

Love's Logic

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true love for God originates solely from God's prior and sovereign love for us, which awakens and sustains our love in return.

Scripture: 1 John 4:19, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:11, Romans 9:15, John 3:16, John 1:13, 1 John 3:3

Topics: "Divine Love", "Regeneration", "Faith and Obedience"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound truth that our love for God is not self-originated but springs from God's sovereign and prior love for us. He emphasizes that true regeneration is marked by love to God, which flows naturally from faith in His love. Spurgeon encourages believers and seekers alike to rest in the assurance of God's love as the foundation for a vibrant spiritual life and obedient service.

Transcript

"We love him because he first loved us."—1 John 4:19.

THIS is a great doctrinal truth, and I might with much propriety preach a doctrinal sermon from it, of which the sum and substance would be the sovereign grace of God. God's love is evidently prior to ours: "He first loved us." It is also clear enough from the text that God's love is the cause of ours, for "We love him because he first loved us." Therefore, going back to old time, or rather before all time, when we find God loving us with an everlasting love, we gather that the reason of his choice is not because we loved him, but because he willed to love us. His reasons, and he had reasons (for we read of the counsel of his will), are known to himself, but they are not to be found in any inherent goodness in us, or which was foreseen to be in us. We were chosen simply because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. He loved us because he would love us. The gift of his dear Son, which was a close consequent upon his choice of his people, was too great a sacrifice on God's part to have been drawn from him by any goodness in the creature. It was not possible for the highest piety to have deserved so vast a boon as the gift of the Only-begotten; it was not possible for any thing in man to have merited the incarnation and the passion of the Redeemer. Our redemption, like our election, springs from the spontaneous self-originating love of God. And our regeneration, in which we are made actual partakers of the divine blessings in Jesus Christ, was not of us, nor by us. We were not converted because we were already inclined that way, neither were we regenerated because some good thing was in us by nature; but we owe our new birth entirely to his potent love, which dealt with us effectually turning us from death to life, from darkness to light and from the

alienation of our mind and the enmity of our spirit into that delightful path of love, in which we are now travelling to the skies. As believers on Christ's name we "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The sum and substance of the text is that God's uncaused love, springing up within himself, has been the sole means of bringing us into the condition of loving him. Our love to him is like a trickling rill, speeding its way to the ocean because it first came from the Ocean. All the rivers run into the sea, but their floods first arose from it: the clouds that were exhaled from the mighty main distilled in showers and filled the water-brooks. Here was their first cause and prime origin; and, as if they recognised the obligation, they pay tribute in return to the parent source. The ocean love of God, so broad that even the wing of imagination could not traverse it, sends forth its treasures of the rain of grace, which drop upon our hearts, which are as the pastures of the wilderness; they make our hearts to overflow, and in streams of gratitude the life imparted flows back again to God. All good things are of thee, Great God; thy goodness creates our good; thine infinite love to us draws forth our love to thee.

But, dear friends, I trust after many years of instruction in the doctrines of our holy faith, I need not keep to the beaten doctrinal track, but may lead you in a parallel path, in which the same truth may be from another point. I purpose to preach an experimental sermon, and possibly this will be even more in accordance with the run of the passage and the mind of its writer, than a doctrinal discourse. We shall view the text as a fact which we have tested and proved in our own consciousness. Under this aspect the statement of the text is this:—a sense of the love of God to us is the main cause of our love to him. When we believe, know, and feel that God loves us, we, as a natural result, love him in return; and in proportion as our knowledge increases, our faith strengthens, our conviction deepens that we are really beloved of God; we, from the very constitution of our being, are constrained to yield our hearts to God in return. The discourse of this morning, therefore, will run in that channel. God grant it may be blessed to each of us by his Holy Spirit.

