

The Greatest Sentence That Was Ever Written

by R.A. Torrey

The Bible teaches that God is love, and He shows His love to humanity through various means, including pardoning sin, taking account of sin and punishing it, sympathizing with us, giving us gifts, and making sacrifices for us.

Scripture: Psalm 136:1, Isaiah 55:7, Isaiah 63:9, John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Ephesians 2:4-5, Hebrews 12:6, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:8

Topics: "God's Love", "Salvation"

Description

R.A. Torrey emphasizes the profound truth encapsulated in the phrase 'God is love' from 1 John 4:8, asserting it as the greatest sentence ever written. He explains that this simple declaration reveals the essence of the Bible and God's relationship with humanity, highlighting His willingness to forgive, punish, sympathize, give, and sacrifice for us. Torrey illustrates how God's love is demonstrated through His actions, including the ultimate sacrifice of His Son for our salvation. He urges listeners to reflect on their response to God's love, encouraging acceptance rather than rejection. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder of the depth and implications of God's love for each individual.

Transcript

"God is Love." -- 1 John iv. 8.

My subject is the greatest sentence that was ever written. Of course, that sentence is in the Bible. All the greatest sentences are in the one Book. The Bible has a way of putting more in a single sentence than other writers can put in a whole book. Yet there are some who would tell us that the Bible is no more God's Book than other books. Either they have not read the Bible, or they have read it with their eyes closed.

This sentence has in it but three words. Each word is a monosyllable. One word has four letters, one three, and one only two; yet these nine letters, forming three monosyllables, contain so much of truth that the world has been pondering it for eighteen centuries, and has not got to the bottom of it yet. Whole volumes are dedicated to the exposition of this wonderful sentence- thousands of volumes.

1 John iv. 8., "God is love." That is the greatest sentence that was ever written. That sentence is the key-note of the mission that begins to-day. Everything that you will hear in song or in word for the next four weeks in this mission revolves round that one central truth, "God is love." That sums up the whole contents of the Bible. If I were asked for a sentence to print in letters of gold on the outside of our Bible, a

sentence that summed up the whole contents of the Book, it would be this one, "God is love." That is the subject of the first chapter of Genesis, it is the subject of the last chapter of Revelation, and it is the subject of every chapter that lies in between.

The Bible is simply God's love story, the story of the love of a holy God to a sinful world. That is the most amazing thing in the Bible. People tell us the Bible is full of things that it is impossible to believe. I know of nothing else so impossible to believe as that a holy God should love a sinful world, and should love such individuals as you and me, as the Bible says He does. But impossible as it is to believe, it is true. There is mighty power in that one short sentence, power to break the hardest heart, power to reach individual men and women who are sunk down in sin, and to lift them up until they are fit for a place beside the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Throne.

When Mr. Moody organized the church in Chicago, of which I am pastor, he was so anxious that everybody should always hear this one truth, and was so afraid that some preacher might come and forget to tell it, that he had it put on the gas jets right above the pulpit, so that the first thing you would see when you went in there on an evening was that text shining out in letters of fire.

One stormy night, before the time of the meeting, the door stood ajar. A man partly intoxicated saw it open, and thought he might go in and get warm. He did not know what sort of a place it was, but when he pushed the door open he saw the text blazing out, "God is love." He pulled the door to, and walked away muttering to himself He said, "God is not love. If God is love, He would love me. God does not love a wretch like me." But it kept on burning down into his soul, "God is love! God is love! God is love" After a while he retraced his steps, and took a seat in a corner. When Mr. Moody walked down after the meeting, he found the man weeping like a child. "What is the trouble?" he asked. "What was it in the sermon that touched you?" "I didn't hear a word of your sermon." "Well, what is the trouble?" "That text up there." Mr. Moody sat down and from his Bible showed him the way of life, and he was saved.

I hope it will break some of your hearts. I am not going to tell you what I think of the love of God. I am going to give you the Bible's plain statements about it. There are people who start out with this text as a foundation, and build a superstructure of speculation that contradicts the plain teaching of the very Book from which they have taken their foundation-stone. Now, nothing can be more illogical than that. One of two things is certainly true. Either the Bible is true, or it is not true. If the Bible is not true, we have no proof that God is love, so that all these universalist schemes, built on the foundation that "God is love," crumble away. If the Bible is true, these schemes which contradict its plain teaching are false. You can take whichever horn of the dilemma you please. Whichever you take, the shallow universalism of the present day crumbles away.

