

Love

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1 John 4:8

I. The Text Stated

A. 1 John 4:7-9

1. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 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." (1 John 4:7-9).
2. "God is Spirit," "God is Light," (1 John 1:5), "God is Love" (1 John 4:8).
 - a) God is love.
 - (1) *This does not mean that "love is God."*
 - (2) *If two people confess "love for each other" does not mean that their love is necessarily holy or godly.*
 - b) It also does not mean that this is all God is.
 - (1) *He is just, holy, wrath, he is as Hebrews says a consuming fire, as much as he is love.*
 - (2) *Love may be most attractive for those who do not know God, and the attribute most people run to when they need something.*
 - (a) *Who would not run to a God that loves them, or that they conceive is all of love?*
 - c) The Apostle John defines what this love is in its context of God's expressions in the world to redeemed sinners, and *what* God is.
3. God is love and true love is of God.
 - a) He is the fountain and author of love.
 - b) Love is the summation of the Gospel.
 - c) And every one that loves (whose spirit is framed and fixed to this holy love) is born of God, verse 7.
 - (1) *The Spirit of God is the Spirit of love.*
 - (2) *The new nature in the children of God is the offspring of his love.*
 - (3) *The disposition of this nature in born again Christians is love.*
 - (a) *The fruit of the Spirit is love, Gal. 5:22.*
 - d) True love argues for a true knowledge of the divine nature.
 - (1) *"He that loveth knoweth God," v. 7.*
 - (2) *"He that loveth not knoweth not God," v. 8.*
 - e) Goodness that is communicated to the world from God's divine majesty is a communication of His love.
 - f) God is love (v. 8), in his nature and essence.
 - (1) *His will and his works are primarily out of love.*
 - g) God loves his church, his people, and this manifestation of the love of God towards "us" (v. 9), is towards those who are enemies made into friends.
 - h) The value of this outward expression of this love sits in sending of Christ, the Messiah, that out of love, God expresses love by giving sinners an incomparable gift.
 - (1) *God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him, v. 9.*

i) The Apostle will say a verse later, “Herein is love not that we loved God, but that he loved us,” v. 10.

(1) *He loved his people, when they had no love for him.*

(2) *He loved them, before they ever loved him back.*

4. This God of love is set in the context of divine love to the brethren.

a) If God loved us, we ought also to love one another, v. 11.

(1) *The reason being, children should imitate their Father.*

B. Verse 7

1. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." (1 John 4:7).

2. (πᾶς with ὁ ἀγαπῶν) “everyone who is loving.”

a) This emphasizes the importance of love in the life of every believer.

3. If one does not love, they do not know God.

a) If one *does love*, they have a relationship with the Father.

b) They have a relationship that is grounded in such a way as to then love one another.

C. Verse 8

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

2. This verse is closely associated with verse 7, in that John emphasizes his line of thinking by stating it in reverse.

3. “Everyone who is loving knows God, ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν οὐκ ἔγνω τὸν θεόν, “anyone who is unloving has not known God.”

a) It's not simply a theoretical love that is the standard of measurement as to whether one loves God or not.

b) God's nature is love, and if one has been saved and redeemed by God through Christ, the epitome of the outworking of love, then, they will in turn love others.

c) Knowledge of God should lead to love for others.

(1) *Sometimes people ask “why study the attributes of God?”*

(2) *This is one answer to that - Knowledge of God, leads to love others.*

(3) *If a person is redeemed by Christ, and they have the love of the Father in them, and they know the love of God and that God is love, whoever enters into this kind of relationship with God can be transformed from a hateful person, into a loving person (cf. verse 11).*

4. ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν, “for God is love.”

a) Ethics turns to theology for its substance.

b) John says “God is love” (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν).

(1) *God is not only the source of love (v 7a), but he is love itself.*

(2) *This does not simply refer to the activity of God, but the nature of God.*

(3) *The Triune Godhead is love.*

c) An Old Testament covenantal idea set inside the context of action.

(1) *God is love, but God is love leads to action.*

(2) *He does not set God out to be merely theoretical love, but that the nature of God includes the action of God.*

(a) *The action of God is covenantally specific.*

(b) *He loves in covenant.*

(c) *He loves in his Mediator.*

(d) *He loves because he is love and expresses love in this way to men.*

d) Neither is John trying to pit one attribute against another, as so many poor theologians and pastors do today.

