

I Christians believe that God loves everyone. (Most of us have memorized John 3:16; and we try to teach children to memorize it. No other motive for God's sacrifice of His only begotten Son makes sense to us, than the love of God for humanity. This turns out to be an object lesson for believers, too. If God loved us so much that He was willing to sacrifice even His only Son to save us from sin, then how much should we love God? The answer is that we should love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds. And how can we demonstrate that love, in a way that God will recognize it as love? God demonstrated His love by the sacrifice of Christ to atone for our sins: in the words of one hymn, *I gave, I gave my life for thee; what hast thou given me?* The Bible teaches us to demonstrate our love for God by showing love to other people: *Love thy neighbor as thyself.*)

A One characteristic of love is where we choose to be. (Here we can see another way by which God used Old Testament symbols to teach New Testament truths. God loved humanity, and wanted to be where people were; yet humanity loved rebelliousness against God more than God. God would not compromise Holiness by continuing to have fellowship with rebellious men. Now, in Exodus 19 and 20, God is ready to reveal His plan for reconciling humanity to Himself, so that He could restore the fellowship that our first ancestors destroyed by the Original Sin. So one of the ways we perceive love is by where we are, and where those we claim to love are. To understand this, ask your-self, where do you prefer to be, in the company of your Christian brothers and sisters, or somewhere else? Do you prefer the companionship of your family, or friends from school and co-workers from your job? Do we *really want* to be where God is (i.e., the Spirit of God lives in His Word; and God inhabits the praises of His children); or do you prefer to spend you time talking about economics, politics, psychology, sociology, or political correctness, espec-

ially on Sunday mornings? We see in our passage today that God promised to come to the Children of Israel and bless them in *whatever place* He caused His name to be honored. Now we will re-visit this business of *God causing* His own name to be honored momentarily: because if God did not choose the place and cause the honor, then the efforts of men to make that happen will always be futile.)

B We express our love for God in some unproductive ways. (They are unproductive because they are not ways that God ordained. We have seen, through the 10 Commandments, what absolutely perfect holiness means in the mind of God, and as we reflected on the implications of the Commandments in light of other scriptures, we also saw how *all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God*. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve knew that they were naked and tried to hide their shame with fig leaves. That did not satisfy God; He killed animals and made clothing for them from the skins. Then Abel learned to honor God by sacrificing an animal on an altar, but Cain did not; he tried to substitute fruits and vegetables for an animal sacrifice. Then in the first part of the Book of Exodus we saw how Moses and Aaron demonstrated their love for God by obedience to Him, whereas Pharaoh had no regard for the Word of God. Later we shall see the same pattern in the Kings of Israel and Judah, and in the New Testament too, where some people loved God and proved it by honoring His Word, but others (e.g. Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 6, or the 7 sons of Sceva in Acts 19) only pretended to do so. Jesus said simply that *if you love me you will keep my commandments*; and so we, like all the Bible-times people we have read about, must decide both *if* we will obey God, *and* whether or not we will do so in the right spirit. At this point we shall merely note again that the Spirit in the contemporary church is not the Spirit of Christ, but a spirit of popular entertainment by exciting activities, where pretty girls in short skirts jump up and down and get everyone all excited about— excitement; and of scrambling to save face for someone when a godly man challenges their worldliness with scrip-

tural principles, and all of it masquerading as religious duty. That spirit has a name: it is called humanism. The Spirit of God is no more willing to share the platforms or programs of contemporary churches with ungodly leaders than He was willing to share His Throne in Heaven with Lucifer. He cast Lucifer out of Heaven; in the contemporary churches, The *Holy Spirit* of our *Holy Heavenly Father* does not even bother to go in. He is outside, *standing at the door knocking* (Revelation 3:21).

