

The God of Love

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Almost anyone who claims to be a Christian should be able to complete the following quote from the Bible.
 - A. *"God so loved the world. . ."* What does the rest of that verse say?
 1. The passage is found in the third chapter of the gospel of John, and read:
 - a. **John 3:16** - *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*
 2. How did you do?
 - B. Even those who do not consider themselves Christians know that one of the greatest attributes of God is the love of God.
 1. And yet, while many people talk about the love of God, and believe they truly understand the love of God; and while some even claim they feel God's love, most are amazed to find just how little they really do know about the love of God when they investigate the Scriptures further.
 - C. So, this evening we're going to examine this wonderful and awesome attribute of God.

1. To help us focus on the most important aspects of God's love, I want us to take some time exploring the many ways God's love is demonstrated.
2. And then look at how the love of God can shape, and mold, and change our lives forever.
3. So, let's begin.

BODY:

- I. We could literally spend days just discussing the various characteristics of God's divine love. But let's focus on a few of the more important characteristics.
 - A. Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of God's love is that it's infinite. It's limitless and unfathomable in nature.
 1. **Psalms 103:11** – *For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. . .*
 2. **Isaiah 63:7** – *I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.*

3. **Ephesians 3:17-19** – . . .*that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*
 4. We may ponder the love of God for all eternity, and yet we will never be able to fully comprehend His love – for the love of God is infinite, limitless and unfathomable!
- B. Closely associated with the infinite nature of God's love is the fact that God's love is also eternal.
1. **Jeremiah 31:3** – *The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."*
 2. One of the ways we measure the value of something is based upon how long it endures.
 - a. For example, gold, platinum, and silver will always be among the most precious metals we know because of their beauty and their enduring intrinsic value.
 - b. Diamonds are also of more value than other precious stones, because of their immense enduring beauty and rarity.

- c. God's love is also of immense value because God's love is eternal – it endures forever.
- C. God's love is not only eternal, His love toward us is holy and designed to also make us holy – just as God Himself is holy.
 - 1. God's love has always been an expression of His holiness, and it works in us to produce holiness in our own lives.
 - a. **Ephesians 1:3-4** – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. . .*
- D. Through His infinite, eternal and holy love, God also disciplines us – which means God's love is disciplinary in nature
 - 1. **Hebrews 12:5-6** – *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."*
 - 2. **Hebrews 12:9-11** – *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they*

indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

3. The love of God is not a guarantee that we will escape suffering; rather it assures us that whatever suffering we endure, that suffering is designed to purify our lives and make us holy.
- E. But God's love is also sacrificial – which is seen in the greatest demonstration of His love toward us.
1. From eternity past, God, in His infinite, eternal and holy love purposed to save us through the sacrificial death of His Son.
 2. **John 3:16-17** – *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*
 3. **John 15:13** – *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*
 4. **Romans 5:6-8** – *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

5. **1 John 4:9-10** – *In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 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.*
- E. Not only is God's love sacrificial, it is also an act of God's limitless grace.
1. God's love is not given to us because we are lovely or desireable. God chose to love us in spite of our miserable condition.
 - a. Remember: **Romans 5:6** – *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*
 2. In fact, speaking through Moses, God reminded the people of Israel why He chose them.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** – *The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

3. This kind of love sets the God of heaven completely apart from all the false deities of the heathen world.
 - a. During New Testament times, the Greek and Roman world had never conceived of this kind of divine love.
 - b. Their gods often plotted and schemed, and displayed all the corrupt and evil characteristics we see in humankind.
 - b. Their gods would never love sinners.
4. **Ephesians 2:4-9** – *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

II. Unfortunately, people sometimes read about all these wonderful characteristics of God's infinite, eternal love, and jump to completely erroneous conclusions about the nature of this love.

- A. The love of God is only one of His many divine attributes.
1. Therefore, to properly understand the true nature of God's love we need to define this love in relationship to all of His other attributes.
Let me explain.
 - a. Twice in his first epistle, John boldly proclaims "*God is love*" (**1 John 4:8, 16**).
 - b. But, the Scriptures also tell us:
 - (1). The God who made the world, is also the God who brought judgment against the world by the Flood.
 - (2). He is the God who called Abraham and made him a great nation; but He's also the God who chastened His people of Israel by making them suffer conquest, captivity, and exile.
 - (3). He's the God who sent His Son to save the world; but He's also the God who cast off unbelieving Israel and destroyed Jerusalem.
 - (4). And He's also the same God who will someday judge the world in righteousness.
 - c. Therefore, the God described in the Bible as loving the world so much that He would give His Only Begotten Son to save

the world; is the same God who will condemn and punish the world for its disobedience.

2. Unfortunately, some simply can't accept this divine truth. And so, they reason this way:
 - a. God is love.
 - b. God is all-powerful.
 - c. Therefore, how could a loving, all-powerful God allow suffering and pain if He is truly both loving and all-powerful?
3. Unfortunately, this kind of logic fails because it omits other crucial elements in the equation.
 - a. God is also holy - He hates sin and cannot have fellowship with unrighteousness or that which is unholy.
 - b. God is also compassionate, merciful and full of grace. And He demonstrated His love toward mankind in sending His Son to die on the cross so we can be free from sin.
 - c. But despite God's love, sinful, rebellious man is hostile toward God, toward His Word, and toward the way of righteousness. And, ultimately, sinful man is hostile toward God's Son.
4. So, I believe there are at least two reasons why God allows suffering and pain in this world.

