

OF THE LOVE OF GOD

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY,

BOOK 1.

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Dr. John Gill. D.D.

Chapter 12

OF THE LOVE OF GOD

Next to the attributes which belong to God, as an intelligent Spirit, to his understanding and will, may be considered, those which may be called “Affections”; for though, properly speaking, there are none in God, he being a most pure and simple act, free from all confusion and disorder; yet there being some things said and done by him, which are similar to affections in intelligent beings, they are ascribed to him; as love, pity, hatred, anger, &c. from which must be removed everything that is carnal, sensual, or has any degree of imperfection in it; and among these, Love stands in the first place; and this enters so much into the nature of God, that it is said, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). So the Shekinah, or the divine majesty and glory, is, by the Jews, called אהבה “Love”; and the heathens give the same name to God; Plato expressly calls him “Love”: and Hesiod speaks of love as the fairest and most beautiful among the immortal gods. In treating of this divine attribute, I shall,

1. Consider the objects of it. And,

1. The principal object of the love of God is himself. Self-love is in all intelligent beings; nor is it discommendable, when it is not carried to a criminal excess, and to the neglect of others; none are obliged to love others more than themselves, but as themselves (Matthew 22:39). God first and chiefly loves himself; and hence he has made himself, that is, his glory, the ultimate end of all he does in nature, providence, and grace, (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11; Eph. 1:6) and his happiness lies in contemplating himself, his nature and perfections; in that love, complacency and delight he has in himself; nor needs he, nor can he have anything out of himself that can add to his essential happiness.

The three divine Persons in the Godhead mutually love each other; the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son. That the Father loves the Son, is more than once said, (John 3:35, 5:20) and the Son is sometimes called the well beloved and dear Son of God, (Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Col. 1:13) he was from all eternity as “one brought up with him”; and was loved by him before the foundation of the world; and that with a love of complacency and delight; as he must, since “he is the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person”, and is of the same nature, and possessed of all the same perfections with him, (Prov. 8:30, 31; John 17:24; Heb. 1:3; Col. 2:9) yea, he loved him as his Servant, as the Mediator, in his state of humiliation, and obedience, and under all his sufferings, and on account of them; and even while he bore his wrath as the sinner’s surety, he was the object of his love, as his Son, (Isa. 42:1; Matthew 3:17; John 10:17) and now he is at his right hand, in human nature, he looks upon him with delight, and is well pleased with his sacrifice, satisfaction, and righteousness. The Father loves the Spirit; being the very breath of him, from whence he has his name, and proceeding from him, and possessing the same nature and essence with him (Job 33:4; Ps. 33:6; John 15:26; 1 John 5:7). The Son loves the Father, of whom he is begotten, with whom he was brought up, in whose bosom he lay from all eternity, as his own and only begotten Son; and as man, the law of God was in his heart; the sum of which is to love the Lord God with all the heart and soul; and as Mediator he showed his love to him by an obedience to his commandment, even though that was to suffer death for his people (Ps. 40:8; John 14:31, 10:18; Phil. 2:8). The Son also loves the Spirit, since he proceeds from him, as from the Father, and is called the Spirit of the Son, (Gal. 4:6) and Christ often speaks of him with pleasure and delight, (Isa. 48:16, 61:1; John 14:16, 17, 26, 15:26, 16:7, 13). And the Spirit loves the Father and the Son, and sheds abroad the love of them both in the hearts

of his people; he searches into the deep things of God, and reveals them to them; and takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto them; and so is both the Comforter of them, and the Glorifier of him (1 Cor. 2:10-12; John 16:14).

2. All that God has made is the object of his love; all the works of creation, when he had made them, he looked over them, and saw that they were good, "very good", (Gen. 1:31) he was well pleased, and delighted with them; yea, he is said to "rejoice in his works", (Ps. 104:31) he upholds all creatures in their beings, and is the Preserver of all, both men and beasts; and is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works, (Ps. 36:6, 145:9) and particularly, rational creatures are the objects of his care, love, and delight: he loves the holy angels, and has shown his love to them in choosing them to happiness; hence they are called "elect angels", (1 Tim. 5:21) by making Christ the head of them, by whom they are confirmed in the estate in which they were created, (Col. 2:10) and by admitting them into his presence, allowing them to stand before him, and behold his face, (Matthew 18:10) yea, even the devils, as they are the creatures of God, are not hated by him, but as they are apostate spirits from him: and so he bears a general love to all men, as they are his creatures, his offspring, and the work of his hands; he supports them, preserves them, and bestows the bounties of his providence in common upon them, (Acts 17:28, 14:17; Matthew 5:45) but he bears a special love to elect men in Christ; which is called his "great love", (Eph. 2:4) whom he has chosen and blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, (Eph. 1:3, 4) and which love is distinguishing and discriminating (Mai 1:1, 2; Rom. 9:11, 12). I go on to,