II Old Testament people worshipped God by burning sacrifices. (This was a tradition which dated back as far as the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve taught their sons to honor God in that way; Cain did not learn the lesson, Abel did (and then died for his godliness). Seth learned it, and managed to pass the lesson on to his sons. The Bible tells us that in the time of Seth's son Enosh, men began to call on the name of the Lord. God was very picky about what should be burned on an altar, too. We should point out that God would remain God whatever the sacrifices were, and whether sacrifices were offered to other gods or not. The same remains true: Jesus is still our Lord and Christ, even though many people do not honor Him as such, and many who claim to be honoring Him by their church activities only honor themselves instead, or some humanistic church leader. But God will have Israel be holy because He is holy. Again, the same remains true for us: God will have His Church be holy, because He is holy. Now God could not compromise His holiness by receiving symbolic and humanistic tokens of love from people who did not truly love Him. (He would not be holy if He did.) So God told the Children of Israel how to make sacrifices that would truly honor God, and not merely appear to do so. Similarly, the New Testament tells us that Jesus is our Lord and our Christ; and how to honor Him as such (e.g., by our faith, only, and not by our works). The works of men's hands defiled the altar of God; and the works by which people in the New Testament era attempt to prove their faith actually *dishonor* the Grace of God in an equally corrupt substitution of worldliness for godliness.)

A God is holy; His altar and sacrifice must be holy too. (God gave Moses some specific instructions for how to construct a *holy* altar. It is important to remember that if the altar was not holy then the sacrifices offered upon it would not be holy either; and in the same way, if an unholy sacrifice were offered upon the holy altar, then the altar would be defiled by the sacrifice. What is that to us, New Testament believers? It is an illustration for the high regard in which God holds the sacrifice of Christ. When the Son of God died, His righteousness was uncorrupted by any sin in His life. Therefore the sacrifice was perfectly holy, once-and-for-all atonement for all sins of all people of all times. This is the reason why the Doctrine of Salvation by Grace, through faith in Jesus is so important: if we try to add our own efforts to the atonement purchased by the Blood of Jesus, then we corrupt that sacrifice with our humanism. Furthermore, if we try to make atonement for our sins by good works, then the Grace of God is ineffective for us, and we are condemned for our failure to live absolutely holy and righteous lives. But the greatest damage to True Faith in Jesus is not done by erroneous or inaccurate doctrine; it is done by leaders of institutional churches who replace preaching the Word of God with song-and-dance routines suitable for nightclubs, and raise up Christmas trees the way the Israelites raised up a golden calf, and install nicotine slaves and alcoholics as church officers, as long as they support the institutional objectives of the organization, but turn away anyone whose godly testimony condemns worldly lifestyles.)

B No efforts by humanity will ever please God. (God told Moses that if people lifted up tools to dress the stones of the altar they would defile it. God made the dirt, and God made the stones, and there is nothing that man can do to improve on the perfection of God's Creation. Perhaps we think, dressed stones look better than plain stones, and they certainly fit together better. By the same logic, rehearsed choirs sound better than ad hoc choirs in impromptu performances; and choreographed dancing is more sophisticated than spontaneity (and a *spontaneous*, spirit-

ual dance might not fit the rhythm and meter of the music the dancers prefer); and someone who is *taught* to talk in tongues is more likely to do so on cue, and stop on time, than someone who only does so if and when the Holy Spirit speaks through him. We say again, these activities are humanistic, not godly; and in the institutional church they arise from the humanistic spirit. It must be that way among them, for, as we have noted, the Spirit of God will not compromise holiness with the corruption of humanism and worldliness. He will stay outside forever, instead, if He must.)

C Revelation 3:17 shows *how* humanistic the church has become. (Unredeemed humanity is *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked*. When un-regenerated people become leaders of institutional churches they institutionalize spiritual depravity. The construction of big and beautiful buildings does not impress God any more than dressed stones for altars did. Spending money to set up a school in a foreign country where church kids (who are not smart enough to attend an international school in their own country) can attend an international school, and calling it missions work in a foreign country, is a ludicrous deception. The only purpose for that school is plainly seen from the recruiting efforts of its owners: they only recruit Koreans who would spend a lot of money on expensive private lessons anyway, and only care about foreign nationals if they have enough money to pay the school fees. And the only beneficiaries of the transaction are the owners of the school, since the children who attend will not learn English there any better than they would have if they had stayed at home. If that school also attempts to recruit indigenous believers to come to Korea as missionaries, so that Korean kindergarten owners can employ English speaking workers more cheaply than they could hire Koreans or westerners, then that school is engaged in human trafficking, not in evangelism, regardless of who puts up the front money for it. But the contemporary church has sufficient material affluence to do these things, and to hide their true motives. They can tell everyone that they don't need anything. They especially do not need someone like Jesus

telling them how wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked they are. That would make them feel bad about their ungodly attitudes and unrighteous conduct!)

