

## God's Everlasting Love

### Murdoch Campbell

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*The Lord hath appeared unto me of old saying, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee. (Jer. 31:3).*

When these words were first spoken by the prophet, God was laying many and heavy chastisements on His people for their sins. But lest their spirits should fail under their afflictions, and lest they should be tempted to think that the Lord had forgotten to be gracious, He sends them a reassuring word of unspeakable consolation. It was not a word spoken to them only, but is meant for all the people of God in every age. In seeking to understand something of the significance and implications of these inconceivably precious words let us consider:

### **I. The Nature of God's Love**

It is "everlasting". That word "everlasting" means something which, like a river, is ever flowing. Under this figure we may say that this love had its rise and wellspring in the heart and sovereign will of God. It is the river of His "good pleasure", the streams of which make glad the city of God both in Heaven and on earth. Unlike the love of God, our love to Him has a beginning in time, though it shall have no end. His love flows on through eternal ages without a beginning or an end. "Unto Him who loves us." The present tense in this phrase implies a beginningless and endless continuity.

There are three Persons in the Godhead, but only, as Augustine reminds us, *una mens*, or one mind. Therefore His love also is one. It is the love of the Triune God. This love, however, has its several manifestations and its different exercises. We speak, for example, of the electing love of the Father, the redeeming love of the Son, and the sanctifying love of the Holy Ghost. "God is love", and His love is, therefore, like Himself. It is infinite, eternal, unchangeable and unsearchable. It is everlasting in its duration. It is infinite, or like a sea without a shore. It is unchangeable or like an ocean which is always at full tide. It is unfathomable in its depth, and unsearchable in the mystery of its grace and choice. Paul once prayed that the new-born Church at Ephesus might be able to know, "with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height

of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” He told them of this life-giving plenitude, out of which they might drink, that they also “might be filled with the fullness of God.”

It was this everlasting love which was in the heart of God that gave full exercise to all His glorious attributes in the salvation of His Church. All His gifts and blessings may also be traced to His love. Both Christ and the Holy Spirit, with the countless blessings associated with each, are the gifts of His love. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” And God “who spared not his own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

Again God’s love is necessarily sovereign. It arose spontaneously in Himself “according to the good pleasure of His will” and without any worthiness on our side. There was nothing in our persons or in our works to draw this love towards us. There was, on the other hand, everything to repel. He loved us, not for what we were, but in spite of what we were. Paul could never forget the stupendous miracle of Christ’s sovereign love to himself. He who raged against and persecuted the infant Church, and who spoke of himself as “the chief of sinners”, marvelled that the Son of God should love him and give Himself for him. It was he who afterwards wrote of how “the kindness and love of God appeared to men, not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He saved us.” (Titus 3).

This is also a love which is intimately personal. “I have loved **thee**.” He loves each of His people as He loves all. In conscious possession of Christ’s love and promise every Christian may say: “My Beloved is mine.” To many believers God communicates this sweet secret — that they were the subjects of His love from all eternity. In the manifestation and assurance of His love to the soul there is an all-absorbing apprehension of Christ as the One who is fairer than the sons of men, and of the glory of His finished work.

## **II. The way in which His Love was revealed**

It was revealed “of old”. He loved us “from afar”. So the word might be translated. It embraces not only the idea of duration but also of distance. God, in the dignity of His Being, is an infinite distance from all the creatures whether in Heaven or on earth. He is far above all. The highest angel before the throne is, in point of being, an immeasurable distance from Him who dwells in light which is inaccessible, and who is infinite in Himself. But who can measure the moral and spiritual distance between God and the sinner? Modern scientists labour, as it were, in the grip of mathematics as they try to give expression to the vast inconceivable distances between the various stars in that part of the universe which is under the observation of their limited perception. These are, however, mere fractions of distance compared to the distance between the Throne of Glory in the highest Heaven and “the far country” where the sinner is. That distance was so great that only God’s love and wisdom, in the Person of His dear Son, could ever span it. “The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God who dwells on high. Who humbleth Himself to behold the

things which are in heaven and in earth.” “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and the needy out of the dunghill.” (Ps. 113). How wonderful it is that God should look in such a way “on the base things of the world and on the things which are despised.”

