

**1st John 4: 19; “Because He First Loved Us”, Sermon # 20 in the series –
“Behold What Manner of Love”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on October 7th, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In verse 18 we see that perfect love casts out fear in relation to men, as well as in relation to God. But oftentimes we as Christians are actually more afraid of men than we should be, and we are actually less afraid of God than we should be. With the love of Jesus Christ at work in our hearts, perfecting our love, we need not fear either God or man with a craven fear. A right fear of God comes from loving God because He first loved us as it says in verse 19. This afternoon, before we partake of the Lord's Supper, I want to set before you 1st of all – How God loved us first. 2nd – How we are to conceive of our love to Him. And 3rd – What our remembrance of His love will lead us to.

1st of all – Let's think about how God loved us first.

“We love Him because He first loved us.” This verse shows us something very important about our salvation; that is, that it was God who came before us in His showing His love for us, before we ever had any true love for Him. Indeed, He loved all of His elect people from before the foundation of the world. In Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 3, Jeremiah says – “The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’” Now, if you loved God first, the verse would not read this way. If you loved God first, then why would He have to draw you to Himself. You would have run to Him first, and you would have proved your love for Him first, by keeping all of His commandments, and by attempting to please Him in everything. Verse 2 of Jeremiah 31 does not say that God showed this electing love to all Israelites irrespective of saving purpose. What does He say? He says – “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness – Israel when I went to give Him rest.” This shows us that not all Israel was spiritual Israel; not all Israel was elect Israel. It was only those who were shown grace; only those whom God chose to show mercy to who were loved with this everlasting love.

Listen to Malachi chapter 1, and verse 1. “The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.” “I have loved you, says the Lord, yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob's brother?” says the Lord.” “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.” The way that God loved Israel was to choose to save him from his sins, and to preserve him from Esau's destructive hatred and to make an elect nation out of him. God set His love upon Jacob to save him when he did not deserve it. Let me ask you now whether you believe that that you deserved to be saved by God? Can you tell me the reason that you deserved to be saved? Oh, you say, I deserve to be saved because I have always loved to read His word and do His will. And I sought him when I was just a little child. Ah, yes, that may be true that you sought Him when you were a little child, and you may have even come to know Him as a little child. But have you ever thought about the fact that if you were seeking him as a little child that it was only because of His precious and powerful grace drawing you to Himself; teaching you in your heart and mind that He was the perfectly holy God; and then early on, opening your heart and renewing your will to seek Him? Did you see yourself as a sinner when you were a little child, or did you see yourself as a really good little boy or girl?

Certainly, if you are a true Christian, you do not believe that you brought salvation to yourself on your own, apart from grace, by your own free-will, do you? The Bible very clearly states in Romans 3 that there is none who seeks after God, no not one. Let it be known here today that anyone here who has come to know God, that His saving love to you was not based upon anything lovely that God saw in you, and therefore said to Himself – I think that I will choose that person. I think that I approve of them just as they are. And so I think that I will set my love upon them because of the good things that I see in them. No, the Bible tells us that if you are a Christian, it was always and eternally the fact that it was God's purpose to set His love upon you, and He did so in time and space at a particular point in your life, because He knew that you were a sinner and that He alone could save you. All those who make up the spiritual Israel of God have come to Him by faith; not in themselves, not in their own

inherent goodness, not on the basis of their good works, but on the basis of the grace which was given to them by God in relation to the promise of Christ. And the promise of God in salvation is always made based upon what God purposed that Christ would do for them, His elect people. All of us were unworthy and undeserving sinners, but we need to be reminded often, that it was only on the basis of the grace of Christ, that God drew you to Himself.

So, to be clear, the reason that you love God at all, is because He first loved you. By nature none of us knows God or loves God because there is sin in our nature which has alienated us from God. If you know God and have come to love God, it was not simply your choosing to love Him on your own, apart from grace. It was because you learned of God's love in Christ, and you believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ; that you were a sinner, and yet you heard that God loves sinners in Christ, and He saves them when they cannot save themselves. It was because God showed you this loving saving mercy that you learned this new and living way to live your life to Him. God drew you to Himself by His spiritually teaching your heart and your mind about His love in Christ. His love was demonstrated first of all in His gift of Christ to do the work of redemption. And then His love was shown to you in His calling you to Himself through the gospel promise being preached to you by a Christian, showing you that God would save you by your trusting in His Son.

