

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 238

## GOD'S LOVE

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*God is love.*

1 John 4:16

### **Our Purpose**

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

# Free Grace Broadcaster

## GOD'S LOVE

# 238

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# GOD IS LOVE

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

*God is love.—1 John 4:16*

**I**F one perfection of God shines out in redemption with greater effulgence<sup>1</sup> than any other, it is this. Love is the focus of all the rest, the golden thread that draws and binds them all together in holy and beautiful cohesion.<sup>2</sup> Love was the moving, controlling attribute in God's great expedient<sup>3</sup> of saving sinners. Justice may have demanded it, holiness may have required it, wisdom may have planned it, and power may have executed it; but love originated the whole. [It] was the moving cause in the heart of God, so that the salvation of the sinner is not so much a manifestation of the justice, holiness, wisdom, or power of God, as it is a display of His love.

Had not God's love resolved to save man, all His other perfections must have been employed and displayed in destroying man. Love set its heart upon man, yearned to save man, and resolved to embark in the expedient of his salvation. It did this by conceiving a plan that would harmonize all the other attributes<sup>4</sup> of His nature and engage them in the divine and wondrous work of redeeming mercy. It is not, therefore, without reason and design that we make the love of God the concentric<sup>5</sup> truth from which we start.

The character of God as the God of love is but imperfectly apprehended, even by those who are the special objects of His regard. There are but few saints of God who study His character and read His dispensations<sup>6</sup> in the light of this wondrous perfection of His nature. They are awed by His greatness, impressed with His holiness, tremble at His power; but how few are subdued and drawn to Him by His love! They do not, for the most part, conceive that loving view of His character and cherish those kindly thoughts of His mercy that would disarm their minds of the terror of the slave and fill their hearts with the affection of the child. And yet a believing apprehension of God's

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<sup>1</sup> **effulgence** – brilliant shining-forth; radiance.

<sup>2</sup> **cohesion** – state of holding or sticking together.

<sup>3</sup> **expedient** – something done to achieve an objective; means to an end.

<sup>4</sup> See A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>5</sup> **concentric** – common center.

<sup>6</sup> **dispensations** – arrangements of events by divine providence.

loving and lovable character, of the great love with which He loves His saints, lies at the root of all holy, filial,<sup>7</sup> and unreserved obedience.

As there is no such commanding, controlling, all-constraining<sup>8</sup> power as that of love, so, in proportion to the deep view we have of the love of God to us in Christ Jesus, will be the quickened response it awakens of confiding love in our hearts and of obedient love in our lives. May the present unfolding of God, as the “God of love,” dissipate<sup>9</sup> those cold, distrustful, and dishonoring views and feelings of His character and government that we have too deeply cherished, enabling us to read and understand in a new and clearer light the divine and wondrous declaration upon which our meditation is founded: “God is love.” You have thought of Him, perhaps, as the God of holiness, as the God of justice, as the God of power, as the God of judgment; come now and meditate upon Him as the God of love. While you thus muse<sup>10</sup> on this marvelous and soul-subduing truth, may the fire of a responsive affection kindle in your heart and your tongue break forth into thanksgiving and praise.

God is essentially the God of love. The words that suggest our present meditation emphatically declare this: “God is love.” This is, perhaps, the most sublime<sup>11</sup> sentence of the Bible. It is a sentence that could only arise from a divine mind. It is at once simple and grand, intelligible and affecting. It involves a truth in which an angel’s mind might expatiate,<sup>12</sup> and which a child’s can grasp. It reaches to the highest and descends to the lowest intellect.

That the abstract term *love* should be employed, and not the concrete term *loving*, expresses something beyond the ordinary meaning of the word. And what is the truth thus embodied? Just the one we are now attempting to vindicate: God is essentially love. Love is not so much an attribute of God as it is His very essence. It is not so much a moral perfection of His being as it is His being itself. He would not be God were He not love. To deny that He is love would be to deny that He is God. To unrobe Him of this essential quality of His nature would be tantamount<sup>13</sup> to unrobing Him of His essential Godhead. He would not be God were He not love!

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<sup>7</sup> **filial** – having the relationship of a child to a parent.

<sup>8</sup> **all-constraining** – irresistibly urging.

<sup>9</sup> **dissipate** – cause to disappear.

<sup>10</sup> **muse** – meditate upon in silence.

<sup>11</sup> **sublime** – of such grandeur and beauty as to inspire admiration or awe.

<sup>12</sup> **expatiate** – speak or write at great length.

<sup>13</sup> **tantamount** – equivalent; the same as.

As I have remarked, this is the central perfection around which, as satellites, all the others revolve, and from which, as harmonized in the salvation of man, they derive their position and luster. Thus, for example, omnipotence is the power of love; omniscience is the eye of love; omnipresence is the atmosphere of love; holiness is the purity of love; justice is the fire of love. Thus might we travel the circle of the divine perfections, and each one would be found to be but another form of the essential perfection of love.

“In the words, ‘God is love,’ we have a perfect portrait of the eternal and incomprehensible Jehovah, drawn by His own unerring hand. The mode of expression here adopted differs materially from that usually employed by the inspired writers in speaking of the divine perfections. They say, “God is merciful, God is just, God is holy”; but never do they say, “God *is* mercy, God *is* justice, God *is* holiness.” In this instance, on the contrary, the apostle, instead of saying, “God is loving, or good, or kind,” says “God is love,” love itself. By this expression, we must understand that God is all pure, unmixed love, and that the other moral perfections are so many modifications of this love. Thus, His justice, His mercy, His truth, His faithfulness are but so many different names of His love or goodness. As the light that proceeds from the sun may easily be separated into many different colors, so the holy love of God, which is the light and glory of His nature, may be separated into a variety of moral attributes and perfections. But, though separated, they are still love. His whole nature and essence is love. His will, His works, His words are love; He is nothing and can do nothing but love.”<sup>14</sup>

Love is so completely the essence of God that it shines out in every perfection of His nature and is exhibited in every act of His administration. He is nothing and can do nothing foreign to Himself. Consequently, He is nothing and can do nothing in which His love is not an essential quality. All the streams of a fountain must partake essentially of the source from where they rise. All the rays of light, whatever their prismatic hues,<sup>15</sup> must partake essentially of the sun from where they flow. And were not God’s perfections thus modified and softened by love, were they not led on by this commanding perfection of His nature, each one and all combined would be terribly against us. His wisdom would baffle, His power would crush us, His holiness would terrify us, His justice would condemn us, and His truth would

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Payson, *Memoir, Select Thoughts, and Sermons*, ed. Asa Cummings, Vol. 1 (Portland, OR: Hyde, Lord, & Duren, 1846), 460.

<sup>15</sup> **prismatic hues** – qualities of color formed by light passing through a prism.

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stand by, pledged to the stern and utmost fulfilment of their terrible and righteous display.

Now, God is essential love. He is not only loving, but He *is* love; [He] is not only good, but goodness. All others are loving and good, not of themselves, but by derivation.<sup>16</sup> The essence of all creatures is good because God made them so, and so pronounced everything that He made. But they are not essentially good, else they could not change their nature and become bad. God is love from Himself and not from another; He is absolutely, independently love. His love is not a quality or accident of His being, imported into His essence—something foreign to Himself. It is His essence itself. If we admit His eternity—and we cannot rationally deny it—we must admit that love is the eternal, necessary, and independent essence of His being. Creatures are lovable and loving, but God is love. Every creature must necessarily derive its love and its capacity of loving from God. But God derives His love and His power of loving from no other being but Himself.

Here let us pause, in deep adoration of a truth so vast yet so intelligible, so glorious yet so precious! In coming to a God of absolute love—that love flowing to us through the cross of Christ—we feel we are coming to One Whose love can cover over all our sin, misery, and unworthiness, meeting our utmost need, without diminishing a hair's breadth of its boundless sufficiency. It is a great comfort to faith thus to deal with Him Who is essential love, no fear haunting the mind as to the sufficiency of the supply. I may fear that the river may dry out, but not the ocean that feeds it; that the beam may vanish, but not the sun that emits it because their resources are within themselves, independent, and inexhaustible. Thus, when we come to God through Christ, as to a Father Whose nature and Whose name is “love,” we are assured that, whatever other sources of power and sympathy fail, God will never disappoint us, but, accepting our draft<sup>17</sup> upon His all-sufficiency, will honor it to its utmost demand.

This suggests another and a kindred view of God as the God of love. His love is *infinite* in its degree. We have just seen that God and love are sacred synonyms, divinely and essentially the same. His love, therefore, must partake of the infinitude of His being. It is a serious defect in the religion of many that their faith deals too faintly with the infinity of God. This leads to a limiting of the Holy One of Israel.

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<sup>16</sup> **derivation** – obtaining something from a source.

<sup>17</sup> **draft** – drawing off something from a larger source for a special purpose.

Finite beings ourselves, all our ideas and conceptions of God's greatness are bounded by the finite. This "restricting of Jehovah" dwarfs our personal Christianity and robs Him of His divine glory. But God is infinite, and therefore His love to us is boundless and fathomless.<sup>18</sup> This view of His infinite greatness is not to paralyze, but to strengthen our faith; not to repel, but attract us. The very immensity of God is one of our greatest encouragements to approach Him. If David made the greatness of his sin a plea with God for its pardon—"For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psa 25:11)—surely we may plead the greatness of God's love when we ask anything at His hand. And although in thus coming to His infinity, we may appear like a child dipping its tiny shell into the depth of the ocean thinking to exhaust it, nevertheless, small though may be the vessel with which we draw, we must feel that nothing less than infinite love can meet the deep need and [satisfy to the full] the intense yearnings of our soul. In proportion as the Holy Spirit leads us to see the depths of our sinfulness, poverty, and nothingness, we shall learn that nothing less than a God of infinite love, grace, and sufficiency could meet our case.

Approach, then, this love, my reader, with the full persuasion of its infinite measurement. It can fill the large vessel as well as the small, and the small vessel as well as the large, to its utmost capacity. It can flood over all the ruggedness and barrenness of your nature, its sweetly flowing waves filling the shallows and veiling the chafings<sup>19</sup> of life's daily conflict with sin and sorrow. Let not the greatness of your transgressions appall you; let not the deep needs of your soul discourage you; let not the turpitude<sup>20</sup> of your guilt dismay you; let not the intensity of your grief overwhelm you. You deal with a God Whose love is infinite and can infinitely more than reach the farthest extent of your need. Come with your great and your minor sins; come with your deep and your shallow needs; come to His infinite ocean of love, in which the elephant may swim, and the lamb may wade.

From *Our God*, in the public domain.

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**Octavius Winslow (1808-1878):** Nonconformist pastor; born in London, England, raised in New York, buried in Abbey Cemetery, Bath, UK.



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<sup>18</sup> **fathomless** – of measureless depth; bottomless.

<sup>19</sup> **chafings** – irritations; things that inflame our feelings or make us impatient.

<sup>20</sup> **turpitude** – depraved, shameful character.

# THE NATURE OF GOD'S LOVE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

**T**HREE things are told us in Scripture concerning the nature of God. First, “God is a Spirit” (Joh 4:24). In the Greek, there is no indefinite article.<sup>1</sup> To say God is “a” spirit is most objectionable, for it places Him in a class with others. God *is* spirit in the highest sense. Because He is spirit, He is incorporeal, [that is,] having no visible substance. Had God a tangible<sup>2</sup> body, He would not be omnipresent, He would be limited to one place; because He is spirit, He fills heaven and earth.