III Nakedness is a symbol of guilt for sin. (This brings us back to the Biblical text for today's message. The Israelites were forbidden to go up to their altar by steps, because their nakedness might be exposed. This might be a literal problem if their skirts were too short; but it is an even more significant *spiritual* problem because the elevation of humanity only serves to reinforce human pride. As we have seen, pride is the most likely and best concealed culprit in all sin. Nakedness was not a problem for Adam and Eve before their sin; therefore it is a symbol for shame. We should associate bare skin with both sin and shame, and we should teach children as much, particularly with regard to their participation in church activities (immodesty is only a different form of rebelliousness). Now the people in Revelation 3:17 were naked, and the shame of their sin is obvious to everyone (except to themselves)—especially if they are leaders of institutional churches. When God cautioned the Israelites that steps at the altar might expose their nakedness, He meant bare souls as well as bare bodies. So if Israelites risked exposing the shame of their spiritual nakedness by climbing steps to an altar, does it not stand to reason that contemporary church members also risk exposing the shame of their spiritual nakedness, and the blindness of their spiritual ignorance, and the wretchedness of their spiritual poverty, by climbing the steps of advancement in the institutional church? Of course the guiltiest offenders never perceive how pitiful they are; but the Spirit of God does, and so does every true believer in whom the Spirit of Christ is maturing.)

A God knows what we look like: He is concerned about people's vision. (God wants people to give Him all their moral allegiance. If one person or another stands up on a platform then people naturally look up to him as a leader whom they should follow. For this reason, we, as a church, need to be careful about who we install in positions of leadership. They need to meet some exceptionally high spiritual qualifi-

cations. The *Capital-C-Church* must install leaders who will point people to God, instead of distracting people's attention from Him by attracting it to themselves. This is the real problem in contemporary worship; not that God has any preferences regarding the syncopation of the music, but that He will not share His Throne in Heaven with Lucifer, or the platform of a church with girls in short skirts (so they can attract the attention of all the men), or with boys who need a haircut and wear earrings (so they can brazenly exhibit their disregard for the Word of God). All these things detract from the Glory of God by replacing God as the center of our attention with something that will allow the gratification of someone's vanity, and make worldly people comfortable. We must facilitate worship of God in our church worship services, by preaching His Word, and not obstruct people's approach to God with the vanity of humanistic distractions.)

B Contemporary churches still try to cover their shame with fig leaves. (Adam and Eve tried to hide their nakedness from God; modern people try to deny their guilt for sin too, to each other and to God. There was a time, before 1577, when the institutional church interposed itself between people and God with the *fig leaves* of the Latin Mass; then the Protestant Reformation put the Word of God in the hands of people again, and in their own languages. Protestant church leaders need to be born again just as the catholic clergy does, and if they are not, then their leadership is just as corrupted by worldliness as that of the catholics was. Secular philosophy pointed out how ill-equipped the church was for a rational faith, and too many churchmen in the late middle ages tried to rationalize it with another set of fig leaves, falsely called *science*, instead of contending *earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints*. Then again, the Word of Faith in the mouths and hearts of sincere believers revealed the Grace of God through Christ and brought revival to anyone who was sufficiently disenchanted with the political and economic realities of the early nineteenth century to read it. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, dispensation-

alism offered another set of fig leaves, whereby people could substitute their ability to *misquote* scripture (i.e., Schofield's notes) for living a holy life. The Pentecostal movement brought another revival (in America, at least) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then the charismatics sewed the current set of fig leaves together beginning in the 1960s. By *the current set of fig leaves* we mean the liberalism and worldliness that comprise what is called the Christian religion by the contemporary church.)

