

How Firm is Your Foundation?



November 1, 2022

Lesson Nine

“What is your Christian life like? What is the shape of your gospel, your faith?
In the end, it will all depend on what you think God is like. Who God is drives everything.”
(*Delighting in the Trinity*, p. 129)

What makes the doctrine of the love of God more difficult to understand or explain? Here are some reasons:

1. The meaning of love in our culture is often very removed from the biblical understanding of God’s love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

2. Many people who say they believe in this God of love do not hold to many of the other known attributes of God. The love of God has been sentimentalized.
3. In our postmodern world, the sentimental and pluralistic views of God and God’s love make it ever more difficult to clearly state the biblical understanding of God’s love.

The word translated “love” occurs 551 times in the NIV—319 in the Old Testament and 232 in the New Testament.

Hebrew words for love:

Hesed – lovingkindness.

This is arguably the most significant word for love in the Bible. Fidelity, loyalty, patience, mercy, grace, forgiveness, covenantal faithfulness, and salvation (among others) are all concepts tied up with God’s lovingkindness.

Dod – romantic love. Used throughout Song of Solomon.

Greek words for love:

Eros – sexual or romantic love..

Phileo – fraternal or friendly love.

God loves the Son:

John 5:20: For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

God loves us:

John 16:27: No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.



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Agape – self-sacrificial love. Means a conscious action rather than an emotional feeling.

It describes the love God has:

1 John 4:8: Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

It describes the love God shows his Son:

John 17:26: I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

And the love God has for Christians:

John 14:21: Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

Consider the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father

John 3:35: The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.

John 5:20: For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

John 14:31: ...but he (the Holy Spirit) comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Before he ever created, before he ever ruled the world, before anything else, this God was a Father loving his Son.”
(*Delighting in the Trinity* p. 21)

This love of the Triune God—between the Father, Son and Spirit—sets Christianity apart from any other monotheistic religion—religions who believe in one God. Why is this important?

John 17:24: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

“... without the Son, God cannot truly be a Father; thus alone, he is not truly love. Thus he can have no fellowship to share with us, no Son to bring us close, no Spirit through whom we might know him” (p. 12).

1 John 4:8: Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

God is love because he is a Triune God—loving before time began. That is why we can say “God is love.”

“Without Jesus the Son, we cannot know that God is truly a loving Father. Without Jesus the Son, we cannot know him as *our* loving Father” (p. 130).

Consider God’s providential love over all he created.

--He calls all the stars by name.

Psalms 147:4: He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

--He floods the fields with beautiful wildflowers.

Matthew 6:28 – 30: “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

--He feeds the wild animals and provides shelter for them.

Psalms 36:6: Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.

Psalm 8:5 – 8: You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:⁷ all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,⁸ the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Only a benevolent, loving God would care so for his created world and all that is in it.

Consider God's love for the world.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

He's the judge of the world, but he also makes it clear that he invites all to repent:

Ezekiel 18:32: For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Consider God's love for those he has chosen.

Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jeremiah 31:3: The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

We must always speak of the Love of God in the full context of that love.

Further attributes of God's love:

God's love is incomprehensible.

1 Timothy 6:15b - 16: God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:17b – 19: And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

God's love is in total agreement with all of his attributes.

The love of God must be interpreted in the light of God's other attributes. Otherwise, we end up with our own idea of what God is like.

Someone has said, "We are not free to pick up the ball of 'God is love' and run with it wherever we will." God's love is always connected with his justice and wrath.

"It may be easier just to think "God is love" and to fill that statement with whatever our human minds suggest. Certainly it requires less mental effort just to let our own minds generate our theology, rather than to subject them to the disciplined study of God's self-revelation in Scripture. But at the end of the day a god who is little more than a projection of my own mind can never satisfy me" (From *His Love Endures Forever*, by Garry J. Williams).

God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loves us.

It is the love of God that accounts for the truth that we who are believers have been adopted into God's family.

1 John 3:1: See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Ephesians 2:4 – 5: But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

God's love is eternal and irrevocable.

Romans 8:35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

J.I. Packer sums up well both the eternal and irrevocable nature of this divine love:

To know that from eternity my Maker, foreseeing my sin, foreloved me and resolved to save me, though it would be at the cost of Calvary; to know that the divine Son was appointed from eternity to be my Saviour, and that in love he became man for me and died for me and now lives to intercede for me and will one day come in person to take me home; to know that the Lord 'who loved me and gave himself for me' and who 'came and preached peace' to me through his messengers has by his Spirit raised me from spiritual death to life-giving union and communion with himself, and has promised to hold me fast and never let me go – this is knowledge that brings overwhelming gratitude and joy ("The Love of God: Universal and Particular," in *Celebrating the Saving Work of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, 1:158-59).

God's love is shown in his discipline of us.

Hebrews 12:5 – 6: And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

The absence of affliction is not a sign of God's special favor; indeed afflictions are evidence of God's fatherly love.

God's love for us makes it possible for us to love others.

1 John 4:12: No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 2:5: But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

Romans 5:5: And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

What must be our response to God's love?

John 13:34-35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Why did Jesus refer to this as a "new command"?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength

Leviticus 19:18: Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Jesus reinforced it when he said this:

Matthew 22:36 – 39: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Love God; love others—the two greatest commandments.

How do you love someone you don't like? You pray:

Lord, help me to see this person as you see him or her. Lord, show me why this person behaves the way they do.
Lord, give me insight to understand them, and then give me grace to have compassion on them.

Who is it in your life that is unlovable? Are you willing to take this step of faith and ask God to help you agape love them?

Summary

If you want to describe God's love in one simple sentence, here it is:

1 John 4:10: This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Think about His love, think about His goodness
Think about His grace that's brought us through
For as high as the heavens above
So great is the measure of our father's love
Great is the measure of our Father's love

(Don Moen - Think About His Love)

The Love of God – Damaris Carbaugh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK-XJA2Kf8A>