



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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The Greatness of God's Love to His Elect

by Thomas Goodwin

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."—Ephesians 2:4-6.

The Apostle in the former verses having given a full and exact description of man's misery by nature and in the state of nature, both by reason of sin and the wrath of God that is due thereunto, begins here to set out the greatness of that love and that mercy in God which is the cause and the fountain of our salvation. And he sets it out, as I shewed you the last discourse, when I ran over the series of all these three verses, in the most taking and most advantageous way, and in the greatest truth. I shall not repeat what I then delivered.

I came to the exposition of the words, and what I shall now say will be some little addition, as I go along, to what then was said.

But God.—Besides what I said of this particle *but* in the last discourse, I only add this, indeed as the main thing, that it serveth to usher in, not only a great turn, the greatest turn that ever was,—it doth not only usher in the notice of a remedy to misery, that there is balm in Gilead that may be had, because that God is merciful, and that is his nature, and that therefore he may be merciful to us, and so that there is hope concerning this thing,—but it ushers in and gives the intimation of a forelaid intention in God, of a contrivement and design beforehand taken up and set upon, whereby God had beforehand preceded all the mischief and all the danger that was like to arise from the misery and sin which the elect were fallen into. He had laid such a design as all this misery and sinfulness that the elect ones had fallen into should be so far from undoing them, that it shall but serve to set out that love the more; and so the words that follow do evidently shew. 'But God, for the love wherewith he loved us;' he hath loved us and chosen us out of love from everlasting, and hath shewed it in this, by triumphing over all that misery, that even 'while we were dead in sins and trespasses, he hath quickened us,' &c.

And it is a love not only which mercy and pity stirs up, after he had seen us thus miserable; but it is a love that having been so great, and so long borne to

us, and first pitched on us, that it stirred up mercy and bowels to us in this misery; for so, if you mark it, the words run: ‘God,’ saith he, ‘who is rich in mercy,’—there is his nature—’for his great love wherewith he loved us.’ And not only so, but this love being seated in a nature infinitely rich in grace and mercy, had conspired with mercy, and contrived the depth of misery, to extend that riches. On them so great a love had set itself, even to this end, as in the 7th verse, ‘that in ages to come he might shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, in kindness and love to us.’ And thus also in Titus 3, that *but* even now mentioned ushers in, upon the like occasion, the like reserve or design beforehand laid, to glorify love and goodness. But when the kindness of God and love to man appeared; namely, when that love, taken up by him long before this sinfulness he spake of in the verses before, hath lain hid as it were in ambushment, letting you march on in sinful ways under Satan’s banners; that in the end appears and precedes all that misery, and rescues you out of it. There is, I say, a kind of ambushment, if I may so express it, a waylaying of all that sin and misery the elect fell into.

And how many such *buts* of mercy, lying in wait to deliver and save us out of great and strong evils, did we meet with in our lives? And this but here, of this great salvation, is the great seal and ratification, or *Ante signamus*, of all the rest. To this purpose you may observe that oftentimes in the New Testament, when mention is made of God’s ordaining us unto salvation, this phrase is used, he did it ‘from the beginning.’ So it is in 2 Thess. 2:13: ‘God,’ saith he, ‘hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation;’ that is, he had beforehand, even from the beginning, set his love upon you, so that all that sinful estate you have since run into should be no prejudice nor damage to you. And it comes in here, as if that a company of men, whom a king or a prince loveth, or children whom a father’s heart is set upon, are permitted and let alone to run into the highest rebellion, to do as evil as they could, as the phrase is, Jer. 3:5, so that by the law they are dead men, men undone, men of death and condemnation, there is no hope for them: *but*—but that the king, as he is merciful in his nature, and so apt to pardon any, so besides he hath had his heart set upon it, and it is but his design, to shew his princely grace the more in pardoning them and advancing them to higher dignities upon it.

But God.—And God cometh in also here, besides what I mentioned in the last discourse, to shew that all salvation is from him, he is the sole author and founder of it; as in Rom. 9:16, ‘It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy:’ so here, ‘But God, that is rich in mercy.’

I came in the next place, for the opening of the words, to shew you the difference between mercy, and love, and grace; for you have all those three in these three first verses. Love is a desire to communicate good unto us, simply

considered as we are creatures; but mercy respecteth us as we are fallen into sin and misery, as we are dead in sins and trespasses. And then that of grace, as I shall open in its due place, adds but this, a freeness unto both. Love and mercy freely bestowed, that is called grace in either.

Also, for explication's sake, I shewed you why the Apostle doth not content himself to name mercy only, or love only, as the cause of our salvation, but that he addeth love to mercy. I gave you two reasons for it, in a word. If he had named mercy only, that respecting misery, it might be thought that that would but relieve us out of misery. But because he mentioneth not only a deliverance out of the misery we lay in by nature, which mercy doth, but the highest advancement besides, to sit together with Christ in heavenly places; therefore he mentioneth love. It comes in likewise, in the second place, to intend and make mercy the greater; for when mercy cometh out of love, and not simply out of a virtue of mercy, if a father be of a merciful disposition, he will pity any one out of a virtue of mercy in him, but he will pity his son out of love.

Then again, for the further explication and understanding of this, I told you, that of the two, the main and the primary cause is love; for so, if you observe it, the text implies. 'God, being rich in mercy,' saith he, 'for his great love:' it is resolved into love. To explain this—

In the first place, you may observe here, that God's being merciful is mentioned but as his nature and disposition, which may be wrought upon; but love comes in, as having passed an act of his will, set upon us. For, my brethren, had God had never so much mercy in his nature, never so much goodness and lovingness as he hath, yet if it had not been a full act of love, through his will pitched upon us, we had never been the better. Our salvation doth not only depend upon mercy, but upon love; and not only upon the love of his nature, but upon an act of love, a love set upon us with his will and heart. It is not an indefinite disposition of mercy in him, as it is said of the kings of Israel that they were merciful kings; but that which our salvation depends upon—through upon that also—is this, that an act of love hath determined this, mercy, engaged this mercy.

I shewed you likewise that it is rather an act of love than of mercy. That first act of election is indeed to shew mercy, but not so properly out of mercy.

