

*I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.*  
Jeremiah 31:3

*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!*  
1 John 3:1

## **The Limitless, Infinite, *Personal* Love of God**

God loves you.

You've heard this before, no doubt. I knew a man once who hosted a Christian music video program back in Pennsylvania who closed his program with the phrase, *God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life*. Preachers use this often, too. And it's only appropriate that this topic comes up in May, the month of Mother's Day when we're reminded of the sacrificial love of mothers.

We use the phrase so much, in fact, that it has almost become cliché, a sound byte, a password of sorts for the "Christian Club" that increasingly loses its meaning as time goes by and usage increases. It's a phrase we keep in our *heads*, almost as if it were the answer that explains everything:

What's the meaning of life? *God loves you.*  
What's the solution to this crisis? *God loves you.*  
How do I get this computer unfrozen?  
What's the capital of North Dakota?  
What's 462 divided by  $6\frac{2}{3}$ ?

And so on, as we sit – Sunday after Sunday, sermon after sermon – and our minds start to drift into what we want to eat after service is over, that thing we've got to do come Monday, that issue that you keep reading about or seeing on the news that nags at you like a stone in your shoe.

And yet, the tiny distance of maybe one and a half feet separates us from the answer; that's roughly the distance from your brain to your heart. Because once the knowledge that *God loves you* crosses that distance, your whole world changes. Once you realize just how much He loves you, that knowledge more than anything else keeps you from sin. Not so much because your particular sin didn't do something for you or isn't a temptation for you (although sometimes God does take the particular temptation away), but because of a new attitude that springs up inside you; *I can't do that to Him – I just don't have the heart for it anymore.*

Often, there is something in our makeup or our personality that initially blocks the knowledge of God loves you from reaching across those 18 inches, even after we receive Salvation. Perhaps it's a past hurt from someone you opened your heart to who betrayed that trust. Maybe people who otherwise wouldn't know you from Adam or Eve treated you with cruelty – we all know people for whom, as Steven King put it once, "meanness is a drug" and they are quite hooked. Some of you may have come from the streets, which are not known for pity or compassion, where such emotions have to be suppressed in order to merely survive. Parents can sometimes favor one child and be indifferent to

another, even though both come from the same gene pool. Since parents are in a role instituted by God, they are the first type, or representation, of God to their children; when that parent leaves the scene or is selfish or displays cruelty or indifference to their children, such displays subconsciously impact the child's idea of God, usually for the worse. This is why Godly parents are so critical to a child's development and why Satan is so desperately attacking or trying to distort the role – indeed, the very idea – of the family today.

Those of you who know me know that I can be a bit of an oddball sometimes. (And if you don't know me that well, just ask any of my students.) People who are in that situation know that acceptance doesn't come easily sometimes, especially when you're a kid. Everyone tends to labor under a "herd mentality" at that age, and your peers (lacking in maturity and sensitivity) often will find the smallest deviation from the norm and hold it up for general – and frequent – ridicule. Of course, equally lacking in maturity, the target of such abuse doesn't understand that such behavior *is* childish and can take the taunts of their peers far too much to heart. Such rejection can haunt that person for years, well into adulthood, even long after you find that the other kids have grown up and are not so bad after all and you thought you've put all that junk behind you. After all, we were just *kids*, right? What did we know? And yet in relationships and circumstances where the opposite reaction is a distinct advantage, these people find themselves reserved and hesitant emotionally, finding it easier to just withdraw from their supposedly forgiven peers and get on with their life rather than confront the basic issues and deal with them. On top of that, our own flesh, the sin nature we carry as fallen beings, further complicates matters as we pile problems of our own making on top of the baggage we have already acquired from others. Sometimes the Gospel finds massive resistance in that person, and sometimes the Gospel is eagerly taken in. But even in the latter category, when that person hears the Gospel and gladly accepts the Salvation of Jesus, it can take years for God to work through the layers of the palace guard surrounding their hearts and get them to deal with the problems at their core.

When He finally does, the idea emerges that ***God makes individuals*** and that He loves you as you are – with all the traits, quirks and oddities that you once saw as a liability and maybe drove you to wish that you could be different somehow – and it always comes as a surprise. Not that there isn't some cleaning up to do; sin is still rebellion against God and must be dealt with and discarded, and each person's sins are as individual as they are. They may fall into different general categories, but their expression is unique to that person. But at the end of that process, God tends to restore you to yourself – only you as God meant you to be, prepared for the purposes He created you for in the first place.

