before God. That is his proof that he shares in the death of Christ; that is his surrender of self to death ever anew. That is what will keep him from trusting not a false or imaginary Christ, but the very Lamb of God whose humility opened for Him and for us the way to the glory of God.

Do you see it? This humility, meekness, and surrender to God in which the death to self consists is to be found in Christ alone. Seek them with your whole heart. Seek them in Him by a spirit-breathed faith that makes you one with Him, and receive from Him, the Lamb of God, these virtues in which His salvation consists, which He waits to bring forth in you. Read now

again the last paragraph of our passage.

26. *The Marks of the Beast*

Theogenes.—This doctrine also makes me quite weary and ashamed of all my own natural tempers, as so many marks of the beast upon me. Every whisper of my soul that stirs up impatience, uneasiness, resentment, pride, and wrath within me shall be rejected with a "Get thee behind me, Satan," for it is his and has its whole nature from him. To rejoice in a resentment gratified appears now to me to be quite frightful. For what is it in reality but rejoicing that my own serpent of self has new life and strength given to it, and that the precious Lamb of God is denied entrance into my soul. For this is the strict truth of the matter. For to give in to resentment, and go willingly to gratify it, is calling up the courage of your own serpent, and truly helping it to be more stout and valiant and successful in you. On the other hand, to give up all resentment of every kind, and on every occasion, however artfully, beautifully, outwardly colored, and *to sink down into the humility of meekness* under all contrariety, contradiction, and injustice, always turning the other cheek to the smiter, however haughty, is the best of all prayers, the surest of all means, to have nothing but Christ living and working in you, as the Lamb of God that taketh away every sin that ever had power over your soul.

What a blindness was it in me to think that I had no covetousness because the love of self was not felt by me? For to covet is to desire; and what can it signify whether I desire this or that? If I desire anything but that which God would have me to be and do, I stick in the mire of covetousness, and must have all that evil and disquiet living and working in me which robs misers of their peace both with God and man.

Commentary

Once again we are led to think of self and its works. Theogenes confesses how he now begins to see the evil of giving way to resentment, and the folly of thinking that covetousness only meant a miser's love of money.

Of the former he says that he now sees that his natural tempers are all so many marks of the beast. That to give in to resentment residing in the heart is nothing but rejoicing; that the serpent of self has new life and strength given to it, is calling up the courage of your own serpent and helping it to be more successful in you. He sees that to sink down into the humility of meekness under all contradictions and injustice is the surest means to have Christ living in you as the Lamb of God who taketh away every sin that ever had power over a soul.

There are two lessons we have to learn here. The one is, that when we speak of the death to self, we must beware of not confining it to our relation to God, and using strong language

about our nothingness before Him, while in our communication with our fellowmen self seeks and has its own way. The humility and meekness and patience and resignation to God which we seek, which we see in the Lamb of God, for which we turn to Him in faith, are specially needed for, and must be proved in, our communication with men. It may be easy to try and humble ourselves before the great God—who would not do that?—but before our fellow sinners—it is this that is hard. It is this the Lamb of God can give. His meekness stood the test of man's provocation and ingratitude. If ours is to do so, we need every morning, every hour, to sink down into Christ's humility, and believe in it as our only safeguard in daily life, our only strength to walk in lowliness and love all the day.

The other lesson is, that every rising or outbreak of evil, of anger, or selfishness, or pride must ever be regarded as a mark of the beast—a proof of the presence of the serpent in our paradise, and at once urge us to turn to the Lamb of God, not only for deliverance from that outbreak, but for that promised indwelling by which the Spirit of Love becomes our whole life, and we are made more than conquerors through Him who loved us, and in His love makes His abode with us. It is the promised seed alone, in His indwelling presence, who can bruise the serpent's head.

