

The Love of God revised 6-9-02

God is love. 1John 4:8,16 Language so often confuses us, especially when we translate it. In this passage 'love' is *agape* love. It is a love freely given that expects nothing back. Too often, we think of God as love, and we confuse it with our modern usage of the word 'love'. We think of love as some wimpy sentimental gushy indulgent kindness. This is where we need the truth of Scripture to transform our thinking and give us the real definition of love. That is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Here is a love that denies itself for the one loved. If you look deeply into this chapter you will find all the attributes of God we have discussed. They are expressed in this type of love, faithful, unchanging, merciful, and never failing. The love of man is often contingent upon others returning our love or giving us the favors we demand, but God's love does not seek His own benefit. A real knowledge and experience of the love of God is utterly lacking in our world today. I say that because a revelation of the love of God for us transforms us and births in us a love for God that is so rare in the world of Christians today. We love Him because He first loved us. 1John 4:19 We would do well to follow the psalmists' example,⁹ Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Psalms 48:9 (NIV)

To step into this holy ground and try to elaborate on this description of God is to know we will only touch the surface of this attribute. In 1743 John Brine appropriately said, "*No tongue can fully express the infinitude of God's love, or any mind comprehend it: It 'passeth knowledge' (Ephesians 3:19). The most extensive ideas that a finite mind can frame about Divine love, are infinitely below its true nature.*" As with all of God's attributes, we must look past the mind of man to the revelation of God's word to get a glimpse of this marvelous perfection of God's love.

If we were to describe the love of God without the Word of God we would fall miserably short. 1 John 3:16 (NIV)¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Love is a giving up of your life for another. John 15:13 (KJV) Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. What more could anyone give for another? Romans 5:5-8 (NIV)⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Did you notice the theme of death as the ultimate expression of love as I read the Scriptures referring to the love of God? If we are to look at a picture of this attribute there is but one perfect picture – it is the cross. It is in Christ Jesus loving us so much that He willingly laid down His life for us. That is the love of God demonstrated for us so that we might be able to understand it. For God so loved the world He gave his only begotten son... A laying down of one's life or that dearest to him for another is the love we are talking about. This is the love that God has for you. Oswald Chambers said, "*In the cross we may see the dimensions of Divine love. The cross is not the cross of a man, but the exhibition of the heart of God. At the back of the wall of the world stands God with His arms outstretched, and every man driven there is driven into the arms of God. The cross of Jesus is the supreme evidence of the love of God.*"

Our flesh does not like us dwelling on this subject because ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 (NIV) And remember what love we are talking about? Love that lays down your life. We see the love He first had for us in laying down His life for us, and as we let the power and reality of that past our hard exterior and into our very heart, the same type of love is birthed in us, His own love, that lays down our life for Him and for others. This is one place NIV has a more accurate rendering of the Greek, for there is no pronoun that is the object of love in the Greek. It doesn't say we love HIM or we love OTHERS. The text just says, "We love because..."

You can't have that agape love in you without loving God and in turn those He loves. And again, that love is death to self, laying down your life. Follow along as I read what John writes in the fourth chapter of his first letter: ⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.¹³ We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

Verse 9 says God showed His love – it has been demonstrated in sending His only Son into the world, why? That we might live through Him. God loves us so much that He wants to rescue us from our spiritually dead condition. We don't deserve to be rescued, but He loves us, and He desires to rescue us and give us life. The only way it could be done was through the highest price He could pay. He loved you that much. If you ever have a question about the love of God toward you, look to the cross. Would you deliberately choose to go through that for anyone?

Nurses will tell you they have to become somewhat insensitive to the pain of others because it hurts too much to deal with it day after day. Any of you who have spent time in a hospital can testify to that. They just have to, to keep from getting ulcers and to keep from constantly hurting for others. I think we do the same thing in regards to this demonstration of the love of God in Jesus. As we take communion we try to resensitize ourselves to the love that He showed, but often, even then, we will only go so deep. Don't do that. Let it grip your heart, for His love begets love. His love will produce in your heart a love for Him and others. ⁹ Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love. Psalms 48:9 (NIV)

Elizabeth DeBeasi tells the story of putting her daughter Carla to bed. She asked Carla, "What is it like to be 4?" Carla answered, "It's special!" "Why", her mother asked.

"Because I know my mommy loves me", came her quick reply. Life is special no matter what your age, because your heavenly Father loves you!

Any Christian would say they want to love God more, but few will let the power of the demonstration of the love of God break their heart and bring the response of the same love – repentance for reserving part of your life from Him, and laying down our life for Him and others. That is our first love. *"At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light..."* If you want your first love back you have to return to that place you got it and let the pain of that demonstration of God's love grip you afresh. It will renew your desire to lay down your life for Him.

1 John 3:1 (NIV) ¹ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! I like that word 'lavished'. God's love doesn't just get distributed sparingly, for God declared Himself to Moses as the One abounding in love. What a need there is for us to know how much we are loved. When you realize what man is, as we contemplated in the sermon last week, and what it means that God is holy as we studied the week before, then we realize how much we need the love of God in abundance.