Then, thirdly, love is said to be the cause for this reason also, because that love is it which directs mercy to the persons; love singles out the persons, and so they become vessels of mercy.

The next thing I explained and observed in the last discourse was, the circumstance of time here. He doth not say, God that doth love us, as he that began to love us when he first called us, or loveth us now he hath called us; but, God that *hath loved* us. I gave you a like scripture for it, in Jer. 31:3, 'I loved thee

with an everlasting love;’ which, I told you, hath two things principally in it, and both are intended here in this ‘hath loved us,’ which is a love before conversion, and causeth conversion. 1. For the time ‘for the beginning of it, it is a love from everlasting; and, 2. It is a love continued all the while, from everlasting, even till the time of one’s calling.

The last thing I came to in the last discourse is this, *us*; ‘hath loved us.’ He hath not only put forth an act or purpose of love at random, indefinitely, that he would love some of us, or that he would love mankind, but *us* determinatively. As it was not merely the natural disposition of love and mercy in God that was the cause of our salvation, but an act of his will put forth; so is it not an act of mere velleity, or an indefinite act, that he would save some, but it is us; he resolved upon the persons whom he would save, he resolved upon them distinctly and nakedly: loved them distinctly, by name; and nakedly, that is, loved their persons, without the consideration of any qualification whatsoever.

And so now I have done the explanation of these words in a plain and brief manner. I reserved two things to be handled, which I shall now despatch. The one is, *the greatness of this love*; and the other is, *the riches of this mercy*.

I made observations from the words thus explained in the last discourse. There is only one observation which I shall at this time handle, and that is this:—

Obs. —That the foundation of our salvation is an act of love, it is out of love; ‘for the love,’ saith he, ‘wherewith he loved us.’ I shewed it in the last discourse, in distinction from mercy; that it was rather an act of love (the original act) than of mercy, which I will not now prosecute. My brethren, election is an act of love. I mention this because it is fundamental to what shall afterwards follow. The Apostle in the former chapter had expressed election to be an act of God’s will; ‘being predestinated according to the counsel of his will,’ saith he, ver. 11. And he calls it also an act of God’s good pleasure; ‘according to his good pleasure that he purposed in himself;’ so ver. 5, 9. But to take their hearts the more, when he comes to make application to them of the misery they lay in, he terms it now an act of love. To make it an act of his will and good pleasure was but a more general thing; for by his will he worketh all things, his will is pitched upon everything; and that it is an act of his good pleasure, imports rather the sovereignty and majesty of God, out of which he did it, and aiming at himself therein: but love is a condescending virtue. When a king will speak as a king, he saith it is his pleasure, and he makes it an act of his will; but when he calls it love, his majesty comes down then. Love doth import not so much the sovereignty of God in it, though it was joined with an act of sovereignty, aiming at his own glory; but it imports especially a respecting us in it; for *amare* is to communicate good things for the

sake of him we love rather than our own. Now I find that election is especially expressed unto us by love, indeed the one is put for the other usually in the Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New.

Take the Old Testament. When he would say he had chosen Jacob and refused Esau, how doth he express it? 'Jacob have I loved,' saith he. So in Rom. 9:13; it is quoted out of Mal. 1:2. And afterwards, when he cometh to speak of the choice of the people of Israel and of their fathers, both Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in Deut. 10:14, 15, how doth he express it? 'Behold,' saith he, 'the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's; the earth also, with all that therein is.' He had choice enough: 'Only,' saith he, 'the Lord had a delight in thy fathers, to love them; and he chose their seed after them.' That is, as the Septuagint there hath it, 'He chose to love them.' Mark it, he expresseth his choice, and sets it out by those sweet words, love, yea, and a delight to love them; a love unto their persons, and a delight in that love. So you shall find that love and choice go together; as Ps. 47:4, and Ps. 78:68: He chose the tribe of Judah, the inhabitants of Mount Sion, which he loved. And thus in the New Testament also, when our Lord and Saviour Christ, who was elected by his Father as he was Mediator, as we are, as you have it in 1 Peter 1:20, where it is said that he was 'foreordained before the foundation of the world;' how doth Christ himself express it? In John 17:24, speaking of the glory given him, (therefore he speaks of predestination,) he saith, 'Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world;' that is, thou gavest me this glory by a choice, by an election; and you see he expresseth it by love. And, Rom. 11:28, they are beloved according to election. You shall therefore not only find election called the counsel of God, and the purpose of God, and the will of God; but grace joined to it, purpose and grace both put together. So in 2 Tim. 1:9, 'He hath saved us, and called us, according to his own purpose and grace, before the world began.' And you have a more express place for it in Rom. 11:5, where it is called the 'election of grace,' or love, for grace there is taken for free love; the soul, the spirit of election lies in that act; and therefore we are said to be chosen in Christ, which is all one and to say we are loved in Christ; for to love is to choose.

And so now I have despatched that observation, which is previous to what I am to deliver afterwards.

Now I come to those two things which I said I reserved in the last discourse to be now handled; for there is nothing remaining to be spoken to in this ver. 4, but, first, to shew you *the greatness of this love*; and, secondly, *the riches of this mercy*: two of the greatest subjects, if one would handle them as subjects,—that is, in the whole compass of all that might be said of them,—that the whole book of God affords. Now where is it that I must begin? The truth is, riches of mercy offers itself first in the words; but we must give the prerogative to