All this is equally true of what Theogenes says of his great mistake about covetousness

being only love of money. "If I desire anything but that which God would have me be or do, I stick in the mire of covetousness." If we look at the extent to which Christians indulge with the world, in the pursuit of comforts and luxuries, of pleasures and possessions—if we think of what a large part attention and devotion of the soul is given to being, and having, and doing all we see others around us are, and have, and do, we cannot wonder that the self which is fostered and nourished by all this should in other directions exercise an irresistible power.

Everything points us to the one thing: It avails little to resist the workings of self; a death to self is our only hope. We must die to self, and that death the Lamb of God died for us that He might share it with us. As we gaze upon the cross in the humility, and meekness, and patience, and resignation to God He showed there, let us turn to Him, with the desire to be like Him, with the faith that makes us like Him. Let us in His name sink down in deep humility and meekness, and give and leave ourselves in God's hands.

27. *Oh, Sweet Resignation to God!*

Theogenes.—Oh, sweet resignation of myself to God, happy death of every selfish desire, blessed unction of a holy life, the only driver of all evil out of my soul! be thou my guide and governor wherever I go! Nothing but thee can take me from myself, nothing but thee can lead me to God; hell has no power where thou

art, nor can heaven hide itself from thee. Oh, may I never indulge a thought, bring forth a word, or do anything for myself or others but under the influence of this blessed inspiration.

Forgive, dear Theophilus, this transport of my soul! I could not stop it. The sight, though distant, of this heavenly Canaan, this Sabbath of the soul, freed from the miserable labor of self, *to rest in meekness, humility, patience, and resignation under the Spirit of God*, is like the joyful voice of the Bridegroom to my soul, and leaves no wish in me but to be at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Commentary

Oh, sweet resignation of myself to God. Happy death of every selfish desire! Blessed unction of a holy life! All the teaching of the previous pages is gathered up in this passage. Resignation to God includes everything that has been said on the humility, meekness, and patience of the Lamb of God. It reminds us, what we cannot repeat too often or study too earnestly, that man was created to receive all his goodness and happiness from God in an unceasing direct communication; and that therefore the giving up himself to God is the root of all Christian experience and blessedness. Christ came to restore us to that state: there was no possibility of anything better or higher—to live in unceasing blessed dependence on God. He came to live out a human life, as Adam should have lived it, with the meekness and lowliness of a lamb

as its spirit. He so conquered sin and redeemed us from its power that He can live this life in us and make resignation into God's hands the habitual spirit of our life. It was His humbling himself that fitted Him to be our Saviour; it is His humility that is our salvation. Salvation is making us humble as He was.

It often takes a long time before this truth, even when known and accepted, fully dawns on the soul. We then begin to see: As there is only one God, so, for the creature and the sinner, the one duty towards Him is the humility that gives Him His place and is content to receive everything from Him alone. We begin to see that in every prayer, in every thought, in every moment of our life, we need just one thing—to take the place of humility and dependence before God, of a meek and patient resignation or giving up of ourselves into God's hands. This humility will then no longer be to us one among a number of other virtues, not even the chief of all the virtues, but the one essential condition and root of the life of grace. We shall see that all other graces—peace, love, joy, faith, devotion, service—have their beginning here, because it alone places and keeps us in the posture of dependence where God can work in us.

Oh, sweet resignation to God! It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that the word has not only a passive sense, as we apply it to a meek and patient submission to His will in providence, but also includes the exercise of the active power of obedience as the surrender

to the performance of His commands. In prophecy God had revealed the work Christ had to do as well as the sufferings He had to endure; both were equally to Him the will of God; He gave himself with a perfect resignation into the will of God to do all He commanded and to suffer all He appointed. We may often find that as we long to turn to Christ in true humility, meekness, and patience, under a sense of our impotence and nothingness, there is still something that hinders and disturbs our finding perfect rest. See whether it be not this, that in something or other, in some little thing perhaps, we are still doing our own will, or are not careful to know fully all that God wills. Full resignation to God's will, a wholehearted giving up of ourselves to the blessed perfect will of God, will bring perfect rest. Let the resignation of submission ever be accompanied by the resignation of obedience.