At Cornerstone Christian Academy there are a few children that have a tough home life or are in foster homes. They don't know they are loved and they keep testing the teachers to see if we will love them regardless of how irritating they become. They are looking for the love of God in us. Some children have no question as to their parent's love, and they are well adjusted. In the same way, when we have no question as to our heavenly Father's love, we will be well adjusted spiritually. I know I need that. I think we all do, so once a week I review Ps 139 and dwell on His love for me. About once a year I will go through the Song of Songs and let it really sink deep into my heart. But more than these helpful exercises is the daily communion in which I allow Him to speak to my heart of His love for me. If you want to see a fire in your heart for God, that is where it will be kindled, in the secret place, in His presence, taking in His abounding love for you.

James chapter four tells us how jealous God is over us. The world looks at jealousy as a negative virtue, but we must understand the desire of God is that we be completely His. What else is there? If we belong to anything else, it is the world – and that is sin – and sin destroys. God's jealousy is holy, unlike man's. It is a desire to see us pure, kept from evil, walking in His life and light, completely His.

The love and faithfulness of God are ever preceding Him, but remember that his rule and reigning is established on a foundation of righteousness and justice. Psalms 89:14 (NIV) declares, Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. The love of God will not ignore justice or keep from disciplining those He loves. With love comes some painful scourging. God will do, in love, whatever it takes to keep His child from going astray. He wants us to know the consequences of sin. Sometimes we will have to speak the truth in love to our family in the Lord, even though it pains them and us. Love speaks what is most helpful to the one loved.

Did you ever notice how some unbelievers don't seem to suffer from sin and you always do? Your Father won't let you slide. I know I can't get away with anything, and I thank God for it. I consider that an expression of His love for me. If you want to walk closely with God welcome that consistent discipline from the loving hand of God.

When God allows those painful experiences in life it helps me to remember what Christ suffered. He was beloved of the Father but He experienced poverty, disgrace and persecution. He got hungry and thirsty. The fact that men were allowed to spit on Him and punch Him did not mean that God did not love Him. And so we, too, should not question the love of God when we are rejected, afflicted or in a trial. He had nowhere to lay His head but He did have the Spirit without measure. Understand that spiritual gifts and spiritual comfort are gifts of God's love that are worth more than wealth, more than pleasure, more than all the world can offer.

If we will see the love He puts into planning each day of our lives we will be more in love with Him than ever. Psalms 89:15-16 (NIV)¹⁵ Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.¹⁶ They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness. I was thinking about these verses recently, what it means to learn to acclaim or praise God. We praise him for what He does in our lives. Some eyes are sensitive to the works of God all around them through the day. The more I walk in the Spirit the more I am attuned to those things in which He expresses His love to me and praise God for them. The more I walk in the carnal nature the more readily I see things as discouraging and defeated and praise is absent from my lips. My focus is off the love of God. It is like I'm looking for something to complain about instead of things to praise about.

Brothers and sisters, if we are going to touch the community, we must be willing to allow God to change us from whiners to winners! Winners realize they have won. They don't focus on the little errors of others. They are focussed on the victory of Jesus. Because God loved you so much He made you a winner in His Son. When He said, "It is finished!" He was declaring His victory for you. When He rose from the dead He rose victorious over death and hell. If you've risen with Him you are a winner! His abundant love is upon you. Why dwell on some little offense or imperfection in your brother? You've got bigger things, better things, to dwell on. Dwell on the God who loves you. Dwell on how to share Him with others. What would this church look like if every one of us would do that? What would people see when they came to visit? They'd see the love of God because you are willing to keep your eyes fixed on Him as He changes you!

Eph 3:16-19(NIV)¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge --that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

We need His power to see His love in the world around us. When we are willing to receive it and see it, His love establishes us, roots us in Him. Nothing can separate us from it. I pray that all of us would start to see the dimensions of the love that God has for us, that we might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Just as with all His attributes, God expects His life in you to express His love, His unconditional love to Him first. That is the great Commandment, and then to others as His love flows through you. John said, if that isn't happening, we probably don't know God, because GOD IS LOVE. The invitation is to open our hearts afresh to Calvary and our eyes to His love expressed in so many ways toward us personally everyday; and then for us to return that first love, and let it flow to others. The cost is laying down our life, but that is the natural fruit of knowing and

receiving His love for us. We can't work it up, but we can let it flow. We can follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as He expresses love toward the Father, and love to others.

I'll close with a story from Ed Rotz. He went to the hospital to see his premature granddaughter, Zoe. Zoe is the Greek word for life. Little Zoe was only 1 pound and 7 ounces. Ed's wedding band could slide up Zoe's arm all the way to her shoulder. When Ed first saw Zoe she had 2 IVs in her naval and one in her foot. There were monitors on each side of her chest. In her mouth were respirator and feeding tubes. To make matters worse, one-week earlier Zoe's biological father had moved on. The nurse, Helen, found out Ed was related and told him, "You are going to be Zoe's surrogate father. I want you in here everyday stroking her arms and legs with your fingertips and telling her you love her. If this baby is going to make it she will have to hear and feel she is loved."

God knew we needed His voice and touch, so He not only gave us His Word (His voice) but also His Son (His tangible presence). He gave us not only Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh) but also His body, the church. God's voice and God's touch say, "I love you." Little Zoe made it, and you will too, from whiners to winners, from those focussed on others' faults to those focussed on God's love in Jesus. Keep your eyes open to His love as you go through each day and your ears open to His words of abounding love toward you.