C John 14:15 tells us how Jesus wants us to show our love for God. (The point of the abbreviated history lesson was to illustrate how the devil can provide good-looking substitutes for everything that is godly. In fact, every time humanity gets a decent start in the right direction, the devil raises someone up who wields enough influence in worldly affairs to distract our attention from God. This is fairly easy for him to do, too, because we have a propensity for sin rather than for righteousness. Jesus said, *If you love me you will obey what I command*; and then the devil tells us that God loves us all and won't really send anyone to hell, just like he told Eve that she would not really die if she ate the forbidden fruit. Well then, let us stay focused on Jesus and not be distracted by the devil's *what ifs* and *reallies*. We show our love for Jesus by obeying His commandments, which were: *love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind, and love thy neighbor as thyself*. Now we just finished 8 weeks' worth of illustrating the ways people love themselves more than they love God, and more than their neighbor. Have you caught on yet why proper love for God and neighbor is so hard to show? It is because of too much love for self, which is vanity. To return to the point of our text for today's message: the person who would dress the stones for the altar is concerned with showing off his own abilities, not with loving God; and the person who would raise himself up to that altar by climbing steps is concerned with making people look at him, not with leading people to God through faith in Jesus. Both of them are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked in the eyes of God, and both love them-

selves so much that they can't repent and love God instead, whether they dress altar stones and climb steps, or dance and sing to c-c-m in contemporary churches.)

IV The Children of Israel were afraid of the Voice of God. (This is really at the heart of all these other issues. They didn't want to hear the voice of God from Mt. Sinai any more than contemporary church members want to hear the Word of God from the pulpits of their institutional churches. They wanted to listen to Moses, instead. Now we know church pastors who would say without hesitation, *O.K. I'll listen to God and then tell you what He said. Just listen to me. Just obey me.* But that was not God's way then, and it is not His way now. We should point out as well that God intruded into their happy little world, with an ultimatum to be as holy as He is or to die for their sin. They had no place to hide from God, and could not pretend that they did not hear Him. Moses, however, was a man, just as they were men. They thought that if they were listening to a man only, then they could debate some point or another with him. And just as modern people hear and see what they want to, they could pretend not to see or hear things that Moses told them if they didn't like them. Then if all else failed, they could turn around and walk away from Moses; they could do what they wanted to in their tents and he couldn't see or hear them. Not so with God, so they were afraid of Him. And God wanted them to be afraid, so that they would obey. Familiarity, as we say, breeds contempt.)

A They were afraid of dying. (Is it really possible to die from fright? Well, yes. One of the physiological responses to fear is shock, and one can indeed die from shock induced by fear. So their concern was real. But life and death are in the hands of God, are they not? They should have remembered *that* from their experiences in Egypt. So they are really afraid of something else; they only described it as fear of death. Try to picture a small child who has offended his father. Dad is angry and it shows in his countenance. The child's eyes are wide with fear already, and then the father's voice comes forcefully and clearly. The child will cover his ears, duck his

head, and even turn his back, if he can. Now think of the Israelite camp. The mountain was shaking. It was on fire. There was a dark, thick cloud, with a lot of thunder and lightning. Then above all the other sounds, the voice of God boomed out of the cloud, demanding that they love Him (Whom they could not see), and their neighbor (whom they knew to be just as unlovable as they were), and threatened them with death if they so much as touched the mountain. No one could control the events. They couldn't explain them, or even understand why they were happening. Any of us would have preferred to listen to Moses too. But this was a test from God; would any of us pass the test any better than they did?)

B The human spirit *must* die in us, for the Spirit of God to live in us. (There is no doubt that some of these Israelites truly did fear for their mortal lives. It would have been a scary experience. But their real worry was more spiritual. If they were to obey all the 10 Commandments, and obey them perfectly, they could not be human beings any more. They would have to become super-human, spiritual beings (just like God is Spirit), and they didn't know how to do that. None of us does. The only man who did know was Jesus, and *we* only know that He indwells the souls of believers after reading the New Testament. Yet that kind of *spiritual* death and re-birth was precisely what God proposed to accomplish in them, just as surely as He proposes to accomplish it in us. Now since the Israelites failed their test we cannot know how the change would have worked itself out, or what the results of it would have been. Only God could have foreseen that, as one of many potential outcomes that depend on the actions of people's free-will, as we have mentioned previously.)