the greatness of love, because, as you heard before, it is the foundation of mercy. 'Riches of mercy' are brought in here as subserving his love, commanded and disposed of by his love; for the reason why God lays forth riches of mercy to these and these persons, is because he loveth them. So then that stock, or that treasury of love, which the will of God was pleased to set apart first for his elect and children, and lay up in his own heart, this is that which I am first to speak unto; you see it is in the text. And let me say this of it: we can never search enough into this; we may pry too much into the wisdom and counsels of God, to seek a reason of his doings, but we can never pry enough into the love of God. It is a sea of honey, as one calls it, and if in wading into it, we be swallowed up of it and drowned therein, it is no matter. And let me likewise profess this about it, that of all subjects else, it is of that nature as cannot be set out by discourse or in a rational way. It is part of the meaning, I think, of that of the Apostle in Eph. 3:19, where he calleth it a love that passeth knowledge; that is, the human way of knowledge by way of reason and discourse, whereby we infer and gather one thing out of another in a rational way, and so come to the knowledge of them. But it is more fully the meaning of that in Rom. 5:5, 'The love of God is *shed abroad* in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' He doth not say, the love of God which he hath told us of, and spoken so great things of in the Scriptures,—and indeed you shall upon search find the Scripture to speak little of it,—but he saith, 'the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts.' So as he doth not speak of a love which a man's understanding, by collecting one thing out of another, or by laying one thing to another,—as reason, yea, spiritual reason, in other things useth to proceed,—and so may argue to be great: but the way to apprehend it is, by its being shed abroad, and the report and taste of it the Holy Ghost makes. As the seat of God's love is his own heart, his will, so the receptacle thereof is not so much the understanding as the heart of a Christian.

The conscience of a man is the proper receptacle of Christ's blood, when it sprinkleth it from evil works; but the heart of a man is the seat of God's love, to be shed abroad there. And to this purpose be addeth, 'by the Holy Ghost,' as being solely and immediately his work; for he in one moment can speak more to the poorest man, of the lowest and meanest understanding, of the greatness of God's love than all that the Scripture says of it, or than all that all the divines in the world out of Scripture can say of it. The truth is, all discourses of God's love are in themselves dull and flat, compared with what representations and impressions thereof the Holy Ghost makes. As, take an excellent song, when the notes are written on paper, what a dull thing is it compared to what the music itself is? My brethren, so is it here. Therefore still you shall meet with such expressions as these in the Scripture: Come, see, and taste how good the Lord is: and, if ye have

tasted how good the Lord is, &c.; for the greatness of God's love is only known that way.

Now to shape out a little the subject I am to speak unto; for it is a great point, and would swell into many sermons if I should speak all that which in a discursive way may be said of it. Neither do I purpose now to say all that may affect your hearts and take you with this love. No, the thing that I must keep to is this, to speak of that love borne to us before calling, before quickening, as it is the cause of our salvation; I say, of the greatness of it in that respect, which is proper to what the text here saith, and confine myself merely to such things as are held forth within the compass of these three verses.

The first whereof is this: *It is great in respect of the subject and source of it.* It is God that loveth us, and it is called 'his love.' For if you mark it, there is that little particle in the text, 'but God,' saith he; he puts an emphasis upon that; and likewise, 'his love,' saith he, 'wherewith he loved us.'

Secondly, The greatness of it may be set forth by what may be taken from the *persons* mentioned here upon whom this love is pitched—*us*; and that either simply considered in our persons nakedly; or else, secondly, in the condition that we were in, that we were dead in sins and trespasses: 'even,' saith he, 'when we were dead in sins and trespasses;' that though he did not make choice first of us when we were dead in sins and trespasses, yet he ordered in his decrees that that should be our condition, to shew forth the more love. The Apostle puts an emphasis upon it, both upon us, not others, and upon us in that condition, dead in sins and trespasses.

Thirdly, From what those words will afford, 'the love wherewith he loved us,' which to me holds forth these three things: Here is first an *act of love*: 'loved us.' Here is the *time*, and that is the time past: 'hath loved us.' And here is, thirdly, an intimation of a *special kind of love*: 'his love wherewith he loved us.' He contents not himself to say, 'for his love,' or, 'for that he loved us.' but you see he doubles it, 'for his love wherewith he loved us.'

Fourthly, and the greatest of all shewn before calling, is in *giving Christ*. The Scripture runs most upon that, and indeed instanceth in almost nothing else, for that is enough. But you will say, this is not in the text. Yes, it runs all along, through every verse mentioned. For he saith, we are quickened with Christ, and in Christ, who therefore out of that love was given unto death for us, as chap. 1:19. And we are raised up together with him, and we sit together in heavenly places in him.

Lastly, Here are the *fruits of this love*, which, you see, are quickening, raising up with Christ, sitting together in heavenly places in him.

And these, I say, are the particulars which I shall confine myself unto, as those which the text suggesteth.

Let us begin *first* with the *subject, and rise, and original of this love.*—*He loved.* ‘But God, for his great love wherewith *he* loved us.’ My brethren, all that I say of this is but this, that if God will fall in love, and is pleased and delighted to set his love on creatures, how great must that love be! And whomsoever’s lot it falls to, they shall have enough of it. God that is infinite hath an infinite love in his heart to bestow, and whoever it be that his will is pleased to cast that love upon, of whom it will be said, ‘he hath loved us,’ it must be a great, yea, an infinite love. The fountain of love in God being, as was said, his goodness; for it is in all rational creatures, that which makes them love is a goodness of disposition in them; the fountain of love, as was said, is goodness, and so far as any are good, so far are they apt and prone to love others; and according to the proportion of the goodness, so will the love be also, and accordingly the greatness of love in any.

Now God, he is so good, as he only is said to be good. ‘There is none good but God,’ Matt. 19:17; that is, with such a transcendency of goodness; and therefore answerably thereunto, God is said to be love, so 1 John 4:8. As none is good, so there is none that loves but he—that is, in comparison of him. The goodness and kindness *in* God, yea, and all the goodness that is in him, (as ver. 7.) moved him to love somebody besides himself, that he might communicate his goodness to them. And so his will resolved to love such and such persons, for he would not communicate his goodness to those whom he did not love; rational, wise men will be sure to love those whom they do communicate much to, and so did God. He also resolving to communicate all his goodness to some, resolves also to love them first, and his love shall be proportionable to his intent of the communication of his goodness, and that to the greatness of that goodness in him. He meant to communicate his goodness to the creature to the utmost; for if he will do it, he will do it as God, or he will not do it at all, he will shew himself to be the chiefest good; why then he will love them to the utmost, and love them like the great God too.

