

# The Strange and Wonderful Attributes of God

## Lesson #16 – God’s Love <sup>2316</sup>

The love of God is where our heart is. It comforts us. It thrills us. It is our anchor in this life (or rather should be). From this, His love, is our confidence in this life.

### I. Definition of God’s Love

The term “Love” when talking about God is a determined decree to choose to emotionally relate to His creatures. It is an emotion based on desire, pity, purpose and/or compassion. But, it is not just one thing. The use of the various words used for love in the Greek has a number of separate and yet overlapping meanings. The primary words (Greek) used to describe God’s love are

φιλεω (phileo) (Strong’s 5368) 25X; showing love, affection, hospitality. Used to describe the tender affection that the Father has towards the Son. (Jn 5:20) Also used for our affection toward the Father.

αγαπαω (agapao) (Strong’s 25) 143X;

- Love of a husband for his wife,
- God’s gracious love for His people,
- God’s people’s love for their brethren.

There is a sense in which this love is a love of decision for the good of the object of that love.

These two Greek words are used in various ways to describe the love of God. Both of these words are used in different places to describe God’s love.

### Categorical Discussions:

**Is this an Existential or a Relational Category?** This attribute of God existed in eternity past between the members of the Trinity. In that sense it is existential (God’s very inherent nature). In present time, this attribute is expressed toward His creatures as a relational attribute.

**Is this an Incommunicable or a Communicable Category?** This is clearly a communicable category.

**1 John 4:7-11** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. All 13 of the occurrences of love in this passage are a form of αγαπη, a love of commitment. If we don’t have this nature within us, it is clear that we are not “in Christ”.*

**Problem Statement:** There are at least three problems in our churches today regarding our understanding of the love of God.

1. The raising up of the love of God towards mankind as the pre-eminent and to some degree, the single important attribute of God over His other attributes, thus ignoring the nature of God’s existence as “Simple” (indivisible). Thus ignoring God’s justice, wrath, impassibility, holiness, etc.
2. Not connecting with the immense love that surrendered His Son to experience His total wrath on Jesus so that the unlovable (we) would become His very beloved children. He owed us no such thing and yet lavished on us the highest and most gracious of loves.
3. That God has a number of expressions of true love, not all equal. These are:
  - 1<sup>st</sup>** The love of the Father for His Son and the love the Son has for His Father. This intra-Trinitarian love between the three persons of the Trinity is the evidence that God’s love is existential.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>** God’s providential love over all that He has made is a love of one who creates with great wisdom and care. His creation is providential in that all has been created and is maintained in accordance with His wisdom and exists to His own glory.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup>** God’s salvific work to provide for their redemption from His wrath towards man’s rebellion against Him. The gospel is for all men in terms of God’s provision for a way of escape from His

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righteous wrath. But they will not! Men refuse to bend the knee to God. How foolish. Why do some men refuse to acknowledge God as their King and Sovereign?

**1 John 2:15-17** *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. **If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

**4<sup>th</sup> God's particular, effective love towards those whom He enabled, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to save (His elect).** The elect includes God's angels, OT saints of Israel, OT Gentile saints, true believers in the church, and Tribulation saints. God's love has been set upon all of His elect from before the foundations of the world (before either creation).

It is also true **that Israel the nation was elect (a nation chosen)** for God's glorious purpose in revelation to the whole world.

**5<sup>th</sup> God's love is toward his own national people as part of a bipartite (if/then) covenant with Israel. If Israel obeys God, worships Him with integrity, then God will love them. If they don't obey and love God, then He will not bless them (with earthly blessings).**

## II. Logic and Importance of God's Love

God knows that we are but dust. He hates our rebellion and even our ignorance. His response is first pity for our weakness and lack of faith knowledge of the glory that is to come. His knowledge of our weaknesses leads to His pity regarding these weaknesses and yet He understands our frail faith.

He provides for us and then we forget to thank Him and to be grateful. Our sins are ever before Him and yet He has made a sure provision. This provision is the substitutionary blood atonement of Jesus on the cross to judicially remove our wickedness and His just rod of judgement from us. In this new, judicially righteous state, we are adopted by our loving God into His family. We are already judged "fully righteous" before His righteous nature.

