

Tenderness of Spirit

by G.D. Watson

Tenderness of spirit is a supernatural work of God's sweetness and tenderness that overflows all the mental faculties and saturates the soul with its sweet waters.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Matthew 5:7, Romans 12:15, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12, 1 Peter 3:8

Topics: "Divine Tenderness", "Christian Character"

Description

G.D. Watson preaches about the divine tenderness of spirit as the essence of the Gospel, emphasizing that it is a supernatural work throughout the whole spiritual being, overflowing into every aspect of life. Without this tenderness, even the most religious life is a misrepresentation of the true Christ-life. He highlights that tenderness of spirit is preeminently divine, the very soul and marrow of the Christ-life, and can only be fully known through great suffering, which crushes hearts into heavenly sweetness. Watson also discusses the behavior that accompanies divine tenderness, which is superhuman and heavenly, instinctively avoiding hurting others and embodying limitless charity and forgiveness.

Transcript

It is much easier to convince a human soul of its natural impurity than to convince it of its natural hardness, and utter destitution of heavenly and divine tenderness of Spirit. The very essence of the Gospel is a divinely imparted tenderness and sweetness of Spirit. Without this, even the strongest religious life is a misrepresentation of the true Christ-life. Even among intensely religious people, nothing is more rare to find than a continuous, all-pervading spirit of tenderness.

1. Tenderness of spirit is preeminently divine. It is not the delicacy and soft sensibility of a mere gentle make-up of body and mind, which some persons naturally possess in a high degree. Neither is it the tenderness of mind and manner, which results from high culture and beautiful social training, though these are very valuable in life. But it is a supernatural work throughout the whole spiritual being. It is an exquisite interior fountain of God's own sweetness and tenderness of nature, opened up in the inner spirit to such a degree that it completely inundates the soul. It overflows all the mental faculties, saturating with its sweet waters the manners, expressions, words, and tones of the voice. Tenderness of spirit mellows the will, softening the judgments, melting the affections, refining the manners, and moulding the whole being after the image of Him Who was infinitely meek and lowly in heart. It cannot be borrowed, or put on for special occasions. It is emphatically supernatural, and must flow out incessantly from the inner fountains of the

life, and resembles having every atom of our being soaked in sweet oil.

2. Deep tenderness of spirit is the very soul and marrow of the Christ-life. Without it, the most vigorous life of righteousness, and zeal, and good works, and rigid purity of morals, and missionary reform, and profuse liberality, and ascetic self-denial, and the most blameless conduct, utterly fail to measure up to the Christ-life unveiled in the New Testament. It is impossible to see the infinite excellence and necessity of real heavenly tenderness of spirit unless it is specially revealed to us by the Holy Ghost. It takes a direct revelation from God to enable us to discern what is the very marrow and fatness of Christ's character, the inexpressible tenderness and gentleness of His nature which is always the heart inside of the heart, the soul within the soul, of the Christ-life.

What specific gravity is to the planet, what beauty is to the rainbow, what perfume is to the rose, what marrow is to the bone, what rhythm is to poetry, what sublimity is to the ocean, what the pulse is to the heart, what harmony is to music, what heat is to a human body, all this and much more is what tenderness of spirit is to religion. Without tenderness of spirit the most intensely righteous, religious life is like the image of God without His beauty and attractiveness. It is possible to be very religious, and staunch, and persevering in all Christian duties, even to be sanctified, and be a brave defender and preacher of holiness, to be mathematically orthodox, and blameless in outward life, and very zealous in good works, and yet to be greatly lacking in tenderness of spirit, that all-subduing, all melting love, which is the very cream and quintessence of Heaven, and which incessantly streamed out from the eyes and voice of the blessed Jesus.

Many religious people seem loaded with good fruits, but the fruit tastes green; it lacks flavor and October mellowness. There is a touch of vinegar in their sanctity. Their very purity has an icy coldness to it. They seem to have a baptism on them, but it is not composed of those sweet spices of cinnamon, and calamus, and cassia, which God told Moses to compound, as a fragrant type of the real sweetness of the Holy Spirit. Their testimonies are straight and definite, but they lack the melting quality. Their prayers are intelligent and strong and pointed, but they lack the heart-piercing pathos of the dying Jesus. The summer heat in them is lacking. They preach eloquently and explain with utmost nicety what is actual and original sin, and what is pardon and purity, but they lack the burning flame, that interior furnace of throbbing love, that sighs and weeps, and breaks down under the shivering heat of all-consuming love.