Second, “God is light” (1Jo 1:5), the opposite of darkness. In Scripture, “darkness” stands for sin, evil, death, and “light” for holiness, goodness, life. “God is light” means that He is the sum of all excellency. Third, “God is love” (1Jo 4:8). It is not simply that God loves, but that He *is* love itself. Love is not merely one of His attributes, but His very nature.

There are many who talk about the love of God, who are total strangers to the God of love. The divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence. It is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. The truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is apparent not only from the ignorance that so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality that is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians. How little real love there is for God! One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with His wondrous love for His people. The better we are acquainted with His love—its character, fullness, blessedness—the more our hearts will be drawn out in love to Him.

1. **The love of God is *uninfluenced*.** By this we mean [that] there was nothing whatever in the objects of His love to call it into exercise, nothing in the creature to attract or prompt it. The love that one creature has for another is because of something in them; but the love of

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<sup>1</sup> In English, “indefinite article” refers to the word *a*, and the “definite article” refers to the word *the*. The author’s point is that the Greek language does not use the article *a*, and he does not agree with the translators’ use of the indefinite *a* because it does not appear in the Greek text.

<sup>2</sup> **tangible** – what can be grasped by the mind or dealt with as a fact.



God is free, spontaneous, uncaused. The only reason God loves any is found in His own sovereign will: “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you” (Deu 7:7-8). God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity. He loves from Himself, “according to his own purpose” (2Ti 1:9).

“We love him, because he first loved us” (1Jo 4:19). God did not love us because we loved Him, but He loved us before we had a particle of love for Him. Had God loved us in return for ours, then it would not be spontaneous on His part; but, because He loved us when we were loveless, His love was clearly uninfluenced. It is highly important if God is to be honored and the heart of His child established that we should be clear on this precious truth. God’s love for me and for each of “His own” was entirely unmoved by anything in them. What was there in me to attract the heart of God? Absolutely *nothing*. But, to the contrary, everything to repel Him, everything calculated to make Him loathe me—sinful, depraved, a mass of corruption, with “no good thing” in me...

**2. It is *eternal*.** This [is] of necessity. God Himself is eternal, and God is love; therefore, as God Himself had no beginning, His love had none. Granted that such a concept far transcends the grasp of our finite minds, nevertheless, where we cannot comprehend, we can bow in adoring worship. How clear is the testimony of Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” How blessed to know that the great and holy God loved His people before heaven and earth were called into existence, that He had set His heart upon them from all eternity. This is clear proof that His love is spontaneous, for He loved them endless ages before they had any being.

The same precious truth is set forth in Ephesians 1:4-5, “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us.” What praise should this evoke from each of His children! How quieting for the heart. Since God’s love toward me had no beginning, it can have no ending! Since it is true that “from everlasting to everlasting” He is God, and since God is love, then it is equally true that “from everlasting to everlasting” He loves His people.

**3. It is *sovereign*.** This also is self-evident. God Himself is sovereign, under obligation to none, a law unto Himself, acting always according

to His own imperial pleasure. Since God is sovereign, and since He is love, it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. Because God is God, He does as He pleases; because God is love, He loves whom He pleases. Such is His own express affirmation: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom 9:13). There was no more reason in Jacob why he should be the object of divine love than there was in Esau. They both had the same parents and were born at the same time, being twins, yet God loved the one and hated the other! Why? Because it pleased Him to do so.

The sovereignty of God’s love necessarily follows from the fact that it is uninfluenced by anything in the creature. Thus, to affirm that the cause of His love lies in God Himself is only another way of saying He loves whom He pleases. For a moment, assume the opposite. Suppose God’s love were regulated by anything else than His will. In such a case, He would love by rule; and loving by rule, He would be under a law of love, and then so far from being free, God would Himself be ruled by law. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to”—what? Some excellency that He foresaw in them? No. What then? “According to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:4-5).

4. It is *infinite*. Everything about God is infinite. His essence fills heaven and earth. His wisdom is unlimitable, for He knows everything of the past, present, and future. His power is unbounded, for there is nothing too hard for Him. So, His love is without limit. There is a depth to it that none can fathom. There is a height to it which none can scale. There is a length and breadth to it that defies measurement by any creature standard. This is intimated beautifully in Ephesians 2:4: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.” The word *great* there is parallel with the “God so loved” of John 3:16. It tells us that the love of God is so transcendent<sup>3</sup> it cannot be estimated.

“No tongue can fully express the infinitude of God’s love or any mind comprehend it: it ‘passeth knowledge’ (Eph 3:19). The most extensive ideas that a finite mind can frame about divine love are infinitely below its true nature. The heaven is not so far above the earth as the goodness of God is beyond the most raised conceptions that we can form of it. It is an ocean that swells higher than all the mountains

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<sup>3</sup> **transcendent** – going beyond the ordinary limits of the material universe.

of opposition in such as are the objects of it. It is a fountain from which flows all necessary good to all those who are interested in it.”<sup>4</sup>

**5. It is *immutable*.** As with God Himself there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17), so His love knows neither change or diminution.<sup>5</sup> The worm Jacob supplies a forceful example of this: “Jacob have I loved,” declared Jehovah, and despite all his unbelief and waywardness, He never ceased to love him. John 13:1 furnishes another beautiful illustration. That very night, one of the apostles would say, “Show us the Father”; another would deny Him with cursings; all of them would be scandalized by and forsake Him. Nevertheless, “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” The divine love is subject to no vicissitudes.<sup>6</sup> Divine love is “strong as death...many waters cannot quench it” (Song 8:6-7). Nothing can separate from it (Rom 8:35-39)...

**6. It is *holy*.** God's love is not regulated by caprice,<sup>7</sup> passion, or sentiment, but by principle. Just as His grace reigns not at the expense of righteousness, but through it (Rom 5:21), so His love never conflicts with His holiness. “God is light” (1Jo 1:5) is mentioned before “God is love” (1Jo 4:8). God's love is no mere amiable<sup>8</sup> weakness or effeminate softness. Scripture declares, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6). God will not wink at sin, even in His own people. His love is pure, unmixed with any maudlin<sup>9</sup> sentimentality.

**7. It is *gracious*.** The love and favor of God are inseparable. This is clearly brought out in Romans 8:32-39. What that love is from which there can be no “separation” is easily perceived from the design and scope of the immediate context. It is that goodwill and grace of God that determined Him to give His Son for sinners. That love was the impulsive power of Christ's incarnation: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (Joh 3:16). Christ died not to make God love us, but because He did love His people. Calvary is the supreme demonstration of divine love. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the love of God, Christian reader, go back to Calvary.

Here, then, is abundant cause for trust and patience under divine

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<sup>4</sup> John Brine (1703-1765), *The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ* (London: Little Britain, 1743), 6.

<sup>5</sup> **diminution** – reduction in size.

<sup>6</sup> **vicissitudes** – unpredictable changes in life.

<sup>7</sup> **caprice** – sudden change of mind without apparent motive.

<sup>8</sup> **amiable** – friendly; kind.

<sup>9</sup> **maudlin sentimentality** – weak overindulgence of emotion.

affliction. Christ was beloved of the Father, yet He was not exempted from poverty, disgrace, and persecution. He hungered and thirsted. Thus, it was not incompatible with God's love for Christ when He permitted men to spit upon and smite Him. Then let no Christian call into question God's love when he is brought under painful afflictions and trials. God did not enrich Christ on earth with temporal prosperity, for He had not "where to lay his head" (Mat 8:20). But He did give Him the Spirit without measure (Joh 3:34). Learn that spiritual blessings are the principal gifts of divine love. How blessed to know that, when the world hates us, God loves us!

From *The Attributes of God*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



Oh, the unfathomable depth of God's love! You who are the branches of this Vine, let me beseech you: love the Vine that bears you. Kiss and embrace Christ. Let your souls sound forth hallelujahs to the whole Trinity. Admire God the Father in sending a Vine from heaven. Admire God the Son Who was a bleeding Vine for you. Admire God the Holy Ghost Who hath by His mighty power implanted you into this Vine. Turn all your sullen discontents into triumphant songs! You are now made living branches, who were once dead; holy branches, who were once unclean. You now bear grapes, who did once bring forth thistles. Oh, make melody in your hearts to the Lord! Admire and celebrate free grace. It is well that there is an eternity coming, and that will be little enough to praise God.—*Thomas Watson*.

It is a special consideration to enhance the love of God in giving Christ, that in giving Him, He gave the richest jewel in His cabinet, a mercy of the greatest worth and most inestimable value. Heaven itself is not so valuable and precious as Christ is: He is the better half of heaven, and so the saints account Him: "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" (Psa 73:25). "Ten thousand thousand worlds," saith one, "as many worlds as angels can number, and then as a new world of angels can multiply, would not all be the bulk of a balance to weigh Christ's excellency, love, and sweetness." O what a fair One! What an only One! What an excellent, lovely, ravishing One is Christ! Put the beauty of ten thousand paradises, like the Garden of Eden, into one. Put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colors, all tastes, all joys, all sweetness, all loveliness in one. O what a fair and excellent thing would that be? And yet it should be less to that fair and dearest well-beloved Christ than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and fountains of ten thousand earths. Christ is heaven's wonder, and earth's wonder.—*John Flavel*

# ETERNALLY LOVED IN CHRIST

Thomas Manton (1620-1677)

*Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.—John 17:24*

**T**HE point to be discussed is the eternity of God's love to Christ, and, in Christ, to us. The love of parents to children is but a shadow of the eternity of God's love to Christ (as God) as His Son. We are finite; so are our affections. [God loved Christ as] His image: "Who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3). Likeness is the ground of love. God loves Christ, not only as like Himself, but as being of the same essence with Himself: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one" (1Jo 5:7). There is no created instance to answer it: all that we love are [external to] us, but Christ is of the same essence with God. Then He loveth Him as Mediator<sup>1</sup> and Head of the Church. He doth not only love *us* in Christ; but in a sort, He loveth *Christ* in us because of the complacency<sup>2</sup> that He took in Christ's obedience: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Joh 10:17). God did therefore eternally love Him and glorify His manhood for His love to us.

In God's loving *Christ*, He loved *us*. We are elected in Him before the foundation of the world: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4).<sup>3</sup> When God chose Christ to be Mediator, He chose us in Christ. This is the method of the divine decrees.<sup>4</sup> God from all eternity resolved to create man pure

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<sup>1</sup> **Mediator** – *literally*: "one who goes between"; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>2</sup> **complacency** – pleasure and satisfaction.

<sup>3</sup> See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>4</sup> See FGB 237, *God's Decrees*.

and innocent, but with a changeable will, to permit him to fall; and He resolved on the remedy—*Christ*—and in Christ to receive them to grace and accept them to life again. First, He loveth Christ, and then us in Him. As a king doth not only love a subject that hath done him service, but all his friends and kindred, they are brought to court and preferred for his sake.

**This love to us was also *eternal*.** “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). So, “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Ti 1:2). But how then are we children of wrath by nature, the elect as well as others? “And were by nature children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3). *Answer:* That showeth the merit of the natural state, not the purpose and decree of God. There are “vessels of wrath,” viz.,<sup>5</sup> the reprobate;<sup>6</sup> “children of wrath,” that is, the unregenerate elect; and “children under wrath,” that is, children of God under desertion.<sup>7</sup> It notes not what God hath determined in His everlasting counsel, but what we deserve by nature and in the course of His justice.

