

## God Is Love (Part 2)

What is love, and how would you define it? How would you know if you have it? This is a common question that teens have. "How will I know I'm in love?"

The true meaning of love, as defined in the Bible, has been corrupted in the common usage of our English language and society. Most often, love is confused with infatuation – that elated, "high" feeling we get when we "fall in love." This kind of "love" is something that lasts typically less than a year, and unless replaced by true love, results in broken relationships.

There is nothing like the love of God! The source of love itself is God. As the Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:7, "**Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.**"

The reason that God is the source of love is that God is love. John continues by saying, "**He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.**" (1 John 4:8, 16)

As we have seen, the Bible indicates that love is from God. Love is one of the primary characteristics of God. Likewise, God has endowed us with the capacity for love. This capacity for love is one of the ways in which we are created in the image of God.

God is the embodiment of love, and He demonstrates perfect love. It is the most overwhelming thing I have ever encountered in my life. It is the greatest thing God ever did for any of us! The reason I can say that is this: Because He loved us, He was moved to do everything else that He has done. I believe John's first epistle has a four-fold purpose.

The first of these is to show that our God of love desires that our joy might be full and complete: "**And we are writing this that our joy may be complete,**" John writes in 1 John 1:4.

Secondly, John wrote it that we might not continue in sin: "**My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;**" (1 John 2:1).

Thirdly, it was written that we ourselves might love others as our God of love loves us: "**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**" (1 John 4:11)

Lastly, it was written to remind us of the promise we have from our God of love of eternal life in Jesus Christ: "**I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.**"

1 John is the great book of love. Love is mentioned 46 times in 135 verses. It was written to combat a heresy known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that knowledge was power. They felt that they had a special knowledge of God and His ways. John is writing to put them into their place! And, as he does so, he tells the rest of us about a great God with a great love for great sinners. It's that great love of that great God that I want to address this evening for a few minutes. Let the Lord speak to your heart as we consider the thought, what are the facts about God's love? Let's look again at 1 John 4:7-11:

***7. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. 8. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. 9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so 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 expiation for our sins. 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.***

God is love. His entire being is devoted to love for His creation even to the point of willingly leaving His home in Heaven and all the glory and honor He so richly deserved simply for being the Lord and Creator. Yes, His love and compassion for His lost children was so great that He manifested that love by emptying Himself of that glory and coming to this lowly plain of existence to live and breathe and work and sweat and toil and face immense temptation just as the rest of humanity does, in order that He could become that perfect sacrifice and propitiation for all of the sins of the world.

The goal of the Christian is to become ***"partakers of the divine nature."*** We do that by becoming more like our Father in Heaven. In Peter's second epistle, he says that we are to behave with moral excellence, which is an exercise of our love for God and others.

***"Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love."*** (2 Peter 1:5-7)

The most famous biblical chapter on love is from 1 Corinthians 13:

***"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it***

***is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*** (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

This is a description of godly, biblical love. It is described as being patient, kind, truthful, unselfish, trusting, believing, hopeful, and enduring. It is not jealous, boastful, arrogant, rude, selfish, or angry. True love never fails. The description perfectly fits God's love toward us, and should be the way we love each other and God. However, I have never met any person who perfectly fulfills this biblical definition of love. The Bible says that this unconditional love is more important than everything else. All of these things, which are "good" things, will pass away. Only love is eternal, since love will be the basis of eternal life. In fact, when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He said, ***"You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*** (Matthew 22:37) He then added that the second most important law was ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** Jesus said that the entire law was dependent upon these two commandments.

It must be understood that true love reflects the totality of goodness. Absolute goodness resides in God alone and is shared by Him with those who have sincerely sought association with Him. When one honestly seeks out God one is looking for that fullness of truth found only in God, a fullness of truth that few have any real desire to put into practice.

God's love towards us, we who are estranged from Him due to our sin, is graphically depicted in the sacrifice He made on our behalf when He willingly took on the sins of the world and bore them on the cross of Calvary. As Jesus said in John 15:13, ***"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."***

Jesus Christ is God's unique and eternal Son. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Great I AM, the "Mighty God" by Whom all things were created and in Whom all things consist. Jesus, Who is the head of all things, humbled Himself in such a way that the human mind could not even bear the thought of it. He came into this sin-cursed world and actively partook in our sufferings. Even as we are flesh and blood, He shared in the same. He became

a man and dwelt among us. He shared in the sufferings we brought upon ourselves through our rejection of His holy precepts. And as if that were not enough to convince us of His love and concern for us, Jesus, the immortal God and the Giver of Life, gave up His own life upon the cross in the greatest act of love the world has ever known! In doing so He took our sins away, effectively nailing them to the cross with Himself. Thus, He Who knew no sin became sin for us and He Who gave life to all, tasted death for those condemned to it.