When we realize that we are individuals, made by God *as* individuals, that we are unique from everybody else (there is truly no one on Earth like you), and despite everything that has happened in your life that the Almighty, Eternal Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the Alpha and Omega, the great *I AM* loves you *anyway*, somehow there's a huge weight lifted from your shoulders. That hard shell you built around yourself cracks at last, and the pressure eases. You can be yourself around Him without fear of betrayal or ridicule, and let Him do with you as He likes because "perfect love drives out all fear." (1 John 4:18)

Satan knows this, too, and realizes that once we are aware of this limitless, eternal, and personal Love of God that we will gladly turn to Him. Of course, that's the one thing Satan *doesn't* want; so he tries to hijack that knowledge for his own loser purposes and steer us into ungodly things to keep us from realizing the fullness of His love, our full worth to God and our full potential in God's Kingdom. And once we fall for whatever lie Satan employs to get us into that position, he then uses a second lie – that we've gone too far, we've blown it with God, we can't go back. We forget that, God *being* God, one of His qualities happens to be *omnipresence*; the ability to be everywhere at once. In other words, God never left *you*. He was there in the midst of whatever it was you were doing; He saw it all, even the stuff people wouldn't dare make public (even today) and He says, "I love you still, and I'm here when you're ready to repent."

I don't know what your particular sins were and I don't want to know. And you don't want to know about mine. Unless God's put us in a position where we can help each other stay close to the Lord and overcome the same sin, I refuse to become a member of this "voyeur nation" we are turning into, where everyone is in everybody else's business 24/7. The particular sin – be it anger, lust, unforgiveness, idolatry or whatever sets itself up for devotion before God Himself – is not what's important. God is not sitting up in Heaven with a big old barrel full of thunderbolts just *dying* for a chance to use them the moment someone steps out of line. (That's Zeus' old shtick, and Zeus is a fake god, anyway.) The important thing is that it's a part of our lives that we will not yield, surrender, *sacrifice* to God. And we cling to those sins not necessarily because we're getting all that much out of it anymore, but because it's familiar; it's what we know. In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, the account of Jesus walking on the water to the Disciples' boat out on the stormy sea, Peter had gotten out of the boat and was walking to Jesus on the water, until he saw where he was and realized he was doing the impossible. (Where do you think the old-time cartoonists got that sight gag of somebody walking on air until they realized where they were?) In demanding that we give up those old, familiar sins, God asks us to step out of the boat and do not only what is unfamiliar but what we think is impossible.

What we don't realize (at the time) is that *God never asks us to give up something without having something better to replace it*. Even if it's nothing material or tangible in this life, but something spiritual – the sacrifice is for something better. When I took the step of discarding those things that God asked me to, I received better understanding of how He does certain things. When my wife discarded what God asked her to, He developed further the gifts of the Spirit that operate in her now. God asks us to give up those things that we may enjoy but are harmful to us so that He can give us more of Himself. And He only builds us up until we find that we love Him not for the stuff He provides, but for Himself.

Aren't we all looking for that type of love? Strip away the facades we build around ourselves, and isn't this what drives us (when we don't have the Lord) to seek it out as best we can on our own – which often ends in heartbreak or worse? You may say, "Well, if I'm blessed, I *can* find it in a human being." You may have found it in your spouse – but Who do you think is operating *that* kind of love *through* that person?

It is His love that drove Him not to just simply wipe out Adam and Eve at the fall and start from scratch. It is His loving kindness that prevents Him from destroying us when we sin, continually working on us and witnessing to us to see the better things He

has for us if we would but turn to Him. And it is His love that calls us to higher levels in Him; to new teachings that will better develop us as members of the Body of Christ. Most importantly, it is His love that calls us to Himself because He wants us with Him. He takes no pleasure in the death or eternal condemnation of anyone. And He gets no glory out of seeing us continue to struggle, year after desperate year, with the idea that we're not worth much of anything, when in fact we were made to be kings and priests in His Kingdom.

It's time for believers to step up and be who we are called to be. Because we have a job to do in the Kingdom, and the time is fast approaching when we all have to be at our stations. And believers are just starting to find out that the love of this world is turning cold toward those who put their trust in the Lord. None of that matters, because we will be citizens the Kingdom of God for eternity – far longer than we will be citizens of this country. And it all begins with learning Who really loves you, and how much He loves you.

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ  
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