

GOD'S INEXORABLE LOVE

By

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One of the first things we learn about the nature of God is that He is love.¹ The best known verse of the Bible is the one that begins, "For God so loved the world."² But when we view all the suffering about us and when our own hearts are wrung with anguish from the bitter experiences of life and earth, we require — we demand — a better understanding of just how God's love is to be seen and applied in the light of such bitter grief.

If God is so filled with loving kindness, as described in Scripture,³ how can He permit His people to endure disease, pain, suffering and persecution? How can the judgment and destruction of the unsaved be reconciled with such love?

WARM FUZZIES. God's love for man is thought by many to compare with their own interpretation of their love for God, described by one writer as a "warm and fuzzy feeling." Much that takes place in worship programs is aimed at creating an atmosphere that will bring about such a feeling, that each person may feel he is experiencing God's love.

Such subjective feelings may be produced by the music or by a skilled charismatic leader or by the contagious mood of the assembly. They may produce an emotional response which has little or nothing to do with God's love and which vanishes and is forgotten in the hour of crisis and trial.

We can be sure that God's love for us is not based on His subjective feelings. It cannot be increased or diminished by the mood of the hour nor by outward circumstances. God is eternal — ever the same — and the measure of His love for us is not affected by the same things that change the way we feel. Our feelings of love may increase or decrease as our own sense of well-being rises or falls, affected by our health, by our work, or even by the weather. Certainly these feelings are more intense at one time than at another, due to many variable conditions. But God's love is steadfast. It is not a subjective feeling but a part of His very nature and character.

DESIGN AND PURPOSE. Love is an intrinsic quality of God. It lies at the very root of man's existence as creatures created in God's image for God's pleasure and glory. It is not as if infinite God looked down upon earth and found here people who are struggling, suffering and striving against gigantic evil forces and felt His pity for their condition develop into compassion and love. Rather, God's love for the world is His natural concern for that which He Himself designed and created. Every person is a product of that design and therefore is an object of His deepest concern. Man is made for a purpose: to be in His image, to live in harmony with Him and operate on the plan He gave. Out of His love He provides all the needs for such operation, not what we may want or feel we need, but what He in His purpose knows we need, because His love is not a mere feeling but a desire to bring us to the fulfillment of His purpose.

What a narrow view many Christians have of God's love. Some think of His love only in the good times, when all is well and they are abundantly blessed. Some relate God's love only to their salvation from sin and its consequences.

Indeed, these things are products of His love, but we need to realize that God loves us in the bad times, that by permitting our pain and anguish He is not withholding His love and that even His judgment, whether in the present time or at the last day, is rendered in love.

The Bible teaches that just as a father's love compels him to chasten his children, we are chastened by our Heavenly Father because of His love. "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd of him; for whom the Lord loves he chastens."⁴

One big difference is that God makes no mistakes in His chastening. "For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness."⁵ Even though our love may be pure, we can only chasten our children as it "seems good" to us, and sometimes what seems good is not the best. But God makes no mistakes. He chastens because He loves us and would conform us to His own holy image. In His love He would mold us to His own design and purpose.

LOVE AND JUSTICE. Advocates of the "rights" of homosexuals often claim that, since God loves everyone, those who practice sodomy are also objects of His love and therefore acceptable to Him. What they fail to recognize is the fact that it is just God's love of His creatures that condemns this wickedness, which is diametrically opposed to the purpose He has for them. It was as husband and wife that God blessed man and woman that they might bring forth their own kind.⁶ Homosexuality perverts the Creator's design for sex and destroys its basic purpose, thus negating the purpose of God. Like all the other commandments of God, the ones that forbid sodomy reflect His love, love that wills only the good for all His creation.

It was love behind the action of God when He scattered the people from Babel and confounded their language. He would not allow them to reach the goal of their idolatry to become their own sovereign and thus lose any opportunity to gain the life He designed.⁷

It is one of the greatest joys and strongest consolations to the believer that God in His sovereignty will not allow His love to go unfulfilled. The love He has for His people will ultimately be consummated in their being fully conformed to His glorious image,⁸ in a new creation of total righteousness.⁹

However, God's love must be seen against the background of His holy nature, which is repulsed by the sin of His creatures. The wages of sin is death.¹⁰ To defy the Creator's design for life is to reject life itself. Such rebellion rejects the Author of love and cannot be excused nor tolerated in the name of love.¹¹ It is such a serious breach that reconciliation is possible only by the most severe accounting — the death of His Son, Jesus.¹² This not only points up the severity of man's sin but also the magnitude of God's love.

Thus His love will finally exclude all sin and sinners.¹³ The final judgment and destruction of all who reject God's purpose is not a sign of love's failure but the proof of love's victory. If God should continue to supply life to those who misuse it and who refuse to be brought out of their sin to His glory, not only would He be consigning them to continued misery, but by their survival they would mar the perfection of the creation for all others, so that His loving purpose could never be fulfilled. The final death of all who reject God's love will be an act of that love to bring harmony, peace and joy to all those who desire to fulfill the purpose of their creation.

How shall we respond to such love? We are to believe it. “Thus said Jehovah, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows me, that I am Jehovah who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, said Jehovah.”¹⁴

Whatever the change, the loss, the trial, the pain, we can know that God’s love does not fail, and nothing outside of our wills can separate us from God’s inexorable love.¹⁵

We are to return it. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”¹⁶ This has nothing to do with sentimental emotions or performing a ritual on Sunday morning. It implicates all of life, in all we do from day to day. It compels us to repent toward God, to learn all we can of Him, to read His word and let His word abide (live) in us,¹⁷ to renew our minds and bring about a transformation of our lives that will conform us to God’s will.¹⁸

We are to love our neighbor. “And a second like unto it is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁹ This tempers all our relationships, causing us to treat others as we would have them treat us.²⁰

“Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”²¹

“If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”²²

REFERENCES

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