

God's love is Bestest of All



A Lesson About God's Love!

~ 1 John 4:8,16

To know God's love is to have heaven on earth. According to the New Testament, it is not the privilege of a favored few; it is a normal part of ordinary Christian experience. To know God's love.

In Romans 5:5, when Paul says "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us," he does not mean *our love for God*, but rather, an awareness of *God's love for us*.

Three points about what Paul said here:

First, the verb "shed abroad" literally means "poured" or "tipped out." It suggests a free flow and a large quantity --in fact, a flood. The NEB has it "God's love has flooded our innermost heart." Paul is not talking about faint and fitful impressions, but deep, overwhelming ones. Savannah Guthrie, in her children's book, put it this way: "God's love surrounds you." The title of her book? "Mostly, What God Does Is Love You!"

Second, the tense of the verb is perfect, telling us that it is a settled state, and a complete action. God's love, having flooded our hearts, floods them now.

Third, the giving of this knowledge is described as part of the regular work of the Holy Spirit. The most important work of the Holy Spirit is causing us to know God's love. It is his universal ministry. There is nothing greater, so far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, than his ordinary work of giving peace, joy, hope, and love, through "shedding abroad in our hearts the knowledge of God's love." In 1 Corinthians, Paul insists that without love all of the gifts and enablings of the Holy Spirit are worth precisely nothing.

The highest thing that Paul could desire for the Ephesians in connection with the Holy Spirit was that they might be led deeper and deeper into a "knowledge of the love of God in Christ." The NEB has it like this, "May he grant you strength and power through his Spirit in your inner being ...may you be strong to grasp, with all God's people, what is the breath and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know it though it is *beyond knowledge*." That is, it is beyond knowing in the normal sense of knowing.

Our task in this service will be to talk about the nature of the Divine love which the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts.

Today, we go to the very inner being of God if that were possible: For when we look at the wisdom of God, we see something of the *mind of God*. When we look at his power, we see something of the *hand of God*. But when we think about his love, we go to the very *heart of God*.

We will take note of three general comments of John's to, as it were, clear the road out ahead of us.

First, "God is love" is not all that the Bible has to say about God. It says that, but it says more than that.

The God of whom John speaks is the God who made the world; who chastened his Old Testament people by conquest, captivity, and exile; who sent his Son to save the world; who predicted the destruction of Jerusalem; and who will one day judge the world **in righteousness --or fairness, as we say.**

It is this God, says John, who is love. It is not possible to argue that a God who is love cannot also be a God who is just and fair --who condemns and punishes wrong doers. There are "built-in" consequences for hate and lies. Otherwise, how could "wrong fail and right prevail?"

Take this in connection with two other statements John makes: John 4:24 "God is spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." "God is spirit." The other statement is that "God is light" (John 1:5, 9).

"God is love, God is spirit, God is light."

First of all, "God is spirit." Jesus said this to dissuade the Samaritan woman of the idea that there could be only one right place to worship --as if God were somehow locally confined. The point Jesus makes here is that while man is "flesh" he can be in only one place at a time. God is not in that way limited, "God is spirit." God is non-material and therefore, non-localized.

Then Jesus continued by saying, "the condition of acceptable worship is not that your feet should be standing in either Jerusalem or Samaria --or anywhere else for that matter. The condition is that your heart should be standing before God. We must "worship God in spirit and in truth."

That is to say, God is not localized; neither is our worship of God localized. God is spirit --uninhibited, unrestricted, and our worship of God is in spirit; also, unrestrained, unrestricted, and uninhibited.

God has no body, therefore he is free from all limitation of space and distance. Neither does true worship of God come from the body, but from the spirit. Because true worship does not come from the body, but rather the spirit, our worship is also unrestrained. It is not limited; we can worship God when our body is ill, or in prison, or dying, or in slavery --our spirits know no such limits. Our African American brothers and sisters knew that; so, they climbed out of the physical confines of the plantation and the chains of slavery by singing, "we are climbing Jacob's ladder, children of the Lord." You cannot own spirits. No slave-master could own their spirits.

So the love of God (who is spirit) is not limited or fluctuating as the love of man. Song of Solomon 8:6 says, "His love is strong as death." "Many waters cannot quench it." "Nothing can separate him from those he embraces" (Romans 8).

But the God who is spirit is also the God who is light. John made this statement to professing Christians who had lost touch with moral reality and were claiming that nothing they did was sin. Light means holiness and purity, while darkness means moral perversity and degradation. Darkness means doing what you do when people cannot see. That is why people tend to rob at night.