I. At the outset we will consider THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF LOVE TO GOD IN THE HEART.

There are some graces which in their vigor are not absolutely essential to the bare existence of spiritual life, though very important for its healthy growth; but love to God must be in the heart, or else there is no grace there whatever. If any man love not God, he is not a renewed man. Love to God is a mark which is always set upon Christ's sheep, and never set upon any others. In enlarging upon this most important truth, I would all your attention to the connection of the text. You will find in the seventh verse of this chapter, that love to God is set down as being a necessary mark of the new birth. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." I have no right, therefore, to believe that I am a regenerated person unless my heart truly and sincerely loves God. It is vain for me, if I love not God, to quote the register which records an ecclesiastical ceremony, and say that this regenerated me; it certainly did no such thing, or the sure result would have followed. If I have been regenerated I may not be perfect, but this one thing I can say, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." When by believing we receive the privilege to become the sons of God, we receive also the nature of sons, and with filial love we cry, "Abba, Father." There is no exception to this rule; if a man loves not God, neither is he born of God. Show me a fire without heat, then show me regeneration that does not produce love to God; for as the sun must give forth its light, so must a soul that has been created anew by divine grace display its nature by sincere affection towards God." "Ye must be born again," but ye are not born again unless ye love God. How indispensable, then, is love to God.

In the eighth verse we are told also that love to God is a mark of our knowing God. True knowledge is essential to salvation. God does not save us in the dark. He is our "light and our salvation." We are

renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created us. Now, "he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." All you have ever been taught from the pulpit, all you have ever studied from the Scriptures, all you have ever gathered from the learned, all you have collected from the libraries, all this is no knowledge of God at all unless you love God; for in true religion, to love and to know God are synonymous terms. Without love you remain in ignorance still, ignorance of the most unhappy and ruinous kind. All attainments are transitory, if love be not as a salt to preserve them; tongues must cease and knowledge most vanish away; love alone abides for ever. This love you must have or be a fool for ever. All the children of the true Zion are taught of the Lord, but you are not taught of God unless you love God. See then that to be devoid of love to God is to be devoid of all true knowledge of God, and so of all salvation.

Further, the chapter teaches us that love to God is the root of love to others. The eleventh verse says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." Now no man is a Christian who does not love Christians. He, who, being in the church, is yet not of it heart and soul, is but an intruder in the family. But since love to our brethren springs out of love to our one common father, it is plain that we must have love to that father, or else we shall fail in one of the indispensable marks of the children of God. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren;" but we cannot truly love the brethren unless we love the father; therefore, lacking love to God, we lack love to the church, which is an essential mark of grace.

Again, keeping to the run of the passage, you will find by the eighteenth verse, that love to God is a chief means of that holy peace which is an essential mark of a Christian. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord," but where there is no love there is no such peace, for fear, which hath torment, distresses the soul; hence love is the indispensable companion of faith, and when they come together, peace is the result. Where there is fervent love to God there is set up a holy familiarity with God, and from this flow satisfaction, delight, and rest. Love must co-operate with faith and cast out fear, so that the soul may have boldness before God. Oh! Christian, thou canst not have the nature of God implanted within thee by regeneration, it cannot reveal itself in love to the brotherhood, it cannot blossom with the fair flowers of peace and joy, except thine affection be set upon God. Let him then be thine exceeding joy. Delight thyself also in the Lord. O love the Lord ye his saints.

We also see, if we turn again to St. John's epistle and pursue his observations to the next chapter and the third verse, that love is the spring of true obedience. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." Now a man who is not obedient to God's commandments is evidently not a true believer; for, although good works do not save us, yet, being saved, believers are sure to produce good works. Though the fruit be not the root of the tree, yet a well rooted tree will, in its season, bring forth its fruits. So, though the keeping of the commandments does not make me a child of God, yet, being a child of God, I shall be obedient to my heavenly Father. But this I cannot be unless I love God. A mere external obedience, a decent formal recognition of the laws of God, is not obedience in God's sight. He abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found. I must obey because I love, or else I have not in spirit and in truth obeyed at all. See then, that to produce the indispensable fruits of saving faith, there must be love to God; for without it, they would be unreal and indeed impossible.

