

What Saith the Scripture?

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God's Love To Us

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Lecture VII
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Text.--Rom. 5:8: "But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

What is meant here by "commend"? To recommend -- to set forth in a clear and strong light.

I. Towards whom is this love exercised?

II. How does He commend this love?

III. For what end does He commend His love to us?

I. Towards whom is this love exercised?

Towards us -- towards all beings of our lost race. To each one of us He manifests this love. Is it not written -- "God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life?"

II. How does He commend this love?

By giving His Son to die for us. By giving one who was a Son and a Son well-beloved. It is written that God "gave Him a ransom for all;" and that "He tasted death for every man." We are not to suppose that He died for the sum total of mankind in such a sense that His death is not truly for each one in particular. It is a great mistake into which some fall, to suppose that Christ died for the race in general, and not for each one in particular. By this mistake, the gospel is likely to lose much of its practical power on our hearts. We need to apprehend it as Paul did, who said of Jesus Christ -- "He loved me and gave Himself for me." We need to make this personal application of Christ's death. No doubt this was the great secret of Paul's holy life, and of his great power in preaching the gospel. So we are to regard Jesus as having loved us personally and individually. Let us consider how much pains God has taken to make us feel that He cares for us personally. It is so in His providence, and so

also in His gospel. He would fain make us single ourselves from the mass and feel that His loving eye and heart are upon us individually.

III. For what end does He commend His love to us?

- 1. Is it an ambition to make a display? Surely there can be no affection in this. God is infinitely above all affectation. He must from His very nature act honestly. Of course He must have some good reason for this manifestation of His love. No doubt He seeks to prove to us the reality of His love. Feeling the most perfect love towards our lost race, He deemed it best to reveal this love and make it manifest, both to us and to all His creatures. And what could evince His love if this gift of His Son does not? Oh how gloriously is love revealed in this great sacrifice! How this makes divine love stand out prominently before the universe! What else could He have done that would prove His love so effectually?
- 2. Again, He would show that His love is unselfish, for Jesus did not die for us as friends, but as enemies. It was while we were yet enemies that He died for us. On this point, Paul suggests that "scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die." But our race were far as possible from being good. Indeed they were not even righteous, but were utterly wicked. For a very dear friend one might be willing to die. There have been soldiers who, to save the life of a beloved officer, have taken into their own bosom the shaft of death; but for one who is merely just and not so much as good, this sacrifice could scarcely be made. How much less for an enemy! Herein we may see how greatly "God commendeth His love to us, in that, while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us."
- 3. Notice yet further, that this love of God to us cannot be the love of esteem or complacency, because there is in us no ground for such a love. It can be no other than the love of unselfish benevolence. This love had been called in question. Satan had questioned it in Eden. He made bold to insinuate -- "Hath your God indeed said, Ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" Why should He wish to debar you from such a pleasure? So the old Serpent sought to cast suspicion on the benevolence of God. Hence there was the more reason why God should vindicate His love.
- 4. He would also commend the great strength of this love. We should think we gave evidence of strong love if we were to give our friend a great sum of money. But what is any sum of money compared with giving up a dear Son to die? Oh surely it is surpassing love, beyond measure wonderful, that Jesus should not only labor and suffer, but should really die! Was ever love like this!
- 5. Again; God designed also to reveal the moral character of His love for men, and especially, its justice. He could not show favors to the guilty until His government was made secure and His law was duly honored. Without this sacrifice, He knew it could not be safe to pardon. God must maintain the honor of His throne. He must show that He could never wink at sin. He felt the solemn necessity of giving a public rebuke of sin before the universe. This rebuke was the more expressive because Jesus Himself was sinless. Of course it must be seen that in His death, God was not frowning on His sin, but on the sin of those whose sins He bore and in whose place He stood.