C Christians must not water down our message. (The human spirit still must die, so that the Spirit of God can accomplish the regeneration of our souls. We cannot water that down or dumb-it-down or sugar coat it or soft-soap it, to make it easier for un-regenerated humanity to accept, or to curry favor and popularity with worldly church people. The Commandments of God and the holiness He demands

of us are not negotiable. It is also impossible for us to attain unto the standard of absolutely perfect righteousness by virtue of our own efforts. The only way any of us will ever be holy enough to enter Heaven is if Jesus Christ Himself makes us holy with His own righteousness, which God must impute to us according to our faith (that is, either we believe that the death of Christ atoned for our sins, and trust God for Salvation in His Grace or else we have no part with Jesus at all); and as we have shown, the Spirit of God will not co-habit the human soul with a rebellious human spirit. We must surrender to Him unconditionally, and *crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof* (Galatians 5:24), so that the Holy Spirit can make us alive again with eternal life from our Heavenly Father. We must not sacrifice the integrity of that message on the altar of what is pleasant for sinners to think about.)

V Moses said that God was testing the Israelites. (We should remember what the purpose of the test was: *so that the fear of God will keep you from sinning.* God had made them afraid. So what would be the pragmatic outcome of the test? Well, as is the case with most of us, they did not sin by touching the mountain, but they found another way to commit sin (as we shall see in Exodus 32). God instilled fear in them, but whether that fear would keep them from sinning depended on them, not on God. So it is with all of us: *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man, but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts.* So what was their lust? As we shall see, they wanted a god they could see. They wanted to know it and understand it *so it would not frighten them,* and they could control where it was and what it did. This God, Whom they could not see, was in control of them instead, and they didn't like it. So for what do contemporary church members lust? They covet the same thing, really. They want control over the circumstances of their lives and so they take as much control as they can, (or accumulate enough money to buy control, if they can), so that neither God nor anyone speaking for God can make them feel uncomfortable about their worldliness. They can enjoy all the

pleasures life has to offer and deceive themselves (and other worldly people) about their dressed stones and elevated altars, and put on a good show for everyone, but God won't watch it. God's test in this post-modern age is whether or not we love Him enough to *come out of it and be separate from it, and touch not the unclean thing* (II Corinthians 6:17); or if we only pretend to convert and ask Him to bless the pretense.)

A God tests believers, too. (We must not confuse *test* with *trial* or *temptation*. Temptation is when Satan attempts to distract us from God with an attractive substitution for holiness. When Christians speak of trials, we mean that an opportunity to make a choice. One option is to pretend to be holy; the other is to give up an attachment to worldliness that we have been hiding, perhaps even from ourselves: but we must make a choice. A test from God is more complicated, and spiritual. God's tests come after He instructs us about something: the test will show us *and God* whether we learned the lessons and are ready to live by the truths that we have learned. Most of us fail our tests as badly as the Children of Israel did, and then try to pretend that we passed. Let us be honest with ourselves and God, and *receive instruction in wisdom, judgment, justice, and equity* (Proverbs 1:3) and then pray for grace to live by these principles.)

B We can only prepare for God's tests by studying His Word. (Most of us have some experience in test-preparation. Some have experience helping others prepare for tests. The smartest students always remember that they must study, and the best study-coaches know how to advise them as to what, and how, to study. So it is with these observations about tests from God. Some people fear the tests; but the more fearful confrontation, for us, is with the Test-Maker, Who is God. Now some people are so distracted and disaffected by temptations that they never arrive at the trial by which they decide to shift their moral allegiance to the only God Who can intrude into their lives without their permission; they serve idols, like appearances, and covet popularity instead. Then God intrudes into their lives with instructions against idolatry and covetousness: *Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!* and then

they fail to love God properly, because they love themselves too much. They have never learned to fear God: *by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil*. So let us who name the name of the Lord depart from evil. Hebrews 10:31 says *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.*) The Children of Israel fell into His hands, as shall we all. So let us prepare ourselves to meet God on that Great Final Day, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. No pretending will help anyone then: *there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit* (Romans 8:1). We said that love is related to locations. So let us who claim to love God move to a position to one we will find only *in Christ*, and may God help us to fear being located anywhere else.)