If light travels far and fast how much more does the love of God! Distance and duration are, indeed, two aspects of His marvellous love. When the prophet uses the words “of old” he also brings the idea of duration within historical time. The word may even express God’s first manifestation of His love to his own soul. We think, however, that he is speaking on behalf of the Church of God in every age. This love which was in God from everlasting was revealed to man in the very morning of Time. Think of Adam and Eve trying to hide themselves among the trees of the garden. At that solemn hour God sought them, and having pronounced the dread sentence which their sin, and ours in them, called forth, He there and then opened for them a door of hope. Mercy shone through the thick darkness, and the terrors of His just curse were pierced through by beams of love eternal. From the lips of God fell that word which contained the promise of a Redeemer. “The seed of the woman” would come to bruise the serpent’s head. Within that unspeakably precious word were hid those great depths and the mystery of that divine grace which the ages of eternity cannot fully declare. (Ps. 106:2). From that hour drops began to fall from Heaven, and the finger of God began to draw aside the curtain till, in the fulness of the times, there was a real and final manifestation of His love and glory in the gift and work of His own eternal Son. But what, we may ask are

### III. The Evidence and Characteristics of His Love?

A primary characteristic of love is that **it seeks nearness to its subjects**. We naturally seek nearness to those whom we love. And Christ came near to the Church in the everlasting council of peace. He then undertook to be her Husband and Saviour. As it is customary among men for the father “to give away” his daughter on the day of her marriage, so in the transactions of eternity, when the Son consented to redeem His people, God the Father gave them to the Son in an indissoluble covenant. “Thine they were and thou gayest them me.” “He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom.” Nearer He could not come. This is the most solemn and the most mysterious relationship known to man. “This”, says Paul, “is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” (Eph. 5:32).

He came near to them in another way. There is a lovely law in nature, whereby all the creatures dwell together “after their kind”. This wonderful law nature observes in the most impressive way. The Great Author of this law of kinship imparted sanctity and honour to it when He united our nature to His own Person for ever. Thereby He became what He was not till then — He became Man. “Forasmuch then as the children are made partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.” (Heb. 2). He married our nature that He might come near to us and dwell with us, and that He might be a true Husband to us in all love and tenderness. God the Father prepared a body for Him, and the Spirit conceived it in the womb of the Virgin. He took our nature without its sin, and yet with its sinless infirmities — that He might enter into

our trials, temptations and sorrows, and that in a real, personal and experimental sense His love and pity might flow to all His suffering people to the end of time. The Church, indeed, is the weaker vessel, but her exalted Lord is still touched with a feeling of her infirmity.

He took our nature also that He might destroy the sin which had destroyed us, and “him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”. How wonderful to think that from all eternity our Lord joyously anticipated the day when, as “a man of sorrows” He should inhabit the earth, and in their nature and likeness tabernacle with men in order that He might deliver them out of the hand of Satan who had led them captive in their fall!

Another characteristic of Christ’s love was **its willingness to suffer** for those on whom it rests. Our Lord found His people ready to perish for ever in the cruel, unrelenting grasp of sin and death. They had the sentence of death in themselves. They came to know also that God’s justice, in perfect righteousness, was, like an avenging sword, ready to slay them. They heard the accusing voice of the Holy Law — whose just demands are that we should perfectly love the Lord and one another — speaking against their sins. The voice from the mountain which is shrouded in unrelieved darkness they heard like thunder reverberating through a guilty conscience. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the works of the Law to do them.” But for the joy set before Him Christ faced all the spiritual and physical agonies, all the shame and reproach, all the wrath, and all the heavy and unavoidable afflictions which their sins deserved. “He who knew no sin was made sin for us.” The whole weight of our iniquities with all the sorrows and sicknesses which they bore, He took upon Himself. Our sins, which were imputed to Him, became His own. In love He died our death. “For the transgression of my people was He smitten.” This He did, that His perfect righteousness and merit, might, in being imputed to us, render us for ever acceptable to God. O, what love moved Him to do all this. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” And in the day of her final presentation to Him in Heaven, when in His righteousness and image she shall appear in all the wonder of eternal youth and loveliness, He shall rejoice over her as a young man rejoiceth over his bride.

