

# The Love of God

By Evangelist Sam R. Ensor May 2003

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3: 16)*

Feeling alone and unloved is one of the most tragic and devastating conditions of the human spirit; it is also the **greatest lie** of the ages, and John 3: 16 proves it! This verse is the most quoted, most memorized, most recognized Scripture in the Bible. It is called the “*Bible-in-a-Verse*”; so theologically profound that it overwhelms the greatest scholars, yet so perfect in its simplicity that it thrills the hearts of the poorest sinners!

One of the most wonderful examples of the power of this Scripture is memorialized in the life of the famous American evangelist Dwight L. Moody. In May 1867, Moody sailed to England, trusting to meet the great British preacher Charles H. Spurgeon, and George Mueller of Bristol, who by the power of prayer alone cared for thousands of England’s orphan children.

This would be the first of several such trips, although no pre-arrangements were made for Moody to preach. The London Bible Society invited the famous preacher to see the work of the Gospel in the Isles. In Dublin, Ireland, Moody met the man whose preaching was destined to dramatically alter his own ministry; although at the time Moody was not impressed with young Henry Moorehouse, called by many in England simply the “*Boy Preacher*.” By his own admission Moody was put off by the youth, calling him “a mere lad,

ruddy-faced. Why, he hasn’t even a beard!” He convinced himself that this boy couldn’t preach.

Young Moorehouse determined to win an invitation to preach in the United States, in Moody’s very church! He pleaded to return with Moody, an idea which the great preacher flatly refused. Undeterred, Moorehouse promised that he would indeed come to America, to Chicago, and asked for an appointment to preach. Moody replied tersely, “If you are ever in America you may call on me.” He left Ireland and subsequently returned home, convinced this cold answer would discourage the young preacher. To his surprise a cable arrived shortly thereafter from New York, from this “*Boy Preacher*,” asking permission to visit and preach in Moody’s pulpit! Pressed further, he allowed that Moorehouse could “stop by if he was ever in Chicago.” The young preacher did indeed come to Chicago and again asked to preach.

Moody was not encouraging. It happened that he would be out of Chicago for a meeting on the date Moorehouse was to arrive. He told church leaders that he did not at all believe the boy could preach but that they could interview him and then decide what to do. On a Wednesday evening Moorehouse came to Moody’s pulpit and took as his text the beloved John 3: 16 - “*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.*” The congregation had never heard anyone from this pulpit preach with such fervor on the Love of God (In Moody’s era the classic style of preaching was stern, warning of the wrath of an offended Holy God and the sinner’s calamity at His hands in sure judgement). When Moody returned home he asked his wife how the young preacher had fared the night before. “Very well indeed,” she

replied, “although he doesn’t preach at all as you do. He tells the worst of sinners that God loves them and will save them if they only repent and believe. He used that text in St. John, Chapter Three, Verse Sixteen.” Moody replied, “Ridiculous! Now I know he cannot preach!” To which Mrs. Moody responded, “You may see for yourself tonight. He has been invited back!”

On Thursday evening Moody watched his people enter the great hall, excitement undeniably in the air. He had never seen so many Bibles brought to church. Everyone praised the wonderful sermon from last night. The singing was fervent; when Moorehouse was introduced he took as his text, John 3: 16. Moody had never heard or seen such preaching! The young preacher did not take a single verse and expound upon it, but beginning in Genesis and through the entire Bible called text upon text to prove that God did indeed love the worst of sinners! The congregation responded much the same as on the previous evening; a multitude of souls fell upon the altar for forgiveness and salvation from a loving Saviour! Moody had never seen such an outpouring of God’s mercy upon the lost. He invited Moorehouse to return the next evening and preach. Once again the young preacher took as his text, John 3: 16. Moody could not have thought the message would top the previous night’s, but confessed that with every sermon the boy preacher drove home with greater proof from that one text, John 3: 16, that God loved the vilest of sinners.

For another full week Moorehouse came to the pulpit and took the familiar text. On the final night of the campaign Moody thought certain the boy would find a different text. Anxious, he waited for Moorehouse to announce his subject. Young Moorehouse in great humility of spirit arose and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have

prayed and studied all through the night for God to give me another subject, to no avail, so tonight I conclude by returning to the blessed text which I have preached to you for these many nights. I have tried but poorly to tell you how much God loves you but His love is beyond my feeble words . . . if I could borrow Jacob’s Ladder and climb up into Heaven and ask Gabriel the mighty Archangel to describe the love of God, surely he could only say, “*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.*”!

