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# God In Christ, A God Of Love

By Ebenezer Erskine

"*God is love.*" 1 John 4:16

My friends, the gospel is called *good news*, and a *joyful sound*; and I do not know what better news could be brought into a company of sinners of Adam's family, who are lying under the sentence of death, and condemned from heaven, and under the awful apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of the great God, than to tell you that *God is love*. And I am sure, that, if this report of a God in Christ were but received and entertained in a way of believing, it would make every one of this assembly join issue with the angels at the birth of Christ, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good-will towards men." *God is love*. This is not to be understood of God essentially, but manifestatively, in the manifestation that he has made of himself in Christ: he is love, or love is the swaying attribute of his nature.

We are this day called to celebrate a love-feast: I have therefore chosen to discourse a little at this time on that attribute and perfection of the divine nature, which is most signally and remarkably displayed in this ordinance, which is the very same with that by which God is described in the words of my text, *God is love*.

It is a great question which you have in your Shorter Catechism, *What is God?* It perplexes and bewilders men and angels everlastingly, to tell what he is. "Who can by searching find out God? Who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Who is capable to tell the first letter of his glorious and ever blessed name? The highest seraphim in heaven cannot form an adequate conception of him, and, therefore, is not capable to give a full description of him: it is only some of the back parts of his glory that are seen or known by created beings. I remember to have heard of a certain philosopher, who, being asked what God is, desired time to answer it; when that time was come, desired a longer; and when that was come, desired yet a longer; and so on: and being asked the reason why he

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protracted the time, and deferred his answer, he replied, That the more he thought on God, the more he was swallowed up, and at a loss how to describe him. And so will it be with every finite understanding, that thinks to find him out to perfection: it is only God himself who can resolve the question, and tell what he is.

And I remember of a three-fold answer that the Spirit of God gives to this question in scripture, *What is God?* One you have, John 4:24: *God is a Spirit*; a second you have, 1 John 1:5: *God is light*; a third you have in the words of my text, *God is love*. The first two tell what God is in himself, but this tells us what God is to us.

If the question were asked, *What is God*, to a guilty sinner that has violated his law, trampled upon his authority, and lifted up rebellious arms against his Sovereign? One would think that the answer would be, God is a God of fury, God is wrath, God is hatred, God is vengeance: but, to the eternal surprise of men and angels, the very reverse! The answer is, *God is love*.

The text, you see, is short, but, Oh! It is concentrated, marvellously full: it is but one simple proposition. Where notice, (1.) The subject of the proposition, *God*, whose name commands reverence and adoration among men and angels. I conceive that God is not spoken of personally here, but essentially, as having a respect to all the persons of the adorable Trinity, who are one in essence, will, and operation; so that the meaning is, the Father is love, the Son is love, and the Holy Ghost is love. (2.) We have the predicate of the proposition, or the thing asserted concerning him, he is *love*. There is a height and a depth in this expression, which surpasses our comprehension: and we cannot give a just commentary upon it; for we do but darken counsel by words without knowledge, when we speak of God. All I shall say of it, by way of explication, is only to tell you, that God is one simple and uncompounded Being, and the divine, attributes and perfections are all one in him: his wisdom is nothing else but the infinitely wise God; his power is nothing else but the omnipotent or almighty God; his holiness is nothing else but the infinitely holy God; his justice is the just and righteous God; so here love denotes the loving God, or a God of love. I shall only notice farther, that God here, in this description he gives of himself, is presented to our view, not in the law, but in the gospel-revelation of himself. When God is viewed by a guilty sinner in the law revelation, his justice and wrath immediately appear ready to take

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vengeance on the workers of iniquity; hence, the holiest of the saints of God, when they view him in this glass, cannot fail to fall a trembling: "I remembered God," says the holy man, Psal. 67:3, "and was troubled." But when God is viewed in the gospel revelation, or as he is in Christ, not imputing their trespasses to them, then grace, and love, and good-will present themselves to the sinner's view. And in this view God is to be considered in this description we have of him, *God is love*. From the words thus briefly opened, the observation I offer is this: —

DOCT. "That God manifesting himself in Christ is a God of love."

Now, in prosecuting this doctrine, I shall endeavour,

I. To premise two or three things for clearing the way.

II. Prove that God in Christ is a God of love.

III. Offer you a view of the love of God in Christ.

IV. Inquire whence it is that God in Christ should be a God of love.

And,

V. Apply the whole.

I. *The first thing is, to premise two or three things for clearing this doctrine.*

1. Know, that the goodness, sweetness, and pleasantness of God's nature is the foundation of his love; he has a majestic disposition of communicating of himself to others, and from thence flows his love to mankind. Hence it is, that when God had a mind to make known his love to Moses, he tells him, that he would make all his goodness to pass before him; and, accordingly, he proclaims himself to be, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." And with this view, I think our divines, in the 4th question of the Shorter Catechism, speak neither of the love, mercy, nor grace of God, but wrap them up in that general of goodness, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, and truth.