I hope it is not necessary for me to pursue this argument any further. Love to God is as natural to the renewed heart as love to its mother is to a babe. Who needs to reason a child into love? As certainly as you have the life and nature of God in you, you will seek after the Lord. As the spark, because it has in it the nature of fire, ascends aloft to seek the sun, so will your new-born spirit seek her God, from whom she

has derived her life. Search yourselves, then, and see whether you love God or no. Put your hands on your hearts, and as in the sight of him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, answer to him; make him your confessor at this hour; answer this one question: "Lovest thou me?" I trust very many of you will be able to say—

"Yes, we love thee and adore;

Oh, for grace to love thee more."

This much was necessary to bring us to the second step of our discourse. May the Holy Spirit lead us onward.

II. You see the indispensable importance of love to God: let us now learn THE SOURCE AND SPRING OF TRUE LOVE TO GOD. "We love him because he first loved us." Love to God, wherever it really exists, has been created in the bosom by a belief of God's love to us. No man loves God till he knows that God loves him; and every believer loves God for this reason first and chiefly, that God loves him. He has seen himself to be unworthy of divine favour, yet he has believed God's love in the gift of his dear Son, and he has accepted the atonement that Christ has made as a proof of God's love, and now being satisfied of the divine affection towards him, he of necessity loves his God.

Observe, then, that love to God does not begin in the heart from any disinterested admiration of the nature of God. I believe that, after we have loved God because he first loved us, we may so grow in grace as to love God for what he is. I suppose it is possible for us to be the subjects of a state of heart in which our love spends itself upon the loveliness of God in his own person: we may come to love him because he is so wise, so powerful, so good, so patient, so everything that is lovable. This may be produced within us as the ripe fruit of maturity in the divine life, but it is never the first spring and fountain of the grace of love in any man's heart. Even the apostle John, the man who had looked within the veil and seen the excellent glory beyond any other man, and who had leaned his head upon the bosom of the Lord, and had seen the Lord's holiness, and marked the inimitable beauty of the character of the incarnate God, even John does not say, "We love him because we admire him," but "We love him because he first loved us." For see, brethren, if this kind of love which I have mentioned, which is called the love of disinterested admiration, were required of a sinner, I do not see how he could readily render it. There are two gentlemen of equal rank in society, and the one is not at all obliged to the other; now, they, standing on an equality, can easily feel a disinterested admiration of each other's characters, and a consequent disinterested affection; but I, a poor sinner, by nature sunk in the mire, full of everything that is evil, condemned, guilty of death, so that my only desert is to be cast into hell, am under such obligations to my Saviour and my God, that it would be idle for me to talk about a disinterested affection for him, since I owe to him my life, my all. Besides, until I catch the gleams of his mercy and his loving-kindness to the guilty, his holy, just, and righteous character are not loveable to me, I dread the purity which condemns my defilement, and shudder at the justice which will consume me for my sin. Do not, O seeker, trouble your heart with nice distinctions about disinterested love, but be you content with the beloved disciple to love Christ because he first loved you.

Again, our love to God does not spring from the self-determining power of the will. I greatly question whether anything does in the world, good or bad. There are some who set up the will as a kind of deity,—it doeth as it wills with earth and heaven; but in truth the will is not a master but a servant. To the sinner his will is a slave; and in the saint, although the will is set free, it is still blessedly under bonds to God. Men do not will a thing because they will it, but because their affections, their passions, or their judgments

influence their wills in that direction. No man can stand up and truly say, "I, unbiassed and unaided, will to love God and I will not to love Satan." Such proud self-assuming language would prove him a liar; the man would be clearly a worshipper of himself. A man can only love God when he has perceived some reasons for so doing; and the first argument for loving God, which influences the intellect so as to turn the affections, is the reason mentioned in the text, "We love him because he first loved us."

Now, having thus set the text in a negative light, let us look at it in a more positive manner.

