

On the Eternal Love of God

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the eternal love of God as the source of the believer's happiness and the final glorification of the saints.

Scripture: Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Ephesians 1:3, Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 1:2, Revelation 7:9

Topics: "Eternal Love", "Salvation Assurance"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the eternal love of God as the source of the believer's happiness and the final glorification of the saints. He emphasizes the unchangeable promises of God in Christ, the blessings of redemption, and the sovereign will of God in salvation. Reade highlights the importance of ministers preaching the whole counsel of God with sincerity and love, following the example of Paul who sought the salvation of others with fervor. He encourages believers to seek assurance through faith, holiness, and the witness of the Spirit, leading to eternal joy in the presence of God.

Transcript

ON THE ETERNAL LOVE OF GOD, THE SOURCE

OF THE BELIEVER'S HAPPINESS.

THE FINAL GLORIFICATION OF THE SAINTS.

The unchangeable nature of the promises of God in Christ, which are yes, and amen, to the glory of his grace, gladdened the afflicted Apostle under all his troubles. By the inspiration of the Spirit, he was enabled to lead his Christian converts to the one only source of all their holiness and happiness- the eternal purpose and love of God in Jesus Christ, through whom their souls were redeemed and sanctified.

The sweet Psalmist of Israel struck his harp to this inspiring theme- "Salvation belongs unto the Lord; your blessing is upon your people." O may we catch the sacred fire, and feel our every power glowing with holy love. None but ransomed sinners can fully estimate the blessings of redemption.

Salvation springs altogether from the grace and sovereign will of God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy. It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy; who dispenses his blessings, whether temporal or spiritual, as seems good in his sight.

All blessings of time and eternity must be traced to this infinite love of God the Father, in, and through, his beloved and co-equal Son. The heart of Paul glowed with holy fervor whenever he dwelt upon this theme of mercy. Angels delight to look into this mystery of love. Devils tremble at the amazing sight of man's redemption. None but unhumiliated sinners turn from it with disgust!

When writing to the churches, the divinely-inspired Apostle kept back nothing that was profitable; neither did he shun to declare the whole counsel of God. Ministers who are swayed by self-interested motives, easily forsake the path of rectitude. Instead of preaching those truths which would be profitable to others, they preach such doctrines as are profitable to themselves. Paul was a man of another spirit. He had tasted that the Lord is gracious; to him Christ was precious; and his heart's desire and prayer to God was, that His way might be known upon earth, and His saving health among all nations. "To the suggestions of worldly prudence, he paid no attention; his counselor was conscience; and the source of his actions was the love of Christ. Hence he sought the salvation of others, with an ardor little inferior to that, with which he labored, through grace, to secure his own. Contenting himself with the consciousness of upright intention, and the approbation of his Master in heaven, he did not hesitate to bring forward, in the proper season, whatever would contribute to the instruction and establishment of those, to whom he ministered, even though, in some instances, it should awaken their temporary displeasure."

This holy man, well knew, that as a faithful minister of Christ, he must rise superior to every consideration, but that of his duty. Actuated by this principle, he sought not glory from men, being willing to be esteemed as the off-scouring of all things for Jesus' sake. He, who could say, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel," would never shrink from a faithful exhibition of Gospel Truth. To the Galatian church he feared not to say, "Obviously, I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant."

Tracing his own conversion to the sovereign and eternal love of God, who was pleased to separate him from his mother's womb, and to call him by his grace, he delighted to dwell on the exhaustless theme of mercy. Being guided by the Spirit into all Truth, how sweetly did he comfort the Roman Christians, by the comfort with which he himself was comforted of God, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Here we have presented to our view the golden chain of grace and mercy, reaching from everlasting to everlasting, which draws up into glory all who are called according to his purpose.

