

LOVE'S BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

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A SERMON
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“We love Him, because He first loved us.”
1 John 4:19.

VERY simple words, but very full of meaning; I think I might say of this sentence what the poet says of prayer—it is “the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try”—and yet it is one of the “most sublime strains that reach the majesty on high.” Take a little believing child, and ask her why she loves the Savior, and she will reply at once, “Because He loved me, and died for me.” Then ascend to heaven where the saints are perfect in Christ Jesus, and put the same question, and with united breath the whole choir of the redeemed will reply, “He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” When we begin to love Christ, we love Him because He first loved us, and when we grow in grace till we are capable of the very highest degree of spiritual understanding and affection, we still have no better reason for loving Him than this, “Because He first loved us.”

This morning in trying to preach from the text, I would pray the Holy Spirit that every person here may first *feel* it. It is amazing the difference between a text read and heard, and a text *felt* within the soul. Oh, that you this morning, may be able to say from your hearts because you cannot help saying it, “*We love Him.*” If I were to say no more, but sit down in silence, and if you were all to spend the next three quarters of an hour in exercising the emotion of love to God, it would be time most profitably spent! It is beyond measure beneficial to the soul to take her fill of love with the Lord Jesus; it is the sweet cure for all her ailments for her to have leisure to delight in the Lord, and faith enough to dwell at ease in His perfections. Be sure then to let your hearts have room, scope, and opportunity for indulging and inflaming the sacred passion of love to God. If the second part of the text shall also be made equally vivid to you by the power of faith—“*He first loved us*”—your hearts will be satisfied as with marrow and fatness! If the exceeding love of God in Christ Jesus shall be shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit, you will need no sermon from me—your inward experience will be better than any discourse! May your love like a drop of dew be exhaled, and carried up into the boundless heaven of God’s love; may your heart ascend to the place where your treasure is, and rest itself upon the heart of God! Blessed shall you be if in your hearts Christ’s love and yours shall both be fully known and felt at this moment! O, blessed Spirit, cause it to be so! Thus should we have the text in action—and that is a thousand times better than the mere quiet letter. If you have visited the picture galleries at Versailles, where you see the wars of France from the earliest ages set forth in glowing colors upon the canvas, you cannot but have been struck with the pictures, and interested in the terrible scenes. Upstairs in the same palace there is a vast collection of portraits. I have traversed those galleries of portraits without much interest, only here and there pausing to notice a remarkable countenance; very few persons linger there—everybody seems to walk on as quickly as the polished floors allow! Now why is it that you are interested in the portraits downstairs, and not by those upstairs? They are the same people; very many of them are in the same dress; why do you not gaze upon them with interest? The reason lies here—the *portrait* in still life as a rule, can never have the attraction which surrounds a scene of stirring *action*! There you see the warrior dealing a terrible blow with his battle-ax, or the senator delivering an oration in the assembly, and you think more of them than of the same bodies and faces in repose. Life is impressive! Action awakens thought! It is just so with the text. Look at it as a matter of doctrinal statement—“*We love Him, because He first loved us*”—and if you are a thoughtful person you will consider it well. But feel the *fact* itself, *feel* the love of God—know it within your own soul, and manifest it in your life, and how engrossing it becomes!

May it be so by the power of the Holy Spirit this morning! May you be loving God while you are hearing, and may I be loving Him intensely while I am preaching!

With this as an introduction, I shall use the text for four purposes. First, *for doctrinal instruction*; secondly, *for experimental information*; thirdly, *for practical direction*, and fourthly, *for argumentative defense*.

I. We shall use the text briefly, for DOCTRINAL INSTRUCTION—and one point of doctrinal instruction is very clear, namely, that *God's love to His people is first*. "He first loved us." Now, be sure of this point of doctrine because forgetfulness about it is connected with much error, and with more ignorance. The love of God to us *precedes* our love to God; according to Scripture it must be first in the most eminent sense because it is eternal! The Lord chose His people in Christ Jesus from before the foundations of the world, and to each one of His people that text may be applied—"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love." His mercy is from everlasting to them that fear Him; from all eternity the Lord looked upon His people with an eye of love, and as nothing can be *before* eternity, His love was *first*. Certainly He loved us before we had a being, for did He not give His Son to die for us nearly 1900 years ago, long before our infant cries had saluted our mother's ears? He loved us before we had any desire to be loved by Him, yes, when we were provoking Him to His face, and displaying the fierce enmity of our unrenewed hearts! Remember "His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sin." "God commends His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." When we had not as yet one throb of spiritual feeling, one pulse of hope, or one breath of desire, the Lord loved us even then!