It is certain, beloved brethren, that faith in the heart always precedes love. We first believe the love of God to us before we love God in return. And, Oh what an encouraging truth this is. I, a sinner, do not believe that God loves me because I feel I love him; but I first believe that he loves me, sinner as I am, and then having believed that gracious fact, I come to love my Benefactor in return. Perhaps some of you seekers are saying to yourselves, "Oh, that we could love God, for then we could hope for mercy." That is not the first step. Your first step is to believe that God loves you, and when that truth is fully fixed in your soul by the Spirit, a fervent love to God will spontaneously issue from your soul, even as flowers willingly pour forth their fragrance under the influence of the dew and the sun. Every man that ever was saved had to come to God not as a lover of God, but as a sinner, and to believe in God's love to him as a sinner. We all wish to take money in our sacks when we go down hungry to this Egypt to buy the bread of life; but it must not be, heaven's bread is given to us freely, and we must accept it freely without money and without price. Do you say, "I do not feel in my heart one good emotion; I do not appear to possess one good thought; I fear I have no love to God at all." Do not remain in unbelief until you feel this love, for if you do, you will never believe at all. You ought to love God, it is true, but you never will till you believe him, and especially believe in his love as revealed in his only begotten Son. If you come to God in Christ, and believe this simple message. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," you shall find your heart going out after God. "Whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life;" believest thou this? Canst thou now believe in Jesus; that is, trust him? Then, Christ died for thee; Christ the Son of God, in thy stead, suffered for thy guilt. God gave his only Son to die for thee. "Oh," saith one, "if I believed that, how I would love God !" Yes, indeed, thou wouldst, and that is the only consideration which can make thee do so. Thou, a sinner, must take Christ to be thy Saviour, and then love to God shall spring up spontaneously in thy soul, as the grass after showers. Love believed is the mother of love returned. The planet reflects light, but first of all it receives it from the sun; the heliotrope turns its face to the orb of day, but first the sunbeams warm and woo it. You shall turn to God, and delight in God, and rejoice in God; but it must be because you first of all believe, and know, and confide in the love of God to you. "Oh," saith one, "it cannot be that God should love an unloving sinner, that the pure One should love the impure, that the Ruler of all should love his enemy." Hear what God saith: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, for the heavens are higher than the earth; so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." You think that God loves men because they are godly, but listen to this: "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Think of his "great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." God has love in his heart towards those who have nothing in them to love. He loves you, poor soul, who feel that you are most unloveable; loves you who mourn over a stony heart, which will not warm or melt with love to him. Thus saith the Lord: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." O that God's gracious voice this morning might so call some of his poor wandering ones that they may come and believe his love to them, and then cast themselves at his feet to be his servants

for ever.

Brethren, rest assured that in proportion as we are fully persuaded of God's love to us, we shall be affected with love to him. Do not let the devil tempt you to believe that God does not love you because your love is feeble; for if he can in any way weaken your belief in God's love to you, he cuts off or diminishes the flow of the streams which feed the sacred grace of love to God. If I lament that I do not love God as I ought, that is a holy regret; but if I, therefore, conclude that God's love to me is the less because of this, I deny the light because my eye is dim, and I deprive myself also of the power to increase in love. Let me rather think more and more of the greatness of God's love to me, as I see more and more my unworthiness of it; the more a sinner I am, let me the more fully see how great must be that love which embraces such a sinner as I am; and then, as I receive a deeper sense of the divine mercy, I shall feel the more bound to gratitude and constrained to affection. O for a great wave of love, to carry us right out into the ocean of love.

Observe, beloved brethren, day by day the deeds of God's love to you in the gift of food and raiment, and in the mercies of this life, and especially in the covenant blessings which God gives you, the peace which he sheds abroad in your hearts, the communion which he vouchsafes to you with himself and his blessed Son, and the answers to prayer which he grants you. Note well these things, and if you consider them carefully, and weigh their value, you will be accumulating the fuel on which love feeds its consecrated flame. In proportion as you see in every good gift a new token of your Father's love, in that proportion will you make progress in the sweet school of love. Oh, it is heavenly living to taste God's love in every morsel of bread we eat; it is blessed living to know that we breathe an atmosphere purified and made fragrant with divine love, that love protects us while we sleep, changing like a silken curtain all around our bed, and love opens the eyelids of the morning to smile upon us when we wake. Ah, even when we are sick, it is love that chastens us; when we are impoverished, love relieves us of a burden; love gives and love takes; love cheers and love smites. We are compassed about with love, above, beneath, around, within, without. If we could but recognise this, we should become as flames of fire, ardent and fervent towards our God. Knowledge and observation are admirable nurses of our infant love.

