

THE LOVE OF GOD

Understanding The Misunderstood

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” –1 John 2:5

The Most Famous Verse In The Bible

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*

John 3:16 is arguably the most recognized and quoted verse in the Bible. At sporting events, political rallies, and even criminal trials this Scripture verse can be seen on makeshift signs, banners, and posters throughout the crowds. These inspired words, faithfully recorded by the *Apostle John*, communicate God's *love, mercy, and forgiveness* expressed in the love-gift of His only Son, *Jesus Christ*. Nevertheless, there are many who fail to rightly comprehend the Biblical concept of *God's love*. Moreover, the doctrine of *love* is even further skewed when discussing evangelism or practical Christianity. It is apparent to any serious student of the Bible that *Biblical love* is grossly misinterpreted today. Unfortunately, many false doctrines are also masked under the term "*love*." The purpose of this tract is to clarify this often misunderstood, yet all-important, divine attribute.

How Can We Define Love?

1 John 4:8 ...*God is love.*

The emphasis of this Bible verse is often overlooked or interpreted in the wrong way. Regrettably, *1 John 4:8* is frequently used to render a "*definition*" for God. Of course, no one will deny that God's nature is one of disinterested *love*. Nevertheless, God's character is far more comprehensive than merely the naming of one of His many Divine attributes. So then, what exactly is meant by, "*God is love*" as recorded in *1 John 4:8*? The meaning is obvious and clear: the primary purpose of this verse is not to reveal the *nature of God*, but to reveal the *nature of true love*. Thus, *1 John 4:8* does not merely give us a statement about *God*, but rather, an absolute definition for *love*. Therefore, if we are to fully comprehend Biblical *love*

then it will be necessary that we examine the character of God because, “*God is love.*” Incidentally, as we measure our carnal views about *love* with the God of the Bible we will find many sharp contrasts.

Isaiah 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

Love And Judgment

Many erroneously suppose that a God of *love* can never harshly judge sin. This exposes a false notion that many hold concerning the *love of God*. The Bible records many acts of God that utterly defy this humanistic idea. For example: God’s judgment of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the destruction of the old world by flood, and the deaths of *Ananias and Sapphira* in the *Book of Acts*. If we hold to our Biblical formula of allowing God’s character to define *love*, we must conclude that these actions are all consistent with the “*love of God.*” Why? Because, “*God is love.*” Hence, divine *love* can never agree with sin, but rather, always demands its judgment because sin is harmful and wicked. Moreover, it is important for us to note that there are many attributes of God that must harmonize in order to express the fullness of His Person. Accordingly, God’s *love* and *mercy* are always balanced with His *justice*. God will never exercise His *mercy* indiscriminately while carelessly violating His *justice*. In God’s plan for man’s salvation, we see both His *love* and His *hatred*, His *mercy* and His *wrath*, and all in accordance with His *justice*. At Calvary, the atonement of *Jesus Christ* provided the perfect sacrifice for sin as it satisfied God’s wrath and justice while also furnishing a sure remedy for man’s sinful condition. For this reason, *love* and *judgment of sin* go hand in hand...

1 Cor. 13:6 (Love) Rejoiceth not in iniquity...

Today, many speak of God’s “*love*” but in essence they actually promote an unbiblical and humanistic “*tolerance.*” There is a vast difference between *tolerance* and *love*. God is not *tolerant*, but *loving*. They offer God’s promises of forgiveness, restoration, and fellowship without clearly communicating the Biblical conditions of repentance, faith, and obedience. In His *love*, God sent *Jesus Christ* to die on the cross so sinners could be set free from their sins. Nevertheless, if men refuse God’s *love* by rejecting the gospel of *Jesus Christ* then they must face God’s wrath. We do humanity a great spiritual disservice when we leave them with the impression that God will not judge sin.

*Deut. 32:35-41 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; **their foot shall slide in due time:** for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people... See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: **I kill, and I make alive;** I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies and will reward them that hate me.*

Love And The Gospel Presentation

If you were to ask most Christians in America to sum up the Gospel in five words or less they would reply without hesitation, "Jesus loves you." No real Christian will deny the fact of God's love expressed to mankind through the person of *Jesus Christ*. However, neither Jesus, nor the Apostles ever uttered these words as they preached the gospel. A close examination of the N.T. will reveal that the *true* gospel message and the method in which it was delivered are much different than our current "much improved and inoffensive versions." *Jesus* was indeed motivated by *love* but He only speaks of God's *love* for humanity in six verses of the four gospels. In contrast, *Jesus* mentioned hell, judgment, condemnation, and wrath in 163 verses in the same four gospels. The *Book of Acts* [which records more public proclamation of the gospel than any other book in the Bible with the exception of the Gospels] *never* mentions the *love of God*. Not in one public sermon by *Paul, Peter, Philip, or Stephen* did they ever mention God's *love*. However, they mentioned the fear of God six times and repentance several times.

"We have so simplified Christianity that it amounts to this: God is love; Jesus died for you; believe, accept, be jolly, have fun and tell others. And away we go- this is the Christianity of our day. I would not give a plug nickel for the whole business of it. Once in a while God has a poor bleeding sheep that manages to live on that kind of thing and we wonder how." -A W Tozer¹

Let me ask you; are we wiser than *Jesus* and the *Apostles*? Are our methods Scriptural? Whose gospel is out of balance? May we learn that it is more important for us to be 'motivated' by *love* than to speak of *love*. The Bible says in...

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

¹ A.W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot Or Revival*.

Love And Holiness

Romans 13:10 ...love is the fulfilling of the law.

Likewise, many today boast of their "*love for God*" and yet rarely manifest any clear Biblical fruit to validate such a claim.

"The language of love and the language of seduction are basically the same; The one who wants a woman for a wife and the one who wants her just for the night both say, 'I love you'...but they mean totally different things. One speaks of commitment the other of gratification." –Richard Wurmbrand²

Our *love* for God is not a “warm-fuzzy-feeling-inside” but a surrender to His Person and a ***commitment*** to accomplish His perfect will and keep His Word. In this hour many who claim to *love God* are only interested in what God can do for them. Tragically, they deceive themselves if they believe that this constitutes a genuine *love for God*.

Luke 6:46 *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

1 John 5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*

Friend, do you have a right view of God's *love*? Do you *love* God by keeping His commandments? If not, perhaps you need to recognize God's *love* for you by committing yourself fully to Him and forsaking your humanistic views of His *love*. The Bible commands you to repent of all known sin, trust in the finished work of Christ for cleansing and deliverance. Then, take up your cross and follow the Lord *Jesus Christ (Acts 17:30)*. If you do so, then you shall live and abide in His *love*.

–B.W.

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²Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured For Christ*.