To the Ephesian church, Paul unfolded the hidden wisdom of redeeming love, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." Here again grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

To the Thessalonians, the Apostle imparted the same glorious revelation, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; whereunto he called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this comprehensive and most

consolatory passage, we behold the source, the means, and the end of that salvation which will fill heaven with unceasing praise.

Peter, in unison with his brother Apostle, being taught by the same spirit of Truth and Love, styles believers- "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Leighton has made the following beautiful remarks on these words of Peter, "This foreknowledge is his eternal and unchangeable love. 'Has not the potter power over the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?' This, if it be harsh, yet is apostolic doctrine. This deep, we must admire, and always in considering, close with this, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God."

"Effectual calling is inseparably tied to this eternal election on the one side, and salvation on the other. These two links of the chain are up in heaven, in God's own hand; but this middle one is let down to earth, into the hearts of his children; and they, laying hold on it, have sure hold on the other two, for no power can sever them; if therefore they can read the characters of God's image in their own souls, those are the counter-part of the golden characters of his love, in which their names are written in the book of life.

"Their believing, writes their names under the promises of the revealed book of life, the Scriptures; and so ascertains them, that the same names are in the secret book of life, that God has by himself from eternity. So finding the stream of grace in their hearts, though they see not the fountain where it flows, nor the ocean into which it returns, yet they know that it has its source, and shall return to that ocean which arises from eternal election, and shall empty itself into that eternity of happiness and salvation.

"If election, effectual calling, and salvation, be inseparably linked together; then, by any one of them, a man may lay hold upon all the rest, and may know that his hold is sure; and this is that way, wherein we may attain and ought to seek that comfortable assurance of the love of God. Therefore, make your calling sure, and by that, your election; for that being done, this follows of itself. We are not to pry immediately into the decree, but to read it in its outworking .

"Though the mariner sees not the pole-star, yet the needle of the compass that points to it, tells him which way he sails. Thus, the heart that is touched with the loadstone of divine love, trembling with godly fear, and yet still looking towards God by fixed believing, points at the love of election, and tells the soul that its course is heavenward, towards the haven of eternal rest.

"He that loves may be sure he was loved first; and he that chooses God for his delight and portion, may conclude confidently, that God has chosen him to be one of those that shall enjoy him and be happy in him forever; for our love and electing of God, is but the return and the repercussion of the beams of his love shining upon us."

The writer of these pages has no wish to uphold any human system of theology. He desires simply to declare, in the words of the inspired Apostle, the whole counsel of God, and to keep back nothing which he deemed profitable to the Church of Christ. Angry controversies and contentions wound the mind, embitter the spirit, and destroy the peace and unity of the Church.

To every prayerful student of the Bible, it must be most apparent, that all the doctrines of the Gospel, when received in the simplicity of faith, must, from their nature, have a practical influence on the heart and life. For they are revealed for this very purpose, to make us humble, and holy, and happy. How forcibly does Paul impress this truth upon his beloved Timothy; "The foundation of God stands sure, having this

seal; The Lord knows those who are his. And, let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity."

The first seal is secret to us- "The Lord knows those who are his." The second seal is visible to all- "Let every one that names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." If we bear the second seal, we may be scripturally assured that the first is impressed upon us. All who bear the broad seal of sanctification, have also the private seal of adoption; for if we love God, it is because he has first loved us.

Let us then seek for those precious fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, which are the indubitable marks of the children of God.

True Christians may differ from each other in language, national customs, and other external circumstances. Yet, they all resemble each other in their likeness to God. Their views and feelings, their conflicts and supports, are substantially the same. Being born from above, and taught by the same Spirit, they each bear the stamp of their divine origin, though separated by oceans and trackless deserts. Writing to the Ephesians, the holy Apostle mentions this blessed operation of grace; "And now you also have heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us everything he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. This is just one more reason for us to praise our glorious God."

Also to the Corinthians, "It is God who gives us, along with you, the ability to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment of everything he will give us."

