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“GOD IS LOVE”

“God is love.”—I John 4:16

MY TEXT IS TAKEN from I John, and it is one of those texts the world does not believe. If I could make everyone believe this text, I would not preach a sermon. If we all believed it, we would not need a sermon. “God is love.” That is one of the texts the Devil would like to blot out of the Bible. For six thousand years he has been going up and down the world trying to make men believe that God is not love. Love begets love, and hate begets hate. Let me tell any one of you that I heard a man say this week that you were one of the meanest men in town, and you will soon come to the conclusion that the man who said that was the meanest man you ever heard of. Let me tell you that I heard a man say he thought more of you than of any other man in the city, and though you may not have thought about him before, your love will spring up and you will say, “I think a great deal of that man.”

Now, men are believing the Devil’s lies when they don’t believe God is love. A few years ago, when we built a church in Chicago, a friend put up over the pulpit in gas jets the words, “God is love.” We thought, if we couldn’t preach it into the hearts of

the people we would burn it in. A man happened to see that text up there, and he said to himself: "God is not love; God does not love me"; and he came around into the church, not to hear the sermon, but to see the text as it was burning there upon the wall. The arrow reached its mark. He went into the inquiry meeting. I asked what it was that impressed him. He said it was not the sermon; it was those words that had burned into his soul. He was weeping, and he wanted to know what he should do to be saved.

"God is love." I hope this text will find its way into every heart. I want to prove it from Scripture. The great trouble with men is, they are all the time trying to measure God by their own rule, and from their own standpoint. A man is apt to judge others from his own standard. If a man is covetous, he thinks everyone else is covetous. If he is a selfish man, he thinks everyone else is selfish. If a man is guilty of adultery, he thinks every other man is. If a man is dishonest, he thinks every other man is. Many are trying to bring God down to their own level. They don't know that between human love and divine love there is as much difference as there is between darkness and light. God's love is deep and high; Paul says it passeth knowledge. We love a man as long as he is worthy of our love, and when he is not we cast him off; but we don't find in the Word of God that God casts off those who are not worthy of His love. If He did, there would be no one in the kingdom of God except Jesus Himself. He was worthy of love.

Turn to John 13:1: "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the

world, he loved them unto the end." Now we find His love is unchangeable. He knew His disciples were to forsake Him and leave Him. Peter was to deny Him with a curse. Judas was that night to betray Him with a kiss, and sell Him for thirty pieces of silver. He knew that that night, when the Shepherd was smitten, the whole flock was to be scattered. Yet it is said, He loved them right through it all. His love is unchangeable; His disciples were never dearer to Him than that hour when He was betrayed. Some people think that, because they are not worthy of His love, He is going to cast them off.

It says in Isaiah 49:15, 16: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." There is no woman on this earth that loves like a mother. There is no love on earth so strong as a mother's love. A great many things will separate a man from his wife, or a father from a son; but nothing will separate a true mother from her child. She will love him through all his sin and iniquity. He may sink so low that a hiss will go up against him from every human being, but the mother loves him through it all. God takes that for an illustration. He says: "Can a woman forget her . . . child? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me." His love is unchangeable. He loved Judas, when Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. I should have thought that love would have broken the heart of Judas. The soul that goes down to Hell must go over God's love. You have to trample that love under your feet.

It is said in Jeremiah 31:3: "I have loved thee with

an everlasting love." He loves us with an everlasting love; that means, love without end. The only way you can get into the pit of Hell is to go right over the love of God; you cannot get there in any other way. God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for you. That is what will make Hell so terrible. It is because you have to go over the love of God. Some people say: "I like some proof of love." If a man told me he loved me, and never gave me any token, and never showed his love by any act, it would not be long before I would doubt his love.

