

CHAPTER XIX

THE LOVE OF GOD

Henry Drummond says that love is the greatest thing in the world. And from our point of view love is the greatest thing in God. Without love His justice would cut us off; His holiness would put us out of His sight; and His power would destroy us. Love is the one hope of sinners, and our great concern should be to discover God's love to us.

With regard to His moral nature, God is said to be two things: light and love. *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1 Jno. 1:5). In Scripture, "darkness" stands for sin and ignorance, and "light" is a symbol of holiness and understanding. "God is love": *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love"* (1 Jno. 4:8). Light and love are balancing perfections in the Divine nature. Because God is light, His love is not amiable weakness or good natured indulgence. Because God is light, His love is a holy love and not a mere sickly sentiment. God's love never conflicts with His holiness. Because God is light, He never overlooks sin even in His own people, *"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Heb. 12:6).

The love of God may be defined as that eternal principal of His nature by which He is moved to bestow eternal and spiritual blessings. Love is the moving cause of all His acts of mercy and grace. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us"* (Eph. 2:4). *The love of God is the guarantee that all things work together for the ultimate good of His people; it is the basis of all His redeeming activities.*

Characteristics of God's Love

1. It is eternal. *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee"* (Jer. 31:3). Here we have the secret drawing of the sinner to the Savior explained. He draws because He loves. *"Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple"* (Ps. 65:4). The love that bought us also sought us and brought us to the place of safety, even to the Mercy Seat; Jesus Christ. There was never a time when God did not love His people, and there will never be a time when He will not love them. He loved us as much before we were saved as He does since we have been saved, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8).

2. God's love is immutable. God changeth not and there can be no change in His love. *"Now*

before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (Jno. 13:1). God's love for His people had no beginning and blessed be His Name, it shall have no ending. It is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting. Paul's grand argument for the security of the believer is based upon the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God nothing in the grave of the past, nothing in the perils of the present, and nothing in the womb of the future. The love of God is subject to no vicissitude.

"His love no end nor measure knows,
No change can turn its course,
Eternally the same it flows
From one eternal source."

3. God's love is sovereign. This is self evident. God Himself is a Sovereign, consulting His own imperial pleasure, and working all things after the counsel of His own will. And it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. He alone selects the objects of His love. If He loves Jacob and hates Esau, who is to criticise Him? If He loves fallen sinners of the human race and hates fallen angels, who is to gainsay His right to do so. *"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"* (Rom. 9:18); *"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"* (Rom. 9 :20).

There is absolutely nothing in sinners to cause God to love them; nobody can claim the right to God's love; His love is sovereign and free. What was there in this poor sinner to attract the heart of God? Absolutely nothing! On the other hand there was everything to merit His hatred; everything for which He might have loathed me.

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in Thy sight."

4. The love of God is effectual. This is obvious, for it is the love of the Almighty. It means something; yea, it means everything, to be loved by God. We are often loved by those who are helpless to help us. They are powerless to do for us what they would like to do. Their love is helpless because they lack power to make their love effectual. Darius loved Daniel but was powerless to save him. But we are loved by the Almighty, with whom nothing is too hard. The objects of God's love are eternally safe. He who can make sure that God loves him may also be

assured of a home in heaven.

Here is a most important question: How may I know that God loves me? How can I be assured that all things work together for my good? By making sure that I love God. My love for God is inward evidence of His love for me. "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (I Jno. 4:19). His love for us created our love for Him. "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is (Gk. has been) born of God, and knoweth God*" (I John 4:7).

Manifestations of God's Love

God is love and He manifests what He is. There are no idle attributes in God. There is no such thing as secret love. Love will win out, whether it is the love of God or the love of man. Love is an acting, working principle of life.

1. God's love to sinners was manifested in the gift of His Son. Love gives. Love gives the best. "*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). Christ so loved the church that He gave Himself for it: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*" (Eph. 5:25). "*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*" (Jno. 10:11). As a typical Jew, Nicodemus thought God loved nobody but Jews, but our Lord told him that "*God so loved the world (Gentile as well as Jew), that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever (Gentile or Jew) believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). Until they were taught better, Christ's own apostles thought all the sheep were among the Jews, but the Savior corrected them by saying, "*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*" (Jno. 10:15,16). The sheep among the Jews were in a fold, a ceremonial enclosure which distinguished them from the Gentiles. The sheep among the Gentiles had not been subjected to ceremonial laws. In saving the sheep among the Jews Christ led them out of the fold (Judaism), and made them one with the Gentile sheep that heard His voice, so that there is only one flock and one Shepherd. All of God's people are one in Christ, for "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Gal. 3:28). This does not teach that there are no distinct spheres of service, but it means that all the saved have a common salvation.

2. God's love is manifested in the new birth. By nature we are children of wrath; by a supernatural birth we become the children of God. "*That is, They which are the children of the*

flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:8). John says, "*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"* (I John 3:1). We are not only named children, but we are made children of God by the new birth. We are children by a Divine call; that effectual call which comes in connection with the new birth.

3. God's love is manifested in discipline. Discipline is an expression and proof of love. "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth"* (Heb. 12:6). Here is ample evidence that none of God's children are perfect. They all need the Father's chastening rod. The word for "chasten" means to train as a child, and the word for "scourge" means to whip or flog. Children need training and whipping, and the love of God will give us what we need. Chastisement is from the loving hand of a wise Father; condemnation is from the truthful lips of a just Judge. "*But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"* (I Cor. 11:32). Chastisement is not pleasant, but it is profitable; it increaseth the fruit of righteousness and maketh us partakers of His holiness: "*For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."* (Heb. 12:10,11).

Various Aspects of God's Love

Some theologians speak of several kinds of Divine love, but we prefer to think of one Divine principle with varying emotions, according to the object upon which the love is bestowed. We like what Dr. Kerfoot has to say on this point:

"If the object loved is lovely, then the emotion of loving is that of complacency. If the object loved is one needing kindness or beneficence, the emotion is that of benevolence. If the object is in distress, the emotion is that of compassion or pity, etc. Just as the active principle of fire is the same, whatever may be the character of the material upon which it lays hold, so the principle of love is always the same."

1. When God's love terminates upon Himself or upon innocent creatures, it is the love of complacency. This is the aspect of His love for His Son with Whom He is always well pleased, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), and in whom He ever takes delight. His love for the holy angels is

likewise a love of complacency and delight.

2. When the love of God is towards sinners as objects of misery, then it is the love of compassion or pity. *"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. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)"* (Eph. 2:3-5). In mercy He quickens dead sinners into life, and this marvelous mercy is on account of His great love. Great love for sinners fruits in "plenteous mercy," and "abounding grace."

A dirty, drunken, ragged harlot, howling and filling the air with obscene language, was being dragged down the street by policemen. A refined and elegantly dressed woman stepped out into the street and kissed the vile wretch. Startled into sobriety for the moment, the vile creature asked in surprise: "What made you do that?" "Because I love you," was the prompt reply. Are you surprised at this example of love? Then remember that the moral distance between God and the sinner, any and every sinner, is far greater than that between these two women; and yet He stoops to give us the kiss of reconciliation.

"I've found a Friend; O such a Friend!
 He loved me ere I knew Him;
 He drew me with the cords of love,
 And thus He bound me to Him.
 And round my heart still closely twine
 Those ties which naught can sever;
 For I am His and He is mine,
 Forever and forever."