All who truly believe in Jesus, have the witness in themselves; for the indwelling of the Spirit, that precious fruit of the atonement, is known by the change which is produced in the soul. The believer, by this holy transformation of character, evidences his "election of God," and his interest in the merits and intercession of the Redeemer.

All who possess the Spirit of Christ, have the mind of Christ, and follow the example of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth, both in doctrine and practice. His genuine work is, the production of light in the mind, and of love in the heart. Thus, all who are actually pardoned through the blood of Christ, are graciously sealed by the Spirit of Christ to the day of redemption.

The Church of England, in her Homily on Whit Sunday, is in perfect accordance with this truth of Scripture, "It is the Holy Spirit, and no other thing, that quickens the minds of men, stirring up good and godly motions in their hearts, which are agreeable to the will and commandment of God, such as otherwise, of their own crooked and perverse nature, they could never have. That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. As who should say, man of his own nature is fleshly and carnal, corrupt and nothing, sinful and disobedient to God, without any spark of goodness in him, without any virtuous or godly motions, only given to evil thoughts and wicked deeds. As for the works of the Spirit, the fruits of faith, charitable and godly motions, if he has any at all in himself, they proceed only of the Holy Spirit, who is the only worker of our sanctification, and makes us new men in Christ."

How blessed is that man in whom the Spirit of God condescends to dwell. He has new joys, new concerns, new hopes, new desires. He prays by the Spirit, and for the Spirit. Receiving the spirit of adoption, he approaches the throne of grace with confidence- views God as his Father- possesses the

temper and prospects of God's child, and delights in everything which promotes the glory of his divine Redeemer.

"Surely, may such n one say, the Lord has loved me with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn me, even when I was far from him; and now having brought me near, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, he will preserve me to the end, as much by his unvarying truth, as he led me at first by his spontaneous mercy. What shall I render then unto the Lord for all the benefits which he has bestowed upon me! I can only render to him by receiving from him. The more I know of his goodness, and taste of his bounty, the more I am indebted to his grace. He himself must, and, I doubt not, will enable me to receive the cup of salvation, and to call upon his holy name, as my Lord and my God! And when the heavens are rolled together as a scroll, and the elements melt with fervent heat; when the earth, with all the inhabitants of it, is dissolved; then may I and each of my brethren, say; 'I have lost nothing; still I can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.'"

It was to such holy characters as these, that Paul addresses this affectionate exhortation- "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful."

Thus we see how true faith purifies the heart, works by love, overcomes the world, and triumphs over death and hell. True faith is inseparable from holiness, for the same Divine Power which enables the sinner to put on Christ as his righteousness, transforms him into a holy temple for Christ to dwell in, as his purifier. This is the glory and blessedness of the Gospel. It brings the sinner into union with his Savior; and raises him from earth to heaven.

The influences of faith are extended through the whole soul, and its life is spread by a vigorous circulation. Wherever faith is set up in the mind, as a convincing light to discover the sweetness and excellency of Christ, it will discover itself in the will, by an eager appetite to feed on his pleasant fruits; and in the affections, by that heavenly flame which is ever ascending towards him as the chief good.

This was exactly the effect produced in the soul of the great Apostle, when divine light broke in upon his mind. He saw the glory of Jesus; his will was captivated, and his affections were wholly fixed upon him. No sufferings could deter him from his service, no enemy could drive him from his post of honor. As he gloried in the cross of Christ, so ho gloried in tribulations also, when endured for his sake. Ardently desiring the salvation of sinners, he labored with unceasing perseverance to make them acquainted with their only Savior; and, perhaps, no man was ever so blessed in his labors of love.

O! what a glorious day will that be, when this holy man of God shall appear before the throne of Jesus, clothed with immortality, and wearing the crown of righteousness. Then will his joy indeed be full. Surrounded by his spiritual children, whom he will know as the fruit of his labors, he shall realize those sweet anticipations of bliss expressed to the Thessalonian believers; "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming; for you are our glory and joy."

