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THE  
LOVE  
OF  
GOD

Trinity Sermon, No. 14

LANCE R. SHILTON



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THE LOVE OF GOD

5DN Broadcast Address

by the Reverend

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Trinity Sermon No. 14

## THE LOVE OF GOD

"But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8

Do you know what the love of God is? One writer tells the story of the little boy who was out flying a kite. It was a fine day and very suitable for kite-flying. The wind was brisk. Large billowy clouds were flowing across the sky. The kite went up and up until it was entirely hidden by the clouds.

"What are you doing?" a man asked the little boy.

"I'm flying a kite", he replied.

"Flying a kite are you?" the man said, "How can you be sure? You can't see the kite."

"No," said the boy, "I can't see it, but every now and then I feel a tug so I know for sure it's there."

You would be a very peculiar person if the heartstrings of your being have never felt the tug of the love of God.

But we could easily get confused in the use of this word "love". We say, "I love cake, I love cricket, I love cats, cars love petrol, I love my wife."

In English the one word love has a variety of meanings. However, in the Greek language there are three words for love.

1. EROS - a sensuous passion which is not really love at all; it could be translated as "base desire". This word is not used in the New Testament.
2. PHILIA - meaning friendship or affection, the regard which we have for our friends, this word is used frequently in the New Testament.

and the third word;

3. AGAPE - meaning a deep personal love, and it is this word which was used by St. Paul in the 5th Chapter of his letter to the Romans and in the 8th verse he wrote

"God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Literally this could be translated:-

"God shows His deep personal love, or stands by His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died on our behalf."

(New English Bible - "But Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and that is God's own proof of his love towards us.")

This verse falls naturally into three sections -

The love of God,  
The sin of man,  
The death of Christ.

### 1. WHAT IS THE LOVE OF GOD?

First, let me say, that the love of God is not selfish. If you read the Greek classics, you will notice that the ancient writers of poetry and prose portrayed the Greek deities like human beings. Such love shown by their Gods and Goddesses was capricious and uncertain. Mortals were completely at the

mercy of the god's whims and passions. There was nothing rational or unselfish about their attitude to each other, let alone to man. This was the ancient Greek concept of Divine Power. The love or the wrath of their gods was exercised to man without any rhyme or reason. The gods existed to please themselves.

The Greeks made their gods in their own image. I wonder do we endeavour to make our God in our own image. God's love is a love which seeks to give itself and not to get for itself. Often when I am speaking to wedding couples, I say the real test of your love for each other is not shown by your desire to get from your partner, but to give.

It's the giving to each other which expresses true love. I suppose it is easy enough to love those who love you, but God's love is not selfish even to that extent, for it goes much more deeply.

In this passage which is before us, J.B. Phillips translates Paul this way:

"In human experience it is a rare thing for one man to give his life

for another even if he be a good man, though there have been a few who had the courage to do that."

"Yet the proof of God's amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us."

The Love of God is not selfish.

## 2. THE LOVE OF GOD IS NOT SUPERFICIAL.

It is not something on the surface only. When it is put to the test, its solidarity supports you.

I remember while in England I spent a day in the middle of the winter at St. Leonards-on-Sea. It was one of the coldest winters on record, the water was frozen, the snow was inches deep, and we decided to go for a walk. I was just about to step on to what appeared to be an even covering of snow when my friend grabbed hold of me and shouted, "Hey, don't step there; it's a lake." I'm sorry to disappoint you but I didn't step there, but if I had the surface would have been put to the test and I would have found out very definitely how superficial it was.

I want to say that you can rest your

whole weight on the love of God and it will support you.

Someone who suffered a very sad bereavement recently said to me, "I find it difficult now to believe in the love of God." All I could say was "the love of God is strong enough to support you now."

And the love of God is not superficial in the sense in which we can see it presented in novels and films. It is extremely difficult for young people particularly to get a true idea of what real love is. You read a novel entitled "True Love Stories" and you follow the escapades of men and women who claim in extravagant terms to love one person after another, with no regard whatever to the moral and spiritual values which is the character of real love. You see in the pictures those sloppy scenes which parody love as mainly physical; they are advertised in papers and in hoardings to make their sex appeals in order to attract the gullible crowds. They masquerade as true love, but its presentation is superficial. The love of God is not like that.

### 3. THE LOVE OF GOD IS NOT SENTIMENTAL:

Some people think of God as a benevolent old grandfather who has no sense of responsibility, who gives us what we like, when we like and as often as we like. God is a god of love they say, he won't punish sin. He knows that we can't help doing the wrong thing. He says, "I know how hard it is for you. I'm going to forget all about your sins. I know you have been caught up in difficult circumstances, you've had a hard background. You haven't really had a fair chance. I am going to let you off. There is plenty of excuse for you." But that is not what the Bible teaches, for it says in Romans 2:1, "Thou art inexcusable, O man", and in 2:6, "God will render to every man according to his deeds;" and in 2:8, "unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile for there is no respect of persons with God."