2. I premise, that love is the ruling or prevailing attribute of the divine nature, if I may so speak. So much seems to be pointed at in the

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expression of the text, *God is love*. I do not find any other attribute of the divine nature so expressed in the scripture; we do not find it is said, God is mercy, God is justice, God is holiness, God is power, or God is wisdom: no; the expression in this attribute has something peculiar in it, *God is love*. And I conceive it plainly bears this much, that love is, as it were, the majestic or commanding attribute of the divine nature, insomuch that every other attribute receives a dye and tincture of love from it: there is a strain of love runs through every one of them, and it is as it were the spring that sets all on work. What but love sets wisdom on work to ingeniously devise our redemption? What but love actuates infinite power to execute that plan? What but love sets sympathetic feelings of mercy rolling towards the miserable sinner? Thus, I say, love is the first wheel as it were that sets all the other wheels a going.

3. The gift of Christ to a lost world is the most signal and glorious display of the love of God that ever heaven or earth heard tell of: hence is that of the apostle, in the 10th verse of this chapter where my text lies, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us," but how was this love manifested? "He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." To the same purpose is that which you have, John 3:16: "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 love of God to sinners lay hid, as it were, under a veil of wrath and justice, till Christ appeared, undertaking to satisfy justice, and to bear the wrath of his Father in our stead; then, indeed, the kindness and love of God to man appeared, working itself out in a most glorious and triumphant manner, insomuch that, in and through Christ, *grace* and love "reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." But this leads to,

II. The *second* thing in the method, which was, to *make it a little more evident, that God in Christ is a God of love*. This will be abundantly clear, if we consider these few things:—

1. God in Christ is a reconciled God, a God of peace, that has received the atonement: 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Rom. 5:10. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." He both finds the ransom, and

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accepts of the ransom that he has found; and having accepted of the ransom, of the Surety, he proclaims himself to be "the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ." Oh, sirs! Does not this say that *God is love*? What greater evidence of it could God give, than to provide a ransom, and to receive it, than to cry, "Deliver them from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom?"

2. God in Christ is a promising God and does not this say that he is a God of love? God abstractly considered is a threatening God, a revenging God; but in Christ, a promising God; and we find, 2 Cor. 1:20, that "all the promises of God are *in Christ*, and in him yea and amen." Whenever you meet with any promise in the Bible, of grace or of glory, of peace or of pardon, or be what it will, you should still take it up as a promise of a God in Christ: Christ having fulfilled the condition of the promise of eternal life, by his obedience and death, the promises are given out to us, through him, as the immediate ground and foundation of our faith, with an intimation and advertisement, "The promise is unto you, and to your seed, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Sirs, if any man should present to you a bond, bill, or security, for a vast sum of money, which would enrich you for all your days, you would look upon it as a great and indisputable evidence of his love to you. Well, this is the very case between God and you; through Christ, he is a promising God; he comes in a gospel dispensation, saying, "I will put my Spirit within you; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more," &c. These promises are presented to you as the ground of your faith; and that very moment you take hold of them in a way of believing, you come to be possessed of them, and all the benefits of his purchase, according to that, Is. 55:3: "Hear, and your soul shall live;" it is the hearing of faith that is intended; "and I will make" or establish "an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Oh, sirs! does not this say that *God is love*?

3. God in Christ is a God sitting upon a throne of grace: and does not this say, that *God is love*? God has a threefold throne, —a throne of glory, a throne of justice, and a throne of grace. The first of these, his throne of glory, is so bright, that it dazzles the eyes of angels, and they cover their faces with their wings when they approach it. The second, namely, his throne of justice, is clothed with red vengeance; and it is so

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terrible, that the most holy saints tremble when they behold it, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? In thy sight shall no man living be justified." And because we were not able to stand here, he has erected another throne, namely, a throne of grace, from whence he issues out acts of grace and mercy to guilty sinners; and so soon as he is seen sitting upon his throne, he is taken up as a God of love; and upon this the poor sinner, that was trembling at the thoughts of being cited before the throne of justice, flees for his life to the throne of grace, saying with the apostle, Heb. 4:16: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

4. God in Christ is a God matching with us, and betrothing us unto himself in loving kindness; and does not this say, that he is a God of love? There is a twofold match that the great and infinite JEHOVAH has made with Adam's family. (1.) He espouses with our nature by a personal union in the person of his eternal Son: he marries our nature; and thus he becomes akin to the whole family of Adam, an honour that the angelic family was never dignified with; for "he takes not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." Oh, sirs! What shall I tell you? Strange and surprising news indeed, "God is manifested in the flesh!" The great God becomes related to us in Christ; for he is clothed with our nature; he is become "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and what is the language of this, but that of the angels at his birth, "glad tidings of great joy, good will and peace towards men upon earth?" (2.) Another espousal he makes with us, is, by taking us actually under the bond of a marriage relation. The espousal is proposed to all in the call and offer of the gospel: but you know the bare proposal of marriage does not make marriage, till once the consent of the bride be obtained; and the moment the soul gives its assent and consent to the proposal made in the gospel, he betroths that soul to himself in loving kindness and in mercy, in righteousness and in judgment; and the Lord rejoices over that soul, as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, saying to it, "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name," Is. 54:5. And, oh, sirs! Does not this say that *God is love*? Because the distance between him and us was too great, (abstractly considered,) therefore, he first comes on a level with us, by taking on our nature, that so the inequality of the persons might be no barrier: he becomes our husband, and we his spouse and bride.