There is this difference between God’s loving and ours: we must see a goodness in the creature that we love, to draw out love from us; but all the love that is in him, he had it in his own power to set it where he would, Exod. 33:19, ‘I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious.’ We can but love so far as our love is drawn out; our will doth not intend love to the height, unless it runs out in some natural way; but so can God say, I will have such and such, and I will bear such and so great an affection to them. And when he doth so, his will shall not only cause him to communicate all his goodness to them, but cause him also to do it

with the highest love, with rejoicing over them, with delighting to love. So you have the phrase in that place of Deut. 10:15. Men may, and do, do good to others, beyond the extent of their love, for other ends. A man's will may cause him to communicate good to others beyond what the proportion of love is in his heart. But it is not so in God: as is his goodness, so is his love; therefore God is good to Israel, and he loveth Israel; it is all one, as in Ps. 73:1.

In one word, then, will you go and take the source and the original of love in God, the genealogy of it, and so by that the proportion of it?

First, His goodness putteth him upon communicating himself, and then he loveth those proportionably unto whom he communicateth himself; and so he sets himself to love, singles out the persons. This you have in ver. 7, 'In his kindness towards us.' Tit. 3:4, 5, when he shews the causes of our salvation, as he doth here, he begins first with the same word used in ver. 7, a goodness, a sweetness, a pleasantness of nature in God, an heroic disposition of being good unto others, from whence ariseth a *philanthropeia*, a love to mankind; which, though there it be expressed indefinitely, yet as here and elsewhere, he pitcheth upon particular persons. Or, to give perhaps a more clear place for it, Exod. 33:19; when God there would express his heart to Moses, and intimate to him that he loved him, and how dearly he valued him,—and therefore this Moses his choice is mentioned as an instance of the grace of election, in Rom. 9,—what saith God to him? 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee.' So he begins to him; his scope was to shew what love he did bear unto Moses, by the effect of it, and that proportioned to its original in God, and he would have his heart taken with it; how doth he begin? I have, saith he, all goodness in me, and I mean to communicate it unto thee. And what follows? 'I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious.' He pitcheth upon persons, as in Moses' instance appears, and love upon those persons. And those, saith he, whom thus I resolve to be gracious unto, they shall have all this goodness; I have cast out of my goodness, my love and grace on thee, and therefore 'I will cause all my goodness to pass before thee.'

He that hath my love, he hath all my goodness; and the source of all is that his goodness, and the manifestation of it. Now as love thus ariseth from goodness, and the desire of communicating of it; so mercy ariseth from love: for what follows? 'I will be merciful unto whom I will be merciful.' First he says, 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.' There it is taken for favour and acceptation freely; and if they be fallen into misery, 'I will be merciful,' my mercy shall do as great wonders as my love. In Eph. 3:18, he prays that they 'may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.' And what follows? 'And be filled with all the fulness of God.' Why? For whoever God hath pitched this love upon,

all the fulness that is in God is coming upon that soul; for it is the love of the great God, it is a love proportionable to his goodness; they have and shall have all his goodness, all his fulness.

To cause us therefore to set a value on this: of all dispositions, good nature, as we call it, and love, in whomsoever it is, is the best, and God himself values it most as in himself; he takes more unkindly the despising of his love than he doth the slighting of his wisdom. And love, in whomsoever it is, is the most predominant of all dispositions; whatsoever is good and whatsoever is excellent in any, love hath the command of it; and so it hath in God. All his goodness, the whole train of it must pass before Moses, because God had loved him, and resolved to be gracious to him. So that now, look how great the great God is, so great his love must needs be; for, as I may so speak with reverence, it commandeth all in this great God. In John 10:29, saith Christ, My sheep, no man shall pluck them out of my hand; for, saith he, it is the will of my Father that gave them me that they shall be saved; and he is greater than all. He hath set such a love upon them that all the greatness in this great God is interested in it. It hath commanded and set on work all in God; it hath set on work all the persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to bear several offices in our salvation. It hath set on work all attributes, mercy, justice, power, wisdom, wrath itself to fall upon our Lord and Saviour Christ, his only Son. Why? Because love is the most predominant, wherever it is it commandeth all; and that which commandeth all that is in God, must needs be great. In other dispositions, he shews forth but one or two attributes: if he throw men into hell, he shews his justice and the power of his wrath; but where he loveth, he draweth forth all.

The poets themselves said, that *amor Deum gubernat*, that love governed God. And, as Nazianzen well speaks, this love of God, this *dulcis tyrannus*,—this sweet tyrant,—did overcome him when he was upon the cross. There were no cords could have held him to the whipping-post but those of love; no nails have fastened him to the cross but those of love. And hence—to confirm this notion more to you, that love is the predominant thing that commandeth all—you shall find that God is every attribute of his; he is his own wisdom, his own justice, his own power, &c. Yet you have him peculiarly called love. It is not said anywhere of God, that I know of, that he is wisdom, or justice, or power, &c. Christ indeed is called the wisdom and power of God, that is, manifestatively, as he is Mediator. It is true, indeed, all God's attributes are himself; but yet love in a more peculiar manner carries the title of him. 'God is love,' saith he, in 1 John 4:8; and he saith it again, ver. 16.

Let us expound the words a little, because we are now upon them. 'Beloved,' saith he, ver. 7, 'love is of God.' He is the fountain of it, and if the

fountain will love, if he that is love itself will love, how great will that love be! We use to argue thus, that God is therefore the highest good because whatsoever is good in any creature is eminently found in him. Truly thus doth the Apostle argue. Love, saith he, is of God. All the love that is in all creatures, in all angels and men, that is in the heart of Christ himself, it is all of God, he is the fountain of it; therefore whosoever hath his love, his love from whom all love is, it must needs be a great and an infinite love. As the Apostle saith, ye need not be written to, to love one another, ye are taught of God so to do. It is nature in you, so it is nature in God.

Now what follows in the next words? ‘Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not, knoweth not God.’ It is such a phrase as this: if you be ignorant of what is the greatest excellency of any one, you do not know him; the man is thus and thus, this is his character, and his chiefest character, if you do not know that, you do not know the man. So saith he of God, ‘God is love,’ and there is no man that doth know him, but he finds so much love in him towards him, that he must needs love others; and he that doth not love, knows him not, for love is his genius. And as to love one another is the great commandment that Jesus Christ gave us; so for God to love us is the greatest and most eminent disposition in the great God. Will you have a definition of God? Why, saith the Apostle, ‘God is love.’ and he contents not himself to have said it once, but he saith it again, ver. 16. Now then, great must needs that love be which is his love. Mark that emphasis: ‘for his great love wherewith he loved us.’

