

Tractates on the First Letter of John, VII, 7-8: The Root of Love

by St. Augustine of Hippo

T*hus has God's love for us been revealed.* Behold, we have an exhortation to love God. Would we be able to love him, if he did not love us first? If we have been lazy in loving him, let us not be lazy in returning his love. He loved us first; we do not love in this way. He loved the sinner, but he undid sin: he loved sinners, but he did not gather them together for the sake of sin. He loved the sick, but came to them to heal them. Therefore *God is love. In this has been revealed God's love for us, that he sent his only-begotten Son into this world, that we might live through him.* As the Lord himself says: *No one has greater love than this, that he lay down his life for his friends;* and that is how Christ's love for us has been proved, since he died for us. How has the Father's love for us been proved? Because he sent his only Son to die for us: so the Apostle Paul says: *He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all, how has he not given us all things along with him?* Behold, the Father hands Christ over, and Judas hands him over; does it not seem to be basically the same action? Judas is a betrayer: is God the Father therefore a betrayer as well? "Heaven forbid," you say. Not I, but the Apostle says: *Who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all.* The Father hand him over, and he handed himself over. The Apostle says the same: *He who loved me, and handed himself over for me.* If the Father handed over the Son, and the Son handed over himself, what did Judas do? A "betrayal" is done by the Father, a "betrayal" is done by the Son, a "betrayal" is done by Judas; one deed has been done: but what distinguishes the Father handing over the Son, the Son handing over himself, and the disciple Judas handing over his master? The difference is that the Father and the Son did this in love, but Judas did it in treachery.

In hoc manifestata est dilectio Dei in nobis. Ecce, ut diligamus Deum, hortationem habemus. Possemus illum diligere, nisi prior ille diligeret? Si pigri eramus ad amandum, non simus pigri ad redamandum. Prior amavit nos; nec sic nos amamus. Iniquos amavit, sed iniquitatem solvit: iniquos amavit, sed non ad iniquitatem congregavit. Aegrotos amavit, sed sanandos visitavit. *Deus ergo dilectio est. In hoc manifestata est dilectio Dei in nobis, quia Filium suum unigenitum misit in hunc mundum, ut vivamus per ipsum.* Quomodo ipse Dominus ait: *Maiorem dilectionem nemo potest habere, quam ut animam suam ponat pro amicis suis;* et ibi probata est dilectio Christi in nos, quia mortuus est pro nobis. Dilectio Patris unde probata est in nos? Quia Filium suum unicum misit mori pro nobis: sic et Paulus apostolus dicit: *Qui Filio proprio non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit eum, quomodo non et cum illo omnia nobis donavit?* Ecce Christum tradidit Pater, tradidit Iudas; numquid non quasi simile factum videtur? Traditor est Iudas: ergo traditor est et Deus Pater? Absit, inquis. Non dico, sed Apostolus dicit: *Qui Filio proprio non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit eum.* Et Pater illum tradidit, et ipse se tradidit. Ait idem apostolus: *Qui me dilexit, et tradidit seipsum pro me.* Si Pater tradidit Filium, et tradidit seipsum Filius, Iudas quid fecit? Facta est traditio a Patre, facta est traditio a Filio, facta est traditio a Iuda; una res facta est: sed quae res discernit Patrem tradentem Filium, seipsum Filium tradentem, et Iudam discipulum tradentem magistrum suum? Quia hoc fecit Pater et Filius in caritate; fecit autem hoc Iudas in proditione.

You see that one must consider not what a man does, but the mind and will with which he does it. We discover God the Father in the same action in which we discover Judas; we bless the Father, we detest Judas. Why do we bless the Father and detest Judas? We bless love, we detest sin. For how much has been offered to the human race from Christ's having been handed over? But it wasn't this consideration that led Judas to hand him over, was it? God thought of our salvation by which we have been redeemed; Judas thought of the price which he received to betray him. The different intention, therefore, makes for a different action. Though it be one thing, if we measure it from the different intentions, we find that one is to be loved, the other condemned; one glorified, the other detested. This is the power of love. You see that love alone makes the difference, you see that it alone distinguishes the deeds of men.

We have said this regarding similar actions. Regarding different actions, we find a man made savage by love, and one made mild by sin. A father strikes a boy, and the slave-dealer caresses him. If you propose two things, beatings and caresses, who would not choose the caresses and flee the beatings? If you look to the persons, love strikes, and sin caresses. You see what we are suggesting, that the deeds of men are distinguished only by the root of love. For flowers also have thorns: some things seem rough, seem fierce; but they are done for discipline under the guidance of love. One last time, then, you are taught a short precept: Love, and do what you will: if you are silent, be silent in love; if you shout, shout in love; if you correct, correct in love; if you spare, spare in love: let the root of love be within, and nothing but good can spring from this root.

Videtur quia non quid faciat homo, considerandum est; sed quo animo et voluntate faciat. In eodem facto invenimus Deum Patrem, in quo invenimus Iudam; Patrem benedicimus, Iudam detestamur. Quare Patrem benedicimus, Iudam detestamur? Benedicimus caritatem, detestamur iniquitatem. Quantum enim praestitum est generi humano de tradito Christo? Numquid hoc cogitavit Iudas ut traderet? Deus cogitavit salutem nostram qua redempti sumus; Iudas cogitavit pretium quo vendidit Dominum. Filius ipse cogitavit pretium quod dedit pro nobis; Iudas cogitavit pretium quod accepit ut venderet. Diversa ergo intentio diversa facta fecit. Cum sit una res, ex diversis eam intentionibus si metiamur, unum amandum, alterum damnandum; unum glorificandum, alterum detestandum invenimus. Tantum valet caritas. Videte quia sola discernit, videte quia facta hominum sola distinguit.

Hoc diximus in similibus factis. In diversis factis, invenimus saevientem hominem factum de caritate; et blandum factum de iniquitate. Puerum caedit pater, et mango blanditur. Si duas res proponas, plagas et blandimenta; quis non eligat blandimenta, et fugiat plagas? Si personas attendas, caritas caedit, blanditur iniquitas. Videte quid commendamus, quia non discernuntur facta hominum, nisi de radice caritatis. Nam multa fieri possunt quae speciem habent bonam, et non procedunt de radice caritatis. Habent enim et spinae flores: quaedam vero videntur aspera, videntur truculenta; sed fiunt ad disciplinam dictante caritate. Semel ergo breve praeceptum tibi praecipitur: Dilige, et quod vis fac: sive taceas, dilectione taceas; sive clames, dilectione clames; sive emendes, dilectione emendes; sive parcas, dilectione parcas: radix sit intus dilectionis, non potest de ista radice nisi bonum existere.