**Use:** God’s eternal love is a ground of hope why we may look for everlasting life. So it is urged here. There are two grounds of hope: the eternity of His love and His love to Christ.

(1) *The eternity of His love:* From eternity it began and to eternity it continueth, before the world was and when the world shall be no more. “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting up-

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<sup>5</sup> EDITOR’S NOTE: The word *viz.* is from the Latin *videlicet*, which means “that is to say; namely.” Hereafter, the editor will substitute “that is.”

<sup>6</sup> **reprobate** – one rejected by God; “Reprobation also has its basis in the good pleasure of God (Rom 9:11-18). However, while election is purely sovereign, taking no account of the personal deserts of the objects of it, reprobation, while certainly sovereign, is also judicial and does take account of the guilt of the sinner. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chap. 3, sec. 7) states the Reformed position clearly: ‘The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice’ (Rom 9:18-22; 2Ti 2:19-20; Jude 4; 1Pe 2:8). Thus, reprobation has two parts to it: (a) Preterition, or the passing over of some in the decree of election. This is the sovereign prerogative of God. As Calvin long ago pointed out, God owes no man anything, and no man can justly argue against the righteousness of God in passing him by in election, so leaving him to his own sinful self-determination. (b) Condemnation is the act of the sovereign judge. It is passed upon sinners. No man will be damned except for sin.” (Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 336)

<sup>7</sup> **children...desertion** – when God’s children sin against them, He sometimes chastens them by removing the sense of His presence.

on them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psa 103:17). It is the weakness of man to change purposes; God's love is not fickle and inconstant. We have good purposes, but they are speedily blasted; God's eternal purpose shall certainly stand. So the great foundation of our hope is the immutable love of God the Father. He that seeth all things at once cannot be deceived; we are ignorant of futurity and, therefore, change our minds upon new events. Whatever falleth out, God repenteth not: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29). His ancient love continues still. We have many backsliding thoughts: we think to love God, but new temptations carry us away. So, we are fickle and changeable, but God changeth not. He cannot deny Himself (2Ti 2:13).

(2) *His love to Christ, which is the ground of His love to us:* It is the wisdom of God that the reasons why man should be loved should be outside of man himself, in and among the persons of the Godhead. The Son loveth us because the Father requireth it, and the Father loveth us because the Son merited it. The Holy Ghost, that proceedeth from the Father and the Son, loveth us because of the Father's purpose and the Son's purchase. And then the Holy Ghost's work is a new ground of love. As long as the Son is faithful to the Father, and God regardeth the obedience of Christ and the work of the Spirit, we are sure to be loved.

But will not such an absolute certainty make way for looseness? It is possible it may with a carnal heart, for the very gospel is to some the savor of death unto death; but to the elect, *it cannot be*. The great gift of God's eternal love is holiness: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph 1:4). And so for Christ's love: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:25-26). The Holy Ghost worketh us to this very thing "through sanctification of the Spirit" (2Th 2:13). If we turn a wheel around, the wheel of necessity must run around. If God loveth us eternally, we must be holy. There is not only a necessity of precept, but of consequence. He hath not only commanded it, but it must be so.

**Use:** It commendeth God's love that you may admire it. Remember: it is eternal, of an old standing. All that is done to us in time are but the issues and fruits of eternal love.

**1. It is eternal, as ancient as God Himself.** There was no time when God did not think of us and love us. We are [accustomed] to prize an ancient friend: the oldest friend that we have is God! He loved us, not

only before we were lovely, but before we were at all. He thought of us before we could have a thought of Him. In our infancy, we could not so much as know that He loved us; and when we came to years of discretion, we knew how to offend Him before we knew how to love Him and serve Him. Many times, God is not in all our thoughts, when He is thinking how to bless us and do us good. Let us measure the short scantling<sup>8</sup> of our lives with eternity, wherein God showeth love to us. We began but as yesterday and are sinners from the womb. The more liberal we find God to be, the more obstinate we are. Yet He repenteth not of His ancient love. Certainly, if God should stay until He found cause of love in us, we should never be loved.

**2. Look to the effects of His love in time.** We receive new effects of His love every day, but all cometh out of His ancient and eternal love in Christ. Though the effects be new, the love is ancient. It is good sometimes to trace God in the paths of His love: by what strange providences our parents came together that we might have a being; how wonderfully were we preserved that we might not be cut off in our natural estate! How we were converted, many times when we did not think of such matters! Everlasting love sets itself to work: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). What could move God when Paul was in the heat of his persecution? How wonderfully did God...send afflictions to stop the course and career of sin! For, “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1Co 11:32). How many disappointments did we meet with in a carnal course!<sup>9</sup> As David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand” (1Sa 25:32-33). Oh, how sweet it is to see eternal love in all that befalleth us!...

**Use:** It teacheth us to disclaim merit. God’s love was before our being and acting. Paul, out of a less circumstance, concludeth election not to be of works: “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger” (Rom 9:11-12). God’s election is before all acts of ours; therefore, we deserve nothing, but

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<sup>8</sup> **scantling** – portion; amount.

<sup>9</sup> **carnal course** – sinful, fleshly way of living.



all is from God. It is not a thing of yesterday: our love is not the cause of God's, neither is it a fit reward and satisfaction...

**Use:** It presseth us to get an interest in<sup>10</sup> this eternal love. How shall we discern it? By the scope and aim of your lives and actions. Do you labor for another world? "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2Co 4:18). What is your heart set upon, and what do you make your scope and aim? A child of God prayeth, professeth, in order to<sup>11</sup> eternity. A man shall know his general scope by what satisfieth him. Are you contented with the world, to have your names written in earth, to have your whole portion in this life?...Grace [in the heart] must have eternity, for it would [eagerly] answer God's love; it would live forever—forever to praise God and serve God. All the world will not satisfy it without this eternal enjoyment of God.

Have you an eternal principle [within you]? Is there a life begun that cannot be quenched? Is the immortal seed<sup>12</sup> conveyed into your hearts? "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pe 1:23). Then certainly, thou art loved from eternity; for thou hast a pledge of it...there is a work wrought in [our] souls that can never be undone and disannulled,<sup>13</sup> something that is of an everlasting nature. Therefore, what seeds of eternity hath God planted in your hearts?

From "Sermons upon the Seventeenth Chapter of St. John" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 11, 102-113, in the public domain.

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**Thomas Manton (1620-1677):** English Presbyterian Puritan preacher; born in Lawrence-Lydiat, Somerset, England, UK.



It is one thing to believe intellectually that "God is love" and that He loves His people, but it is quite another to enjoy and live in that love in the soul. To be "rooted and grounded in love" means to have a settled assurance of God's love for us, such an assurance as nothing can shake. This is the deep need of every Christian, and no pains are to be spared in the obtaining thereof. Those passages in Scripture that speak of the wondrous love of God should be read frequently and meditated upon daily.

—A. W. Pink

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<sup>10</sup> **get an interest in** – lay claim by faith.

<sup>11</sup> **in order to** – in regard or with respect to.

<sup>12</sup> **immortal seed** – eternal life implanted by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>13</sup> **disannulled** – canceled and done away with.

# LOVE ETERNAL AND UNCHANGEABLE

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

**G**OD is love (1Jo 4:8)! Sweet truth! O my soul, rejoice daily in this blessed revelation, “God is love.” Before all worlds, before any being was formed, “God is love”—love eternal and unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is love. How inconceivably great is the love of God! All worlds rolling in the infinite expanse, all beings inhabiting those innumerable spheres, which extend far beyond the boundaries of the most excursive imagination, all the myriads of angelic spirits which dwell forever in the bright effulgence of uncreated light, are only the overflowings of that love, which is inexhaustible. The immense fountain loses not one drop, though countless millions are filled by its streams. It is ever flowing, ever full. “Lord, Thou art love. Oh, fill my soul with Thy love! Thou canst not be diminished, and I shall be made everlastingly blessed.”

When the Almighty created the angels in heaven and man in Paradise, He endued both with powers suited to their distinctive degrees of excellence. Both were formed holy and, consequently, happy. All nature proclaims the benevolence of the Deity, the unbounded goodness of Jehovah. The Moral Law emanated from the love of God. This law was stamped upon the heart of Adam when he was in a state of innocence. It is a transcript of the divine mind as holy, just, and good.

When man sinned, he broke the law of God. He fell under its curse. To redeem him from this wretched state, Jesus, the Son of God, assumed our mortal nature, expiated<sup>1</sup> our guilt, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. He burst the bars of death. He ascended on high and reigns as the sovereign Lord of angels and of men.

When the royal law of love was broken in Paradise, how soon did Adam’s first-born imbrue<sup>2</sup> his hand in a brother’s blood! Violence overspread the earth with awful rapidity until God, in righteous judgment, swept the guilty rebels from the earth by a tremendous flood of waters. Every succeeding age has been marked by miseries of every name, all flowing from one common source—an evil heart of unbelief. Sin is the cause of all misery, and sin originates with man.

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<sup>1</sup> **expiated** – paid the penalty for; made satisfaction for.

<sup>2</sup> **imbrue** – stain; dye one’s hand with blood.

If it be asked, what is the true cause of man's inability to love and serve God, may we not answer, a criminal indisposition<sup>3</sup> of heart so to do? It is not that man *cannot* love God from a natural incapacity, arising from a total destitution<sup>4</sup> of understanding, will, and affections; but rather that he *will not*, owing to a deep-rooted enmity against the holy character and commands of God.

This aversion<sup>5</sup> of the heart from God constitutes the chief guilt of man. Man is a responsible being and must render an account to God, from Whom he receives all his powers, for the abuse of those talents committed to his trust. He has a heart that can love the world: he can love sensual delights, he can love riches and honors—yes, he can love everything that tends to gratify his passions and to exalt him in his own eyes or in the estimation of others. He has a will to choose what is pleasing to his animal appetites and to refuse what is painful or distasteful to him. He has an understanding to judge upon worldly matters and a quick eye to discover the path to temporal advancement. He finds his hopes and fears, his joys and griefs, his loves and hatreds, brought into continual exercise with the ever-varying events of life.

Hence, man does not labor under a natural incapacity. His inability is altogether of a moral kind. Sin has darkened and corrupted all the higher faculties of the soul, so that “the world by wisdom knew not God” (1Co 1:21). “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:19), for “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7).

This wrong state of the heart, this evil bias of the soul, this radical corruption of our nature is universal. It spreads itself through the whole human race, without exception—for all are born in sin, all are by nature the children of wrath and the heirs of hell. So powerful is this innate evil, this natural indisposition of the heart towards God, that neither reason, conscience, nor philosophy can remove it. God alone can turn the heart of the sinner to Himself. The language of divine revelation is, “Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help” (Hos 13:9).

While, therefore, in deepest self-abasement, we bear the burden of our guilt and acknowledge that we have destroyed ourselves, we must ascribe all the glory of our salvation to omnipotent Love, in Whom

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<sup>3</sup> **indisposition** – condition of not being inclined to do something.

<sup>4</sup> **destitution** – poverty so extreme that one lacks the means to provide for oneself.

<sup>5</sup> **aversion** – feeling of intense dislike.

our help is found, and say with the grateful psalmist, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake” (Psa 115:1).

The whole human race must soon stand before the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>6</sup> No plea will then be accepted in arrest of judgment. In that awful day, every mouth shall be stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God, “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal 6:7). From this view of our fallen state, we may scripturally conclude that sinners, if left to themselves, would never turn to God. Hence, we see the blessedness and necessity of that grace that turns us from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God (Act 26:18).