There is love by the tongue, but that does not strike down into the heart. That is not worth much. God does not say He loves us without giving us some proof of His love. Isaiah 63:9 says: "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Now see how beautiful it is: "In all their affliction he was afflicted." You cannot afflict one of God's own without afflicting Him. No man could strike that little child but He would feel the blow more than the child. He takes the place of a loving father, and now He says: "In all their affliction he was afflicted . . . in his love and in his pity he redeemed them." That is what He wants you to believe—that He loves you, and is in sympathy with you.

Not only that, but in Isaiah 38:17 it is said: "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." "Now, out of love to my soul," says the prophet, "He has taken all my sins," not a part of them, "and cast them behind His back." Now tell me, how is Satan going to get at our sins, if God

has put them behind His back? If God has washed us, how is Satan going to find anything against us? Who shall say anything against God's elect? The prophet says: "Out of love to my soul He has taken all my sins, and cast them behind His back." Satan could get behind my back, but he cannot pass the Lord God Almighty. He has not taken part of them. I like that little word *all*—"all my sins."

Suppose my little boy had committed ten sins, and he came to me and confessed, and wanted me to forgive him and I would say: "I will forgive you nine of them, but one is such a big one I will not forgive that." That would not do him any good. A lady came into the inquiry room, and she thought the Lord had forgiven all her sins but one, and that was too great. The Lord does not do that; He forgives all. The prophet says: "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Is not that a proof of His love, that He forgives us freely? If I attempt to cover my sins they will find me out; if I dig a grave, I cannot bury them so deep but they will have a resurrection. But the Lord takes them away; not one of them shall ever be mentioned: they are gone for time and eternity. Is not that a proof of God's love, that He has taken all our sins out of the way and put them behind His back forever?

Then Paul says: "He loved me, and he gave himself for me," as if there were not another man in the wide, wide world that the Lord Jesus Christ loved but Paul. He took the benefit of what Christ had done; and in order to get the benefit from Christ we must appropriate Him to ourselves. "He loved me, and he gave himself for me." Is not that a proof

of His love? To think He loved us so that He gave Himself for us should make us love Him.

Turn to I Corinthians 8:3. Here is one verse to which I want to call your attention. "But if any man love God, the same is known of him." Some people say, "Oh, yes, I love God," and never do it. You never see it in their lives or in their actions; you never see it in anything they do. Now let me tell you, you may deceive your neighbors or yourself; you may join some church, and profess to love God. You may make a great profession of religion; you may be a teacher in some Sunday school; but the Lord God looks into the heart to see if there is some love.

Many a man is resting his hope upon having joined some church. What God wants is love. If love does not prompt us to work for God, it is all abomination to Him. He cannot want sacrifice; it is love in the heart He wants. This verse says, "If any man"—I like those words—"if any man"—I don't care who it is—"if any man love God, the same is known of him." God knows all about him. God measures his love, and He knows how deep it is, how broad it is. "If any man love God, the same is known of him." God knows the street you live on and the number of your house. He knows all about you. He said there was not a sparrow that fell to the ground without His notice. He knows all about the sparrows; He hears the young ravens when they cry. He says the very hairs of our heads are numbered. Is not that love? If I pull out a hair, I throw it down and don't think much of it; but God knows all about it. That is love. I see mothers think a great deal of their babes; but I never heard of a mother that loved a babe so much that she numbered the hairs of its head.

God is looking down to see how many are loving

Him. He knows your heart; you cannot conceal it. If you love Him, He will make His abode with you; but if your heart is full of malice and bitterness, the Lord cannot dwell with you. If you love Him, then He comes and makes His abode with you.

Then there is another verse I want to call your attention to. There are some people who love God, and yet get into darkness because things go against them. They get almost to doubting God's love. If you are such a one, I want to call your attention to Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Emphasize that little word *all*. A great many leave it out. They say some things work together for good to them that love the Lord. If you do a good stroke in business, you say that is one of the things that work for good; but if you lose a great deal, you do not think it is. Now it may be that the losses will work more for your good than your successes. Let a man have prosperity, and how he turns away from God! It was when Jerusalem got fat that it kicked against God. See how this nation has been sinking into iniquity since the war. Men turn their influence against God and His cause. You need not go out of your own acquaintance to see that. People want prosperity, and that often turns them against God. Paul says: "All things work together for good to them that love God." Do you love Him?