"Oh, sweet resignation of myself to God! be thou my guide and governor wherever I go! Nothing but thee can take me from myself; nothing but thee can lead me to God! Freed from the miserable labor of self, to rest in meekness, humility, patience, and resignation under the Spirit of God, is like the joyful voice of the Bridegroom to my soul." Let everyone who is seeking for the birth of the Spirit of Love in his soul, and is willing to sell all that he may become the owner of the treasure, of which even the sight is so delightful, listen again to and mark well the voice of his guide: "Humble

yourselves under the mighty hand of God; he shall exalt you in due time." Bow and rest under the covering of the Spirit in the humility, meekness, patience, and resignation of the Lamb of God. Make it your one care, your one desire, your continual prayer and practice to learn of Him who is meek and lowly of heart: ye shall find rest to your soul. Seek only the one thing—to come out of self in giving up all to God, to walk before God in the fellowship of Christ's death to sin and self, to keep the very lowest place before God, and He in His love and power will in due time exalt you.

28. *The Marriage Feast of the Lamb*

Theophilus.—Thither, Theogenes, you must certainly come, if you keep to the *path of meekness, humility, and patience, under a full resignation to God*. But if you go aside from it, let the occasion seem ever so glorious, or the effects ever so wonderful to you, it is only preparing for yourself a harder death. For die you must to all and everything that you have worked or done under any other spirit but that of *meekness, humility, and true resignation to God*. Everything else, be it what it will, hath its rise from the fire of nature; it belongs to nothing else, and must of all necessity be given up, lost, and taken from you again by fire, either here or hereafter.

For these virtues are the only wedding garments; they are the lamps and vessels well furnished with oil.

There is nothing that will replace them; they must have their own full and perfect work in you, or the soul can never be delivered from its fallen, wrathful state. And all this is no more than is implied in this Scripture doctrine, viz., that there is no possibility of salvation but in and by *the birth of the meek, humble, patient, resigned Lamb of God in our souls*. And when *this Lamb of God has brought forth a real birth of His own meekness, humility, and full resignation to God in our souls*, then are our lamps trimmed and our virgin hearts made ready for the marriage feast.

This marriage feast signifies the entrance into the highest state of union that can be between God and the soul of this life.

Commentary

Keep to the path of meekness, humility, and patience, under a full resignation to God. These virtues are the only wedding garments: they are the lamps and vessels well furnished with oil. There is nothing that will replace them. All this is implied in the Scripture doctrine, that there is no possibility of salvation but in and by the birth of the meek, humble, patient, resigned Lamb of God in our soul.

In a previous passage we read of the meek and patient Lamb of God, who alone hath power to bring forth the birth of these heavenly virtues in the soul. Here we come one step still further: our salvation is by the birth of the meek, humble, patient, resigned Lamb of God himself in our

souls. It is when this Lamb of God, by giving himself within us, has brought forth a real birth of His own meekness, patience, and full resignation to God in our souls that our virgin hearts are made ready for the marriage feast—the highest state of union between God and the soul that can be in this life. This was the union between God and the soul for which man was created here on earth in a life of loving, adoring humility and dependence, receiving all from God even as Christ when on earth. This is redemption and this is salvation, when Christ as the Lamb of God is formed in and dwells within us, and in the love that passeth knowledge fills us with the fullness of God.

To all this, humility and resignation to God is the only entrance and the sure access. It alone is deliverance from self: it follows the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; it yields the whole being to, and receives the full operation of, the power of God in the heart. It is itself the highest blessedness, freedom from all desire that is not after God, the very image of God's Son, the object of His complacency and delight, the only adornment He seeks in the temple in which He dwells.