It is a true saying of Augustine<sup>7</sup> that without free will there could be no condemnation, and without free grace there could be no salvation. But the voice of sovereign love declares to the great Melchizedek, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3). Here is set forth the power of God, the persons on whom that power is exerted, and the blessed effects of it upon their souls. This power is the power of God unto salvation. When He works, who can resist it? It is convincing power, converting power, sustaining power. O that this divine power, this energy of love, may be felt in every soul! Lord, may I feel it in *mine*!

But on whom is this power exerted? When we view the whole human race sunk in sin and misery, in a state of open rebellion against the majesty of heaven, where shall we find His people? The very words *they shall be willing* imply that they were not always so. Prior to this great change, they were enemies in their minds by wicked works (Col 1:21). They are His people in purpose and grace, “chosen...in him before the foundation of the world, that [they] should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Eph 1:4), predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).

When Paul was at Corinth, the Lord appeared to His persecuted servant and said, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Act 18:9-10). O that my proud heart could submit to receive salvation as the free gift of unmerited mercy! Lord, make *me* willing in the day of Thy power to yield myself unto Thee as a living sacrifice, as my most reasonable service (Rom 12:1).

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<sup>6</sup> See FGB 210, *Day of Judgment*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>7</sup> Aurelius Augustine (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa and theologian.

We see what is the *effect* produced by this power on the minds of “his people”: “They shall be willing”—willing to *receive* Christ, willing to *suffer* for Christ, willing to *give up all* for Christ. This change in their will is not effected by any natural effort of their own or by the moral persuasion of others, but solely by the power of God through the instrumentality of the gospel.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” wrote the apostle to the Romans, “for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16). Those favored souls who are thus made willing in the day of God’s power are not compelled by an unwelcome force to embrace salvation, but are sweetly and lovingly inclined through the soft influences of heavenly grace to choose, delight in, and appreciate the work and service of Emmanuel. They are made willing. Their whole heart goes forth towards the Savior, as when Jesus said to Levi at the receipt of custom, “Follow me” (Luk 5:27). They love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. They embrace Him as their only Savior and His precepts as their only rule, His promises as their only support, His cross as their only glory, His righteousness as their only boast, His people as their only friends, His heaven as their only home. O what a change! “Lord, may I long and pant and labor after this blessedness. Stir up my soul to seek it more and more.”

I have here an evidence to judge of my own character: “Thy people shall be willing.” If, then, I belong to this happy number, I must be willing to be saved on God’s terms, to delight in His salvation, to choose His ways. Do I feel my will subdued and cheerfully inclined to embrace in humble faith the whole revelation of mercy, as made known to me through a crucified Jesus? “Lord, put forth Thy mighty grace. Let this very day be the day of Thy power. Tomorrow may find me in the eternal world. O, may I now be willing to be wholly Thine, that every succeeding hour may only increase my willingness to do and suffer Thy whole righteous will.”

How different is earth to heaven! Here on earth, an awful disinclination<sup>8</sup> of heart to love God is discoverable in all the fallen children of Adam. Even the regenerate feel with grief this hated deadness of soul to God. “My soul cleaveth unto the dust” was the lamentation, and “quicken thou me according to thy word” (Psa 119:25) was the fervent prayer of David.

In heaven, all is governed by the sweet constraining principle of pure, undivided love. Were a soul to leave this earth under the influ-

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<sup>8</sup> **disinclination** – unwillingness to do something.

ence of alienated affections, how could such a soul be either fit for or happy in that blessed place where every note is harmony and every heart is love?

Reason, even in its present beclouded<sup>9</sup> state, must see the unfitness of such a soul for glory when that glory consists in loving God with a supreme affection and being made like Him in all His communicable<sup>10</sup> perfections.

How great, then, is the happiness of loving and serving God while journeying through this valley of tears! This is the sweet peculiarity of the religion of Jesus. It diffuses joy and gladness wherever it is received in the simplicity of faith. “God is love” (1Jo 4:8), and “every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (4:7). Loving God and being the object of His love constitute the bliss of angels. The opposite of this is hell.<sup>11</sup>

What poor, miserable creatures we are while in a state of nature and under the power of sin and Satan! We smile when we should sigh. We laugh when we should mourn. We appear gay and sprightly when we should be of a sorrowful spirit. But, oh, the change that takes place when the gospel comes to the heart, not in word only, but in power! Then we receive beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Then we are privileged to rejoice always and to delight ourselves in the abundance of peace. O happy, blissful state—to be the genuine disciples of the blessed Jesus, Who has assured His faithful people that He will manifest Himself to them, as He does not unto the world! Yes, He will even come to them and make His abode with them. Who can contemplate these wonders of grace and not feel the holy influence of this precious revelation: “God is love”? Surely none but they who know not God; for thus says the apostle, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1Jo 4:8).

From *Christian Retirement or Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*,  
in the public domain.

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**Thomas Reade (1776-1841):** English layman and author; born in Manchester, England, UK.




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<sup>9</sup> **beclouded** – made obscure or gloomy.

<sup>10</sup> **communicable** – able to be communicated or shared with others.

<sup>11</sup> See FGB 211, *Hell*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

# THE MANIFEST LOVE OF GOD

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

*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.—1 John 4:9-10*

**T**HE love of God can only be finally understood and appreciated in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is what God has done in Him and through Him that ultimately reveals it all. “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<sup>1</sup> for our sins” (1Jo 4:9-10). That is the manifestation of the love of God, says John, and here again is a compendium<sup>2</sup> of theology, a synopsis of doctrine. There is no greater theological statement in the whole Bible than these two wonderful verses.

John does not say, “God is love,” and then pass on to something else. He says, “If you want to know anything about love, you must realize these truths because it is in this way that God has manifested His wondrous love to us. Apart from these things, you know nothing about love.” But let me go further. The love of God, I maintain, is only understood and felt in terms of theology, and to reject the theology is to reject the love of God and to be bemusing<sup>3</sup> ourselves with some hypothetical<sup>4</sup> and imaginary love. “In this was manifested the love of God,” and here we have John’s exposition of it.

Having, therefore, emphasized that fundamental attitude, let me attempt with reverence to look at this glorious and sublime statement. Would you like to join “with all the saints,” as Paul puts it, in trying to measure and estimate “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”

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<sup>1</sup> **propitiation** – appeasement; “Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice.” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)

<sup>2</sup> **compendium** – short but comprehensive summary of a larger subject.

<sup>3</sup> **bemusing** – confusing.

<sup>4</sup> **hypothetical** – based on something that is possible and imagined rather than real or true.

(Eph 3:18-19)? This is how John proceeds. We are, of course, attempting the impossible. We are going to measure the immeasurable; we shall try to plumb the depths that no man can ever reach; we shall ascend the height that no man can ever aspire unto; and yet, says Paul, let us do it. And as we attempt to do so now, let us be guided by the apostle John.

His general proposition is this: God's love has been manifested in what He has done for us or in us in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, let us start in the depths. Let us start to look at the love of God and attempt to measure it by looking at ourselves. You will never know the love of God until you know yourself. We will never appreciate the love of God until we know the startling truth about ourselves apart from Him and about His wondrous grace. God, we are told, has loved us. Why? Has God loved us because we are lovable? Has He loved us because we are such kind and wonderful people, so deserving of His favor?

Consider the answer of the apostle John in these two verses: the love of God—let me emphasize it again—is only to be understood theologically. Here is what we are told: God sent His only begotten Son that we might live through Him. From [this] I deduce that apart from Him, we are dead; and that is the fundamental statement about man as the result of sin that runs right through the Bible. “You hath he quickened,” says Paul writing to the Ephesians, “who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). All of us, apart from Jesus Christ, are in a state of spiritual death. We not only lack a knowledge of God, we lack an understanding of spiritual things; the great spiritual faculty that God gave man at the beginning is lying dormant. As a result of sin, we have no life in us: we do not *live*, we *exist*. Read the first three verses of Ephesians 2, and there you have it: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” Dead—dead to God and to His spiritual qualities—dead to everything that is truly uplifting and ennobling<sup>5</sup>—living according to the course of this life and of this age—an existence in a state of death.

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<sup>5</sup> **ennobling** – giving greater dignity of character to.



This is what John says, namely, that Christ came that we might live through Him; without Him, we are dead.

But not only that. According to the Bible, far from being lovable and loving, men and women by nature hate God. “Herein is love, not that we loved God”; that is, it is not the case that we in our natural state loved God and He responded to our love. The picture of the Bible is not that people are ever seeking for God because they love Him. That is the popular theology—that men and women are seeking God and that God responds to their request. Not at all! “Not that we loved God, *but that he loved us.*” People, by nature, do not love God. According to the Bible, by nature and as the result of sin and the Fall, they are enemies of God. “The carnal mind”—the natural man—“is enmity against<sup>6</sup> God,” says Paul; “it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).

Is all that not the simple truth, and must we not all confess that by nature and apart from the light we have had in the gospel of Jesus Christ, when things go wrong the feeling is one of enmity? We are enemies, aliens, strangers, at enmity against God. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners...For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...” (Rom 5:8, 10). That is the picture that is given of man: dead and hating God, far from loving Him, but rather feeling opposed to Him. And because of all that, man by nature is under the wrath of God and deserves the punishment of God for his sins. That is Paul’s statement, and it is the statement of the Bible everywhere.

We are, let me remind you, trying to measure this amazing love of God, and that is the first measurement: men and women down in the dregs and depths of sin, deserving nothing but wrath, and with nothing to be said for them. And the whole argument of the New Testament is that until we see that that is the simple truth about us, we do not begin to know anything about the love of God. That is the first step in measuring it.

But let us go on to the second. Let us proceed immediately from the depths right up to the heights. We have seen man. Now let us look at God and see what He has done, and the astounding thing we are told is that God has “sent *his only begotten Son* into the world.” That is the central message of the New Testament, and indeed of the whole Bible; it is about a person called Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Who is He? John has been talking about Him; his whole message is about

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<sup>6</sup> **enmity against** – hostile to; the state of being an enemy.

this person, and this is what he tells us about Him: He is God's "only begotten Son." The original reads like this: "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." His Son—His only begotten Son. That statement means that this person has a unique kinship with God. It is John's way of saying that Jesus Christ is none other than the eternal Son of God, co-eternal, equal with God,<sup>7</sup> dwelling in the bosom of God, the effulgence<sup>8</sup> of God, one with God, the second person of the blessed Trinity.<sup>9</sup>

But, you see, John puts this in another form: God "sent" His Son. So, if Jesus Christ is someone Who has been "sent" into the world, He must have existed before. None of us have been sent into the world. We are born into this world, but here is someone Who was sent from somewhere else. He existed before, in eternity. His birth at Bethlehem was not the beginning for Him. He began His earthly course, He came, He was sent from heaven. That is another way of estimating the love of God. God has manifested His love towards us in that He, there in glory, has sent from heaven, with its eternal bliss and absolute perfection, into this world His only begotten Son. We cannot fathom this—it escapes us. But can we try to imagine something of what this means? God, we are told, "sent" His Son; He asked Him,<sup>10</sup> His only begotten Son, to come into this world, consisting of men and women such as I have already been describing. "In this was manifested the love of God," that out of heaven He "sent His only begotten Son," the One Who is in His own bosom.

