

SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF A LOVING GOD

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Romans 5:8: *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

During the 1730's and 1740's, the American Colonies were in the midst of the religious revival known as the Great Awakening. During this time, evangelists such as George Whitefield and Isaac Watts traveled up and down the Atlantic coast preaching the gospel to the settlers of the new world. Other preachers, such as Jonathan Edwards and Gilbert Tennent wrote sermons and books that were distributed along the Atlantic coast. The evangelism of George Whitefield and the printed material of Jonathan Edwards fueled the Great Awakening, which historians say brought widespread revival and paved the way for independence and the Constitution.

On July 8, 1741, one of history's most recognizable messages was preached. On this date, in the town of Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The message was preached to a congregation that, by all accounts, were not responding to the gospel message as were the neighboring communities. Mr. Edwards was asked to come and preach to the congregation in hopes that the community would embrace correct spiritual habits and forsake their sinful ways as had the surrounding communities.

By all eyewitness accounts, Mr. Edwards rose to the challenge. He used Deuteronomy 32:35 (*"To me belongeth vengeance and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste."*) as his text, while on other occasions he used Amos 9:2-3. (*"Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them*

out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them.”)

As was his method, Mr. Edwards read the message in a level, monotone voice making sure not to make eye contact with any of the congregation. Despite his tone, the vivid images and illustrations of hell were more than the congregation could handle. On several occasions, Mr. Edwards was interrupted by screams and shrieks, as those in attendance would later describe that they felt as though they could, at any moment, slip off into hell. After asking for silence, Jonathan Edwards would continue with the message, which lasted nearly six-hours.

Though there is no record or account that puts a number on the lives that this message influenced, it is no doubt in the hundreds of thousands. This message was used in a special way during the Great Awakening and is still being used to help sinners today.

The purpose of this booklet is not to take offense or object to anything Jonathan Edwards said in his message. I wholeheartedly agree with the Bible when it says in Psalms 7:11. (*“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.”*) I also am aware of, and believe that sinners are as Ephesians 2:3 says *“Children of Wrath.”* (Ephesians 2:3: *“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”*)

One day, while preparing for a message, I came to a portion of the outline that dealt with the love of God. At that moment, it seemed like the Lord spoke, “Sinners are in the Hands of a Loving God.” The message was for a future date, but the thought kept mulling around in my mind and heart for several weeks. The Lord started to bring scripture to my mind about the love of God such as I John 4:8, *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”* This verse describes an attribute of God or what God is, He IS love. I have heard men preach, “God only loves the saved, He does not love the sinner.” Have you ever set down and analyzed if this statement is true according to the Bible? In Mark 10, we read about a rich young ruler that came running to Jesus. This man asked Jesus for eternal life, claiming that he had observed (kept) the commandments. In Mark 10:21, the Bible says, *“Then Jesus beholding him loved him. . . .”* The Greek word used for love there is “agape,” which is the God-kind of love. In foreknowledge, Jesus knew that the rich young ruler would walk away, yet the Bible says Jesus loved him. What about in Matthew 9:36? The Bible says, *“But when he (Jesus) saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”* No doubt there were some (probably most), in this multitude that were lost. Yet we see that Jesus had compassion on them. We need to keep in mind that although Jesus loved the sinner, He did not love their

sin. Many times, in the scriptures, we see that He ate with sinners, but He didn't agree with, nor did He partake in their sin. The same is true today. The Lord loves the sinner, but at the same time, hates their sin.

How do we reconcile these two thoughts? Does God love the sinner or is He angry with him? I would explain it like a coin. A coin has two sides, each side is different in its unique way. If I were to explain to you what a Washington Quarter looks like, I could go in to detail about the image of George Washington, about his hair, and the inscription "In God We Trust." All of that would be true. However, I failed to mention anything about the other side of the coin. Were the statements about the Washington Quarter false? No, I was just focusing on one side. The love of God and the wrath of God are two sides of the same coin, both are true. The same can be said of the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility in salvation. Both doctrines are true. However, if someone preaches only on the sovereignty of God, he is labeled a Calvinist. On the other hand, when someone preaches only on man's responsibility, he is said to be preaching works for salvation. You may ask, "What do you believe?" I believe the Bible. I believe in both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Salvation is all of God. No saint will ever take credit for anything they did in coming to Christ. However, there are times when the Lord enables one to obey. At that point, if one does not obey what he has been enabled to do, he will remain stagnate and the Lord will not do anything else. If they obey and continue (John 8:31-32: "*Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"), the Lord will bring them to a point of Salvation, where the saint will confess the Lord did it all. We must rightly divide the word of God and as II Timothy 2:15 says, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