As eternal life is the gift of Christ, so, like the good shepherd, he guides his flock in safety to the fold above. If we would we reach that heavenly world, we must be ever looking unto Jesus, the author and Finisher of our faith. We must rely upon him for a joyful admission into the realms of peace. He alone can strengthen us for the trials of the way- he alone can support us under the last conflict with sin and death. If we believe in Jesus with all our heart, the stream, through which we shall have to pass, may be tempestuous, but its waves shall not be allowed to overwhelm us. Jesus will carry us in his bosom, and, through his faithfulness and love, will safely land us on the heavenly shore.

And oh! what bliss will await us there! No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, no heart has conceived, the glory which shall be revealed in us, as the ransomed of the Lord. We shall be heirs of God! We shall possess him as our portion, who is the possessor of heaven and earth. We shall be joint heirs with Christ, who is the Head over all things to the Church. Though now compassed about with infirmities, we shall then be like the sun in his strength; though now allied to the dust, we shall then be made kings and priests unto God. We shall sit with Christ upon his throne, and forever drink the living waters of purity and joy.

Our toils will there be exchanged for rest. In that region of unsullied happiness, Satan cannot reach us; wicked men cannot harm us; grief cannot distress us; sin cannot defile us. The day will forever shed its brightness over us, for the Lamb will be our everlasting light, and our God our glory. We shall then be made like unto Jesus, and shall follow him, as the trophies of his victory, wherever he goes.

O! transporting thought, to be made like unto Jesus! This will form the most blessed ingredient in the happiness of heaven. The glorious image of Christ will never be defaced, but the beautiful lines of the new creature will forever shine in the perfection of beauty, to the praise of redeeming love. Here on earth, we are struggling with imperfection, infirmity, and sin; but there, the happy spirit, disengaged from every weight, will ascend, with lightsome wing, to the bosom of its God and Savior.

When we come into that happy world above, to be clothed in the white attire of innocence, it will be impossible for one evil thought to slide into our minds. In that region of perfection there will be perfect light in our understandings; perfect rectitude in our wills; perfect purity in our affections. Our spiritualized bodies will then no longer clog the soul, but rather assist in quickening the movements of the willing spirit. In heaven, we shall enjoy an eternal communion with God. In this world of clouds and shadows, he is often a God who hides himself; but there, he will reveal Himself to the Church triumphant, in all the splendor of his glory, in all the fullness of his love. There, we shall have sweet fellowship with angels, and with the spirits of just men made perfect; and above all, with Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant. And there, with fullness of grace in our hearts, with diadems of glory on our heads, and with the high praises of God upon our tongues, we shall surround his throne, and shall reign with him forever and ever. Thus our bliss will be perpetual; it will be an Eternal Joy.

With what gratitude, if believers in Jesus, should we now begin the song of praise to the Father of mercies, who, from the beginning has chosen us unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; to the Son who has redeemed us unto God by his blood; and to the Spirit who sanctifies us, and all the elect people of God. Happy, thrice happy shall we be, if we have the witness in ourselves, that we are the children of God, and can justly conclude that we have saving faith, from the truth of our sanctification.

If we are holy, we are believers; but without holiness there can be no settled principle of faith. It is sin which darkens our evidences, and destroys our comfort. A constitutional morbid feeling may prevent our enjoying the blessedness of communion with God, by the dread which it creates in the mind; but, if we are

happily preserved from this mental depression, and are delivered from the reigning power of sin, as ransomed sinners we ought to rejoice at all times, and in everything to give thanks. This is our privilege and felicity, as it is the earnest and foretaste of our eternal bliss.

It is the will of God, that his people should be happy; the fault is theirs, if they are not so. His law is good, as well as just and holy; its language is, "Do yourself no harm." His Gospel is love, and breathes good-will towards men; speaking peace through Jesus Christ, and inviting sinners to be reconciled to God. If sinners perish, the cause is from themselves; if they are saved, it is through the unmerited grace of God. Hell will be filled with self-reproach. Heaven will resound with never-ending praise.