The love of God is *before* our seeking. He draws us before we run after Him. We do not seek that love—that love seeks us. We wander further and further from it, resist it, and prove ourselves unworthy of it; our nature and our practice are such that they offer nothing congenial to divine love; but the love of God arises in its freeness, and stops our mad career by its power over the conscience and the will. "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you," is the voice of Sovereign grace! Let our response be, "By the grace of God we are what we are!"

The Lord's love is before any repentance on our part. Impenitent sinners never would repent if God did not love them first. The Lord hates sin, but yet He loves sinners; He compassionately loved us when sin was pleasant to us, when we rolled it under our tongue as a sweet morsel, when neither the thunders of His law nor the wooing of His gospel could persuade us to turn from it. When in our bosoms there were no convictions of sin, when there were no evangelical lamentations because of offenses against a gracious God, He loved us! Today, brothers and sisters, we are possessors of faith in Jesus Christ, but our faith in Jesus Christ did not come *before* His love; on the contrary our faith rests in what that love has done for us of old. When we were unbelieving, and hard of heart; when we resisted the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and put from us the word of eternal life, even then the Lord pitied us, and had mercy upon us—and continued still to invite, to entreat, to persuade until at last the happy hour came when we believed, and entered into a sense of His love. There are many things about you now, beloved of the Lord, which are the objects of divine approval, but they were not there at first. They did not precede divine love, but are the *fruits* of it. To use an old English word which has somewhat lost its meaning, the love of God is *preventing* love—it goes before any right motions of the soul, and in order of time it is *first*, before any desires, wishes, aspirations, or prayers on our part. Are you devout today? Yet He loved you not at the first because you were devout, for originally you were not so; His love was *before* your devotion. Are you holy today? Blessed be His name for it! But He loved you when you were unholy. Your holiness *follows* His love—He chose you that you might be holy! You are becoming like He by the sanctifying influences of His blessed Spirit, and He loves His image in you, but He loved you when that image was not there. Yes, He looked on you with infinite compassion when you were heirs of His wrath even as others—and the image of the devil was conspicuous both upon your character and your nature. However early in life you began to love the Lord, His love was first. This is very amazing, but blessed be His name, we know that it is true, and we rejoice in it!

The fact is that the love of God, as far as we know anything about it, had no reason derived from us upon which to ground itself. He loved us because He would love us, or, as our Lord put it, "Even so, Fa-

ther, for so it seemed good in Your sight." He had reasons in His own nature. Good reasons fetched from the best conceivable place, namely from His own perfections; but those reasons He has not been pleased to communicate to us. He bids us know that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion, and thus He tries the loyal submissiveness of our hearts, and I trust we are able to bow in reverent silence to His Righteous Will.

Divine love is its own cause, and does not derive its streams from anything in us; it flows spontaneously from the heart of God, finding its deep wellsprings within His own bosom. This is a great comfort to us because being uncreated, it is unchangeable! If it had been upon us because of some goodness in *us*, then when the goodness was diminished His love would diminish too. If God had loved us second, and not first, or had the *cause* of His love been in *us*, that cause might have altered, and the supposed effect, namely His love, would have altered too. But now whatever may be the believer's condition today—however he may have wandered, and however much he may be groaning under a sense of sin—the Lord declares, "I do earnestly remember him still." The Lord did not love you at first because you had no sin—He foreknow all the sin you would ever have—it was all present before His sacred mind, and yet He loved you, and He loves you still! "I am God. I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." O blessed love of God, since You are first we will give you the first place in our thoughts, the highest throne in our hearts, the royal position in our souls! We glorify You, for You are first!