As love is willing to suffer **it is also willing to give**. Christ possesses unsearchable riches. As God’s only and eternally begotten Son He is the “Heir of all things”. The Father gave all things into His hand. As the Mediator of the New Covenant God gave Him the fulness of the Spirit and all the treasures of His wisdom and grace. The blessing is “on the head of Joseph and top of the head of him who was separated from His brethren.” But, in a deed of testament, Christ gave His riches away! That testament became valid when He died. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich.” These unsearchable and inexhaustible riches are administered in the Gospel now, and will be administered throughout endless ages in the kingdom of glory. This is love indeed; and this is good news for the poor in Zion. God is able to supply all our needs “according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ.” Throughout eternity His people shall

be led to make new discoveries of the wonderful love “which passeth knowledge”. Happy are all they whose prayer is:

**“Remember me, Lord with that love,  
Which thou to thine dost bear,  
With thy salvation, O my God,  
To visit me draw near.” (Ps. 106).**

Another blessed characteristic of this love is **its irresistible power**. “And with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” Christ found His people dead in trespasses and sin; but in a day of His power He quickened them and called them effectually to Himself. He passed by them and said, “Live”, and He made their time “a time of love”. He drew them out of a state of death and darkness “with the cords of love and with the bands of a man.” They saw His love in dying for them on the Cross. This, especially, is what melted their heart, drew them into His bosom, and made them weep at His feet. “I if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.” From this love they can never be separated; for “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” From that day a prayer was born in their heart: “Draw me and we will run after thee.” Those who have His love in their soul shall be enabled to persevere to the end of their pilgrimage journey. “Love never faileth.” Many waters cannot quench it. It is stronger than death and jealous as the grave. Let me very briefly and in conclusion mention:

#### **IV. Some of the marks which belong to those who know this love.**

There is one place where all God’s people meet. They meet within the great declaration — “We love Him who first loved us.” This is, therefore, a reciprocating love. All whom Christ loved will come to love Christ. We know, of course, that there are degrees of this love within the Church of God, but, in this world, none can love Him in the measure in which He deserves. No, nor yet throughout eternity.

Now, the love of Christ in the heart is not a mere emotion. It is certainly something which lodges in our heart, but which has also its outward manifestation in the life of all His people. To love Christ is to obey Him. “If ye love me keep my commandments.” And to His own His commandment is not grievous but joyous. God’s child loves God’s will as it is revealed in His Word, and, like David, when he or she sees God’s law disparaged and trampled under foot of men, “rivers of waters run down their eyes.”

Those who love Christ would serve Christ. In this our own day when “the harvest truly is plenteous and the labourers are few” how we ought to exert ourselves in His service! But with iniquity abounding on all sides the love of many has waxed cold. O! that we might in this day of small things and during life’s brief hour, show our love to Him by doing what we can, and especially by wrestling with Him in secret that His kingdom may come and that the kingdom of darkness might be destroyed.

His people not only serve Him but they also suffer for Him. “Unto you it is given on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake.” The page of history tells us of the physical sufferings of the Church in other days. To her, literally speaking, His love was better than life. Many lay down their lives for their love to Him. But we believe that the greatest trials of God’s people are often inward, and proceed from their conflicts with sin and Satan. A great Divine once wrote a letter to a friend in which he said that in the measure in which we love God in the same measure will Satan hate us. “For thus,” he said, “is the nature of the love of God, according to the measure of it in the heart the most fiery and envenomed darts of Satan will pierce through our spirits tempting us to despise Him whose glory we account preferable to all creation.” But His love in our heart “endures all things”. If we are His, very soon we shall be drawn beyond the reach of all that distresses us here.

Then, in that fair world beyond the skies, we shall sing together His praise

**“But as for me I with my mouth  
Will greatly praise the Lord,  
And I among the multitude  
His praises will record.” (Ps. 109).**

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