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A Look At Love

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"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (I John 3:1).

There is an old saying to the effect that all the world loves a lover. If this were true, all the world would love God, for He is the truest and greatest of all lovers. Who can be compared to God as a lover whose love in its range and height and depth passeth knowledge? David said, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (Ps. 27:10). And Paul looked into every nook and corner of this vast universe and studied all the exigencies of human existence and expressed his conclusion in words that have brought hope to many a heart. And here is what he said: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38,39). God loves more people than anyone else, and His love is deeper and truer than that of anybody else.

Outside the realm of God and eternal truth there does seem to be some basis of fact for the proverb that all the world loves a lover. We like the theme of love. Some would have the preacher use no other theme from the pulpit. But to be clean from the blood of men, we must not shun to declare all the counsel of God. We like to sing songs that advertise the love of God. And we even dare to sing, "O how I love Jesus."

There is something about love that attracts. The love of Edward the 8th for Wally Simpson that led him to give up the throne of the British Empire has something admirable about it. And, so far as the world knows, he has been a true lover.

But it is easy to be tricked about love. Many a young couple thought they were desperately in love when they took the nuptial vows only to find they were mistaken. We need to be warned that true love is something more than sweet sentiment—something more than songs for the lips—something more than admiration for dimples; true love uses hands and feet and heart, as well as lips. True love goes into action, and stays in action, for its object. True love remains steadfast even when its object has become unlovely.

Where there is true love for God, there will be a life that seeks to do His will—a life that mourns over any failure to honor and please Him.

A study of words is necessary to crack the coconut of divine truth contained in our text. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Our scholarly friend, Dr. George Ragland, says that the word "Behold" is not an interjection to be followed by a comma, but an imperative verb as given in the R.V. And another has called our attention to the fact that it is in the aorist tense, a tense in the Greek that expresses an action complete in itself. And so the word "behold" may be rendered, "Just take a look"—take a look at the love the Father hath bestowed upon us. The word "manner" refers to the quality or kind of love. Just take a look at the fine quality of God's love. How glorious! How sublime!

Dr. Ragland also says that the clause, "that we should be called the sons of God" indicates both purpose and result. Its predominant sense is purpose, but the purpose of a result already predetermined. God's love intended that we should be called the sons of God and named us sons. God purposed that we should become sons and the purpose has been actualized—that is what we are. The word "sons" should be translated "children". So to paraphrase: "Just take a look at the quality of God's love that purposed we should be children of God and named us children of God."

Our scripture speaks of present dignity and future glory. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:2). The world does not know us children of God, but we are really somebody. We belong to the blood-royal. Morally and spiritually, we have the blood of kings in our veins.

We make much of our first birth, "Happy Birthday" is a common expression. Even prattling children like to sing "Happy Birthday" to daddy and mommy. But this natural birthday is not such a happy reminder; it does not mean much; it only marks another mile-post on the way to the grave. Our first birth brought us into a dying family and gave us a sinful propensity. But the second birth brought us into the realm of eternal life and gave us the divine nature.

Now only a marvelous love—a true and powerful love—could have made this possible and actual. God's love does wonders for its objects. It is not a helpless love like that which Darius had for Daniel. Darius loved Daniel and set his heart upon him and labored till the going down of the sun to deliver Daniel, but the law of the Medes and Persians was too much for Darius. But the law meant nothing to God and He delivered him. God's love is never helpless in the face of His law.

". . . and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him . . ." We are now children but it is better ahead when we shall be manifested in His likeness.

Some things about our future we do not know now. Our minds and hearts are too small to contain and comprehend some of the glorious things of the future. We know our future will be glorious, but the exact nature of the glory we do not know. We do not know the kind of place heaven will be. I could not draw you a picture of it. We cannot describe just how our bodies will look. We only know they will be like unto the glorious body of Christ. We know they will be free from pain and disease and death. We know heaven will be a place free from sin and everything that defileth. We cannot know what the vocabulary of heaven will be. The language of heaven is unknown to us.

The spiritual can only be described in terms of the natural. All the descriptions of heaven are given in terms of the most beautiful and glorious and valuable of things in nature. Its streets are of gold; its gates are of pearl; the foundation stones are precious jewels. But who can visualize the gold and pearl and precious stones of heaven.

Our scripture tells us that this hope of being like Christ has a purifying effect. "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Does this mean that God's people here and now can be as pure as Christ is? Actually and literally, NO; in aim and desire, YES. In the absolute sense, NO; in the relative sense, YES.

The hope we have of being like Him in heaven makes us want to be—and strive to be—like Him here on earth. Some of you will remember Nathaniel Hawthorne's story of the Great Stone Face. The youth, through his long look of love at the mountain's face in stone, was changed into the likeness upon which it looked. And so, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18). If you really hope to be like Christ yonder, you will be trying to be like Him here.

This earth is the training ground for heaven's activities. We practice here for the performance there. It is here we acquire our love for God; there we shall enjoy Him to the fullest. And this world is the kind of place to be in to make us long for heaven. Too many of us want to be on dress parade instead of being in the training camp or on the firing line. He who thinks he can love the sinful things of the world here, and all at once have a love for God and heaven when he leaves this earth has a sad surprise awaiting him. There is no magic in coffins and shrouds and graves to make men different from their former selves. Death will indeed release us from fleshly limitations, but it will put no new desires in us. If you never learn to love God here on this earth, you will never learn to love him after you leave here.

Now hope in the general sense—just the mere hope of heaven—will not make us very active. The mere desire to reach the land of gold and pearl and precious stones will not make us very godly. Many are lusting after such things who have no love for God or interest in Jesus Christ. It is this aspect of hope that poets have criticized and ridiculed. The poets have said that hope may smile and wave her golden hair; but that she is not in the way of doing much work in the world.

But this aspect of hope—the hope of being like Christ—the hope of perfection—the hope of glory—has a purifying effect, and we strive to be here and now what we will be when we are like Him.

And so our Scripture calls upon us to take a look at God's love in action. The love that made us and named us children of God. The love that will make all the sons like the only Begotten Son.

The love that wins our love, for we love Him because He first loved us.



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A child on his tiptoes trying to blow out the sun is to be pitied less than the theologian who pitches his fallibility against God's infallibility.