

## The Love of God

We have been looking at understanding about God through His attributes. We consider those attributes through the way *we* reflect them being made in the image of God. The difference is that, in us, they might grow or decay, but with God in His perfection, they can *not* wax or wane. This is the essential meaning of holiness, which was the first one we looked at. In His holiness, He transcends all that we are able to understand. We have also studied about His righteousness and His grace.

There are many ways that the world tries to portray God. This includes exaggerated caricatures of God as a harsh judge, a deity who is whatever we imagine Him to be, a Santa Claus, a puppet master, an impersonal force, an absentee landlord, or the God of love. *Some* of these are based on actual attributes of God taken out of context. God *does* bless us, but not because He is Santa Claus. God does have judgment for sin, but mixed with grace. We have examined about how central the attribute of holiness is, but God's love speaks powerfully to the hearts of mankind.

1John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

God *is* love, which is today's topic, but not as people might think of love. The natural love of self has so strong a pull that we have to remember what love is.

1. Love is not defined by -

Love is not defined by:

- Overlooking sin

God doesn't tolerate bad behavior or ignore sin. There is the ultimate day of judgment but there is judgment here on earth, too.

Pro 5:22 His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of

his sins.

Prov 24:20 For there shall be no reward to the evil *man*; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

It is possible to "love the sinner and hate the sin." Love is not just universal, unconditional *approval*. In our time, this seems to be the biggest social concern. Toleration of sin perverts the marriage issue, turns freedom of speech into hate, and pits people against each other because they love themselves. We are called upon to be tolerant, respectful, and accepting of those in sin. More than that, liberal society expects us to be *approving* as well. Of course, in a sinful world that only works one way. Christians and principled people must approve of aberrant behaviors while Christians must be suppressed. There are *also* times not to be tolerant of sinners. There are *also* times to not be respectful, but to take a stand. There are *also* times to not be accepting of those in sin. There is *never* a time when we should be expected to be *approving* of sin or to give our blessings upon it.

- Satisfying someone's lust

Love is not defined by giving in to someone's lustful demands. People cry, "You don't love me because you didn't give me what I want." This was the sin of the Israelites coming out of Egypt. They had a "What have you done for me lately" attitude that was called tempting God. Many people have been manipulated by the statement "If you loved me you would..." The proper response is "If you loved me you wouldn't ask me to do that."

We will see later on that if you require someone to love you then you are not a loving person. God describes Himself as worthy of love but He ultimately only *invites* our love. We are free to not love, although that does bring consequences when we rebel against God.

- Bribing someone with gifts

Bestowing gifts on someone for the purpose of manipulating them is not a good measure of love. When you give a gift, it is with no strings attached. If you give a gift to someone and they sell it to use the money for something else, you shouldn't criticize them. Otherwise it is like the King of Siam's white elephant gift. According to legend, the king of Siam would give a white elephant as a gift to a courtier who had fallen out of favor or someone he wanted to ruin. The gift, while appearing generous, was actually a curse. A white elephant was considered sacred. It could not be killed or put to work. The recipient would be burdened with the cost of caring for the elephant, ultimately leading to their financial ruin. If someone receives a gift, he must be absolutely free to do with it what he wants without costing us a ruined relationship.

- A physical relationship

Love is commonly understood as a romantic, physical relationship. There are three common words in Greek for love. One is for God's unconditional love of us (*agape*). Another is our love of others (*phileo*). The third is *eros*, where we get our word erotic from. This word is never used for our love of God, love of our brethren, or God's love for us.

- An emotion

The last, and most subtle and most important false view of love, is that it is an emotion. This notion of love makes loving your enemies an absurdity. If forgiveness is based on feeling positive toward your enemy then forgiveness will seem impossible. True love *is* possible toward your enemy if you use God's love. It is easy to have God's kind of love because love is not an emotion. God's love is based on a decision to want the best for us. It is hard to forgive an enemy if loving means you have to have positive emotions about the offender.

## 2. God's example of love -

In Deuteronomy 5 God repeated the 10 commandments and followed up the re-giving of the law in chapter 6 with this:

Deut 6:4-6 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD:

5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

Notice the order that is established in these verses. There is only one God and *between* the lawgiver and the *law* is love. The foundation of the law, what underlies the law, what gives power to the law, is love. Obeying God is built on the love of God, not the fear of God. Jesus amplified this when He was asked what the greatest commandment is.

