

The Love of God.

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By
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1 John 4:16.

And we have known, and believed, the love that God hath to us.

In the true knowledge and comprehension of God, as described, and revealed in the Scripture, consists the present, and everlasting happiness, of immortal souls!

Without such a knowledge, it is impossible to worship him acceptably. Whatever men may presume to do in their nature's ignorance, while in that lamentable state, all their acts of worship fall infinitely short of, and are diametrically contrary, in their very nature and tendency, to that spiritual worship, which the Scripture so powerfully enforces, and so clearly inculcates!

The *Athenian* worshippers had altars as many, and as various as their deities; and from the light of nature, they dedicated one to the true and eternal God. But what did they inscribe thereon? All that was possible for those to assert, who were alienated from God through ignorance: **To the unknown God**; whom, (as Paul faithfully informed them) they *ignorantly* worshipped. Bound by the infatuating chains of ignorance, as the willing slaves of superstition, they were utterly incapable of looking to God, as the great Author and Supporter of their existence; and of coming to him as the overflowing fountain of benignity, mercy, and superabounding goodness: neither could they, while in this pitiable situation, contemplate the Divine glories and perfections, which

shine with the most illustrious splendor and magnificence only in the face of Jesus Christ!

And, O how desirable is such a knowledge! To know God as a God of goodness, grace, and love; to feel our minds happily liberated from every thing that hindered our access to him; to approach him in the person, blood and righteousness of Christ; to find in him all those blessings, which completely, and fully satisfy, the extensive desires of our capacious and immortal powers; and to say, from our very souls, "we have known and believed the love that God hath to us," must be, to the sensible sinner, above all other things, the most desirable!

But, alas! how opposite to this is the natural state of man: as we learn from the circumstance of the idolatrous *Athenians*. And this is not only true, as it respects heathenish idolaters, but it is also the melancholy state, even of many who have the superior advantages of God's *written* and *preached* word: to whom it may, with the greatest propriety, be said, as our Lord addressed one of old, "*Ye worship ye know not what.*"

And, as it is impossible to worship God, reverently, affectionately, and devotedly, without a true knowledge of him, and all men, by nature, are destitute of such a knowledge, the necessity of the Spirit's work must appear in a very clear and striking point of view! The eternal God certainly has, in infinite condescension, revealed himself in his most holy Word, in such beautiful characters, and under such familiar and agreeable metaphors, as are peculiarly adapted to our contracted ideas, and shallow comprehension: but under none of those characters is he to be known; by none of those metaphors can he be comprehended, only as the soul is taught by the eternal Spirit!

God is a Spirit. But how should man, who is *earthly, sensual, and devilish*, understand the spirituality of God? "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither indeed can he know them, because they are *spiritually* discerned.

God is a sun – God is light. But darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the people; and though "The light shineth in darkness, the darkness comprehendeth it not." For men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. Poor lost man, captive to the power of darkness (Co. 1:13), has no ability to come to God, to come to the light, until God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, shines into his heart (2 Cor. 4:6), and as one of his own people "call him out of darkness, into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

And, according to our text, *God is love.* But men are "living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3): yea, are even "haters of God" himself! (Rom. 1:30.) In short, such is the state of sinful man, that he is destitute of the life of God in his soul, alienated from him, and not only without hope in him, but his carnal mind is enmity itself to God! So miserable is his condition, that there is in him, every thing contrary to God, and his truth: and, instead of loving him, and looking to him, as an inexhaustible source of the purest love, if he think of God at all, he considers him as a being, full of wrath and fury, and under this consideration, daily exercises an enmity to him!

Men and brethren are these things so? Happy then are the people whose natural enmity to Jehovah is slain: who are acquainted with God, as a God of love: who love him, because he first loved them. "Happy is the people that is in such a case!" Everlastingly blessed are all those, who can say, from heart-felt experience, *we have known, and believed the love that God hath to us.*

While I call your attention to this sublime and most important subject, may the eternal Spirit, whose office it is to teach his people, take of the things of Christ, and show unto you – may he comfortably direct your hearts into the love of God. And before I proceed, let me exhort you, seriously, and deliberately, to meditate upon those passages of God's word, which I shall quote in defense of what I am about to advance: remembering the unerring language of inspiration; "To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not

according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

Hear with impartiality: and may the Lord enable you to life up your hearts unto him for his Divine instruction, and peculiar blessing! For, except he makes a powerful application of this truth to your hearts, my preaching, and your hearing, will be altogether abortive.

I shall endeavour to show,

- I. The discovery of God's love to the souls of sinners.
- II. Wherein God hath manifested his love.
- III. The nature and properties of his love.

And in speaking of the discovery of God's love to the souls of sinners, I would observe,

First, That in the Scriptures, and only there, Jehovah hath revealed himself a *God of love!* This is the peculiar province of the Bible, and herein appears the superexcellence of Divine Revelation.

