



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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God the Fountain of Salvation for all His Elect

by Thomas Goodwin

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-6.

We have already sailed over one sea, that of man's corruption, a dead sea, as I may so call it: and we are now entering into another, a far vaster and deeper, of God's love and free grace; 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us,' &c.

In opening of these words, I shall pursue that method which I have used from the beginning.

1. To give you the general scope, parts, and coherence of the words.
2. To give you an exposition. And—
3. Observations upon them.

*1. For the main general scope; it is to set out the greatness of that love, mercy, and grace that is in God, as it is the fountain of salvation to all his elect, and this in the chiefest outward fruits and benefits of it *ad extra*, towards us, in three several degrees thereof. He doth take an advantages in setting of it forth, to take their hearts whom he wrote to.*

He had first presented to them a map and a prospect of their sin and misery, in the former verses; how they were 'dead in sins and trespasses,' 'children of wrath,' &c., and this to prepare their hearts. Even as, suppose you would prepare the spirits of men condemned to die to entertain with the highest welcome the grace and mercy of a prince that was resolved to pardon them, you would first set out to them all their wretchedness and demerits to the full, and then emphasize the goodness and graciousness of the prince in his resolutions of grace and favour towards them: so doth he here. A graciousness shewn not only simply in forgiving, pardoning, and pulling them out of that depth of misery, but in raising and advancing them, and setting them up upon the highest pinnacle and top of honour; raising them up from death, and a death in sin, to sit together in

heavenly places in Christ Jesus, or with Christ Jesus. Such a story as this, were it told but to standers-by, but as that which concerned other men and not themselves, it would wonderfully affect them, and cause them to fall down in admiration of that superexcelling grace in him that should deal so with miserable and unworthy creatures subjected to his wrath. But when the men the story is uttered of are the persons themselves that hear it, and the objects of all this grace, how must this needs transport them!

Now after he had forelaid and inlaid the description of their misery, he sets out the mercy of God in the most taking way.

He first brings it in with a *but* of some hidden and secret design to remedy all this, that that God whom he had said had elected and predestinated, contrived our salvation according to the counsel of his will, having mercy in him; a *but* of an admiration and astonishment in himself, of excess and abundance of grace in God, and reservation of a superabounding happiness intended to them: '*But God,*' saith he.

And at the second word, he names him that is the subject of all this goodness, and the designer and author of all this happiness to them, to the end they might have him in their eye, even from the first: '*But God.*'

My brethren, I appeal to you: if you had first only heard the story of your natural condition and the desert of it, from an ambassador sent from heaven, and he had done nothing but laid open to you the woeful, rueful, wretched condition that you are in, with all the punishment God had threatened to inflict and you had deserved; and his last words had been, concluding you under the wrath of the great God, 'children of wrath,' as here; and then should have gone, and further said, '*But God,*' and gone no further, and paused there for a while, your thoughts naturally would have meditated nothing but terror, and have thought nothing but that God, that is so displeased with sin, that is so great a God, he will be avenged, he will destroy us, he will do unto us according to his wrath, and our desert. But what follows?

'*But God, that is rich in mercy.*' Here is a happy turn, a beam of hope breaks out now to poor prisoners of hope. Here is a mine sprung, that neither Adam nor the angels knew; it is a mine of mercy, a rich mine, and an intimation of an engagement of all that riches: for why else should it come in here for the pardon?

And this mercy in God—having laid open such a treasure both of disobedience and wrath upon this occasion—he loadeth with as great attributes and epithets. '*God,*' saith he, '*who is rich in mercy.*' And yet God might have been merciful in his nature, and we never the better for it; he might also have been rich in mercy, of long-suffering and patience, and yet destroyed us at last; as in

Rom. 2:4, you read of the riches of his patience and long-suffering, to them that treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. No, 'God, who is rich in mercy,' and hath 'loved us,' saith he; special mercy joined with, and rooted in special love. And that love is not a new love, newly taken up, but it is a love which he hath borne: 'for the love wherewith he hath loved us,' saith he,—loved us that were thus sinful and thus wretched, and loved us while we were thus sinful and thus wretched, yea, from everlasting; yea, who ordained us, thus sinful, to shew this love and mercy, ver.7.

And he contents not himself barely to mention this love, but he loads that also with a new epithet, 'great love.' He contents not himself to say, 'God, who is rich in mercy, and hath loved us.' but, 'for the great love wherewith he hath loved us.' So that now, as in respect of mercy there is an expectation of being freed from all this misery; so in respect of this great love there is an expectation raised of as great an advancement, that shall answer the mention of the love of so great a God, and so great a love in him.