In looking at the thought "Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God," I'd like to look at Romans 5:8, "***But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***"

I realize that in context, Paul is writing the book of Romans "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. . ." (Romans 1:7) However in Romans 5, Paul starts the chapter by describing what the saints have in Christ, but beginning in verse 6, he looks back at what the saints were (when they were lost). In verses 6, 8, and 10, (Romans 5:6: "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*" Romans 5:8: "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Romans 5:10: "*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*") Paul says, "when we were," "while we were," and "when we were," looking back on their unconverted state. Even in his unconverted state, while he

was lost and undone, Paul goes on to tell the readers of Romans, both then, as well as today, what Christ's thoughts are toward sinners. Let us take a look and see what Paul says about the love of God.

The first thing I would like to point out in our text (Romans 5:8: "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"), is "**Divine Love.**" The first two words of the verse say, "**But God.**" Many times in the Bible, the darkest and bleakest of conditions is turned to joy and happiness by these two words, "But God." In Ephesians 2:1-3 "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*"), we read about the condition of natural man. He is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins (verse 1), he is dominated by the course of this world (verse 2), his mind is depraved (verse 3), he is doomed, and a child of wrath (verse 3). A very dark, discouraging picture, but then we come to Ephesians 2:4-5a, ("*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins. . .*") "But God." If you really think about it, those are the only two words that could have negated the previous condition and the same is still true today. The only person that can help you today in your lost condition is God. It is a Divine Love, in that He knows all about you. Do you realize that based on the foreknowledge of God, He knew all about you before the world was ever hung on nothing. (Job 26:7: "*He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.*") He knows about your faults and failures, yet He still loves you. No wonder I John 3:1 says, "*Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*" The word "manner" in this verse speaks of a foreign kind of love. Foreign in respect to our understanding of this love. It is hard for us to understand how someone could love, yea even die for someone who would sin and continue to come up short. He knew we would fail Him, sin against Him and even at times, fight against Him but still He loved us enough to face the cruel cross of calvary. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said this about Divine love, "Divine love can rake a dunghill and find a diamond." How true that is. What Divine love!!

Secondly, we see "**Declared Love.**" "*But God "commendeth. . ."* The word "commend" here in this verse means "to show" or "to exhibit." The tense of the word is continual action. This means that the Lord is continually showing and exhibiting His love to and for us. Who is he continually showing His love to? As we have already stated, He is talking about one that is in a lost state. Those that have been saved can look back and say, without a doubt, that the Lord showed His love to you while you were lost. Even the lost, if you are honest, can

readily agree that the Lord is good to you now, even in a lost condition. You have food to eat and clothes on your back. This is the goodness of God. We know from the scriptures that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. (Romans 2:4: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?") While Jesus walked this earth, it was told that, He was a "friend of publicans and sinners." (Matthew 11:19: "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.") This was showing His love for them. Not love for the sin, but love for the sinner. The same is true today. Though Jesus has ascended and is at the right hand of the Father, He still loves sinners through His saints and ministers. (I Corinthians 3:5: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?")