I will, with the greatest pleasure, admit, that the works of Creation and Providence, in a most convincing manner, demonstrate the existence, unsearchable greatness, and astonishing power of the great God. But in none of these is he discoverable, as the grand fountain of eternal love. Nevertheless, I say, it gives me pleasure to affirm, that these are demonstrable proofs of his eternal existence, infinite wisdom, and uncontrollable power. Let that bold blasphemer, the daring *Atheist*, take but a cursory survey of the beauties, and unsearchable glories of creation; let him stand still, and reflect, and he must shudder at his own presumption!

How forcibly a contemplative mind must be struck, in surveying the bright luminaries of the night, and the burning orb of day, that warms and illuminates the earth by his genial beams; and by whose fructifying influence, it brings forth its fruits in due season.

These glittering orbs, that strike us with such an astonishment, must have their origin and formation. But who was their author? By what power were they created? Grand and

magnificent objects! What but an Almighty power could have created them? The eternal God, the first grand cause of all causes, of his own unerring Will, and by his all-commanding voice, spoke them into being! And if these are his glorious and incomprehensible works – *the work of his fingers*, how unsearchably Great must **HE** be, who now holds them in his hand, and by whose sovereign command, they revolve in their appointed circuits! And O, when compared with these, how diminutive frail man appears! A creature of a day – a worm of the earth – a sinful inhabitant of this little ball! And that the eternal Jehovah, whose glory the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, that **HE** should look upon man, or at all visit him, is still matter of greater astonishment!

Such, we find, were the Psalmist's thoughts, when contemplating the grandeur, and unsearchable power of his Creator: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man that thou visitest him" (Psa. 8:3-4).

Every object in the vegetative, animal, or rational world, is a living witness of Jehovah's existence, and has a mouth to speak his boundless praise.

But they give us no account of restoration for fallen man – salvation for the lost – pardon for the guilty – mercy for the miserable – grace for the unworthy – nor of the covenant love of God, in Christ, to sinners.

No, it is the Bible, that blessed God-breathed book, which contains this joyful news, and gives us the pleasing information of **Divine love** to men! Blessed be God for this precious volume of truth! Wherein he hath fully manifested himself as a *God of love*; and encourages us to approach him as such, by the most loving declarations; such as you will find in Isa 27:4 – "Fury is not in me." Zeph. 3:17 – "He will rest in his love." Rom. 5:8 – "God commendeth his love towards us." Rom. 8:39 – "The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eph. 2:4 – "His great love wherewith he has loved us." 1 John 3:1 – "Behold what manner of

love the Father hath bestowed upon us." Mal. 1:2 – "I have loved you saith the Lord." Jer. 31:3 – "Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love." John 3:16 – "God so loved the world." John 17:23 – "And hast loved them, even as thou hast loved me."

But, *second*, though he is revealed in the Scriptures as a God of love, man, through his natural aversion to him, is incapable of viewing him in this sublime, and most endearing character, till *directed into the love of God, by the Lord* (2 Thess. 3:5) the Spirit; whose prerogative it is to teach the spirituality of those writings, which were indited immediately under his Divine inspiration.

I know that the Divine authority of the Bible may be irrefutably evinced, by a variety of the most nervous arguments. Arguments, which are sufficient to stop the mouths of all the carnal, and deistical reasoners in the world. But, at the same time, I am bold to affirm, that no man can receive the Bible, in reality, as the Word of God, till he has undergone a Divine renovation of heart; till he is born again. The Spirit is the witness of Jesus, who witnesseth with our Spirits that we are the children of God: which is the powerful and indubitable evidence, to God's people, of the authenticity of Scripture. Their experience attests the truth of God's Word. This is provable, from the language of *Paul* to the *Thessalonians* – "For this cause, also, thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). He did not ascribe any praise to *them*, for their reception of God's Word; but thanked God without ceasing, through whose power they had received it. It wrought effectually in them, for it was given unto them to believe. It wrought effectually, as a *hammer* (Jer. 23:29), in breaking the rocky heart, as a *sword* (Eph. 6:17), in slaying the enmity of the carnal mind, as a word of grace, to encourage them, and as a word of consolation, to comfort them.

In discovering his love to a redeemed soul, the Lord exerts his Almighty power; a no less power than that which created the

world, and raised Christ from the dead. The necessity of this will obviously appear, if we consider how averse the human heart is to God, and what must be removed out of the way, before the soul can have any comfortable view of everlasting love in Christ. Under the influence of sin, and a natural enmity to God, the language of the soul is – "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice" (Ex. 5:2). *Job* thus represented the state of the wicked, and the rebellion of their language – "They say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" (Job 21:14-15). – "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Psa. 10:4). This is a true, because it is a scriptural representation of man in his fallen condition. What an Almighty power then, must be exerted, in brining such rebel, such monster of iniquity, near to the Lord; to embrace him in the arms of his affection, as the God of love! And till the Omnipotent exerts his exceeding great power, in removing the stubborn will, stony heart, darkness, and ignorance, all other efforts to make the soul acquainted with God's love and grace, are frustrated, and rendered abortive.

Let *Paul* reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25), and by the power of eloquence, touching the natural passions, or through the accusations of a terrifying conscience, *Felix* will tremble. But if *Paul's* master does not reveal himself as a God of love, if a Divine blessing does not succeed, his labors are rendered fruitless, and he reasons but in vain!

