

Epistles of John Chapter 5 the Love of God

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and experiencing God's love, which is revealed through Christ's sacrifice and redemption, and leads to faith, love, confidence, and service to others.

Scripture: Matthew 22:39, John 3:16, Romans 8:28, Galatians 5:13, 1 John 4:8-9, 1 John 4:12, 1 John 4:16, 1 John 4:19-21

Topics: "God's Love", "Love for One Another"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound nature of God's love as revealed through the teachings of John, the beloved disciple. He explains that God is love, and this essence shapes all of His attributes, guiding believers to understand that every experience, even painful ones, is ultimately rooted in divine love. Simpson highlights that Christ is the ultimate manifestation of God's love, and through faith, believers can experience and reciprocate this love, which leads to confidence and a call to love one another. The sermon concludes with the reminder that true love cannot be selfish but must overflow into acts of kindness and service towards others, reflecting God's love for humanity.

Transcript

"He that loves not knows not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8.)

It was peculiarly appropriate that it should be given to John, the beloved disciple, to unfold the Father's love. It was in keeping with the principle which he himself has announced in this chapter, that as it takes sin to know sin, so it requires love to understand love. "He that loves not knows not God." John was the disciple of love and therefore the revealer of love. In this passage he has given to us the seven great principles of divine love.

I. GOD IS LOVE

God is not justice. God is not wisdom. God is not power. God has all these attributes but none of them is great enough to constitute His essence. But love is His very nature and in love all other attributes find their completeness. Just as in the process of color printing all the cardinal colors when combined produce a perfect white; so when all the attributes of God meet they form the immaculate purity of divine love. Wisdom without love would be harsh. Justice without love would be severe. Power without love would be terrific. But love modifies, directs, and softens every one of them, and blends them into the beautiful harmony of the divine character.

We should, therefore, always recognize the love of God as His supreme purpose in everything He does. He always loves, and He loves all as much as it is possible under the circumstances for them to receive. And when His love cannot avail, even then His heart is full of sorrow and compassion and He gives them at least the love of pity if not of approval. This is made very plain and very pathetic in our Savior's bitter tears over Jerusalem when they would not let Him save them; at least He would let them know that He loved them still. Perhaps it will be true in the last great day that the final remembrance which lost men will have of the Father's face and the Savior's heart will be a look of infinite tenderness, and perhaps once more a flood of tears.

We should look at everything that comes to us in the light of love, and believe that God means it for good. This may not appear at first. Again as in the process of color printing, the first impression may be crimson and the dark tints may follow, one upon the other, but when the last color has been put on it will always result in the spotless white. So if God's providence has seemed so far to be strange and painful, wait a little longer. The process is not finished. Trust Him through every testing and when His work is finished, you, too, like Jacob, will be compelled to say, "He redeemed me from all evil," or, like Paul, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

II. CHRIST IS THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S LOVE

Had it been left for us to read the revelation of God upon the face of the earth and sky we could certainly have discerned two mighty words in letters of light and fire, God is. But there the sentence would have paused and the universe waited for the next great word. The sunshine could have painted goodness there. The blossoms of the spring might have added richer tints to the same word. The joyous festival, the laughter and the song of youth -- all these might have emphasized the same gracious inscription. But as we look and wait, lo, there comes the angry lightning, the wild tempest, the sinking vessel, the raging conflagration, the funeral procession, the deep, dark, lonely grave, and lo, the writing is blotted out, and instead we read, God is power, God is justice, God is mystery, and the heart falls back in helplessness and perplexity and cries, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him;" "Show us the Father, and it suffices us." But now another hand takes up the pencil and the brush and writes across the sky, the earth, the guilty conscience, the broken law, the gloomy grave, the very judgment seat, God is love.