Fathers and mothers, does this mean anything to you? Think of your own love to your children and multiply it by infinity, and that is God's Father-love to God the Son; and yet He sent Him into the world. So, you know nothing about the love of God unless you believe the doctrine of the incarnation.<sup>11</sup> Believe me, you cannot talk of the love of God dwelling in you unless you know that Jesus of Nazareth is the unique and only begotten Son of God. If you are uncertain about the person of Christ,<sup>12</sup> you have no love of God in you—you are fooling yourself. You must not put the love of God as an opposite to the doctrine of the person of Christ. He is the God-man; all the miracles

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<sup>7</sup> See FGB 230, *The Deity of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>8</sup> **effulgence** – great brilliance or brightness.

<sup>9</sup> See FGB 231, *The Triune God*.

<sup>10</sup> See FGB 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*.

<sup>11</sup> See FGB 234, *Incarnation*.

<sup>12</sup> See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*.

and the supernatural power, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (Col 2:9). Understanding the person of Christ is absolutely essential to understanding the doctrine of the love of God.

But let us pause there. From the heights let us come down again to the depths, and let us glance for a moment at what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. We have said that God has “sent His only begotten Son” from heaven; but He sent Him, John says, “*into the world.*” O blessed be His holy name! The Son, the only begotten Son, came into this world. We are measuring the love of God—and this is the way to measure it. Look at the world into which He came. You remember His birth and what we are told about it. This is the sort of world that the eternal Son of God, Who had come from heaven, came into: there was no room for Him and for Mary and Joseph in the inn. The selfishness of mankind was such that even a woman in this condition did not get a room and had to go into a stable; so the Lord of glory was placed in a manger in a stable. That is the sort of world He came into; a selfish, grasping, self-centered world in which every man is out for himself.

You also remember the story of Herod and the massacre of the innocents—all the malice, envy, hatred, and bloodshed. And, oh, the poverty into which He came! They could not afford to give the price of the highest offering for Him; they had to offer the two turtledoves—they could not afford any more. He was born into a very poor home; He knew something of...the need that accompanies poverty. And for thirty years, He lived a very ordinary life as a carpenter, mixing with ordinary people. Can you imagine what it must have meant to Him, the Lord of glory, the eternal Son of God Who came out of God’s eternal bosom, to see sin firsthand? To look at the ugliness of evil and sin and see it face to face? The shame of it all and the foulness of it all! We are measuring the love of God, and that is the measure of it. How could He in all His purity and holiness ever come from heaven and live for thirty years in the kind of world in which you and I are living? How could He have done it? How could He stand or bear it?

Then watch Him in His ministry, teaching His pure, loving, holy doctrine, seeing the opposition that arose. Look at the people looking at one another, asking their questions, trying to trip Him—the cleverness they display in trying to pull Him down. Look at the scheming; look at the treachery even among His own friends; look at Him deserted by all His disciples; look at Him on trial; look at the crown of thorns they put upon His holy brow—that is the world into which

He came. “In this was manifested the love of God...that God sent his only begotten Son into the world.”

But more, He sent Him, we are told, to be “*the propitiation for our sins.*” What does this mean? Here, of course, is the great classic doctrine of the atonement,<sup>13</sup> and it means that He sent Him into this world in order that He might become the sin offering for us. It means that God “hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). It means that Jesus Christ is not only the priest, but He is also the offering, the propitiation, the sacrifice offered. God sent Him into the world in order that God might punish our sins in Him.<sup>14</sup> He has made His Son the sacrifice; it is a substitutionary offering<sup>15</sup> for your sins and mine. That was why He was there in the Garden sweating drops of blood because He knew what it involved—it involved a separation from the face of His Father. And that is why He cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). There we see the love of God not only in the world He came into, but in the propitiation, the sacrifice, the substitutionary death, so that you and I might be delivered. Herein was manifested the love of God, that God sent His only begotten Son to death, to the cruel shame and agony and suffering of the cross, to be made sin for us Who Himself knew no sin and so was innocent.

But, thank God, it did not stop at that. He raised Him again from the dead and thereby proclaimed that the sacrifice was enough, that the Law was satisfied, and that everything was complete. I say again, you do not begin to know anything about the love of God until you see that if Christ had not died on the cross in that way, God could not forgive sin. I say it with reverence: that is God’s way of making forgiveness, for without the doctrine of the atonement you do not understand the love of God. Let me beseech you, never again put the love of God and doctrine as opposites. It is only in this way you understand the love of God. There is the depth again.

But let us once more rise from the depths to the heights; let us rise with Him in resurrection,<sup>16</sup> and let us look at what He has meant to us as the result of that. Christ died—that is what we are told. He has been made “the propitiation for our sins.” In other words, as the result of what He has done, God forgives us for our sins; by His death

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<sup>13</sup> See FGB 227, *Atonement.*

<sup>14</sup> See FGB 225, *The Work of Christ.*

<sup>15</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution.*

<sup>16</sup> See FGB 235, *Resurrection.*

we are reconciled to God in Him; we have redemption through His blood. The blood is essential; never speak about it as if it were something that is legalistic. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14). In Him, we are reconciled to God, pardoned, forgiven, and restored. Yes, and even more, God sent His Son into the world, that we might live through Him. We receive the gift of life; we begin to live because He came. We are given His nature; we are given His power. He becomes One Who resides in us. We live in Him, and He is in us; we live through Him. There we again rise to the height.

That is what God has done for us in His love through Christ—pardon, forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, life anew. We begin to live in a new world, and we see new possibilities. We know something of His mighty working in us and the power that operates in us. That is how the love of God is manifested, that He sent His Son, and the Son has taken hold of us and, as Paul puts it, has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

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**David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981):** Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



The Christian’s chastisements flow from God’s love. Not from His anger or hardness, nor from arbitrary dealings, but from God’s heart do our afflictions proceed. It is love that regulates all the ways of God in dealing with His own. It was love that *elects* them. The heart is not warmed when our election is traced back merely to God’s sovereign will, but our affections are stirred when we read “in *love*: having predestinated us” (Eph 1:4-5). It was love that *redeemed* us. We do not reach the center of the atonement when we see nothing more in the cross than a vindication of the Law and a satisfaction of justice: “God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (Joh 3:16). It is love that regenerates or effectually calls us: “With loving kindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). The new birth is not only a marvel of divine wisdom and a miracle of divine power, but it is also and superlatively a product of God’s affection.—*A. W. Pink*

In Christ’s love, you have begun a banquet that will never end. “May the love of God be with you all” is meant for all God’s people. But is that love with all present? If you have not tasted God’s love, you do not know what life, true life, means. The richest, the most celestial, the most transporting joy that mortal mind can know is a full assurance of the love of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon*

# GOD'S LOVE IN ALL THINGS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

**T**HE great manifestation of the love of God yet remains to be considered—God's love as embodied and expressed in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. How emphatic are the terms in which this great truth is recorded. Listen to Jesus Himself: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Joh 3:16). Listen to His apostle: "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" (1Jo 4:9-10).

How corrective these declarations are of an erroneous view of God's love that some have entertained, that is, that the coming of Jesus as the Savior was to procure, rather than to manifest; to inspire, rather than to reveal God's love to man. In other words, that Christ died to redeem us, and therefore God loves us, that He originated rather than expressed the love that filled the bosom of Jehovah. What a dishonoring misapprehension is this! What a libel on the character of God as the God of love!

But take the converse of this idea and you have the correct interpretation of God's love—that is, Christ died for us *because* God loved us. In other words, the atonement of Christ was not the cause, but the consequence; not the origin, but the manifestation of the great love with which God loved us.

Who can ever fully spell that marvelous monosyllable, "so"? "God *so* loved us." Who can fathom the immensity of the love compressed within its wondrous, boundless meaning? Our ennobled and perfected faculties will be the only suitable instrument, heaven the scene, and eternity the limit of its study. Behold how great and resplendent<sup>1</sup> the love of God appears as manifested in Jesus! It would have been impossible—reverently we speak it—to have transcended this manifestation of love. He then must have eclipsed Himself. It is no ideal and exaggerated expression. His love was so divine, He alone could know it; so hidden, He alone could reveal it; so vast, He alone could

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<sup>1</sup> **resplendent** – shining, dazzling in appearance.

express it; and so precious, no costlier gift could embody it than His own co-equal, coeternal, and beloved Son. Herein is love, and only here! In all other things, as we have remarked, we infer that God *does* love; here, in the person and work of Jesus, we learn that God *is* love. All other manifestations of His love are shadows. Christ is the full-orbed Sun, pouring down in subdued and softened rays an infinite tide of light, life, and beauty around a sinful and rebellious empire.

“God so loved the world” with a love of benevolence, and so loved the Church with a love of redemption, that He gave His only begotten Son. By the love of benevolence, the world is kept from instant destruction; and by the love of redemption, His elect Church is taken out of the world, saved, and glorified.

Now, it is just in this light [that] God would have His people study His character and read His heart as the God of love. This is the only mirror that truly and perfectly reflects, as with focal and resplendent power, the marvelous truth that “God is love.” It is only in Christ we read His sin-forgiving love. “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy” (Mic 7:18).

It is love, O believer, that has forgiven you all your great debt, has blotted out your transgressions as a thick cloud, that has cast all your sins behind His back, and will remember them no more forever because He is love. My soul, measure this great love by the greatness, the number, and the enormity of your sins, and then exclaim, “Oh! The depth and immensity of that love that could flood over and bury forever sins red as crimson, transgressions countless as the sands!”

**God’s love is a soul-justifying<sup>2</sup> love.** It throws a robe of righteousness<sup>3</sup> around the believing soul, which presents it before Him, the holy Lord God, unblemished, and unproveable<sup>4</sup> in His sight. Oh, wondrous love that provides, imputes, and invests the soul with a righteousness so divine as discharges it from the court of divine justice, the indictment quashed,<sup>5</sup> the conviction reversed, the sinner ful-

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<sup>2</sup> **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19), and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>3</sup> **righteousness** – quality of being conformed to the character of God and the standards set forth in His Word; see FGB 191, *Imputed Righteousness*.

<sup>4</sup> **unproveable** – blameless.

<sup>5</sup> **quashed** – made void.

ly and forever delivered from condemnation, and all through “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom 3:22)! “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1).

**The love of God is *adopting* love.** It makes us His children, who once were rebels; His friends, who once were foes. By an...act of His electing and sovereign grace, it has taken us into His family, makes us heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, teaching us to approach Him in prayer crying, “Abba, Father!” “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1).

What more shall we say? It is a love that will not cease—nor ceasing then—until it has brought us home to Himself in heaven, having enabled us to glorify Him here, permitting us to enjoy Him fully and forever hereafter.

We have yet to trace the love of God in His dealings with His people. The path along which our heavenly Father is conducting us homeward is a checkered<sup>6</sup> and a varied path. It is paved with stones, precious stones, of many shapes and hues. But faith reads it all, and gratitude accepts it all, as resolved into God’s eternal and unchangeable love. There can be nothing but love in the conduct of Him—mysterious and painful though that conduct may be—Who laid our sins, curse, and condemnation on His beloved Son, wounding, bruising, and putting Him to grief and to death for us.