Let the terrors of the law, and the torments of the damned, be sounded in the ears of a sinner; this may alarm him, and fill his soul with a slavish fear of Jehovah; and like *Pharaoh*, when alarmed with judgment, he may cry out, *I am wicked*: still it leaves him destitute of a knowledge of Divine love, averse to the truth, and at enmity with God! The law worketh wrath – it is the *ministration of condemnation*." For if such convictions are not succeeded by a revelation of God's love in Christ (which is always

an evident proof, that the sinner was truly slain by the law, Rom. 7:9-11), they will very soon wear off, and "the last state of such a man is worse than the first"; for he becomes more hardened in his iniquity!

Further, all the engaging charms of the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God, will never effect this Work, till the Spirit gives a *new* heart! Is the Gospel compared to the most delightful music? The sinner is deaf, he hath no ear to hear it. Is the Gospel represented by a delicious feast? The sinner hath no spiritual appetite; he is unacquainted with his mental indigency, unalarmed in a starving condition! Is a precious Christ exhibited on the pole of the Gospel? (John 3:14-15). Are the glories of Immanuel displayed in the preaching of the Word? – Alas! the sinner is blind, he cannot behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; the god of this world (i.e., the devil) hath blinded his mind (2 Cor. 4:4). But, when the Eternal makes bare the arm of his salvation, what can repel his force? Who shall resist his operations? And when he communicates his loving kindness to a soul, the sinner feels,

First, the *attractive* power of Divine love. For thus saith the Lord, by the mouth of his prophet *Hosea*, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them" (Hos. 11:4). The yoke of the law, that galling yoke of bondage, is taken off; the soul is no more under the *spirit of bondage to fear* (Rom. 8:15); no longer looks upon the Lord as full of vindictive wrath, but, drawn with the cords of the man, Christ Jesus; powerfully attracted by efficacious grace in him, comes near the gracious throne, washed and made white in his most precious blood; liberated from the eternal curse of the fiery law, and freed from the inexorable frowns of inflexible justice; -- he views God as full of love and mercy in his dear Son; for it is the time of *love*, and the Lord saith unto him live (Eze. 16:6-8). The Prodigal is returned to his father's house, and the loving father falleth on his neck, and kisseth him! – Jehovah now *appeareth* unto him as a kind, forgiving, and

affectionate Father, saying, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving kindness have I *drawn* thee."

These *cords* are attractive indeed, when the poor sinner sees his sins in the wounds of Jesus, and, by the eye of faith, views his loving, bleeding heart, receiving the sword of justice, and bearing, in his stead, the wrath of heaven!

And O! to hear him say, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27).

Having such a view of a bleeding Christ, and hearing such melting language from his lips, the sinner exclaims, in ecstasies of love and praise, "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 4:10). Thus viewing the man, God's fellow, making reconciliation for iniquity, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness, he feels himself happily delivered from all terrific fear, and his whole soul dissolved in love to Jesus! The *love of God being shed abroad in his heart* (Rom. 5:5), the "yoke is taken off his jaws." Before, he could neither speak *to* God, *of* God, nor *for* God – but his tongue is now loosened, and "behold he prayeth," and find sweet liberty in wrestling with his God, being brought nigh by the blood of Christ! His familiarity with the Lord is inexpressible; his soul thirsts for the blessings of his love, and his cry is, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26) – "Draw me, and I will run after thee" (Solomon's Song 1:4).

These are the powerful attractions of *the bands of love*; the *bands* wherewith the Sacred Three are bound in everlasting covenant, and wherewith Christ and his church are bound, as eternally one, by an everlasting, and indissoluble union!

And I laid meat unto them, saith the Lord. Being brought to the banqueting-house of Jesus, his banner over them is *love*, and his *fruit* is sweet to their *taste*. For it is a feast of love – "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined!" – They have bread to eat that

the world knows not of – Christ, the living bread, who came down from heaven, as the fruit of the Father's love, is the very life of their souls!

Second. The renewed soul feels the *constraining* influence of the love of Christ. Not constraining him to do any thing contrary to his will; but his will divinely renewed, and divinely governed. – The *new will* which is opposite to "the *will* of the flesh," always acquiesces, and delights in the will of God! He is carried, a willing captive, in the chains of love, to his adorable Redeemer, and lies with humility and submission at his feet. What a detestable light does *sin* now appear in! Sin, that before was his darling pleasure, is become hateful in all its glaring and specious forms. He looks upon it with a greater degree of abhorrence, than that with which men look upon a *murderer*: For he knows that it hath murdered thousands of souls, that are now sinking in irrecoverable ruin! And O melting thought! It caused a precious Christ to bleed and suffer – that *his sin* caused Christ to suffer! Sin was the enormous load under which he groaned, when crying in the most pathetic lamentation, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!*"

He no more wants Mount *Sinai's* thunder to deter him from sin, nor *Moses'* rod to drive him to obedience. Sin appears, in his sight, ugly as hell itself! And, powerfully constrained by the love of God, he yields the most cheerful, and unreserved obedience to the all-glorious commands of Jesus, the eternal king of Sion: and finds, by blessed experience, that *his* "yoke is easy and *his* burden is light." Who would not wish thus comfortably to walk with Jesus, and commune with the God of love? O sirs! Is it our happy state? Can we say that we daily carry on a glorious intercourse with heaven? That our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ? (1 John 1:3) If so, we know that God is love – we find him so, for we dwell in love, and therefore dwell in God, and God in us!

