

Lesson 12

God is Love

One of the most precious declarations in the whole Bible is that God is love.

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

“And 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.” (1 John 4:16)

Only the Bible gives us the supreme revelation of God’s love. Neither nature, nor philosophy, nor science has ever told us that God is love, but this revelation is found only in the Holy Scriptures. The loving God of Scripture is in contrast with the gods of heathenism who only hate and show anger, and with the gods of the philosophers who are cold and indifferent.

There are many today who talk much about the love of God who are total strangers to the God of love as He is revealed in the Bible. For sure, God is love but He is also omnipotent, omniscient, holy, just, righteous, truth, goodness, eternal, immutable and wrath. God is not just love, but one of His attributes is love. To hear people speak today, you would think that God is only love, but this is not so according to the Scriptures.

One time I heard of a reasonably famous Bible teacher who said that the whole plan of God was based on God’s love. He made this statement because he is a sentimentalist, for actually the plan of God is based on all of God’s attributes. Love is just one of God’s many characteristics.

In last week’s sermon, we pointed out that God is wrath. He is holy and He hates sin. Because He is just, He must judge sinful men. God’s particular or redemptive love for men is directly related to Christ’s death for sinners. God’s special love goes out to those who have believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Bible opposes those who say that God loves everybody with a particular love and would not judge any of His creatures. Those who make this claim are either ignorant of the Bible or are rejecters of the plain truth.

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (John 3:36)

DEFINITION OF GOD’S LOVE

Trying to define God’s love is like trying to count the stars in the heavens; it is impossible. Having said that, I will now try to give a limited, human definition of love: “Love is

that perfection of God's divine nature by which He is eternally moved to communicate with men and set His affections upon them." God's love is not an emotional impulse, but a rational and voluntary affection, having its ground in truth and holiness, and its exercise in God's free choice.

God is love. He is the fountain-head, focal point, the first cause of love. Without God there would be no love. Often we think of God's love in comparison with man's love, but God's love is perfect and is not like any human love we know. God's love is not amiable weakness, effeminate softness and a sort of good natured indulgence, reduced to mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. No, divine love finds its source in God and is beyond total comprehension by any human being. The old Scotchman was right when he said, "Love is better felt than telt."

CHRIST AND GOD'S LOVE

The first and primary object of the Father's love is his Son, Jesus Christ.

"As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17)

The Father not only loved the Son at His baptism but He loved Him from all eternity.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." (John 17:24)

The Father loves His Son, Jesus Christ, with an infinite love, for Christ is God and God loves himself.

THE CHRISTIAN AND GOD'S LOVE

We know with an absolute certainty that God loves His own. Hundreds of verses in the Bible tell us that God loves all of His spiritual children who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In fact, there are only two verses in the whole Bible that imply God has a general love for the unsaved world and both of these verses are open to interpretation. These two verses are John 3:16 and Mark 10:21. The real emphasis of the Bible is on God's particular, redemptive love for those who are true believers in Christ.

God's love for His own is uninfluenced. By this we mean that there was nothing in the objects of God's love to merit His love. All men are sinners and vile before a holy God, so there is nothing in the creature to attract or prompt God's love.

“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you . . .” (Deut. 7:7-8a)

God’s love is free, spontaneous and uncaused. God loves because he wants to, not because He has to, for He finds nothing in man to love, for all men are in rebellion to God. We must remember that it was God who first loved the Christian.

“This is love; Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

God loved us before we ever had one particle of love for Him. He loved us when we were totally unlovely. Be honest! Is there anything in you that could attract the heart of God to you? When we search ourselves, we find only vileness. Only a person filled with pride or conceit would say that there was anything in him that would cause God to love him.

“What was there in me that could merit esteem,

Or give the Creator delight?

Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing.

Because it seemed good in Thy sight.”

God’s love for His own is eternal. Since God is eternal as well as love, we may conclude that His love is eternal. Christian, did you know that God loved you from His eternal counsels?

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.’” (Jer. 31:3)

God had you on His heart from everlasting to everlasting. Christ in His high priestly prayer implied that the Father loved the true Christian in the same manner as He loved His own Son, for as Christ was loved by the Father in the eternal counsels, so was the Christian.

