

JOHN THREE: SIXTEEN

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CHAPTER TWO

So Loved

"LITTLE IS MUCH when GOD is in it" is a true statement, and there is much in this little text of two words "**so loved**" because GOD is in it. This is GOD's love.

This text does not say that the FATHER so loved, but that GOD so loved, bringing to us the great, grand, and glorious fact that our salvation is the result of the love of our Triune GOD. Our salvation is divinely purposed by the loving FATHER, divinely prepared by the loving Son, divinely imparted by the loving SPIRIT. It was wrought out by the FATHER Who is love; it was wrought for us by the SON Who is love; it is wrought in us by the SPIRIT Who is love.

"So Loved" Beggars Description

What is love? It is a mystery, to be sure. It absolutely cannot be defined. Words can no more define love than they can depict GOD. If you tried to analyze love, where would you get? People talk about being in love, but what do they mean? The dictionary does not help much. It gives a great many definitions, but most of them mean no more than the young man's definition which stated that it was a "tickle under the fifth rib."

We give several statements from the dictionary, although we are sure they will still leave you in the dark. "To have a feeling of affection or regard for; be strongly attached to or attracted toward; hold dear; as, to love home or friends; to love life." "To take pleasure or delight in; hence have great partiality, appetite, or liking for; as, to love to do good; she loves ice cream." "Love is the yearning or outgoing of soul toward something that is regarded as excellent, beautiful, or desirable; love may be briefly defined as strong and absorbing affection for and attraction toward a person or object. Love may denote the sublimest and holiest spiritual affection, as when we are taught that '**God is love.**'" Be sure that GOD's love is not mere emotional affection. Such definition falls far short.

The dictionary gives as synonyms for love - affection, attachment, attraction, charity, devotion, feeling, fondness, friendship, liking, passion, regard and tenderness.

Hundreds of quotations might be given which seek to explain love, but each one leads you to feel that the explanation needs an explanation.

We quote Luther: "Love is an image of GOD, and not a lifeless image, but the living essence of

the Divine nature which beams full of all goodness."

Dr. John Henry Jowett writes: "Love is not feeling, but fealty; love is not emotion, but devotion; love is not ecstasy but chivalry; love is not luscious sensations but faithfulness unto death."

Hear Drummond: "Love has nine ingredients - courtesy, unselfishness, kindness, generosity, humility, good temper, guilelessness, patience, sincerity."

Harriet Martineaux asks: "Must love be ever treated with profaneness as a mere illusion? or with coarseness as a mere impulse? or with fear as a mere disease? or with shame as a mere weakness? or with levity as a mere accident? whereas it is a great mystery and a great necessity, lying at the foundation of human existence, morality and happiness - mysterious, universal, inevitable as death."

A. H. Strong declares: "By love we mean that attribute of the Divine nature in virtue of which GOD is eternally moved to self-communication."

Doran writes in a report of the British and Foreign Bible Society: "From the island Ambrym, in the New Hebrides, we hear a beautiful word, the native word for love. Literally translated it means, 'The heart keeps calling, calling, calling for me,' and love of GOD in the Ambrym language is 'the heartcallings of GOD.'"

Scripture states that **"love is the fulfilling of the law."** That is not a definition of love, however. It tells of the obedience of love.

I Corinthians 13 renders the word "love" as "charity." Three hundred years ago when the Authorized Version was written, charity meant practically what our word "love" means today. Our present day use of the word "charity," however, does not fulfill the word love. Charity may be dealt out with coldness and severity and contempt. Charity can be organized. We have it organized in Minneapolis. Charity may be administered without much or any heart. The love of GOD cannot be organized in such manner.

How weak the words of men when defining love, but how much greater the difficulty becomes when we join to it the little word "so" - **"so loved."** SO is one of the shortest but one of the greatest words in this verse.

