

THE LOVE OF GOD

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world; that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I John 4:8-10.

John, the beloved disciple, more than any other of the New Testament writers dwelt upon the love of God. If any man knew the measure of God's love, it was John. He had grasped the hand, looked into the eyes, listened to the voice and felt the throbbing of the heart of Christ as he pillowed his head upon His bosom, but all he could say was "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God!" "What manner of love!" Who can describe it? It is unparalleled, unmerited, unsolicited, unchangeable and unending. It surpasses all finite understanding.

In writing on the subject of this sermon, John said, "God is love." What a simple statement! It contains only three monosyllables. But, what an unfathomable word! It is one of the shortest sentences ever written, but at the same time it is one of the greatest and most profound. It is the fundamental thought of the entire Bible. It is inexhaustible in its meaning. Multiplied thousands of sermons have been preached on this text, and, yet, something new awaits every preacher who studies it and seeks to expound it.

The world never would have known that "God is love," if God had not revealed the fact in His own Word. We owe the knowledge of this glorious truth wholly and solely to the Bible. This remarkable and meaningful sentence, "God is love," is the key-note of the Bible. It is the fundamental truth in the entire Bible.

There cannot be any practical knowledge or experience of the love of God except through the Son of God in whom that love is revealed and the Word of God in which it is recorded. The love of God was never fully known until Christ revealed it and the Bible recorded it.

I. The Proof Of God's Love.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world." If you want to be assured that there is a God of love, a God Who cares, a God Who is seeking to save sinful men, you must turn to the Christ of the New Testament. In no one else than in the Christ of the New Testament do you find that "God is love." Since Christ alone reveals God as the God of love, let us see what He has to say about the love of the Father. Love is the very essence of the nature and being of God. It is emphasized that God's love is altogether different from human love. Men love because they recognize in the object of their affection something that is lovable. But God's love arises out of His own nature. Like some clear fountain, springing up out of the heart of the earth, there wells up constantly and forever from the heart of the Divine Being the love which is Himself. He loves us, not because we love Him, but because He is God.

Because God's love is not evoked by anything in His creatures, it is universal. Therefore, we do not need to question as to whether or not we deserve God's love. Surely no conscious unworthiness need never make us falter in the least in our grasp of the great truth that "God

so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Perhaps this is the biggest thing the Bible says about God. Leave love out and it is difficult to explain God. Leave love out and it is impossible to understand Him. God's love is changeless and undying. Human hate cannot kill it. Human sin cannot kill it. You cannot be bad enough to make God quit loving you. Christ never hated Judas Iscariot. Nor did He hate Pontius Pilate. He never had any hatred in His heart for His murderers, for the Lord Jesus was God, and "God is love." Christ does not hate drunkards and vagabonds and thieves and criminals and prostitutes and murderers. He loves them, for He is God and cannot deny Himself. A soul can never drift so far as to be outside the zone of the love of God, nor fall so deep as to be beyond its reach. God's love was manifested in His giving His only begotten Son to die for us. God made the greatest possible sacrifice for our good. In making the greatest sacrifice in the history of the world, He "gave up" that which was dearest to Him, His own Son. No earthly son was ever as dear to his father as Jesus Christ was to God.

1. The characteristics of God's love.

- (1) It is everlasting in its date. Jeremiah 31:3.
- (2) It is unmerited in its objects. Ezekiel 36:21-23.
- (3) It is immutable in its nature. Psalm 89:30-36.
- (4) It is unspeakable in its value. Ephesians 3:17-19.
- (5) It is eternal in its duration. Ephesians 3:11-12.

2. The manifestation of God's love.

- (1) The greatness and glory of the Person sending: God. Isaiah 57:15.
- (2) The dignity of the Person sent: Christ, the God-man. Hebrews 1:3.
- (3) The place into which He was sent: this world. I John 4:9.

II. The Purpose Of God's Love.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Because "God is love," He manifested Himself in Christ. God loved that we might live. Twice God brought life into the world. Once at the creation He brought life into the world for we read, "He formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." He brought life into the world again at the redemption when He brought eternal life through His Son. Physical life came through God's breath and spiritual life through Christ's blood.

Jesus Christ has many names, and all of them are great and transcendently meaningful. Among the greatest of His names is "The Only Begotten Son." "Father" is an official title designating activities. "Son" is also an official title designating activities. "Father," meaning source, refers to the infinite, eternal and invisible source of all. "Son" means that which, carrying forward omnipotently, omnisciently and omnipresently, expresses the Father. All that the Father ever has done, is doing, and will do is through the sinless Son, the objectification and executive of Deity.

Christ's mission did not originate God's love, but it did reveal it. Christ died for us because God loved us. God loves us in spite of our sins. The real purpose in God sending His only begotten Son into the world was that we might have life through Him.

III. The Provision Of God's Love.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The love of God provides a "propitiation" or "covering" for our sins. When man sinned against the God Who loved him, he deserved to pay the price of his disobedience. He made himself at enmity with God by his wilful disobedience. He deserved the worst, but God provided the best for him. Only God, whose nature and character was that of love, would do this. The love of God breaks down all barriers between God and man through Jesus Christ.

We are not saved because Jesus Christ lived a lovely life, but because He died for us. We are not saved by His teachings, but because of His sufferings. We are not saved because Jesus Christ preached the love of God, but because He propitiated our sins. Calvary is the provision of God's love. His precious and shed blood, being an adequate satisfaction for sin, covers our guilt, making it as if it were not. By means of His precious blood it is completely hidden from before God's holy eyes. It is entirely blotted out.

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.

"When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me:
Lo! it glows with peace and joy.

"When the sun of bliss is beaming
Light and love upon my way,
From the cross the radiance streaming
Adds more luster to the day.

"Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide."

IV. The Priority Of God's Love.

"We love him, because he first loved us" (John 4:19). The priority of saving love is on God's part. The love of God toward us precedes our love for Him. The initiative is always with Him. God's love for us was a reality before we ever loved Him. We did not have any interest in Him at all. Notwithstanding this fact, He loved us. Our redemption sprang from the spontaneous love of God. His love preceded any repentance on our part. Impenitent sinners never would repent if God did not love them first. He loved us compassionately when sin was pleasant to us, when neither the thunders of His law nor the pleadings of His gospel could persuade us to turn from it. His love originates and we simply appropriate.

V. The Product Of God's Love.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11). When we have been the recipients of God's love we should love like Him. Our love to one another is simply God's love to us, flowing into us and through us. That is all it is. Christians are to love those who are God's children, even though some of them may be unlovely, as He loved us. They should also love those who are not saved and seek to persuade them to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.