So, the God who is love is also the God who is light; therefore, any idea about a love that is indulgent, soft, permissive --a love that *lowers moral standards* must be ruled out from the start. In fact, true love has only the

highest expectations for the loved one. God's ideal for his children is that they will become "perfected even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Isn't this what love must do?

Now I want to make a second and balancing comment. The God who is light and the God who is spirit, is to the Christian, the God who is love, because the Christian finds, in the cross of Christ, assurance that he or she as an individual is loved by God. The cross assures us of God's love.

Galatians 2:20, "The Son of God **loved me and gave himself for me.**" Knowing this, we are able to apply ourselves to the promise that "all things work together for good to them that love God and who are called according to his purpose." Not just some things, but all things. Every single thing that happens to us expresses God's love to us. Even when we cannot see the why and the wherefore of God's dealings we know that there is love behind them --so that we can have peace, even when humanly speaking, things go wrong. Love can save you in the worst of times.

But what essentially is God's love?

First, God's love is an exercise of his goodness. James Orr wrote, "Love is that principle which leads one being to desire and delight in another, and reaches its highest form in that personal fellowship in which each lives in the life of the other, and finds his joy in giving himself to the other, and receiving back the outflow of that other's affection unto himself."

Second, God's love is an exercise of God's goodness **toward sinners** --which is what we all are. It has the nature of mercy and grace. The objects of his outgoing kindness are not merely undeserved, but actually contrary to dessert; for the folk that God loves were actually his enemies. Love among people is awakened by something in the one loved. But the love of God is free, undeserved, uncaused, without reason. Charles Wesley said, "No reason can be given for his love." The Greek and Roman world never heard of such a thing. The Greek and Roman god's were often credited with lustng after women; but, never loving sinners and enemies. The New Testament had to introduce a whole new word for this kind of love --agape, which is Greek for our word altruism.

Thirdly, God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual people. It is not vague, diffused good-will toward everybody in general and nobody in particular.

Fourth, God's love to people involves his identifying himself with their welfare. This kind of identification is involved in all love; it is the test of whether love is genuine or not. For example, if a parent remains unmoved and untroubled when his or her child is in some sort of distress or trouble, we at once wonder how much love there is for the child. We know that those who truly love are only happy when those they love are truly happy also. --So it is with God.

Finally, we must say that God's love is expressed by the gift of his Son to be our Savior. ***The measure of love is how much it gives, and the measure of God's love is the gift of his Son.***

"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)?

John goes straight-on with his "God is love," to say "In this was manifested (made clear) the love of God toward us,

because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins."

"God so loved the world" (John 3:16). "God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Paul found proof of God's love in this "giving," for he said, "the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). John commented on it by saying, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man give his life for his friend" (John 15:13).

Giving and loving cannot be separated.

I think there is an even wider principle here. It is one of giving our lives little by little --hour by hour, year after year. This is how most of us do give our lives. In this way, a person can give of his or her life in behalf of other people. One of the things that makes it more difficult to exercise our Christian service and worship in the twenty-first century is that every hour of life has a dollar price tag placed upon it. We cannot expect someone to engage in service toward another, or worship toward God if, for example, they are faced with giving up a \$50.00 per hour opportunity to do so. We are paid for our hours (for our lives). We sell them at certain rates. We are not paid for our worship, nor for our Christian service toward others, or within the Church --there is the crunch. The priority we give to much of our Christian effort has been reduced to math. Is there a way to overcome this? I don't know. What I do know is that it is a crucial matter that threatens to reduce God's work in the Church to third rate. It results in giving God what is left;

In Christian service we do give our lives to others a little at a time; when dollar values are placed on our time, it makes it more difficult to give. Or to say it another way, it makes it more difficult to love. Loving and giving cannot be separated; the cross is both loving and giving.

If we have love, we enjoy the relationship. If it is true that "God is love" to me as a *Christian*, and that the love of God means all that has been said, then why do I allow myself to grow cold and half-hearted in the service of the God who loves me? Why do I allow my loyalties and priorities to become compromised, so that God is often last in line. John wrote, "God is love" in order to make an ethical point, that is 1 John 4:11, "If God is love, and loves us, we ought to love each other." Yes! We ought to love each other.

So I ask, could a bystander learn anything from the quality and degree of love that we show others? --my wife, my husband, my children, my parents, my family, my neighbor, the people at church, the people at work? Could they learn anything at all about the greatness of God's love from me? *This is evangelism.* Christians must give up on the "power of the insult" as a way forward --while there is still some faith left on earth. If we must insult our way to victory --count me out, The social-emotional "mood index" in America is "sour." Insult never brings people together. It leaves them alone, feeling worthless, and without hope. Insult doesn't connect people --it separates them. Love connects people.

Loving and giving must go together. The Cross is both loving and giving. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on his name may not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