This was God's love to you. It was demonstrated in Christ's life and death, and it is also the love which was freely offered you in the gospel. God is saying this – If you will believe in My love, that is in My giving of My Son for a sinner like you, then I will justify you in My sight. If you will trust in My promise, I will be reconciled to You through His finished work of righteousness and sufferings for your sins. I will adopt you into My family, and I will treat you as My Well-Beloved, as though you have never sinned against Me, in the way that I view you. When you do sin, you will have My Son as an Advocate for you, with Me, the Father. He ever lives to make intercession for you. If you accept that My Son is the Holy One and the Righteous One, and you are the sinner applying to Me for grace and favor, then I will make over to you personally all the benefits of His life, and death, and resurrection. And when I make these benefits over to you, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the New Birth, then you will come to really experience My love being poured out in your heart, and your life will become radically different from what it once was. For now there will be created in you, righteous attitudes toward Me and My word, and righteous thoughts and actions toward Me and towards others by the power of the Holy Spirit. This, my brethren, is why John says, “We love, because He first loved us.”

2nd – I want you to think with me now for a few minutes about how we are to conceive of our love for Him.

We have seen so far that our being able to love at all, in a way which is pleasing to God is based upon our coming to perceive His great love for us. Ephesians 2: 4 – “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...” This radical change, in who you love and what you love, you should understand, did not come from yourself; but it came from the Lord above. How then, should we respond to this kind of love? Well, listen to Ephesians 4: 17-24 – “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” “But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.”

How do you show forth your love to God? You do so on the basis of the reality of His having shown forth His love to you, in giving you the gospel and in teaching you Christ. He has graciously allowed you to hear of Him and be taught by Him, and now you are learning to put off your former sinful and self-absorbed conduct; the way that you used to live before you came to faith in Christ. You

have put off the Old Man, the person that you once were before you came to faith in Christ. You are putting off the deeds of the Old Man, the flesh, those sinful motions of your heart which are put forth by your flesh; your remaining indwelling corruption which would like to bring you back to the sin which once dominated your life. That sin once ruled over you, and had dominion over your heart and life and conduct. But now you are being renewed in the spirit of your mind daily. You have put on the New Man at conversion and you put him on every day. That is, you have put on Christ, and you have taken up His yoke and you are learning from Him what is good and right for you to do at every given moment in your day.

For you have come to realize, and you now know that this New Man is the new person which you are, and are becoming, in Christ. You are being conformed to His blessed image by the power of the Holy Spirit. You are not the Old Man that you once were, even though his motions keep coming up and will come up at times during the rest of your earthly life. You will mortify his motions and his deeds. You know from the word of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit within you, that he does not have dominion over you anymore, and so you now understand that you are free to put on what Christ would have you to put on – His life in you, which will lead you to righteousness and true holiness. When you come to partake of the Supper in a few minutes, will you not thank God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ for this severe mercy that has been shown to you? It is not only that God has rescued you and delivered you from such a great weight of sin and death, and has given you light and life, to live in the way that will please Him. He has also set His love upon you, and this love will continue to be shown to you through all the days of your life and all throughout an endless eternity.

Because God has loved us in this glorious way, by sending His Son to live for us and to die for us, we therefore are those who will show forth our thankfulness to Him, in expressing our love to Him, in our words and actions, in an on-going way throughout the rest of our life. We do not have to think upon God punishing us, or the fear that we will ever taste this eternal death. Christ has tasted that death for us. Instead, the thought that ought to often come to our mind is that goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Since we know that He loves us, we also know that we can now love Him in very practical ways. He loved us and gave Himself for us, and we can love Him and give ourselves to Him, and to His service. Since Christ has accomplished redemption, we can love Him in one very important way. We can love Him by studying to keep His commandments. John 14: 15 – “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” That is love indeed!

