

"God is Love."

BY REV. W. B. HINSON.

JOHN 3: 16.

I consider this the most magnificent verse in the whole Bible. If other verses are stars, then this is like the morning star, shining with a splendor second only to that of the great Sun. It is the largest verse I know of in revealed truth. The largest, not in phraseology, not in mere words and clauses; but in deep suggestiveness, nobleness of conception, and range of vision. It speaks of God the Father; of Christ the Son; of the soul's salvation. Of the Father; with His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; the Creator, Preserver, and Sovereign of all mortals. Of Christ also; the Son of David, the Son of Mary, the Son of Man, the Son of God; the incarnate Word who washed the feet of Peter, and who swung the Milky Way. Of Salvation too; of deliverance from sin the cause of hell, and of hell the result of sin; of the escaping the destruction from God, and attaining to everlasting felicity. It is the gospel in epitome. The "faithful saying" of the Apostle Paul falls to define salvation; it simply says, "Christ came to save sinners." Even that illustrative text which asserts that as Moses lifted the brazen serpent for the benefit of Israel, so Christ should be crucified for the world's life; makes no mention of the Father's grace and love. But this sublime passage defines salvation as it speaks of eternal life; while it declares God the Father gave His Son to save the lost.

The text reveals God as the author of salvation. God is the great commencement. Go sufficiently far in any direction, East or West, North or South, up or down; and you find God. He is as the centre of the universe, and He is about its circumference. As Festus says—

"God, God, God; All Thou dost make, Lies like a lake Beneath Thine infinite eye."

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit," said the Hebrew Psalmist; "or whither shall I flee from Thy presence; if I ascend up into heaven Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell behold Thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall uphold me." In gravitation, controlling the fiery comet and the bubble on the breaker; in astronomy with all its stars and suns; in history, telling how the nations rose and declined; behind all science and the high water mark of man's wisdom; back of all protoplasm and evolution; beyond where angel or patriarch left their impress on the world's life; long ere rock flung back sea wave, or morning star sang o'er animated nature, you can find God. And the world, the universe, the heavens, are but effects of which He is the great cause; for He is about all things, as is space the earth, or water, an island. For in the beginning, "God created the heavens and the earth." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." He is the great Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, the everlasting God.

To progressive revelation we owe our present conception of God. In the commencement of human record He was known as the great "Creator" whose massive might was evidenced by skies, and seas and storms; whose Kingship all creation acknowledged. Later on He declared Himself to be the mysterious "I AM," dwelling in the thick darkness no man could approach unto. David standing near the sunrise sang of a God who pitied "with more than a Father's pity." Isaiah told of a Deity who would reason with man; who would comfort with more than a "mother's comfort." And thus all down the prophetic period the vision of prophecy grew increasingly clear; but to the great Christ was reserved the glory of revealing to the world the Fatherhood of God. Thou art a God "fearful in praises;" thus spoke Moses, central figure of a bygone dispensation. "Our Father who art in heaven" is the brighter and more blessed revelation of the divine Lord.

The Fatherhood of God was a doctrine for the reception of which the world was long in training. As Leviticus is explained by the epistle to the Hebrews; as the law shows the necessity of grace; so the Old Testament is preparation for the New; and the Mosaic dispensation erected the platform upon which the Cross was lifted. And of all His attributes, I think love was the last man predicated to God.

That He is mighty, just, holy, mysterious, yea, even merciful, I can learn from Genesis; but the grand manifestation of His love is fully revealed by the New Testament only. That God loved mankind might be inferred from the sacred songs and the prophetic musings of the Old Testament; but it was a comparatively modern writer—one learned in the school of which Christ is the Master—who soared sufficiently high to assert that God is love. Not merely loving, or lovable, or lovely; but God is love. Nor can I wonder that it took ages of schooling to fit men to receive a truth so vast and wonderful. That love is at the heart of all, is a mighty fact;

is as the blazing of a bright sun that nearly blinds by its brilliancy. For the tiny stream to feel that the great ocean loves it and lives for its benefit; for the firefly to be told of relationship to the day sun; is no more wonderful than for mortals to be assured of immortal affection; to be convinced that love is behind might, and in mystery's heart. For mark you, a loving God—say rather a "God of love"—is as a revelation peculiar to Christianity. Judaism—tallest of all religions outside its great development and completion, Christianity—never dreamed it. That God might be appeased, that sacrifice might atone for wrong doing, this was taught; but that the love of God, the divine affection of the Almighty should clothe man as with a garment, this was fully declared only by the Christ. Ah, in these later days, when an inspiration common to Moses and Socrates, to Christ and Thomas à Kempis is proclaimed; let us clearly understand that the revelation of God and human life which Jesus gave, o'er tops man's grandest guess, as does hill the plain, or sky the sod.

