

HEREIN IS LOVE

If we seek to arrive at a proper concept of love, we will not be successful as long as we are looking at *our* love for *God*, but rather we must look at *God's* love for *us*. There is a vast difference between our *having* love and God *being* love. Not only is love *of* God (I John 4:7), but God *is* love (ver. 8). Love is so much a *part* of God that He may rightly be said to *be* love. But by contrast look at the description of ourselves as we are by nature, "hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). There is nothing about us that is lovable, nothing in us to *cause* God to love us. All of the reasons for God's love toward us is in Himself, not in us (See Deut. 7:6-8). The unconditionality of God's love for His people is seen in Romans 5:8; "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

We are told in Psalms 14:2 and 53:2 that "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God." And did He find any love or any desire toward Him among the whole lot of us? No, but rather He saw that we were "all gone aside" and were "altogether become filthy." He saw that there were *none* that did good, no, not one. How different is this picture from the way in which men by nature like to view themselves! How contrary to the exalted view man has of his own value and worthiness! The apostle Paul elaborates on this in Romans 1 and 3 and concludes that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He shows that the only way any of them will ever see God in peace is by "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Therefore it is clear that the only way anyone will ever love God is for Him to love them first (I John 4:19) and for Him to shed abroad His love in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them (Romans 5:5). Man's love for God is in no way an ultimate and sufficient illustration of love, but rather His love for man---and even then it passes understanding. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1). One of the greatest questions that can ever be posed is; Why did He love any of the fallen and corrupt race of man? And the only viable answer that can ever be given is; "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight" (Matt. 11:26).

Herein, then, is love—not that God's people loved Him, but that He loved His people. *By nature* they were children of wrath, just as the non-elect are in *actuality* (See Eph. 2:3), and there was nothing about them that was lovable, yet He loved them. *That* is love. We cannot now fathom this kind of love. The love we have for God is a God-given love, and there is everything in Him to make Him lovable to those of us who have seen ourselves as the poor, wretched sinners that we truly are. To us He is "altogether lovely" (S of S 5:16), and He has made Himself precious to us. It is therefore easy to see why *we* love *Him*, but to our finite minds it is impossible to fathom why *He* would love *us*. Our love for Him is not to be compared with His love for us. In view of all this then, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (John 4:10).

—Elder Ralph Harris