Sometimes Christians get the wrong idea about keeping the commandments of God. They still think of keeping them in a legalistic way; as though their keeping them is why God continues to love them, and if they don't keep them, that God does not love them, and will not continue to show them His favor. But this is not Biblically true at all. I hope that you will see here today that God's love is unchanging toward you, the believer. When God undertook the work of your salvation, He did not say to Himself – I have now declared My love to them in My son, and I have forgiven all of their sins, when they asked Me to. And so, they had better keep My commandments and be pleasing to Me, or I will change My mind, and I will cast them off; I will let them go, and not have anything to do with them anymore. No, God is not like that. How do I know that? Well, turn with me over to Jeremiah chapter 32, and verse 37. This section of Jeremiah's prophecy is about the conversion of God's ancient people the Jews, but the statements made about their national salvation and their being brought into covenant with God are pertinent to us here today as individual believers in Christ, whether we are Jew or Gentile.

“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.” “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may

fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.” “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.” “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.” Now, I want you to see that even though this is speaking, in the context of the conversion of the Jews, that there are important spiritual actions which God says that He will take here, in relation to the salvation of any believer, whether they are a Jew or whether they are a Gentile, when He chooses to save them; because all of His actions in the salvation of any individual or any nation are always performed on the basis of the everlasting covenant.

And what is the everlasting covenant? It is the covenant which God made with Christ; the covenant of redemption which the Father made with the Son; that if the Son, out of love for the Father and love to His law, and love to His covenant people; His elect and Christ’s Church, that Christ would willingly and lovingly undertake this great work; to become a Man in His incarnation, and then fulfill all of His law and will in relation to His justice, then He would most certainly convey these blessings of salvation to them. And what were they? That He would not turn away from doing them good; but He would put His fear in their hearts so that they would not depart from Him. And that He would rejoice over them to do them good. This, I am saying, and the Bible is saying, is what God undertakes to do for every single Christian; every single believer, whether they are a believer in the Old Testament times, or New Testament times. Salvation is of the Lord, not only in its beginning, but also all through our living our life after we come to saving faith in Him. And we should conceive of our love to Him, in terms of obedience to Him, in that context of His never turning away from us, to do us good. This is what we want to remember now in our partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

3rd – We need to think about what the remembrance of His love leads us to.

This is why we have come to this table once again; to remember the love of God and the love of Christ for us; we who are unworthy sinners apart from His grace. And, we need to come here to renew our covenant with Him; that we would remember that His love to us should be continually leading us on to have a greater love for Him. That love will evidence itself in a whole-hearted loving obedience to Him. In Song of Solomon, chapter 1, and verse 1 it says – “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.” “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is better than wine.” “Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you.” “Lead me away!” “We will run after you.” “The King has brought me into his chambers.” “We will be glad and rejoice in you.” “We will remember your love more than wine.” Before we partake of the elements of the bread and the wine, I want to stimulate your thoughts in terms of thinking about the great love of Christ for you, and in doing so, pray that your love for Him, and for the brethren, will grow.

It is the desire of every true believer in the Christ’s Church to have intimate spiritual fellowship with Him, their Bridegroom/King. Believers want to be kissed with the kisses of His mouth; in other words, they want to know more of His love. They want to know that love, not only by believing in the word, which is absolute truth, but also by their knowing the rich experience of Christ’s showing them affection by His Spirit during these precious times of the Lord’s Supper and in their private devotions to Him. We want Him to lead us away to greater fellowship with Him, and obedience to His word. We want to remember that His love is better than wine. Let us remember that knowing the love of Christ goes beyond knowledge (Ephesians 3: 19), and it causes us to rejoice that we belong to Him. It causes us to realize that He can do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. You have been espoused to Christ as a chaste virgin. All of your sins have been forgiven you for Christ’s sake. In partaking of these elements you should pray that in knowing more of Christ’s love, that your love for Him will be constant, and that it will even grow. Pray to be able to run after Christ in the way that you live your life for Him. Remember that His love is better than wine; better than any earthly thing that brings you joy. Be glad and rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, that Christ is yours.