Another part of the doctrine of the text is this, that *the love of God is the cause of our love to God*. A thing may be first, and another second, and yet the first may not be the *cause* of the second; there may be no actual link between the two, but here we have it unmistakably—"We love Him *because* He first loved us," which signifies not merely that this is the motive of which we are conscious in our love, but that this is the force, the divine power which created love in us. I put it to you, would we have loved God had He not first given His Son to die for us? Had there been no redeeming Sacrifice, would we have had any love to God? Unredeemed men left to go on like fallen angels in their sin would have had no more love of God than fallen angels have. How could they? The great foundation of His love is the Son given to redeem! God gives His Son, and so reveals His own love, and creates ours. Is not His love seen to be the cause of ours when we remember Calvary?

But He might have given His Son to die for men, beloved, and yet you and I might not have loved Him because we might not have been aware of the great fact. It is no small grace on God's part that, "to you is the word of this salvation sent." While the heathen have never heard it, by the arrangement of His gracious providence you have been favored with the good news! You have it in your homes in the form of the Holy Scriptures! You hear it every Sunday from the pulpit! How would you have ever come to love Him if He had not sent His gospel to you? The gift of His Son Jesus and the providence which leads the herald of mercy to the saved one's door are evident causes of man's love to God. But more than this, Christ died and the gospel is preached—and yet some men do not love Him! Why not? Because of the hardness of their hearts; but others *do* love Him—shall I trace this to the natural betterness of their hearts? I dare not and much less do they! There is no believer who would ask me to do so in his own case; I must trace it to the influence of the Holy Spirit going with the revelation of the love of God in Christ Jesus, affecting the heart, and creating faith, and love, and every grace in the soul! Beloved, if you love God it is with no love of yours, but with the love which He has planted in your bosom! Unrenewed human nature is a soil in which love to God will not grow; there must be a taking away of the rock, and a *supernatural* change of the barren ground into good soil, and then as a rare plant from another land, love must be planted in our hearts, and sustained by divine power or else it never will be found there! There is no love to God in this world that is of the right kind except that which was created and formed by the love of God in the soul!

Put the two truths of God together—that the love of God is *first*, and that the love of God is the *cause* of our love, and I think you will be inclined from now on to be believers in what are commonly called the doctrines of grace. To me it is very amazing that they are not received by all churches because they are practically acknowledged by all Christians when on their knees! They may preach as they like, but they all pray according to the doctrines of grace, and those doctrines are so consistent with the Christian's experience that it is notable that the older a believer becomes, and the more deeply he searches

into divine truths, the more inclined he is to give the whole of the praise of his salvation to the grace of God—and to believe in those precious truths which magnify not the free will of man, but the free grace of the Ever Blessed! I need no better statement of my own doctrinal belief than this, “We love Him because He first loved us.” I know it has been said that He loved us on the foresight of our faith, and love, and holiness. Of course the Lord had a clear foresight of all these, but remember that He also had the foresight of our *absence* of love, and our *lack* of faith, and our *wandering*, and our *sins*! And surely His foresight in one direction must be supposed to operate as well as His foresight in the other direction! Remember also that God Himself did not foresee that there would be any love to Him in us arising out of *ourselves*, for there never has been any, and there never will be! He only foresaw that we should believe because He *gave us faith*; He foresaw that we would repent because *His Spirit would work repentance in us*; He foresaw that we should love because *He worked that love within us*! Is there *anything* in the foresight that He means to give us such things that can account for His giving us such things? The case is self-evident—His foresight of what *He* means to do cannot be His *reason* for doing it! His eternal purpose has made the gracious difference between the saved, and those who willfully perish in sin. Let us give all the glory to His holy name, for to Him all the glory belongs. His preventing grace must have all the honor!