Love is the foundation, and very essence of true religion. It is the sum and substance of Christianity. Without love, whatever may be our religions pretences, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). Can we

say then, and express it from the most affectionate sensations, "We love God, because he first loved us." – And we have known, and believed the love that God hath to us?

If this is our happy experience, observe, by way of conclusion to this head of discourse,

1. that we are delivered from **fear**; for "perfect love casteth out fear." Not the filial fear of a child of God, which is "wisdom" (Job 28:28): nor does this fear intend those doubts and fears, with which the children of God are frequently exercised. Not that these are commendable, nor consistent with that strong faith which gives glory to God; neither do I assert this to encourage any in their doubts, who sincerely love Christ; no, not for a moment; for they are evidences of our weakness: notwithstanding, God's people are troubled with them. If not, why should the Lord, so affectionately, and so very frequently say, *Fear not?* Blessed be God for such comfortable exhortations, which have so often administered unspeakable consolation to my soul! When alarmed by the formidable appearance of my spiritual foes, I have forgotten the rock of my salvation, and have been ready to give up all for lost! But such an exhortation, as, *Fear not, for I am with thee*, has stimulated my soul with fresh courage and magnanimity, and in the strength of Jesus, the Lord of Hosts, I have bidden defiance to all my threatening enemies!

But the *fear*, which love casteth out of the regenerated soul, is that which is always accompanied with terror, and which causes those, who are under its enslaving influence, to look upon God as an enemy and an avenger. This is what *Paul* means by the *Spirit of bondage*.

2. That we *love* the *people* of God. "If any man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "For every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." Those that bear the image of Jesus, and *receive* the *truth*, in the love of it, sincerely love one another. "Whom I love (saith *John*) **in the truth.**"

3. That we *love* the *worship* of God. "Lord, I have loved (exclaims the Psalmist) the habitation of thine house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth!"

Now, my dear brethren, if this is your spiritual and comfortable state; if under the insuperable power of the Holy Spirit, your hearts are directed into the love of God, you will participate in my pleasure, and continue to give me your earnest attention to this very interesting subject, while I proceed to consider,

II. *Wherein God has manifested his love.*

So wonderful, extensive, and innumerable are the manifestations of God's love to sinners, that I am almost silenced – What should a worm of the earth say? How should he express himself, in presuming to declare the marvelous loving kindness of the unsearchable Jehovah? I feel myself entirely unequal to my undertaking; for could I call in to my assistance, all that penetrating sagacity, and all those rapturous tongues, of the myriads of flaming seraphim above, in conjunction with all the glorified spirits of just men made perfect, I should still fall infinitely short of describing one thousandth part of the love of God! May the God of love, then, direct me, in attempting to speak,

1. Of the *love* of the **Father**. And before we take under consideration the manifestations of the Father's love, we do well to observe, that this love is in Christ: he that loved his people in his dear Son; therefore the apostle calls it, "The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." There is no love in the Deity out of Christ. How vain then are *his* hopes, and what sandy foundation is *he* building upon, who presumes to approach an absolute God, without fleeing to Jesus for refuge, and pleading the efficacy of his blood!

Deluded wretch! Do you suppose that a God of holiness can see any thing amiable or pleasing in your pretended righteousness? Remember he searches the heart; and whatever you may think of yourself, be assured that your "heart is deceitful above all things,

and desperately wicked." The Lord is a God of justice, and without iniquity, who will never leave one sin unpunished, nor clear the guilty without atoning blood! Permit me then to say (for I speak in love to your soul; and O may the Lord use me as an instrument in undeceiving you!), that except you are found in Christ (Phil. 3:9), accepted in him the **beloved** (Eph. 1:6), you have neither part nor lot in the love of God; but with all your sins on your head, must sink for ever, under the frowns of a God of Justice, in the gloomy confines of a dismal hell! For as there is salvation in none other (Acts 4:12), neither is there love in any other but the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the **beloved** of the Father, *in whom* he is well pleased (Matt. 3:17); and as his people are *in him*, the Father looks upon them, with complacency, delight, and *love*. His love is manifested, first, in their *adoption*; "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" (1 John 3:1.) High and dignified title! Honorable and exalted state! Is it not enough to be the Lord's servants, but must we be his sons? "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Psa. 118:23). O Christian, it was everlasting love that numbered us with the family of heaven, put us among the children, and gave us in covenant to Christ! Second, the Father's love is further discovered, and still more astonishingly magnified in the unspeakable gift of his dear Son: "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). O amazing love! He spared not his Son – his only begotten – who was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him (Prov. 8:30). That he should deliver him into the hands of justice, to rescue guilty rebels! This is love indeed!

