

Divine Attributes – The Love of God by William Bates (1625-1699)

Eph 3:18

I. The Text Opened

A. Eph. 3:18

1. Mercy is a consequence of divine love.
 - a) This is described by the apostle Paul using all the dimensions available to him in an attempt to signify its greatness.
 - b) He prays for the Ephesians “that they may be able to comprehend with all saints, the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God in Christ which passes knowledge,” (Eph. 3:18).
 - (1) *No language is sufficient to express God's infinite love to finite creatures; we are incapable of comprehending it.*
2. At the same time, it is our duty to study it with our best effort and devotion of mind and heart.
 - a) Our very happiness depends on it, as in this way we can better understand God's heart toward us.
 - b) And what we desire to discover shall be obtained by the presence and light of our Redeemer.

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: God's divine love is seen in the greatness of redemption.

1. The greatness of divine love in our redemption appears in three things.
 - a) 1) By reflecting on the mighty evils from which we are freed.
 - b) 2) The means by which our redemption is accomplished.
 - c) 3) That excellent state to which we are advanced by our Redeemer.
2. If we reflect on the horror of our natural sinful state, we will come to appreciate to a much greater degree the mercy that delivered us.
 - a) By our original rebellion, we forfeited God's favor and the honor and happiness He enjoys in paradise (Ps. 49:20).
 - b) And as there is no middle state between sovereignty and misery, He that falls from the throne does not stop until he comes to the bottom.
 - c) So when Adam fell from God and the dignity of his innocent state, he became extremely miserable.
 - d) By default, all mankind since is under the servitude of sin, the tyranny of Satan, the bondage of the law, and the empire of death. “He is conceived and born in sin,” (Ps. 51).
 - (1) *“He is sold under sin,” (Rom. 7), “and sells himself to do evil,” (Isa. 28:15).*
 - e) As that which is sold passes into the possession of the buyer, so the sinner exchanging himself for the pleasures of sin is under its power.
 - (1) *Original sin took possession of our nature.*
 - (2) *He is the servant of corruption by yielding to it, “For of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought in bondage,” (2 Peter 2:19).*
 - f) As a consequence of the fall, man is under the tyranny of Satan, who is called the god of this world.

- (1) *He overcame man in paradise, and by the right of war rules over him.*
- (2) *The soul is kept in his bondage by subtle chains.*
- (3) *Mankind is captive "to do his will," (2 Tim. 2:26), being under the curse of the law. And for his guilt, he is justly exposed to the punishment due transgressors (Heb. 2:15).*

3. How great is that love which pitied us and rescued us from sin, death, and hell?
- a) The measure of God's love is proportionate to the misery from which we are redeemed.
 - b) Only He that created us by His power could restore us by His love.
 - c) Divine compassion is exhibited in our full and entire deliverance, demonstrated in scope by the means in which our redemption is accomplished – the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God.
 - d) The essential condition of the human nature assumed by our Redeemer reveals His transcendent love to us.
 - e) For what commonality is there between God and man?
 - (1) *Infinite and finite are not terms that allow comparison, as do greater and less; but are as opposite in meaning as all and nothing.*
 - (2) *The whole world is "but as the drop of the bucket that has scarcely weight to fall; and the small dust of the balance, that is not of such moment as to turn the scales; it is as nothing, and counted less than nothing, and vanity," (Isa. 40:15, 17).*
 - f) Deity by nature is independent and sovereign.
 - (1) *To be a creature implies dependence and subjection. And yet, "the Word was made flesh."*
 - (2) *Christ was not made as Adam was, beginning the first step of His life in the full exercise of reason and dominion over the creatures, but came into the world by the way of a natural birth, the holy baby dependent upon a mortal creature.*
 - (a) *The eternal wisdom of the Father stooped to a state of infancy, which is most distant from that of wisdom, and the mighty God to a condition of indigence and infirmity.*
 - (b) *The Lord of nature submitted to the laws of it.*
- (i) Such admirable love!**