So long as man is innocent, so long as the fact of sin does not intrude, nature reveals nothing but beneficence. But when we come up against the fact of disobedience to law and personal wrong on the part of the sinner, all this is changed. Nature has nothing but retribution and pain for the transgressor. It is just here that love comes in with its glorious triumph and finds a way by which even sin can be forgiven and sinners loved and saved by a holy God. The very scene where divine love most sublimely triumphs is the fall and the ruin of the human race, and the dark cloud of man's condemnation becomes the background on which Calvary and redemption have written in eternal luster, "God is Love." Just as the Gulf stream flows northward through the cold Atlantic, warming its waves into tropical mildness until at last it embraces in its bosom the icebergs of the pole and melts them in its embrace; so God's love was poured through the dark waters of time and met man's guilt in the embrace of its mighty sacrifice and melted it away. And so John adds, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . . . And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."

III. LOVE BEGETS LOVE

It is the love of God to us that calls forth our love to God. "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4: 19.) Here is the divine order of Christian morals and Christian holiness. Here is the essential distinction between law and grace. Here is the key to all true spiritual motives. We never can work up our love to God by trying or fearing. Only when we fully believe in His love to us will our love flow forth spontaneously in return. Therefore, redemption meets man with unconditional mercy, forgives him without his deserving it, and finds that as the fruit of forgiveness a new life and a responsive love flow from the ransomed soul and make every service and sacrifice a delight.

The proud English Queen tried in vain to break the spirit of her would-be assassin by threatening her with punishment, or even by asking her what she would do if she received a pardon. "Madam," said the haughty French maiden, who had sought her life, "Grace with conditions is no grace at all." "Then," said the Queen, "I forgive you without conditions," and the girl fell at her feet and cried out with tears of gratitude, "Then I am your servant forever." But the unsought, unmerited love of God in Christ breaks down the sinner's heart. Well may he say as the Cornish miner is made to say in the old ballad:

There's a word that burns in my heart like a fire,

And will not let me be.

Jesus, the Son of God, who loved

And gave Himself for me.

IV. LOVE IS THE ORGAN BY WHICH WE KNOW LOVE

"He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. . . No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us." Our love is the alphabet by which we understand God's love. Hearts, therefore, that know little of love know but little of God. Therefore God has given us every human tie of love and affection as an organ of divine knowledge that through these we might rise to the comprehension of His greater love. I have known two hearts to receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost in the moment after they met after a long separation, and both bowed together at the throne of grace. As those two brothers mingled their tears and wept on each other's necks, the blessing for which their frigid hearts had been breaking for many years found right of way through the open channels of love, and poured in until the love of man overflowed into the mighty billows of the love of God.

On the other hand I have known a soul so ignorant of human love that she could not comprehend at first what I meant when I told her of the love of God. She had been poor, neglected, abused, and wronged so long that her hand was against every man and every man's hand was against her. I found her in the outskirts of the city, one of our neglected poor, and tried to lead her to the knowledge of Jesus. But she looked up in my face and said "I do not understand you. Nobody ever loved me and I do not even know what love means." I went home that night to my proud and wealthy church and I told them I wanted them to make a poor sister understand the meaning of love. And so they began one by one to visit her, to give her little tokens of their interest and regard; until at last one day, months later, as I sat in her humble room, she looked up in my face and said with much feeling, "Now I think I understand what love means, and can accept the love of God." Beloved, has God given to you earthly friends, earthly ties, earthly affections? They are stepping stones to Him. Have you ever felt a throb of pure heart love? That is just a taste of what it is to lie forever on His bosom and drink in His everlasting love. Do not rest in the human love as an end, but receive it and rise from it to the love of your Heavenly Friend. And as you receive His love you will

better understand it, until at last your heart shall grow into all the depths and heights of heavenly love.