2. The love of the **Son**. The love of the dear Lord Jesus has always been a most pleasing theme to the saints of God; upon which they have dwelt with increasing affections, and upon which all the ransomed of the Lord shall dwell, with hearts expanded, and overflowing with love to the exalted Lamb of God, when they shall

surround his throne, for ever exempted from all sin, sorrow, coldness, and darkness of heart, to praise him in the full blaze of eternal day!

My brethren, I would now pray in your behalf, as *Paul* prayed for the *Ephesian* church (O let us all united in the petition to heaven), "That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).

And wherein hath the precious Jesus discovered his love for our souls? *First*, in his covenant undertaking. Does he not voluntarily propose to become our surety, and willingly undertake our cause?

Hear his loving language; "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure: then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Psa. 40:6-8, Heb. 17:5, etc.). – *Second*, in his amazing condescension. He leaves the bosom of the Father, the inexpressible joys of heaven, where he was highly exalted as the eternal God, receiving the homage, the worship, and rapturous praises, of the bright inhabitants of the glorious world of bliss – to lay aside his dignity, glory, divine grandeur, and happiness itself! – To veil his divinity in human flesh – to become a man of sorrows, and to be acquainted with grief – to be treated with indignity and contempt by sinful worms, and to be tempted of the Devil! – Thus to exchange the incalculable heights of bliss and happiness, in glory, for the unfathomable depths of sorrow, distress, and ignominy, in this lower world, is love that soars beyond all possible imagination!

Meditate upon this wonderful contrast ; and ask, what but love, unparalleled love, could ever excite the Savior to this wonderful condescension?

But in these, our researches, we are not yet arrived to the summit of his sufferings, nor to the extensive of his love. For, *third*, his love is particularly manifested in his agonizing *death*.

Here the great love of Christ appears in a most conspicuous light. Here is love unequalled – "Love beyond degree!" "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But, when we were his most malicious enemies, Christ died for us! What! Love enemies, traitors, the most sinful, and most rebellious, whose demerit cried for Jehovah's vengeance?

Yes, his church was involved in sin and ruin, yet he **loved** the church, and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25). A sacrifice, a ransom price – hath *purchased* his *church* with his won blood (Acts 20:28). "In his **love**, and in his pity he redeemed them." And in accomplishing this everlastingly complete redemption, O what did he endure! Not only the contempt of men, and the temptations of the devil – not only the pains of body, when the thorns pierced his temples, when lashed with the cutting scourges, when the nails tore his tender hands and feet, and the spear entered his loving, bleeding heart! – The sorrows of death not only compassed him, but the pains of hell gat hold upon him (Ps. 11:63). He must endure the wrath of heaven – the Father frowns, and his *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was, as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground! – And O on the accursed tree! – The wrath of men and devils united, and a fierce storm of heaven's tremendous vengeance, were then fully experienced, by the bleeding Lamb of God!

Still his love to his people is immoveable. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

Who that knows the Saviour, can reflect on this without feeling the warmest emotions of love?

My brethren, if our hearts are not hardened to stone, or frozen to ice, under the influence of the monster *sin*, surely upon these considerations, we must feel an unfeigned love tot his loving and altogether lovely Saviour; who hath omnipotently vanquished the powers of darkness, extracted the dreadful sting of the last enemy death, and unbarred the dreary prison of the grave! "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly,

triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). "God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet" (Ps. 47:5); and is highly exalted, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also that in which is to come (Eph. 1:21). And having loved his own, he loved them unto the end; -- he loves them perpetually, and expects to see his enemies made his footstool (Heb. 10), and all the objects of his redeeming love brought home, to those mansions that he is gone to prepare for them.

3. *The love of the Spirit.* It is a most striking proof of the Spirit's personality, that his love is spoken of in contradistinction both to that of the Father, and of the Son: as in Romans 15:30. "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for *the love of the Spirit,*" – And he hath in a most gracious and endearing manner, manifested his love:

First, in convincing us of our sin, alarming us of our danger, and converting our souls to God (Eph. 2:4-5). *Second*, in taking possession of our hearts. Herein appear the freeness and perpetuity of his love: That he should take up his abode in us, who are in ourselves nothing but sin, is love amazingly free: and there could not, in this respect, be any thing amiable, or inviting in our sin-polluted hearts, to excite such an holy inhabitant there to dwell. Neither did he ever receive an invitation from us, previous to his first gracious visit. We never once desired, or requested the comfortable presence of this celestial visitant; but, on the contrary, did every thing in our power to oppose his Divine operations. But, is it possible for a worm of the earth to withstand Omnipotence? Presumption to suppose! No, we could not, rebellious as we were, withstand his omnipotent influence; no, not for a moment. In his great love, he made us willing in the day of his power.

