

God Is Love

John 3:16 (New American Standard Bible)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Introduction

(Begin with Bible Trivia): 1. *The New Testament has more references of ‘love’ than the Old Testament.* True or False? Answer: False. In ten translations, from KJV to the Message, with no exception, ‘love’ appears more in the Old Testament.

2. In the New Testament, the word ‘love’ appears in all books except one. *Which book doesn’t have the word ‘love?’* Answer: Acts

3. In the Old Testament, which book has the most references of ‘love?’: Psalms (43 times). ‘Song of Solomons’ is second (30 times). The most references in the New Testament: The Gospel of John (38 times).

One night the late Billy Graham was coming down from the platform after a crusade. That night, hundreds of people accepted Christ as their Savior. On his way down, he saw a man sitting on the ground quietly sobbing. Feeling sorry for the man, he walked toward him thinking that the man must have been touched with his sermon. He kindly asked the man why he was weeping. The man, without answering, pointed his finger out to the outdoor advertising in the stadium. On high, there was a message, “God Is Love.” That night, Mr. Graham heard loud and clear one of the greatest messages of all: God is love.

Content

Today, I am concluding my sermon series on this year’s theme: *Know your God.* This morning, we will think about God’s love, what God’s love is, and what it is not. And we will talk about three characteristics of divine love that culminated in God’s sending His only begotten Son to the cross to save humanity from their sins.

What God’s Love Is Not: Human or Indulgent

First, although there are some similarities between divine love and human love such as affection and pleasure, God’s love is clearly different from its human counterpart. Unlike

human love, divine love is not changing (therefore, constant) or conditional (therefore, unconditional). It is not emotional love, either (therefore, it never fluctuates).

Next, it is not soft or lenient love all the time without discipline. It always comes with discipline, especially for His own children. God's love is holy love.

Let's dig a little deeper.

The sum of all God's attributes (power, wisdom, justice, righteousness, mercy, kindness, compassions, forgiveness, patience, and so forth) is love. God is love. All God does with us and for us is based on His unchanging and everlasting love. The foundation of God's purpose and will is love, too. According to His love, God predestines, elects, sanctifies us to be His own treasured possessions. Based on human sentimental and emotional ideas of love, however, some folks have gone astray from biblical truth, therefore, failed to understand God the Author of love.

Elementary Understanding of 'God Is Love': *God's love is always fuzzy, soft, lenient with no consequences, no discipline, no judgment, or no retribution.*

This is how some folks explain their faulty understanding of God's love. First, they start with a quote that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16). Then, they move on to say, since God is love, He must be indulgent, benevolent, and soft all the time. Promoting such theology, Professor Packer writes, they "divorce God from moral standards and concerns" (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 122). Since God is love, they further argue, He cannot also be a God, who condemns and punishes the disobedient and the wicked, as you've seen in the Old Testament. Consequently, they reject the God of justice and the God of retribution in preference of the God of love and grace.

Such heretical teaching has been in the Church from its early years. E.g., 1. Marcionism in the second century A.D. taught only the benevolent God of the Gospel. Therefore, it rejected any hint of the Old Testament God and only accepted 10 chapters from Luke (out of 24 chapters) and ten letters of Paul (out of 13). The rest of the New Testament along with the entire Old Testament was rejected. E.g., 2. Some false teachers say that there's no Hell (*it is too cruel of God*), and the God of love welcomes everyone to Heaven regardless of their moral behaviors. Others also teach in the name of God's 'abundant grace' that God's love transcends our sins (true), therefore, it is OK to live in sin (not OK). Sin must be repented for forgiveness.

We must avoid such misunderstanding and false teaching whenever we say that “God is love.” How can we do that? By testing it against God’s whole truth and by holding it against the other attribute of God, which is ‘light.’

Right Understanding of ‘God Is Love’: *God is Love and Light. God’s love is holy love.*

What does come to your mind when you think of light? E.g. My living room brings in morning sunlight that exposes all floating dust/water stains on my clean drinking glass. I realized that we can’t hide anything from God and that nothing impure will stand before God. Light exposes everything.

Packer writes: “*Light means holiness and purity, as measured by God’s law; darkness means moral perversity and unrighteousness, as measured by the same law (1 John 2: 7-11, 3: 10)*”—(ibid, p. 121).

Remember: God is love but He is also light. God is kind but He is also just. God is merciful yet He is also holy. All measured by His own law. God is holy. Listen to what He says about Himself: *For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be **holy**, because I am **holy*** (Leviticus 11:44).

Those who come near God and claim that God is love also ought to walk in the light, i.e., to obey God’s commandments and live the life that is pleasing to the Lord. You cannot claim that you know God who is love and light when you hate your brother and remain in darkness, John the Apostle reminds us (1 John 2:11).

God is love, but He is light, He is also holy. So, we must say God is Holy love.

For the rest of my sermon, I am going to focus on three characteristics of divine love.

Three Characteristics of God’s Love

First, *God, out of love, respects our free will.* He never overrides our will against our own wish. People often wonder why the almighty God allows so much evil in the world. Why does He keep those evil people still alive? Why doesn’t He stop all the bad things from happening to good people? Why doesn’t He remove the wicked right away from the face of the earth?

Here’s why: Because God never forces anyone on anything against their own will. Even for the bad people for bad decisions, God still honors their will and does not override

their decisions. Love must be voluntary not compulsive. For instance, you've never seen anyone fall in love with someone else by force. Once God starts overriding human will, He will start breaking the fundamental nature of love. Out of love, God respects our free will, either good or bad. He stops no one, even when people make a bad decision to hurt others. Wait, though. Don't get God wrong, here. The same God also upholds the Law of Consequences. He eventually holds each one of us accountable for whatever decisions we have made. He will repay each one according to their deeds (2 Timothy 4:14).

Next, *God's love disciplines His children*. In His love, God always disciplines His loving children. *For whom the Lord loves He disciplines* (Hebrews 12:6). *He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness* (Hebrews 12:10). E.g., Troubled youths loved one tough lady who oversaw youth detention center. Someone asked if she was too strict. All of them said, No. *On the contrary, they said, we love her, because her discipline gives us freedom to roam around within boundaries*. They felt they were loved by her discipline. No discipline means no love.

Thirdly, *God's love saves humanity from the fear of death and slavery of sin*. On Christmas Day, God sent Jesus to humanity--His biggest love gift for all! Jesus Christ came to give His life as a ransom for many so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have an everlasting life. God has dealt with sin in Christ Jesus through His death. *Thoroughly and completely*. Folks, that's what Christmas is all about. Not Santa. Not being good or naughty. Not gift exchange. But God's love for all. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, God gives eternal life so that they may be together with Him in Heaven forever and ever.

Conclusion

Mr. Packer beautifully defines God's Love as follows: *God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relation* (*ibid.*, p. 123).

That God's love culminated in God's sending His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to die on the sinner's behalf so that their sins may be forgiven, that the wall that divided sinners and God would be broken down, and that reconciliation would take place once and for all. That's what Christmas is all about. God sent His love for us. God is love. Agape Love. Sacrificial Love. Holy Love.

Amen.