(1) *God is not a giant wave of love that splashes indiscriminately on everyone everywhere all the time.*

(2) *John is not ignoring that God is light and that God is truth and that God is spirit, or that God judges sin and wickedness, or that he is just.*

(3) *He, in the practical outworking of God's Redeemer, shows that in connection to all these things for God's people, God is love.*

(a) *In connection to his truth, his spiritual work on the soul, in the moral law, in commanding against sin, the love of God can be seen.*

e) "God is love" for the Apostle, directs the reader from the theological nature of God, to the way God's love is manifested in the world.

(1) *That is, Christians know the essence and nature of love by considering the work of God through Christ in redemption.*

(2) *John does not do what most people do today who look to a God of love, in referring to a touchy feely God of their own making.*

(a) *That is not what love means.*

(b) *It's not just a fuzzy feeling to make one's self feel good about something they think they need God's forgiveness or help for.*

D. Verse 9.

1. John shows the reader that since God is love, God's attribute of love is expressed in the world, it is determined and understood by his self-disclosure in the sent Christ.

a) The Christ is Jesus the Son of God.

b) "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," (1 John 4:9).

(1) *The idea that God is love, is made visible, manifested, toward his people, because he sent the Christ.*

(a) *It is not about touchy-feely ideas.*

(b) *Certainly, the humbled sinner who becomes the pardoned saint has feelings about this.*

(c) *But they are informed feelings about God's love.*

(2) *The saint knows the love of God is eminently covenantal in its scope and directly surrounds the Christ.*

(3) *God sent the covenant Mediator to come and save them.*

(a) *God is love in this.*

c) ἐν τούτῳ ἐφανερώθη ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν, "this is how God's love was revealed among us."

(1) *This refers to Christ's appetence, the very way John introduced his letter, and introduces his Gospel.*

(2) *The Christ was God incarnate.*

(3) *The Christ was the manifestation of God as love sent to the world.*

(4) *The manifestation of God's love toward his people was in the giving of his Son.*

(a) *He alone is Only begotten.*

(i) He alone is God in the flesh.

(b) *Not only did God send his Son, but it was his only begotten Son whom he sent.*

(c) *Christ is the only born Son of God in this way.*

(i) There are no others.

(d) *And such a love gift, and exercise of the nature of love is in Christ's work of dealing with reversing the fall.*

(i) *Propitiation and expiation.*

(ii) *Satisfaction.*

(a) *The power of Christ in reversing the fall in people demonstrates the love of God.*

d) This Christ comes in covenant to save his people, and indwells his people by the Spirit, who gifts the church for service to worship God.

(1) *The love of God exegeted by Christ, manifested by Christ in declaring the Father, indwells the church by the Spirit.*

(2) *This is the where the continual work of the Spirit cultivates a bond of everlasting love to them.*

(a) *Vitally connected to the Christ.*

(b) *Without which they can do nothing, much less love someone, or something in a godly manner.*

(i) *Without the covenantal Christ there is no love.*

(3) *Faith, hope and love, are the ongoing gifts of the church militant, and yet, even into eternity will love prevail forever.*

(a) *Faith is turned to sight, hope is turned to fulfillment, love is forever.*

(i) *For God is love.*

(b) *A lack of love (vv. 7–12) demonstrates that such false teachers and false spirits (verse 1-6) did not possess the Spirit of God at all (vv. 3, 6, 8).*

(c) *They represent the spirit of antichrist, not the Spirit of God (v. 3).*

(4) *And if a person is loved by the God of love, love becomes a virtue working in them stemming from Christ, in the power of God's Spirit.*

II. The Doctrine of the Text

A. DOCTRINE: God is Love.

1. Even though this is a short truth, it is a profound truth.

a) There are two ways to consider that God is love, internally and externally.

(1) *In God and a manifestation outside of God in the world.*

2. God's Love in the Abstract internally.

a) God's Love internally is a love that is intra-trinitarian.

(1) *It is in the trinity as an attribute.*

(2) *"The love of God is the goodness seen by God where he approves himself first." Perkins, W. (n.d.). A Golden Chain: The Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation.*

(a) *Goodness in approval.*

(3) *God loves what he thinks is good, and so he loves himself to the full.*

(a) *It is his infinite ability to exercise affection and understanding where he knows and enjoys the perpetual union he has between Father, Son and Spirit.*

(i) *And this with extreme desire.*

(b) *God loves himself necessarily because he is the most perfect and blessed being.*

(c) *To love is to love in exercise and light of that being.*

(i) *Love is nowhere else found.*

(d) *This love, this delight, seeks union with that which is the most good.*

(e) *John 17:24, "I desire that where I am, they also will be with me," a longing by which he, as it were, seeks us (Ps. 119:176).*