While I am speaking of the Spirit's operations, and of his dwelling in our hearts, it is very probable that some persons may be condemning me for an *Enthusiast*. But, if this be Enthusiasm, may the Eternal Spirit make us all Enthusiasts! For, *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his* (Rom. 8:9). (And

how awful the consequence of not being Christ's!) And farther, if this be *Enthusiasm*, then Paul was as much of an *Enthusiast* as ever existed; and, even in this case, includes all believers with himself, in this very intelligent and important interrogation: "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor. 3:16).

And the Spirit not only demonstrates his love in taking possession of, but also in *abiding* in us. The Father sends us his holy Spirit, that he may *abide* with us *for ever!* And this is a convincing proof of his love. For do not we particularly court the company of those whom we dearly love? And do we not wish always to abide with them? But if *our* friends slight us, or treat us with a cold indifference, our love for them daily declines; and instead of desiring, we gradually withdraw from their company. Not so the ever-blessed Spirit. O how transcendently glorious his love herein shines! Though we have grieved him, and slighted his love, still he abides with us, to convince us of our folly, and to restore our wandering feet to the paths of peace!

"Midst all our care, and sin, and woe,
The Spirit will not let us go."

Third, He manifests his love, by revealing pardon and peace to our souls, through the blood of Christ; and by witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

"All praise to the Spirit, whose whisper Divine,
Seals mercy, and pardon, and righteousness mine."

Fourth, By affording us his most gracious assistance in prayer, and in every other act of worship; -- "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).

Fifth, In *comforting* us. And this he does by teaching us the most comfortable, and instructive lessons of spiritual wisdom; by showing us the things of Christ, and by a powerful application of

the Divine promises to our souls! Herein consists our solid, and substantial comfort.

When our souls are bowed down in us, through the prevalency of indwelling sin; or, under the darkness of unbelief, exposed to the most powerful, and most malicious foes; who, but the gracious Spirit, can administer a cordial of comfort, soothe our sorrows, remove our fears, and restore us to perfect tranquility of mind? On this account he is emphatically denominated **the Comforter** – *the only real* Comforter! The world may talk of comfort, happiness, and pleasure, as long as please; but, while they remain strangers to the ever-blessed Comforter, they never will experience one drop of *real* comfort; for as they are "in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity," the *gall of bitterness* must, unavoidably, be mingled with the cup of their pretended pleasures!

May we admire, then, the distinguishing love of the Lord, who has taught us willing to depart *from*, and to look with an holy contempt upon, all those carnal amusements that the world call pleasure, and that we ourselves once delighted in! – That he hath taught us to pursue celestial pleasures, and given us to taste that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory! O how comfortable! To walk in the "green pastures" (Ps. 23) of the Gospel, enjoying perfect liberty, uncontrolled by sin and Satan; no more alarmed by the terrifying voice of an accusing conscience, nor by the melancholy apprehension of divine vengeance; but, breathing in celestial air, fanned by the sweet and refreshing zephyrs of redeeming love, charmed by the most melodious sounds of *Praise unto our God*, and gazing, with increasing delight, upon the Sun of Righteousness, shining in all the refulgence of his eternal Glory!

As the Spirit hath thus loved us, and manifested his love, in such a variety of pleasing, and satisfactory instances, what ingratitude it must be in us, to walk contrary to the holy direction which he has given us in the scriptures! But, alas! such is the base ingratitude of our carnal nature; and will frequently be again! For it is *unavoidable*, only as we are *kept by the power of God* (1 Peter 1:5). O may he teach us, then, seriously to attend to that weighty

exhortation, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). If he leave us to ourselves, we feel nothing but ingratitude; with every thing that is carnal and rebellious, for our nature possesses nothing else: but, when he is pleased to shin upon us, and direct our hearts in the Love of God, we cannot but be *grateful* and *obedient*, under a firm persuasion of our interest in that love! If we are firmly persuaded that a friend loves us, we would not wish to do any thing to grieve that friend: how much more, then, will this principle influence our hearts, and govern our actions, under a consideration of the Spirit's love to our immortal souls! *This, I say then, walk in the Spirit*, (contemplate his amazing love, look to him for assistance, follow his gracious directions), *and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh* (Gal. 5:16).

Thus I have concisely stated, and irrefutably proved from the Scriptures, some of the manifestations of the love of the sacred **Three; Fathers, Son, and Holy Spirit**; the one true and eternal God over all, blessed for ever! And now, by way of conclusion to this part of the subject, shall make the following observations: that if the Lord hath thus made known his love to your souls,

1. He hath given you everlasting consolation, and good hope; according to the language of inspiration: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father which hath **loved** us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope, through grace, comfort your hearts" (2 Thes. 2:16).

This consolation is derived, from a view of the immutability of Jehovah's gracious counsel and the stability of his covenant and promises; whereby the salvation, and eternal glorification of his people are everlastingly secured (Heb. 6:18-19).

And the *Hope* is denominated *good*, because, like precious faith, it is the gift of God; and is well-grounded, having Christ for a *sure* foundation, and is, therefore, an anchor to the soul, both *sure* and steadfast! And also, because it hath *good objects* in view; a complete deliverance from all sin, and eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ!