And, ah, the soul grows rich in love to God when she rests on the bosom of divine lovingkindness. You, who are tossed about with doubts and fears as to whether you are now accepted or shall persevere to the end, you can scarcely guess the ardours of heart which inflame those saints who have learned to cast themselves wholly upon Jesus, and know beyond a doubt his love immutable. Whether I sink or swim, I have no hope but in Christ, my life, my all.

"I know that safe with him remains,

Protected by his power,

What I've committed to his hands

Till the decisive hour:"

And in proportion as I am thus scripturally confident, and rest in my Lord, will my love to him engross all my heart, and, consecrate my life to the Redeemer's glory.

Beloved, I desire to make this very clear, that to feel love to God we must tread along the road of faith. Truly, this is not a hard or perilous way but one prepared by infinite wisdom. It is a road suitable for

sinner, and indeed saints must come that way too. If thou wouldst love God, do not look within thee to see whether this grace or that be as it ought to be, but look to thy God, and read his eternal love his boundless love, his costly love, which gave Christ for thee; then shall thy love drink in fresh life and vigour.

Remember wherever there is love to God in the soul it is an argument that God loves that soul. I recollect meeting once with a Christian woman who said she knew she loved God, but, she was afraid God did not love her. That is a fear so preposterous that it ought never to occur to anybody. You would not love God in deed and in truth unless he had shed abroad his love in your heart in a measure. But on the other hand, our not loving God is not a conclusive argument that God does not love us; else might the sinner be afraid to come to God. O loveless sinner, with heart unquickened and chill, the voice of God calls even thee to Christ. Even to the dead in sin, his voice saith "Live." Whilst thou art yet polluted in thy blood, cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, the Lord of mercy passes by, and says "live." His mighty sovereignty comes forth dressed in robes of love, and he touches thee the unloveable, the loveless, the depraved, degraded sinner, at enmity with God,—he touches thee in all thine alienation and he lifts thee out of it and makes thee to love him, not for thine own sake, but for his name sake and for his mercy sake. Thou hadst no love at all to him, but all the love lay in him alone; and therefore he began to bless thee, and will continue to bless thee world without end, if thou art a believer in Jesus. In the bosom of the Eternal are the deep springs of all love.

III. This leads us, in the third place, to consider for a moment THE REVIVAL OF OUR LOVE. It is sadly probable that there are in this house some who once loved God very earnestly, but now they have declined and become grievously indifferent; God's love to us never changes, but ours too often sinks to a low ebb. Perhaps some of you have become so cold in your affections, that it is difficult to be sure that you ever did love God at all. It may be that your life has become lax, so as to deserve the censure of the Church. You are a backslider and you are in a dangerous condition; yet, if there be indeed spiritual life in you, you will wish to return. You have gone astray like a lost sheep, but your prayer is, "seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments." Now, note well, that the cause which originated your love is the same which must restore it. You went to Christ as a sinner at first, and your first act was to believe the love of God to you when there was nothing in you that evidenced it. Go the same way again. Do not stop, my dear brother, to pump up love out of the dry well within yourself! Do not think it possible that love will come at your bidding. If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned. Think of the Lord's unchanging grace, and you will feel the spring-time of love returning to your soul. Still doth the Lord reserve mercy for the sinful, still he waiteth to be gracious; he is as willing to receive you now that you have played the prodigal, as he was to have retained you at home in the bosom of his love. Many considerations ought to aid you, a backslider, to believe more in the love of God than ever you did. For think what love it must be that can invite you still to return, you, who after knowing so much have sinned against light and knowledge; you, who after having experienced so much, have given the lie to your profession. He might justly have cut you down, for you have cumbered the ground long enough. Surely, when Israel went astray from God, it was a clear proof to her of Jehovah's love when he graciously said, "They say if a man put away his wife, or she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return to her again?" Why, the answer in every bosom is "No !" Who would love a wife who had so polluted herself? But thus saith the Lord, "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me." What matchless love is this. Hear yet more of these gracious words, which you will find in the third chapter of Jeremiah's prophecy. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever." "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you: and

I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion." "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Can you hear these words without emotion? Backslider! I pray thee take the wings of God's love to fly back to him with. But I hear you enquiring, Will he still receive me? Shall I be once more—

"To the Father's bosom pressed,

Once again a child confessed."