II. Secondly, we shall use the text FOR EXPERIMENTAL INFORMATION. First, we learn that *all true believers love God*. “We love Him,” and we all love Him for one reason, “because He first loved us.” All the children of God love their Father; I do not say that they all feel an *equal* love, or that they all feel as much love as they should. Who among us does? I will not say that they do not sometimes give cause to doubt their love. No, I will urge that it is well for them to examine even as Christ examined Peter, and said, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?” But there *is* love in the heart of every true-born child of God; it is as necessary to spiritual life as blood is to natural life. Rest assured there has never been born into the kingdom of God one solitary individual destitute of love for God. You may be deficient in some virtues, (you should not be), but yet the root of the matter may be in *you*. But if you are without love, you are as a sounding brass, and as a tinkling cymbal. Whatever your outer works, though you give your body to be burned, and all your goods to feed the poor, yet if there is no love to God in your soul, the mark of God’s sheep is not upon you, and your lot is not the lot of His children. *Rest assured that whoever is born of God loves God!*

Observe carefully the *kind* of love which is essential to every Christian—“We love Him, because He first loved us.” Much has been said about disinterested love to God; there may be such a thing, and it may be very admirable, but it is not mentioned here. I trust, beloved, we know what it is to love God because of His superlative excellence and goodness; surely the more we know Him the more we shall love Him for what He is; but unless we love Him *because He first loved us*, whatever other sort of love we may have or think we have, it does not prove us to be children of God. *This* is the love we must have! The other form of love, if it is true, will grow up in us afterwards; that however is not essential nor need we unduly exalt it—loving God because *He first loved us* is sufficient evidence of grace in the soul. Gratitude has been vilified as a mean virtue, but indeed it is a noble emotion, and is one of the most forcible of spiritual motives! Let a man love God admiringly because of what He is, but yet there must run side by side with it this *grateful love of God* because He first loved him, or else he lacks that which John says is to be found in all the saints. Beloved, do not vex yourselves about any supposedly higher degrees, but see to it that you love Him because He first loved you. You may not be able to rise into those heights into which others of your brethren have ascended because you are as yet only a babe in grace, but you are safe enough if your love is of this simple character—that it loves because it is loved.

Within this humble form of love, which is so essential, there dwells a gracious sense of unworthiness necessary to a true Christian. We feel that we did not deserve the love which God sheds upon us. This humility we *must* have or we lack one mark of a child of God. There is also in this lowly form of gracious affection a clear recognition of the fact that the Lord’s love is graciously bestowed—and this also is essential to a Christian, and becomes to him the main source of his obedience and affection. If a man only loves me as much as I *deserve* to be loved, I do not feel under any very strong obligations, and consequently do not feel any very intense gratitude. But because the Lord’s love is all of pure grace and

comes to us as utterly undeserving, therefore we love Him in return. See whether such a humble, grateful love towards God dwells in your hearts, for it is a vital point.