Blessed Humility! how shall we seek and find thee? Turn the whole desire of thy heart towards it, seeking soul. Sink down into thy own nothingness. Lift up thine eyes to the God of glory looking on thee and loving thee, and waiting to give and work all in thee. And if thou findest there is that in thee which will not, which cannot be, humble, turn thy longing eyes to the

Lamb of God. *There is the humility of God prepared for thee.* There thou hast thy Redeemer, who gives thee all He is and has. Let this be thy humility, that thou dost confess thou hast none of thy own, that thou art content to receive His as thine, and so to abide in thy nothingness, while all the glory is His. Let every desire for humility draw thee out of thyself to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Then, with every thought of Christ, turn into thy heart with the assured faith that this is thy salvation, the birth of the meek, humble Lamb of God in thy soul.

And if the fear comes that all thy longing for Him and turning to Him and believing in Him is too feeble, just remember, it is His own Holy Spirit who has wakened these desires and this love of humility, who is moving and drawing thee towards himself. He who has worked in thee the beginnings of a love of humility, will, with divine certainty and power, beget within thee the meekness and resignation of the Holy Lamb of God.

29. *The Birthday of the Spirit of Love*

Theophilus.—This marriage feast signifies the entrance into the highest state of union that can be between God and the soul in this life; or, in other words, it is *the birthday of the Spirit of Love* in our souls, which, whenever we attain, will feast our souls with such peace and joy in God as will blot out the remembrance of everything that we called peace or joy before.

All that we have said of the necessity of the

fallen soul's dying to self, *by meekness, patience, humility, and full resignation to God*, is strictly the same thing and asserted from the same ground as when it was said that the three first properties of nature must have their wrathful activity taken from them by the light of God breaking in upon them, or manifesting itself in them.

Therefore, as sure as the light of God, or the entrance of the Deity into the three first properties of nature, is absolutely necessary to make nature to be a heavenly kingdom of light and love, so sure and certain is it that the creaturely life, that is fallen from God under the wrathful first properties of nature, can have no deliverance from it, cannot have a birth of heavenly light and love, by any other possible way but that of dying to self, *by meekness, humility, patience, and full resignation to God*.

And the reason is this. It is because the will is the leader of the creaturely life, and it can have nothing but that to which its will is turned. And therefore it cannot be saved from, or raised out of, the wrath of nature till its will turns from nature and wills to be no longer driven by it. But it cannot turn from nature, or show a will to come from under its power, any other way than by *turning and giving up itself to that meekness, humility, patience, and resignation to God*, which, so far as it goes, is leaving, rejecting, and dying to all the guidance of nature.

And thus you see that this one simple way is, according to the immutable nature of things,

the one only possible and absolutely necessary way to God. It is as possible to go two contrary ways at once as to go to God any other way than this.

Commentary

We are now coming to the close of Law's book on the Spirit of Love, and to the special point this third dialogue was to deal with. He had started with the one truth that God is love—an infinite and unchangeable will to communicate all His own goodness and blessedness to His creatures, and that this love of God was meant to be our life. After expounding how creation and redemption were the manifestation of this love, he had undertaken, in this Golden Dialogue, to teach the way for us to enter into it, and really be blessed with the Spirit of Love filling our hearts. Having shown us the need of an actual divine birth of this love within us, the deadly evil of self, and the necessity of dying to it if this new life is to born in us, he opened up the one only way to this death—that living faith in the Lamb of God which receives Him into the heart, with those virtues which constituted Him a Saviour, a meek and humble resignation and obedience to God. When this Lamb of God has brought forth a real birth of His own meekness, humility, and resignation to God in our souls, then are our virgin hearts made ready for the marriage feast—*then is the birthday of the Spirit of Love in our souls.*

This is surely nothing more or less than our

blessed Lord meant when He spoke of our abiding in His love even as He abode in the Father's love. And He makes it such a blessed possibility, such a divine certainty, by telling us that as the Father loved Him, even so has He loved us. It was the Father's love to Him, when He slept an unconscious infant on His mother's knee, or hung on the cross, or lay in the grave—it was the infinite love of God that kept Him and filled His heart. That love was His life. It is with that same love Christ loves us now. If we only believe in its infinite lovingness and longing to impart itself to us and get possession of us—for that is the very nature of love and the very power divine love has—how we should count upon the love holding us fast, and open our whole hearts to be filled with it. To the soul that in utter self-despair will die to self and meekly yield itself to God to do His work, there is a birthday of the Spirit of Love and entrance into Christ's love to abide there and have it abide in him.

