

Experiencing the (True) Love of God

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Understanding God of the Bible Series

The first **use** of the word *love* in the Bible is not found until Genesis 22, when God told Abraham to take Isaac and sacrifice him. (It is the Hebrew word *ahab*). We will come back to that passage. However the first **expression** of the love of God toward you and I occurred in Genesis 1: 26-27. We covered those verses in the first two lessons in this series: *In the Beginning and Its About Relationship Not Religion*.

Today we are going to dive deeper into that theme. One research study reported that 80% of Americans say they believe in God. When pressed to understand what they mean, only about half say they believe in the God of the Bible. Even fewer understand what that means, i.e., Who He is based on Who He says He is in the Bible. That was the compelling reason the Holy Spirit led me to study, write, and teach this series.

For if we do not understand God, to the extent He reveals Himself in His Word, how can we enjoy an intimate relationship with Him, i.e., receive His love and love Him in return? The short answer is we cannot.

I have not seen this published, but I believe it can be said without much debate that all those who believe in God or a form of god would say He is a god of love. And they are right. Most everyone wants to think they are loved—first and foremost by God. And that also is true. But...

Just as many people do not understand the nature and character of God of the Bible, and some mold Him into their image or perception of what “God” should be and do, the same is true concerning the love of God. People take their limited human

understanding and meanings of the word love and project them onto God. Sometimes this is based on past relationships with parents, spouses, or friends, all of which can dramatically affect the truth.

The best thing I can do for you is to let God of the Bible tell you in His own words, expressions, and actions what love means. So let's get started.

As discussed in the previous lesson, God was thinking about you before you were conceived. We know from the Genesis 1 passage, He created us to be in a perfect relationship with Him meaning the Triune God also first revealed in those verses. It was to be **perfect union and communion**. In His mind, before time, and then physically in the Garden, we were conceived in love.

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works...My frame was not hidden from You, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance..." (from Psalm 139: 13-16)

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you..." (Jeremiah 1: 5a)

Stop and Believe #1: God knew you, formed you, and loved you just as He created you before you were born. You were created in love with a purpose and plan in mind.

Unconditional Love – What it is and is not.

God loves us no matter what and that is great news. That means no matter what we have done, good or bad, God loves us. David wrote,

"How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings."

(Psalm 36: 7)

Jesus said, "*for (God) causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*" (from Matthew 5: 45)

Much of my many years of ministry has been to the broken, poor and disenfranchised, whether homeless (men and women), living in a rescue mission, or in a prison cell. One of the common denominators is that many do not believe God loves them. They consider their circumstances evidence thereof or, even worse theology, that they are not good enough to merit His love—they have not done enough to earn it. Satan is a liar, and these are among his favorites.

Stop and Believe #2: There is nothing any one of us can ever do to make God love us more or less. He created us in love and loves us whether or not we love Him back.

There is one truth that comes out of the above discussion with people in these sad, even pathetic, circumstances. They see no point in trying to build a relationship with God because they think they are not worthy. They are right, none of us are. No matter what your zip code, you are no more worthy of God's love nor can you do anything to earn it than the poorest of souls.

BUT that does not matter because the love of God even took care of our broken relationships brought on by what came out of the Genesis 3 world and permeates all of us like a cancer...**sin**.

You may recall God gave Adam and Eve a death penalty for their sin. It did not mean He stopped loving them, but love is only one part of His nature and character. He is holy and just and requires payment for sin—otherwise we die physically and spiritually in the sense that those whose sin is not forgiven will be, according to Jesus, cast into Hell to suffer forever. They will wish they were completely dead.

Now I may lose those who rise up and cry out, *"How can that be love?"* If you study the New Testament you will learn Jesus warned about Hell – a real literal place of eternal torment and suffering – more than anyone else. He spoke of it many times. I will teach on that another time.

Friends, that is a double portion of God's love. The first portion is God Himself came from Heaven to warn us about what was to come for sinners. That includes all of us. The Apostle Paul wrote,

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) By death, he meant Hell.

Now the best part of the story is the greatest expression of God's love in the history of man. Here are three of the most famous verses from the Bible beginning with Jesus' own words.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3: 16)

"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 (substitute) for our sins" 1 John 4: 9-10

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5: 8)

This represents the fullness of the love of God. He made a way for us out of sin and death because only He could. That is the ultimate expression of love.

"For in (Christ) all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete," (Col 2: 9)

BUT to experience His forgiveness and this fullness that makes

us complete (whole again and free from the penalty of sin), there conditions if you want to call them that.

- First you must recognize you are a sinner and lost without hope.
- Confess your sin to God and repent
- Believe Christ is Who He says He is – the only Way to Salvation as He Himself said.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14: 6)

Stop and Believe #3: Take Jesus at His word. Stop where you are and ask Him to forgive your sins and be your Savior and Lord. Then believe He has.

When you do, you will experience the love of God in ways you cannot apart from Him. It becomes a relationship in which He loves you and you love Him back. Out of this love relationship, the ability to love others as Christ commanded will flow where it never could before. And you will be able to love yourself in the healthy way He also told us we must do.

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4: 19)

For Christ's Sake,

Walter