Love to God wherever it is found is a sure evidence of the salvation of its possessor. If you love the Lord in the sense described, then He loved you first, and loves you now, you need no other evidence but this to assure yourself that you abide in the love of God—that you love Him. I was told by a venerable brother some little time ago a story of our famous preacher, Robert Hall. He charmed the most learned by the majesty of his eloquence, but he was as simple as he was great, and he was never happier than when conversing with poor believers upon experimental godliness. He was accustomed to make his journeys on horseback, and having been preaching at Clipstone he was on his way home when he was stopped by a heavy snowfall at the little village of Sibbertoft. The good man who kept the “Black Swan,” a little village hostelry, came to him, and besought the preacher to take refuge beneath his roof, assuring him that it would give him great joy to welcome him. Mr. Hall knew him to be one of the most sincere Christians in the neighborhood, and therefore got off his horse, and went into the little inn. The good man was delighted to provide him a bed, a stool, and a candlestick in the Prophet’s Chamber, for that rustic inn contained such an apartment. After Mr. Hall had rested awhile by the fire, the landlord said, “You must stay here all night sir, and if you do not mind I will call in a few of my neighbors, and if you feel that you could give us a sermon in my taproom they will all be glad to hear you.” “So let it be, sir,” said Mr. Hall, and so it was! The taproom became his cathedral, and the “Black Swan,” the sign of the gospel banner! The peasants came together, and the man of God poured out his soul before them wondrously. They would never forget it, for to hear Mr. Hall was an event in any man’s life! After all were gone, Mr. Hall sat down, and there came over him a fit of depression out of which he strove to rise by conversation with his host. “Ah, sir,” said the great preacher, “I am much burdened, and am led to question my own condition before God. Tell me now, what do you think is a sure evidence that a man is a child of God?” “Well, Mr. Hall,” said the plain man, “I am sorry to see you so tried. You doubt yourself, but nobody else has any doubt about you; I hope the Lord will cheer and comfort you, but I am afraid I am not qualified to do it.” “Never mind, friend, never mind, tell me what you think is the best evidence of a child of God?” “Well, I would say, sir,” said he, “if a man loves God, he must be one of God’s children.” “Say you so,” said the mighty preacher, “then it is well with me!” And at that signal he began to magnify the Lord at such a rate that his hearer afterwards said that it was wonderful to hear him, as for about an hour he went on with glowing earnestness declaring the loveliness of God! “O sir,” he said who told the tale, “You should have heard him! He said, ‘love God, sir? Why I cannot help loving Him! How could I do otherwise?’ “And then he went on to speak about the Almighty and His love and grace, extolling the Lord’s greatness, goodness and glory in redemption, and all that He did for His people, till he said, ‘Thank you, thank you, my friend; if love to Him is an evidence of being God’s child, I know I have it, for I cannot help loving Him! I take no credit to myself; He is such a lovely being, and has done so much for us that I should be more brutish than any man if I did not love and adore Him.’” That which cheered that good and great man’s heart may perhaps cheer yours. If you love God, you must have been loved *of* God! True love could not have come into your heart in any other conceivable way! And you may rest assured that you are the object of His eternal choice!

But oh *if you do not love God, dear hearer, I invite you to think for a minute upon your state!* Hear of God, and not love Him? You must be blind! Know anything about His character, and not adore Him? Your heart must be like the heart of Nabal when it was turned into stone! See God in Christ, bleeding on the cross for His enemies, and not love Him? O hell, you cannot be guilty of a worst offense than this! Here is love, shall it have no acknowledgment? It is said that a man cannot feel that he is loved without in some measure returning the flame, but what shall I say of a mind which beholds Christ’s love but feels no love in return? It is brutish! It is devilish! God have mercy upon it! Breathe the same prayer, O unloving heart, and say, “Lord, forgive me, and by Your Holy Spirit renew me, and give me from now on to be able to say, ‘I, also, in my humble fashion, love God because He first loved me.’”

III. Thirdly, we shall use the text as a matter OF PRACTICAL DIRECTION. I earnestly trust that there are some here who although they do not love God at present, yet desire to do so. Well, dear friend, *the text tells you how to love God.* You say perhaps, “Oh, I shall love God when I have improved my

character, and when I have attended to the external duties of religion." But are you going to get love to God out of *yourself*? Is it there then? "No," you say. How then will you get it from where it is not? You may go often to an empty iron safe before you will bring a thousand pound note out of it! And you may look a long time to your own heart before you will bring out of *it* a love to God which is not there! What is the way by which a heart may be made to love God? The text shows us the method of the Holy Spirit; He reveals the love of God to the heart, and then the heart loves God in return! If then you are awakened this morning to desire to love God, use the method which the text suggests—meditate upon the great love of God to man, especially upon this—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." See clearly that you by faith trust your soul with Christ, and perceive that it is vast love which sets before you such a way of salvation in which the only thing required of you is that you be nothing, and trust Christ to be *everything*—and even that faith He gives you as a *gift* of His Spirit, so that the plan of salvation is all of His love. If you want to repent do not so much consider your sin as the love of Jesus in suffering for your sin! If you desire to believe do not so much study the doctrine as study the person of Jesus Christ upon the cross! And if you desire to love think over perpetually till it breaks your heart, the great love of Jesus Christ in laying down His life for His worthless foes! The love of God is the birthplace of Holy love! Not there in your hearts where you are attempting an absurdly impossible feat, namely, to create love in the carnal mind which cannot be reconciled to God, but there in the heart of *Jesus* must love be born, and then it shall come down to you. You cannot force your mind into the condition of believing even a common thing, nor can you sit there and say, "I will love So-and-So," of whom you know nothing. Faith and love are second steps arising out of former steps. "Faith comes by hearing," and love comes by contemplation. It flows out of a sense of the love of Christ in the soul even as wine flows from the clusters in the winepress. Go to the fragrant mystery of redeeming love, and tarry with it till in those beds of spices your own garments shall be made to smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia! There is no way of sweetening yourself but by tasting the Sweetness of Jesus Christ! The honey of His love will make your whole nature to be as a honeycomb—every cell of your manhood shall drop sweetness!