4. This love is more endeared to us by considering the servile state of the nature He assumed.
- a) An account of this we have in the words of the apostle in Philippians 2:5-8, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ; who being in the form of God..." that is, enjoying the divine nature with all its glory eternally and invariably.
 - b) Our Savior possessed that glory that is truly divine before He took our nature (John 17:5).
 - c) The angels adored Him in heaven, and by Him "princes reigned on the earth," (Prov. 8:15).
 - d) It is added, "He thought it no robbery to be equal with God," (Phil. 2:6).
 - e) Being the essential image of the Father, He had rightful possession of all His perfections.
 - f) And yet "He made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man."
 - g) A servant is not simply a man, but a man in a low state.
 - (1) *Now He that was in the form of God lessened Himself into the form of a servant.*

- (2) *He assumed human nature without honor, attended with its infirmities; so that by the visible condition of His life, He was judged to be an ordinary person.*
- h) This is better understood if we consider the lowness and poverty of His birth, as well as the tenor of His life while he conversed with men.
- (1) *What nation was more despicable in the esteem of the world than the Jews?*
 (2) *And among the Jews none were more vilified than the Galileans, and in Galilee, Nazareth was a contemptible village, and in Nazareth the family of Joseph was very obscure.*
 (3) *This is the context into which the Son of God was born.*
- i) His reputed father was a carpenter, and his mother a poor virgin that offered two pigeons for her purification.
- (1) *He first breathed in a manger, and was covered with swaddling rags.*
 (2) *This is the same Son of God, master of heaven and earth who adorns all creatures with their glory.*
 (3) *But love made Him who is heir of all things set aside the privilege of His supernatural position.*
 (a) *What inconceivable condescension!*
- j) An angel was dispatched from heaven, appearing with a surprising miraculous light, to assure the shepherds that the babe which lay in the manger was indeed the Redeemer of the world.
- k) The course of His life was a preface, in preparation for the death of the cross.
- (1) *He had a just right to all the glory of heaven.*
 (2) *His transfiguration exhibited a notable instance of it as glory descended from heaven to encompass Him.*
 (3) *“The fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily,” yet in His humble state His divine glory was voluntarily veiled.*
- l) God is light, and the Son is the brightness of His Father’s glory.
- (1) *Yet in His pilgrimage upon the earth His glory was veiled.*
 (2) *He was made not only “lower than the angels, but less than all men,” (cf. Heb. 2), joining the majesty of God with the meanness of “a worm,” (Ps. 22:6).*
 (3) *The “high and lofty One,” whom the prophet saw “exalted on a high throne,” (Isa. 6:1-4) and all the powers of heaven in a posture of reverence about Him, “was despised and rejected of men,” (Isa. 53:3).*
 (4) *“They turned their eyes from Him,” not for the luster of His countenance, but for shame.*
 (5) *“He grew up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground, there was no form or comeliness in Him,” (Isa. 53:2-3).*
- m) From His birth to the time of His perfecting He lived so privately as to be only known as the carpenter’s son.
- (1) *The inconceivable glory due Him was repressed from the first moment of His appearing among men.*
 (2) *In short, His despised condition was an abasement not only of His divinity but of His humanity.*
- n) And how conspicuous was His love in this darkening condescension?
- (1) *“We know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, He became poor for our sakes,” (2 Cor. 8:19).*
 (2) *He did not assume that which was due the excellency of His nature, but what was convenient for our redemption, which was to be accomplished by sufferings.*
- o) The most evident and sensible proof of the greatness of God’s love to mankind is in the sufferings of our Redeemer to obtain our pardon.