It is great also in this, respect, as in God,—for still I am arguing from its being in him as he is the subject of it,— because there is no other origin of his love, besides that of his goodness mentioned, but his love; his own love and goodness is a source to itself. All love in us is of God, but all love in himself must needs be much more of himself; this argues it great, wherever he pitcheth it. For if he loved us for anything in us, it is too narrow: for the truth is, so he loves all creatures; so far as there is any goodness in them, so far he loves them; but that he should love his saints thus, it would be too narrow, too scanty a love. He loved Adam but thus, plainly; it was but a providential love wherewith he loved Adam, take him in that first estate. God saw all that was in the creatures to be good, and he loved them; so he saw that which was in Adam to be good, and that was the cause he loved him. But when love in the great God is the predominant thing, that which commandeth all in God, when this shall be a fountain to itself, then it will overflow, it knoweth no bounds, nothing is so diffusive. It is a saying of Bernard, and it is an exceeding good one: ‘That God,’ saith he, ‘loveth his children, he hath it not elsewhere, from anything out of himself; but it is himself from whence that love riseth, his own love is the spring of his own love, and so is the measure of the

extent of it, and that knows no measure. And therefore he must needs love strongly, saith he, when he is not said so much to have love, as that he is love. And therefore this love, which is the fountain of love itself, how great must it be!’

Again, the end of his love is but to shew love; it is the great end of it, and so large as his end is, so large must his love be, and his desire to love. *Appetitus finis est infinitus*;—What a man loveth for an end, he loveth infinitely. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace,’ saith ver. 7, that is, of his free love; there is his end. As he hath no reason why he loveth but because he willeth, so he hath no higher end to love but because he will love, and because he doth love, and because he will shew love. If so great a love will make itself its end, how unsatisfied will that love be! And so much for the subject of it.

I will only add this. Do but only take a scantling of it by the love that is in the Mediator, Jesus Christ, who is God-man. ‘That ye may know,’ saith the Apostle, ‘the breadth and length, the depth and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.’ What need I stand to set out that love to you? It drew him from heaven to the womb, and from the womb to the cross; and it kept him upon the cross when any great spirit in the world would have been provoked to have come down; it was his love that held him there. But now that love that was in the heart of the man Christ Jesus, and as he was Mediator, is less than God’s love. ‘My Father,’ saith he—and he speaks as Mediator—‘is greater than I,’ and so also is his Father’s love greater than his, And yet if there were infinite worlds made of creatures loving they would not have so much love in them as was in the heart of that man Christ Jesus. ‘All love is of God,’ so John saith; and the truth is, all the love that Christ had was of God; he spake to his heart to love us. ‘Thine they were,’ saith he, ‘and thou gavest them me.’ And therefore he loved them. Great therefore must this love be, because it is the love of God; it is ‘*his* love.’

I should also add under this head, that is it is great in itself, because it is the love of the great God, so therefore it is greatly endeared to us. For love, be it never so small, is always heightened by the greatness of the person that loves us. The greatness of the person doth not heighten mercy, it shews a nobleness in him indeed, as for a king to be merciful; but for a king to love, this is a heightening, and endearing of it to us, for *majestas* and amor do seldom *convenire*,—majesty and love seldom meet,—because it is a coming down, a debasing of majesty. But I shall not speak much to this head, because I am not to speak things that may endear the love of God to you, but as it is the cause of salvation. Only I will give you that scripture in a word: Ps. 113:6, ‘He humbleth himself, to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth.’ Why is God said to humble himself in this? Is it a stooping and condescending in God to take all things into his omniscient knowledge, and to guide and govern the world? Truly he were not God, if he

should not do it; if any creature should escape, any motion of a fly should escape the knowledge of the great God, he were not God; yet he calls it a humbling, a condescending. O my brethren, what is it then for him to condescend to love!

The *second* thing in the text here by which the greatness of this love is set out to us is *the persons whom he loveth*; ‘*us*,’ saith he. And this setteth out the greatness of his love to us, by way of endearment, which therefore I shall more briefly pass over. He loveth *us*, not others; that is clearly the Apostle’s scope. ‘We were by nature children of wrath, as well as others; but God, who is rich in mercy, loved us,’ not others; and out of that love he hath quickened *us*.’ Others are not quickened; the whole world lies in wickedness, but we know we are of God; and a few are quickened, it was because he loved us; a special love, that argues greatness too.

To set out the greatness of it in this respect, and to endear it to you:—

In the first place, the great God, when he meant to love, he did not go and say, I will love somebody, or I will love *indefinitely*; no, but he pitched upon the persons. That way of the Arminians doth exceedingly detract from the love of God, viz., to make him a lover of mankind, and that that is the thing out of the consideration whereof he give his Son; and that he loves them in common, and loves them indefinitely; and if they believe so, God will then shew love to them. God might delight himself in heaven, though men had never been saved; he might there have upbraided them with their unthankfulness. No, God goes another way, he directly sets up the very persons whom he meant to love, and he lays forth all the contrivances of his love, having them distinctly in his eye; as a father that lays out portions for every one of his children by name, legally and distinctly, hath them in his eye; so doth God. ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.’ That same on whom implies that it is not indefinite. I will only give you that observation, upon comparing two places that are both known, and I will bring them both together by paralleling of them. Saith Christ, in John 13:18, ‘I know whom I have chosen.’ The parallel place directly to it is in 2 Tim. 2:19, ‘God knoweth who are his;’ that is, distinctly knoweth them, he had them in his eye, viewed them, and under the viewing of the persons, on them he would bestow all, did lay the whole plot, all the contrivements of that salvation he intended. Which he did to endear his love the more, having the persons to whom in his eye; he did not do it indefinitely, that he would love mankind, and love some in an indefinite way. Dare any man say, that he did not know the man Christ Jesus, and pitch particularly upon that man that was in the womb of the virgin? Did he only say, I will have a mediator somewhere out of mankind, fall as it will? No, he did ordain that man; so Acts 17:31. And he was foreordained. saith 1 Peter 1:20; that very

man that is now in heaven, that individual nature, and no other. And so he did do with the members likewise: for there is the same reason of both.