II. Give some instances of the love of God, particularly to chosen men in Christ, and who share in the love of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The love of the Father has appeared in thinking of them, thoughts of peace; in contriving and forming the scheme of their peace and reconciliation in Christ, from eternity, (2 Cor. 5:18, 19) in choosing them in him from the beginning, even from everlasting, to salvation, by him, (2 Thess. 2:13) in putting their persons into the hands of Christ, and securing and preserving them in him, (Deut. 33:3; Jude 1:1) in laying up all blessings in him for them, and blessing them with them so early, (Eph. 1:3, 4) in appointing Christ to be the Saviour of them; in providing, promising, and sending him into the world, to work out their salvation, (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10; Titus 3:4, 5) in the pardon of their sins through the blood of Christ, (Isa. 38:17; Eph. 1:7) in their adoption, (1 John 3:1) in their regeneration and conversion, (Jer. 31:3; Eph. 2:4, 5) and in the gift of eternal life unto them (Rom. 6:23).

The love of the Son of God appears in espousing the persons of the elect, those sons of men, in whom his delights were before the world was, (Prov. 8:31; Hosea 2:19) in becoming their Surety for good, undertaking their cause, engaging to do the will of God with that cheerfulness he did; which was to work out their salvation, (Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 7:22) in assuming their nature, in the fullness of time, to redeem them, work out a righteousness, and make reconciliation for them, (Gal. 4:4, 5; Rom. 8:3, 4; Heb. 2:14, 17) by giving himself a Sacrifice for them; laying down his life on their account; and shedding his blood for the cleansing of their souls, and the remission of their sins (Eph. 5:2, 25; Titus 2:14; 1 John 3:16; Rev. 1:5).

The love of the Spirit, of which mention is made in (Rom. 15:30) appears in his coming into the hearts of God's elect, to convince them of sin and righteousness, and to comfort them; by showing the grace of the covenant, and the blessings of it to them; by opening and applying the promises of it; and by shedding abroad the love of God and Christ in their hearts; by implanting every grace in them, and drawing them forth into exercise; by witnessing to their spirits their adoption; by assisting them in every duty, particularly in prayer, making intercession for them, according to the will of God; and in being the earnest, pledge, and seal of them to the day of redemption (John 16:7, 8; Rom. 8:15, 16, 26, 27; Eph. 1:13, 14).

3. It may be proper next to consider the properties of the love of God towards chosen men, which will lead more into the nature of it. And,

1. There is no cause of it out of God; there is no motive or inducement to it in them, no loveliness in them to excite it; all men by nature are corrupt and abominable; rather to be loathed than loved; and those that are loved, are no better than others, all being under sin; and are, "by nature, children of wrath, as others"; as deserving of that as those that are not loved, (Rom. 3:9; Eph. 2:3) what loveliness or beauty is in saints, is owing to the righteousness of Christ, imputed to them; which is that comeliness that is put upon them, whereby they are made perfectly comely; and to the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, whereby they are all glorious within, and appear in the beauties of holiness: so that all this is the fruit of the love of God, and not the cause of it. Nor can it be any love in them to