- (1) *He is called in Scripture “a man of sorrows,” (Isa. 53:3).*
- (2) *His whole life was a continual passion.*
- (3) *He suffered the contradiction of sinners, who by their malicious slanders obscured the luster of His miracles and most innocent actions.*
- (4) *He endured the temptations of Satan in the desert.*
- (5) *He was often in danger of His life.*
- p) But all these were nothing in comparison to His last sufferings.
- q) It is therefore said that at the bare apprehension of them He “began to be sorrowful,” as if He had never felt any grief until then.
- r) So in our Savior’s last sufferings the anger of God, the cruelty of men, and the fury of devils broke out together against Him.
- (1) *And that the degree of His love may be measured by those of His sufferings, it will be fit to consider them with respect to His soul and His body.*
- s) Upon His entrance into the Garden of Gethsemane, He admits, “my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”
- (1) *There were present only Peter, James and John to assure Him of their fidelity.*
- (2) *There was no visible enemy to afflict Him, yet His soul was saturated with sorrows.*
- (3) *It is easy to conceive the injuries He suffered from the rage of men, for they were inflicted upon His body.*
- (4) *But how do we understand His inward sufferings, the wounds of His spirit, the cross to which His soul was nailed?*
- t) These were inexpressibly greater, as the visible effects declare.
- (1) *The anguish of His soul so affected His body that His “sweat was as it were great drops of blood,” the miraculous evidence of His agony.*
- (2) *The terror was so dreadful that the assistance of an angel could not calm it.*
- (3) *And if we consider the causes of His grief and the design of God in afflicting Him, it will further appear that no sorrow was ever like His.*
- u) The causes of Christ’s misery in the Garden included the inconceivable burden of the sin debt He was about to bear.
- (1) *God is supreme good; sin supreme evil.*
- (2) *The Lord Christ alone had perfect light to discover sin in its true horror, and perfect zeal to hate it according to its nature, for who can understand the excellency of good, and the malignity of evil but the author of the one and the judge of the other?*
- v) On this account the grief of our Redeemer exceeded all the sorrows of repenting sinners from the beginning of the world.
- (1) *For our knowledge of sin is utterly imperfect, and our zeal so remiss, that our grief for sin is much beneath what it is worthy of.*
- (2) *But Christ’s sorrow was equal to its evil.*
- w) Another cause of Christ’s misery included His comprehension of the death He was to suffer, attended with all the curses of the law and the full measure of God’s indignation.
- (1) *From here it is said, “He began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy,” (Matt. 14:34).*
- (2) *The depth of His pain is evidenced by the fact that even though He knew His passion should soon give way to His glorious resurrection and the securing of the salvation of mankind, still He was shaken with fear and oppressed with sorrow at the first approaches of it.*

- x) Finally, Christ was in great pains of misery because the wrath of God would be poured out in full against Him, once He “became sin” for us.
- (1) *Though He was perfectly innocent – and more distant from sin than heaven is from earth – by the ordination of God as well as His own consent, “the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him,” (Isa. 53).*
 - (2) *He suffered as deeply as if He had been guilty for the sins of the whole world, for they were (in their entirety) transferred to Him on the cross.*
- y) However, the vindictive justice and eternal plan of God was unstoppable to His prayers and tears.
- (1) *Although He renewed His request with the greatest ardency, God would not spare Him.*
 - (2) *He “was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”*
 - (3) *Who is able to conceive the weight of God’s hand when He punishes sin according to divine justice?*
 - (4) *Who can understand the degrees of those sufferings when God exacts satisfaction from one that was obliged, and able to make it?*
 - (5) *How piercing were those sorrows by which divine justice, infinitely incensed, was to be appeased?*
 - (6) *Who knows the consequence of those words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”*
 - (7) *It is impossible to comprehend, or represent, that great and terrible mystery.*
- z) But even when the pain of His sin-death was greatest, Christ did not murmur against God. Nor did He express anger against his enemies.
- (1) *But while His faith, love, humility and patience were yet in their exalted state, the glory and unspeakable joy that had been evident during the course of His life on earth was withdrawn.*
 - (2) *An impetuous torrent of pure unmixed sorrows broke into His holy soul.*
 - (3) *Having lost the sense of His present joy, there remained in His soul only the hope of future joy.*
 - (4) *And in that moment, His mind was so intent upon His imminent sufferings that He seems to have been diverted from the glory that would follow what He was about to do.*
 - (a) *All comforting influences were suspended. His soul was liable to sorrows, as His body to death.*
 - (b) *But Deity is the principle of life as well as of joy; so even though the body of Christ was three days in the tomb, He was never separated from the Godhead.*
 - (c) *He endured whatever was necessary for the expiation of sin while never in the least account being guilty of any of those vicious evils, blasphemy, and hatred of God that He paid the price for.*
 - (d) *And one of the great divine mysteries is that at the same time the Father’s wrath burned against His Son for the sin that He bore, God was also infinitely pleased in His obedience.*
 - (e) *Our blessed Lord suffered the punishment due us.*
 - (i) *How cutting was it to His soul to be suspended from the perfect vision of God?*
 - (ii) *To be divorced as it were from Himself, and to lose that paradise He always had within Him?*
 - (f) *If all the angels of light were at once deprived of their glory, the loss would not equal this dreadful eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness.*