And when he had thus laid this foundation, both of what riches of mercy is in God's nature and heart, and what great love hath been in the purposes of his heart, in this 4th verse he goes on further to tell them what this mercy and love hath intended and done for them. And, still to take and affect their hearts the more, whilst he is in the midst of doing of it, he winds in the mention of what they were and had been, he minds them of that 'God,' saith he, 'who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins;' so ver. 5. He repeats no more, but he would have them take in all that he had said in the 1st, 2d, and 3d verses: 'when we were dead in sins and trespasses,' 'walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air;' when we were 'children of disobedience,' slaves to the devil, 'children of wrath by nature.' He intermingleth, as I may so say, the sense of their sinfulness and wretchedness in the midst of his discourse of God's graciousness and mercy, that they might be sure to carry that along in their eye, have inlaid thoughts of their wretchedness to affect their hearts with his goodness. And then, lest they should not take in and think soon enough of the mercy of God which he had spoken of but even now, he darts in another beam of God's love into their hearts under a new name, with a new memento to set it on. 'By grace ye are saved.' and grace addeth yet to both love and mercy. It is not only great love for quantity, it is not only rich mercy, but it is grace also, for the freeness of it, and for the particularness of it unto them, and not to others. And when he had done all this, he comes to shew three degrees of advancement unto these men that were thus miserable and wretched, that God doth and hath bestowed upon them, and will

bestow upon them, which they may be sure of, that they shall attain to and arrive at in the end. He then mentioneth, I say, three degrees of benefits.

He tells them, first, that this God, thus rich in mercy, hath quickened them, quickened them when they were dead, and dead in sins and trespasses,—for if you would restore a dead man, you must first put life into him, you must begin there,—quickened them both with a life of justification, they being dead in respect of the guilt of sin, pardoning all their sins out of the riches of his mercy; and quickening them with a new spirit, with a new soul, with the Holy Ghost to dwell within them for ever, the same Spirit that dwells in Jesus Christ, and that quickened him, to quicken them, who was himself a quickening spirit. And quickening them also with a principle of life in holiness, even as the soul dwelling in the body quickeneth it with a life. And, saith he, all this he hath done already for you, here in this world.

But, saith he,—he means not to rest there,—there are two other benefits in the life to come, which are two degrees more. He will raise you up, saith he, at the latter day. And as a pawn and testimony of that, look upon the resurrection of Christ, and he in rising is the first fruits of them that rose, and ye are ‘risen in him,’ saith he; in Christ ye are risen, when he rose. And he speaks of it as done, because he would shew the certainty and sureness of it. As God raised up Jesus Christ’s body, so he will raise up yours; yea, when Jesus Christ rose, ye were reckoned in him: and as God put a glory upon Christ’s body when it was risen, so he will do upon yours at the day of judgment.

And that is the second degree, that degree of glory the soul shall have when it meets its body, and is raised again at the day of judgment. But then there is a higher degree than this; for when the day of judgment is over, you shall, saith he, be placed in the midst of a sea of glory, and have a full possession of it, as Jesus Christ himself has. He *hath* placed us, saith he; still to shew the sureness of it, he speaks as if it were done. All that glory, saith he, which Jesus Christ hath, he hath it as representing you; look what place he is in, you shall be in; yea, you are now reckoned to sit there, so as you cannot be frustrated of it; and your life is hid with God in Christ, and when Christ shall appear, who now representeth you in heaven, you shall be possessed of it.

And so now you have the general scope or meaning of these words opened to you.

Now then for the coherence and the parts of it.

First, For the coherence. You see, they come in next to that of our sinful state, to that end and purpose to emphasize and to heighten the riches of the glory of the mercy and love of God in Christ, and also of that glory which in Christ God hath ordained unto us.

Now the scope being to emphasise the mercy and grace of God in every way, these are the parts of it:

First, He sets out what in God is the most inward and original cause of all this, which he would have magnified, by three names, *mercy, love, grace*; to which, if you will, may be added, kindness, out of ver.7.

Secondly, He ascribes unto all these the most heightening epithets. To mercy he addeth 'riches;' to love he addeth 'greatness;' to grace, 'exceeding riches,' ver.7. 'God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he hath loved us.' He sets all these out.

Thirdly, By minding us of the condition we were in, when God thus did shew mercy to us. 'Even,' saith he, 'when we were dead in sins.'

Fourthly, To take our hearts the more, he sets it out by the benefits we are advanced to, which are three. We are quickened with Christ; risen with Christ; sit together with Christ in heavenly places. And—

Last of all, That Christ may be magnified, and have a praise in it, as he is God-man, Mediator, as well as God, he saith that all this is done in Christ, and with Christ, as the instrumental cause, and representative head, and meritorious cause of all this.

And so now you have the parts of these words.