And the way to abide there, when we have entered, is so simple and so sure. Jesus says, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Some think the abiding in the love an impossibility because the keeping of the commands is impossible. Our Lord surely does not mock us by telling of a way that cannot bring us to the blessed life He offers. No, He assures us that we are to keep the commandments *even as He kept them*. God

is our Husbandman, who cares for the branches as much as for the Vine, and works in them all He worked in Him. Christ is our Vine, to impart all His life and spirit and strength to us, His branches. Christ the loving one is Christ the obedient one: He imparts His obedience as much as His love. His love enables us to obey. Oh, do not think that Christ speaks of abiding in His love as an impossible blessing, or keeping His commandments as an impossible way. Would you mock a hungry cripple at your door by inviting him in to an abundant meal that was waiting when you knew he could not rise to come in? Would you not help him in? And can we not count upon our Lord Jesus, when He flung the door wide open—"Abide in my love"—and when He points out the way in which He walked, which He himself is—"Keep my commandments"—to bring us in? Do let us turn in meekness and humility to the meek and lowly Lamb of God. He will bring forth in our souls His own humility and that obedient resignation to God which can and will keep the commands.

"Love is the Christ of God; wherever it comes, it comes as the blessing and happiness of every natural life, as the restorer of every lost perfection, a redeemer from all evil, a fulfiller of all righteousness, and a peace of God which passeth all understanding. Through all the universe of things, nothing is unsatisfied or restless, but because its nature has not attained the full birth of the Spirit of Love." "Abide in my love": the infinite love of Jesus stretches

out its arms and longs to take us up in its embrace, longs to have our heart for its abode. Let our religion become more a faith in, and communion with, and obedience to, a personal Lord Jesus, loving us personally and tenderly. We shall soon believe and know and feel that there is such a blessing as the birthday of the Spirit of Love. And if we have not yet attained, let us turn in great simplicity and humility to the Lamb of God, who alone can bring forth this birth in them that follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

30. *This Way to God Absolutely Infallible*

Theophilus.—But what is best of all, this way is absolutely infallible; nothing can defeat it. And all this infallibility is fully grounded in the twofold character of our Saviour: (1) As He is the Lamb of God, *a principle and source of all meekness and humility in the soul.* (2) *As He is the Light of eternity,* that blesses eternal nature, and turns it into a kingdom of heaven.

For, in this twofold respect, He has a power of redeeming us, which nothing can hinder; but, sooner or later, He must see all His and our enemies under His feet, and all that is fallen in Adam into death must rise and return into a unity of an eternal life in God.

For as the Lamb of God He has all power to bring forth in us a sensibility and a weariness of our own wrathful state, and *a willingness to fall from it into meekness, humility, patience,*

and resignation to that mercy of God which alone can help us. And when we are thus weary and heavy laden, and willing to get rest to our souls *in meek, humble, patient resignation to God,* then it is that He, *as the light of God and heaven,* joyfully breaks in upon us, turns our darkness into light, our sorrow into joy, and begins that kingdom of God and divine love within us which will never have an end.

Commentary

In a passage of exquisite beauty and depth, the whole teaching of the book is now summed up. The reason is given why this one simple way of turning to the Lamb of God is the only and infallible way. The reason is this: Because the two sides of the truth that have been presented, dying to self and living in love, are found perfectly united in Christ as the Lamb of God.