(i) *And yet, His sorrows were only equaled by that love which secured them.*

III. The Text Applied

A. Suffering for Us

1. The sufferings inflicted by the hand of God declare the infiniteness of our Redeemer's love to us.
 - a) And if we consider the goodness of our Redeemer and the quality of His love to us, it is even more evident by Christ's voluntary submission to such a horrific death.
 - b) Two circumstances make our Savior's death very terrible to us: both the humiliation and the sheer torment He suffered.
 - c) As honor depends on the esteem of others, so infamy consists in the judgment of others.
 - (1) *Every death inflicted for a crime is attended with disgrace.*
 - (2) *To be executed privately is a favor, but to be made a spectacle to the multitude increases the dishonor of the one that suffers.*
 - (3) *Again, when death is carried out speedily, the sense of shame is fleeting.*
 - (4) *But to be exposed to public view for many hours, as a malefactor, while onlookers gaze with disgust is much worse.*
 - d) To hang on the cross was the most conspicuous mark of public displeasure; a special shame was associated with it.
 - (1) *To the Jews, hanging on a tree was branded with the curse.*
 - (2) *Therefore, God commanded that the "bodies of those that were hanged on a tree should be taken down in the evening, that the land might not be defiled with a curse," (Deut. 21:23).*
 - (3) *It was only inflicted on the most infamous offenders, as fugitives, slaves, thieves, and traitors, those for whom the lowness of their status or the height of their crimes rendered unworthy of any respect at all.*
 - e) The pain of Christ's death was extreme.
 - (1) *Iron spikes were driven through His hands and feet.*
 - (2) *Crucifixion is a slow death where the victims actually feel themselves die.*
 - (3) *As a result, in pity the soldiers typically broke their legs, in order to put an end to their misery.*
 - f) The pure and gracious hands of the Son of God, which were never stretched out but to do good, were pierced, and those feet which bore the Redeemer of the world, and for which the waters had a reverence, were nailed.
 - (1) *His body, the precious workmanship of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the Deity, was destroyed.*
 - (2) *He that is the glory of heaven was made the scorn of the earth.*
 - (3) *The King of kings was crucified between two thieves in Jerusalem, at their sacred feast, in the face of the world.*
 - (4) *His naked body was exposed on the cross for three hours, only covered with a veil of darkness.*
 - g) This was such a stupendous submission of the Son of God that even nature relented at His last sufferings.
 - (1) *The sun was struck with horror and withdrew its light.*
 - (2) *The earth trembled, and the rocks rent; the most insensible creatures sympathized with Him.*
 - (3) *In His pain we have the most visible instance of divine love to us.*

(4) Scripture distinctly represents the love of God in giving His Son, and the love of Christ in giving Himself to die for man, and both require our deepest consideration.

h) The Father expressed such an excess of love that our Savior Himself speaks of it with admiration, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” (John 3:16).

(1) If Abraham’s obedience to offer his son was in the judgment of God a convincing evidence of his affection (Gen. 22:12), how much more is the actual sacrificing of Christ the strongest proof of God’s love to us? God “spared not His own Son.”

i) What human understanding could have conceived such a thought, that the Son of God should die for our redemption?

j) John represents to us that “God is love,” not simply charitable and loving; God is love itself.

(1) The divine nature is infinite essential love.

(2) And He produces the strongest and most convincing testimony of it. John 4:9 says, “In this was manifest the love of God to us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”

k) The love of God in regard to all temporal blessings is slight when compared to the love that is expressed by our Redeemer.

(1) As much as the Creator exceeds the creature, the gift of Christ is above the gift of the whole world.

(2) “Herein is love,” the apostle says, that is the clearest and highest expression of it that can be, “God sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.”

l) The wisdom and power of God were certainly displayed in creation.

(1) But the love of God demonstrated in our strange salvation through Christ cannot be expressed in a higher degree.

(2) The giving of heaven itself, with all its joys and glory, is not so perfect and full a demonstration of the love of God as the giving of his Son to die for us.

(3) Nor is the Son’s love better demonstrated than by His obedience to this death.

(4) “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend,” (John 15:8).

(5) But there’s a degree of love higher than that, a love that compels one to die for one’s enemies.

(6) And yet Romans 5:8 says that while we were still sinful rebels and haters of God, Christ died for us.