

One of our greatest needs as human beings is to be loved. We need to know that we are important to somebody, that somebody truly cares about us, wants us, and accepts us unconditionally.

The good news from God's Word is that somebody does care. Twice the Apostle John states that "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). God's love is one of the most sublime, uplifting, and reassuring truths known to mankind. Love is His nature, the essence of His being. He is always going to act toward us in love because He cannot do otherwise. If He is nothing but love why would He send anyone to hell for eternity? Several observations must be made:

- 1) It was an expression of love when the Lord taught that hell was never created to be the destiny of human beings (Matt. 25:41).
- 2) It was an act of love God sent His Son to be the sacrifice for the sins of every human, for it was never His intention for any human to ever be in hell for eternity (1 Jn. 2:2).
- 3) It was and is an act of love to offer salvation to the whosoever will, and offer such a full forgiveness that the sins of the individual would never be brought up again (Heb. 10:17).
- 4) It was and is an act of love to keep offering man the genuine offer of salvation, irrespective of how often it was rejected, or sins committed (Col. 2:13; 1 Jn. 1:9).
- 5) It is also an act of love for truth and righteousness which necessitates God giving to man that which he decides he, the individual, determines. If an individual is determined to reject God's way of salvation knowing such rejection results in being cast into hell, that is their choice. God never made humans to be robots and override their free will. Consequently, God will oftentimes use the word "whosoever" (Jn. 3:16; Acts 10:43). God says, "The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

God's Love Is Self-Giving

Love is expressed in the giving of oneself for the good of another. Our love is often selfish and demanding. David wrote, "I love the Lord, BECAUSE" (Psa. 116:1). John wrote, "We love Him, BECAUSE He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). God's love is pure. James tells us that, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (Jam. 1:17).

God's Love Is Sacrificial

We hesitate to do anything for others that will cost us too much or inconvenience us too greatly. God's love cost Him the very best that He had—His only Son, "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" (Jn. 3:16). God's giving His Son involved more than merely allowing Him to leave Heaven's glory and come to earth. It meant allowing Him to die in our place and pay the awful debt of our sins. God proved His love by sending His Son to the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:9-10). That is sacrificial love.

God's Love Is Unconditional

One of the most amazing things about God's love is that it is extended to us when we do not deserve it and continues steadfast and strong even when we do not respond to it. His love is unconditional. That certainly is different from our love. We have a tendency to show more love to the people who obviously love us and less love to the ones who do not. God is not like that. The best-loved verse in the Bible says, "For God so loved the world."

There is not one good thing in any of us that merits God's love. He does not love us because we are so lovable or because we can somehow make ourselves worthy of His love. We are totally unworthy, yet He prizes us highly and showers His very best on us. It is His love for us that gives us our worth. God finds great delight and receives great glory when we respond to His love, enter His fellowship, and do His will. Whether or not we ever return His love, He keeps on offering it to us. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us any more. He loves us perfectly and completely, His love is unconditional.

There is a Biblical illustration of God's unconditional love in His relationship with the nation Israel. "The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples: But because the LORD loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7-8). There is no human reason for His love for Israel for they were a rebellious people, but He loved them anyway.

That is how it is with you and me. Nothing we ever did made Him love us and nothing we ever do will make Him stop loving us.

God's Love Is Eternal

This message also was given originally to the nation Israel, but its application is for every true child of God.

"The LORD hath appeared . . . saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3).

That everlasting love reaches into eternity past. He knew us and loved us before He made us, and He will love us for eternity to come, for, as the Apostle Paul assured us, nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39).

When we think of Christ's earthly disciples, they were men of inestimable spiritual privileges, yet they displayed an amazingly small degree of spiritual insight. On the evening of the last Passover, the impending agony of bearing the world's sins was weighing heavily on the Lord's heart and He longed for their prayerful support, but they were more interested in arguing about which one of them should be accounted the greatest (Lk. 22:24).

Later, three of them fell asleep when they were supposed to be praying (Lk. 22:44-45), they deserted the Lord when He was taken captive, Peter denied Him (Lk. 22:57, 61-62), and Thomas later doubted Him (Jn. 20:27-28). Notice how this upper room experience began: "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (Jn. 13:1). He will love us to the end of our waywardness and wanderings, He will love us to the end of our deepest need, He will love us to the end of our lives, to the end of time. He will love us forever. His love is eternal.

How can we ever exhaust the love of God! The love of an infinite God must be infinite love. Paul called it a love that "passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19), far greater than our finite minds can grasp. He also called it a "great love" (Eph. 2:4). He referred to its breadth, its length, its depth, and its height (Eph. 3:18), but it is obvious that he was speaking of dimensions that defy measurement: breadth and length which encompass the whole world, a depth which reaches to the lowest sinner, a height which exalts us to the loftiest Heaven. God's love has no limit. It is described in F. M. Lehman's gospel song:

Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Tho' stretched from sky to sky.

God's Love Is Holy

Everything God does is done in the totality of His being, so His love must always be consistent with His other attributes. Since God is holy, then His love must be a holy love that encourages holiness in those loved. The evidence is overwhelming! For example, in the same context in which Paul explains that we in love were predestined unto the adoption of sons, he states God's purpose for choosing us. It is "that we should be holy and

without blame before Him" (Eph. 1:4). Love and obedience consistently go together in Scripture, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3; Jn. 14:15; 15:10).

God will use every loving means at His disposal to encourage our obedience. He does that because He loves us. The writer to the Hebrews encouraged us not to regard God's discipline lightly. It is the evidence of His love for us (Heb. 12:5-6). He knows that obedience to His Word will be for our greatest happiness, so He takes steps to help us want to obey Him. If He did not love us, He would not care about our happiness.

He does not enjoy inflicting pain any more than we enjoy receiving it). Concerning His people Israel we read, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). He feels our pain because He loves us. Don't chafe under His disciplinary hand, He knows best what we need and always administers it in love for our best interests. We can respond to His holy love by bringing our lives into conformity to His Word.

God's Love Is Comforting

When we grasp the reality of God's love, we will no longer seek our security in jobs, bank accounts, investments, houses, husbands, wives, friends, or health, we will rest in the Lord, free from all fear, secure in the assurance that He is going to provide all that we need and protect us from everything that will not be for our good.

God laid all the punishment for our sins on His Son. He disciplines us in love for our benefit (Heb. 12:11). Understanding God's love eliminates all fear—fear of God's discipline, fear of what tomorrow holds, fear of natural catastrophes, fear of global war, fear of suffering, fear of death, fear of being alone, fear of rejection. God loves us! There is nothing to fear. His love is comforting.

God's Love is Life-Changing

It really is true—God loves us. Jesus said it plainly: "For the Father Himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:27). It is to our advantage to know and believe the love that He has for us (1 Jn. 4:16). We may never be able to grasp it fully with our human understanding alone, but God is ready to make it real to us if our hearts are open and receptive to His Word.

. . . Yvonne Vernon