Matt 22:35-40 Then one of them, *which was* a lawyer, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Jesus and Paul boiled the law down to the essence given in Deu. 6.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

John 15:17 These things I

command you, that ye love one another.

Rom 13:8-10 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

Jesus talked about the degree of the character of the kind of love He was talking about in John 15:12. Jesus Christ fulfilled the *demands* of the law (death to the sinner) by His *love*:

John 15:12-13 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Paul described this kind of Christ's love as being available not only for those it could be said He liked as friends. He described it as being available for those who were His enemies.

Rom 5:6-8 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

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

When Christ came into the world, it was because of His love for us. There was nothing lovable about us. God did not demand that we do something to

*deserve* His love. We would recognize this as child abuse if we heard of a parent who made his child *earn* his love. Here is one of the great truths about love then: it is a decision. It is not an emotion. It is not a fluttering of the stomach. It is not lightheaded, lighthearted, or light duty. It is a decision to be given over completely to offer something for the best for someone else. When Jesus came, it was His decision to want the best for us. The best for us was salvation and it cost Him His life.

Heb 12:2-4 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.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

You might not be able to measure love, but you can see its effect. Someone put it this way one time: I asked Jesus how much He loved me and He said, "This much," and He stretched out his arms and died. Love is always by grace. Nobody *deserves* love. We are loved by God by His *choice*. Not because we made Him happy...that would violate the concept that love is given in exchange for something. It is necessarily of grace...undeserved favor.

### 3. The effect of love -

- Receiving God's love - your salvation

In His love He *made* us acceptable.

Eph 1:6-7 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

- Receiving God's ability to love

The effect of receiving God is to be renewed and joined with Him and His nature. Because we have Christ in us we have the ability to have God's love.

1Pet 1:22-23 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently:

23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

1John 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

- True love cannot be selfish

This is why the word for love is translated *charity*, or active love, in 1 Cor. 13.

1 Cor 13:1-8 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Love is not selfish. Love can only give, it cannot expect. You can tell that someone doesn't get it when they say "I give and give and give and get nothing in return." Or, "It doesn't seem to make a difference." Were you only giving because you expected something to come of it? I must love because I am a loving person, not because love works to get me what I want.

2 Cor 12:15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.



Love is the difficult realization that something other than oneself is real.

— Iris Murdoch

The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.

— G. K. Chesterton

*This* is how it is possible to love your enemies.

It is natural to love them that love us, but it is supernatural to love them that hate us.

— Source unknown

Matt 5:43-48 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so?

48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

- True love is active

You will see the effect of love as action.

1John 3:16-18 Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we

ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

**17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?**

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; **but in deed and in truth.**

There are some lessons that are basic to the Christian life and this is one of the big ones. It keeps you from falling into a victimization mentality. It brings harmony to your worst relationships. It paves the way to give the Gospel. It brings patience into your heart. It gives maturity to your spirit and relationship with God. It helps you experience heaven on earth. It will take you through the worst trials.

Have you experienced God's love of offering Himself to die for your sins? Or, are you just looking for undeserved approval and ignoring of your sin? Once you surrender your heart to Jesus and ask for His forgiveness, you will be made a child of God *and* you will be filled with God's love for others. Can you say you have received the love of God by accepting His salvation that Jesus died for?

Are you a child of God but you are laboring under how much people owe you because of their offenses toward you? Practicing the selfless love of God will inspire you to help those very same people find *their* next spiritual level. It might be helping them find Christ or it might be helping them to grow in their spirit. This will also help you fight sin and temptation in your life as your love for others will keep you from the things that could get in the way of their relationship with God. Will your love override your self? When you are tempted, does your love of God draw you back?

1John 4:8

1. Love is not defined by - Pro 5:22, 24:20

2. God's example of love - Deut 6:4-6, Matt 22:35-40, John 13:34, 15:17, Rom 13:8-10, John 15:12-13, Rom 5:6-8, Heb 12:2-4, John 3:16-17
3. The effect of love - Eph 1:6-7, 1Pet 1:22-23, 1John 4:7-11, 1Cor 13:1-8, 2Cor 12:15, Matt 5:43-48, 1John 3:16-18