(f) *When it is externalized, it desires that men know and enjoy God as he really is, and draws near to him, Ephesians 2:13 "As you who were once far off have now been brought near."*

(4) *He loves himself perfectly, and the communion he enjoys in goodness and love is infinite joy and delight between the three persons of the Trinity which then is accommodated to the redeemed and pardoned soul.*

(5) *God's love is set on the highest good, and that is himself.*

(a) *The divine persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, are eternally engaged with each other in the highest possible motion of blissful communion.*

(b) *The Father with the Son (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; Matt. 3:17; 17:5), the Son with the Father and Spirit with the Father and Son (John 14:31).*

(6) *In this love between the Godhead, God is forever concerned with how delighted he is in all things he is, and all things he has done.*

(a) *He looks at all this with an eye to promote his own glory above all other things.*

(i) *Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; Isa. 43:7.*

(b) *And when he glories about things, those things which are outside himself, and loves them, he does so not because of the things in and of themselves, but how they are in relation to his glory, and himself.*

3. God's Love Externally

a) The expression of God's image in creation is found in three ways.

(1) *After God approves of himself, and sees delight in that, then all his creatures are seen as good, and in them God takes delight because they are created by him.*

(2) *God's goodness, communicated, is love.*

(3) *His love does not contain any hypocrisy; and there are 3 kinds.*

b) The first degree of love is universal [**benevolence**].

(1) *God willed good to creatures he created from eternity*

(a) *"The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works." (Psa. 104:31).*

(i) *Psa. 145:9; 147:9.*

c) The second degree of love is common [**beneficence**].

(1) *God does good to the creature in time according to his good will.*

(a) *"...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45).*

(b) *We call this his indiscriminate providence, which is good.*

(i) *How creatures use this is wholly a different issue.*

d) The third is a special love [**complacency**].

(1) *In this he delights himself in the creature on account of his redeemed image seen in them.*

(a) *John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," etc.*

(b) *Rom. 5:8, "God sets out his love towards us, seeing that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

e) Considering these three kinds of love.

(1) *By universal love he loved humankind before they were as something he would create.*

(a) *He saw all things he would create as good and loved them in that way.*

(b) *Things God creates are considered good as things in themselves in that way because God made them.*

(2) *By common love, he loves humankind as they are created in his image.*

(a) *In knowledge, righteousness and holiness.*

(b) *He still loves the idea of the image of God in men.*

(i) *He loves that idea.*

(3) *By special love he loves human beings when they are renewed after his image through Christ and redeemed from the fall by his power.*

(a) *This love is only to the elect, by which he bestows all the benefits of redemption, all saving benefits to them, benefits that accompany true salvation (Heb. 6:9).*

(b) *This special love is not classified as food, sun and rain, etc.*

(i) *Peter Van mastricht said, "For it is most terrible to confuse nature and grace." (Vol 2, 352)*

(ii) *These two cannot be confused, where people often do.*

4. God's Love in His Work

a) It flows from his goodness.

(1) *"The goodness of God is demonstrated in that he created dwellings before inhabitants, food before living creatures, those things which would be useful for man, before man himself. Ames, W. (n.d.). The Marrow of Theology (37)."*

b) God has a disposition to promote his own happiness and the happiness of his creatures, and this is an exercise of goodness seen in love.

(1) *The object of God's love in Christ are fallen sinners to be redeemed by him.*

(2) *It is not very difficult to see why God hates the wicked.*

(a) *He hates men, and hates sin in men.*

(b) *"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," (Rom 9:13).*

(3) *It is most mysterious and yet incredible that God loves men in loving His church.*

(a) *Sinners who are changed into saints are loved by God.*

(i) *This is amazing.*

(b) *According to His will, God saves sinners, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus," (Eph. 2:7).*

(4) *The goodness of God in the form of love or universal love is revealed in nature where we see life teeming with enjoyment.*

(a) *Love to the undeserving demonstrates such benevolence.*

(b) *It demonstrates the common love of God, the disposition of his love to image bearers.*

(i) *But this is not saving love.*

(5) *The realm of redemption and God's purpose for His people is very different, for it is fall-reversing.*

(a) *"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," (John 3:16).*

(b) *And as John also said, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," (1 John 4:10).*

(6) *This special love of God includes delight in its object (as a result of being joined with Christ) with the desire of possession and communion.*

(a) *God is love and love in Him is, in all that is essential to its nature, what love is in his elect.*

(b) *In this the Christian should rejoice exceedingly.*

(i) *They should be thinking, "The infinite God of the universe condescended to love me."*