Brothers and sisters, if we wish to sustain the love we have received, we must do the same thing. At the present moment you love God and desire still to love Him. Be wise, then, and feed your love on His love—it is its best food. This is the honey which will keep your sweetness sweet; this is the fire which will keep your flame flaming. Could we be separated from the love of Christ, our love would die out like a lamp in yonder streets when cut off from the main. He who quickened us into the life of love must keep us alive or we shall become loveless and lifeless.

And if perhaps your love has grown somewhat cold; if you long to revive it, do not begin by doubting God's love to you—that is not the way of reviving, but of weakening love! Believe in divine love, my brothers and sisters, over the head of the coldness of your heart! Trust in Jesus Christ as a sinner if you cannot rejoice in Him as a saint, and you will get your love back. You see the flowing fountain how it gushes with a constant stream? And here I bring a pitcher, and set it down so that the stream rushes into it, and fills it till it overflows. In this manner our souls ought to be filled with the love of Christ. But you have taken away your pitcher, and it has become empty, and now you say to yourself, "Alas, alas, there is nothing here! What shall I do? This pitcher is empty." Do? Why do what you did at *first*—go and set it under the flowing stream, and it will soon be full again! It will never get full by your removing it into a dry place. Doubting is the death of love! Only by the hand of faith can love be fed with the Bread of heaven; your tears will not fill it; you may groan into it, but sighs and moans will not fill it; only the flowing fountain can fill the vacuum. Believe that God still loves you, even if you are not a saint. Believe in the mighty love of Christ towards sinners, and trust yourself with Him! And then His love will come pouring in till your heart is again full to overflowing! If you want to rise to the very highest state of love to Christ; if you desire ecstatic joy, or to be perfectly consecrated; if you aim at an Apostle's self-denial, or at a martyr's heroism, or if you would be as like to Christ as the spirits are in heaven, no tool can engrave you to this image but His love! No force can fashion you to the model of Christ Jesus but the love of Jesus Christ shed abroad in your soul by the Holy Spirit. Keep to this then, as a matter of practical direction; dwell in the love of God to you that you may feel intense love to God.

Once more, as a practical direction, *if you love God show it as God showed His love to you*. You cannot do so in the same degree, but you may in the same *manner*. God loved the worthless; you love the worthless; God loved His enemies; you love your enemies. The Lord loved them practically. Love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. He loved them to self-sacrifice, so that Jesus gave Himself for us. You love to self-sacrifice also. Love God so that you could die a thousand deaths for Him. Love Him till you make no provision for the flesh, but live only for His glory. Let your heart burn with a flame that shall consume you till the zeal of God's house shall have eaten you up. "We love Him *because* He first loved us," therefore let us love Him as He loved us! Let His love be both motive and model to us—

*"Loved of my God, for Him again,
With love intense I burn.
Chosen of Him before time began
I choose Him in return."*

IV. Our text suggests to us AN ARGUMENTATIVE DEFENSE. You will see what I mean when I observe first that our love to God seems to need an apology. We have heard of an emperor casting eyes of love upon a peasant girl. It would have been monstrous for *her* to have first looked up to *him* as likely to be her husband! Everybody would have thought her to be bereft of her senses had she done so, but when the *monarch* looked down upon *her*, and asked her to be his queen, that was another thing. She might take leave to love from his love! Often does my soul say, "O God, I cannot help loving You, but may I? Can this poor heart of mine be allowed to send up its love to You? I—polluted and defiled, nothingness and emptiness, and sinfulness—may I say, 'Yet do I love You, O my God, almighty as You are'? 'Holy, holy, holy,' is the salutation of the seraphim, but may I say, 'I love You, O my God'?" Yes I may, because *He* first loved me! *There* is love's license to soar so high—