"God SO loved." How much is that? How much is SO? How long is SO? Spurgeon, in commenting on this little word, said: "Come, ye surveyors, bring your chains, and try to make a survey of this word 'so.' Nay, that is not enough. Come hither, ye that make our national surveys, and lay down charts for all nations. Come ye, who map the sea and land, and make a chart of this word 'so.' Nay, I must go further. Come hither, ye astronomers, that with your optic glasses spy out spaces before which imagination staggers, come hither and encounter calculations worthy of all your powers. When you have measured between the horns and space, here is a task that will defy you - **'God SO loved the world.'**"

"Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break!"

And all harmonious human tongues
Their Savior's praises speak!

"Angels, assist our mighty joys;
Strike all your harps of gold;
But when you raise your highest notes,
His love can ne'er be told!"

"So Loved" Surpasses Illustration

This is true because all illustrations of Divine love are human illustrations. *No human love is a measuring-stick for Divine love.*

The love of mother. This love has frequently been spoken of as the greatest illustration of Divine love. We rejoice in such love, and could say with Kipling:

If I were hanged on the highest hill,
I know whose love would follow me still.
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine!

If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
I know whose tears would come down to me
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine!

If I were damned of body and soul
I know whose prayers would make me whole
Mother o'mine, O mother o'mine."

Yet GOD asks the question, "**Can a woman forget her sucking child?**" (Isaiah 49:15). As we think of our mothers we instantly answer, "No," but GOD answers, "Yes," and as we pause to think, case after case will come to mind which will verify GOD's answer. Then GOD goes on to say, "**Yet will I not forget thee.**" No, mother-love is not a measuring-stick for GOD's love.

The love of FATHER. Scripture emphasizes this love. It speaks of sorrow as when a father mourneth for his son. Addison said, "Certain it is that there is no kind of affection so purely angelic as the love of a father to a daughter." When we read this quotation recently, the mind went back to an old song that Mother used to sing. The song told the story of a daughter driven from home by the father. This has been repeated in true life many and many a time. No, father-love is not a measuring-stick for GOD's love.

The love of lovers. A great many regard the deepest love as that existing between a young man and a young woman. Yet how often that love burns out. George Matheson was a blind poet. Before he lost his sight he was engaged to a young lady whom he loved very dearly. He had trouble with his eyes, and his physician finally informed him that it was only a matter of a short

time until his sight would be permanently gone. He felt it his duty to offer his fiancée a release from the engagement, feeling that because of her great love for him she would not accept it. His love for her was that great. Yet when he told her and offered her her freedom, she drew her engagement ring from her finger and offered it back to him saying, "Why, George, I couldn't be tied to a blind man the rest of my life." With earthly darkness closing in upon him, and with a heart darkened by the loss of this human companion, he went to his room and there thought of a love that was beyond the love of any woman. In that hour of darkness he poured forth the throbs of his heart in these immortal words:

"O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be."

No, lovers' love is not a measuring-stick for GOD's love. His love surpasses all human love.

"So Loved" Transcends Emotion

Some theologians speak of different kinds of love. Others speak of different phases or forms of love. Others, such as Kerfoot, at one time Professor of Systematic Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, taught that love was a principle of willing self-impartation which expressed itself in natural emotions. These emotions vary according to the object upon which love exercises itself. We mention a few of these emotions to show that GOD's love far transcends them.

Affection. This is love that exists between intimates, but it cannot be used in John 3:16, for there is no intimacy between GOD and sinners. GOD does not fellowship with sinners. Some might mistakenly object to this statement, referring to the love that existed between the father and the prodigal son, but please remember that that "son" was a son. He bore a relationship to the father. That is not true of the sinner. A sinner is the creature of GOD but not the child of GOD. "**Ye are of your father the devil,**" said our Lord. GOD has affection for His own, but "**so loved**" far transcends affection.

Approval or approbation. "**God saw that it was good**" is what we mean by this. This is an emotion in relation to any attitude or act of GOD's children who earnestly and sincerely try to please Him, but certainly nothing a sinner can do ever can be pleasing to GOD. We are sure that GOD was well pleased with the efforts of Paul, the Apostle, but just as certain that there was no approval for anything done by Saul of Tarsus. GOD has approval for His own, but "**so loved**" far transcends approval.