From Genesis to Revelation God reveals Himself as a Holy God. He is too Holy to touch sinful man, too Holy to

endure sinful living. When we speak of the wrath of God, we are not thinking of some human wrath which is irrational or inconsistent, the kind of outburst someone would have when another person accidentally spills a pot of paint on his head, or treads on his toe, but something which is rational and consistent and which is settled. The wrath of God means that because of God's very nature of Holiness and justice He is actively hostile against sin, but is loving towards the sinner. The strong love of God is not wishy-washy and sentimental; it has within it the moral force of His own righteousness, for God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were yet sinners brings us to our second section:

## II. THE SIN OF MAN

We shall never know the amazing depths of God's love until we have realised the exceeding sinfulness of sin. This fact was forcibly brought home to me when after the War I had the opportunity of visiting the concentration camp at Dachau in Germany.

Gone were the corpses which once laid in the annexe waiting their turn to be burned when the gas chamber killed more than the ovens could cope with.

Gone, too, were the queues of hapless humans waiting outside the changing rooms for their turn to enter the lethal chambers.

Gone, too, forever were these men, women and children, but their memories remained and their memories filled the air. We never know the exceeding love of God until we realise the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

The first thing I want you to notice about sin is this:

### 1. Sin is Universal:

We may label as sinners the Nazis who thought they had the right to do anything because they were the master race. We may label as sinners the ruthless men of the Kikuyu tribe who tortured and murdered under the name of Mau Mau. We may label as sinners the Communists who claim in the words of their philosophers Marx and Engels that they are working for the forcible over-

throw of all existing powers.

It is true, that there have been, and still are, some pretty successful sinners, many of them in our own day and generation; and we can go right back to the beginning of history of men and we find that sin entered into the hearts of Adam and Even when they chose to disobey God.

The same sin was shown by the people of Noah's day when they neglected God and the way of salvation which He provided. We see the same sin entering in between Jacob and Esau; we see the same experience of sin between Joseph and his brothers; between Pharaoh and Moses; between the children of Israel and their leaders; between the Hebrew people and their prophets; between the Pharisees and Our Lord; between Christ and the people; between the early church and the Roman Empire; between the medieval church and the true believers; between the Church at the time of the Reformation and those who opposed such a Reformation, between those who stood for truth and justice and those who were more concerned about money making in the industrial revolution, between the na-

tions of the world in two world wars.

And we see the same sin today entering in between men and women, between peoples and peoples, between races and colors. In all colors, in all countries in all civilisations, in all centuries, sin has been the common experience of man, for sin is universal, and the Bible tells us that

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; there is none righteous, no not one."

The second thing I want you to notice about sin is this:

## 2. Sin is Personal:

As long as we talk about sin being the experience of everyone, we are likely to feel a sense of security in numbers. We think all others have sinned, therefore it doesn't matter about you or me. Like the person who said, "I don't want to go to heaven. I prefer to go to the other place because all my friends are there."

I well remember when I was at school,

and believe it or not, this was in the early days of aviation, and it was always a fascinating thing whenever an aeroplane flew overhead to rush outside and look at it. Of course, with school-boys it was perhaps more of a fascination, and at that particular time the master was out of the room so about 30 boys rushed outside to look at the 'plane, which, by the noise, seemed to be flying rather low. I thought to myself, "I'm pretty safe this time because the master won't punish the whole class. He couldn't give the cane to us all" - but he did! There was no safety in numbers for me or for anyone else.

You know we are very much inclined to think that way about our own personal sin. Although the Old Testament emphasis was mostly upon the sin of the group, the sin of the family, the sin of the people of God, the sin of the nation, nevertheless the prophets, time and time again, brought out the fact that each individual person was responsible before God. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," said Ezekiel, the prophet, and others, and I wonder

HOW PERSONAL IS YOUR SIN AND MINE?

It may be in WORD.

James tells us this in his Epistle - "The tongue is a little member and boasteth great things."

"The tongue is a fire and a world of iniquity"

"The tongue defileth the whole body"

"The tongue can no man tame, it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison".

"Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing".

It is with words that we exaggerate, that we fabricate, that we criticise, that we condemn. Sin now becomes more personal, doesn't it?