God, that is the cause of his to them; for they had no love in them when Christ died for them; nor until regenerated by the Spirit of God; and when they love him, it is because he first loved them, (1 John 4:10, 19) and though Christ is said to love them that love him, and the Father is said to love them too; yet this must not be understood of the first love of God and Christ, unto them, nor of the first display of it; but of further and larger manifestations of it to them; and is descriptive of the persons who are most certainly and evidently the objects of their love; but not as being the cause of it, (Prov. 8:17; John 14:21, 23, 16:27). Nor are good works the cause of this love; for this, at least, in one instance of it, was before either good or evil were done, (Rom. 9:11, 12) and in other instances it broke forth towards them, and broke in upon them while they were yet in their sins, and before they were capable of performing good works, (Rom. 5:8; Titus 3:3, 4; Eph. 2:2-4) and how can it be thought, that since the best works of men are so impure and imperfect as to be reckoned as filthy rags, that these should be the cause of God's love to men? no, even faith itself is not; that "is the gift of God", and flows from electing love, and is a fruit and evidence of it (Eph. 2:8; Acts 13:48; Titus 1:1). God loves men, not because they have faith; but they have faith given them, because God loves them; it is true indeed, that "without faith it is impossible to please God"; that is, to do those things which are pleasing in his sight; but then the persons of God's elect, may be, and are, well pleasing to God, in Christ, before faith, and without it. In short, the love of God purely flows from his good will and pleasure; who "is gracious to whom he will be gracious", (Ex. 33:19) it is that pure river that proceeds out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb, as an emblem of sovereignty, (Rev. 22:1) as God loved the people of Israel because he loved them, or would love them; and for no other reason, (Deut. 7:7, 8) in like manner he loves his spiritual and mystical Israel.

2. The love of God is eternal, it does not commence in time, it is without beginning, it is from eternity: this is evident from the love of God to Christ, which was before the foundation of the world; and with the same love he loved him, he loved his people also, and as early, (John 17:23, 24) and from various acts of love to them in eternity; as the election of them in Christ, which supposes the love of them, (Eph. 1:4) the covenant of grace made with them, in which, grants of grace, and promises of glory, were made before the world began; and Christ was set up as the Mediator of it from everlasting; all which are strong proofs of love to them (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Prov. 8:22, 23).

3. The love of God is immutable, unalterable, and invariable; it is like himself, "the same today, yesterday, and for ever": and, indeed, God is love; it is his nature; it is himself; and therefore must be without any variableness, or shadow of turning. It admits of no distinctions, by which it appears to alter and vary. Some talk of a love of benevolence, by which God wishes or wills good to men; and then comes on a love of beneficence, and he does good to them, and works good in them: and then a love of complacency and delight takes place, and not till then. But this is to make God changeable, as we are: the love of God admits of no degrees, it neither increases nor decreases; it is the same from the instant in eternity it was, without any change: it is needless to ask whether it is the same before as after conversion, since there were as great, if not greater gifts of love, bestowed on the object loved, before conversion, as after; such as the gift of God himself, in the everlasting covenant; the gift of his Son to die for them when in their sins; and the gift of the Spirit to them, in order to regenerate, quicken, and convert them; heaven itself, eternal life, is not a greater gift than these; and yet they were all before conversion. There never were any stops, lets, or impediments to this love; not the fall of Adam, nor the sad effects of it; nor the actual sins and transgressions of God's people, in a state of nature; nor all their backslidings, after called by grace; for still he loves them freely, (Hosea 14:4) for God foreknew that they would fall in Adam, with others, that they would be transgressors from the womb, and do as evil as they could; yet this hindered not his taking up thoughts of love towards them, his choice of them, and covenant with them. Conversion makes a change in them; brings them from the power of Satan to God, from darkness to light, from bondage to liberty; from fellowship with evil men to communion with God: but it makes no change in the love of God; God changes his dispensations and dealings with them, but never changes his love; he sometimes rebukes and chastises them, but still he loves them; he sometimes hides his face from them, but his love continues the same, (Ps. 89:29-33; Isa. 54:7-10) the manifestations of his love are various; to some they are greater, to others less; and so to the same persons, at different times; but love in his own heart is invariable and unchangeable.

4. The love of God endures for ever; it is an everlasting love, in that sense, (Jer. 31:3) it is the bond of union between God and Christ, and the elect; and it can never be dissolved; nothing can separate it, nor separate from it (Rom. 8:35, 38, 39). The union it is the bond of, is next to that, and like it, which is between the three divine persons (John 17:21, 23). The union between soul and body, may be, and is dissolved, at death; but neither death nor life

can separate from this; this lovingkindness of God never departs; though health, and wealth, and friends, and life itself may depart, this never will, (Isa. 54:10) whatever God takes away, as all the said things may be taken away by him, he will never take away this, (Ps. 89:33) having loved his own which were in the world, he loves them to the end, to the end of their lives, to the end of time, and to all eternity (John 13:1).