What does the Bible tell us as to how God shows His love?

1. That God shows His love, by pardoning Sin. - Isaiah Lv. 7: "Let the wicked forsake his; way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." God tells us plainly in His Word that He is willing to forgive any sinner that lives, no matter how deep down he has gone, if he will only turn from sin and turn to Him; and He will forgive him the very moment he does so. Of course, God cannot forgive a man while he holds on to his sin, and retain His own moral character.

I have a boy. I love that boy, and I would give a great deal to see him now. I believe there is nothing that boy could do but, if he repented and turned from it, I would forgive him. But I could not forgive him if he

held on to his evil way. I could continue to love him and seek to save him, but I could not forgive him. And God cannot forgive us, and remain what He is- a holy God-until we are ready to quit our sin. But the moment we are, He will have mercy upon us, and He will abundantly pardon. If the wickedest man or woman in Edinburgh should have come in tonight-and I hope they have-and should here and now turn from sin, the moment they did so, God would blot out every sin they ever committed.

I knew a millionaire in New York City who turned his back on all his business and money-making to save the perishing. When he was going down one of the streets one night, a poor woman came out of an underground den of infamy and groaned as he passed. My friend stepped up to her and told her of the love of God. At first she would not believe, but he persuaded her that God loved her. He gave her a shelter. She did not live long- only about two years- but before she died, Nellie Conroy stood up before a great audience in Cooper State, and told them how God had saved her. - Tears were streaming down the faces of all. A little while after she lay dying, and as my friend came into the room, she said: "Uncle Charlie-he was not her uncle, but she called him so for the love she bore "I will soon see, in a few hours, little Florence, and I will see Jesus." And Nellie Conroy, The pardoned and blood-washed sinner, went up to behold the King. There is not a man or woman in Edinburgh that God will not save the moment they turn from their sin.

2. God shows His Love by taking account of Sin, and punishing it. - Hebrews xii. 6: "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom, He receiveth." People think God will allow sin to go on unchecked, unrebuked, unpunished. "God is love " and therefore He takes account of and punishes sin. There are fathers who are so selfish that they will not punish their children when it is necessary for their good. It hurts their feelings, as it does to all true fathers; and they are so selfish that they sacrifice the welfare of the children in order to spare their own feelings. That is not love but consummate selfishness.

One of my children disobeyed me. I said to myself, "That child must be punished." Oh, how I studied it find some way out, but I could not do it. I knew that for the child's highest welfare, punishment must be administered, and the child was punished. I suffered a great deal more than the child, but I loved the child enough to sacrifice my feelings for the child's welfare. God suffers when you and I are punished; but He loves us so much, that when we need to suffer He administers the suffering Himself.

A gentleman with whom I was staying said to me one day, "Would you like to take a drive?" We went out to a cemetery, and came to a place where there were three graves. One was long; it was an adult one, and in it his wife was buried. In the two short graves were the bodies of his two daughters, all he had except a baby boy. We knelt and prayed by the side of the graves. As we were driving back to town the gentleman said, "I pity the man that God has not chastened." What did he mean? He meant that he had been a man of the world, an upright man, but not a Christian. One night when he came home his wife said, "Porter, one of the children is sick." In a few days she was cold and dead; and, as she lay in the casket, he knelt down and promised God to take Christ as his Lord and Master. But he lied to God, and forgot all about his resolution. Some time after he came home again, and his wife said, "Porter, the other child is sick." In a few days she also lay cold and dead. Once more he knelt down and promised God that he would become a Christian, and accept his word. All the holiest, deepest, purest joys of life had come from his great sorrow.

Are you in sorrow? It is because God loves you. Are there some here resisting the entreaties of God's mercy and grace? I beseech you to repent. I tremble for some men and women, for those who know the way of life, with whom God is striving by His Holy Spirit, but who will not come to Him. I tremble for them,

because I know that God loves them. You think that is a very strange reason for trembling for a man. No, I know God loves you, and so loves you that, if He cannot bring you in any other way, He will bring you by sorrow and heart-ache.