Thirdly, we see in this verse, "**Directed Love.**" "But God commendeth his love **toward us** . . ." The love of God is a directed love. A love that is intentional. There will never be a person that will be able to stand before the throne of God and say, "God, you never loved me." Oh, I'm sure man will try to make the argument, but it will not hold water. Pharoah, Esau, and even Judas Iscariot will not be able to claim that the Lord did not love them or that they did not have a chance to be saved. They were loved and graced just like every man that has ever been born. (Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.") Paul in I Timothy 1:15, ("This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.") confessed that he was the chief of sinners. Keep in mind that is the inspired word of God. The Lord loved the chief of sinners, therefore He loves you (I John 4:19: "We love him, because he first loved us.") As the song says, "I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin." Someway, somehow, Saul (Paul) stepped in light and was given more light. It could have been that those saints he had put in prison testified to him or maybe he saw something in them. He saw in their eyes that they had perfect peace even in the face of prison or even death. Down deep, Saul realized that something was not right, so he stepped in light the best he knew how until one day on the road to Damascus, the Lord spoke to him and said in Acts 9:6: ". . . Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Saul obeyed (human responsibility) and there he met Ananias on the street called Straight and was saved, three days after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Pharoah, Esau, and Judas Iscariot rejected the light they had. When they stand before the great white throne of judgement, the Lord will point out where they rejected light and had they not rejected the light they had, they would have been given more. As we think about this Directed Love, let us think about who it was directed to. The verses surrounding our text shows who the love was directed toward.

In Romans 5:6 ("For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."), we see that it was directed to those that are "**Without Strength.**" The phrase "without strength" means that man, in this condition, has no strength or is weak for good. Totally unable within himself spiritually to please or become acceptable to a Holy God. (Isaiah 64:6: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.")

In Romans 5:6 ("For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."), we also see that this love was directed to those that are "**Ungodly.**" The word "ungodly" is the opposite of "without strength." It means that man, in this condition, is strong. But the strength is bent toward evil doings, because man is depraved.

In Romans 5:8 ("But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."), we see that love was directed to "**Sinners.**" A sinner is one that is devoted to and enjoys sin. The word sin means both "to miss the mark" and "to overstep a boundary." (Romans 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.") Adam was made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.") When Adam sinned, he plunged the entire human race into sin. Now, everyone is born in the image of Adam, not God. We have a sin nature, that we inherited from Adam. We are sinners by nature, but also sinners by choice and therefore always miss the mark and come up short when trying to please the Lord. That is why we need to be born again, at which time we become a new creature, then becoming in God's image again. (II Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.") Not only do we miss the mark when trying to obey what He has said, but we overstep the boundaries by doing things that are forbidden. (I John 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.") The word transgress means one knows the boundary or limits, yet oversteps anyway.

In Romans 5:10: ("For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."), we see that love is directed to "**Enemies.**" The word "enemies" describes one that is actively opposing another. More specifically, it is one that is an adversary or hostile toward God. What love!! I think about Jesus as He was hanging on that cruel cross of

Calvary. In love, He looked down at those soldiers and those reviling Him and said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.")

Fourthly, we see, "**Deflecting Love.**" "*But God commendeth his love toward us, **in that**. . .*" The love of God is a deflecting love. The wrath of God hangs above every sinner at this moment. (John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.") The word "abideth" means that it remains or dwells on the sinner. Why has not the wrath consumed the sinner? The love of God is holding back the wrath and judgement that is deserving of every sinner. The Lord, in mercy, is giving a space of repentance. The moment one reaches the knowledge of accountability they are under this wrath that is being held back by the love of God. You may be thinking, "when does one reach this knowledge of accountability?" According to Deuteronomy 1:39 ("Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it."), it is when one knows the difference between good and evil, not right and wrong. It is described as 20 years old for the children of Israel in Numbers 14:29: "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against me." and Numbers 32:11: "Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me." This knowledge comes at different ages and I'm not saying it is 20 years old, but I believe it is closer to 20 than it is to 4 years old. Another question you may be thinking is "What about babies?" That's a very good question. Like everything else, we need to go to the Bible for the answer. Bethsheba conceived of her adulterous relationship with David and the young child became very sick. During the sickness, David fasted and prayed for the child's life. After hearing of the child's death, David says this in II Sam 12:23: "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." David had some insight that he would see that child again in heaven one day. Babies, as well as others, that never reach the knowledge of accountability are SAFE (not SAVED). If they happen to die, they are safe in the arms of Jesus. This should bring comfort to those that have lost little ones.