- 6. This shows God's abhorrence of sin, since Jesus stood as our representative. While He stood in this position, God could not spare Him, but laid on Him the chastisement of our iniquities. Oh what a rebuke of sin was that! How expressively did it show that God abhorred sin, yet loved the sinner! These were among the great objects in view -- to beget in our souls the two-fold conviction of His love for us and of our sin against Him. He would make those convictions strong and abiding. So He sets forth Jesus crucified before our eyes -- a far more expressive thing than any mere words. No saying that He loved us could approximate towards the strength and impressiveness of this manifestation. In no other way could He make it seem so much a reality -- so touching and so overpowering. Thus He commends it to our regard. Thus He invites us to look at it. He tells us angels desire to look into it. He would have us weigh this great fact, examine all its bearings, until it shall come full upon our souls with its power to save. He commends it to us to be reciprocated, as if He would incite us to love Him who has so loved us. Of course He would have us understand this love, and appreciate it, that we may requite it with responsive love in return. It is an example for us that we may love our enemies and, much more, our brethren. Oh when this love has taken its effect on our hearts, how deeply do we feel that we cannot hate any one for whom Christ died! Then instead of selfishly thrusting our neighbor off, and grasping the good to which his claim is full as great as ours, we love him with a love so deep and so pure that it cannot be in our heart to do him wrong.
- 7. It was thus a part of the divine purpose to show us what true love is. And one said in prayer -- "We thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast given us Thy Son to teach us how to love." Yes, God would let us know that He Himself, is love, and hence that if we would be His children, we too must love Him and love one another. He would reveal His love so as to draw us into sympathy with Himself and make us like Him. Do you not suppose that a thorough consideration of God's love, as manifested in Christ, does actually teach us what love is, and serve to draw our souls into such love? The question is often asked -- How shall I love? The answer is given in this example. Herein is love! Look at it and drink in its spirit. Man is prone to love himself supremely. But there is a totally different sort of love from that. This love commends itself in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. How forcibly does this rebuke our selfishness! How much we need this lesson, to subdue our narrow selfishness, and shame our unbelief!

How strange it is that men do not realize the love of God! The wife of a minister who had herself labored in many revivals, said to me, "I never, till a few days since, knew that God is love." What do you mean? said I. "I mean that I never apprehended it in all its bearings before." Oh, I assure you, it is a great and blessed truth, and it is a great thing to see it as it is! When it becomes a reality to the soul, and you come under its powerful sympathy, then you will find the gospel indeed the power of God unto salvation. Paul prayed for his Ephesian converts that they might "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of God that passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God."

- 8. God sought, in thus commending His love to us, to subdue our slavish fear. Some one said -- "When I was young, I was sensible of fearing God, but I knew I did not love Him. The

instruction I received led me to fear, but not to love." So long as we think of God only as One to be feared, not to be loved, there will be a prejudice against Him as more an enemy than a friend. Every sinner knows that he deserves to be hated of God. He sees plainly that God must have good reason to be displeased with him. The selfish sinner judges God from himself. Knowing how he should feel towards one who had wronged him, he unconsciously infers that God must feel so towards every sinner. When he tries to pray, his heart won't; it is nothing but terror. He feels no attraction towards God, no real love. The child spirit comes before God, weeping indeed, but loving and trusting. Now the state of feeling which fears only, God would fain put away, and make us know that He loves us still. We must not regard Him as being altogether such as ourselves. He would undeceive us and make us realize that though He has "spoken against us, yet He does earnestly remember us still." He would have us interpret His dealings fairly and without prejudice. He sees how, when He thwarts men's plans, they are bent on misunderstanding Him. They will think that He is reckless of their welfare, and they are blind to the precious truth that He shapes all His ways towards them in love and kindness. He would lead us to judge thus, that if God spared not His own Son, but gave Him up freely for us all, then He will much more give us all things else most freely.

- 9. Yet again; He would lead us to serve Him in love and not in bondage. He would draw us forth into the liberty of the sons of God. He loves to see the obedience of the heart. He would inspire love enough to make all our service free and cheerful and full of joy. If you wish to make others love you, you must give them your love. Show your servants the love of your heart; so will you break their bondage, and make their service one of love. In this way God commends His love towards us in order to win our hearts to Himself, and thus get us ready and fit to dwell forever in His eternal home. His ultimate aim is to save us from our sins that He may fill us forever with His own joy and peace.