In this light, then, we are to read all His dealings with us, whether they be of judgment or of mercy. Is it judgment? Is the discipline of God with you a discipline of trial, of sorrow, of suffering? Still is He the God of love, and from His love all this discipline of trial springs. Love will control the furnace, temper the flames, and conduct the whole to so salutary<sup>7</sup> and holy a result as will cause the desert to ring and heaven to resound with the music of your thanksgiving and praise. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6). “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev 3:19). In the holy light, then, of His love, read and interpret every cloud that shades you, every dispensation<sup>8</sup> that afflicts you, every sorrow that wrings

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<sup>6</sup> **checkered** – uneven and characterized by periods of trouble.

<sup>7</sup> **salutary** – beneficial.

<sup>8</sup> **dispensation** – act of divine ordering and arrangements of events.



your heart with anguish. Is your song of mercy? Then love has dropped the veil it wore and stands before you in its own undisguised and unmingled tenderness and power, challenging your warmest acknowledgment and your loftiest praise.

Thus, God's love shapes and guides the whole scene. It traces all and blends with all His doings. It sweetens the bitter dispensation and makes the sweet one sweeter. It brightens the dark cloud and makes the bright one brighter. It may be a hard lesson for faith to learn, a bold acknowledgment for grace to make, a startling inference for love to draw that all God's trying, wounding, disappointing dispensations towards His people are the result of His everlasting love. Nevertheless, it is so. He is the God of love, and He cannot change. He Who smiles today and Who frowns tomorrow, Who kisses now and smites us then, is the same tender, faithful Father, Whose love knows no change and Whose faithfulness never fails.

And when the sorrow is past, the storm subsides, and, in calmer moments, we review all the way that He has led us, to what conclusion can we come but that through it all, true to His nature and faithful to His promises, He was the God of love? And now we see that love planted that thorn-hedge; that love crushed that fond hope; that love stirred up that soft nest; that love blighted that sweet flower; and that love alone permitted you to take that step that involved you in such perplexity and plunged you into such grief. Thus, out of the ravenous eater comes food and from the fiery furnace [comes] silver so pure and gold so refined.

My soul, your gold is true, but full of dross;  
Your Savior's breath refines you with some loss;  
His gentle furnace makes you pure as true;  
You must be melted before you are cast anew.

One more view of this subject, and this shall be a practical and sanctifying one. God so loves us, as to make love the great controlling motive power of our religious life. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10). "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Joh 14:15). Such is the teaching of His Word. The religion we receive from Christ is the religion of love, and the religious life to which it is to give birth in us is to be a life of love to God, securing our obedience, enlisting our service, and constraining us by the mercies of God to yield our bodies living sacrifices, thus teaching and strengthening us to deny "ungodliness and

worldly lusts,” and that “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Ti 2:12).

In proportion to our experience of the love of God in our souls, it will become a motive power in our lives. The outward holy life of a believer is the result of an inward principle of love to God: “The love of Christ constraineth<sup>9</sup> us” (2Co 5:14). For this cause the apostle breathed that precious prayer in behalf of the Thessalonian saints: “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God” (2Th 3:5). Standing as upon the shore of this boundless, fathomless ocean, he prays that the Lord, the Spirit, might lead their hearts into its infinite depths. What a needed and holy prayer! What a vast and precious blessing! Their hearts were sinful, sad, and weary. Guilt tainted<sup>10</sup> them, bereavement<sup>11</sup> shaded them, conflict and service exhausted them; and now, just as their heart was, the apostle prays that it might be led into the sanctifying, soothing, life-refreshing love of God.

Into this ocean of divine love, my reader, let your heart plunge, just as it is. Repair, with all its sin, sorrow, and weariness, to no other purifying, comforting source, but to the shoreless, soundless sea of the love of God in Christ Jesus. Oh, descend, in simple, childlike faith, into its depths, and lose yourself amid its boundless infinitude! The love of God thus filling and overflowing your heart, all will be well. Winter will bloom into spring, spring will blush into summer, and summer will ripen into the golden fruit of autumn. Oh, how the love of God changes the aspect of everything! Afflictions are then seen to be “disguised blessings”; trials [as] proofs of divine faithfulness; clouds [as] chariots paved with love and penciled with light, in which the Savior comes to us. God, revealing His glory and His grace in Christ Jesus to your soul, will bring you into the sweetest acquiescence<sup>12</sup> with all His will. [He will] cause you to go forth, and by the sacred, all-powerful influence of a holy life—silent, luminous,<sup>13</sup> and penetrating as light—proclaim to every object, rational and irrational, that “God is love,” that God loves you, and that you love God! Blessed Savior!...

Go forth and be loving, even as your Father in heaven is loving. Let your heart be as large in its creature capacity as God’s heart is in its divine. If He has a large heart for you, beware of a small heart for

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<sup>9</sup> **constraineth** – causes to act; provides impulse for some activity; urges.

<sup>10</sup> **tainted** – contaminated; polluted.

<sup>11</sup> **bereavement** – being deprived of anything, but especially a loved one by death.

<sup>12</sup> **acquiescence** – acceptance and submission without protest.

<sup>13</sup> **luminous** – shining in the dark.

your fellows. If His heart is open, see that your heart is not closed. And since He departs not at sinfulness or ingratitude, at injury or unworthiness on the part of the recipient of His goodness, be an imitator of God. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21).

God has so dealt with you, overcoming and winning your evil heart with the goodness and love of His own. Go and do likewise towards all who have injured you, wounded you, and spitefully used you, and so shall you be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mat 5:48). Live for God, and act towards others as one who, in a little while, will flee from a world of sin, infirmity, and strife—from all its taintings, woundings, and misunderstandings, and find yourself playing upon the surface and plunging into the depths of the ocean of love that flows and sparkles beneath and around the throne of God and the Lamb.

O Lord Jesus Christ, if a little taste of Your love here below, as it flows through the channels of Your sacred Word and ordinances, is so sweet, what will the full draught be above!

When shall this happy day of rescue be!  
 When I shall make a near approach to Thee,  
 Be lost in love, and wrapped in ecstasy?  
 Oh, when shall I behold Thee, all serene,  
 Without this envious, cloudy veil between?  
 'Tis true, the sacred elements impart  
 Your virtual presence to my faithful heart,  
 But to my sense still unrevealed Thou art.  
 This, though a great, is an imperfect bliss;  
 To see a shadow for the God I wish.  
 My soul a more exalted pitch would fly,  
 And view Thee in the heights of majesty.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

From *Our God*, in the public domain.



Learn, therefore, the exceeding preciousness of souls and at what a high rate God values them, that He will give His Son, His only Son, out of His bosom as a ransom for them.—*John Flavel*

# BEHOLD, WHAT MANNER OF LOVE

Samuel Eyles Pierce (1746-1829)

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.—1 John 3:1*

**I**N this verse, the apostle breaks forth in reflecting some glorious beams of light and love on the minds of such as were born of Christ and “were made partakers of the divine nature,” as the apostle Peter terms it (2Pe 1:4). As the doctrine of the Holy Trinity runs throughout every article of our most holy faith, and the distinct acts and operations of the Sacred Three are one grand part of the New Testament, so our apostle in this verse now before us calls on these he writes unto, to behold, to take into their minds, and to consider the love of the divine Father unto them—to view it in this [example] of it: they were called “the sons of God.”

It was but a title, but they had [with it all that was] contained in it. Therefore, the manner of love—the freeness of it, the sovereignty of it, the eternity of it, with the blessings contained in it—most truly deserved their most spiritual and deepest attention. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” It is pure; it is infinite love. It is God’s own act of grace towards us. He is a fountain of everlasting love. We are His children by adoption, and our regeneration is the fruit thereof, so that this title and honor do most truly belong unto us...

It is with us as it was with Christ: the world, [that is,] the people of the Jews, knew not the Lord of Glory when He appeared amongst them in the form of a servant. “The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” In order, and with a design to open these words, so as if possible the whole excellence and force of them may be preserved, I will give the outline of them in the following particulars: I will notice the word *behold* with which they are introduced and what we are called upon to behold: it is “what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us”...

Notice the word *behold* with which the words of my text are introduced which gives an item of the vast importance of what is contained in them. It is used by the Lord Himself, the Prophets, Christ,

and the Evangelists on some very particular occasions, both in the Old and New Testaments.

When the LORD God is speaking of the person, incarnation, and work of Christ, He speaks thus: “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him” (Isa 40:10). When the Divine Majesty in the person of the Father is pleased to set forth His coequal Son in the full glory of His person and mediation, He is pleased to make use of this word to fix the attention of the mind on this one grand object and subject. [By this, He intimates that] there is no other object or subject on earth or in heaven worth consideration but this alone. He uses this word, “*Behold* my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1).

Again, when the divine Father would have Joshua and his fellow priests look on Christ the glorious Mediator as the foundation stone, the only Mediator and Savior, and view Him in the complete and glorious accomplishment of His work, this word is used. “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (Zec 3:8-9).

The Prophet Isaiah, when speaking of the incarnation of Christ, used this word. “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). When John speaks as a prophet about Christ’s appearing, he uses this word: “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7). Our Lord Himself uses this word on the great subject of communion with Himself. “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20)...

So, this word *behold* is used in the sacred page by God, Christ, the prophets, and apostles as introductory to the most grand and important subjects revealed and recorded therein... So doth our apostle here before us. He would have us to contemplate this vast subject—the love of God to us. It is most certainly designed to engage our minds, to fix our thoughts, to fill us with holy wonder, to draw us out into a holy admiration of the subject he is about to set before us... “What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.”

The *us* are saints—the very same *us* who had fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ; Whose blood was their present and everlasting purity before God; Whose righteousness was their eternal perfection; Whose life of priesthood and advocacy was their everlasting security. The *us* here are the same who had received an unction<sup>1</sup> from the Holy One, who were born of Him. As all their blessedness and blessings were the fruits and effects of the Father's love, the apostle would have them take a view thereof...He is not here calling on us to *believe* the love wherewith God hath loved us; nor is he calling on us to *receive* the knowledge of it into our minds that we may receive the same into our hearts. He is calling us to *behold* it, to *look* at it, to *contemplate* it in its original, in its spring and fountain, in its freeness and sovereignty, in its nature, in its manner, in its gifts and blessings!

It was actually bestowed upon them. They had an actual enjoyment of the same. Yet, as it exceeded all they could ever have the enjoyment of, either in earth or heaven, he would therefore have them look off all their real enjoyments of it to this love, as it was in God, the fountain of it. This the very word *behold* implies. If they were to *behold* this love wherewith the Father had loved them, and what freeness, sovereignty, and greatness were contained in it, then they themselves, or what they enjoyed of the same, made no part of the subject that they are here excited to consider.

The elect are the objects and subjects of the Father's love. Yet, all His love to them is in Himself. It is not in the saints, be they in earth or in heaven, but by revelation, manifestation, and reflection. It is in God as the fountain of it. He only is the spring of it: and it is the good pleasure of His will to love His elect in Christ. There is no cause to be assigned why He should love them, but because it is the good pleasure of His will. God's love is an act of His will.

His predestinating purpose respecting them is an act of His understanding. The eternal Three in the one incomprehensible essence have but one will. They therefore love the elect with one and the same love, not One more than the other. It hath pleased Them to manifest Their loves to give full proof of the distinct act of Their wills towards them. Yet love in God is but one act, and it is an act in the mind of God. Therefore, it is eternal and immutable. The elect are the objects and subjects on whom the will of God terminates. He loved them, and therefore He chose them in Christ. This is the first act of His love towards them. All the acts of His grace towards them in Christ are the

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<sup>1</sup> **unction** – anointing.

effects of His love to their identical persons, as the objects of His eternal love and complacency. He loved them so intensely as to choose them in Christ, and thereby *give* them being and well-being in Christ before the world was. And further to express the same, He blessed them in Christ, their Head, with all spiritual blessings suited to their relationship to the person of Christ and which were to remain theirs in Him forever.

