

# *The Love of God.*

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## SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE BAPTIST MEETING,  
GREAT YARMOUTH, 1800.

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1 JOHN IV. 16.

AND WE HAVE KNOWN, AND BELIEVED, THE LOVE  
THAT GOD HATH TO US.

**I**N 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 splendour 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, (Colossians i. 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 Corinthians iv. 6.) and as one of his own people “ call him out of darkness, into his marvellous light.” (1 Peter ii. 9.)

And, according to our text, *God is love*. But men are “ living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another:” (Titus iii. 3.) yea, are even “ haters of God” himself! (Romans i. 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 shew 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 defence 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." (Isaiah viii. 20.)

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

I shall endeavour to shew,

- 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." (Psalm viii. 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 Isaiah xxvii. 4.—“Fury is not in me.” Zephaniah iii. 17.—“He will rest in his love.” Romans v. 8.—“God commendeth his love towards us.” Romans viii. 39.—“The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians ii. 4.—“His great love wherewith he has loved us.” 1 John iii. 1.—“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.” Malachi i. 2.—“I have loved you saith the Lord.” Jeremiah xxxi. 3.—“Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love.” John iii. 16.—“God so loved the world.” John xvii. 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 Thessalonians iii. 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 Thessalonians ii. 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*, (Jeremiah xxiii. 29.) in breaking the rocky heart, as a *sword*, (Ephesians vi. 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." (Exodus v. 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* xxi. 14, 15.)—"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts." (*Psalms* x. 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 bringing 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 xxiv. 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 labours 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, (Romans vii. 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 iii. 14, 15.) Are the glories of Immanuel displayed in the preaching of his 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 Corinthians iv. 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.” (Hosea xi. iv.) 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*;

(Romans viii. 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. (Ezekiel xvi. 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 xx. 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 iv. 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*, (Romans v. 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 finds 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.”—(Genésis xxxii. 26.) “Draw me, and I will run after thee.” (Solomon’s Song i. 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 i. 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 religious pretences, we are nothing. (1 Corinthians xiii. 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 xxviii. 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 honour 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 marvellous 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 hath 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, (Philippians iii. 9.) accepted in him the BELOVED, (Ephesians i. 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 iv. 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; (Matthew iii. 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 iii. 1.) High and dignified title! Honourable 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 marvellous in our eyes.” (Psalm cxviii. 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 iii. 16.) O amazing love! he spared not his Son—his only begotten—who was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. (Proverbs viii. 30.) That he should deliver him into the hands of justice, to rescue guilty rebels! This is love indeed!