REMARKS.

1. We see that saving faith must be the heart's belief of this great fact that God so loved us. Saving faith receives the death of Christ as an expression of God's love to us. No other sort of faith -- no faith in anything else, wins our heart to love God. Saving faith saves us from our bondage and our prejudice against Him. It is this which makes it saving. Any faith that leaves out this great truth must fail to save us. If any one element of faith is vital, it is this. Let any man doubt this fact of God's love in Christ, and I would not give much for all his religion. It is worthless.

2. The Old Testament system is full of this idea. All those bloody sacrifices are full of it. When the priest, on behalf of all the people, came forward and laid his hand on the head of the innocent victim and then confessed his sins and the sins of all, and then when this animal was slain and its blood poured out before the Lord, and He gave tokens that He accepted the offering, it was a solemn manifestation that God substituted for the sufferings due the sinner, the death of an innocent lamb. Throughout that ancient system, we find the same idea, showing how God would have men see His love in the gift of His own dear Son.

3. One great reason why men find it so difficult to repent and submit to God, is that they do not receive this great fact -- do not accept it in simple faith. If they were to accept it and let it come home to their hearts, it would carry with it a power to subdue the heart to submission and to love.

4. One reason why young men are so afraid they shall be called into the ministry, is their lack of confidence in this love. Oh if they saw and believed this great love, surely they would not let eight hundred millions go down to hell in ignorance of this gospel! Oh how it would agonize their heart that so many should go to their graves and to an eternal hell, and never know the love of Jesus to their perishing souls! And yet here is a young man for whom Christ has died, who cannot bear to go and tell them they have a Savior! What do you think of his magnanimity! How much is his heart like Christ's heart? Do you wonder that Paul could not hold his peace, but felt that he must go to the ends of the earth and preach the name of Jesus where it had never been known before? How deeply he felt that he must let the world know these glad tidings of great joy! How amazing that young men now can let the gospel die unknown and not go forth to bless the lost! Ah, did they ever taste its blessedness? Have they ever known its power? And do you solemnly intend to conceal it, that it may never bless your dying brethren?

5. This manner of commending God's love is the strongest and most expressive He could employ. In no other way possible could He so forcibly demonstrate His great love to our race.

Hence, if this fails to subdue men's enmity, prejudice and unbelief, what can avail? What methods shall he use after this proves unavailing? The Bible demands -- "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Well may it make this appeal, for if this fails to win us, what can succeed?

6. If we had been His friends, there had been no need of His dying for us. It was only because we were yet sinners that He died for us. How great then are the claims of this love on our hearts!

7. Sinners often think if they were pious and good, the Lord might love them. So they try to win His love by doing some good things. They try in every such way to make God love them, and especially by mending their manners rather than their hearts. Alas, they seem not to know that the very fact of their being sunk so low in sin is moving God's heart to its very foundations! A sinless angel enjoys God's complacency, but not His pity; He is not an object of pity, and there is no call for it. The same is true of a good child. He receives the complacency of his parents, but not their compassion. But suppose this child becomes vicious. Then his parents mourn over his fall, and their compassion is moved. They look on him with pity and anxiety as they see him going down to the depths of vice, crime and degradation. More and more as he sinks lower and lower in the filth and abominations of sin, they mourn over him; and as they see how changed he is, they stand in tears saying -- Alas, this is our son, our own once-honored son! But fallen now! Our bowels are moved for him, and there is nothing we would not do or suffer, if we might save him!

So the sinner's great degradation moves the compassions of His divine Father to their very depths. When the Lord "passes by and sees him lying in his blood in the open field," He says -- That is My son! He bears the image of His Maker. "Since I have spoken against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Sinners should remember that the very fact of their being sinners is the thing that moves God's compassion and pity. Do you say -- I do not see how God can make it consistent with His holiness to pardon and love such a sinner as I am? I can tell you how -- By giving His own Son to die in your stead!