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5. God in Christ is a God with us, on our side, our friend, and takes part with us against all evil or danger: and does not this say, that *God is love*, as he is in Christ? Oh, sirs! God out of Christ is a God against us: hence, he is said to be "angry with the wicked every day;" he "whets his glittering sword, and his hand takes hold on judgment," to render vengeance to every transgressor of his holy law. But God in Christ is not a God against us, but a God with us, or a God for us; the name *Immanuel* imports, *God with us*. And every one that takes a God in Christ for their God, may say, upon warrantable grounds, with the church, Psal. 46:7: "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." And they may say it upon a covenant ground, for God in Christ has said, Is. 43:2: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

6. God in Christ is a pardoning God: and does not this declare him to be a God of love? "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. I will be merciful to their unrighteousness," &c.

7. God in Christ is a pitying God; he pities Christless and unbelieving sinners, and is loath at his very heart to give up with them: Hos. 11:8: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." And how great is his pity to the soul that believes in him! His pity to them is like the pity of a father to his son: Psal. 103:13: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." It is like the pity of a fond mother to a sucking child: Is. 69:15: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that he should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

8. God in Christ is a God of infinite bounty and liberality, and a prayer-hearing God; (I cast things together, that I may not be tiresome.) Oh, sirs! his heart is free, and his hand is full and open; open-hearted, open-handed: "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Such is his bounty and liberality, that it is nothing but ask and have with him: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Matth. 7:7. When we have asked great things of him, he chides us, as if

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we had asked nothing: he does not deal with a miserly or a sparing hand: no, no: "Ask, and ye shall receive," says he, "that your joy may be full." Yes, such is his bounty, that he is ready to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can either ask or think; such is his bounty, that he presents us with the blessings of his goodness: his goodness and mercy are like the rain or dew, that does not wait for the sons of men: Is. 65:24: "And it shall come to pass, that, before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

9. God in Christ is an urging God, an entreating God, to sinners: and does not this say, that he is a God of love? He invites us to come to him for all needful grace: Is. 55:1: "Ho, every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." He is an entreating God in Christ: 2 Cor. 5:20: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." He complains of the backwardness of sinners to come to him: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." He complains to them on this account: "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me." He waits for an answer; he will not take a repulse. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." And he stands knocking till his locks are wet. Oh! Does not all this say that God in Christ is love?

10. To crown all, God in Christ is our God. He makes a grant of himself in the covenant as such; "I will be their God:" and he allows us to claim him by faith as our God, upon this very grant he makes of himself to us in Christ, Zech. 13:9: "I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God." And, oh! happy that soul that is enabled to give faith's echo to this covenant grant, and say, "This God is my God for ever and ever; and he will be my Guide even unto death." In a word, God in Christ is our Father; for it is only a God in Christ that says, "I will be unto them a Father, and they shall be unto me sons and daughters." He has taught us to say, "Our Father which art in heaven." And he is displeased with us, when we are shy withthrough unbelief, to call him by this endearing title: Jer. 3:4: "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, and not turn away from me?" Oh! What but infinite feelings of sympathy and love could speak in such a style and dialect? Now, from all



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this I think the truth of the doctrine is abundantly evident, that God in Christ is a God of love.

III. The *third* thing in the method was, to *offer you some views of the love of this God in Christ*. And there is only a threefold view of it that I shall present you with. 1. View it in the kinds of it. 2. View it in the dimensions of it. 3. In its qualities.

*First*, I say, let us view the love of a God of love, in the different kinds of it.

1. Then, He has a love of benevolence, or good-will, which he bears towards men, particularly towards the whole visible church. The lifting up of the brazen serpent in the camp of Israel, that whosoever looked to it might be healed, was a clear evidence of his good-will to the whole camp: so the manifestation of Christ in the nature of man, and the revelation of him in the gospel, is an evidence of the good-will he bears to the salvation of all, John 3:15, 16. He declares it on his word, that he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" and, lest his word should not be believed, he has confirmed it with his oath, Ezek. 33:11: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

2. He has a love, not only of benevolence, but of beneficence; he not only wishes you well but does well unto you. Oh, sirs! Many a good turn has he done you, particularly you who are members of the visible church; he gives you line upon line, precept upon precept; he makes you to hear the joyful sound, the voice of the turtle: many a minister has he sent you; many an offer of Christ, and of life through him, has he made to you; many a time has he knocked at thy door, by word, by conscience, and the motions and whispers of his Spirit; so that he may say to us, as he did of his vineyard, Is. 5:4: "What could have been done more for them, that I have not done?" And because of your obstinacy in unbelief and sin, he may challenge you as he did Israel, and say, Mic. 6:3: "O, my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me. Was I ever a barren wilderness, or a land of darkness?" Thus, I say, God's love of benevolence and beneficence is, in some respects, extended to all.