It may be in DEED. James again tells us that

"Faith without works is dead;"

that an orthodoxy in religion, an intellectual assent to credal statements of belief is not enough, if it is divorced from right deed, for "faith without works is dead." I wonder are we convicted by the things we do or

don't do.

Sin goes even more deeply because it concerns our THOUGHTS. We pray in one of our Collects - "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit." Yes, it is so easy for us to allow our thoughts to run away with us, to harbour attitudes of jealousy, resentment, pride, or even worse to be caught up in some of the baser things which convict us before God so that we find the most holy and sacred things of life are felt by us to be dirty.

Sin is very personal.

The third thing about sin is this:

### 3. Sin is Serious:

Because it separates us from God. Now those that are married might have had this experience. The husband comes down to the wife in the morning, feels perhaps there is something wrong, and says:

"What's wrong dear?"

She says, "Oh, nothing."

And the husband says, "But there is

something wrong, isn't there?"

She says, "Well, it doesn't matter."

He says, "Well, won't you tell me what the trouble is?"

"Oh, it's alright."

And so it goes on, until they both come to the point of recognising that there is something that is separating them, something which is destroying the close relationship, and it is not until they come together and confess it one to another that the separation becomes a reconciliation.

I wonder is that how you feel with God? Many people have said to me, "You know, I don't feel I can get through in prayer." "Well," I reply, "I could advise you to try praying harder, try praying with more faith, try praying more often." But that is not always the answer, for usually there's something fundamental which is separating that person from God. It's the fact that sin had not been dealt with, the cause of the separation has not been confessed, and sin separates from God and we can't get through to Him in prayer.

Sin is serious because it HARDENS,

and the longer we continue in it the more hardened we become to it. How often we refer to a hardened sinner, a hardened drunkard or a hardened something else. We talk about the hardened heart of Judas, or the hardened hearts of the Pharisees. Do we realise that all the time we refuse to deal with the deep problem of sin which is within us, we are hardening our heart, until eventually we may reach that point where the Holy Spirit can no longer penetrate with His promptings to bring us to that point of dealing with it.

And sin is serious because it KILLS. The ultimate thing it achieves is final separation from God, which is eternal death. Perhaps tonight you have realised as never before that not only is sin universal, it is also personal, and because it is personal, it is serious, and you are saying, "I know that I'm a sinner, you have no need to tell me that. I admit that I'm guilty." But if you are honestly saying that, then you are in the best position possible to experience the all-sufficient love of God, because the third section of the passage before us deals with the death of Christ.

### III. THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

"God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

1. The Death of Christ demonstrates the love of God:

In John 3:16: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

And in I John 3:16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us."

Some time ago in South Australia I spent a few days holiday at Port Elliott. I spent hours watching the huge waves rolling their massive waters on to the great rocks on the shore. As I saw the majesty and the glory of all this I was reminded of the tremendous love of God, and the words by the hymn-writer which expressed this:



has dealt with your sin once and for all. But before you can enter into that benefit, it demands from you a personal decision.

You must make up your mind:

You must give your heart:

You must surrender your will:

for it is a decision affecting your whole personality.

It is not sufficient for you to say that you assent to this with your mind, when you realise that you have sinned. Neither is it sufficient to say, "I am warmed in my heart, for I really feel that God loves me." The most important thing is the surrender of your will as you say, "I willingly receive Jesus Christ as my Saviour from my sin."

Don't let us be vague about this. We can't cover up our sin with the thought that there is safety in numbers; or with indecision which puts off personal committal to another time. You must make your decision for Christ right now, as it is the only way that your sin will be completely covered by the Cross of Christ.

I wonder is the love of God tugging

at your heart-strings right now, urging you to surrender to the Saviour. Don't put it off by saying "Tomorrow".

"Tomorrow," he promised his conscience; "tomorrow I mean to believe;

Tomorrow I'll think as I ought to; tomorrow my Saviour receive;

Tomorrow I'll conquer the habits that hold one from heaven away."

But ever his conscience repeated one word, and one only: "Today!"

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow - till youth like a vision was gone:

Till age and his passions had written the message of fate on his brow;

And forth from the shadows came Death, with the pitiless syllable, "Now!"

"Now is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time:"

"Today, if you hear his voice harden not your hearts:"

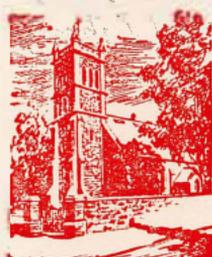
I wonder will you come in person to Jesus Christ in response to His great love, and surrender your will to Him

asking Him to take away your personal  
sin. Come in the words of the hymn-  
writer:

"Just as I am without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bids't me come to  
Thee;  
O Lamb of God, I come.

\* \* \* \* \*

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