II. I shall now begin the *exposition* of them, and run over every one of them severally and apart.

But.—It refers to that God, chap. 1, that had predestinated, &c. Jerome saith that this same but is superfluous, and he would have it blotted out, and thinks it crept into the copy, as it were, unawares. But it is a word which ushereth in a great turn, he having mentioned the state of nature before, and sets an emphasis upon all that follows. And you shall find that upon the like occasion phrases akin to this come in, which we all translate *but*. Paul having spoken of his own unregenerate condition and the mercy shewn him by God as then, comes in with the like *but* when he would magnify the mercy shewn him, in 1 Tim. 1:13: 'I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious; *but* I obtained mercy.' Likewise, Tit. 3:4, you shall find the like *but* comes in, and upon the very same occasion. He had described our unregenerate estate at the 3d verse, 'We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. *But*,' saith he, ver. 4, 'after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, according to his mercy he saved us,' &c. And it is so far from being superfluous that, like John Baptist, it foreruns the manifestation of the richest grace in God.

It is, first, when it comes in thus, a particle of admiration, wondering at God in it. So in that place of Timothy, 'I was injurious, and a blasphemer; but I

obtained mercy.' O wonderful! who would not have made a *but* at me? 'But,' saith he, 'I obtained mercy.' He ushers it in as with astonishment and admiration, and therefore ends his speech with a doxology, ver. 17, 'Unto the King eternal, &c., be glory for ever, Amen.' So here, being 'dead in sins and trespasses,' and 'children of wrath but God, who is rich in mercy,' &c.

Secondly, It is also a *but* of opposition to what might have been generally in all men's thoughts and apprehensions; clear contrary to, and beyond what we could think. So in usual speech we use the particle *but*, when we turn our speech a clear contrary way. It is therefore a door of hope, and it makes to me the greatest in the Scripture. Suppose that, after the Apostle in speaking this, having concluded man's sinful condition, as here, with this, 'children of wrath,' which strikes into all men's souls inconceivable horror, he had mentioned God next, without this *but*, and there paused, and made a suspense of speech, and left the rest to our thoughts; how would we have wildered ourselves in fears, and have thought thus with ourselves? —God, that is by nature holy, as we are sinful, can behold no iniquity, and a God so just as in punishing and destroying the sinner he shall infinitely glorify himself; a God so powerful in wrath that he is able to revenge to the uttermost; and so absolute in sovereignty that we are the clay, he is the potter; if therefore for our filth he should throw us to destruction, we could not reply, Why dost thou so? We being so obnoxious, he could destroy us without an excuse. A God withal so all-sufficient and rich in blessedness in himself, when he had destroyed us according to our desert, and his own provocation in himself thereto, could never find any loss or lack of us, or he could have created new creatures. How would all our souls, like Adam's, have melted within us, and meditated terror! But none of all this, but the quite contrary. 'But God, that is rich in mercy,' &c. There is a mine sprung neither Adam nor angels knew of at the first.

It doth tend also to usher in all sorts of opposite things to what he had said before; he had shewn how man is sinful, but God is merciful. Instead of sins and trespasses, he is to speak of mercy; instead of men being sinful, he is to describe God merciful; man by nature sinful, but God by nature merciful. There is an opposition of quickening to death. When we were under the power of Satan, and the devil was our prince, the prince of the power of the air, now to come under Christ, to be quickened with him, and to 'sit with him in heavenly places,' so high, even when children of wrath by nature; but 'by grace,' as opposed to nature, 'we be saved.' All these oppositions of aspect of the words that follow to what went before, this *but* ushers in.

It also comes in, when what follows exceeds what went before in a way of contrariety, to shew that where sin abounded grace superabounded much more.

Man had done thus and thus, and was thus and thus; but God in his work hath put down man clean in his work. 'But God, who is rich in mercy.' And so much now for that particle, *but*.

God.—It refers to what he had enlarged of God, chap. 1, and anew explicates the sense of it. In the second place here, he holds up God to be, as well he might in this case, the sole author of all that salvation that follows. As in Rom. 11:35, 'Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,' especially our salvation. In 2 Cor. 5:18, 'All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself'