It shall be so. Does he not declare that he is God and changes not, and therefore you are not consumed? Rekindled are the flames of love in the backslider's bosom when he feels all this to be true; he cries, "Behold, we come to thee for thou art the Lord our God." I pray you, then, any of you who are conscious of gross derelictions of duty, and wanderings of heart, do not ask Moses to lead you back to Christ, he knows the way to Sinai's flames, but not to Calvary's pardoning blood. Go to Christ himself at once. If you go to the law and begin to judge yourself, if you get the notion that you are to undergo a sort of spiritual quarantine, that you must pass through a mental purgatory before you may renew your faith in the Saviour, you are mistaken. Come just as you are, bad as you are, hardened, cold, dead as you feel yourselves to be, come even so, and believe in the boundless love of God in Christ Jesus. Then shall come the deep repentance; then shall come the brokenness of heart; then shall come the holy jealousy, the sacred hatred of sin, and the refining of the soul from all her dross; then, indeed, all good things shall come to restore your soul, and lead you in the paths of righteousness. Do not look for these first; that would be looking for the effects before the cause. The great cause of love in the restored backslider must still be the love of God to him, to whom he clings with a faith that dares not let go its hold.

"But," saith one, "I think it is very dangerous to tell the backslider to believe in God's love, surely it will be gross presumption for him so to believe," It is never presumptuous for a man to believe the truth: whether a statement be comfortable or uncomfortable, the presumption does not lie in the matter itself: but in its untruthfulness. I say again, it is never presumptuous to believe the truth. And this is the truth, that the Lord loves his prodigal sons still, and his stray sheep still, and he will devise means to bring his banished back again, that they perish not. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Remember here that the motive power which draws back the backslider again, is the cord of love, the band of a man, which makes him feel he must go back to God with weeping and repentance, because God loves him still. What man among you this morning hath a son who has disobeyed him and gone from him, and is living in drunkenness, and in all manner of lust? If you have in anger told him, so that he doubts it not, that you have struck his name out of your family, and will not regard him as a child any longer, do you think that your severity will induce him to return to you in love? Far from it. But suppose instead thereof, you still assure him that you love him; that there is always a place at your table for him, and a bed in your house for him, ay, and better still, a warm place in your heart for him; suppose he sees your tears and hears your prayers for him, will not this draw him? Yes, indeed, if he be a son. It is even thus between thy God and thee, O backslider. Hear ye the Lord as he argues thy case within his own heart. "My people are bent to backsliding from me; though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man." Surely, if anything will draw you back, this will. "Ah !" saith the wandering son, "my dear

father loves me still. I will arise and go to him. I will not vex so tender a heart. I will be his loving son again. God does not say to you prodigals, who once professed his name, "I have unchilded you, I have cast you away," but he says, "I love you still; and for my name's sake will I restrain my wrath that I cut you not off." Come to your offended Father, and you shall find that he has not repented of his love, but will embrace you still.

IV. Time fails, but I must speak for a little, time or no time, upon the fourth point—THE PERFECTING OF OUR LOVE TO GOD.

Beloved, there are few of us who know much of the deeps of the love of God; our love is shallow; ah, how shallow! Love to God is like a great mountain. The majority of travellers view it from afar, or traverse the valley at its base: a few climb to a halting place on one of its elevated spurs, whence they see a portion of its sublimities: here and there an adventurous traveller climbs a minor peak, and views glacier and alp at closer range; fewest of all are those who scale the topmost pinnacle and tread the virgin snow. So in the Church of God. Every Christian abides under the shadow of divine love: a few enjoy and return that love to a remarkable degree: but there are few in this age sadly few, who reach to seraphic love, who ascend into the hill of the Lord, to stand where the eagle's eye hath not seen, and walk the path which the lion's welp hath never trodden, the high places of complete consecration and ardent self-consuming love. Now, mark you, it may be difficult to ascend so high, but there is one sure route, and only one, which the man must follow who would gain the sacred elevation. It is not the track of his works, nor the path of his own actions, but this, "We love him because he first loved us." John and the apostles confessed that thus they attained their love. For the highest love that ever glowed in human bosom there was no source but this—God first loved that man. Do you not see how this is? The knowledge that God loves me casts out my tormenting dread of God: and when this is expelled, there is room for abounding love to God. As fear goes out, love comes in at the other door. So the more faith in God the more room there is for soul-filling love.