D. L. Moody’s ministry was forever changed; he and Moorehouse remained the best of friends. In honor of the preaching from John 3: 16, that year, Moody had erected over the choir loft in gas jet burners for all to see . . . “**God Is Love.**” God does love the worst of sinners and He will save you now if you will call upon His Name: “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*” (Romans 10: 13)

Is it possible for sinful men to comprehend such love? Not apart from a personal, experiential relationship with its Author, because God’s love is **divine** in its constitution. It is not **what He does** but rather **who He is**, for “*God is love.*” (1 John 4: 8). Divine love is epitomized in the Law: “*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*” (Mark 12: 30).

Here then is the theological predicament of the sinner; he is charged in the Law to love God with a love that is beyond the capacity of his sinful heart. No unsaved person can love God with a divine love; he doesn’t have the

heart for it. Only the operation of the Holy Spirit in salvation can fit man with the kind of heart capable of loving God in the manner which the Law demands. Upon redemption the repentant sinner receives a **“heart transplant”** that enables him to love God with the love prescribed by the Scriptures: *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

*And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”* (Ezekiel 36: 26-27).

The love of God is **giving** in nature, such love being defined as **that character which seeks the highest good for another**. God’s amazing love was manifested in its fulness on the cross; God came down to pay our sin debt though it cost the life of His Only Begotten Son:

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 6: 23)

*“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*  
(Romans 5: 8)

If ever a gift were to be judged by what it cost to give, surely the blood of Jesus Christ the blessed Lamb of God, shed upon the cross was the most precious! It was **sacrificial** love, God’s execution of the death penalty, the Just dying for the unjust (1 Peter 3: 18). What is required for God to forgive sin? Simple divine fiat? No! God’s justice demands the death penalty against sin. At Calvary the Saviour paid the debt that sinners owe a Holy God. Christ took our place under the condemnation of sin in order to secure the way for God to exercise both justice and mercy! Jesus died;

the debt was paid. Now the gift of love, everlasting life, could be offered: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Ephesians 2: 8-9).

The love of God is **sublime** in its application and unbounded in its outreach. Out of the *horrible pit* (Psalms 40: 2), and up onto the **Rock of Ages**, God’s love has reached from the *gutter-most* to the *uttermost* in the miraculous work of redemption.

In one of the twentieth century’s most famous sermons, **“Can God?”**, preached by Dr. Harold Sightler at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in 1966, the following story was told of a letter sent to his radio broadcast, **The Bright Spot Hour**. It read in part, “Dear Dr. Sightler: I was turning my radio dial this afternoon and just happened to hear you say that God loves sinners. I am the worst sinner who ever lived. I have broken all ten of God’s commandments. I am such a reprobate woman that I hesitated to write this letter; I did not want you to have to touch the same paper that I have handled. Can God do anything for a vile reprobate like me?” The preacher turned to his typewriter and with tears in his eyes answered, “There is a balm in Gilead and a sympathizing Saviour!” He told her the old gospel story of Bethlehem, Calvary, and the Empty Tomb; he gave her the Bible verses of the plan of salvation. He prayed for her and mailed the letter.

Some time later Dr. Sightler was in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, for a revival meeting and told the story of this reprobate woman to the local pastor during dinner at an area restaurant. He hoped to arrange a visit to her home while there but could not remember the address. As they spoke a pretty little girl approached the table and said,

“Excuse me sir, is the address on this envelope yours?” Dr. Sightler looked at the letter, addressed to *The Bright Spot Hour*, and replied, “Why yes, child, it is.” The young lady proceeded: “My mother asked me to bring it over here to you and ask if you would take it and save her the postage.” He replied, “Of course, I’ll be happy to take it.” As he put the letter into his coat pocket, he glanced on the reverse side at the return address. “Why, preacher,” he exclaimed, “this is a miracle! It is from the very woman which I have been telling you about!” He excused himself and hurried over to the table where the lady and the young girl sat. “Pardon me, ma’am; are you the person who wrote me some time ago saying that she had broken all ten of God’s commandments and was a reprobate sinner?” She rose, and with tears streaming from her eyes said, “Yes I am, Dr. Sightler. I received your kind letter and found a Bible and read the Scriptures that you had quoted. I fell to my knees that very day and prayed the sinner’s prayer. God saved me and restored me to my family, and we are going to a little church near our home. I am serving God today because I am not the woman that I used to be.” What a sight it was that day in a busy restaurant, the woman weeping and the old preacher shouting!