But then, secondly, as his love is thus set out to us, that it was not indefinitely pitched, but as having all the persons in his eye and having them all in view; so by this also, that he hath not pitched it upon everybody. This is distinct from the former; for an indefinite is not knowing whom he pitched it upon. Now as he knew whom he pitched upon, so he hath pitched but upon some, not on every one. He might have pitched upon all, but the text saith otherwise; *us*, not others. So then here is another thing that sets forth this love, it is a special love, and that greateneth it also. My brethren, if God would love, it was fit he should be free. It is a strange thing that you will not allow God that which kings and princes have the prerogative of, and you will allow it them. They will have favourites whom they will love, and will not love others; and yet men will not allow God that liberty, but he must either love all mankind, or he must be cruel and unjust.

The specialness of his love greateneth it, endeareth it to us. You shall find almost all along the Bible, that when God would express his love, he doth it with a specialty to his own elect, which he illustrates by the contrary done to others. In 1 Thess. 5:9, he is not content to say, he hath 'appointed us to obtain salvation,' but he illustrateth it by its contrary; he 'hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation.' Not to wrath, for it might have been our lot, for he hath appointed others to it. In Isa. 41:9, 'Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee.' And he doth not content himself to say so only, for if he had said no more, it implies only that he had taken them out of the heap of others that lay before him; but he adds, 'I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away;' that is, I have not dealt with thee as I have done with others. And you shall find frequently in the Scripture, when he mentioneth his choice of some persons, he holdeth up likewise on purpose his refusing of others. When he speaks of Jacob, and would express his love and set it out to himward, he saith, 'Jacob have I loved;' that might have been enough for Jacob, but he sets it out with a foil, 'Esau have I hated.' And in Ps. 78:67, when he speaks of an election out of the tribes, he contents not himself to say he chose Judah, but he puts in the rejection, the preterition at least, of Joseph. 'He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim; but chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Sion which he loved.' So among the disciples; how doth Christ set out his love to them? John 6:70, 'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' and, chap. 13:18, 'I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen;' and, chap. 15:19, 'I have chosen you out of the world;' and, chap. 17:9, 'I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me,' &c.

I will give you but one eminent place, which indeed concerns us in these times. In 2 Thess. 2:11, speaking of the times of Popery, and the apostasy thereunto, he saith, 'God shall send among them strong delusion, that they should believe that lie,' that great lie of Popery; and among other things why he mentions this, what use doth he improve this to, his hardening the Popish and apostate world that would not receive the truth in the love thereof 'That they all might be damned,' ver. 12. But that, in ver. 13, to set out his love to his elect: 'But we are bound always to give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation,' though he hath done, and will do thus with others. The thing I quote it for is this, that he setteth off, enhanceth the greatness of God's love to them, in regard of the specialness of it, that he hath not dealt with them, as with others: thanks be given to God always for you.

Now this concerns us, for we live in the times of Popery; the Christian world began to warp towards it then, and we and our forefathers have lived in the height and ruff of it. Now what saith Rev. 13:8? —it is a parallel place, —'All that dwell upon the earth shall worship the beast, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb.' You see the reason why many men now are set against Popery, and embrace the truth in the love thereof, and are savingly kept from believing that great lie; and that these parts of Europe fell off from Antichrist. It is because God hath here multitudes of men 'whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb.'

Now that God doth thus set his love upon some and not on others, of purpose to set off his love and make it greater, I will give you a place for it: Deut. 10:14, 'Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that is therein. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers, to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.' If I would choose, saith God, I have choice enough, I have the heaven of heavens, I could have filled all those with creatures; and there were angels that fell, I might have chosen those, and fixed them as stars, never to have fallen; but I let multitudes of them tumble down to hell. And I had all the earth also, and all the nations thereof, before me; but, to shew my love in a special manner, I have chosen you above all the people of the world. So that, I say, the greatness of his love is set off by the specialness of it, Therefore he doth call the people of God upon all such occasions to consider, the one with the other, that their love of God maybe greatened also. Rom. 11:22, 'Behold, to them severity, to thee goodness.' He would have them to eye both at once; why hath he shewn severity to others? That his goodness to thee might the more appear. He calls them to behold it;

behold, saith he, to them severity, and to thee goodness; the one setteth off the other.

And I might shew you that God hath shewn his special love, not only in choosing you out of all the rest of mankind, and angels, and the like, whom he refused and threw down to hell, but out of all creatures possible, or which he could have made. Believe it, brethren, there came up before him, in his idea, infinite millions of worlds; all that his power could make were as makeable as we were, and he chose us out of all that he could make, and not only out of all that he did make, or did decree to make.

And let me say this: the greatness of his love, in respect of the specialty of it, is mightily enhanced to us, the elect, in the latter ages of the world, in this respect, that God had all the great heroes of all ages that are past before him, the great worthies of the world, all the wise, gallant, brave men in Rome and Greece, and in all nations, in all the ages before,—he might have filled up thy room in heaven with some of those; there were men enough amongst them that might have had places in heaven, and thou mightest have been let alone. No, all these could not win away his love from thee that livest in this age; he passed over all them, suffered them to walk in their own ways; they are perished, they are gone; and, as the phrase is in 1 Pet. 1:5, he hath reserved heaven for thee. The love of God to thee, I say, is not only magnified by those out of whom he hath chosen thee in this age, but in all ages past; and when all mankind shall meet together, it will infinitely greaten the love of God to that remnant whom he hath chosen out of all the rest of the world. It is special love that makes his love great love.