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3. There is a love of complacency, or delight and satisfaction, which is peculiar only to believers; who, because of the excellency of his loving kindness, do put their trust under the shadow of his wings. Oh, believer, the Lord loves thee, a God of love loves thee, not only with a love of benevolence and beneficence, as he does others, in some respects, but he loves thee with a complacent love, as so to take pleasure in thee: "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation." He loves thee with a love of estimation: he puts such a high value and estimate upon thee, that thou art precious in the sight of the Lord, thou art his treasure, and his peculiar treasure: "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." He loves thee with a love of union; he desires thy company, and to hear thy voice, and to see thy countenance: Cant. 2:14: "O, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." He loves thee with an ecstatic love: his love overflows into a kind of rapture and ecstasy, Cant. 4:9, twice with one breath he cries out, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." No where is the word used in scripture but here; "Thou hast ravished my heart." New words are, as it were, coined to express the inexpressible love, that a God in Christ bears towards his people. The word signifies, thou hast UNHEARTED ME: it is an allusion to that which is a weakness in us, when our affections run so much out to any particular object, as to become heartless of any thing else. Some render the words, "Thou hast wounded or pierced my heart, Oh, my sister," &c. The love of God runs so deep, that he was content, in the person of his eternal Son, to be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities."

Now, the complacent love of God to his people is variously expressed in scripture. As,

*1st*, His love is said to be a pastoral love, or the love a shepherd has to his flock: Is. 40:11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd," &c.

*2dly*, His love is a friendly love: "Ye are my friends," says he, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." And, like a true friend, he communicates his mind to them, John 15:15: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."

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Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom; but to others it is not given."

*3dly*, His complacency in them sometimes overflows into a conjugal love: Is. 54:5: "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name," &c.

*4thly*, Sometimes it runs out into a paternal love: "I will be to them a Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." But why do I stand on this? In one word, his love is the love of a God; his love cannot be expressed by any similitude, for *God is love*; he is as it were all one flame of love to the believer. Love is in him in its perfection, and perfect love casts out hatred: his heart is just the very centre of love; and whatsoever sparks of love are to be found in any of our hearts, they are all kindled at this fire. As all the waters that are in the rivers come originally from the sea, and return back to it again; so any drop of love that is to be found in any of our hearts, is just an emanation of his love, returning back again into its proper centre, from whence it came. And thus much for the different kinds of his love.

*Secondly*, Let us view the love of God in its dimensions. Among corporeal beings there are only three dimensions reckoned; but the apostle, speaking of the love of God in Christ, admits of a fourth, Eph. 3:17, 18. He there speaks of the height, the depth, the breadth, and length, of the love of God, which passes knowledge.

1. It is so high, that the height of it can never be reached; no, not by the most soaring angel or seraphim in heaven. We find that the Spirit of God, when he would express his love, runs above the height of the highest heavens to borrow a similitude for the illustration of it, comparing it to the love which the Father bears the Son, John 15:9: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." Oh! who can tell how the Father loves the Son! There is more here than all the angels in heaven are capable either to conceive or express; yet such is the love of a God of love to believers.

2. He speaks not only of a height, but a depth in this love. The heart of man is a great depth, that none knows it, but he that knows all things; and if the heart of man be such a great depth, what must the heart of God be? Yet this love is rooted in the very heart of God; so much is implied in the very expression of the text, *God is love*. His love is a

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heart of love. He loves with the whole heart, and with the whole soul. So deep is his love, that it descended, as it were, to the depth to help and relieve us; it descended unto the depth of hell, in the dying agonies of the Son of God, to bring us up from the depth of misery and distress into which we had plunged ourselves.

3. This love of a God of love has also a breadth with it, which can never be measured. So broad is this love, that in the word of grace, and external dispensation of the gospel, it reaches forth its arms to embrace a lost world: John 3:10: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." So broad is it, that it takes in Jew and Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; it takes in those that lived before the law, those that lived under the law, those that live under the gospel. Oh, sirs! the love of God is broad; his heart is wide and capacious: you need not fear as if there were no room for you: no, no, for all the innumerable multitude that his love has grasped, there is yet room for you, room for me, and room for all the world that come to him through Christ.

4. The apostle yet adds another dimension to this love, and that is, the length of it; and, in short, it is as long as eternity. Look back to an eternity past, and we shall find, that his love, like himself, never had a beginning: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." And let us look forward to an eternity to come, and we shall find that his love shall never have an end; for it is "from everlasting to everlasting;" he rests in his love, and changes not: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee." Thus, you see its dimensions.

*Thirdly,* Let us take a view of the love of a God of love in its qualities and properties.

1. His love is a free love: Hos. 14:4: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." This love is free in its *first* fountain, viewing it, I mean, as it lies in the heart of God. What made him to set his love upon any of Adam's posterity, and to choose them from eternity? The cause of it is not to be found in the creature, but in himself; only his own sovereign will and grace is the cause of it; for he "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good

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pleasure of his will," Eph. 1:5: "He hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began," 2 Tim. 1:9. And then, again, this love is free, not only in its first fountain, but free in the offer, revelation, and manifestation of it in the word: and the love of God, as it is in the word of grace, is a common love, common to all the hearers of the gospel, in regard it comes to every man's door, and offers itself to him: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come. Whosoever will, let him come," &c. "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man." And then it is a free love, in regard of the application of it to the elect soul in the day of power; the love of God is manifested in the word of grace taken by the Holy Ghost, and shed abroad upon the sinner's heart, and that without regard to any good qualification or work of righteousness in us. In a word, this love of a God of love is free, in opposition to merit. That which conciliates love among men, is either beauty, strength, wisdom, riches, or some such qualification or inducement: but no such thing is to be found in any of Adam's posterity: "When thou wast in thy blood, I said unto thee, Live; and thy time was a time of love." Instead of beauty, nothing but deformity; instead of strength, nothing but weakness; instead of riches, nothing but poverty. And as it is free in opposition to merit, so it is free in opposition to any constraint or force. Love is a thing that cannot be forced; no, it is voluntary, and of its own accord. God's love is only owing to the freedom of his own will, Eph. 1:9.