2. You experience his chastisement: "For whom the Lord **loveth** he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; -- but, if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons:" formal professors, and not the heaven-born children of God (Heb. 12:6-8).

3. He giveth you the victory over your spiritual enemies: "We are more than conquerors *through him* that **loved us**" (Rom. 8:37). For thus saith the Lord, "No weapon formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee, in judgment, thou shalt condemn" (Isa. 54:17). The Lord will manifest his love to his people, even in the face of their enemies; according to his gracious promise, and encouraging declaration: "Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have **loved** thee." These are the promises of **everlasting love**; which, notwithstanding all our present troubles, and threatening foes, shall be *completely fulfilled*, to our comfort and astonishment, to the confusion of our enemies, and to the eternal glory of **divine faithfulness!** (Rev. 3:9.)

We now proceed to consider,

III. The nature, and properties of the love of God. – And O, how comfortable, for poor lost sinners, as we are, to consider that it is,

In the first place, free and unmerited! There is nothing in us that Jehovah foresaw, sees now, or ever will see, to attract his gracious notice, or, merit his divine love. You who are acquainted with yourselves, as sinners, will readily acquiesce with me in this sentiment, and confess, to the glory of God, that his love is infinitely free, both in its nature and communications.

In order to express its freeness, and to convey to our minds, in a forcible, and comprehensive manner, its independent, and unmerited nature, it is represented by the singular love of an husband to an *adulterous* wife. Thus the Lord speaks to his revolted Israel, in Hos. 3:1: "Go, yet love a woman (beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress) according to the love of the Lord towards the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of

wine." Is there any thing in the detestable adulteress to attract the love of the deceived, injured, and forsaken husband? No; but, on the contrary, every thing calculated to create in his breast, a most implacable hatred to such a filthy, and degenerate character! We should think him a singular man indeed, possessed of very unusual, and almost immoveable affection, who, in such aggravating circumstances, could yet love that woman! But strange, and singular as this may appear, it bears but a very faint resemblance of the love of God, to those *who look to other gods* – who willingly obey the god of the world, which is the devil: -- who are filled with pride, which is an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 6:16, 17); with *covetousness, which is idolatry* (Col. 3:5); with open and continual rebellion to the King of kings, which is as the sin of witchcraft (1 Sam. 15:23); whose very nature is polluted and corrupt – who are earthly, sensual and devilish! Will any one presume to say, that merit is attached to such? who are guilty of the grossest enormities, and whose hearts are contaminated with every iniquity! Wherewith should they come near the Lord? Or upon what grounds expect any favor from him? Whose commands they have violated, whose authority they have trampled underfoot, and with whom they are at the bitterest enmity!

But, while I am giving this sad (though just) description of human nature, I know, poor self-condemned sinner, you readily confess, it is a striking delineation of your miserable state, and rebellious, ungrateful conduct to the Lord! And, under such a conviction, are you earnestly enquiring what you shall do to be saved?

To you I proclaim, with increasing pleasure of soul, the *freeness* of God's love, to the most unworthy sinner. – *But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!* (Rom. 5:8.)

And as unworthy *sinners*, we are invited to approach this great and precious Saviour! Hear his free invitation, and gracious direction, "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord, say unto him, take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously:" and

concerning such as thus approach him, he declares, "**I will love them freely**" (Hos. 14:2-4).

And as God's love is infinitely free, it must be,

Second, **Sovereign love**. But, alas! I am touching upon a subject that is become almost obsolete; and that is, to many professors of Christianity, unbearable; and to some other, altogether detestable! For men and devils are up in arms against the sovereignty of God.

Poor proud man, not only wants to make *demands* upon the Lord, for his *supposed* merit, but, in his natural and ambitious rebellion, would even command the eternal God himself! – Would take away his power of *working all things after the counsel of his own will* (Eph. 1:11). Would usurp the eternal throne, and call the Deity to an account for his sovereign transactions! – Would,

"Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod,
Re-judge his justice, be the **God** of God!" – Pope.

But, whatever man may attempt to do, in his satanic pride, God is a Sovereign still; and his love to his people is the result of his Divine sovereignty. He did not set his love upon them, because they were more excellent than other people – he was under no restraint whatever, but loved because he would love! As it is written, "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" (Deut. 7:7-8).

My friends, have we *known and believed the love that God hath to us?* – O let us not attribute any merit, or glory to ourselves, but ascribe all the glory to *sovereign grace!*

"Pause, my soul; adore, and wonder,
Ask, O why such *love to me?*
Grace hath put my in the number,
Of the Saviour's family!"

