

THE BAPTIST HOUR

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Three Dimensional Living

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SCRIPTURE—I John 4:7-11

TEXT—"Herein is love"

I John 4:10.

David W. Griffith was perhaps the most outstanding movie director in the early days of Hollywood. He directed such classics as "The Birth of a Nation" and "Way Down East." Many of you will not remember these films. But they most likely would have been awarded "Oscars" had such been given then.

After his retirement Mr. Griffith lived in La Grange, Kentucky. During a revival service there I preached on I John 4:18, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear*" Following the service Mr. Griffith said to me, "I want to thank you for your exposition on love. The love of which you spoke is so different from the sentimental idea of love created in Hollywood."

Perhaps the word "love" is one of the most sinned against in the English language. It is used to express the widest possible range of human emotions from sinful lust to spiritual fellowship between the soul and God. We sometimes say that "the Greeks had a word for it." Certainly it was true with regard to love. Three words were most commonly used. One referred to sex attractions, another to friendship, and a third to love in its highest essence. This last word expresses God's love for man, man's love for God, and, in Christ, man's love for other men. I prefer to think of it as Christian love.

It is of this love that John speaks in I John 4:7-11. It is that of which we are thinking today. It is a rare commodity indeed, and one desperately needed in this hour. It produces life at its best. It is living in three dimensions. In the words of Henry Drummond, it is "the greatest thing in the world."

Many of you will remember hearing Eddie Cantor tell the story of his visit to an orphanage. As he entertained the children he noticed one

little girl shyly standing alone. He went to her and asked if he could do anything for her. She replied, "Love me."

Is not this the deepest desire of every heart, just to be loved. Paul prayed that we "*may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge . . .*" (Eph. 3:18-19). He was thinking of the dimensions of Christ's love.

Life itself has three dimensions as it relates to love. Let us consider them as we note, first, the depth; second, the height; third, the breadth.

First, note the depth. "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (I John 4:10). Thus is seen the depth of God's love, which reaches down from the heights of glory to the depths of our sinful shame to claim us as His own.

The greatest thing about you is not that you are seeking God, but that God is seeking you. This is a staggering thought but one that is true. The psalmist expressed it for us. "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what a man, that thou art mindful of him?*" (8:3-4).

Yes, the God of the universe is seeking you. "*God is love*" (I John 4:8). And love to be complete must have an object. John says that God's "*love is perfected in us*" (I John 4:12). It finds its full expression in God's love toward us.

It is the very nature of love to give. So John 3:16 tells us that God so loved us that He gave His only "*begotten Son*." In our text John repeats this truth. God "*sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*." So God sent His Son as the full expression of His love to "*seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10). The Gospel records are a commentary on these profound words from the lips of Jesus.

One of the sweetest and tenderest poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning was written to her husband, Robert

Browning. It begins, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." The answer is an utter abandon of soul as she pours out her love for her husband.

Somehow it seems that God is asking, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." And then He points to Jesus. His life, words, deeds, death, and resurrection. God says, "In utter abandon I have thrown my Son into the very jaws of death, because I love you. I did it not to satisfy some sadistic strain in my divine nature. I did it to open the way whereby you might find your way back home." It is God's Light of love shining from the window of His heavenly home to beckon sinful wanderers back to the Father's bosom.

Beloved friend, you cannot sink so deeply into sin that God's love cannot reach you. Nor can you climb so high up the ladder of moral self-improvement that you do not need His love. And for God's love for you to be effective it must find a response in your own heart.

Second, consider the height. "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (I John 4:19). This is the answer of our love to God's love. Even as God's love reached down to us, so must our love in return reach up to Him. The love of God is shed abroad to all men. But it accomplishes its purpose only in those who give their love in return. This is true even in human love. No matter how much you may love someone, your love is incomplete unless that person gives his or her love in return.

A little girl was asked to quote John 3:16. She began, "God so loved the world that he gave his only *forgotten* Son" Alas! but her quotation is often all too true. And because the world forgets Him who is the gift of God's love, it knows far too little of the life which stems from His love.