V. FAITH IS THE MEANS BY WHICH GOD'S LOVE IS REVEALED

So we read again, "We have known and believed the love that God has toward us." (1 John 4:16.) We know the love of God by believing it. But we cannot know it until we believe that it is for us. I remember visiting a sick man once in a yellow fever hospital. He was not prepared to meet the Lord and he told me he did not know how to become a Christian. I explained to him the Gospel and the way of faith. But he told me that he believed in the Gospel and always had believed it. I suggested that we take a verse as a specimen to see if he believed it. I took that verse in this epistle, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin." I asked him if he believed it. Of course he did. "What do you believe?" "Why," he said, "I believe the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from all sin." I told him that was not the verse and to read it correctly because the verse says "Cleanses us." Then he tried again. "Well," he said, "I believe that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses all Christians from all sin." Still I held him to the words of the text, and insisted that it meant "us." "That is," I said, "you and me. Now, do you believe that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you and me from all sin?" Then he saw that he did not believe the Bible as true for him, and before we parted he put the "us" in it and the "me" in it, and the light of faith and joy came into his heart so that which he believed first he came to know experimentally as a fact, in his own personal consciousness. Then he could say in the words of the text, "We have known and believed the love that God has toward us." Do not, therefore, wait to feel the love of God, but believe it on the testimony of His Word. Take it as for yourself. Tell Him so. Rise to the place of confidence, to the place of the disciple whom Jesus loves, and God will place you where you dare to put yourself and make real to you every promise that you reckon true.

VI. LOVE LEADS TO CONFIDENCE

Just as in the beginning faith leads to love, so in the end love leads to higher faith, and brings to us the perfect confidence which this passage so beautifully describes, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear: because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love." There is a kind of faith that fights its way to the throne and claims its rights by a logical process. But there is a kind of faith that wins its way to the heart of God and takes its rights as a matter of course, because it knows that He is far more willing to give than we can be to receive. Therefore the prayer of love is the quickest to reach the ear of God, and the confidence and boldness of faith are only born of perfect love. There is a confidence that comes from holding fast to His Word. But there is a confidence that grows out of ten thousand cords of memory and blessing. Promises fulfilled, prayers answered, deliverances given, mercies as countless as the sand, weave themselves at length into a cable of a thousand strands that never can be broken. Or, like the great banyan tree of India, which first starts with a single root and trunk, but after awhile sends down a hundred smaller trunks from the branches to take fresh root in the soil until its spreading arms are upheld by innumerable props that grow out of its very life. So the life that has been spent in the intimate fellowship of God becomes so interlinked with Him by every memory and experience of blessing that all the power of earth and hell cannot separate it from His love or make it ever doubt His perfect faithfulness. This is the perfect love that casts out fear and it is our privilege to abide in this love and rest under the shadow of His wings.

VII. THE LOVE OF GOD LEADS TO THE LOVE OF ONE ANOTHER

It cannot be confined within the limits of even religious selfishness, but it overflows in beneficence to our brethren and all mankind. Therefore the apostle reaches the great conclusion "If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God love his brother also." (1 John 4: 20, 21.) Divine love is therefore practical and leads to every Christian duty, sacrifice, and service for our brethren and for a suffering and sinning world. God has made us His representatives and His channels to reach humanity, and without us He cannot bring to them the blessings of the Gospel. It is not His fault that men and women are dying in sin, but it is ours. He has "so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But we have failed to supply the missing link between His love and their need, and we have hoarded to ourselves the grace that was meant for all and sufficient for all.

"How can you say your Father loves you?" a skeptic harshly asked of a little boy who had just testified in a mission to the goodness of God in saving him, though he was clothed in rags and looked half starved. "If he loves you," said the critic, "why doesn't He tell somebody to send you clothes and feed your hunger and supply your need?" The little fellow looked at himself for a moment and colored with mortification. But in a moment he was himself again and looking up manfully, he said, "My Father does love, and perhaps He does tell somebody to help me, but somebody forgets." Was there ever a more truthful or touching reproof and appeal! Ah, beloved, if we loved we would not forget. This is just the essence of love that it remembers, and its sweetest tokens are the little acts of thoughtfulness that show that it was not indifferent or forgetful of the comfort and happiness of the object beloved. And so if we truly love as He loves we will remember, we will sacrifice, we will send or go or give to save a dying world.

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