I had a little girl taken down a few years ago with scarlet fever. I was very anxious about her, and I went to a physician with whom I was well acquainted. He wrote a prescription, and I took it to one of the leading druggists, and said, "I want you to carefully fill this." I watched him as he went to a shelf and took down a great many different kinds of bottles, and he poured some out of each of them,

and put it all in one and mixed it up. Then he put it in another bottle and stamped it and gave it to me. Perhaps the medicine from any one of those bottles would have been rank poison and would have killed the child; but they, being all mixed together, were just the medicine the child needed, and it worked for good and saved the child.

So it is that all things work together for good to them that love God. It is a little affliction here, a little trouble, and a little persecution—all working together for good. Some of you may have lost a little child a while ago; but perhaps you had no thoughts of Heaven until God took that child. A lady came into the inquiry room, and she had had no thought of Heaven for a long time; but death came and took two of her lambs, and now she wants to follow them.

I was told a story of a man in Palestine. He saw a shepherd coming down to a stream with his flock. The shepherd tried to get them into the water, but they would not follow him. They came to the bank of the river, but they would not follow him in. He took a little lamb and putting it into his bosom plunged into the river and took it to the other side. The old sheep then, instead of trembling, began to look up at him and bleat. In a few minutes the whole flock went over, and he then put the lamb down and led the sheep away into the green pasture.

The Great Shepherd takes the little lambs to the hilltops of glory, and then the father begins to love and serve God. Out of love to you He has brought you into affliction. "All things work together for good to them that love God." If you are under the afflicting rod, don't complain. You will find, when you get yonder, that it was pure love that prompted Him to afflict you.

The apostle Paul, when he was here, said in Ephe-

sians 3:14-19: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." That is the love of God—that we might be able to comprehend the breadth, length, depth, and height of God's love. That is what the apostle prayed for. If we only knew that love, how much more we would be with Him and love Him. The only way for us to comprehend the love of God is to survey the wondrous cross at Calvary on which the Prince of life died. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Christ laid down His life for His enemies. It is the cross that speaks of His love. Do you think God would have given up His Son if He had not loved you? Was it not pure love in Him?

There is a story told of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Paris, who, when France was at war with Prussia in 1871, was thrown into prison by the Commune. It seemed he had been to Calvary, and knew something about this wondrous love of God. Before he was executed, he wrote on the top of a little window in his prison, which was in the shape of a cross, "height"; at the bottom, "depth"; at the end of each arm of the cross, "length," and "breadth." Ah, that man had been to Calvary and tried to measure the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of God's love. He had surveyed the cross; he had drunk in its truth; he had laid hold of its

power. He saw its height reached to the throne of God; its depth to the borders of Hell; and its length and breadth to the corners of the earth. Oh, that this love may sink down deep into every heart!

Some may say: "I have no doubt but God loves Christians; but I am a sinner, and I have rebelled against Him all my life." If anyone has that thought, he is wrong. God loves sinners. The Bible says God loves sinners. It teaches another thing: that God loves you in your sin. Some of you may shake your heads and say that is false. God loves you in your sin; because, if you could get rid of your sin, you would not need a Saviour. If He does not love us until we are free from sin, there is no hope for any of us. To be sure, He saves us from sin; but while we were yet in sin, Christ loved us, and died for us.

A poor woman came into the inquiry room and said she had no strength. I said: "Thank God for that, Christ died for us when we were without strength." Christ died for the ungodly. There was a time when I preached that God hated the sinner, and that God was after every poor sinner with a double-edged sword. Many a time have I represented that God was after every poor sinner, ready to hew him down. But I have changed my ideas upon this point. I will tell you how.