As the Lamb, He is on the one hand the principle and source of all meekness and humility in the soul. On earth He humbled himself to enter into our weakness, and both in life and death He proved himself the meek and patient Lamb of God. He was and did all this for no other reason but that He might work out such a nature and disposition as we needed, and impart it to us. In carrying out this, His blessed saving work, it is He who wakens in us the sense of weariness with our own sin, and makes us willing to sink down under it into the meekness, humility, patience, and resignation to that mercy of God which alone can help us.

We need to believe this. The work of the Lamb of God is not only to die and atone for our sin. By no means. But it is to be our leader in that path of submission and obedience in which alone the creature can be blessed. As leader, He really leads us, drawing us on, inspiring and enabling us to walk in His footsteps. If we now would only believe that every feeling of weariness and unrest, every sense of evil and impotence, is the stirring of His Spirit within us, how we should turn from all our struggles and self-reproach, in stillness to yield to His working, and in meek and humble resignation to expect deliverance nowhere but from God himself.

When the soul has thus known and bowed before Him, then, as the Lamb on the throne in that city of God, of which it is said, "The Lamb is the light thereof," He rises upon the soul as the light of heaven, and begins that divine kingdom of love within us which shall never have an end. The Lamb of God, meek and lowly of heart, can give rest to our souls in no other way but by making us partakers of His meekness and lowliness. Do let us believe that, as we accept that meekness and lowliness on earth as our dwelling-place, as the air we breathe, and the light in which we walk, the Lamb on the throne will make himself known to us in His heavenly life and power, and shine into us with the light of the glory of God. The meekness and lowliness of earth are inseparably linked to the light and the love of heaven. Bow in all thy sinfulness and feebleness in meek and patient

resignation to God, and rest there; thou mayest be assured the light of God will rise on thee.

The death to sin, and to self as its instrument, in the fellowship with Christ, the Lamb of God, gives an infallible entrance, even in this life, into a life in the light and love of God.

Seek fellowship with Him in His meekness on earth; receive Him in His lowliness into your heart as its one hope and love, and you may be sure His glory, as the Lamb on the throne, will become your light. Give Him a place in the depth of your heart, and, with every rising of self, sink down in His presence in humility, and meekness, and stillness of soul. You will know Him as the Lamb on the throne.

31. *Salvation the Life of God in the Soul*

Theophilus.—Need I say anymore, Theogenes, to show you how to come out of the wrath of your evil earthly nature, into *the sweet peace and joy of the Spirit of Love*? Neither notions, nor speculations, nor heat, nor fervor, nor rules, nor methods can bring it forth. It is the child of light, and cannot possibly have any birth in you but only and solely from the light of God rising in your own soul as it rises in heavenly beings. But the light of God cannot arise or be found in you by any art or contrivance of your own, but *only and solely in the way of that meekness, humility, and patience, which waits, trusts, resigns to, and expects all, from the inward, living, life-giving operation of the Triune God within you; creating, quickening, and reviving*

in your fallen soul that birth, and image, and likeness of the Holy Trinity, in which the first father of mankind was created.

Theogenes.—You need say no more, Theophilus. You have not only removed that difficulty which brought us hither, but have by a variety of things fixed and confirmed us in a full belief of that great truth elsewhere asserted, namely, "That there is but one salvation for all mankind, and that is the life of God in the soul. God is one, human nature is one, salvation is one, and the way to it is one, and that is the desire of the soul turned to God."

Therefore, dear Theophilus, adieu. If we see you no more in this life, you have sufficiently taught us how to seek and find every kind of goodness, blessing, and happiness in God alone.

Commentary

Here we now have Law's summing up of the whole. He has shown us how to come out of the wrath and wretchedness of our evil, earthly nature into the sweet peace and joy of the Spirit of Love. But before he parts he must first once again utter a word of warning. "Neither notions nor speculations, heat nor fervor, rules nor methods, can bring it forth." No clear reasonings nor beautiful mental conceptions of the truth, no warm feelings of admiration or earnest purpose to attain it, no strict obedience of laws of life or conduct can give it us. The Spirit of Love is the child of light, and cannot have any birth but from the light of God, in His own free

grace and power rising on the soul. No art or contrivance of religion can bring it; it can arise only in that way of meekness, humility, and patience which expects all from the inward operation of the Triune God within you, creating again in your fallen soul the image of the Holy Trinity, that is, that likeness to God in his life and being in which our first father was created.