God loves us. But God is immutable, and knows no alteration. If He loves me today, He loved me yesterday; if yesterday, at birth; if at birth, ere He built the universe; if He loves me now, He loved me EVER. Aye did He! Ere He flung gold dust as stars athwart the heavens; ere His finger hollowed out wild Atlantic's bed; ere wing of angel cut the ether; God loved thee, O Christian soul! Ere thou didst see the light or breathe the air He loved thee; and with the shepherd king thou canst say, "In Thy book all my members are written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there were none of them." Loved thee at birth! I tell thee, soul, God loved thee millions of centuries ere thou wast born; yea ever since there was a God—for so we must speak—thou hast been beloved by Him. For He Himself has said, "I have loved thee with an EVERLASTING love." Think of it, brother; let it sink down into thy soul; ponder it till the key of thy heart's praise be struck, and the full diapason of thy soul's melody ascribes glory to God for His everlasting love. Did God love the world when he wounded it? Yea, for rightly viewed, the wounding is a strong, sure proof of His affection. The gardener prunes the vine because of his great love; God, "the husbandman" pruneth. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," and the rightful chastening of the parent is a proof of the parent's love. When the kind father operates upon his own child, the strange doctor might more lightly touch the cancer; but the father, because of his great love, will cut deep into the flesh, seeking for the outermost root of the accursed thing that has threatened the child's life.

Understand, my friend, God hates your sin, as that kind father hates his child's disease; but understand also, He loves your soul. He hates the miasma that hurts you so; and because of His love to you He makes you climb the steep ascent, where the swamp mist of worldliness cannot reach you. He hates the blight, the evil, the sin, that spoils your soul's beauty, and saps your manhood's vigor, and mars you in every way. And if He loved you less, He might perchance permit your stay within its reach; but that the serpent's tooth shall not instill its poison, God has made it sound the alarming rattle which disturbs thy sleep of carnal security; and said to say, sometimes causes thee to murmur and repine.

What but love could watch the world with pitying forbearance during all these long centuries of wrong doing. How God has borne with us and tenderly pitied us; how in mercy He has refused to answer the mad appeals of our sin delirium. As the mother watching her sick child sees no loathsomeness albeit the scales of disease cover the features; feels no resentment though the hand of the sufferer be dashed rudely in the patient watcher's face; yea, who welcomes the returning strength of the dear one, although that strength is the occasion of her own pain; even so has God watched the world. And at times during the long, dark night of evil, He has been heard plaintively saying: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim, why will ye die!" What but love could train, and train again, while the wilful scholar rebelliously refused to learn. "How often will you tell that boy the same thing?" said a father once; "you have repeated it nineteen times already." "True," said the mother, "but I'll tell it over and over until he remembers and learns it." Ah me, how like that is to God. Line upon line; precept on precept; warning on warning; appeal following appeal like wave succeeding wave on the sea shore; love o'erripping love like shingles on a house roof. O brothers, what but infinite and everlasting love could train the world so long; and not lose heart and cease? 'Twas a plot of ground all open to the south wind and bright sun. 'Twas carefully fenced from desecrating foot, and manifestly tended well. Over and again the seed of bright blossoms was sowed therein, but the flowers ne'er greeted the sower's gaze, nor rewarded his labor. So the dark night fell and lasted long; but when the morning sun scattered the darkness, I saw the sower still bending over the soil, still sowing the seed. "Ah, friend," I cried, "you must not only be foad of flowers, but very partial to that soil, or you would never toil so laboriously." I said no more, for just then the sower lifted his head and laid his hand upon the garden

fence; and when I saw the red mark in his palm, and the blood sweat on his brow, I knew the gardener was He of Gethsemane. Ah, God sowed seed by angel, and patriarch, and prophet, and apostle, and conscience, and Christ; and ever when righteousness said "Cease," mercy pleading with righteousness sowed yet once again.

