



Love-Slaves

Chapter 11 – Holy Covetousness

'Covet earnestly the best gifts,' wrote Paul to his Officers and Soldiers at Corinth. Not the highest promotions, not the best positions, but 'the best gifts,' those gifts which God bestows upon the people who earnestly covet them and diligently seek Him.

Nero sat upon the throne of the world; he held the highest position in the reach of man; but a poor, despised Jew in a dungeon in Rome, whose head Nero cut off as a dog's head, possessed the best gifts; and while Nero's name rots, Paul's name and works are a foundation upon which the righteous build for centuries and millenniums.

There were deacons, archdeacons, and venerable archdeacons, bishops, and archbishops in England, some hundreds of years ago, who held high places and power, and to whom other men bowed low; but a poor, despised tinker in the filthy Bedford jail had coveted earnestly and received 'the best gifts'; and while these church dignitaries are forgotten by the mass of men, the world knows and loves the saintly tinker, John Bunyan, and is ever being made better and lifted nearer to God by his wise works and words.

Comrades, you and I should seek these 'best gifts' with all our hearts, and we should be satisfied with nothing short of them. It makes but little difference what our position and rank; if we have these gifts we shall have a name and bless the world; but without them we shall prove to be only sham – painted fire and hollow mockery; and the greater our position and the higher our rank, the greater shams we are, and the greater will be our shame in God's great day of reckoning.

What are these gifts?

There is one which in a sense includes them all, the germ of them all is in that – the gift of the Holy Ghost. Have you received the Holy Ghost? Is He dwelling in your heart? Covet Him. Live



not a day without His blessed presence in you.

Then there is the gift of wisdom. Covet this. The world is full of foolish men and women who don't know how to save themselves, nor how to promote salvation and peace among their fellow foolish ones who miss the way, who stumble along in darkness and perish in their folly. The world needs wise men, men who know when to speak and what to say; who know when to be silent; who know God and His way, and walk in it.

God gives wisdom to those that seek Him. 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God,and it shall be given him' – if he ask in faith without wavering. (James i.5.) Nothing will so distinguish a man and exalt him among his fellows as fullness of wisdom.

There are several marks by which to know this heavenly wisdom. James tells us what they are. He says (James iii. 17): 'The wisdom that is from above is first –

'Pure.' The man who is truly wise will keep himself pure. He will flee from all impurity in thought, word, and act. Filthy habits of every kind are broken and put away by this heavenly wisdom.

'Then peaceable.' The man who has this gift and wisdom from God does not meddle with strife. He seeks peace and runs after it. (1 Peter iii. 11.) He is essentially a peacemaker. He has learned the secret of the 'soft answer' which turns away wrath. He is not quick to take offense.

'Gentle.' The man who lives in the Spirit of this world may be rough and boorish, but he who is wise from above is gentle and considerate; and this gentleness may exist in the same heart with lion-like strength and determination. Jesus was as 'a Lamb slain,' but He was also 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah.' He was gentle as a mother and at the same time immeasurably strong.

'Easy to be entreated.' Though he is sinned against seventy times seven in a day, yet this heavenly-wise man stands ready to forgive. (Matthew xviii. 21-35.) His heart is an exhaustless fountain of good will. While, if it be his lot to rule, he rules 'with diligence' (Romans xii. 8), and, if necessary, with vigor, yet he counts not his life dear unto himself, but is willing to lay it down



for the good of his brethren. (Acts xx. 24; 1 John iii. 16.)

'Full of mercy and good fruits.' Like his Heavenly Father he is rich in mercy.' (Ephesians ii. 4.)

'Without partiality ' He is not a party man. He rises above party and class prejudice and is a lover of all men. He stands for 'the fair deal.'

'And without hypocrisy.' There is no guile in his heart, no white lies on his tongue, no double-dealing in his actions. He is square and open and above-board in all his ways and dealings. He lives in constant readiness for the Judgment Day. Blessed be God for such wisdom, which He waits to bestow upon all those who covet it and who ask for it in faith. Covet wisdom.

Then there is the gift of faith. Covet faith. In every man there is, in some measure, the power to believe, but added to this is a gift of faith which God bestows upon those who diligently seek Him. Covet this, O my comrades! Be steady, strong, intelligent believers. Cultivate faith. Stir it up in your hearts as you stir up the fire in your stove. Feed your faith on God's Word.

I once heard a mighty evangelist say that he used to pray and pray for faith, but one day he read: 'Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.' (Romans x. 17.) Then he began to study God's Word and hide it in his heart, and his faith began to grow and grow until through faith his works girded the globe. Covet faith.

Again, there is the gift of the spirit of prayer. Anybody can pray, if he will, but how few have the spirit of prayer! How few make a business of prayer, and wrestle with God for blessing and power and wisdom! Real prayer is something more than a form of words, or a hasty address to God just after breakfast, before the Meeting, or before going to bed at night. It is an intense, intelligent, persistent council with the Lord, in which we wait on Him, and reason and argue and plead our cause, and listen for His reply, and will not let Him go till He blesses us. But how few pray in this way! Let us covet earnestly and cultivate diligently the spirit of prayer.

We should also covet the spirit of prophecy that is, the ability to speak to the hearts and minds



of men so that they shall see and feel that God is in us and in our words. (1 Corinthians xiv. 1-3.) We may not be able to preach like the General, but there is probably not one of us but might preach and prophesy far more pungently, powerfully and persuasively than we do if we earnestly coveted this gift and sought it in fervent prayer, faithful study, and constant and deep meditation. God would help us; and how greatly it would add to our power and usefulness! Let us earnestly covet this gift, asking God to touch our lips with fire and with grace. The people wondered at the gracious words of Jesus; and why should we not be such mouthpieces for Him that they shall wonder at our gracious words too!

Solomon said, 'He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.' And Paul said, 'Let your speech be always with grace.'

But, above all, covet a heart full and flaming and overflowing with love. Pray for love. Stir up what love you have; exercise love. It is good to take the Bible and, with a concordance, hunt out the word 'love' until we know all the Bible says on the subject. And then with a heart full of love, pour it out on the children, the Soldiers, backsliders, and cranky folks, and poor loveless sinners, until that wondrous text has its fulfillment in us Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in His might.' (Judges v. 31.) How the frost and snows melt, the frozen earth thaws, the trees burst into bud and leaf, the flowers blossom, the birds sing, and all nature wakes to a revelry of life and joy when the sun goeth forth in his might!

And we may be so full of love and faith and power and the Holy Ghost that we shall be like that. Hallelujah! Then indeed we shall be a blessing. Souls dead in trespasses and sin shall come to life under our loving ministry and message; the weak shall be made strong, the sorrowing shall receive Divine comfort, the ignorant shall be taught, and heavenly light shall illumine those that are in darkness. Let us then 'covet earnestly the best gifts.'