2. The love of this God of love is a strong and invincible love. Before his love could reach us in the application of it, it had mountains to level: but, "behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, and skipping upon the hills." There were deep seas and floods in the way of his love, but "many waters could not quench it, neither were all floods able to drown it:" it runs through every difficulty, it encounters every impediment in its way. The infinite distance between God and a creature, was a bar in the way of this love: but he conquers this impediment; for "God is manifested in the flesh." The moral distance between a filthy guilty sinner is an impediment in the way of this love: but he breaks this bar also; for the Son of God is not only manifested in the flesh, but "made in the likeness of sinful flesh, yea, made sin for us." The curse of the law was a bar in the way: but this bar he breaks; for Christ was "made a curse for us, that we might be redeemed from the curse of the law." Sin in its guilt,

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and filth, and power, lay in the way of his love: but love breaks through this, and "finishes transgression, and makes an end of sin." Ignominy and disgrace lay in its way, grief and sorrow: but this love conquers that: for he was content, out of love, to become "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And then, when this love comes to the sinner, in order to conversion, it finds him dead, *dead in trespasses and sins*: the man has perhaps laid twenty, thirty, forty, or sixty years in the grave of sin, so that, lo, he stinks: Oh, what an object he is! He is an object of loathing instead of love: but yet this love of a God of love conquers this impediment also: for, "when we were dead in sins, for the great love wherewith he loved us, he quickened us." And then, after this love has actually grasped the soul in effectual calling, how many provocations gets it by the whoredoms of heart and life-departing from the Lord? And yet, such is the invincible nature of this love, that it overcomes all, and abides firm to the end; hence, says the apostle, Rom. 8:35, 37, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." It is because his love is invincible, that we are more than conquerors through him that loved us; because his love is strong as death, therefore, death shall not separate; because it is deep as hell, therefore, neither hell nor devils shall be able to make a separation.

3. The love of this God of love, is an incomparable, yea, a superlative love. Let us but view here how much a God in Christ loves them who "trust under the shadow of his wings, because of the excellency of his loving kindness." (1.) He loves them more than he loves all other men: Is. 43:3,4: "I will give men for thee, and people for thy life." (2.) He loves believers more than he loves angels. Angels are his servants, believers are his sons; angels are his subjects, believers are his bride. (3.) He loves them more than he loves the whole world. The world consists of heaven and earth. As for the earth, he did not value that, for the love he had to his people: when the devil proffered him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, he contemned them all, out of love he had to his people. As for heaven, he left the glory of the higher house, to dwell with men upon earth. Yea, I shall add, (4.) The love of an incarnate Deity is greater to his people than to himself. He loved their life and safety more than his own; for he laid down his life for his friends, that they might not die: he prayed more for them than he did for himself, as you

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may see, John 17, throughout. In a word, out of love he bore to us, he parted with those things that are reckoned most valuable among men. Men make a great account of their good name; but, out of love to us, he became *a reproach of men*. Men make a great account of their riches; but "though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." Men make a great account of their life; "skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life;" but Christ parted with this, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." Men do or should make a great account of their souls; and yet, out of love to us, he made his soul an offering, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Men, I mean holy men, saints, make a greater account of the love of God than of their life, "Thy love is better than life," says David; and yet Christ was content to lose the sense of that for awhile, out of love to us; and it was withdrawn from him, to that degree, that he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" Thus much for a view of the love of a God of love.

IV. The *fourth* thing in the method was, to *inquire whence it is that, in Christ, God should be a God of love to lost, and undone, and rebellious sinners?* Whence comes this strange alteration, that a God of vengeance, who was ready to destroy all Adam's posterity because of sin, should lay aside his garments of vengeance, and appear to us as a God of grace and love?

*Answ.* 1. An offended and angry God is a God of love to us in Christ, because in him justice is satisfied; a ransom of infinite value is paid in the Redeemer's blood. The justice of God stood as an eternal bar, in the way of the manifestation of love to any of Adam's race; but no sooner did justice get a perfect satisfaction in the death of the Surety, but love expresses itself with infinite delight and satisfaction, and God proclaims himself, as in Exod. 34:6: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

2. In Christ the law is fulfilled; its command is obeyed, and its curse is abolished. The violation of the holy law, by the first sin of Adam, was the thing that incensed the Majesty of heaven against us; but now Christ repairs the honour of the divine law, yea, he "magnifies it and makes it honourable:" and hence it is, that in Christ God is a God of love: for he is "well-pleased for his righteousness' sake."

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3. In Christ God is a God of love, because in him that arch-traitor against Heaven is condemned and destroyed. No sooner did sin enter into the world, but Heaven cried out for vengeance upon it and the sinner. Now, Christ undertakes to "finish transgression and make an end of sin," Dan. 9:24; and, accordingly, for this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, to take away the sin of the world: he "condemned sin in the flesh," Rom. 8:4. And hence it is, that God is a God of love to sinners.