Obs.—I will give you this observation, which I find in the Scripture. He calls his church his love; so Cant. 5:2. And he himself terms himself by the name of the lover; so Rom. 8:37, and Rev. 1:5. It is his title, and became his style. The church is his love, so as he hath no love but the church, it is not scattered to other objects; therefore, Rom. 11, they are said to be ‘beloved according to election,’ even as they are said to be ‘called according to his purpose.’ It is by way of distinction, noting out a specialty of love that accompanies election.

And then, if you add to this, in the third place, the fewness of those upon whom this love is pitched, it doth exceedingly greaten it; for the fewer that all the love of the great God is pitched upon, the greater the love is. And this, in the coherence, though not in express words, we find in the text; for the rest, whom these ‘us’ were called out of, were the world, the world lying in wickedness: ‘among whom we had our conversation, according to the course of this world.’ When God hath betaken himself to a few, to love them, oh, how will he love them! He will be sure to lose none of those, because they are so few. When a great rich man shall have but one heir, or a few in his will, to divide his goods amongst;

so when God, that is rich in mercy, and hath great love, shall have but a few to enjoy it, how will his heart be intended more in love! Isa. 10:22, 'Though Israel be as the sand of the sea,'—he speaks of election,—'yet but a remnant shall be saved.'

And yet let me add this, in the fourth place, that he loveth every one whom he hath chosen as if he loved none else; lest any of his children should be jealous of it, he doth so dexterously manage his love that every one may say, None is loved as I am. As he said, I am the greatest of sinners; so may every one of his children say, I am the greatest of beloved ones. So loving is God to those he chooseth, that all sort of natures speak this of him, be they of what condition soever.

There is also this to be added to this head, the condition wherein we were when we were called, even when we were 'dead in sins and trespasses.' But I will reserve that till it comes in order in the text.

And so much now for that second head here in the text, which doth illustrate the greatness of the love of God,—*us*, and not others.

I come now to the *third*, which contains divers particulars in these words, *for his great love wherewith he loved us*. There is—

1. *Acts of love* mentioned. There is—

2. *The time when he loved us*, viz., before calling. And then—

3. *There is a special kind of love*; 'his love wherewith he loved us.'

To begin with the first—

There are *two great acts of love* which God hath shewn to us. The one was that from everlasting; the other, when he gave Jesus Christ. I will not speak of the latter now, because it comes in afterwards at ver. 5. But let us take in that act of love in God which here certainly the Apostle hath a more special recourse to, — that is, *his electing love*, which is eminently the love which this same *hath loved us* referreth to, and which is the foundation of all the rest, and let me in a word or two shew you the greatness of this.

First, Let me say this of it, that take it as it was an act in God, it can never be expressed what it was nor how great it was. And therefore God himself, as I may so speak with reverence, is fain to manifest that love which he took up in his own heart, by degrees and by effects. The Scripture itself doth not know how to give you the greatness of that love which God did pitch upon us from everlasting, but it is still fain to do it by the effects. In 1 John 4:9, when he had said before that God is love, and therefore he hath thus greatly loved us, he is fain to fall upon speaking of the effects of this love: 'In this was manifested,' saith he, 'the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.' And, ver. 10, 'Herein is love,'—it is manifested in

this, —'not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' And after he had spoken of his love, what saith he? Ver. 12, 'No man hath seen God at any time;' the meaning whereof, I think, is clearly this, as if he had said, I am fain to tell you this love of God which I am discoursing of, merely as it is manifested in the effects; for if you would have me speak of it as it is in the fountain, it is not to be expressed, for no man hath seen God at any time; he is not able to know what love is in the heart of God but at the second-hand. It may be illustrated by the gift of his Son, by making of us happy and glorious in heaven, by his communication of himself to us there; but what, and how great it is, can never be expressed. And I will give you the reason why I interpret it thus, because in Exod. 33:19, &c., when God hath spoken of his love to Moses, and said, 'I will be gracious to those to whom I will be gracious;' he adds, 'No man can see God, and live;' for you cannot see into this love, as it is in him.

And let me likewise say this second thing of it: That that love which God did first take up, in the first act of it, it was as great as all acts transient for ever can express or utter to eternity; it is great love therefore. I say, all the ways and acts That God doth to eternity are but mere expressions of that love which he at first took up. Christ and heaven, and whatever else God shews you of love and mercy in this world, or in the world to come, they all lay in the womb of that first act, of that love he took up, 'wherewith he loved us.'

God was not drawn on to love us, as a man is, who first begins to love one, and to set his heart upon him, and then his heart being engaged, he is drawn on beyond what he thought, and is enticed to do thus and thus beyond what he first intended. No, God is not as man herein, but as 'known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world,' so is all his love that he meant to bestow. And he took up love enough at first, as he should be expressing of all sort of ways that he hath taken to do it, unto eternity. For there is no new thing to God; if there should be any one thought or degree of love rise up in his heart afterwards, which was not there at first, there should be some new thing in God. And the reason is clear by this too, that he doth love out of his own love, therefore his love at the very first dash, when he first begin to love us, was as perfect as it will be when we are in heaven. When Adam fell, God was not then drawn out to give his Son; no, we are not so to conceive it, God had all before him from everlasting.

And this, I say, is easily manifested; for the first act of his love was the womb of his giving Christ; 'God so loved the world that he gave his Son.' Therefore the Scripture makes all the grace that ever we shall have to be given us at the very first, when God first loved us, 2 Tim. 1:9, 'According to the grace of God, which was given us before the world began.' And in Rom. 11:29, speaking

of election, as he had done all along the chapter before, he saith, ‘the gifts of God are without repentance.’ He gave all in the first act, when he first chose us, and never repenteth of it. Election, I say, is expressed to us by all that God means to bestow upon us actually to eternity, for ever and ever, which he ‘hath prepared for them that love him,’ so the phrase is, 1 Cor. 2:9. And, ver. 12, ‘We have received the Spirit of God, that we may know the things which are freely given us of God;’ that is, given us when he first set his heart upon us. My brethren, when God first began to love you, he gave you all that he ever meant to give you in the lump, and eternity of time is that in which he is retailing of it out. ‘I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.’ And then all the goodness that he means to communicate to them unto whom he is thus gracious, is a-passing before them even unto eternity. First, the giving of his Son, he came first in the train; and then the giving of his Spirit; and then grace and glory: and whatever variation of glory there is that is to come, it is all but the passing on of the train, it is all but the communicating of that goodness of his which he did ordain the first time he thought on thee to love thee.