Can words make it plainer that our salvation is from God alone? And that our only hope of salvation is in turning to that Lamb of God who opened up the way to the Father, and now lives to lead us to the Father in the way of His own footsteps? And that all hindrance in the way of salvation comes wholly and solely from the ignorance or the self-will that will not turn from its own efforts to the humility and meekness and patience and resignation to God, which the holy Lamb of God begets in them that trust in Him, and in which He causes the light of heaven to shine in the soul?

Let the warning with which Theophilus closes his teaching remind us of that with which he began. It is only by a birth from above, it is only by a birth from the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit of Love, that the love of God can enter and possess us. Let every lesson of this book, or of any book, or of God's Book, make us turn to the Holy Spirit, who is secretly dwelling and working in us to lead us in the true and living way, and to work in us what is needed, that the death to self and the life unto God may be our experience. *Of all that we see in the word,*

or in Christ, the Holy Spirit bears to us the truth and reality. What is above sense and reason He can work in the inward part. With all we know or do not know, with all we feel or do not feel, with all we seek and have not yet found, let us turn meekly and humbly to the hidden operation of God's Spirit within us. Through Him the Triune God will show forth in us all the riches of His glory and lead us into His life of perfect love.

And let the parting words of Theogenes be ours: "You have confirmed us in a belief of that great truth, that there is but one salvation, and that is the life of God in the soul. And that there is but one way to it, the desire of the soul turned to God. Therefore, dear Theophilus, adieu. You have sufficiently taught us how to seek and find every kind of goodness, blessing, and happiness in God alone."

Appendix A

There is just one point on which a word of explanation may be needful—the expression “dying to self.” It is said that to speak of our dying to sin or self is at variance with Scripture, which teaches us that we *have died*, that we *are dead* to sin.

I am most deeply convinced of the importance of the blessed truth that we have died to sin in Christ, that our only strength for deliverance from its power is in the faith of Him, and that that faith is to manifest itself in our reckoning ourselves as dead unto sin and alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord. I am fully persuaded that only as, by the Holy Spirit, we accept this divine revelation concerning ourselves, and live and act in it, we can experience that victory over sin which God has provided for us.

But how then still speak about dying to sin or self? My answer is this: The truth of the death to sin and self is so far beyond the spiritual capacity of most Christians, because the power of the Holy Spirit is so little known, that their

hearts need to be prepared and their desires roused to seek after it. And I think that there is nothing that will so much help to this as Law's teaching in this little book. As he shows them what self is, why a death to self is the only way to be delivered from it, what the dispositions are which the death to self will be manifested in, how impossible it is for us to give ourselves these dispositions, how the sincere desire after them will lead us to the Lamb of God as the only one in whom and whose death they are to be found, and how faith in Him unites with Him in the wondrous salvation of which Romans 6 speaks. Dying to self is the duty of every sinner as the only way to be freed from that sinful self: as he somewhat understands this, and discovers his own utter impotence to effect it, the attempt to obey the command will prepare him for the glorious gospel, "Reckon yourselves dead." Dying to self is the expression of the willingness and endeavor that will alone prepare for the death self provided in Christ.

This appears to be in harmony with the course our Lord took with His disciples when He commanded them to deny themselves and take up their cross. Dying to self is nothing but entirely denying self. The one is as impossible as the other. And yet our Lord commanded it as the simple duty of those who would follow Him. How utterly the disciples failed we know. But the words helped to waken thought and desire, and so to prepare them for entering fully into the fellowship of *His* cross and *His* death.