8. Christ died for us that He might save us, not in, but from, our sins. Then must it not grieve Him exceedingly that we should continue in sin? What do you think? Suppose you were to see Jesus face to face, and He were to show you those wounds in His hands and in His side, and were to say -- I died for you because I saw you lost and beyond hope, and because I would save you from your sins; and now, will you repeat those sins again? Can you go on yet longer to sin against Me?

9. You may infer from our subject that Jesus must be willing to save you from wrath, if you truly repent and accept Him as your Savior. How can you doubt it? Having suffered unto death for this very purpose, surely it only remains for you to meet the conditions, and you are saved from wrath through Him.

10. You may infer also that God, having spared not His Son, will also with Him freely give you all things else; grace enough to meet all your wants; the kind care of His providence; the love of His heart; everything you can need. To continue in sin despite of such grace and love must be monstrous! It must grieve His heart exceedingly.

A friend of mine who has charge of one hundred and fifty boys in a Reform School, is accustomed, when they misbehave, to put them for a time on bread and water. What do you think he does himself in some of these cases? He goes and puts himself with them on bread and water! The boys in the school see this, and they learn the love of the Superintendent and father. Now, when tempted to crime, they must say to themselves -- "If I do wrong, I shall have to live on bread and water; but the worst of all is, my father will come and eat bread and water with me and for my sake; and how can I bear that? How can I bear to have my father who loves me so well, confine himself to bread and water for my sake!"

So Jesus puts Himself on pain and shame and death that you might have joy and life -- that you might be forgiven and saved from sinning; and now will you go on to sin more? Have you not heart to appreciate His dying love? Can you go on and sin yet more and none the less for all the love shown you on Calvary?

You understand that Christ died to redeem you from sin. Suppose your own eyes were to see Him face to face, and He should tell you all He has done for you. Sister, He says, I died to save you from that sin; will you do it again? Can you go on and sin just the same as if I had never died for you?"

In that Reform School of which I spoke, the effects produced on even the worst boys by the love shown them is really striking. The Superintendent had long insisted that he did not want locks and bars to confine his boys. The Directors had said -- You must lock them in; if you don't they will run away. On one occasion, the Superintendent was to be absent two weeks. A Director came to him, urging that he must lock up the boys before he left -- for while he was absent, they would certainly run away. The Superintendent replied -- I think not; I have confidence in those boys. But, responds the Director, give us some guaranty. Are you willing to pledge your city lot, conditioned that if they do run away, the lot goes to the Reform School Fund? After a little reflection, he consents -- "I will give you my lot -- all the little property I have in the world -- if any of my boys run away while I am gone." Before he sets off, he calls all the boys together; explains to them his pledge; asks them to look

at his dependent family, and then appeals to their honor and their love for him. "Would you be willing to see me stripped of all my property? I think I can trust you." He went; returned a little unexpectedly and late on one Saturday night. Scarce had he entered the yard, when the word rang through the sleeping halls -- "Our father has come!" and almost in a moment they were there greeting him and shouting, "We are all here! we are all here!"

Cannot Christ's love have as much power as that? Shall the love the Reform School boys bear to their official father hold them to their place during the long days and nights of his absence; and shall not Christ's love to us restrain us from sinning? What do you say? Will you say thus -- "If Christ loves me so much, then it is plain He won't send me to hell, and therefore I will go on and sin all I please." Do you say that? Then there is no hope for you. The gospel that ought to save you can do nothing for you but sink you deeper in moral and eternal ruin. You are fully bent to pervert it to your utter damnation! If those Reform School boys had said thus: "Our father loves us so well, he will eat bread and water with us, and therefore we know he will not punish us to hurt us" -- would they not certainly bring a curse on themselves? Would not their reformation be utterly hopeless? So of the sinner who can make light of the Savior's dying love. Oh is it possible that when Jesus has died for you to save your soul from sin and from hell, you can do it again and yet again? Will you live on in sin only the more because He has loved you so much?

Think of this and make up your mind. "If Christ has died to redeem me from sin, then away with all sinning henceforth and forever! I forsake all my sins from this hour! I can afford to live or to die with my Redeemer; why not? So help me God, I have no more to do with sinning, forever!"

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of

accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.