There is an emphatical word in the text, this word *πολλην αγαπην*, *great love*,—as your great critics observe, and so the Septuagint constantly useth it,—which doth not signify that God loves us often, or that his love is reiterated, but that he loves us with one entire love. The Arminians would make the love of God incomplete, and never complete till one comes to die; but it is not a matter of that nature, it is not as sanctification, that admits degrees in us, but it is of the nature of those things that consist *in indivisibili*. I will give you that place for it, Ps. 138:8, ‘The Lord,’ saith he, ‘will perfect that which concerneth me.’ What God did intend to David from everlasting at once, he is perfecting of it in him. There is, saith he, a great deal of mercy yet to come, God hath not half done with me, he will perfect that which concerns me, and he is perfecting of it to everlasting; for so it follows: ‘Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever.’ God hath set up, as I may so speak, an idea in his own heart, what a brave creature he will make thee, and how he will love thee, and all that ever he doth or will do, it is but a perfecting of that idea, and of that love wherewith he loved thee from everlasting. The mercies of God are said to be many, you read often of them in the plural; but his love is said to be but one, because he loved us with one entire act, even from eternity.

Yes, he took up so much love at the first, that his wisdom and all in him is set on work to study and contrive ways how to commend that love.

And therefore that word in Tit. 3:4, which we translate ‘kindness,’ as it signifies *benignitatem*, so it signifies an heroic study, as it were, in God, all sort of ways to deserve well of mankind. It was so great that he knew not how to express it enough; for do but consider a little with yourselves. He began to love

Adam upon the terms of a providential love, but that was not good enough, he must have those of mankind he loves to heaven. He was not content with direct ways of loving, —that is, to love them in their head Jesus Christ, as he loveth the angels, and so no more ado,—but to shew the more love, lets them fall into sin, become enemies to him, and then sends his Son. And, my brethren, the truth is, this cost Jesus Christ dear, merely that God might shew forth the more love; for we might not have been sinners; and though sinners, yet we might have been saved without any satisfaction. But it was a digression of love, as I may truly call it, it was an excursion of love, that as man being sinful sought out many inventions, so God being loving, he sought out a world of inventions for to shew his love. Now, do but think with yourselves, that the very first thought of love that God hid towards you, the very first glance of love he took up, should be so much, as that all sorts of ways that his wisdom can invent, and that in an eternity of time too, should be little enough to express and retail that love which thus in the lump he took up. My brethren, this must certainly be a great love.

And I will add but this to it: that his love was so greedy, —mark what I say unto thee—when he first began to love thee, that the next and main thing that he thought of, that he had in his eye, as I may speak, in order and degree, though all was but one act, was that happiness he meant to give thee in heaven. He doth as it were overleap, so greedy was his love, all the means between; they come in, as I may say, in a second thought. If, I say, they do allow an intention of the end before the means, if God intended the end before the means, he intended that happiness which thou shalt have first. Therefore observe what the Scripture speaks; though it saith that God ordained us to believe, and ordained us unto sanctification, yet ordinarily it expreseth it thus—he hath ordained us unto life. And the place is emphatical, 2 Thess. 2:13, ‘God hath from the beginning ordained you to salvation;’ mark, he joins *you* and *salvation* together, and then comes in the means, ‘through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.’ But, I say, his eye was so intent upon *thy* good, that look what is thy chiefest good. what he means to make thee in heaven, that he pitcheth first upon. And so much now for that act.

Let us next consider the time. ‘He loved us;’—this carries us to the time past. So that if you ask me when this love did begin, the truth is, if I may so speak with reverence, he loved thee ever since he hath been God. Jer. 31:3, ‘I have loved thee with an everlasting love;’ and unto everlasting there can be nothing added. God is from everlasting, and his love is from everlasting. He may be said to have loved thee ever since he loved himself, or ever since he loved his Son in whom he chose thee. As he was God from the beginning, and as Christ was the Word of life from the beginning, John 1:1; so he hath ordained thee unto salvation from the

beginning, 2 Thess. 2:13. And the school-men do rightly say in this, that the liberty of God's will doth not lie as man's doth, that it was a while suspended, no, not for a moment. There was never an actual suspension, for then there were an imperfection; only there was *libertas potentialis*, he might have cast it otherwise; but there never was any time in which there was in his heart a vacuity of love to thee, or unto any one whom he loveth. How infinitely doth this endear the love of God to thee, and make it great! If one have loved you from his infancy, that no sooner he began to have a thought of love, or to love himself, but he loved you, and pitched his heart upon you, how great will you account his love! John makes a great matter of it, 1 John 4:10: Herein is love, speaking of the love of God, that we loved not God, but he loved us first. We did not begin, but he began; and when did he begin? Even from eternity, when he loved himself, and loved his Son.

And as he hath loved you from eternity, that is the first thing considerable in it, so let me add, in the second place, which this *hath loved* doth also evidently import,—comparing it with ver. 7, 'that in ages to come,' and here 'hath,' that is, from everlasting to everlasting,—he hath continued to love his children with a reiterated love. That act of love which he hath first pitched, he hath every moment renewed actually in his own mind. He doth but think over and over again thoughts of love to thee, amongst the rest of his elect, unto eternity. Saith the Psalmist, and it is Christ that speaks that psalm, who knew the love of his Father, and knew his heart, Ps. 40:5, 'How many are thy thoughts towards us, O God!' Many indeed, for they have been from everlasting, therefore they cannot be numbered. And not only that first act, that first thought he had, but the whole lump of that love is still renewed every moment, and shall be unto eternity. I could give you a multitude of places. He is therefore said to have us in his eye, and to write us upon the palms of his hands, &c.

And, lastly, it is to everlasting, which though it be not in this verse, yet we meet with it in ver. 7, 'that in ages to come.' As he loved us from everlasting, from the beginning, as it is in that 2 Thess. 2:13, so he loveth us unto the end, John 13:1.

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