

The Psalm writer tells us in Ps.19:1—“the heavens declare the glory of God...”—they communicate to us something of the power and wisdom of their Creator—and from our perspective there is nothing within those heavens that shouts louder of the glory of God than does the sun—that great ball of gas estimated to be some 92 million miles away and the source of all light and heat to our planet...

But perhaps the second greatest voice for God’s glory in the heavens is the moon—a far smaller planet created to provide light to the earth during the night, Gen.1:16—“God made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night...”—and yet what’s interesting with reference to this lesser light is that it produces no light of itself, but merely reflects it from the sun—thus the light that the moon provides is not original to it but is borrowed from the sun...

We find a similar concept with reference with God, for example, John told us back in 1:5—“God is light...”—and our Savior said of the church—“you are the light of the world...”—this is to say the church collectively and we individually are to reflect God’s holy character to a dark world—by nature [like the moon] we have no light within us, Eph.5:8—“you were formerly darkness...”—but by regenerating grace because we now bear His image, we reflect or imitate that light—and the same is true with reference to love—John told us in 4:8 and v16 that—“God is love...”—that is, He is the original source of love, and because we now bear His image, Christians are to reflect or mirror His love to a world filled with hate...

Thus I suggest to you that a Christian is similar to the earth and the moon—the earth in that we are the recipients of God’s love and the moon in we are to reflect God’s love, CHS—“There is no light in the planet but that which comes from the sun; there is no light in the moon but that which is borrowed, and there is no true love in the heart but that which comes from God...”

In coming to v19 there is a true sense in which we come to the underlining principle of this broader section, and in many ways the mountain peak of this entire epistle—what is the fundamental purpose behind this entire epistle but to point us to the fountain and source of all love—God...

And yet I am willing to go further still and assert that v19 stands out as a summary of the entire Bible—for in the second part of our text we have byway of implication the necessity and provision of redemption—God loved us from eternal past in Christ—His love is a redemptive love and thus can never be separated from all that redemption entails...

But then in the first part of our text, we have the whole of our duty both to God and to our fellow men—“we love...”—what is the substance of what God expects of man but love—love to God and love to man—thus we find in this single text [these 8 English words] a summary of the entire Bible...

Now it’s debatable whether this verse looks back to the previous verses or else forward to what follows—for our purposes it’s probably best to say that v19 serves as a bridge between the both—having mentioned that God is love [at the end of v8], John expands upon God’s love from v9 through v18—in vv20 through 5:2 he goes back to our love for God and others—in v19 we find both of these brought together [God’s love and our love]—and I want to consider this verse from a more topical approach, under three main headings...

- I. An Explanation
- II. An Examination
- III. An Exhortation

- I. An Explanation

- A. His love

1. John tells us in no uncertain terms that our love is the result or by-product of God's love—His is the cause behind ours—His is first ours is second...
2. But to be more specific, notice [1] His love is first in planning redemption—go all the way back to eternity past—a time when nothing existed but the Triune God...
3. And there of necessity existed love—the love of God for His people—His love was before all else—it predated all that He decreed would happen...
4. The Scripture's refer to this eternal decree as “the counsel of His will...”—from eternity past there was a counsel between the Father, Son, and Spirit...
5. And within this counsel they determined to create a world, to allow it to fall into sin, and to redeem a multitude out from it...
6. The primary reason for such a decree can only be attributed to a desire to make known to others the glory of the divine perfections...
7. He desired to manifest His grace and mercy, His patience and longsuffering, His righteousness and justice, His holiness and wrath—and His love...
8. This is the sole reason behind His eternal decree to create a world—to make known to others His own glorious nature...
9. But the question that directly concerns us at this point is this—What was the determining factor behind His choice of a people to save...
10. The Scriptures give us but a single reason behind this question, Eph. 1:5—“In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself...”
11. The one thing that separated a people for salvation was His love—He loved them in a way He did not love the others...
12. Pink—“God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity...”
13. Isn't it a tremendous thought that as long as God existed as God He loved His people—and this for no other reason than because he freely chose to do so...
14. Notice [2] His love is first in applying redemption—by this I refer to the actual application of salvation in time to individual people...
15. To put it plainly—when His saving love came to us, it found us in a state of enmity and hostility towards Him...
16. To put it in more theological terms—His love is not only electing but effectual—that is it finds us out as dead rebels...
17. It comes to us in such a way that it actually changes our hearts and natures—it overrides our native enmity and opposition...
18. At this point I want to deviate for a few minutes and address a view that is very common in our day and in the time in which we live...
19. During the 1700's it was made popular by a man named John Wesley—it's commonly referred to as “prevenient grace...”
20. Now the term “prevenient” simply means “to go before”—thus it refers to grace that precedes or comes before salvation...
21. Let me state at the very outset that the term “prevenient grace” in itself is a good term—it simply refers to grace that precedes any response on our part...
22. But John Wesley used it in a slightly different manner—he taught that it referred to grace given by God to every person enabling them to choose whether or not to believe...
23. Thus accordingly to this view, God loves every person equally, and so gives each person an equal amount of prevenient grace...
24. This grace is unmerited and universal—no person is given any more than the rest, and it has the same purpose for all...
25. Thus if you read Wesley's sermons you will find him confirming the fact that God takes the first step in salvation—that He initiates salvation...
26. But what he means by this is that God took the first step by giving every man without exception a measure of prevenient grace that makes their salvation possible...