4. In Christ, the holiness of God is vindicated, and his sovereignty is maintained, and all his other attributes, which were affronted by the sin of man, are, as it were, illustrated and set in a pure light. Never were the perfections of God so gloriously manifested as they are in Christ; he is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." There is a constellation of all the divine attributes in him, which were obscured by the sin of man. And hence it is, that God in him is a God of love.

5. Because in him, and by him, the image of God in man, which was defaced by the fall, is again restored. This we lost in the first Adam; but it is again restored in Christ, the second Adam; for, through him we are "renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us." But I do not stay farther upon this head. I proceed now to,

V. The *fifth* thing in the method, which was the *application* of the whole.

Use *first* of the doctrine shall be of *information*, in the few following particulars. Is it so, that in and through Christ God is a God of love?

1. See, hence, how much we owe to Christ; for it is owing to his incarnation, obedience, and death, that ever God manifested himself to any of Adam's posterity as a God of love. The love of God to us runs through the channel of blood, that so it might reach us in a consistency with the honour of justice; for love could never take place, to the hurt or prejudice of justice; but in him, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." Oh, then! How much does it concern us to celebrate the praises of our Redeemer Christ Jesus, and to cry, "To him that loved us, be glory and praise!" and "Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever!"



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2. See, hence, the excellency of the gospel, and what a glorious privilege it is, to live under the dispensations thereof. Why, what is the gospel? It is just the revelation of the love of God in Christ, or of God as a God of love and grace in Christ; and may we not cry out with the psalmist, Psal. 89:15: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound?" What more joyful sound can come to the ears of a company of traitors, rebels, condemned sinners, than that the God against whom they have sinned, is a God of love, a reconciled God, not imputing their trespasses unto them? Oh, sirs! Prize the gospel, and study to take up God according to the gospel-revelation of him; for "it is life eternal to know him," and his Son Jesus Christ, as he is set forth in the gospel.

3. See, hence, what an unreasonable thing the enmity of the heart against God is, whether reigning enmity in the wicked, or remaining in the saints. "The carnal mind is enmity against God;" and much of this remains in the hearts of believers themselves, while in an imbodyed state, as is plain in the case of the apostle, who groaned under it, saying "Wretched man that I am! I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." But, oh, sirs! Let us see what a ridiculous and what an unjust thing it is. Oh! to have enmity against love! Strange, indeed! What a monstrous thing would you reckon it in a person, lying in the utmost misery, to entertain malice or enmity in his heart, against one whose passionate sympathies are yearning towards him, and offering to relieve him with the most tender compassion! Yet this is the very case between God and us. He shows himself to be a God of love, yea, love itself: he offers his salvation to us, and to bring us out of the horrible pit and miry clay of sin and misery; to heal our wounds, to cure our diseases, and to save us with an everlasting salvation: and, yet, to entertain enmity against this God of love, oh! How unjust and unreasonable is it! May not God say to us on this account, "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?"

4. See, hence, what way the natural enmity of the heart and obstinacy of the will, are mastered and conquered in a day of conversion: why, it is just by a revelation of God in Christ to the sinner, as a God of love. The Spirit of the Lord comes in a day of power, and he shines into the heart with the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and with this light of the knowledge, there is an emanation of love from a God of love, which conquers, and captivates and carries down the power of

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enmity: hence, he is said to "draw with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love." And when this natural enmity begins to gather strength again, in the soul of the believer, and comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up the banner of love against it, by a new manifestation of the love of God in Christ: thus this Jordan is driven back.

5. See, hence, whence it is that those who know God in Christ, so much breathe after communion and fellowship with him; whence it is that they put such a value upon these trysting places where they often enjoy him: why, they know him to be a God of love; and, therefore, one day in his courts, is "better than a thousand." O! says David, "how amiable are thy tabernacles! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" He knew him to be a God of love: and this made his company so sweet and desirable to him: "O! taste and see that God is good. –How excellent is his loving kindness!" It "is better than life."

6. See, hence, how it comes that there is no fellowship between God and a godless sinner: God does not delight in their company, and they do not delight in his company: why, the matter lies here, *God is love*, and the sinner is "enmity against God;" and what fellowship can there be between things that are so opposite to one another? "What fellowship hath light with darkness? what concord between Christ and Belial," between heaven and hell? Oh, sirs! beware of venturing to come to the table of a God of love, with enmity in your hearts against him; lest he say to you, as he did to Judas, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" You cannot give a deeper wound to the heart of a God of love, than to come with enmity to his feast of love: hence it is, that unworthy communicants are said to "eat and drink judgment to themselves," and to be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

7. See whence an evil heart of unbelief causes us to depart from the living God: why, the plain reason is, unbelief, like the spies that were sent up to Canaan, brings up an evil report of a God of love; it represents him as a God of hatred, wrath, or anger; it says that there is no love or kindness in his heart; that God hath "forgotten to be gracious;" that "he has in anger shut up his tender mercy;" it will not believe the report of the gospel, that God is a God of love; it entertains jealousies of his grace, love, and faithfulness: and, hence it is, that it turns us away from him. So long as we, through unbelief, view God as an enemy, we cannot miss to

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turn away from him; for it is but natural for any man to turn away from an enemy, or to fly his company or presence, as Adam did.