(a) *I am part of his universal love, common love, and special love.*

(b) *Not all men may say such a thing.*

B. God's love is manifested in communication of that which brings him the most glory.

1. God loves himself so much, and he knows that such a love is perfect, and it loves that which is perfect, that he is and always has been eternally moved to communicate that love between the Father, Son and Spirit.
 - a) God is love, and communicates love perfectly within the constitution of the trinity.
 - b) Within the nature of the Trinity, there is a pure love communicated to each of the persons of the Trinity.
 - c) The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father and this love is communicated between them through the working of the Spirit of love.
 - (1) *A love without restriction.*
 - (2) *God, communicating love in this way, holds a pure and unrestricted love in himself.*
 - d) Yet, there is also a pouring out of His love in and through Christ, which is given and restricted to those elected in Christ.
 - (1) *Love to the undeserving demonstrates that communication of God's love to the creature in a special way; not a universal way or common way.*
 - e) This pouring out of redemptive love on His creatures is *ad extra*, outside Himself as Trinity but in the Beloved Mediator.
 - (1) *In other words, Christians are not able to contain the union of the trinity in their finite minds, bodies and spirit.*
 - (2) *Instead, they experience the love of God in its effects to them.*
 - (3) *But they experience God loving them by loving Christ in them, which in turns flows over them by the Spirit.*
 - f) As finite creatures it would be impossible to receive the saving love of God in any other form except through the mediation of Christ since the love which God pours out is infinite.
 - (1) *Pardoned souls need Christ for all communion with God.*
 - (2) *From Christ the Spirit is sent, and in the Spirit is found the motions and flows of the Savior in love to them.*
 - g) Christians obtain and enjoy union with God through God's gift that which is in Christ poured out.
 - h) John Owen speaks about the love of God in this manner when he states, "He is love eternally and necessarily in this love of the Son; all other workings of love are but acts of His will, whereby something of it is outwardly expressed." (Owen, Works, vol. 1, 144.)
 - (1) *God, then, will savingly love men wisely.*
 - (a) *He exercises his goodness and love wisely in special acts of his will to save unlovely people from hell.*
 - (2) *And where is this love found?*
 - (a) *It is found on the street corner?*
 - (b) *Is it found in a room in a house?*
 - (c) *Is it found at the store to be bought?*
 - (d) *God's love is experienced by Christians in the "person of Christ...the first recipient subject of all that divine love which extends itself to the church. It is all, the whole of it, in the first place fixed upon him, and by and through him is communicated to the church." (146)*

(i) *This is why there is no salvation outside the church and God's Mediator.*

(ii) *There is no love outside the church.*

i) God does not use his saving love unwisely, or irrespective of Christ.

(1) *It is founded on him, and set in the context of his everlasting covenant.*

2. He cannot love something that is not of absolute perfection.

a) He cannot find complete satisfaction in anything that falls short of absolute perfection.

b) He loves redeemed sinners for his own sake.

c) He loves redeemed sinners, in the Beloved, because he sees his Christ in them transforming them.

(1) *"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. 1:6).*

d) While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, which demonstrates the love of God for sinners in union with God's Christ.

e) He loves in them himself, his virtues, his work, and his gifts, and when they are changed into his likeness, he loves them more.

(1) *He makes drawing close to God acceptable in the Son.*

f) He sees Christ in redeemed sinners, and sees his image shining back.

(1) *He sees them as his children because he sees Christ as his Son in them.*

(2) *He bestows on them a special love.*

(a) *It is far from universal or common.*

(3) *He communicates to them the fullest communication of his nature which is infinite love; and yet how?*

(a) *As much as a finite creature can contain.*

(i) *John 16:27; Rom. 5:8; I John 3:1.*

(ii) *This is by the Spirit.*

g) There pardoned souls see the sparks of God's divine glory communicated to them when they consider being redeemed by the Christ from the Fall, Sin and Hell

(1) *Enemies to Friends*

(2) *The Christian knows he was once an enemy, and God made him a friend.*

(a) *He must consider who he is in God through Christ.*

(b) *What great love God has and communicates to his people through his Son.*

(3) *He not only sent Christ to die for sinners, that they might be brought into communion with him, but he did this while they were under the curse of the fall and enemies of God.*

(a) *Who would do such things for their enemies?*

h) The Salvation of Men by Christ is a wonder.

(1) *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us," (Eph. 2:4) redeems sinners to make them astonished at his love for them.*

(a) *And how?*

(2) *God uses the death of his Son to save men.*

(a) *"God so loved," so vehemently, ardently, earnestly, wonderfully did God love his people that for their salvation he did not stop Christ from dying, but gave him completely over to death, and the hell of the cross, the hell of judgment, the hell of his wrath.*

(i) *Is this not a Free Love?*

(ii) *Is this not the greatest Love?*

(a) *An Immutable Love?*

(b) This is why it said that God did not merely love, but “so loved.”