27. Now my friends I believe I am right in saying, that this view is common among most Christians—that God initiates salvation in all men leaving to them to make the choice...
28. But such thinking differs greatly from our Reformed and Puritan forefathers, who without a single exception, understood the love of this text as a love that produces, in every case, a returned love...
29. In other words—the sure evidence that we are loved of God in this manner, is that our hearts are changed and we now love Him in return...
30. Now on a practical level what this means is this—the love of God finds us out in this world while we are dead in our sins and at enmity with Him...
31. He first loved us—he loved us when we were born in iniquity—even when we bore the moral image of Satan and refused to take heed to His gospel message...
32. When we were lovers of this world and cared nothing that we lived in open defiance to God, and walked according to the prince of the power of the air...
33. CHS—“The love of God is before our seeking; he draws us before we run after him. We do not seek that love; that love seeks us. We wander further and further from it, resist it, and prove ourselves unworthy of it: such are our nature and our practice, that they offer nothing agreeable to divine love, but the love of God arises in its freeness and stops our mad career by its power over the conscience and the will...”
34. Notice two testimonials, Jer.31:3—“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness...”
35. These words are a part of the Lord’s promise to gather a remnant of Israel out from Babylon having been taken captive for 70 years...
36. This remnant will be brought back to Jerusalem and to the covenantal acceptance and favor of God all-mighty...
37. We find in the latter half of v6 what they will say—“arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God...”
38. Notice v8—“behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth...v9 they shall come with weeping...”
39. This is the manner in which they will come—weeping over their sins and pleading to God for mercy and pardon...
40. But you might ask what all this has to do with us—well I suggest that it has everything to do with us, for throughout the OT the return of the remnant is typical of a penitent sinner...
41. Thus what’s true of the remnant collectively is true individually of every Christian person, notice [a] an electing love—“I have loved you with an everlasting love...”
42. Notice [b] an effectual love—“therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness...”—that is, I have not left you in the far country...
43. 1Thess.1:4-5—“knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction...”
44. Here we find the same truth we saw in Jer.31:3, but in clear didactical terminology—notice the same two things—[a] God’s electing love, v4—“knowing, brethren beloved of God, His choice of you...”
45. God had chosen them from before the foundation of the world—what was the single factor behind this choice is found in the phrase—“beloved of God...”
46. Notice [b] God’s effectual love, v5—“for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit...”
47. Here find the expression or manifestation of love as realized in time—how did Paul know that they were eternally beloved and chosen...
48. “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit...”—he knew they were chosen because they were converted...
49. Notice [3] His love is first in completing redemption—by this I mean His love remains the ongoing cause of our love throughout the completion of the Christian life...
50. We must never think that a Christian person merely needed a jump start to become a Christian, and then can live a Christian life in and of himself...
51. A Christian person remains as dependent upon God’s grace to continue in the faith as he did to be initially put into it...

52. Why does a Christian now love God—because He first loved us and worked within us grace—why do we continue to love God—because He continues to love us and take the initiative to work within us...
53. Oh my friends—what possibly can keep the flame of love burning within our hearts—nothing but the initiating and continuing love of God...
54. This can be illustrated in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress—Christian [who was typical of a Christian on his way to glory] spends some time in the interpreter's house...
55. It is here that Christian would be taught various truths necessary for his continued journey—at one point Christian was take to a wall where a fire was burning in front of it...
56. There was someone standing beside it trying to put it out by pouring large amounts of water upon it—yet the fire continued to burn higher and hotter..."
57. The Interpreter explains—"This Fire is the work of grace that is formed in the heart. The one who throws water on it to extinguish it is the Devil. But as you can see, the Fire is burning higher and hotter in spite of this; and now you will see the reason why..."
58. So then Christian is allowed to look behind the wall where he sees a Man with a container of oil in his hand, secretly and continually pouring oil on the fire...
59. Again the Interpreter explains—"This is Christi, who with the oil of his grace, continually maintains the work already begun in the heart. Because of this, in spite of what the devil can do, the souls of his people will continue to walk in his grace..."
60. Oh my friends while the love of man may end and fail to see us through, this is not true with God's love—for it is new every day...
61. The story is told about George Matheson, a young Scottish minister in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—who was born with an eye condition which was slowly blinding him...
62. Having fallen in love with a young lady he felt obligated to tell her that he probably would one day be rendered completely blind...
63. To which she replied—"I do not want to be the wife of a blind man..."—he was cast into a great depression and sadness...
64. Several years later in the year 1882 as he sat watching his sisters wedding, those sad memories began to flood his soul...
65. And as the story is told, he sat down by himself and in 5 minutes wrote that famous hymn which began with those words...
66. Hymn—"O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be..."
67. But what are these testimonies in comparison to that of the apostle, Phil.2:12-13—"therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure..."