8. See, hence, how it is by faith we draw near to God. As unbelief turns us away from him; so it is by faith we come to him, and have access to his presence: why, faith believes the gospel report of a God in Christ; that he is a God of love, a reconciled God, a God sitting upon a throne of grace, a God matching with our nature, making proposals of marriage to us; a God with us, a pardoning God, a pitying God, a prayer-hearing God, a liberal God; yea, it takes him up as our God in Christ, saying, "My God, my Father, and the Rock of my salvation." Now, I say, this is the view in which faith presents God to the soul; and this makes the soul to follow hard after God, and the desire of the soul to be to him, and the remembrance of his name.

9. See, from this doctrine, whence it is that God's commandments are not grievous, why his yoke is easy, and his burden is light: why, the believer sees them to be the commandments of love; and love sweetens every thing, and makes every thing easy and pleasant. The love that Jacob had to Rachel, made his seven years' service to appear but a few days: so here it is love that commands, and love obeys; and this makes obedience sweet and easy: and it is the lack of due uptakings of God as a God of love, and of his commandments as the commandments of love, that makes them intolerable and burdensome to the wicked and ungodly. Why do they "break his bands, and cast away his cords from them?" Why, they have no consideration of God as a God of love; they take him up as an enemy, and, therefore, any obedience they give him is but slavish.

10. See from this doctrine, what a lightsome and heartsome dwelling-place the believer has: why, he dwells in God; God is his dwelling-place: "He dwells in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty:" and that is in the midst of love; for *God is love*, "and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." Oh what a lightsome dwelling is the bosom of infinite love! and "he carries his lambs in his bosom." Perhaps, believer, you "sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar, thy soul dwells with them that hate peace." But here is thy comfort; thou dwellest in love, dwellest in God, who is love; thou liest in his bosom: and this may bear up thy spirits: for though in the world thou mayst be hated, and have tribulation, yet in him thou hast peace.

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11. See from this doctrine the difference between the law and the gospel why, the law presents God as an absolute God, in which respect he is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity: he is a revenging God: but the gospel presents God to our view as a God of love and grace, with whom compassions flow towards miserable sinners. Indeed, we that are ministers of the gospel are bound to preach the law, to stand upon Mount Sinai and Ebal, and to proclaim the curses of the broken covenant of works against Christless sinners: but when we do so, our design is just to scare you from the law as a covenant, to lead you off from "the mount that burns with fire," from "blackness, and darkness, and tempest," that you may fly to mount Zion, and to the blood of sprinkling, and in him to God, the Judge of all, that through his atoning blood you may find him to be a God of love.

Use *second* of this doctrine, is by way of *exhortation*.

1. Is it so that *God is love*? Is God in Christ a God of love? Oh! then, sirs, believe the report of the gospel: Oh! receive it as "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance," that God in Christ is love: and do not receive it upon my testimony, but receive it upon the testimony or the record of the "three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit:" a Trinity of persons is witnessing and declaring to you, that *God is love*; and, therefore, "set to your seal that God is true" of what he says of himself; and, sirs, remember, that if you do not, you make God a liar, because you "receive not the record that God has given of himself."

2. My exhortation is, not only to believe this truth concerning God, but, Oh! Eat it, (as Jeremiah did) and let it be "the joy and rejoicing of your heart." Eat it, say you; what is that? how can we eat it? I answer, The way to eat it, is to apply and bring it home to your own souls. Oh, sirs, there is much food for faith in this little word, *God is love*. Oh! may faith say, is God love? Then surely he will make me welcome to his table: he is a God of infinite bounty and liberality in Christ, and he will give that which is good; a God of love will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from his people.

3. Is God in Christ a God of love? yea, love itself? Oh! then, put your trust in him. This is the use the Spirit of God would have you to make of this doctrine, Psal. 36:7: (a sweet and remarkable word,) "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put

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their trust under the shadow of thy wings." Oh, sinners! The wings of a God of love are spread out to you, and his heart is calling after you in this glorious gospel; and his hand is stretched out to you in this gospel, saying, "Behold me, behold me." Oh! do not run away from him as an enemy, but trust him as a friend that bears good-will towards you. What is it, O man, that a God of love in Christ is not ready to grant to thee? Dost thou lack garments to cover the shame of thy nakedness? A God of love is ready to grant thee this. Perhaps thou hast some thoughts of coming to a communion-table; but thou art afraid lest thou be found naked in his presence, and the Master of the feast say unto thee, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" Is this thy case? O put your trust in a God of love through Christ, and he will clothe you with "the garments of salvation, and with the robes of righteousness." Dost thou lack a pardon for sin? art thou a broken bankrupt, that owes thousands of talents to the law and justice of God? Art thou crying, "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me?" Well, a God of love is a pardoning God: and therefore trust him for the pardon of thy sins; for he says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." Oh, may you say, I am a poor captive, I am in chains, under the fetters of captivity to my spiritual enemies; the bonds of iniquity are wreathed about my soul. Well, a God of love proclaims "liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and, therefore, O trust him, and he will make thee to share of the glorious liberty of his own children; he will make thy chains and fetters to fall off from thee. Art thou a black and ugly sinner, by lying among the pots, black like the Ethiopian, spotted like the leopard? Well, put thy trust under the wings of a God of love; for he says, "though thou hast lien among the pots, I will make thee as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold. -I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." Art thou a diseased sinner, full of bruises and putrefying sores! Well, put thy trust in a God of love in Christ: for his name is JEHOVAH ROPHI, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Art thou a poor wandering bewildered sinner, that hast lost thy way to heaven, and hast gone astray like a lost sheep? Well, come, put your trust in a God of love: for he has "compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;" a God of love in Christ has said, that he will "lead the blind," &c., and that he will make "the wayfaring man, though a fool, to walk without erring." Art thou a

