

Hymn 529, Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

This hymn is included in so many hymnals, that it is almost as common as the classic hymn “Amazing Grace”!

The hymn begins with such a memorable and beautiful extended series of titles for Jesus, that it starts out sounding like a hymn of praise with these words, “Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heav’n, to earth come down...” But it is not a hymn of praise. Rather, it is a hymn of petitions. In other words, as we sing this hymn, we are making a series of requests to God.

The poem is cast into the form of a prayer, and to whom we are praying changes with each stanza. In stanza 1 we pray to Jesus, stanza 2, the Spirit, and stanza 3, God the Father. After beautifully addressing Jesus in the first line, what are we requesting from Him? We are requesting salvation of our souls, and all the mercies that come with it, such as the very presence of God with us in our daily experience.

The hymn presents a picture of two different persons. One person is the picture of the person praying – you or me. We are pictured expressing those things that we all need. For example, we end stanza 1 praying about our trembling heart. What do our trembling hearts need while we are trembling? Listen to the last words of stanza 1, a request made to Jesus, “visit us with Thy salvation, enter ev’ry trembling heart.” What our trembling hearts need when we are trembling is for Jesus to visit us, for Jesus to grant us His salvation, and for Jesus to enter my trembling heart! Because we know that Jesus is “all compassion, pure, unbounded love” we also know that Jesus loves to answer the sinner’s prayer! In stanza 2, we make the converted Christian’s next request – that the Spirit would “take away the love of sinning.”

We said that the hymn presents a picture of 2 different persons? The one was the person praying, which was you or me. Who is the other person presented in the hymn? It is God Himself!

In this hymn we sing words that present a glorious picture of God. Between our many petitions, we find ourselves singing out descriptions of the heart of love of the Triune God that drives Him to save us. Because we are singing about God, we notice that we are singing extreme words: all, every, always, without ceasing, perfect, and perfectly. Stanza 1, about Jesus we sing “all loves excelling.” Stanza 2, about the Spirit we sing that He is the “loving Spirit.” Stanza 3, to God the Father we sing that “...we glory in Thy perfect love.” In Stanza 4, we observe that God is worthy to be worshipped now here on earth, and also forevermore in heaven where we will add actions to our singing, and we declare to God that “we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

May God restore to us the joy of our salvation (Ps.51:12), as we sing this classic hymn together, Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.