God loves you; hear the Bible assert it. To the house of Israel God says: "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." "Come now," He said to rebellious Judah, "and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." In New Testament times the same tenderness is apparent, for as Christ, beneficent sinners hurrying to perdition, he lamented them while saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing and ye would not." As the prodigal's father watched for his boy's return, and seeing him afar off, with melting compassion hurried to embrace him; so does God the great Father watch for your return, O erring one! Yes, greater love hath God; for in the person of His Son, instead of waiting for thy return; He has gone over the mountains and through the valleys seeking to save the lost O world! God loves you; hear it, ye islands washed by the ever murmuring sea, ye spreading plains and mighty continents, with your surging populations and your multitudinous life, God loves you. O India, banish juggernaut, for God is love! O Buddha, leave your blank of annihilation and believe in God the loving. And ye dwellers in more favored climes, but whose souls are icebound in a loveless creed, see the massive gates of this text unlock to reveal a God of love. Aye, God loves us; let us say it over and over, least by a sad fatality we forget it. Here in a world where hate dwells, and where discord spoils our music; let us say to each other, and to our own hearts; we are beloved of God.

And thou frail friend, who thoughtest the Deity unmindful of such feebleness as thou art, understand for thine encouragement God loves THEE. 'Tis bold to reason that thy lamented frailty but endears thee to thy God, yet it may be even so. Thy lamented frailty we say; the weakness thou canst not avoid; not that of thine own seeking. For the Christ said, "If ye bring evil give good gifts unto your children, much more shall the good God bless his own." He reasoned concerning human kindness, and then lifted that kindness to the God, o'er ruling all. And well we know in earthly households feebleness is not scorned, nor incapacity ill-treated. At night the mother is surrounded by her prattling children, and with kind words and soft kisses she puts them away to rest; but one, the dumb boy who never yet uttered a word, is there. Is he despised? Assuredly not, for while sweet murmurs of the mother may not penetrate his dull ear, yet it is true that in demonstrated affection he receives the lion's share. Do frowns and rebuffs fall to his unhappy lot? Nay, that to the mother's words—

"My silent boy, I hold thee to my heart,

Just as I did when thou wert new-born."

It may be sinful, but I love thee best,

And kiss thy lips the longest night and morn!

"Oh, thou art dear to me beyond all others,

And when I breathe my trust, and bend my knee,

For blessing on thy sisters and thy brothers,

God seems the highest when I pray for thee!"

God so loved the world. Would God we could rightly emphasize that small word, "so!" Small word, and we rather say that broad, large word, whose height we never looked over, and whose depth is all unfathomable; for let plummet fall swift as the forked lightning, and it would take eternity to sound that great deep of love. O sound it on the winds, and write it on the stars; tell it to all the wild waves, and bid all nature sing of the mighty love of God.

A Year in North Carolina.

THE PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES. I have already referred to the size and construction of the houses. I will only add that I have an impression that in city and country there are not as many good houses as there are in the North. I took several walks around Raleigh and have kept my eyes open while travelling and the impression has been the same. Houses that look large on the outside are not so large when one gets into them on account of the verandas. But the houses are not the homes. There are a great many houses, even dwelling houses with people living in them, where there are no homes in the truest sense of the word. I have seen houses such as the slaves had before the war. The cabins of the majority of the colored people do not appear to me to be so very much better today. They are small, very small for the very large families that live in them. In many cases they are without glass windows. The negro is accused of not having very much regard for the seventh commandment, and that is sometimes referred to as evidence of his proximity to the brutes, and of the inferiority of his nature. But it seems to me that there is no necessity of

December admitting the days of slave cultivate cha him the best multitude of races testify, laxity in sex. In these c if not altoge are simply h the greater passionate p chasity of th their igno there may b poor Irish, That cultur chasity is I alarmingly admitted by the best am So far as negroes do them earn many of improviden some Christ that would it said "I I have wor is one in te with my w and get any or not." I left some p a house he moved out. same city a forty dolla bought the quite as we the count religiously thrifty, mo moral atm told me th employer o as well as t negroes ar must practi hundred ne to eat or to you have a than starve Many of wealthier, nurses and a dollar a an illegiti are accuse In connect and in the colored pe home and the idea th not confin natural to in the Nor our Heave Eden and carpenter. women as lesson and slavery. the white the slaves learn how and they all heard heard a st biscuit th would tra never lea found out Well she at that. more than hot biscu milk and here. Th but simpl They call bread ma "light b and not a is always a girl flouri pretty qui people are but here ripe figs