Complacency. This is deeper than approval. It has to do with merit and virtue. This emotion is illustrated in the words of the FATHER, "**This is My beloved Son.**" The FATHER was deeply pleased with the SON. However, there is no merit in the sinner to call forth this love of GOD. GOD does have complacency for His own, but "**so loved**" far transcends complacency.

Gratitude. This emotion springs from good deeds. Such an emotion may be yours for some one who has been helpful to you. But what good deed has any sinner ever done to call forth this emotion from GOD? GOD would feel so toward His own for their efforts in His behalf no matter how feeble those efforts might be, even as a parent may be pleased with the puny efforts of a child, but "**so loved**" far transcends gratitude.

Esteem. This emotion has to do with estimable qualities. Buckingham wrote, "All true love is grounded on esteem." This may be true of human love, but what in the sinner could call forth the esteem of GOD? He has written, "**There is none good, no not one.**" GOD does highly esteem His own, but "**so loved**" far transcends esteem.

"So Loved" Defies Comprehension

The mind of man will never be able to comprehend the love of GOD.

His love is spontaneous, sovereign, uncaused, uninfluenced. There was nothing in us to call it out. There was nothing in us to attract it. What is there in me to attract the heart of GOD? Absolutely nothing. Everything about me should make Him loathe me - a poor, sinful, depraved, disgraceful, corrupt human being with no good thing in me. The old saint was right about all of us when he said, "If GOD did not see anything in me to love before I was born, He certainly hasn't since I was born."

There is an amazing statement in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, "**The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you.**" What a statement! The Lord loved you because He loved you.

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in Thy sight."

His love is everlasting, unending. "**I have loved thee with an everlasting love.**" This is of necessity since GOD Himself is eternal. GOD had no beginning, so love had no beginning. Your mother commenced to love you, but your heavenly FATHER never commenced to love you. Your mother did not love you before you were born, but your FATHER has loved you from all eternity. He had you in His mind and in His heart ever since He was GOD, and He has been GOD from all eternity.

That everlasting love not only goes back into the reaches of eternity; it goes forward as well. Eternity is a circle with neither beginning nor end. As Dr. Hinson once preached, "God is speaking to you today and saying, 'There never was a time in My life - the lifetime of GOD - when I did not love you.'" And when will GOD's love for you end? When eternity ends. When will GOD's love for you end? When GOD's life ends.

You may go back beyond the time when a wave beat upon the beach, or a star shone in the sky, or the leaf of a tree fluttered in the breeze, or an angel worshipped before the throne, and when you get back as far as the mind can reach, you will be no nearer the beginning of GOD's love for you than you are now. If you project your mind into the future to the time when the mountains have molded down into dust, or out beyond the time when the sun has grown cold, and the stars are old, and the leaves of the judgment book unfold, you will be no nearer the end of GOD's love than you are now. We say GOD's love defies comprehension. None of us understand the meaning of what we have just written. We do know that His love for us is from everlasting to everlasting.

"He loved me, ere yet one ray of light
Had flashed itself across the boundless sky,
When all was solitude and starless night,
He loved me then: And shall it ever die?

"Ah, no, that love shall onward, onward roll,
Increasing in its flow, till like the sea,
It breaks in thrills of rapture on the soul,
And spends itself through all eternity."

His love is infinite, illimitable, unbounded. We sometimes say that GOD's love towers above us as the mountains, but you reach the summit of the mountains. They stop. There is no summit to the love of GOD. What a poor finite illustration that is! It is comparable to the answer of the babe when someone says, "How big is big?" and the babe says, "So-o-o high!" stretching tiny hand above the head in measure.

We teach our children to sing "Wide, wide as the ocean," but the ocean is bounded by shores. GOD's love is boundless, shoreless. What a poor finite illustration! It is comparable to the answer of the babe when mother asks, "How much do you love me?" and baby says, "So-o-o much!" stretching wide the tiny arms. So much - from tiny pink finger tip to tiny pink finger tip. We are as helpless as baby when it comes to measuring the love of GOD.