This is God's love as described by Jesus! ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him”*** (John 3:16-17).

Jesus Christ loved the world so much that He gave everything for it, from His rights and privileges as the unique eternal Son of God, to His very life! If you want to see the love of God, listen to the Apostle John and the Apostle Paul and look to the cross. ***“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. 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 4:9-10). ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23).

God's love has been made known to us and now He stands at the door and knocks, gently pleading for you to let Him come into your life. It is up to every individual to pursue either a personal relationship with God or else reject Him outright. The only barrier between God's love and us is our own freewill, and Jesus Christ is the doorway and path that leads to the Father. As Jesus said in John 14:6, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”***

Salvation is a free gift bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. There is no other way. As Paul tells us in Galatians 2:21, ***“Do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”*** You cannot earn God's forgiveness through good works. How will doing the good works that you should have done all your life make up for the countless times you've failed? God is no fool. As we are taught in Jeremiah 2:22, ***““Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before Me,” says the Lord God.”***

A man once fell on his knees before Christ and begged Him, ***“If You are willing, You can make me clean.”*** Christ, ***“filled with compassion,”*** replied, ***“I am willing; be clean”*** (Mark 1:40-41). We, too, can fall on our knees and acknowledge God's only provision for our sins. We, too, can hear, ***“I am willing; be clean.”*** Christ willingly took God's righteous indignation upon Himself so that you do not have to receive it. Whoever accepts His death upon the cross as

payment for their sins in faithful obedience will be reconciled to the God Whom they have offended. **"All this is from God, Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ . . . God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them . . . God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21) Will you accept God's love today?

Another great verse about God's love is found in Romans 5:8, where Paul states, **"But God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** In this verse and in John 3:16, we find no conditions placed on God's love for us. God does not say, "As soon as you clean up your act, I'll love you;" nor does He say, "I'll sacrifice My Son *if* you promise to love Me." In fact, in Romans 5:8 we find just the opposite. God wants us to know that His love is unconditional, so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us while we were still unlovable sinners. We did not have to get clean, and we did not have to make any promises to God before we could experience His love. His love for us has always existed, and because of that, He did all the giving and sacrificing long before we were even aware that we needed His love.

God is love, and His love is very different from human love. God's love is unconditional, and it's not based on feelings or emotions. He does not love us because we are lovable or because we make Him feel good; He loves us because He is love. He created us to have a loving relationship with Him, and He sacrificed His own Son (Who also willingly died for us) to restore that relationship.

The love of God is *uninfluenced*. What I mean by this is there was absolutely nothing whatsoever in the objects of His love that called His love into exercise. There was nothing in the creature to attract or prompt it. The love which one creature has for another is because of something in them; but the love of God is free, spontaneous, uncaused. The only reason *why* God loves any is found in His own sovereign will: **"The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you"** (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity. He loves *from* Himself: **"according to His own purpose"** Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9.

**"We love Him, because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). God did not love us because we loved Him, but He loved us before we had a particle of love for Him. Had God loved us in return for ours, then it would not be spontaneous on His part; but because He loved us when we were loveless, it is clear that His love was uninfluenced. It is highly important if God is to be honored and the heart of His child established, that we should be quite clear upon this precious truth. God's love for me, and for each of "His own," was entirely unmoved by anything in them. It was simply His nature to be a God of love. What was there in me to

attract the heart of God? Absolutely nothing! But, to the contrary, everything to repel Him, everything calculated to make Him loathe me. I was sinful, depraved, a mass of corruption, with "no good thing" in me. Why should He love that?

God's love is *eternal*. This is of necessity. Since God Himself is eternal, and God *is* love, therefore, as God Himself had no beginning, His love had none. I know that this is such a concept that far transcends the grasp of our mere feeble, mortal minds. Nevertheless, where we cannot comprehend, we can bow in adoring worship. How clear is the testimony of Jeremiah 31:3, which says, "***I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you.***" How blessed to know that the great and holy God loved His people before Heaven and Earth were called into existence, that He had set His heart upon them from all eternity! Clear proof of this is that His love is spontaneous, for He loved His people endless ages before they had any being!

The same precious truth is set forth in Ephesians 1:4-5, where Paul write, "***According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. In love having predestinated us.***" What praise should this evoke from each of His children! How tranquilizing for the heart: since God's love toward me had no beginning, it can have no ending! Since it is true that "***from everlasting to everlasting***" He is God, and since God is "love," then it is equally true that "***from everlasting to everlasting***" He loves His people!