In 1867, when I was preaching in a large hall in Dublin, at the close of the service a young man who did not look over seventeen, though he was older, came up to me and said he would like to go back to America with me and preach the Gospel. I thought he could not preach it, and I said I was undecided when I could go back. He asked me if I would write to him when I went, and he would come with me. When I went I thought I would not write to him, as I did not know whether I wanted him or not.

After I arrived at Chicago I got a letter saying he had just arrived at New York and he would come and preach. I wrote him a cold letter, asking him to call on me if he came west.

A few days later, I got a letter stating he would be in Chicago the next Thursday. I didn't know what to do with him. I said to the officers of the church: "There is a man coming from England, and he wants to preach. I am going to be absent on Thursday and Friday. If you will let him preach on those days, I will be back on Saturday, and take him off your hands." They did not care about him preaching, being a stranger; but at my request they let him preach. On my return on Saturday I was anxious to hear how the people liked him, and I asked my wife how that young Englishman got along. "How did they like him?" she said. "They liked him very much. He preaches a little different from what you do. He tells people God loves them. I think you will like him." I said he was wrong. I thought I could not like a man who preached contrary to what I was preaching.

I went down Saturday night to hear him, but I had made up my mind not to like him because he preached different from me. He took his text—and I saw everybody had brought their Bibles with them. "Now," he says, "if you will turn to John 3:16, you will find my text." He preached a wonderful sermon from that text. "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." My wife had told me he had preached the two previous sermons from that text, and I noticed there was a smile over the house when he took the same text. Instead of preaching that God was behind them with a double-edged sword to hew them down, he told them God wanted every sinner to be saved, and

He loved them. I could not keep back the tears. I didn't know God thought so much of me.

It was wonderful to hear the way he brought out Scripture. He went from Genesis to Revelation, and preached that in all ages God loved the sinner. On Sunday night there was a great crowd came to hear him. He took for his text John 3:16, and preached his fourth sermon from that wonderful text, and he went from Genesis to Revelation to show that it was love, love, love that brought Christ from Heaven, that made Him step from the throne to lift up this poor, fallen world. He struck a higher chord that night, and it was glorious. The next night there was an immense crowd, and he said: "Turn to John 3:16," and he preached his fifth sermon from that wonderful text. He did not divide the text up into first, second, and third, but he took the whole text and threw it at them. I thought that sermon was better than ever. I got so full of love that I got up and told my friends how much God loved them. The whole church was on fire before the week was over.

Tuesday night came, and there was a greater crowd than ever. The preacher said: "Turn to John 3:16 and you will find my text," and he preached his sixth sermon from that wonderful text. They thought that sermon was better than any of the rest. It seemed as if every heart was on fire, and sinners came pressing into the inquiry room.

On Wednesday night people thought that probably he would change his text now, as he could not talk any longer on love. There was great excitement to see what he was going to say. He stood before us again and he said: "My friends, I have been trying to get a new text, but I cannot find any as good as the old one, so we will again turn to John 3:16." He preached his seventh sermon from that wonderful

text. I have never forgotten those nights. I have preached a different Gospel since, and I have had more power with God and man since then. In closing that seventh sermon he said: "For seven nights I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but this poor stammering tongue of mine will not let me. If I could ascend Jacob's ladder and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, to tell me how much love God the Father has for this poor lost world, all that Gabriel could say would be that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"

When he was preaching in Chicago, we had to get the largest building there, and then thousands went away because they could not get in. He went to Europe, and returned again. In the meantime our church had been burned, and the people of Philadelphia had put us up a temporary building. When he came there he preached in this temporary building, and he said: "Although the old building is burned up, the old text is not burned up, and we will preach from that." So he preached from where he had left off preaching about the love of God.

Do not believe that God does not love you. He loves you with an everlasting love. "God is love." He wants to save you. Here is a verse in the Song of Solomon: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love." "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." Think of His left hand under our head, and His right hand around us.