Fifthly, we see that Sinners are in the Hands of a Loving God because of "**Drawing Love.**" "*But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, **while we were sinners**. . .*" Thank the Lord that you do not have to stay in a lost state. There is a drawing love. This drawing love lets you know that something is missing. We would call this an awakening, as light reveals that you are not right with God. This may come through preaching or by the life of a dear saint of

God. This is not salvation, although some consider it salvation because they are now attending church and reading their Bible more than in the past. This is simply moving from the broad way to the narrow way. One is not saved until they enter the strait gate. (Matthew 7:13-14: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.") As the love of God draws, there will also be learning or some understanding that must take place. (Psalm 25:8: "Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way.") (John 6:45: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.") The word for "learned" means to understand. There are some things that a sinner must understand. John 16:8-11 ("And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.") says that there is a work of reproof that must take place and that it must be complete in all three areas of sin, righteousness, and judgement. Many make a profession because they do not want to go to hell, yet may have not been fully reproofed of righteousness or sin, therefore resulting in a false profession. The word translated "reprove" is translated five different ways, but when you put the five words together you get the complete definition. "To persuade by argument, using the evidence at hand, sharply and sternly with authority, bringing one to a settled fact that they are guilty." Reproof and Godly Sorrow, brought by drawing love, are works that only the Holy Spirit can do. A drawing that will bring understanding. How much understanding does one need? Enough. I heard a preacher say it this way, "If you have enough you are saved, if you are not saved, you do not have enough." That is plain but also accurate. This drawing love, even without all the others, should prove that God loves sinners.

Sixthly, and lastly, we see in this verse a "**Dying Love.**" "*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners **Christ died for us.***" This phrase includes the Gospel message. For Jesus to be able to die in our place, He had to be virgin born. He had to be born without the tainted blood and sin nature of Adam. For Jesus to be our sin bearer, He also had to live a sinless life. When He died on the cross of Calvary it was a substitutionary death. By this I mean that He died in our place. He wasn't dying for His own sins, for He had none. Yet in love He took our place. Not only did He have to be virgin born, live a sinless life, and die a substitutionary death, but He also had to be buried. The lifeless body of Jesus was buried and there He lay for 3 days and 3 nights. Thank the Lord that the grave could not hold Him, for after 3 days and 3 nights He rose again on that resurrection morning. Through the centuries, there have been millions of men that have died. There have even been men that claimed they died for you. But there has only been one man who died for you

and He is no longer in the grave. After coming forth from the grave, He ascended to the Father and is interceding for each of us today. (Hebrews 7:25: *"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."*) As He made His way to Calvary, when He prayed the great intercessory prayer on His way to Gethsemane He prayed for you. (John 17:20: *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."*). While He was on the cross, suffering as no man had ever suffered, He was thinking of you. (Hebrews 12:2: *"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*) The cross was not a joy, but the outcome of salvation of sinners was a joy that caused Him to endure the cross. He loved you enough to give His life. The blood of Jesus was capable of saving every person that has ever been born, but will only be applied to those that come God's way in salvation.

In conclusion, I want to make a couple of things clear:

1) While "Sinners are in the Hands of a Loving God," there will come a day when the mercy and forbearance of God will run out. I think about the days of Noah. The Bible says in I Peter 3:20 (*"Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*), the longsuffering of God waited while the ark was a-preparing. While the ark was being built, the people were given time to repent and get right. Even when the ark was finished and the animals were inside, the people were given another seven days until the door of the ark was shut by God. (Gen 7:10: *"And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth."*). Once the door was shut, the wrath of God was poured out. The love of God should not make one passive or presumptive but instead cause one to thirst and desire for the One that cares so much for them. It should cause one to seek like never before, knowing that He wants you to be His own. (Isaiah 55:6: *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."*)

2) God IS Love. (I John 4:8: *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."*)

He truly loves the sinner. If this was not the case, how would one come to be saved if the Lord did not love them? Some would say, "He only loves the elect." I disagree with this statement. Jesus loved the rich young ruler, and we see that he walked away without inheriting eternal life. I believe in foreknowledge and understand that the Lord knows what lies ahead. He knows who will be saved and who will reject light, yet He still loves the sinner. What a God !!

Thank the Lord that Sinners are in the Hands of a Loving God!!!

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