(c) It is the greatest love of all.

- (3) Such a love that is communicated to God's people, is constant and perpetual.
- (a) It does not start and stop like the love Christians have for God.
- (b) They love, and then they wax and wane
- (i) They grow cold.**
- (ii) They forget God, and all his benefits when they sin against him.**
- (c) God's covenantal love in Christ's everlasting covenant is as unchangeable as God's essence and nature.
- (d) He is unchangeable in his love.
- (i) 'For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.' (Rom. 11:29).**

(a) Cf. Hosea 11:9; John 13:1

- i) How great is the love of God for and in the Christian?
- (1) God's love is so great that Christians can stand with confidence on the Day of Judgment before God's tribunal in it.
- (2) He loved his people so much in Christ that they will not fear death, or judgment, or hell, by which the whole world will tremble.
- (a) Isa. 28:16: “Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tested Stone, a precious Cornerstone, of a sure foundation.”
- (b) They are able to stand on this Christ, this love for them.
- (3) Through this God of love communicating the love of grace to the Christian, they have faith in Christ, so that they can pass through the day of judgment with a head held high.
- (a) Luke 21:28: “Look up, and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”
- (4) The everlasting covenant of God, the blood of Christ, the red hand, is the comfort of God's love for his people.
- (a) Such sparks of divine glory are found in such love, and earthly words are so inadequate, for the things of the world cannot possibly depict the glories of the Christ and his love in this.
- (5) Martin Luther said, “Surely the whole world does not grasp the tiniest syllable of the statement that God is love.”
- (a) Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 30: The Catholic Epistles.* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 30, pp. 301–302). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.
- (b) Can the Christian gain merely a spark of this divine glory?
- (i) Does he not say with Moses, show me your glory, day by day and in the love of God that God would do so by his Spirit in his eternal word?**

j) Such a love that God bestows, such a love that he is, is most lovely, most worthy to be loved.

(1) “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” (Psa. 34:8).

III. The Text Applied

A. God Loves Us

1. Infinitely So.

a) God's act of divine love in Christ is infinite.

(1) It cannot be counted and has no measure.

b) In every manifestation of God's love to you it is an expression of that infinite love in himself.

c) What he expresses to you is without bounds.

(1) *It is not limited in its desire of blessing you.*

(2) *God loves you infinitely, but you cannot contain it.*

(3) *You are not capable of containing God's infinite expressions, which is why you need Jesus Christ to minister that love of God to you by his Spirit.*

2. Immutably So.

a) This love, like God, cannot change to you.

b) Once he has made a promise, that promise is eternal, for, he is faithful.

c) He says, "everlasting joy shall be unto them." (Isa. 61:7).

(1) *Everlasting joy – found in Isaiah.*

d) "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:" (Heb. 6:17).

(1) *God could swear by no other than himself that his infinite and unchangeable love would ravish every pardoned soul in his special communion of himself to you.*

3. Eternally So.

a) The length of time concerning God's love to you never ends if you have it.

b) It is eternal, without beginning, without end, and has no limits in its continuation.

(1) *"Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." (Isa. 51:11).*

4. Covenantally Given

a) You enjoy the love of God covenantally in Christ.

b) That is, through the Mediator that declares the Father.

c) You have the comfort of covenantal love, bound by an immutable oath if you believe on him by faith.

(1) *Not merely that you know something about this love, but that you trust this God, and so the love is felt in a far different manner than by mere knowledge.*

(2) *You are like a flower that turns itself even around a tree to soak up the sun.*

d) God is faithful in his covenant, it is a covenant that cannot be broken.

(1) *"the scripture cannot be broken," Jesus said, (John 10:35).*

(2) *When God makes a promise, as we have studied, he is forever faithful.*

e) This great covenant of the God of love, to sinners, is set in the death of his Son as unchangeable, infinite and eternal to you.

(1) *But I sin so much, all the time, and all my best works are filthy.*

(a) *Secret sins, presumptuous sins, besetting sins, of omission and commission.*

(2) *What sins of yours will undo what God has done in his love to you?*

(a) *This does not excuse your sin, or give you a license for sin.*

(b) *But it does show you the eternal, unchangeable and infinite nature of God's love to you.*

(i) *Expressing himself to you always through his sin.*

(ii) *Allowing you to delight in his perfections.*

(a) *Delighting in his love.*

(3) *But, you often think of it this way.*

(a) *God loves me, but, I sin.*

(i) *Does he still love me even when I sin?*

(ii) *I don't feel like he loves me today.*

(a) I am ashamed of my sin.