There is still another point of view from which it appears very helpful. There are many who strive to reckon themselves dead in Christ, and yet know very little of what that death of our Lord, in which they share, meant to Him. They have never seen aright that the value of that death, and its power to atone for sin, consists entirely in the dispositions that animated Him in it. His humbling himself as a servant, His obedience to the Father's will, His meekness and patience as the Lamb of God, His entire surrender of His will and His spirit into the Father's hands—it is in this Christ's death to sin consisted. Those who, reckoning themselves dead to sin, claim their partnership in Christ's death, need to know that it is not only a judicial, but an actual spiritual participation in all that His death means. To such there is nothing more needful or helpful than to have this indispensable need for dying to self unfolded to them. One great reason that our being dead to sin in Christ remains such an inexplicable mystery, or else such a powerless article of faith, is that they have never seen the need or the desirableness of a real dying to self. The teaching of dying to self may be the schoolmaster to Christ and the true death to self in Him. It is only as men see what they ought to be and do, and strive after it, and find they cannot attain to it, that the offer of a death in Christ will get meaning, and power, and attractiveness.

Those who are dead to sin and alive to God in Christ are called to yield themselves to God

"as alive from the dead." Their whole life is to bear the death-marks, as Christ the risen one bore the marks of the wounds. The most advanced believer will feel the need of ever studying more deeply the wonderful spirit of that death. Nothing will show more its perfect adaptation to our human life than ever to lay the two alongside each other, and in the study of our dying to self to learn what it is we are to find in our Lord's death to sin as it becomes ours. Our death and our living unto God unites us in Christ in a spiritual birth that must lead on to a spiritual growth, with the maintenance and development and application of all the powers contained in the birth as a bud. The two principles of death and life run together through the whole of the redeemed life. Paul thus says, "I die daily"; "Death worketh in me"; "Always bearing about the dying of Jesus." This death of Jesus to sin once for all completed on the cross, once for all given to the believer in regeneration, once for all seen and embraced when the Holy Spirit reveals it—this death to self has to be maintained as the law of our life in the daily denial of self. And this denial of self, surrender of self, this continual self-effacement in the power of our death to self in Christ, is nothing but the daily dying to self. The more complete our apprehension of the spiritual meaning of Christ's death to sin and ours in Him, the more wholehearted will be our obedience to Christ's command to deny that self—the more real, in the power of His

death working in us, our dying daily to it.

Once again: Christ's death for sin and to sin was not at the beginning but the end of His life. He needed to be prepared for it by a life in which He learned obedience. Souls that are not prepared by strong longing to be delivered from sin cannot apprehend this death to sin, or, if they think they do, they do not live it out. The school of denying self, humbling self, of dying to self with its failures and despair, is indispensable to entering into the full fellowship of death with Christ. Until a soul has been taught to give itself up to death, and found how vain it is, the free gift of a death to sin with Christ cannot be appreciated.

Appendix B

There may be some who fear that all that is said of the birth of the Spirit of Love in us, of the setting up of the kingdom of God and of love in our heart, may lead souls to delight in their own perfection, and so to spiritual self-indulgence. Anyone who remembers Law's definition of love will see how little his teaching would allow of this. Love in God is His unchangeable will to communicate all His own goodness to His creatures as far as they are capable of it. His love entering into us cannot change its nature: it still is a delight to impart itself to others and to bless them. It cannot help loving:

it is rooted in the death of self, and leaves as little room for self-seeking towards man as towards God. It is the very spirit of God and of Christ towards men taking possession of us. It always leads to and gives power for devoted service for men.

The same result will be reached by looking at the Lamb of God in His humbling himself to death. He did it only and solely for the sake of men. No one who truly seeks and enters into His humility, and meekness, and death but will there meet with that love which gave itself to save the perishing. True faith in the Lamb of God as the meek and lowly one must infallibly lead to a love unto death for men.

Whether we speak of the death of self or a sinking down in humility and meekness before God or faith in the Lamb of God, it all means one thing—a deliverance from self to find our liberty and our blessedness in the living sacrifice of ourselves for all around us.