Whilst all this originates from the ever-living, ever-blessed Three, in the one same and ever-glorious Godhead, yet it is generally attributed in the Holy Scriptures to the divine Father. It is so in the first chapter of the Ephesians, where all the eternal acts of God's will in Christ towards the elect are enumerated. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:3-6). It is here to be observed [that] all these fundamental acts in the infinite mind respecting the whole election of grace are attributed to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the origin of these is wholly ascribed "to the good pleasure of his will" and "to the praise of the glory of his grace." The good pleasure of God's will is the fountain cause. The praise of the glory of His grace is the end and issue of all. So, as it respects salvation, according to the express statement of it as set before us in the everlasting gospel, it originates from the Father. It is executed by the Son, revealed, set forth, and brought home to us by the energy and witness of the Holy Ghost. It is the one ever-living, everlasting, ever-blessed God in His divine persons—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—manifesting Himself as the God of all grace in the glorious economy of the same, expressing His everlasting love to give us a blessed apprehension of the obligations we are under to the Holy Trinity for their personal acts in the everlasting council and covenant of grace towards us. It is doubtless with a design to this [that] the apostle directs our views to the love of the divine Father in the words before us: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us..."

The love of God is a subject for the minds of God's saints to contemplate. They may well behold, survey, and take a view of it by faith. It is the greatest thing in God Himself, which we are concerned in.

His love to us is a free love. It is also sovereign love. It proceeds from Himself alone. It is a love fixed on us. It is a love of complacency and delight. It is an immutable and an everlasting love. It was in God's heart towards us before the world was. It will never cease being in His heart towards us throughout the ages of eternity, the blessings of which we are to enjoy in communion with Him now and forever.

Surely then, the views and reviews we take into our minds of this infinite and inexhaustible subject cannot but be very profitable unto us. *Behold*—let your minds, then, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, be engaged and exercised about the Father's love to us: on the greatness of it, the eternity of it, the fixation of it, the immensity of it, the blessings contained in it, the continuation of it; on what we shall forever and ever enjoy as the objects and subjects of it, what hath been already bestowed on us, what we have enjoyed and do enjoy out of and from this infinite ocean! You will find enough to delight your minds, to comfort your hearts, to fill you with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the true knowledge and exercise of your spiritual faculties on the subject. Therefore, I thus address you, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us"—not simply *conceived* towards us and *willed* unto us, but actually *bestowed* upon us. [He hath] given us the real knowledge, perception, and enjoyment of it to [make us] know we are the *us* whom He loved...in Christ, with such a love as will know no end.

May the Lord the Spirit lead you daily and continually to behold and survey the love of your heavenly Father towards you, personally and individually in the person of Christ, in all the acts, instances, outgoings, gifts, and blessings thereof. This will be blessedness indeed to your renewed minds. You will in these apprehensions approach God as your exceeding joy. It will give you the best idea of heaven, of the heavenly state, and of what the happiness and blessedness of the saints in glory consists in, which you possibly can receive before you enter, to join them in the very same participation of the same ineffable blessedness. May the Lord bless what hath been thus feebly delivered unto you. Amen.

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**Samuel Eyles Pierce (1746-1829):** English Baptist preacher; born in Up-Ottery, Devon, England, UK.





# IMMEASURABLE LOVE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,  
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,  
but have everlasting life.—John 3:16*

**T**ONIGHT, we have to talk about the love of God: “God so loved the world.” That love of God is a very wonderful thing, especially when we see it set upon a lost, ruined, guilty world. What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to Him, hatred to His truth, disregard of His law, rebellion against His commandments—those were the thorns and briars that covered the wasteland, but no desirable thing blossomed there. Yet, “God loved the world,” says the text. [He] “so” loved it, that even the writer of the book of John could not tell us how much; but so greatly, so divinely, did He love it that He gave His Son, His only Son, to redeem the world from perishing and to gather out of it a people to His praise.

Whence came that love? Not from anything outside of God Himself. God’s love springs from Himself. He loves because it is His nature to do so. “God is love” (1Jo 4:8). As I have said already, nothing upon the face of the earth could have merited His love, though there was much to merit His displeasure. This stream of love flows from its own secret source in the eternal Deity, and it owes nothing to any earthborn rain or rivulet.<sup>1</sup> It springs from beneath the everlasting throne and fills itself full from the springs of the infinite.

God loved because He would love. When we enquire why the Lord loved this man or that, we must come back to our Savior’s answer to the question, “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:26). God has such love in His nature that He must necessarily let it flow forth to a world perishing by its own willful sin. And when it flowed forth, it was so deep, so wide, so strong that even inspiration could not compute its measure. Therefore, the Holy Spirit gave us that great little word *so*, and left us to attempt the measurement, according as we perceive more and more of love divine.

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<sup>1</sup> rivulet – small stream of water.

Now, there happened to be an occasion upon which the great God could display His immeasurable love. The world had sadly gone astray; the world had lost itself; the world was tried and condemned; the world was given over to perish because of its offenses; and there was need for help. The fall of Adam and the destruction of mankind made ample room and verge<sup>2</sup> enough for love almighty. Amid the ruins of humanity there was space for showing how much Jehovah loved the sons of men; for the compass of His love was no less than the world, the object of it no less than to deliver men from going down to the pit, and the result of it no less than the finding of a ransom for them.

The far-reaching purpose of that love was both negative and positive; that, believing in Jesus, men might not perish, but have eternal life. The desperate disease of man gave occasion for the introduction of that divine remedy that God alone could have devised and supplied. By the plan of mercy, and the great gift that was needed for carrying it out, the Lord found means to display His boundless love to guilty men. Had there been no fall and no perishing, God might have shown His love to us as He does to the pure and perfect spirits that surround His throne. But He never could have commended His love to us to such an extent as He now does. In the gift of His only-begotten Son, God commended His love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6, 8). The black background of sin makes the bright line of love shine out the more clearly. When the lightning writes the name of the Lord with flaming finger across the black brow of the tempest, we are compelled to see it; so, when love inscribes the cross upon the jet tablet<sup>3</sup> of our sin, even blind eyes must see that “herein is love” (1Jo 4:10).

I might handle my text in a thousand different ways tonight; but for simplicity’s sake, and to keep to the one point of setting forth the love of God, I want to make you see how great that love is by [these] different particulars:

1. **The first is the *gift*.** “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.” Men who love much will give much, and you usually measure the truth of love by its self-denials and sacrifices. The love that spares nothing, but spends itself to help and bless its object, is love indeed, and not the mere name of it. Little love forgets to bring

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<sup>2</sup> **verge** – space within a boundary.

<sup>3</sup> **jet tablet** – glossy black slab of stone intended to bear an inscription.

water for the feet, but great love breaks its box of alabaster and lavishes its precious ointment (Mat 26:7).

**Consider, then, *what this gift was that God gave.*** I should have to labor for expression if I were to attempt to set forth to the full this priceless boon;<sup>4</sup> and I will not court a failure by attempting the impossible. I will only invite you to think of the sacred person whom the great Father gave in order that He might prove His love to men. It was His only-begotten Son—His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased (Mat 3:17). None of us had ever such a son to give. Ours are the sons of men; His was the Son of God...When the great God gave His Son, He gave God Himself; for Jesus is not in His eternal nature less than God. When God gave God for us, He gave Himself. What more could He give? God gave His all: He gave Himself. Who can measure this love?

Ye fathers, judge how ye love your sons: could ye give them to die for your enemy? Judge, ye that have an only son, how your hearts are entwined about your firstborn, your only-begotten. There was no higher proof of Abraham's love to God than when he did not withhold his son from God, his only son, his Isaac whom he loved. And there can certainly be no greater display of love than for the eternal Father to give His only-begotten Son to die for us. No living thing will readily lose its offspring. Man has peculiar grief when his son is taken—has not God yet more?...God so loved us that, to put it very strongly, He seemed to love us better than His only Son and did not spare Him that He might spare us. He permitted His Son to perish from among men "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

**If you desire to see the love of God in this great procedure, you must consider *how He gave His Son.*** He did not give His Son, as you might do, to some profession in the pursuit of which you might still enjoy his company; but He gave His Son to exile among men. He sent Him down to yonder manger, united with a perfect manhood, which at the first was in an infant's form. There He slept where horned oxen fed! The Lord God sent the Heir of all things to toil in a carpenter's shop: to drive the nail, push the plane, and use the saw. He sent Him down amongst scribes and Pharisees, whose cunning eyes watched Him, and where cruel tongues scourged Him with base slanders. He sent Him down to hunger, thirst, and poverty so dire that He had not where to lay His head.

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<sup>4</sup> **boon** – gift; something freely or graciously bestowed.

He sent Him down to the scourging and the crowning with thorns, to the giving of His back to the smiters and His cheeks to those that plucked off the hair. At length, He gave Him up to death—a felon’s death, the death of the crucified. Behold that cross and see the anguish of Him that dies upon it! Mark how the Father has so given Him that He hides His face from Him and seems as if He would not own Him! “*Lama sabachthani*”<sup>5</sup> tells us how fully God gave His Son to ransom the souls of the sinful. He gave Him to be made a curse for us (Gal 3:13), gave Him that He might die “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18).

Dear sirs, I can understand your giving up your children to go to India on her Majesty’s service, or to go out to the Cameroons or the Congo upon the errands of our Lord Jesus. I can well comprehend your yielding them up even with the fear of a pestilential<sup>6</sup> climate before you, for if they die, they will die honorably in a glorious cause. But could you think of parting with them to die a felon’s death upon a gibbet,<sup>7</sup> execrated<sup>8</sup> by those whom they sought to bless, stripped naked in body, and deserted in mind? Would not that be too much? Would you not cry, “I cannot part with my son for such wretches as these. Why should he be put to a cruel death for such abominable beings, who even wash their hands in the blood of their best friend?” Remember that our Lord Jesus died what His countrymen considered to be an accursed death. To the Romans it was the death of a condemned slave, death that had all the elements of pain, disgrace, and scorn mingled in it to the uttermost. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Oh, wondrous stretch<sup>9</sup> of love, that Jesus Christ should die!

**Yet, I cannot leave this point until I have you notice *when God gave His Son*, for there is love in the time.** “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” But when did He do that? He did this from before the foundation of the world in His eternal purpose.<sup>10</sup> The words here used, “He gave his only begotten Son,” cannot relate exclusively to the death of Christ, for Christ was not dead at the time of the utterance of this third chapter of John. Our Lord had just been speaking with Nicodemus, and that conversation took place at the

<sup>5</sup> *lama sabachthani* – Aramaic for “Why have you forsaken me?”

<sup>6</sup> **pestilential** – likely to spread an infectious, epidemic disease.

<sup>7</sup> **gibbet** – upright post with a projecting arm from which the bodies of criminals were hung.

<sup>8</sup> **execrated** – loathed; cursed.

<sup>9</sup> **stretch** – extension of Christ’s limbs upon the cross.

<sup>10</sup> See FGB 236, *God’s Eternal Purpose*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

beginning of His ministry (Joh 2:23-3:21). The fact is that Jesus was always the gift of God. The promise of Jesus was made in the Garden of Eden almost as soon as Adam fell. On the spot where our ruin was accomplished, a Deliverer was bestowed Whose heel should be bruised, but Who should break the serpent's head beneath His foot (Gen 3:15).

