

The Love of God

Intro: Many years ago Swiss theologian Karl Barth came to the US to speak and afterward agreed to a question and answer session with some of the theology students. One of them posed the question, “What is the most profound thought you have ever had about God in your many years of study and teaching?” A silence filled the room and every person leaned forward in anticipation of what the theologian might say. After a long pause, he gave his answer: “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so”. The simple truth of this children’s song about the love of God is one of the most profound and mysterious truths in the revelation of God.

I fear that today’s society has lost sight of the wonder of God’s love. That is true in part because it is isolated from the other features of God’s character. Today the religious world presents a “user-friendly god” that is attractive to the world and the tendency is to downplay or completely ignore God’s holiness, justice, and wrath. We have spoken about these first for a reason. By failure to teach the holiness and justice of God, we lose our sense of the glory of God’s love and reduce it to sentimental mush. Against the dark backdrop of God’s justice and wrath, we see the glimmering glory of His love. Like John we could say:

And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

It may be hard to think of God’s love separate from human beings, but God’s love existed before the creation of mankind as its object.

Strong in his systematic theology makes these observations: “God’s love is a rational and voluntary affection, grounded in perfect reason and choice. It is self-communication and self-giving. It is not mere regard for being in general, irrespective of its moral quality. Instead the immanent love of God requires and finds a perfect standard in his own holiness, and a personal object in the image of his own infinite perfections.”

This love God expressed in Himself in the eternal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

“Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

Yet God did not keep His love to Himself.

Though the world itself was not a necessary object of His love in order for Him to experience serenity and joy, God created this universe and man in it as an expression of His self-communicating and self-giving love.

God’s love is seen in the perfect world He created for the first human pair. He gave them everything they needed and revealed Himself to them.

Genesis 1-2 reveal the love of God.

Ironically Satan's success in deceiving the first human pair was in causing them to doubt the love of God. He sought to persuade them that God was "not giving", that He was withholding something from them that would make them as He—"the knowledge of good and evil". Little did they realize that doubting God's love would set them and the whole race on a course of death and destruction.

God responded to man's sin not emotionally but purposefully.

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:4b-6)

God's love is not mere emotion but instead subordinates emotion to the higher principles of truth and holiness.

When man rejected God's love, His actions were regulated by these principles. The only remedy for man's sin was sacrifice, a sacrifice of inconceivable magnitude. The cross of Jesus was and is the most perfect manifestation of God's self-giving and self-communicating love.

and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:2)

God's love was not without cost to Him. The love of God resulted in divine suffering, not only in the physical and spiritual pain of Jesus, but in the suffering of the Father and Spirit as the Son suffered on the cross.

What the love of God means to us!

Think of how our lives are affected by the love of God in Christ. His love is: Self-initiated

We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

God's love is the grounds of our own love for Him.

Undeserved

For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7-8)

God's love assures us that we do not have to earn His love. Instead it is the grounds of His grace.

Sacrificial

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

God's love assures us of a means of forgiveness when we sin. Through acceptance of the terms of the gospel we can be forgiven.

Universal

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

God's love embraces all. The possibility of salvation is available to all men, if they will respond to God's love.

Personal

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20)
God’s love has an awesome healing power for those who have suffered abuse or shame or guilt. “Jesus loves me...!”

Stimulating

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. (1 John 3:1)

God’s love stirs us to see all that is possible for us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It excites a hope in us of being like him and causes us to purify ourselves to obtain this hope.

Powerful

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; (2 Corinthians 5:14)

The love of God becomes the controlling force in our lives. Our decisions and actions are not only regulated by the authority of his law externally but internally by the power of His love for us and our love for Him!

Triumphant

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

If I’ve understood Paul’s point, he shows us that life is filled with things that may serve as a source of temptation and sin for us; but none of them need lead us to defeat or despair. Because of God’s love we can overcome all these things through Christ.

Conclusion: Such is the love of God for all of us. Are we living in it? Have responded to it? Have we come to appreciate it as we should?

May we pray as Paul that we “ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:18-19)