There is a story told of a young man who came to this country from England, became naturalized and went to Cuba, and was there some time. When the civil war in Cuba came on in 1867, he was arrested

as a spy, taken before the military court, and ordered to be shot. Then he sent for the two consuls of this country and England, and told them his case, that he was not a spy or a politician. They found he was perfectly innocent and had nothing to do with the war.

They went to the Spanish officers and said: "This man is an innocent man; he is not guilty of what he is accused." The officer said: "He was found guilty by the Spanish government, and he must die." The consuls had not time to refer to the Spanish government. They brought this man to the grave, and the black cap was drawn over him, and the Spanish soldiers were all ready to fire. But just before they received the command to fire, who should rush up but the American and English consuls. Our American representative took the stars and stripes and wrapped them around the man, and the English consul wrapped the Union Jack around him, and they said: "Fire on these flags if you dare." They did not dare to fire, because behind these flags were two powerful nations.

Think of the flag of Heaven! God says, "My banner over you shall be love." Come under the banner of Heaven tonight. If you are under His blood, you are saved for time and eternity. Escape for your life; come under the banner of love, and He will keep you until you stand before Him, pure and washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Is there any other verse I need quote to you? "Herein," says John, "is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I can imagine some of you saying, "God is angry with the sinner every day." That God loves the sinner is one of the strongest passages in the Word of God. Suppose one of my

boys is kind and affectionate, and the other swears, lies, steals, gets drunk, and behaves as badly as any being can. If I didn't love the boy who behaved badly, I would let him go; but just because I do love him, it makes me angry to have him take a downward course. He is angry when the sinner takes a downward course, and it is the strongest proof of His love. If a boy is never corrected, it is proof of his father's want of love. If you spare the rod, you spoil the child. It is out of pure love that God corrects us. It may be that I am talking to someone who reasons in this way: "If God loves us, why are we punished?" It is because He does love us.

It says in Hebrews 12:6: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" God dealeth with us as with sons. Father, how do you deal with your boy? Don't you punish him when he goes astray? It is a true sign of love when you punish your boy. If I am disobedient and go astray, God has to punish me. That is the reason there are so many suffering.

Now it is not easy to go against God's law and disobey God. When you were a little boy and went contrary to the wishes of your father and mother, were you not unhappy? Is there a man who will not say he was unhappy? If we go against God's law and disobey God, we make ourselves unhappy. The most disobedient man is the unhappiest man, though he have all the wealth of America, and the most obedient man is the happiest. That law holds good everywhere. God says: "If you walk contrary to Me, I will walk contrary to you." There is no peace for the wicked. It is because God loves us He wants to bring us to Himself. If He did not afflict us when we were

disobedient to Him, we never would come to Him and be saved. If you are under the chastening rod, it is because God loves you; and He asks you to love Him. Is it not the most reasonable thing you can do to love God and turn unto Him? Oh, may God bring you under that banner which is love! May His banner float over you, and may that banner be love.

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly.

“WHAT MUST I DO?”

“What must I do to be saved?”—Acts 16:30

WE HAVE FOR A TEXT a very solemn and important question, “What must I do to be saved?” You will find it in Acts 16:30. The question, “What must I do?” is very common. Undoubtedly, there is not a person but that has said, a thousand times in his life, “What must I do?” A great many merchants have asked that question during these hard times, “What must I do to succeed, to keep from going into bankruptcy?” Lawyers who have difficult cases in court very often ask themselves, over and over, “What must I do?” Doctors who have some patients that baffle all their skill ask the question, “What must I do?” And these questions, we say, are very important. A businessman thinks it is very important that he shouldn’t fail in business. Perhaps many of you are out of work, and your families are actually in want; and you have asked yourself, “What must I do to take care of my family?” Well, that is very important. A man ought to take care of his family.