**Consequences of God's Love:** Mankind was created to:

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|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Worship, love, and fellowship with God,                           | Relationship                 |
| 2. Know God and to praise Him in His glory,                          | Revelation                   |
| 3. Obey God,   | Grateful children            |
| 4. Have spiritual & Godly dominion over the earth,                   | Serve God                    |
| 5. Mimic God's communicable attributes and to become like Christ.    | To be faithful in the family |
| 5. God's purpose for His elect is entirely good throughout eternity. | Trust in God's faithfulness  |

God allows and brings calamity, trials, difficulties, etc. into our lives with a purpose of making us:

- Holy; set entirely apart for service to God
- Humble,
- Worshipful,
- In fellowship with Christ's sufferings,
- Grateful for God's sovereign provision, and
- Compassionate and loving towards others.
- To be a witness and defender of God and Christ before this fallen world.

**Historicity of the doctrine God's Love:** The knowledge of God's love has been taught throughout Scripture, but we are thoroughly aware that God's saints have not always understood the nature of God's love towards them and the world in general. Often there has been too much emphasis on God's wrath, God's justice, God's righteousness, etc.

We know now that in our modern American church culture, the shift has incorrectly overemphasized God's love (understood as a worldly love) rather than an appropriate fear of God and His sovereign and just and righteous judgment on men and women.

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### III. Scriptural Basis of God's Love

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are quoted from the New American Standard Updated version (NASU)

Some verses pertinent to this goal of knowing of God's Love are:

**Rom 5:1-11** *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, **because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.***

*<sup>6</sup>For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. <sup>8</sup>**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

**Eph 2:1-10** *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup>Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, even as the rest. <sup>4</sup>**But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,** <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup>not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

**Rom 8:28-39** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup>and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

*<sup>31</sup>What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup>who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." <sup>Ps 44:22</sup>*

*<sup>37</sup>**But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.** <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, **nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

### IV. Important Points About God's Love

#### 1<sup>st</sup> How God's Love Relates to Other Attributes

God's love relates in particular to His mercy, to His personhood, and to His providence. But remember that God's love is modified by all of His other attributes equally!

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Why God's Love is Important to Our Faith** It is in the knowledge and confident faith in God's love that we find sanctuary.

**2 Cor 5:14-19** *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; <sup>15</sup>and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. <sup>16</sup>Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. <sup>18</sup>Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

**3<sup>rd</sup> Confessions or Creeds that Address God's Love**

**London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689; Chapter 2; Section 1** - The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself; **who is infinite in being and perfection**; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; who only has immortality; who dwells in the light which no man can approach, who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; who works all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; **who is most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin;** Who is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him; and who, at the same time, is most just and terrible in His judgements, hating all sin and who will by no means clear the guilty.

**4<sup>th</sup> Errors/Heresies that Deny God's Love** None, though there are churches that distort His love in different ways!

### Important Quotes About God's Love

We too quickly think of our salvation almost exclusively with respect to its bearing on us. **Certainly there is endless ground for wonder in the Father's love for us, in Jesus' love for us.** But undergirding them, more basic than they are, is **the Father's love for the Son.** **Because the love of the Father for the Son, the Father has determined that all should honor the Son** even as they honor the Father (John 5:23). Indeed, this love of the Father for the Son is what makes sense of John 3:16. True, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" - there the object of God's love is the world. But the standard that tells us just how great that love is has already been set. What is its measure? God so loved the world that He gave His Son. Paul's reasoning is similar: If God did not spare His Son, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things (Rom 8:32)? The argument is cogent only because **the relationships between the Father and the Son is the standard for all other love relationships.**

**D. A. Carson;** *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*; p. 35

... an important distinction must be made: **God loves believers with a particular love.** It is a **family love, the ultimate love** of an eternal Father for His children. It is **the consummate love of a Bridegroom for His bride.** It is **an eternal love that guarantees their salvation** from sin and its ghastly penalty. That special love is reserved for believers alone. **Limiting this saving, everlasting love to His chosen ones does not render God's compassion, mercy, goodness, and love for the rest of mankind insincere or meaningless.** When God invites sinners to repent and receive forgiveness (Is 1:18; Matt 11:28-30) His pleading is from a sincere heart of genuine love. "'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezek 33:11) **Clearly God does love even those who spurn His tender mercy, but it is a different quality of love,** and different in degree from His love for His own.

**John MacArthur;** from *The God Who Loves*; p. 16