Again, strong faith in God's love brings great enjoyment; our heart is glad, our soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness when we know that the whole heart of God beats towards us as forcibly as if we were the only creatures he had ever made, and his whole heart were wrapt up in us. This deep enjoyment creates the flaming love of which I have just now spoken.

If the ardent love of some saints often takes the shape of admiration of God, this arises from their familiarity with God, and this familiarity they never would have indulged in, unless they had known that he was their friend. A man could not speak to God as to a friend, unless he knew the love that God hath toward him. The more true his knowledge and the more sure, the more close his fellowship.

Brethren beloved, if you know that God has loved you, then you will feel grateful; every doubt will diminish your gratitude, but every grain of faith will increase it. Then as we advance in grace, love to God in our soul will excite desire after him. Those we love we long to be with; we count the hours that separate us; no place so happy as that in which we enjoy their society. Hence love to God produces a desire to be with him; a desire to be like him, a longing to be with him eternally in heaven, and this breaks us away from worldliness; this keeps us from idolatry, and thus has a most blessedly sanctifying effect upon us, producing that elevated character which is now so rare, but which wherever it exists is powerful for the good of the church and for the glory of God. Oh that we had many in this church who had reached the highest platform of piety. Would God we had a band of men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. It may help those who aspire to mount high in grace, if they keep in mind that every step they climb they must use the ladder which Jacob saw. The love of God to us is the

only way to climb to the love of God.

And now I must spend a minute in putting the truth of my text to the test. I want you not to listen to me so much as to listen to your own hearts, and to God's word, a minute, if you are believers. What is it we have been talking about? It is God's love to us. Get the thought into your head a minute: "God loves me—not merely bears with me, thinks of me, feeds me, but loves me. Oh, it is a very sweet thing to feel that we have the love of a dear wife, or a kind husband; and there is much sweetness in the love of a fond child, or a tender mother; but to think that God loves me, this is infinitely better! Who is it that loves you? God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Almighty, All in all, does he love me? Even he? If all men, and all angels, and all the living creatures that are before the throne loved me, it were nothing to this—the Infinite loves me! And who is it that he loves? Me. The text saith, "us." "We love him because he first loved us." But this is the personal point—he loves me, an insignificant nobody, full of sin—who deserved to be in hell; who loves him so little in return—God loves me. Beloved believer, does not this melt you? Does not this fire your soul? I know it does if it is really believed. It must. And how did he love me? He loved me so that he gave up his only begotten Son for me, to be nailed to the tree, and made to bleed and die. And what will come of it? Why, because he loved me and forgave me,—I am on the way to heaven, and within a few months, perhaps days, I shall see his face and sing his praises. He loved me before I was born; before a star begun to shine he loved me, and he has never ceased to do so all these years. When I have sinned he has loved me; when I have forgotten him he has loved me; and when in the days of my sin I cursed him, yet still he loved me; and he will love me when my knees tremble, and my hair is grey with age, "even to hoar hairs" he will bear and carry his servant; and he will love me when the world is on a blaze, and love me for ever, and for ever. Oh, chew the cud of this blessed thought; roll it under your tongue as a dainty morsel; sit down this afternoon, if you have leisure, and think of nothing but this—his great love wherewith he loves you; and if you do not feel your heart bubbling with a good matter, if you do not feel your soul yearning towards God, and heaving big with strong emotions of love to God, then I am much mistaken. This is so powerful a truth, and you are so constituted as a Christian as to be wrought upon by this truth, that if it be believed and felt, the consequence must be that you will love him because he first loved you. God bless you, brethren and sisters, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 4:1-5.

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