(4) *The fruits of the purchase of Jesus Christ shall be bestowed with all certainty on all those for whom he died, and that everyone who is really interested in the covenant Mediator shall be kept to the final day of salvation, and even through the judgment.*

(a) *That is because salvation is not based on feelings, how you feel, and your sins are not bigger than Christ's love to you is as the Savior.*

(b) *What? Can you out-sin God?*

5. Such love as this is incomprehensible.

a) It hurts the mind to consider the God of love.

b) It is very easy to see why God hated Esau.

c) It is very hard to understand and see why God loved Jacob.

(1) *That lying cheat of a man.*

(2) *It is very hard for you to understand why God loved you.*

(3) *What response do you have, then, of love back to the God of Love in Christ?*

B. Degrees of Love to God

1. As God is love, and he expresses the truth of it and the exercise of it in your life, you will love him back throughout your Christian walk.

a) As a Christian, you will demonstrate varying degrees of love for God back to him at different stages of your life if you are redeemed.

b) There are 5 degrees of love to God that you need to be aware of concerning the God of Love, one false and four true for you as a Christian.

2. The first degree is to love God for His blessings, which most people hang onto; all those like Judas, the coveter, fall into this false degree of love.

a) It is a false love; it is a counterfeit love.

(1) *It makes people almost a Christian.*

b) This is the lowest degree because here people love him simply for the good they perceive he does for them.

(1) *Not the good in Christ in salvation, but in their perception of being blessed.*

(2) *That is not the kind of love that we should have for God.*

(3) *Everyone is out to claim the God who loves them for who they are no matter who they are or what they do.*

(a) *They won't leave off sins to love God, or demonstrate that God is love.*

(b) *They do not want God on his terms but their terms.*

c) He gives us gifts of all kinds.

(1) *Families, houses, cars, jobs, money, food.*

(2) *This is when people pull Jesus off the shelf when things get rough, and pray a prayer or two when they need him.*

(3) *This is a misplaced love; really it is only lust – and that of the world really.*

(a) *A lust of the world because it does not really even love the Giver of the gifts.*

(i) *It lusts after what good things they deem are good for them in their life.*

(ii) *They love the Cosmic Butler that caters to their whim.*

(b) *Such a love as that merely loves the blessings that the God of love has lavished upon the face of the earth.*

(c) *It falls really under a universal love that God has in granting sunshine and rain, and this merely indiscriminately.*

(4) *People think they are blessed, and that is a way they give some respect back to God, but they are not really imitating the God of love here.*

- (a) *They love what the God of love can merely do for them.*
 (b) *That is a false love.*
3. The second degree is to love God for who he is.
- a) It is to love Him because of his nature and essence.
- (1) *To love God for being a God of love.*
 (a) *Not to love God for being loving.*
 (b) *To love God for being the God of love.*
- (2) *To love him because they rejoice in him alone as the epitome of love and benevolence as he is in himself.*
 (a) *This is only done by pardoned souls.*
 (b) *Blood bought, changed, born again sinners converted by the power of Jesus Christ.*
- b) "Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified." (Psa. 70:4).
- (1) *This is the point of studying the attributes of God.*
 (2) *Loving God for who he is.*
 (3) *Love to God because God is love.*
 (a) *The redeemed are very aware of this God of love in this way.*
 (b) *They love him because God is God.*
 (c) *They love Christ because of his excellency.*
 (d) *He is to them chief among ten-thousand.*
 (e) *He is to them the lily of the valley, and the bright and morning star.*
 (i) *He is most excellent to them, and they know his deep love.*
 (ii) *They know they are the loved, and he is the beloved that comes leaping and skipping from the mountains and the hills to them, as it says in the Song.*
4. The third degree of love is to love God above everything.
- a) This is where you love everything for God's sake.
- b) Christ said, Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me. Or he who loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."
- c) You are to forsake everything for Christ.
- (1) *That means you place your love to God in the God of love over all other things.*
 (2) *A Christian is to forsake all his sins, his old way of life.*
 (a) *You are to love God in the new life you have in Christ.*
 (b) *You walk according to the truth and love the God of love, you follow the word of God which shows the God of love, and you cultivate that love for that God.*
- (3) *All your interests in the world you forsake for him.*
 (a) *Pleasures, family, friends, all natural endowments and gifts, all privilege, even life itself is to be parted with if Christ so deems it necessary.*
- d) It is the Christian's duty to forsake everything for the God of love.
- (1) *All the things of this world are transitory, perishing and uncertain, which is how the apostle describes riches, (1 Tim. 6:17).*
 (2) *You love God greater than anything and come to know that you are able to love him because he first loved you.*
5. The fourth degree of love is the height of your Christian joy.
- a) This is not an easy thing to come by.
- b) Joy in the God of love is not an easy thing to sustain.
- (1) *Ask any Scrooge.*

(2) "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:37-39).