He comes in here with God—'but God'—as the subject of all this mercy and love, whom therefore we should carry along with us in our eye to magnify. And 'but God' is a note of specialty. So David, 'Let me fall into the hands of God,'—not man,—'for very great are his mercies,' 1 Chron. 21:13. As also, the prophet, 'Who is a God like unto thee,'—there is none else would have done it,—'that pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin?' It is only he, being rich in mercy, and having so much mercy in him, and being a God of such mercy, that hath done it. 'I am God, and not man; therefore ye are not consumed.' But God, saith he, being rich in mercy, hence it is ye are saved. And by God, he means likewise the Father, as distinct from Christ. He maketh Jesus Christ the instrumental cause: we are quickened in Christ: but who quickened us? God, saith he; it was his contrivance and doing. He would have us attribute the first and chief unto God; and his meaning is this, as if he had said, Now that I have shewn you that man hath done his part, and done his worst in that sinful condition he was in, you shall see what part God will act. 'But God,' saith he, 'who is rich in mercy,' &c. As also to shew that it is God alone that doth all in the matter of salvation, which is his scope in the rest that follows, to reduce the creature to nothing as the Apostle hath it, 'It is not of him that runs, or him that wills, but of God that sheweth mercy.' That as it is in Jer. 3:5, thou hast sinned, and yet called me Father, and 'thou hast spoken and done evil things, as thou couldest;' this thou hast done; well, now, I will see what I can do, ver. 19, 'Thou shalt call me, My father, and shalt not turn away from me.' So the Apostle here: You were so and so, 'but God,' &c.

God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us.

You see here, he speaks of the causes of our salvation, mercy and love. In opening of this, I shall first give you the *distinction between mercy and love*.

I begin with *love*; his shewing mercy is resolved into it. It is a desire to communicate good, the chiefest good, unto the creature; but mercy is to pull the creature out of a depth of misery. The object of God's love is the creature simply

considered; the object of mercy is the creature fallen into misery. So that mercy superaddeth this to love, that it respects the creature in misery. Parents, they love their children simply as they are their children; but if they be fallen into misery, then love works in a way of pity; love is turned into mercy. So that now you see, I say, the difference in a word between these two, that mercy respecteth misery, and hath properly misery for its object. You have that notable place for this, in Rom. 11:32, 'God hath shut up all together in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.' Mercy therefore respecteth those that are thus shut up under unbelief.

The second thing that I would hold forth for the opening of these two is this, *why mercy and love are here both brought in?* It is not mercy only, and one would have thought that had been enough, when he would speak of our salvation, but he also mentioneth love; and why?

1. Because *mercy only respecteth misery*, as I said before; it goes no further simply as mercy than the relieving those that are in misery out of their misery. And because that we had a treasury and a depth of misery, he therefore mentions a treasury and riches of mercy. There was a treasury of wrath, which we being children of wrath had heaped up; therefore he mentions a treasury of mercy. But, I say, mercy only respecteth pulling out of misery, and would have gone no further, simply as mercy. But now that, as an addition thereto, these persons delivered out of this depth of misery should be advanced to the same state and condition that Jesus Christ in heaven hath, that they should sit together in heavenly places with him; mercy alone would not have carried us thither, if mercy had not been winged with love, if love had not been mingled with and added to it; yea, a munificence of love, yea, a greatness of love. Mercy causeth a king to pardon a traitor; but if he shall take this traitor and advance him to the highest dignity, place him with him in the throne, as it were, this must needs be from love too; this is a superadding in that respect unto mercy.

Obs.—Let me affect your hearts with this consideration, That God hath done more for us infinitely than for the angels: he shews love to them; they are vessels of honour, whom he hath loved and taken up unto glory; hut they are not vessels of mercy: but now in saving of men he brings in both, mercy and love too; 'God, being rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us.'

2. *Love is added to mercy here, to shew the extent and the greatness of his &hewing mercy;* for that dependeth much upon love. If one be merciful only out of a virtue that is in him, or out of a duty, then so far as that virtue will carry him, he will shew mercy. As now, take a merciful man that is rich in mercy,—if we may so express it of men, as the Apostle doth, 'rich in faith,'—that hath a great deal of tenderness of bowels in him; let him meet with a man in misery, it will draw out his bowels to shew that man mercy, so far as mere mercy, as it is a

virtue, will carry him. Mark, for this is a distinct thing to the former; but if it light upon a person whom he loveth, then, besides the virtue or grace of mercy in him, mercy is infinitely more intended, comparatively, to him, than when he shews mercy to him merely out of that grace and virtue; love then boils up mercy.

As for example: if a physician that is a merciful man, and heals out of mercy, and takes a great deal of pains with a sick person even out of that grace and virtue, yet if his wife should be sick, or his child whom he loveth, here now mercy would be intended, here mercy would be heightened. Now, saith the Apostle, this is the case of God; he is not simply merciful out of mercy, but he is merciful out of love, loving the persons he shews mercy unto. And therefore in the Scripture he is said to be merciful as a father,—Ps. 103:13, ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him,’—yea, as a mother. He is merciful, not singly out of a principle of mercy only, but out of love also, which therefore intendeth, heighteneth mercy, draws it out so much the more, makes it the more active. If God hath riches of mercy, and love hath the command of that treasury, how profuse will love be to those that are in misery! Now, saith he, ‘God, who is rich in mercy,’ and besides that, he hath ‘loved us with a great love.’ Yea—