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treacherous dealer, that hast "gone a whoring after other lovers," prostrated thyself to every vile lust? Well, come yet and put thy trust under the wings of a God of love; for his voice unto you is, Jer. 3:1, "Though thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me." He is crying from the top of the high places this day, "Return, O backsliding Israel; for I am married unto thee. For I will heal thy backslidings, and love thee freely, and receive thee graciously." So, then, I say, whoever thou art, or whatever thou art, I invite and call you to trust under the wings of a God of love, because of the excellency of his loving kindness. And for motives, consider,

*1st*, That you cannot do a God of love a greater pleasure. Would you please God today, or oblige his very heart? Well, trust him as a God of love; for "he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy," or that trust in him as a God of love.

*2dly*, Would you be fed, yea, feasted, this day, at a communion-table, with the fatness of God's house, with fat things full of marrow? Oh! then, here is the way to it; put your trust in a God of love, come in under his wings: Psal. 37:3: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." You see you have not only his promise, that you shall be fed, but his promise supported and ratified by a strong asseveration, *Verily, thou shalt be fed*. Would you be fed with the blessings of heaven, the blessings of a well-ordered covenant, the sure mercies of David! Oh! then, trust in a God of love; for "blessed are all they that trust in him," Psal. 84:12. Would you have languishing grace revived, brought into a thriving and blooming condition? Oh! then, trust in a God of love, Jer. 17:7,8: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall he as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." Would you be filled with peace? Then trust in a God of love: Is. 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee." Would you be filled with the joys of God's salvation? Then trust in a God of love: Psal. 13:5: "I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation." In a word, trust in a God of love, and you shall never perish: "None perish that trust in him:" you shall never be confounded nor dismayed; and he will never forsake you: "Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken

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them that seek thee, and trust in thee." You shall have all needful preparation for a communion table; for "the preparation of the heart, and answer of the tongue, comes from him." So, then, I say, trust in a God of love. I think it is enough to engage you all to trust him, to repeat the text, and to say, *God is love*. If any of you apprehend a man to be your enemy, in that case you will have no trust to put in him; but if you be once persuaded he loves you, and lacks only an opportunity to do you all the service he can, in that case you will trust him with assured confidence. Well, sirs, we tell you, that God is not only a friend, bearing good-will to you, but he is love, love itself; love is the majestic or commanding attribute of his nature: O, how excellent is his loving kindness! therefore, let the sons of men, let sinners and saints, put their trust under the shadow of his wings.

4. A fourth exhortation from the text is this: Is it so, that a God in Christ is a God of love? Oh, then, sirs, reciprocate your love on a God of love, and render him love for love: "This is the first and great commandment" of the moral law, and the sum of the first table of the law, Matth. 22:37, 38: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Here is the most reasonable and just command that ever was. What can be more reasonable than to love him, who is not only lovely, but love itself, and whose love runs out towards us in such a surprising and astonishing way? Sure I am, it is your "reasonable service," to love him with all thy heart, soul, strength, and mind. And, sirs, this is a command which, to obey, I am sure will not be painful; for, when God commands you to love him, he commands you to make yourselves happy; for the very happiness of the rational soul lies in the outgoings of God's love to you, and the outgoings of your love and affections towards him. Oh, sirs! Love to a God of love "is the fulfilment of the law;" you perform all duties, and exercise all graces at once, when you get your hearts drawn out in love to a God in Christ. What is faith, but love trusting and confiding in the beloved object? What is hope, but love expecting and longing after the enjoyment of him? What is patience, but love bearing and suffering what a God of love lays on? What is humility, but love lying at the feet of a God of love? What is heavenly-mindedness, but love soaring, as upon eagles' wings, after a God of love? What is zeal, but love inflamed with desire to serve a God of love? What are all good works, but love displaying itself in actions of obedience to the commands of a God of love. What is it to communicate?

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It is just to show forth the dying love of a God of love. What is it to pray, but to offer up our desires to a God of love? What is it to praise, but to give expression to the heart in the commendation of a God of love? So that, I say, when you love a God of love, you, as it were, do all things at once. And then, to engage and encourage your life, in the very command itself he presents himself to thee as thy God, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Thus, he ushers in the commandment of the moral law, with, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the house of bondage." He is thy God, not only by creation, as he is the God of all living; but he is thy God in covenant, thy God in Christ: and when he says, "I am thy God," he in effect says, All that I am, all that I have, all that I can do, I make over to you in an everlasting covenant, which shall never be broken. Oh, sirs! shall not all this kindle a flame of love in your bosoms to a God of love? This is a large field, and would admit of a great enlargement: but, that I may not hinder the great work of the day, I shall proceed no farther. The Lord bless what has been said, and to his name be praise.