3. This all-pervading tenderness of spirit is not a novitiate grace. It is not a product of April but of October. It is not the sap that flows up in the grape vine in early spring, but it is the sweet wine, the pure, unfermented juice of the grape, which is crushed out under the mighty squeeze of the winepress. Real tenderness of spirit can never be known except through great suffering. Nothing but the winepress of sorrow can yield it, and it matters not what shape the trial may be, whether an unutterable sorrow for sin, or extreme poverty, or great physical pain, or relentless persecution, or the wear and tear of a thousand daily annoyances, or the agony of unrequited love, or life-long loneliness, or heart-breaking disappointment. These or any other forms of sorrow only constitute the shape of the wine-press, but the result may be the same, and that is the sweetness of heavenly wine from the grapes of crushed, red hearts. There is no saintly character recorded in the Bible or outside of it who did not pass through the wine-press to reach universal tenderness and sweetness of spirit.

It is in connection with Job's manifold and strange sufferings that he says, "God had made his heart soft." It is said that the illustrious Jenny Lind never could melt the hearts of her hearers with her inimitable singing, until her own heart had been crushed with sorrow.

Madame Guyon says that while we are purified from sin by the blood of Jesus yet the attributes and constitution of our nature must be utterly broken under the manifold cross of suffering, to render us divine-like in our feelings and sympathies. And Paul says the weight of glory that will weigh us down, depends on the afflictions through which we pass to work out that result.

We often come across Christians who are bright and clever, and strong, and righteous; in fact a little too bright, and a little too clever, like preternatural brilliance in a black eye, which precedes insanity. There seems so much of self in their strength, and their very righteousness is severe and critical. They have everything to make them saints, except the crushing weight of an unspeakable crucifixion, which would grind them into a supernatural tenderness and limitless charity for others. But if they are of the real elect, God has a wine-press prepared for them, through which they will some day pass, which will turn the metallic hardness of their nature into gentle love which Christ always brings forth at the last of the feast.

4. Divine tenderness of spirit has a behavior to it which is superhuman and heavenly. It instinctively avoids wounding the feelings of others by talking on unpleasant things, wrangling in an argumentative way, by referring to painful and mortifying subjects. It carries its point by ceasing to contend, and wins its opponent by seeming to let him have his way. It cannot scold, or scowl, or threaten; it has lost the power of quarreling. It instinctively buries and forgets all bad things. People who live in hot climates bury their dead very soon after death; in like manner tenderness of spirit lives in the torrid zone of God's love, and quickly buries all putrid things out of its sight.

No scene in the Bible opens up a greater vista into the tenderness of the spirit of Jesus, than where He stooped and wrote on the ground, as if His modest and loving heart did not want to hear the horrible account of evil. As we gaze on the soul of Jesus at that time, we see infinite politeness, both toward the accused and accusers; not a trace of unkindness, or severity to either party. His whole manner and speech and disposition filled the whole air, as with a very sea of refinement, gentleness and inexpressible sweetness of spirit.

This and similar acts of Jesus are like an opening between mountains, through which we look far off on an outspreading silver sea of love, whose every undulation presents a new phase of unspeakable tenderness toward the poor sinner He came to save. Tenderness of spirit makes its home in the bosom of Jesus; and from that holy castle looks out upon all other creatures, good and bad, through the hopeful, pleading medium of the heart that was pierced on the cross. Tenderness of spirit is in divine sympathy with the poor and down-trodden and unfortunate and hated classes of mankind.

It feels for the poor Chinaman and the Negro, or any that are the common butt of worldly scorn. Whenever it hears any of these spoken of in a harsh and bitter way, it feels a dagger pierce its own heart and a tear of sympathy comes to its eye, and a piercing silent prayer ascends from it to that God Who hears the sighing of the prisoner, and the cries of the unfortunate. It feels all things from God's standpoint, and lives but to receive and transmit the spotless sympathies and affections of Jesus. It understands the words of the Holy Ghost, "Be ye tender hearted forgiving one another." Tenderness must be in the very nature, and forgiveness is but the behavior of that nature. All worked in us by the "living Holy Spirit."

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