3. For explication, what is the reason, let me add this as a reason why both these are thus joined together here: That *the foundation of God’s shewing mercy is his love*. So, if you mark it, the Apostle lays it: ‘God,’ saith he, ‘who is rich in mercy;’ but that alone would not have done it, therefore he adds, for the great love wherewith he loved us. And you shall find the like in many other places, as in that Tit. 3:4, 5, which I quoted before, where having laid open our natural condition, he comes in with the same *but* that he doth here. ‘But the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared; according to his mercy he hath saved us.’ For love, I say, is the foundation in God of his shewing mercy. That I may open and explain this to you, for it is a thing of much consideration and help to us:—

Mercy in God and man differs thus: that mercy in man, go take the inward compassion of it, the inward affection in the heart, it always worketh, whether one love the party, or not love him, so that if he be in misery, and it be in a man’s power to help him, and it be lawful to help him, there is a pity within a man stirs him, and doth as it were command him to help that man, draws it forth to do it. *Homo misericors, semper misericors*. And mercy in man, if he shews mercy merely out of mercy, and out of no other affection joined with it, it works equally, is equally compassionate to men in like condition. But mercy in God, you must know, is drawn out, though it be his nature, by his will; he pardoneth whom he will: ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.’ Therefore he pardoneth great sinners, when he lets others that are smaller perish. Nay, the compassion itself

doth not necessarily work in God, but it depends upon an act of his will, though mercy be his nature. If God had been merciful to no sinner, but had damned all men and angels that had sinned, and had done it with wrath and revenge, yet he had been as merciful as now he is, take his nature. So that our salvation must be resolved into some other principle than simply his being merciful. And therefore, by the way, when we say that mercy is nature in God, the meaning of it is this, that it is suited to him, it is that which he doth with the greatest delight,—as men do actions of nature—wherein he hath no reluctancy. The meaning is not that this mercy works naturally and necessarily, for had not he set his heart to love, had not his will been set upon it, not an angel or a man that sinned had ever had a drop of mercy from him, though he is thus full and thus rich in mercy. So that though God is rich in mercy, yet there must be love also as the foundation. That which moved him to be merciful to any was his love pitched upon them; and having first pitched his love upon them, then, he seeing them in misery, love stirs up mercy. In that he did resolve to be merciful to any creature, it is not simply an act of his nature, but it doth depend upon his will: though he had in his nature this riches of mercy, yet we had not been saved if it had not been the good pleasure of his will, and that love had been added to all that mercy; all the mercy that is in him would never else have flown forth from him. But—

They both here come in, not only to shew that his love was the cause why he resolved to shew mercy; but that those to whom he meant to shew mercy, his *love guides and directs him to it*. His love had first singled out certain persons whom he meant to shew mercy to; and love did guide the channel which way mercy should run. And therefore you shall find in Scripture that election obtains it, ‘Jacob have I loved,’ saith he. And that is the reason why he shews mercy to any, ‘that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand,’ Rom. 9:11. So as indeed divines do make mercy but the remote cause of salvation, but love to be the fundamental. And this is true, whether we hold that he loved men when they were considered in the pure mass of creatures, or in the corrupt mass, as they are considered since; still, I say, love is that that did guide mercy; why mercy should be conveyed to these souls, and not unto others, it was because he loved them, it was from his love first pitched upon them.

I shall now come to some observations, for I see I must reserve that of the riches of this mercy, and the greatness of this love, to which something must be spoken, to another discourse.

First, you see there is a love which he hath shewn us, which, I say, is the ground of all his mercy to us, though he is merciful in his nature. The first observation then that make of it is this:—

Obs. 1.—Let the love of God be the greatest thing in your hearts, the nearest thing to your souls of all else, the greatest thing which in your eye you do pursue. It is the first thing in God laid the foundation of good, and it is the highest thing to be attained to, and to be pursued after by us. Of all things in God, value his love, and seek after that; let, I say, the desires of your souls be pointed unto it. God's love is the greatest thing of all the rest, it is more than all his benefits. The love of Christ was more than his sufferings, and his sufferings were more than his benefits; and the love of God is more than all his gifts, and yet he hath given great things to us, and done great things for us. *Amor est primum donum*; his love is the first gift, as one well saith, in the gift of which all things else are yours. The gift of his Son was a great gift, but it was founded in his love. 'He so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.'