And as this love is *sovereign*; as there can be no restraint laid upon the **King of Kings**; but, as it rests entirely with himself, whether to love or hate; and, as his love flows *freely*, without any motive, attraction, or expectation from us, we are naturally led to enquire, *Who are the objects of his love?* In reply to this enquiry, as authorized by Scripture, I shall venture to appropriate to the **Divine Love**, the epithet *distinguishing*. And, O Sirs! Let not the term disgust you; but first enquire, is it *scriptural*? Weigh every sentence that I shall utter, impartially in the balance of the sanctuary, while I take upon me to prove, by biblical expressions, that God's love is,

Third, *distinguishing* love. There certainly is a universality attached to God's love, which is spoken of by Christ himself – "*God so loved the World.*" But is every individual of *Adam's* posterity here intended by the word *world*? No; this word has very seldom such a signification in Scripture. And were that the intention, how violently would this Scripture clash with those, where Jehovah expresses his hatred to certain characters. *Malachi* speaks of a "*People against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever*" (Mal. 1:4). And who are they? Certainly they are a part of *Adam's* fallen progeny. But, you will say, "*He once loved them*" – I would ask, then, how is it that he now *hateth* them, since he hath informed us that **he changes not**? (Mal. 3:6.) How is it, that **his love** is become *hatred*, with whom there is no variation nor even the *shadow* of turning (Jam. 1:17)!

God's loving the *world*, then, cannot imply his loving every individual of the human race, without distinction, or discrimination. But it evidently implies the extension of his love to his people, in every *age*, and *nation* of the *world*; which is abundantly confirmed, by a variety of corresponding passages, both in the Old and New Testament (Isa. 43:6, and 1 John 2:2, compared with John 11:52).

My dear people! Read the Bible for yourselves; and hear what the inspired writers say, respecting the objects of God's love.

Read Deuteronomy 33:3. "*Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand.*" – Those whom the Lord hath loved are in the hand of Christ. And who are they? A people *distinguished* from the rest part of mankind, and, who are particularized in the *tenth* chapter of *John*, under the character of *sheep*, in contradistinction to the wicked, who are characterized *goats*. And what saith the precious Jesus concerning the sheep, which everlasting love put into his hand, to redeem? He speaks with all the dignity, and authority of the Omnipotent, in vindicating their eternal security in him. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Is not here distinguishing love?

And doth not the discrimination of Divine love father appear in conversion work? In calling some by Divine grace, while others, equally as worthy (for we are all unworthy sinners) are left to perish in their sins? I will appeal to you, my Brethren, *who have known and believed the love of God*. Doth not *distinguishing* love shine perspicuously, and refulgently clear, in your regeneration? – When you review the state of the wicked, -- when you look around upon your unconverted neighbors, what are your reflections? Can you say, I am more worthy, I have been more obedient than they; and *therefore* the Lord hath taken possession of my soul? Ah! no; - - for we are children of wrath *even as others*; consequently you must be led to exclaim, "Why me and not others? How is it, that the Lord should love me? For, am I better than they? No, in no wise. I might have been left to have filled up the measure of my iniquity, and to have sunk under the ponderous weight of my guilt, in irrecoverable ruin! – All glory to *distinguishing* love! So eminently displayed in the salvation of the chiefest of sinners." Farther, by the prophet *Malachi*, Jehovah calls upon his people to remember, how peculiarly, and discriminately he has loved them, in these most endearing expressions, and striking interrogations: "I have loved you, saith the Lord: yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Mal. 1:2-3).

Fourth, -- The love of God is **eternal**. It never had any commencement – "*I have loved thee, saith the Lord, with an everlasting love.*" And it never will have any change, alteration, addition, diminution, or termination. – "*He rests in his love.*" Eternity itself will not impair it; it is of eternal duration. It must be so; for God, the great **Unchangeable** and **Eternal**, himself is **love**! He loves his people with the same love wherewith he hath loved Christ! And will any person presume to say, that the Father did not love the Son from everlasting! Or, that he will cease to love him! No, that man who should only presume to suppose the possibility of such a thing, would be justly charged with the most pitiable irrationality; and even in the supposition, would be guilty of horrid blasphemy! It is a plain and incontestable truth, that the Father's love to the Son is *eternal*. If then we have but one plain text of Scripture to prove, *that the Father loveth his people with the very same love wherewith he loveth the Son*; we shall immediately establish it, as an undeniable fact, that God's love to his people is *eternal* love. Now, have we a Scripture that will fully answer this purpose? – Yes, a most glorious passage, uttered by Christ himself, in his fervent and pathetic addresses to the Father: which you may find in John 17:23-24. – *And hast loved them as thou hast loved me – for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

With this Scripture, we may boldly declare, and defy all the enemies of truth, ever to contradict us in the declaration, that God's love to his people, in Christ Jesus, never had beginning, and shall never cease!

The love of Jehovah has many other epithets in Scripture, and is beautifully and strikingly represented, as possessing many other very engaging properties, such as *strong* (Solomon's Song 8), *great* (Eph. 2:4), *incomprehensible* (Eph. 3:19), *inseparable, etc.* (Rom. 8:35-39). And it is with a degree of reluctance, that I now deny myself the pleasure of enlarging upon each of them: but in order to avoid a tedious and unpleasant prolixity, I shall conclude; commending you to the love of God, and beseeching the ever blessed Spirit, to make a powerful, and comfortable **application** of

this infinitely important subject, to your immortal souls! I pray for such a Divine application, under the firmest persuasion, that *Paul* may plant, and *Apollos* water, but God only can give the increase! To him be glory for ever and ever. *Amen.*