A friend of mine in Chicago, Colonel Clark, spent his fortune in saving the lost. He went down every night to preach the Gospel in a mission. There was one man who had been attending and resisting God's entreaties of mercy for a long time; and one night as he came along Col. Clark said, "George, if you do not turn from sin pretty quick, I believe God will take away your wife and child from you, and will lock you up." The man was very angry, and said, "Colonel Clark, you mind your own business; I will mind mine." One month from that night George woke up on the floor of Rochester Jail. His wife was dead, his child had been taken away from him to be put into better hands than his. Right there he took Christ as his Saviour, and now he is a preacher of the Gospel. Remember, God loves you, and "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

3. God shows His love for us by sympathizing with us. - Isaiah Lxiii. 9: "In all their affliction He was afflicted." That is one of the wonderful sentences of this book. The prophet is speaking about the children of Israel. Their afflictions were appalling, and the direct consequence of their own sin, a judgment sent by the hand of God, and yet the prophet said God suffered with them in their sorrow. It is true. There is not a man or woman here who is in trouble but God sympathizes with you. It may have come in any way, but if you have any trouble God sympathizes with you in it.

Some of you may know what it is to have a child sick for a long time. At first friends came and sympathized with you, but their sympathy has grown cold; and, as you have watched day and night by that fading life you have said: "There is no one who sympathizes with me." Yes there is. God sympathizes with you. There are men and women who have a sorrow of such a character that they cannot confide it to any human ear; and they say: "Nobody knows it. Nobody sympathizes with me." Yes, there is One who knows, and He sympathizes with you-God.

4. God shows His Love by His Gifts. -I cannot dwell upon that. I just want to speak of one gift 1 John iii. 1, 2: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Oh, that wondrous gift that God bestowed upon you and me, that men and women like us should be called children of God! Oh, what love! Suppose on his coronation day King Edward, after all the ceremonies were over, had taken his carriage of state, and had ridden down to the East End of London, and had seen some ragged, wretched, profane boy, utterly uneducated and morally corrupt. Suppose his great heart of love had gone out to that boy, and, stepping up to that poor wanderer, he had said: "I love you I am going to take you in my carriage to the palace. I am going to dress you fit to be a king's son, and you shall be known as the son of King Edward the Seventh." Would it not have been wonderful? But it would not have been so wonderful as that the infinitely holy God should have looked down upon you and me in our filthiness and rags and depravity, and that He should have so loved us that He should have bestowed upon us to be called the sons of God.

5. God shows His Love by the Sacrifice He has made for us. -Sacrifice; after all that is the great test of love. People tell you that they love you, but you cannot tell whether they really love you til the opportunity comes for them to make a sacrifice for you. I have a friend in the university- We thought a good deal of each other; but i did not know how much he loved me. Years after, one night when I was away preaching, this friend turned up at my house and got to talking with my wife. He asked a good many leading questions, and finally got out of her that I was in a position in which I needed fifteen hundred dollars. He

did not say any more at the time, but next day he came to me and said: "You think of doing so and so." "Yes." "That costs money!" "I have a scheme to get it?" "What is it?" "I have plans." "Well, what are they?" I did not think it was his business, but finally I told him. He said: "It will not work at all. See here. Just let me give you that fifteen hundred dollars!" "Well," I said, "I am not going to let any man give me fifteen hundred dollars." "Oh, you can pay it back" "I don't know about that." "I will take my chances." He insisted, and would not take "No" for an answer; he gave me that fifteen hundred dollars, and I have paid it back, but he did not know I would. I knew then that man loved me. God has proved His love. "God so loved the world that gave" -gave what?- His only begotten Son" -the best He had, the object of his eternal love- gave Him to suffer and die upon the cruel cross for you and me.

God looked down upon this lost world, upon you and me. He saw that there was only one price that would save us; and He did not stop at that sacrifice. He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That is the most amazing thing in the Bible. You and I sometimes dwell upon the love of Christ, to give up Heaven for us. We look at Him in the courtyard of Pilate, fastened to the whippingpost, with His bare back exposed to the lash of the Roman soldier. We look at Him as the lash cuts into His back again and again, and again, till it is all torn and bleeding. Oh, how He loves us! But looking down from yon throne in heaven was God; and every lash that cut the back of Christ cut the heart of God. We see the soldiers with the crown of thorns, pressing it on His brow, and we see the blood flowing down. Oh, how he loved us! But every thorn that pierces His brow pierced also the heart of God.