“I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”
(John 17:23-24)

God loved His Son from the foundation of the world and He loves His own from the foundation of the world. Since He loves His Son with an infinite love, we know that God loves all true believers in Christ with an infinite love. This infinite love of God is also related to the believer's predestination to be conformed to Christ in eternity future. In Ephesians 1: 4-5 it is perfectly legitimate from the Greek to translate this, "***In love, he predestined us . . .***"

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." (Eph. 1:4-5)

There never was a time when God did not love His own and there never will be a time when He will not love His people. This love is too deep for the human mind to grasp! C. H. Spurgeon said,

"It is a good thing that the Lord loved me and chose me before the foundation of the world, for, if he would have waited until my life on earth to love and choose me, He would not have done so, seeing what a great sinner I am."

God's love for His own is sovereign. We must impress upon our minds that God did not have to love anyone. He was under no obligation to the creature to communicate His love. God grants His love to whom He pleases.

"Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" (Rom. 9:13)

It pleases God to grant love to all who have Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Just because God loves some with redemptive designs, it does not necessarily follow that He has to love everyone in the same way. God is sovereign and He does as He pleases; therefore, the cause of love is in God himself.

God's love for His own is infinite. Before conversion to Christ, every Christian was a lost sinner, an enemy of God, a slave to Satan, sold out to the world's philosophy and dead in sin with no hope. However, God intervened into the sinner's life and saved him, making him a new creature in Christ and an object of God's great love.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved."
(Eph. 2:1-5)

Notice that this is great love. This love is without limits and none can really fathom it. This love defies measurement by any creature standards.

*“Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies with parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God alone
Would drain that ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.”*

God's love for His own is immutable. God's love towards the Christian is unchanging and unchangeable, for it remains constant. He loves His own unto the end.

“... having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1 KJV)

The phrase “unto the end” has been translated “to the uttermost,” and the early church father, John Chrysostom, translated it “to the highest degree.” God will always love the Christian no matter what his spiritual state may be. What a comfort it is to know God still loves us when we become rebellious as His children.

*“His love no end nor measure knows,
No change can turn its course,
Eternally the same it flows
From one eternal source.”*

God's love for His own is gracious. God showed forth His love to Christians before they were ever saved. When they were yet sinners, Christ died for them.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)

God's holiness required an atonement for sin, and God's love provided it. Christian, Christ died for you before you ever came into existence. From the eternal counsels, God loved you, and at the Cross Christ died for you. He did all this for you before you ever loved Him. Oh, what love the Father has shown to us!

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1)

*"My love is oft-times low;
My joy still ebbs and flows;
But peace with Him remains the same –
No change Jehovah knows.*

*I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place
His truth, not mine, the tie."*

God's love for His own is holy. God does not shut His eyes to the sins of His people, for those whom God loves through Christ He disciplines.

"Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Heb. 12:6)

God always disciplines His beloved to produce holiness in them.

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." (Heb. 12:10)

God will not wink at sin, even in His own people, for His love is pure and holy.

CONCLUSION

For those who have trusted in Christ, you know that God loves you, for the Bible tells you so. God loved you through the death of Christ. Just think of it! The infinite God of the universe is interested in insignificant you. His love for you is more important than running the whole universe. He is constantly and forever loving you. God loves you in your sorrows. He loves you in your blessings. He loves you in your failures, and He loves you in your backslidings. The God of love and the love of God secures the Christian in every circumstance in life.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:35-39)

Oh, God of love, we adore you: we love you and worship you!

For you outside of Christ, I want you to clearly understand that there is no particular, redemptive love for you. God’s love is found only in Christ, and those who turn to Christ in faith and repentance shall be saved and experience the infinite love of God. Only when you are born of the Spirit and trust Christ, will you understand that God loved you in eternity, that God loved you at the Cross, that God loved you when you trusted Christ, and that God loves you now. Remember, God’s love is found only in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. Turn to Christ and be a special object of God’s love or you shall perish in your sins.