O! that every self-deceiver may be roused to a sense of his danger, before it be too late. The loss of worldly property may be retrieved; but our wasted moments can never be recalled. How invaluable on the bed of death are moments to an awakened sinner; and yet how little do we estimate their worth, in the day of health and plenty. The insensibility of the human heart to eternal things is most appalling. A reflecting mind will scarcely think it possible for a man to be so far lost to sober reason, as to fancy himself safe while lying on the brink of a crumbling precipice, or standing on the mast of a heaving ship; yet, thus rash is the man, who, trusting in his own righteousness, and following the sinful desires of his heart, fancies himself secure, and his salvation certain, though he is treasuring up to himself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Perhaps some may think, that in the Christian world, few are so entirely lost to every feeling of self-preservation, and the solemnities of a future judgment, as to act such a madman's part. Happy indeed, were this the case- yes, happy, if men were influenced by a salutary fear to flee from the wrath to come; if they would be persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, to seek him before the door of mercy is closed. But alas! even under the fair garb of Christianity, nothing is more common than such a worldly, carnal mind. Actions speak more forcibly than words. They are the test of character. Like fruit upon the tree, they show the nature of the man, while motives, like the sap, are hidden from our view.

The delusions of Satan are very powerful. It is high time to awake out of sleep. No moment should be lost in deciding the important question, Am I Christ's, or am I not? Is Jesus the one object of my love, of my desire, of my delight? Do I esteem him the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely? O that the Eternal Spirit of all grace, may display his saving power, in convincing the sinner of his guilt; in revealing to him the mighty Savior; in leading him to Gethsemane, that there, he may behold the agony and bloody sweat of his Redeemer; in conducting him to the hill of Calvary, that there, he may see the bleeding Lamb of God, dying for his sins. O that the blessed Spirit may melt his heart to penitence and love, renew his soul, bring him into the Gospel-fold, and make him a monument of mercy, a sinner saved by grace.

The door of mercy is still open; the God of grace is waiting to be gracious; Jesus is pointing to his hands, his feet, his side; inviting us to fly from wrath and misery, to endless bliss and glory. The voice of Mercy is now heard- Come, for all things are ready. Come, for yet there is room. Come, to the feast prepared by Sovereign Love. Come, and freely partake of Gospel blessings.

O! that Jesus may draw every heart to himself by the silken cords of love, until the glorious period shall arrive, when all his elect shall be gathered around his throne, redeemed out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, crying with a loud voice, and saying, "Salvation to our God, which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"Oh! how the thought that I shall know

The man that suffered here below,
To manifest his favor
To me, and those whom most I love,
Or here, or with himself above,
Do my delighted passions move
At that sweet word- forever!
Forever to behold him shine,
Forevermore to call him mine,
And see him still before me;
Forever on his face to gaze,
And meet his full assembled rays,
While all the Father he displays,
To all the saints in glory.
Not all things else are half so dear,
As his delightful presence here,
What must it be in heaven?
'Tis heaven on earth to hear him say
As now I journey day by day,
Poor sinner, cast your fears away,
Your sins are all forgiven.
But how must his celestial voice
Make my enraptured heart rejoice,
When I, in glory, hear him;
While I, before the heavenly gate,
For everlasting entrance wait,
And Jesus on his throne of state
Invites me to come near him.

Come in, O blessed, sit by me,
With my own life I ransomed thee,
Come taste my perfect favor;
Come in, O happy spirit, come;
You now shall dwell with me at home,
O blessed mansions, make him room,
For he must stay forever.
When Jesus thus invites me in,
How will the heavenly host begin
To own their new relation?
Come in! come in!- the blissful sound
From every tongue will echo round,
Until all the crystal walls resound
With joy of my salvation!"

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