Throughout the ages, the great Father stood to His gift. He looked upon His Only Begotten as man's hope, the inheritance of the chosen seed, who in Him would possess all things. Every sacrifice was God's renewal of His gift of grace, a reassurance that He had bestowed the gift and would never draw back therefrom. The whole system of types under the Law betokened that in the fullness of time the Lord would in very deed give up His Son to be born of a woman, to bear the iniquities of His people, and to die the death in their behalf. I greatly admire this pertinacity<sup>11</sup> of love; for many a man in a moment of generous excitement can perform a supreme act of benevolence, and yet could not bear to look at it calmly and consider it from year to year; the slow fire of anticipation would have been unbearable. If the Lord should take away yonder dear boy from his mother, she would bear the blow with some measure of patience, heavy as it would be to her tender heart. But suppose that she were credibly informed that on such a day her boy must die, and thus had from year to year to look upon him as one dead. Would it not cast a cloud over every hour of her future life? Suppose also that she knew that he would be hanged upon a tree to die, as one condemned—would it not embitter her existence? If she could withdraw from such a trial, would she not? Assuredly, she would. Yet the Lord God spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32), doing it in His heart from age to age. Herein is love: love which many waters could not quench—love eternal, inconceivable, infinite!

Now, as this gift refers not only to our Lord's death, but to the ages before it, so it includes also all the ages afterwards. God "so loved the world that he gave"—and still gives—"his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The Lord is giving Christ away tonight. Oh, that thousands of you may gladly accept the gift unspeakable! Will anyone refuse? This good gift, this perfect gift—can you decline it? Oh, that you may have faith to lay hold on Jesus, for thus He will be yours. He is God's free gift to all free receivers—a full Christ for empty sinners. If you can but hold out your empty, willing hand, the Lord will give Christ to

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<sup>11</sup> **pertinacity** – persistent determination.

you at this moment. Nothing is freer than a gift. Nothing is more worth having than a gift that comes fresh from the hand of God, as full of effectual power as ever it was. The fountain is eternal, but the stream from it is as fresh as when first the fountain was opened. There is no exhausting this gift!

See, then, what the love of God is: He gave His Son from of old and has never revoked the gift. He stands to His gift and continues still to give His dear Son to all who are willing to accept Him. Out of the riches of His grace, He has given, is giving, and will give the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the priceless gifts that are contained in Him, to all needy sinners who will simply trust Him.

I call upon you from this first point to admire the love of God because of the transcendent greatness of His gift to the world, even the gift of His only begotten Son.

**2. Now notice secondly, and I think I may say with equal admiration, the love of God in the plan of salvation.** He has put it thus: “that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The way of salvation is extremely simple to understand and exceedingly easy to practice, when once the heart is made willing and obedient. The method of the covenant of grace<sup>12</sup> differs as much from that of the covenant of works<sup>13</sup> as light from darkness. It is not said that God has given His Son to all who will keep His law, for that we could not do. Therefore, the gift would have been available to none of us. Nor is it said that He has given His Son to all that experience terrible despair and bitter remorse, for that is not felt by many who nevertheless are the Lord’s own people. But the great God has given His own Son that “whosoever believeth in him” should not perish. Faith, however slender, saves the soul. Trust in Christ is the certainty of eternal happiness.

**Now, what is it to believe in Jesus?** It is just this: it is to trust yourself with Him. If your hearts are ready, though you have never believed in Jesus before, I trust you will believe in Him now. O Holy Spirit, graciously make it so.

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<sup>12</sup> **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the benefit of which is applied to all that believe in Him.

<sup>13</sup> **Covenant of Works** – covenant God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man’s obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17).

What is it to believe in Jesus? It is, first, to give your *firm and cordial assent* to the truth that God did send His Son, born of a woman, to stand in the room and stead of guilty men, and that God did cause to meet on Him the iniquities of us all, so that He bore the punishment due to our transgressions, being made a curse for us (Gal 3:13). We must heartily believe the Scripture that saith, “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). I ask for your assent to the grand doctrine of substitution,<sup>14</sup> which is the marrow of the gospel.

Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead you to give a cordial assent to it at once; for wonderful as it is, it is a fact that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:19). Oh, that you may rejoice that this is true and be thankful that such a blessed fact is revealed by God Himself. Believe that the substitution of the Son of God is certain; cavil<sup>15</sup> not at the plan nor question its validity or efficacy<sup>16</sup> as many do. Alas! They nick at<sup>17</sup> God’s great sacrifice and count it a sorry invention. As for me, since God has ordained to save man by a substitutionary sacrifice, I joyfully agree to His method and see no reason to do anything else but admire it and adore the Author of it. I joy and rejoice that such a plan should have been thought of, whereby the justice of God is vindicated and His mercy is set free to do all that He desires. Sin is punished in the person of the Christ, yet mercy is extended to the guilty. In Christ, mercy is sustained by justice, and justice satisfied by an act of mercy. The worldly wise say hard things about this device of infinite wisdom; but, as for me, I love the very name of the cross and count it to be the center of wisdom, the focus of love, the heart of righteousness! This is a main point of faith—to give a hearty assent to the giving of Jesus to suffer in our place and stead, to agree with all our soul and mind to this way of salvation.

The second thing is that you do *accept this for yourself*. In Adam’s sin, you did not sin personally, for you were not then in existence; yet you fell. Neither can you now complain thereof, for you have willingly endorsed and adopted Adam’s sin by committing personal transgressions. You have laid your hand, as it were, upon Adam’s sin, and made it your own by committing personal and actual sin. Thus, you

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<sup>14</sup> **substitution** – Christ taking the place of His people under the wrath of God for the payment of their sins. See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>15</sup> **cavil** – raise trivial objections.

<sup>16</sup> **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect.

<sup>17</sup> **nick at** – deny.

perished by the sin of another, which you adopted and endorsed; and in like manner must you be saved by the righteousness of another, which you are to accept and appropriate. Jesus has offered an atonement [to His Father], and that atonement becomes yours when you accept it by putting your trust in Him...Surely this is no very difficult matter. To say that Christ Who hung upon the cross shall be my Christ, my Surety, needs neither stretch of intellect nor splendor of character; yet it is the act that brings salvation to the soul.

One thing more is needful, and that is *personable trust*. First comes assent to the truth, then acceptance of that truth for yourself, and then a simple trusting of yourself wholly to Christ as a substitute. The essence of faith is trust, reliance, dependence. Fling away every other confidence of every sort, save confidence in Jesus. Do not allow a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a confidence in anything that you can do or in anything that you can be. Look to Him alone, Whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. This I do at this very moment; will you not do the same? Oh, may the sweet Spirit of God lead you now to trust in Jesus!

See, then, the love of God in putting it in so plain, so easy a way. Oh, thou broken, crushed and despairing sinner, thou canst not work, but canst thou not believe that which is true? Thou canst not sigh; thou canst not cry; thou canst not melt thy stony heart; but canst thou not believe that Jesus died for thee, and that He can change that heart of thine and make thee a new creature? If thou canst believe this, then trust in Jesus to do so, and thou art saved! For he that believes in Him is justified. He that believeth in him *hath* everlasting life. He is a saved man. His sins are forgiven him. Let him go his way in peace, and sin no more.

God bless you and help you to believe in Jesus. Amen.

From a sermon intended for reading on Lord's Day, July 26, 1885,  
delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington,  
available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



Get the love of God in your hearts, and you will run in His ways  
and not be weary.—*Thomas Watson*



# WHEN LOVE TURNS TO ANGER

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

**L**OVE is the central element of [God's] government. In human governments, it is not so; and in this exists a marked difference between God's government and man's. God's government begins where man's government ends—in mercy. Man works from the central attribute of justice; God from the central attribute of love. Before He draws His hand from His bosom and whets His glittering sword of justice to punish, that bosom would seem to devise all schemes of mercy and to employ all means of kindness that, if possible, mercy might rejoice over judgment.

Sinner! Thus has the God of love been dealing with you! Long has He dealt with you in the way of mercy and forbearance.<sup>1</sup> Judgment has lingered. There has been the “hiding of His power” (Hab 3:4). His mercy has restrained His wrath. But for this, hell would have been your present abode. And still you sin; still you fight against God. Still you despise His Son, reject His grace, scorn His salvation, and rush heedlessly, madly upon the thick bosses of His buckler.<sup>2</sup> “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc 8:11).

But there is a limit even to divine forbearance and infinite mercy. When God, so to speak, has exhausted all means of kindness and love, justice steps in and executes His righteous vengeance and wrath. Mercy gives place to judgment, and the sinner is righteously and eternally condemned.

What do you say then, sinner, to this love? Has it interested, instructed, won you? Presume not upon its patience and continuance. Throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and submit to the government of God. Repent and believe. Cast yourself in contrition<sup>3</sup> at His feet, and embrace in faith the scepter of His grace, extended in the person and work of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Est 4:11). That scepter will not always be outstretched; neither will it always be the scepter of grace. God is a God of justice as well as of love, a God that takes vengeance, as well as a God that shows mercy. Listen to His aw-

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<sup>1</sup> **forbearance** – patient self-control.

<sup>2</sup> **bosses...buckler** – knob-like ornamental studs on a shield.

<sup>3</sup> **contrition** – sincere sorrow or affliction of mind for wrongdoing.

ful words: “If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me” (Deu 32:41).

Oh! “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). Do not make light of eternal punishment. Do not think it a small thing to fall under the vengeance of a holy, just, and gracious God. Mercy is fearful when it turns to wrath! Love is consuming when it turns to anger! There is no wrath like “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16)! With hell flashing in your face, with the wrath to come—wrath, forever and ever to come—preparing for its dread and endless outpouring with the certain prospect before you of the undying worm of conscience and the unquenchable flame of bodily and soul suffering (Mar 9:44, 46, 48)—why, oh, *why* will you die?

Is sin so sweet, the world so attractive, the creature so satisfying that for it you are willing to imperil your everlasting happiness, to barter your soul? Conceive, oh, conceive, if possible, what it is to dwell in everlasting burning, to lie down in eternal fire! Spirit of the living God! Awaken the sleeping sinner, quicken the dead soul! Cause men everywhere to realize, in some degree, what a fearful, what an appalling, indescribable thing it is to be lost forever!

Oh, what a mercy that you are not already in hell and that there is a door open to you into heaven! That door is Christ. “I am the door” (Joh 10:9). Cease striving to enter heaven by the door of your good works and religious duties; by the merits and intercessions of men, of saints, or of angels. There is but one door into heaven: faith in the Savior, Who died for sinners on the cross and Whose blood and righteousness supply all the merit God requires or man can bring. Jesus came to save sinners—saves them now, saves them to the uttermost, saves them freely and forever. Why not you?

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I believe the preacher does well who speaks upon this love of God in its eternity, who says of it that it is an ancient thing, more ancient than the hoary mountains or the aged sea; who speaks of it as an unchangeable and inimitable thing, abiding fast forever to those chosen ones who possess it. He does well, I believe, who speaks of it as being without an end, who shall declare in God’s name that Christ,

having loved His own who were in the world loves them to the end; and that  
 this is but a picture of the great love that is in God our Father towards  
 us, that having loved us once, He will never cease to love us;  
 but we shall always be the object of His heart’s  
 affection.—*C. H. Spurgeon*