Old John Foster lay dying, and after a night of weariness and pain, was asked by a friend, "How are you feeling this morning?" "Ah," said he, "Wonderfully well. I have my head down on three pillows; the pillow of GOD's infinite power, the pillow of GOD's infinite wisdom, the pillow of GOD's infinite love. I am well. I am resting on three pillows."

His love is immutable, unchangeable. As with GOD Himself, there is in it no variableness, neither shadow of turning. A sinner may go to hell unsaved; he cannot go to hell unloved. The Christian rejoices in the fact that nothing can separate him from GOD's love.

"His love no end nor measure knows,
No change can turn its course,
Eternally the same it flows
From one eternal source."

"So Loved" Provides Redemption

Henry Ward Beecher said, "We never know how much one loves till we know how much he was willing to endure and suffer for us; and it is the suffering element that measures love." This is true. The measure of GOD's love is seen in the suffering of Calvary. What suffering has ever been like unto this? Where will we find words to describe it? Someone has said that if you could climb a ladder to Heaven and say to Gabriel and the angels, "How much did GOD love the world?" they would shake their heads in wonder and then reply, **"God SO loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."** "So" is the equation between the loving and the giving.

Of human love our Lord said, **"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend"** (John 15:13). But **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"** for His bitterest enemies. A woman said, when told of GOD's love gift, "I can't understand such love. I have two children, and I wouldn't give one of them for the best friend I have in the world, yet you tell me that GOD gave His only Son for His bitterest enemies. I can't understand such love." Who can? Yet, that is the love story of GOD's Word. GOD gave the Son of His love for a world He loved, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

One has beautifully written: "As we gaze upon the Cross the whole being of CHRIST speaks with substitutionary love, and the whole environment is replete with vicarious suffering!

- His heart of love bleeds in death to cleanse us;
- His hands of love are wounded to heal us;
- His feet of love are nailed to release us;
- His side of love is pierced to assure us;
- His body of love is stripped to clothe us;
- His lips of love are parched to bless us;
- His tongue of love is agonized to calm us;
- His head of love is cursed with thorns to crown us;
- His cross of love is shameful to enrich us;
- His death of love is awful to quicken us.

"The whole surroundings of the cross throb with love. The darkened heavens are bright with love's joy; the rending rocks are opened with love's grace; the cruel tree is blooming with love's fruit; the hate of man is the dark background for love's action; the malice of hell is the opportunity for love's triumph; the mockery of the crowd is the call for love's patience; and the suffering for sin unfolds the provision of love's grace."

Many have been thrilled by reading the story of Curfew. A young soldier had committed some offense and was condemned to die. The time of his death was fixed "at the ringing of the curfew." This would naturally be a great disappointment to one who was young in years, but it was a double sorrow because he was soon to marry a beautiful young woman whom he had loved for a long time. The young woman who loved him tried in various ways to save his life, but her efforts seemed to fail. She even tried to bribe the old sexton so that he would not ring the bell, but she could not do that.

The hour for his death drew near. The preparations were made. The prisoner was brought forth. They waited for the signal, but to the astonishment of everyone, the bell did not ring. The girl who loved the young man so much had rushed unseen to the belfry and seized the tongue of the bell. At the fatal moment the old sexton threw his weight upon the rope and the bell reeled to and fro in the tower. The brave girl kept her hold although her position was dangerous. At last the sexton went away. Old and deaf he had not noticed that the bell gave no sound. The brave girl hurried from the church to the place of execution and reached there just as Cromwell was sending to demand why the bell did not ring.

"And her brow,
Lately white with sorrow, glows with hope and courage now,
At his feet she told her story, showed her hands all bruised and torn,
And her young face still haggard with the anguish it had worn,
Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with misty light
'Go; your love lives,' cried Cromwell; 'Curfew shall not ring tonight'."

The Bible tells us of another story of love. CHRIST died upon the Cross to save us from our sins because He loved us SO much. Let us receive Him as a personal SAVIOUR, and give of our lives in service that others may know and love Him too.

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