Though we, being sinners, need mercy, that is the next thing we want, and therefore we look to it—Oh, mercy, mercy!—because we apprehend ourselves in misery. But do you look beyond mercy, and look to love, which is a greater thing to you than mercy, raiseth and enlargeth mercy, and when mercy hath done with you, will do more, or as much for you as mercy hath done, and guideth mercy. The reason why mercy ran into your hearts, and washed you with the blood of Christ, is because that love guided the channel. 'To seek after mercy, this self-love and the misery thou art in will make thee do. Oh, but there is somewhat else, saith a good soul; it is the love of God, and the favour of God, that I would see, and it is not self-love that ever will carry a man on to seek that. And what is the reason that this chiefly is the pursuit of a soul spiritualised? One reason among others is this: because grace is always the image of God's heart; now this being the chief thing in God's heart, and the first thing, and the highest thing, hence therefore the soul seeks that ultimately and chiefly.

Obs. 2.—Secondly, if you ask me what love it is that I would have you prize and value, and what love it is that is here meant; it is *everlasting love*. 'For the great love wherewith he *hath* loved us,' saith the Apostle, not wherewith he doth love us. It is everlasting love that is the cause of all the mercies we have. Jer. 31:3, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love,' —there you have the phrase too; so the Apostle here, 'wherewith he hath loved us;' this *hath* reaches as high as to eternity,—'therefore,' saith he, 'with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.' Will you know the reason why God calleth you, why he saveth you? It is this, I have loved you with an everlasting love. It is not a love that God doth begin to set upon you then when you are first called; no, it is a love taken up from everlasting. He had a love in him to you before he gave Jesus Christ,—that is, before the consideration of giving Jesus Christ as to die for us. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.' And Jesus Christ had a love in him too; he loved

us before he gave himself for us: Gal. 2:20, 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And so, before he calleth us, and converteth us, love, you see, this eternal love of God, is the foundation of all; and so the Apostle resolves it here: 'for the great love wherewith he loved us.'

Obs. 3. —Thirdly, give me leave but in a word to express that which I think is a truth,—it is a controversy amongst divines, and some take one part, and some another, and what is here said is to me an evidence of it amongst others, — that in the order of God's decrees, for he speaks here of everlasting love in God, he doth set his love upon the creature; that is first, and in that respect chooseth the creatures whom he meant to make and whom he would set himself to love, not under the consideration of fallen, but in *that pure mass as yet not fallen*. And his shewing mercy comes in but to shew how much love he meant to shew to such creatures as he had chosen and singled out; and therefore he lets them fall into sin, that so he might be merciful. He resolved to shew so much love to those he had chosen and set himself to love, with so great a love he loved them, that look what way soever would be best to set forth that love, those ways he would take to choose.

Now, thinks he, if I should simply love them, and take them up to heaven, and there give them such and such a glory, this indeed would shew love, and infinite love. But is there anyway else how love may be shewn? Yes, if I permit and suffer these creatures to fall into misery, I shall shew love in a way of mercy to them. So that now our falling into sin, and his giving Christ to die for us, and all these things, they are but to commend that love which he first pitched upon us as we are creatures whom he meant to make so glorious, and whom he meant so to love. Indeed, in Rom. 5:8, it is true, the Apostle saith that God commendeth his love towards us, that whilst we were yet enemies Christ died for us. But, if you mark it, he doth not say that he set his love upon us in the consideration of our being enemies; but whilst we were enemies he commended his love towards us; so he did in his decrees order it that he would commend his love towards us by this. But now that consideration which he had of us, or that act pitched first, was an act of love. Only let me give you this with it, that at the first he resolved to shew love in a way of mercy. As he resolved to shew his justice upon wicked men in a way of wrath, so he resolved to shew his love in a way of mercy. And therefore, as in the counsels of God all things are at once, so we must conceive it he resolved, at the same time when he thus set his love upon us, to permit our falling into sin, and so mercy be shewn.

But still, if you ask what act it was—whether our election was an act of mercy or an act of love; I answer clearly, as a great divine doth who hath spent much to the clearing of it, it was an act of love. It was his decree to shew mercy;

but this act was not out of mercy, it was out of love, and out of good-will; to manifest which love he was resolved to shew mercy, therefore he lets man fall. Election, I say, is an act of love rather than of mercy. Mark the coherence here, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he hath loved us.' God being merciful in his nature, having pitched an act of love upon us, when he saw us fall into misery his bowels turned; but he loved us first. That mercy is mentioned first is because it suited our condition; it is not because it was that attribute out of which the act of election proceeded, though in election there was a purpose to shew love in a way of mercy.