(a) *What a height and depth there is in God.*

(b) *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"*

(Rom. 11:33).

(3) *Jesus Christ is precious, (1 Peter 2:7), and a pearl, a rich treasure, (Matt. 13:44-46).*

(4) *Christ is of very great worth, of more worth than all the world.*

(5) *So is his gospel, and so are all heavenly things like grace, mercy, pardon, justification, sanctification, God's favor, abundant life, the mysteries of heaven and eternal life.*

(6) *When you grasp a mere spark of these things as they are found in God, they cultivate a great joy in this life.*

(a) *But to sustain them is at God's sovereign pleasure, and are very hard for fallen saints to keep up.*

6. The fifth degree of love for God is the love you will have in glory to God and Christ as a glorified saint.

a) Seeing God will have a transformative affect on us.

b) Seeing him will make us to know Christ and God in the highest degree that a human creature can know him.

c) John says in the previous chapter to our text, "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," (1 John 3:2).

(1) *Seeing God in heaven is the eternal glory of seeing the God of love and the Christ of love.*

d) Love Makes us more like God

(1) *Love makes us most like God for God is love!*

(2) *Our love should strive for the higher degrees of service to Christ, for when we love as God loves, our love makes us most like him.*

c. If You Do Not Love God You Hate Him

1. If you do not love Christ, if you do not love God, if you do not love God in Christ, you despise him.

a) You are one who sees Christ as the "reproach of men, and despised of the people," (Psalm 22:6).

b) You reject him as men do, and you do not esteem him as you should, "He is despised and rejected by men. He was despised, and we esteemed him not," (Isaiah 53:3)

c) With Herod you mock him and his ways, "And Herod with his soldiers despised and mocked him," (Luke 23:11)

2. You only love what you value.

a) If you despise Christ, then how can you say you love him?

(1) *What is Christ to you?*

(2) *Can you do what the rich man did and value riches, and love them and not Christ?*

(3) *Can you do what some of his followers did and value your family and love them and not Christ?*

(4) *What are all the things in the world, if you gained them all, and yet despised the Christ who made them?*

(5) *Such people like you think Christ is merely some prophet or teacher, some good teacher who said a few things good, like the golden rule.*

(6) *But Christ is God; what will happen to the one who hates God?*

(a) *What will happen to you in not loving the God of love?*

(b) *What an odd thing it is for wicked men to hate the God of love.*

(i) *If you do not love God, then you hate him.*

(c) *There is no neutral ground between these two.*

(d) *You are commanded to love him, but you hate him if you do not love him on God's terms.*

(i) *Matthew 6:24. "He who is not with me — is against me,"*

(e) If you do not love the God of love, if you do not love Christ, you hate him, "But his citizens hated him, and sent a messenger after him, saying: We will not have this man to reign over us," (Luke 19:14).

b) If you lack this love, then you hate God and you love the devil instead, even by default.

(1) *You love the ways of the devil and you love the works of the devil.*

(2) *Your ways and his ways you love as you love a father.*

(3) *The devil's strategy is to pull you as far away from the love of God as possible, and to despise Christ even by complacency.*

(4) *What kind of trap has he laid for you that you would so readily hate the Christ of God?*

c) And if you do the works of the devil, and as Christ said, have the devil as your father, instead of God, you bear his image.

(1) *Did you know the demons paid more respect to Christ than you do even being demons?*

(2) *They attested to his Sonship.*

(3) *They knew he was the Christ.*

(4) *They knew he was all powerful.*

(5) *They knew he was the supreme judge.*

(6) *They knew he is God's Mediator between men and God.*

(7) *They knew God loves his people.*

(8) *What do you know?*

(9) *Christ didn't die for the devil, but he died for all his disciples, all those who put their trust in him.*

(a) *Devils have no possibility to experience the love of God, the God of Love.*

(b) *They will know only wrath and justice.*

(c) *But for you, there is a Gospel of love and Savior filled with love, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life," (John 3:16).*

(i) *Will that be you?*

(d) *"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared — he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy!" (Titus 3:4-5).*

d) "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him," (1 John 4:16).