Through the dusk of that awful day we see Him on the cross. We hear the last cry, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" We see how He loved us. But yonder, looking down from the throne of light and glory, was God; and every nail that pierced His hands and feet pierced the heart of God, because He loved you, and you, and you, every one of you. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Oh, it was wonderful! What are you going to do about this love?

I once heard a story which brought me such a glimpse of God's love as I never had before. I do not know whether it is true or not. A man was set to watch a railway drawbridge over a river. He threw it open and let vessels through. He heard the whistle of a train up the track, and sprang to the lever to bring the bridge back into place, and as he was doing so he accidentally pushed his boy into the river. He heard the cry, "Father, save me; I am drowning." What should he do? The man stood at the post of duty, brought the bridge back so that the train could pass over in safety. Then he jumped into the river to save his boy, but it was too late. He sacrificed his boy to do His duty. When I heard that story I wondered, if it had been my boy, what I would have done. That man owed it to those on the train to do what he did. God owed you and me nothing. We were guilty rebels against him, but "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

What are you going to do with His love? Accept it, or trample it under foot? Accept Christ, and you accept that love; reject Christ, and you trample that love under foot. I cannot understand how any man or woman in their right senses can harden their hearts against the love of God.

I remember one night at the close of our service we had an after-meeting. The choir were still sitting, and the leading soprano was unconverted-a thoroughly worldly girl. Her mother rose in the meeting, and said, "I wish you would pray for my daughter." I did not look around, but I knew intuitively how that girl looked at that moment. I made it my business to meet her as she was passing out and said, "Good evening, Cora." Her eyes flashed and cheeks burned; she was very angry. She said, "My mother ought to have known better."

She knows it will only make me worse." I said, "Sit down"; and turned to Isaiah lii!. 5: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." I did not say another word. It was not necessary. The anger faded out of those eyes, and burning tears of penitence ran down her cheeks- I went from home next day, and when I came back some one said, "Cora is sick." I found her very sick, but rejoicing in Jesus. A few days after her brother came and said, "We think Cora is dying." I went at once, and looked on the whitest face I ever saw. She had not opened her eyes all the morning; but, after I had finished praying, there came from those lips-still without opening her eyes-the most wonderful prayer I ever heard. She thanked God for giving His son to die for her. She told Him how she longed to live to sing to His glory, as she had sung in the past for herself; but "if it be not Thy will that I live and sing for Christ, I shall be glad to depart and to be with Christ." And depart she did, with a heart conquered, traslformed, by the love of God. What are you going to do with the love of God?

I have here a story cut from a paper to-day. Mrs. Bottome, of New York City, says that she had a friend in her girlhood of whom she lost sight completely for eighteen years. Going back to New York she was passing along a street, and up in a second story window she saw her friend's face, surrounded by prematurely grey hair. She ran up to the door of the house and said to the maid, "Take that card to your mistress." "She is not at home," was the answer. "Oh yes, she is: I saw her at the window"; and Mrs. Bottome rushed past the maid up into the room, and they fell into one another's arms. "What has become of you for all these years?" asked Mrs. Bottome. The answer was, "Come into the other room, and I will show you." In a room magnificently fitted up there sat an idiot boy of seventeen years of age, saucely able to talk a driveling idiot. His mother said "My duty lies here, with my darling boy." Mrs. Bottome says that in a moment of thoghtlessness she asked, "How can you endure it?

I do not wonder you are prematurely grey." I knew you would not understand my love for my sweet boy," said her indignant friend. "It is no burden, no care, to live and serve my boy; and if, some day, he will only give one sign that he recognizes me as his mother, I will feel re-paid for all the years of love I have lavished on him."

That was but a faint image of the love of God. What are you going to do with this love of God? That boy did not repay his mother's love; for, as Mrs. Bottome says, he was an idiot and did not know any better. You are not idiots. You know God's love: how are you going to repay it?

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