

## **The Love of God**

The apostle John the beloved, who provided about 33 percent of the references to love in the New Testament, reached a climax in his writings when he simply declared, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Love expresses the essential character of God.

How do we define or describe God’s love? The Greek noun translated as “love” in these verses is *agape*. It is the unconditional love of God toward humans. This love is not given because of any good thing we have done, or in return for recognizing or valuing Him, the Giver. This love flows towards us because His nature is love. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words defines God’s love as follows:

The deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver.

There are several things we could extract from the above definition, but here we will focus on (1) God’s deep love toward unworthy beings, (2) God’s constant love toward unworthy beings, and (3) God’s love that is shed abroad in believers’ hearts.

### ***God’s Love Toward Unworthy Beings***

The perfect Being here is God and the unworthy beings are humans. Man became unworthy when our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. They lost their relational fellowship with the Almighty God. Before they sinned, God would come in the cool of the day to fellowship with them. God had said to Adam, “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17), so Adam and Eve died spiritually that day.

God in His infinite wisdom and mercy made a way to restore man. Under the Old Covenant, men started sacrificing animals to atone for their sins, “for without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). But it was not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, so at the set time, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, incarnated through the Virgin Mary. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, meaning He was sinless, and He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26). Note that His blood put away sin, rather than just covering it as it was in the Old Covenant.

This deep and unfathomable love of God is seen in His gift of His only begotten Son to the world to pay the penalty of sin, which is death (John 3:16; Romans 3:23). What then is the requirement for salvation for anyone? Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead; you will be saved (Romans 10:9). Can you imagine yourself surrendering your own child to bear the guilt of your community? The answer is, of course, capital NO! But God did, because of His love.

Most people give gifts with the hope of getting something in return. You give your used car to charity so that you can get a tax break. At least, when you give a gift, you want appreciation for it. But see what God did while we were ignorant and rebellious: Scripture tells us, “Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7-8).

This is deep love. And God is still saying to the ungodly, the atheist, the wayward, “Come to Me, I love you unconditionally.” “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). Many young folks hear from their parents, “Get your act together and shape up, or else you will not receive help from us.” So, they simply become performance-oriented children. But God is saying, “Come as you are, you don’t have to wait until you improve yourself.”

### ***God’s Constant Love Toward Unworthy Beings***

In talking to people about tragedies around the world, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, pandemics, or the acts of evil groups like Boko Haram and ISIS where millions of lives have been taken. Many are not too sure of the constancy of God’s love for humankind. Most of the people believe God knew these things were coming. They do not question the omniscience of God. But the questions that follow their admission of God’s knowledge about these tragedies are “Why can’t He stop them from happening if His love is unchanging toward humanity? Does He not care? Does this perspective shatter God’s character of immutability, holiness, mercy, and constant love?” The answer is, of course, no. If you know the character of God, you know without an iota of doubt that God is never to be blamed for the tragedies that happen in our lives, families, nations, or the world as a whole.

Due to lack of knowledge, people tend to blame God for tragedies. Sometimes preachers give just half knowledge to the people, and this can be as dangerous as ignorance.

I heard a story of a boy who became so bad in school and at home that his teacher had to recommend him for suspension from her class. He would bully the other kids in class and destroy their things. The worried mother took him to a Christian counselor. After a long session with the counselor, and without any response from the boy, the counselor said, “Let us talk to God through prayer.” The boy ran out with a shout: “I don’t want to talk to God!” The counselor asked why, and the boy said God killed his grandmother and his cat and made his father leave the family. What happened was: At his grandmother’s funeral, what stuck with the boy was that God gave and he had taken away. Within the same period, his cat died, and his father left home without returning. So, the boy believed God could have stopped these things from happening.

You may be experiencing hardship, tragedy, or the passing away of a loved one. You must recognize that God’s love toward you is unchanging. God is never to be blamed for tragedies.

There are those who are hurting now. Innocent children are killed. Good women are battered by their husbands. Men abandon their wives and

children for younger women. Remember, God's love for you does not change, because He doesn't change. The Psalmist says, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever." God delights in those who put their hope in his unfailing love.

One thing you must realize is this: God is sovereign and does not remove contingent causes. It is true, our first parents sinned, and that caused the original paradise world to be warped so that things like violent hurricanes happen. Paul explains, "The creation was subjected to futility ... For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in the pains of childbirth until now" (Romans 8:20-22). Paul's point is that the creation itself longs for its rebirth in the new heavens and new earth. Since the fall, the earth has been under the curse of death. One aspect of that curse is the violence of nature, as seen in hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters. And the god of this world is Satan. But his end is near!

*God's constant love is also unforgettable:* When Zion complained (Isaiah 49:14-15) that God has forsaken them, God asked, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?" He followed the question with this statement: "Even if a mother forgets her child, I will not forget you." We all know how dear a baby can be to a nursing mother; she carries the baby for nine months in her womb, going through painful nights and days, and then comes the agony of childbirth. That is why you hear mothers shout, "Don't touch my baby!" Furthermore, God said, "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me" (Isaiah 49:16). The part of your body you readily see is your hands; this is where God has chosen to engrave your name. We know God is omniscient, so He can't forget us, but He is also very practical.

*God's love is also unrestrained:* Paul wrote, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). Remember what God went through for us. He turned His back to His son on Calvary because of our sin. If He allowed His Son to die for us, what else in His plan for you will He deny or restrain from you?

*God's love is uncompromising:* God doesn't lower His standard of holiness for those He loves (Revelation 3:19; Job 5:17; Hebrews 12:5-10). Is there any good parent who does not discipline his or her child for the good of the child? Though he may not like it now, it will serve him well in life.

There was a story we were told in elementary school of a child who would bring things home from school, such as pencils or money, and tell his mother that he found them by the roadside. The mother would pat him on the back for finding things and bringing them home, but she never took time to find out the truth. Actually, the boy was stealing them. The unchecked bad behavior continued until he became a grown man. There is a saying that your sin will find you out someday, and he was eventually caught. At his sentencing, he requested to speak to his mother, and his request was granted. He moved close to her, as though he was going to whisper something in her ear, but suddenly bit her ear. When he was asked why he did that, he exclaimed, "If my mother had corrected me while I was bringing materials home as lost and found, I might not be going to jail

today.” God as our loving Father corrects us for our good. God is holy, and He will not lower the standard of holiness for those He loves. He disciplines us when required. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

### ***God’s Love Shed Abroad in Our Hearts***

God’s love is not only deep, constant, and unfailing, but shed abroad in our hearts. The NIV translates “shed abroad” as “poured out,” suggesting that God does not give it to us in a small quantity, but in a large quantity freely. Why does God flood our hearts with love? So that it can flow back to Him, and so that it can also flow to our neighbors.

His love caused Him to give us His only begotten Son, so there should be reciprocity: we ought to love Him back. To show Him our love, we must love Jesus. And that is why Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will love the Father also,” and “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments.” Jesus summed up the commandments as loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Our love for God will cause us to want to know Him better. That is why God cries through the prophet Jeremiah, “My people do not know Me.” If you love your friend or someone else, you want to know them and spend time with them. In the same manner, if we love God, we want to spend time with Him through His Word to know and understand Him better. This is how God is going to reveal more of Himself to us.

Now that our hearts have been flooded by God’s love, it should flow to others. God has demonstrated His love toward us; it should not be hard for us to demonstrate it to our neighbors. We should not find it hard to show love and do things for others, even if it will cost us something, because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts. And love must be without dissimulation—that is, without hypocrisy.