The observation of a great divine is this: saith he, 'Run over the whole Scripture, and you shall find indeed the calling of a saint is attributed unto mercy. Why? Because God calls him that is fallen into sin, and therefore there is mercy in it: as in 1 Tim. 1:13, "But I obtained mercy;" 1 Pet. 2:10; Rom. 11:31, 32. You shall find likewise,' saith he, 'remission of sins is attributed unto mercy,—I mean the act of remission, and the exercise of it,—in Luke 1:78, 79, Matt. 18:33. So likewise regeneration, as here, and in 1 Pet. 1:3, and in Tit. 3:5. So the actual bestowing of glory, Jude, ver. 21, &c. There is only one place,' saith he, 'and that is Rom. 9:16, which seemeth to make election an act of mercy. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." But the truth is, election is not in the text there; he doth not say, election is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but his business is salvation. "It is not of him that willeth,"—that is, salvation is not,—"but of God that sheweth mercy." And if it be said, 'He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy,' his answer is this: saith he, that is in election. He grants God decrees to shew love in a way of mercy; and because that is the issue, because that they are saved by a way of mercy, therefore they are called also vessels of mercy. But still that out of which election proceedeth is not simply the attribute of mercy. And he gives this exceeding clear and good instance:—'God,' saith he, 'is omnipotent, yet that God decreed to shew his power is not an act of omnipotency: so God is wise, but to decree to shew forth his wisdom is not simply to be resolved as an act of wisdom. So likewise here, God is merciful, &c.; but the purpose to shew all these attributes forth is resolved into his love.' This must needs be said, which I beseech you to take along with you, that to shew forth riches of mercy was the final cause of his decree, he had that in his aim and in his eye; but it was his will, and it was his love, out of which this proceeded and which he first pitched upon us, that moved him thereunto.

And so much now for that point, which I have spoken to but briefly, and perhaps more obscurely. It is, I say, a point of controversy, which I will not enter into, to handle all the particulars of it.

A fourth observation which I would make upon these words, which also is of great use to us, is this:—

Obs. 4.—That there is a love in God to us even when we are sinners, when we are in our natural estate, out of which love he calls us, and pulls us out of that condition. It is a strange thing that men should stumble at this. Say they, How can any be children of wrath, children of the curse, and yet be at the same time loved by God? Is there any such thing in all the Scripture? Why, it is here in my very text clearly and plainly: saith the Apostle, ‘When we were dead in sins and trespasses, children of wrath, God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us,’ namely, when we were thus. The need of reconciling these two hath been the cause of I know not how many errors in the world, and is to this day. What say the Arminians? This is their great argument, you shall find it in that Anti-Synod of Dort: If that God loved men from everlasting, and if God be reconciled to them, what need Christ have died? And the Socinians argue just the same. To give them an answer, if you will, in a word; and then, secondly, to shew how both these may stand together, that we may be children of wrath, and that yet God love us—

I answer to them, first, thus: Christ died to manifest his love, Tit. 3:4. We were thus and thus ‘hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared,’ then he saved us, ‘according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration.’ So that now, for the appearing and manifestation of that love it was that he gave Jesus Christ to die; for the appearance and manifestation of that love to the soul it is that he calleth him. And therefore you have that in Rom. 5:8, ‘God hereby commended his love towards us, that whilst we were sinners Christ died.’ It is an express scripture for this. It was not that he did then begin to love us, or doth begin to love us when we are called, but that love which he had taken up in his heart to us was so great, that giving Christ, and all else, is but to commend it, to set it out. So that if you ask, Why did Christ die, and why did God all this, if he loved us already? I answer, He doth it that his love may appear, he doth it to commend his love. I have often said it that Christ died but to remove obstacles; but the radical love, out of which God did give Christ, was pitched before.

Now, is it not an ordinary thing for a father that his child shall be a child of wrath to him, whilst he goes on in such a course,—that is, consider him as he is in that course, according to his fatherly wisdom he can proceed no otherwise with him but in wrath,—yet all that while so to love him as to set all ways on work to bring him in? Did not David deal so with Absalom? In 2 Sam. 13, when Absalom was ran from him, and entered into a rebellion against him, he, as he was a wise king, could do no otherwise in that condition but proceed against him as a rebel,

unless he came in and submitted himself. But what doth David do? He suborneth a woman, at least Joab doth, and David was well pleased with it, for Joab saw the king's heart was towards him; but suppose David himself suborned Joab to do what he did, that he might have a fair come-of, and manifest his love to his son. If David had done so—why, God himself did so. We were fallen into that condition that we were children of wrath, but yet there was a love to us that lay hid in his heart all the while, and he goes and suborneth Jesus Christ, if I may so speak; and Christ comes but to remove all the obstacles that lay in the way of justice, that he might be just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. If we will have another answer, How can we be children of wrath, and yet God love us? I ask again, How was Jesus Christ a curse when he hung upon the cross, and yet at the same time to be loved with the greatest love? According to such rules as God will proceed by at the latter day, if men remain in their natural condition, they are children of wrath but according to what his everlasting purposes are, even these children of wrath he loves, and hath loved.