I do not understand the principles by which radio is possible. But one thing I know. For radio to accomplish its purpose there must be both broadcasting and receiving. Take, for in-

stance, this radio station. It is broadcasting a Gospel message throughout a given area and on a certain wave length. Right now the air about you is filled with my voice. But only those whose radios are tuned to this wave length are receiving it. Some radios in your community are silent. Others are tuned to other stations carrying other programs. If every radio within the range of this station should be turned off or tuned to other stations, this broadcast would not achieve its purpose. The ether would still be filled with the sound waves, but they would not be translated into audible, understandable words.

Now when you apply this to God's love the result is the same. God has shed abroad His love. But it is meaningful only to those who respond to it through faith and love.

This picture is drawn for us in the first chapter of John's Gospel. "*He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name*" (vv. 11-12). ". . . his own received him not . . . but as many as received him" What a difference!

Not everyone who saw Jesus or was blessed by His love received Him as Saviour. They were not tuned in to this gift of God's grace. Some were dead silent to His overtures of love. Others were tuned in to other ways of life, both religious and otherwise. But those who were tuned in to God's station heard heavenly harmonies of grace and love. They became "sons of God."

It is hardly necessary that this should be applied to you further. Here we have love in two dimensions, God's love for you and your love for Him. Neither can find complete expression without the other.

Let us turn the illustration around. Suppose that your radio is perfectly tuned to a given station. But the station is not broadcasting. Your radio receives no sound other than that of static electricity. So your love for

God is incomplete without His love for you. But when God's love comes down to you, and your love rises up to Him, the circuit is complete.

This is the meaning of I John 4:15-16. "*Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"

But there is a third dimension to love.

Third, note the breadth. "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*" (I John 4:11).

Thus you see the three dimensions of gracious living. The downward reach from God to man. The upward reach from man to God. The outward reach from man to man.

If I should be asked to point out the two principal weaknesses in modern man's religious experience, I think I would say that much of modern religion is either vertical or horizontal. It should be both. For some the Christian religion involves only a relation between God and man, a relation which never reaches out to include other men. Still for others religion consists only of a relation between man and man. It is simply a social and ethical reform of man's conduct which does not include the vertical experience with God in Christ.

Now a purely horizontal religion is nothing more than a philosophy of humanism. It has within it no redeeming spiritual power whatever. And while a purely vertical religion has within it the spiritual ingredients for the saving of the soul, it possesses none for the saving of one's life as an expression of God's love to other men. Indeed such a life may well lead us to question whether one has truly had a saving encounter with God. I John 4:20 is sharp in challenging language for us all. "*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*"

But the life that is both vertical and horizontal has within it the elements of life abundant both here and in the hereafter. When the vertical and horizontal lines come together in proper proportion they form a cross. Suppose that you draw a picture of this word which John uses for love. It is God's love come down to man. It is man's love going up to God in response to His love. So you draw a vertical line reaching up and down. This love is the Christian's love going out to all men, that they may come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus. Now draw a horizontal line across the vertical line. Thus you have a cross. This love, therefore, finds its meaning in the cross. It unites God and man. It unites man and man.

Such a love can save every lost person on this earth. It can right every wrong, lift every burden, dry every tear, solve every problem, and furnish the dynamics for abundant living to the ends of the earth and to the end of time.

Now it is not easy for us to experience such a love. God's love for us is perfect. But in our imperfections we are so prone to love little or not at all. However, God not only loves, but He helps us to love. Twice in John 21 Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him with this highest kind of love. Twice Peter replied with a word expressing a less exalted love. The third time Jesus used the lower word for love. When Peter failed to come up to Jesus' love, Jesus came down to his. Not to stay at that lower level, but to lead Peter to this highest experience of Christian love. He will lead you also, if you will follow.

In our feeble efforts to reach up and and out in our love, let us find courage in the words of Joshua Liebman.

"God hears no sweeter music than the cracked chimes of the courageous human spirit ringing in imperfect acknowledgement of His perfect love."

But better still hear the words of God. "*And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God*

love his brother also." (I John 4:21;
cf. John 13:34).

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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