- a. One, is to remind us (in the words of that grand old hymn):
"this world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through, my
treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue!"
 - b. And the other reason God allows suffering and pain in our
lives is to warn us that something may be wrong in our
relationship with Him.
 - (1). God is not the one who has been corrupted by sin. We
are!
 - (2). We have not only been corrupted by sin, we've also
corrupted the world we live in – a corrupt and spiritually
polluted world of our own making.
5. God didn't introduce sin into the world – Adam did by disobeying
God.
- a. But, unfortunately, we have followed in his rebellious, sinful,
self-serving footsteps, and have kept the tradition of rebellion
alive and well in our own lives.
 - b. The sinful, corrupt, polluted world in which we live is a world of
our own making – and so are the consequences of choosing
to create this kind of world for ourselves.
6. Pain and suffering, crime and violence, war and the atrocities of
war, disease and death – these are not the work of a loving God.

- d. These are the consequences of turning our backs on the God who created us, casting aside His commandments, and choosing to go our own way and do our own thing.

III. The bottom line is this: Our world would not be in the condition it is if we had simply chosen to love God and love one another as God intended.

- A. Jesus taught that these two principles – loving God, and loving one another – which are the foundation upon which the teaching of the Law and the Prophets is built.

1. **Matthew 22:35-40** – *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*
2. The apostle Paul proclaimed that these two principles – loving God, and loving one another – is also the foundation for the Law of Christ.
 - a. **Romans 13:8-10** – *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For*

the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

- B. Just imagine how different our world would be; and even how different our own lives, and relationships with others would be; if we simply learned to live by the principle *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*
1. Every commandment of God – whether in the Old Testament or in the New – that deals with person-to-person relationships is summed up in the commandment, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*
 2. But, maybe this is also the key to understanding the problem.
 - a. Maybe too many of us do love our neighbor as we love ourselves – in that we really don't love ourselves.
 - b. Maybe it's because too many of us don't know how to love ourselves, or see any intrinsic value in ourselves.
 - c. Those of us who have no self-worth, also have no self-love; and without self-love we cannot love others.

- C. So, where do we find this self-worth?
1. The answer is simple.
 - a. We can find the measure of our worth by considering the priceless value God places on our soul.
 2. God's love has provided us with the greatest gift we could ever receive – the salvation of our soul. But that salvation came at a terrible price.
 2. Here's the value God placed on your soul:
 - a. **Isaiah 53:4-6** – *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*
 - b. Once again: **Romans 5:6-11** – *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now*

been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

3. The value God placed on your soul – the price it took to redeem you from sin, and to reconcile you to Himself – is the price of the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - a. That's how much you are worth to God; and that's how much you are worth to Jesus Christ – worth enough suffer for you; worth enough to bear the guilt of your sins; and worth enough to die for you.

CONCLUSION:

- I. It's been said that the measure of a man's love is seen in how much he gives of himself to others.
 - A. That's certainly true when considering the measure of God's love; and the measure of Christ's love as well.
 1. **John 3:16-17** – *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the*

world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

2. But, all too often, even this passage is lifted out of its proper context. Jesus had more to say about the love of God, and what that love requires of us.
- B. So, let's look at these verses a little differently – let's talk about the measure of your love for God.
2. **John 3:18-21** – *"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*
- C. Isn't it interesting how Jesus reveals an inseparable link between believing in Him, and doing the truth by coming to the light so that our deeds may be clearly seen, and be done in God?
1. Jesus is essentially saying:

- a. God loved the world to the extent that He gave His Only Begotten Son.
- b. And, what God expects in return is that we believe on His Son so that we can have everlasting life.
- c. However, it's one thing to say we believe on His Son, and it's another thing to obey Him in all He commands of us.
- d. Or, as Jesus said, "*But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.*"

II. Have you done the truth by coming to the light?

- A. Have you come to the light in obedience to the gospel of Christ so that your deeds of obedience may be clearly seen – deeds that have been done "in God" or in keeping with God's will?
 - 1. Perhaps some of you have never come to the light at all – meaning you have not done the truth by coming to the light.
 - a. You have not truly believed Jesus to be the Son of God, or else you would have repented of your sins, confessed your faith in Him before others and would have already been baptized into Christ for the remission of your past sins.

- b. If you haven't obeyed that truth, then how sincere is the faith you claim to have? How real is it? How genuine is that faith?
 - c. If your faith is real and genuine, then be one who *"does the truth"* and *"comes to the light."*
2. But, perhaps it could be that you have done the truth and come to the light in the past, but are now hiding in the shadows of disobedience, ashamed to be exposed by that light.
- a. Jude wrote this to struggling Christians in the first century:
Jude 20-21 – *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*
 - b. Perhaps you've failed to *"keep yourselves in the love of God"* – in the light of His love – and have *"loved darkness rather than light."*
 - c. There is still time to step out of the shadows of darkness and take your rightful place in the light of God's unfailing love.
 - d. Begin today to "Keep yourselves in the love of God!"