I will give you a distinction which will salve all, and it is a good one. There is *amor benevolentiae* and *amor amicitiae*. While men remain in their natural estate, and are children of wrath, he may bear towards them *amor benevolentiae*—a love of good-will; but whilst they remain in their natural condition, he hath not *amor amicitiae* to them—a love of friendship, in which he doth communicate himself to them. But, I say, he may have a love of good-will, which yet is the foundation of the other, and will in time cause the other to break forth. And what is the reason that he hath not a love of complacency, nor a love of mutual friendship, and that we are not said to be reconciled to God till we do believe? Because it is not fit for God upon those terms to communicate himself to us, to open his heart, and to unbosom himself; but when the time comes, that love of good-will which he beareth to us will break forth into a love of friendship, and he will take us into covenant with himself, and then the kindness and love of God towards man appeareth, as the text saith, Tit. 3:4.

Obs. 5.—Fifthly, I make this observation from hence likewise: That *God in his love pitcheth upon persons*. 'For the great love wherewith he loved us,' saith he. God doth not pitch upon propositions only; as to say, I will love him who believeth, and save him, as those of the Arminian opinion hold; no, he pitcheth upon persons. And Christ died not for propositions only, but for persons; he knows his sheep by their names: Jer. 31:3, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love;' and, Rom. 11:7, 'The election hath obtained it, and the rest were hardened.' My brethren, God loved us distinctly, and he loved us nakedly; let me express it so in a word:—

He loved our persons distinctly; that is, singling out and designing whom. Not only so many, —I will love so many of mankind as shall fill up the places of the angels that fell, as some have imagined,—but he sees who they are distinctly. The Lord knows who are his; the text is express: ‘Jacob have I loved,’—he names him,—‘and Esau have I hated.’ ‘Rejoice not,’ saith Christ, ‘that the spirits are made subject unto you, but that your names are written in heaven.’ In Exod. 33:19, where God saith, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,’ he speaks it upon occasion of having peculiar mercy to Moses; and therefore the Apostle pertinently quotes it in Rom. 9:15, for election of persons.

And, secondly, he loved us nakedly; he loved *us*, not *ours*. It was not for our faith, nor for anything in us; ‘not of works,’ saith the Apostle; no, nor of faith neither. No, he pitcheth upon naked persons; he loves *you*, not *yours*. Therefore here is the reason that his love never fails, because it is pitched upon the person, simply as such. I will love such a one, let his condition be what it will be; if he fall into sin, I will fetch sin out of him again, that I may delight in him. The covenant of grace is a covenant of persons, and God gives the person of Christ to us, and the person of the Holy Ghost to us; he chooseth our persons nakedly and simply as such.

Obs. 6.— Lastly, *All the attributes in God are subjected to his love*, and that is the great prevailing attribute that sways all. You see in the text that it sways mercy; for the reason that God is merciful to one man and not to another is, because he first loved this man and not the other. It is love, I say, that is the prevailing attribute; and what way love goes, all attributes else go, mercy and power, &c. And therefore it is observable that when in the first chapter, ver. 19, he had begun to speak of that power that wrought in Christ in raising him from the dead, and said that the same power worketh in us; in this chapter, where he comes to state the application of his comparison, he should according to the common course have said, God, being *great in power*, hath quickened us, and raised us up together with Christ. No, he mentioneth mercy and love, rather than power. Why? Because power is at love’s beck in this. So that here our salvation lies, that God pitcheth an everlasting love upon men; and when he hath thus loved them, if they fall into misery, he is merciful, and love sets that on work; if there be a difficulty, then love sets power on work: and so, look which way love goes, an attributes else go; and if you have love, you have all things else in God, they are all swallowed up in love. And therefore it is observable, that God in a peculiar manner is said to be love, 1 John 4:8.

I know not that the like is said of any other attribute; and the reason is this: because that to one that he doth love, he is nothing else but love; for mercy, and power, and justice, and wisdom, and all, they all work together in a way of

subordination to love, that when a man looks upon all these attributes, they all appear in love, that God is nothing but love to that man. If I look upon his wisdom, it appears to me set on work by love, to exalt and magnify his love. If I look upon his power, it is all swallowed up in love, in respect of his manifestation of it to me; for I take it, when he saith in that place of John that God is love, he speaks not essentially of that attribute, but of the manifestation of it.

And so much now for the opening of this, why mercy and love are here joined, and why that love is made the foundation of his shewing mercy, with such observations as arise out of it. There are two things yet behind, which are the glory of all the rest in this text, and that is, that this mercy that is in God, set on work by love, it is *a rich mercy*; and that this love wherewith he did from everlasting love us, and that is the foundation of all, it is *a great love*. ‘God, that is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he hath loved us.’ But I must refer that to the next discourse.

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