

The Love of God (God's Attributes (1))

What is the love of God?

Strange to say, there are many who talk about the love of God who are actually strangers to the meaning of God's love.

1 John 4:8 says that "God is love." That is very true. But the reality is this: as amazing as God's love is, God's love is one of many attributes of God. God is not just love; God is also a holy, just, wise, eternal, infinite God. And all God's attributes are in perfect harmony with each other – ultimately, they are all one in God. They characterize each other. What that means, for example, is that God's love is a holy love. God's love is a wise love, an eternal love, etc.

What this means, first of all, is that in God's love for Himself and His own glory, God also hates sin and all those who continually walk in sin and refuse to turn from their sin. "The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth," (Psalm 11:5; also Proverbs 3:33; 15:9). God's love is a holy love.

What this means, second of all, is that when God's people hear that God loves them, this makes God's love very precious to them, and actually mean something. Because it makes them ask the question: "But how can God love me, who am a great sinner myself?"

The words in Scripture for "love" emphasize these three ideas: 1) love is a breathing after, or strongly desiring something or someone; 2) love seeks out and pursues that which it desires; 3) love binds itself or fastens itself to that which it loves. (Colossians 3:16)

What the Bible says is this: God is love. And what that means is that, first of all, God loves Himself. Within Himself, as the Triune God, God is a God who loves Himself. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, within the Trinity, long for each other, seek each other out, and embrace each other in love.

When the Bible says that God is love, what it also means is this: All true love

finds its source in God. "God is love." That means there is no true love that does not originate or come from God. In 1 John 4:7 we read, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

And what that verse teaches us is this: all true love is characterized, first of all, by a love for God. If God is love, then we can only truly love with the same kind of love that God has for Himself. (After all, God Himself is the standard of what true love is!) And the main thing that characterizes God's love is this: He loves Himself. He loves His own holiness. He loves His law! He loves His own wisdom. He loves His own glory. God delights in Himself. And so, if we are to love – to truly love – what it requires is that we first love God just as God loves Himself (Matthew 22:37-40).

There are more things we can say about the love of God:

1) God's love is free and sovereign. God is not forced to love anyone. He loves whom He pleases (Psalm 115:3; 135:6)

2) God's love is unconditional (Deut. 7:6-9; Ephesians 2:4-10). God does not love somebody, because that person has made himself to differ from others.

3) God's love is unchangeable (Malachi 3:6); from eternity (Ephesians 1:4-5).

4) God's love is particular – God does not love all men. He loves His elect people in Jesus Christ (Romans 9:13).

5) God's love is a love that gives (John 10:11,18,25-30; Galatians 2:20!).

5) God's love is powerful. It is effectual! That is, those whom God loves, not only does He long for them, but He seeks them out, and He actually binds them to Himself (John 6:44). God always has His love fulfilled! For His love is an all-powerful love. His love is never denied.

And that leads us to an astounding thought. For why do God's people love God? When the world hates God, and live their lives as if there is no God, what makes God's people different?

Well, the difference, of course, is not in God's people themselves. That would make Christianity a very proud religion. The difference is not in what we have done. Not our accepting God. Not our "free will." By nature, all men hate God (Romans 8:7; Jeremiah 17:9). By nature, all men hate Jesus Christ. By nature, man is full of hatred. Christians too! Paul says to God's people, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7).

But the reality is this: "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). If you love God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the reason is because God first loved you.

And what did He do in His love for you? He gave you His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Why did He have to send Jesus Christ to the cross? Because His love for His elect people is still a holy love that hates sin! And therefore, God sent His only-begotten Son to bear the punishment that God's people deserved for their sins, so that He might cleanse them of their guilty record, and so that they might no longer appear in God's sight as sinners, but instead appear as holy and upright. Jesus went through the Hell God's people deserved, so that they are spared from it (John 3:16), and so that they could be the friends of God, enjoying God's friendship.

So powerful is God's love for His elect people, that He also draws them to Himself by His Holy Spirit (John 6:44). We could say this: God's love is a love that makes a person holy! He works His own love in the hearts of His people. When a Christian lives a holy life, loving God, that's only because God's love is at work in that person's heart. That's how God's love works upon a person!

All those who believe in Jesus Christ, know this love of God. And it thrills their hearts. Amazing, sweet, powerful, gracious, holy love of God!

Rev. Erik Guichelaar
Pastor of Randolph PRC in Randolph,
Wisconsin