## B. Our love

1. I must here begin by addressing the matter of a textual variant—the manuscript used by the old and new King James Versions has the pronoun Him—"we love Him, because He first loved us..."
2. While the manuscripts used by the newer translations do not have any pronoun—"we love, because He first loved us..."
3. Now since I deviated from the KJV last week, I hate to find fault with it again this week, but the simple truth is it's almost universally agreed that the pronoun "him" is not original to the Greek text...
4. Notice [1] we love God, Ps.116:1—"I love the LORD..."—this of course is what a Christian is—a person who loves God...
5. Notice [2] we love His Son, 1Cor.16:22—"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed..."
6. Love for Christ is the sure evidence that God's love has been powerfully and effectually applied to our hearts...
7. Notice [3] we love His word, Ps.119:127—"I love your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold..."—because we love the Lord we love His word...

8. And dare I say we love the whole of this word—the commandments and well as the promises, the warnings as well as the encouragements...
9. Notice [4] we love His day—that is we love that day set aside under the New Covenant called the Lord's Day—because we love Him we love the day wherein we especially have dealings with Him...
10. Isa.58:13—“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable...then you will find your joy in the LORD...”
11. Notice [5] we love His people, 1Jn.5:1—“whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him...”

## II. An Examination

Here I want to undergo a quick spiritual check-up, to assist you in discerning your present spiritual health—or to be more specific, what are some signs that our love for God and the things of God has begun to wane or grow cold—let me but suggest four...

### A. Little or no hunger for God

1. The Scriptures make clear that a spiritually healthy person hungers and thirsts after God, Ps.42:2—“my soul thirsts for God, for the living God...”
2. A healthy Christian longs for the sensed presence of God—and oh how it breaks their hearts to be far from it...
3. This is the testimony of the church in Song 3:1-2—“all night long...I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. 2 I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him...”
4. You see a heart full of love will not be content until it meets with the one it loves—there is a deep longing and desire to spend time with the object of its love—and it grows sick if it is refused this desire...
5. For example, I can remember when my wife and I first began to court—and she gave me a picture of her, which I kept in my Bible...
6. And throughout the day I would take this picture out and gaze upon it—and how I would long to see her or at least speak with her on the phone...
7. Well it's a very humbling thing to ask—do I yet possess such affections for my wife, such longings and desires for her presence...
8. Well so it is—a Christian can for whatever reason begin to loose those deep longings and soul thirstings after Christ...
9. Oh my dear Christian friend—can it be said of you that you have left your first love—that your soul no longer hungers and thirsts for God as it once did...
10. Thomas Watson describes this sad condition—“They have no spiritual appetite, they do not so prize Christ, they have not such strong affections to the Word, their hearts do not burn within them...they are spiritually sick...their love is decaying...”

### B. An undue interest in this world

1. The Scriptures describe a Christian as one whose—“crucified to the world...”—that is to say their hearts are no longer held captivated to the things of this life...
2. They have been elevated and fixed upon more noble things—things worthy of their affections and of eternal nature...
3. 1Jn.2:15—“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him...”

### C. Toleration of any known sin

1. It only makes sense that if we love God we will hate all that's in opposition to Him—to love good necessarily implies you hate evil, Ps.97:10—"You who love the LORD, hate evil..."
2. Thus what happens when our love begins to grow cold, our hatred for sin grows cold, and we begin to tolerate things that we never would have...

#### D. Prolonged coldness in worship

1. By this I mean a habitual disinterest or lethargic spirit when it comes to private and public worship—to worship the Lord more with our lips than our hearts...
2. My friends, it's a sure sign of spiritual decay when we can contemplate entering the courts of God with little or no anticipation or enthusiasm...
3. Ps.84:2—"My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God..."

### III. An Exhortation

Here I want to offer a few brief helps to increase our love for God, and to especially recover it if it's begun to wane or grow cold...

#### A. Repent from all that rivals Him

1. If we are to grow in our love for God, then we must decrease in our love for everything else—we must repent from possessing any excessive affection for anything other than God...
2. That God deserves and expects to be loved supremely is the testimony of our Savior Himself, Matt.10:37—"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..."
3. Rev.2:2-5—"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 "and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 "Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent..."

#### B. Remember all that He has done

1. One very necessary means to enhance our love for God is to remember the deep pit from which we were taken out from...
2. Thus one common reason why our love often grows cold, is that we forget from where we have come—we forget where He has brought us from and to...
3. In Luke 7, as our Savior was sitting with His disciples in a Pharisees house, a woman who was a sinner entered weeping, and began to wash, wipe, and kiss His feet...
4. V39—"Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him say this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner..."
5. Our Savior used this as a teaching opportunity for His disciples, as He began to tell Simon Peter this parable...
6. V41—"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty..."
7. V42—"and when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore which of them will him more..."
8. To which Peter replied—"I suppose the one whom he forgave more..." to which our Savior said—"you have rightly judged..."
9. V44—"Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered you house: you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed by feet with fragrant oil..."

10. V47—“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little...”
- C. Realize His present love for you
1. Here I to leave you where we began—what can better revive our love than what caused it in the first place —“we love because He first loved us...”