D. To the Saints, your weaknesses as a saint cannot completely remove Christ's love from you.

1. A word of encouragement to you in this.
2. Such a love is a holy fire kindled in the affections that you have, by which you are carried out by the Spirit of God, after the God of love.
 - a) The Spirit works on your understanding, presses you to discover the beauty of Christ, the beauty of God, his wisdom, holiness, mercy, and love to entice and draw you to the love of God.
 - b) Yet, you know you are not perfect.
 - c) You know that your sins are many.
 - (1) *If may even be that you brought many of them here this morning to cast them at the feet of Christ for forgiveness.*
 - (2) *Longing for the mercy seat to cover you and the red hand to wash you in his everlasting blood.*
 - (3) *You fall so often, and horridly so.*
 - (4) *You wonder what God will do with you, who sin so readily.*
 - d) Look to the hall of faith in Hebrews 11.
 - (1) *The Hall of Faith shows faithful believers demonstrating supernatural faith in difficult circumstances with an eye to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and a sweet submission to God's sovereign providence.*
 - (2) *Wouldn't you like to do that successfully?*
 - (3) *Faith in particular is mentioned and exemplified.*
 - (4) *What is "faith" according to the author?*
 - (a) *By faith, a Christian believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word, he does this for the authority of God himself speaking within it.*
 - (b) *This presses the Christian to consider how faith works out in their life to trust the God of love.*
 - e) But you say, but my sins are so great and large. How can God continue to love me?
 - (1) *Has not Christ most readily, tenderly and compassionately received even the greatest and most heinous sinners who have come to him by faith, loved them with an everlasting love, and given them abundant life?*
 - (2) *Who has Christ so tenderly received and given abundant life to?*
 - (3) *We certainly do not have time to consider them all, but only hear the names of some.*
 - (a) *Consider Adam, the most heinous of sinners, saved by God.*
 - (b) *Samson, that champion of champions who failed in every way before God.*
 - (c) *Solomon, he whom God loved, though Solomon did not restrict his flesh from anything and sinned most wickedly in idolatry.*
 - (d) *Manasseh, that wicked and heinous king, converted by grace in a jail cell.*
 - (e) *The Prodigal, (Luke 15:20ff).*
 - (f) *Matthew the tax collector, (Matt. 9:9).*
 - (g) *Zachaeus the oppressing Publican, (Luke 19:5-11).*
 - (h) *The notorious sinful woman that washed Christ's feet with her tears, etc., (Luke 7:37ff).*
 - (i) *The woman caught in adultery to be stoned.*
 - (j) *The thief on the cross, (Matt. 27:44 compared with Luke 23:40-44).*
 - (k) *Saul, that persecutor and a blasphemer, (Acts 26:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:13-14, 16), who he says is chief among sinners, where he has received abundant grace, abundant life in Christ.*

(i) *For those listed in Hebrews 11, what acts does the Holy Spirit mention?*

(ii) *He only mentions their faithfulness.*

f) Where is Christ's power to love but in his infinite power, and unbounded and free love wherewith he loved us even from before the foundation of the world.

(1) What sins will you commit that will undo the Christ's love to you?

(2) This does not give you license to test that question.

(3) It places it in a perspective to believe God and not be so hard on yourself, which many often do.

(4) God's infinite love should be astonishing to you, but comforting.

(5) He is your constant Friend.

(a) His compassions never fail.

(b) God is your friend forever in his infinite love.

(c) Having loved his own, he loved them to the end.

3. Are you sure of God's love to you? Think in this way:

a) "I am sure God is my God, because he says he loves me and I believe his word. He has given me a heart to fear him in love, and to love him with fear and trembling, to rejoice in his word, to desire to do his will universally, and to depend and trust on his sure mercies and faithful promise in Jesus Christ. God loves me, he now loves me, and I am sure he will forever love me, for where he once loves, he ever loves, and did ever love, even before the world began. I am sure God loves me because he has given me a heart to hate all sin with a sincere hatred, in thought, word, and deed. I am sure God loves me, because he has given me true conviction, and a sincere repentance. I am sure God loves me, because I delight in his ways, and all my longings and desires are to do all his will. I am sure God loves me, because I find his yoke easy, and his burden light. I know God loves me because I heartily and sincerely desire to love him, more than my own self. I know God loves me, because I love him most for who he is. I know God loves me, because I desire nothing so much, as to be his faithful, humble, and obedient servant. I know God loves me, because I love all things for his glory, all things in subordination to my Christ, who is love itself. Sweet Jesus, give me so much love, to love you here on earth, as you love me, for I cannot love you enough, nor soon enough."

4. Love turns to grace, as we will see, then, in the next sermon.