*"Yet I may love You, too, O Lord,
Almighty as You are,
For you have stooped to ask of me
The love of my poor heart!"*

Then again if any should inquire of us as they did of the spouse, "What is your beloved more than another beloved, O you fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us? What is this passion that you have for God, this love you bear to His incarnate Son?" We have a conclusive argument as against them, even as we had a quietus for our own fears. We reply, "We love Him, because He first loved us, and if you did but know that He loved you; if you did but know that He had done for you what He has done for us, you would love Him too! You would not need to ask us why—you would wonder why you do not love Him, too."—

*"His love, if all the nations knew,
Surely the whole world would love Him too."*

We shall not need to all eternity any other defense for loving God than this, "Because He first loved us."

Here is also an argument for the lover of the old orthodox faith. It has been said by some that the doctrines of grace lead to licentiousness, but our text is a most excellent shield against that attack. Brothers and sisters, we believe that the Lord loved us first, and most freely—not because of our tears or prayers, nor because of our foreseen faith, nor because of anything in us—but first! Well, what comes out of that? Do we therefore say, "If He loved us when we were in sin, let us continue in sin that grace may abound," as some have wickedly said? God forbid! The inference we draw is, "We love Him because He first loved us." Some can be swayed to morality by *fear*, but the Christian is sweetly drawn to Holiness by *love*. We love Him not because we are afraid of being cast into hell if we do not—that fear is gone—we who are justified by God can never be condemned! Nor because we are afraid of missing heaven, for the inheritance is upon as many of us as are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Does this blessed security lead us to carelessness? No, but in proportion as we see the greatness, and the infinity of the love of God, we love Him in return! And that love is the basis of all Holiness and the groundwork of a godly character. The doctrines of grace, though often maligned, have proved in the hearts of those who have believed them, the grandest stimulus to heroic virtue! And he who affirms otherwise knows not what he says!

Last of all here is a noble argument to silence a gainsaying world. Do you see what a wonderful text we have here? It is a description of Christianity! Men say they are weary of the old faith, and beg us to advance with the times—how shall we reply to them? They need something better, do they? The philosophers who pander to the age are going to give it a better religion than Christianity? Are they? Let us see. We shall however wait very long before their false promises will approximate to fulfillment. Let us rather look at what we already have. Our text is a circle; here is love *descending* from heaven down to man—and here is love *ascending* from man to God—and so the circle is completed. The text treats only of love. We love the Lord, and He loves us. The text resembles Anacreon's harp which resounded love. Here is no word of strife, selfishness, anger, or envy! All is love, and love alone. Now it comes to pass that out of this love between God and His people there grows, (see the context of my text), love to men, for "he that loves God loves his brother also." The ethical essence of Christianity is *love*, and the great master doctrine that we preach when we preach Jesus Christ is this—"God has loved us, we love God, and now we must love one another." O you nations, what gospel do you desire better than this? This it is that will put aside your drums, your cannons, and your swords! When men love God, and love each other, what need for all the bloodstained pageantry of war? And this will end your slavery, for who will call his brother his slave when he has learned to love the image of God in every man? Who is he that will oppress and domineer when he has learned to love his God, and love the creatures God has made? Behold! Christianity is the Magna Charta of the universe! Here is the true, "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," which men will seek for in vain in politics! Here is the sacred Communism which will injure no man's rights, but will respect every man's griefs, and succor every man's needs! Here is indeed the birth principle of the golden age of peace and joy, when the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the weaned child shall play on the cockatrice's den! Spread it then, and let it circulate throughout the whole earth—God's love first, our love to Him next! And then the universal love which shuts not out a man of any color, of any class, or of any name—but calls upon itself to love both God and man because God is loved!

The Lord bless this meditation to you by His Spirit, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 4.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—19, 248, 810.

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