No matter how deep in sin you are, the love of God can reach deeper and His tender mercy will transform the vilest reprobate into a sweet Christian. After preaching that very message, *“Can God?”*, Dr. Sightler stood at the altar as was his custom, to greet and shake hands with the people. An elderly lady approached and asked, “Dr. Sightler, do you remember me?” He replied, “No ma’am, I am sorry I do not.” She added, “Do you remember the woman, years ago who wrote you and said she was a vile reprobate who had broken all ten of God’s commandments?” Astonished, he looked at the face of this old woman, as radiant as an angel

from Heaven; “You?!!!”, he exclaimed. “Yes, sir,” she replied, and said, “I just wanted to come visit the Tabernacle. I’ve been saved now for a long time and I just wanted to tell you that after all these years it is still good!”

The love of God is miraculous in its power. Our differences abound, but in one profound way we are all alike: *“for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3: 23). Sin is the common thread woven into every heart. Sin results in Divine judgement: *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 6: 23). Such death means eternal separation from God. Suppose one could stop sinning and never sin again; he remains nonetheless a sinner because of the sins of his past. Man is powerless to change his past but God’s gift is the solution to the sins of our past: *“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”* (Romans 3: 24-26). Eternal life is the gift of God’s love: Transforming love; cleansing and forgiving, making a new creature of the vilest reprobate, fit for the Kingdom of God.

The love of God is manifested even in divine correction: *“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth . . . ”* (Hebrews 12: 6). The erring saint is given ample opportunity to repent (1 Corinthians 11: 31), but unconfessed sin will ultimately bring the chastisement of a loving Father. Why? Because He hates His child and wishes to punish him? No! Divine chastisement is never for punishment but rather for correction, and always with the loving aim of restoring His

child: *“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*  
(Hebrews 12: 10-11).

Earthly gifts rarely last a lifetime. Either the gift or the giver fails. But God’s love is forever, an inexhaustible gift freely extended by its eternal Author: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*  
(Romans 8: 35-39).

Such divine love cannot be appropriated by the exercise of persuasive power, prestige or position of mortal men. Nor is it earned by good works as most religious organizations suggest; it is the prerogative of God alone to give, and He alone determines to whom it is offered. His choice includes the entire world (1 John 2: 1-2). The love of God is defined by its **invitation**. The offering is both **all-inclusive**, and **personal**. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever . . .”* Whosoever includes anyone ever born into the family of man from the greatest to the least, the *“somebody”* and the *“nobody”* alike. Yet the invitation is as **personal** as if God

had inscribed my name alone upon a tablet of stone. **“Whosoever”** meant me and you and anyone who will open his heart, repent of his sins and accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

Is **Everlasting Life** a promise to be fulfilled at the **end** of life, or at its **beginning**? Does God impose a “trial period” throughout life to qualify those worthy of His gift? Consider the Scriptures to understand when life, real living truly begins for repentant sinners: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”*  
(John 5: 24).

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

The gift of God’s love is **effective immediately**. Not “down the road,” nor in the “sweet by and by,” but **now!** And it will endure for a lifetime and throughout eternity. Faith is not something which may be proven under a microscope but if you will take God at His word He will prove it to you in your heart every day of your life, and you will never regret trusting Him for your salvation.

The story is told of a reception for students and family at a prestigious seminary long ago, at which the following question was asked of the headmaster; “What is the most profound truth you have ever discovered in the Bible?” Expecting a great theological reply, the simple answer from the old professor quieted the listening crowd; tears filled his eyes as he whispered, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!”

This then is my message to you on the greatest love-verse in the Bible: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3: 16).

Our Lord put it there as a constant reminder of His great love for sinners. We may read it any time we wish, whenever we please. But have you opened your heart to Him, and through the power of a changed life, told Him how much ***you love Him***? We will have all eternity to tell Him how much we love Him, but it will not be long enough to love Him with the love which He deserves! It will surely be the centerpiece of Heaven’s praise; it ought rightly to be at the heart of our worship and service today.

### ***A closing prayer . . .***

Dear Lord, before this day comes to a close, after another day of loaded benefits, none of which I deserve, I just want you to know that I love you for loving me. *“We love him, because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4: 19)

### ***A word from the author:***

I have preached this sermon in revivals and church meetings throughout the span of my ministry; God has honored His Word and lives have been touched by the old, old story of love. If you have asked Jesus Christ to forgive and save you or if you have been encouraged by reading this message please share it with someone you love. Additional copies of this and other inspirational booklets are available by writing:

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