

The Love of God

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Love is a generic idea today. We use this word to describe varying degrees of affection. We love our children. We love pizza. Of course, our affection for our children is quite different from our affection for pizza. Yet, the term “love” gets tossed around with little thought.

Love is both desperately sought and angrily demanded. Everything from war to homosexuality is promoted in the name of love. But, is love whatever we say it is? Is love culturally defined? Can love’s meaning be generationally altered?

Society’s views of love are always changing. People are often impartial in their application of love. People demand acceptance in the name of love on one hand, but, then, demand retribution when someone else does something of which they disapprove. Society defines love by emotional impulses and circumstance. The Bible reveals true love: the love of God.

1. Love is not approval. Before considering what love is, notice what love is not. Much of what we crave as humans are approval and acceptance. We experience this from birth. Our earliest understandings of love come from our parents. As children, we crave acceptance from our parents. As we grow into adults, we want validation for our identities.

The problem is that we seek approval for all sorts of different attitudes and behaviors. These values and lifestyles often clash with one another. In the chaos of this, we demand, “If you don’t accept me, you don’t love me.” Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we would admit that we know better than this.

For example, I never doubted my parents’ love for me. However, they did not always approve of my attitudes and behaviors. Their disapproval did not mean they did not love me. Their disapproval meant that I needed to change.

God’s love for us is fixed and unchanging. His love for us has been proven most significantly by the sending of His Son to die for our sins. Yet, the cross of Jesus also shows God’s disapproval of sin. He does not overlook injustice, oppression, and or wrongdoing of any kind. By His love, he offers the world the atoning sacrifice of His Son to forgive and transform sinners.

2. Love comes from God. The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). Love originated with Him. We can experience love because He has poured Himself into us and our world. This is a consequence of us being made in His image. While this sounds appealing, we must not overlook an important implication. If God is love, then, God has defined love. He has established what love is and what love is not. Therefore, love is not culturally defied. Love cannot be generationally altered. Love is as fixed and constant as God.

3. The offering of God’s love is grace. The apostle of love explained the dynamic of our relationship with God. We love God because He *first* loved us (1 John 4:10). We did not earn, merit, or win God’s love. Cold-hearted parents make their children earn their affection. Sadly,

such a perverted family dynamic never works. Children in these relationships never gain the love of their parents. Thankfully, this is not how our relationship with God operates.

God poured His love into us when He gave us His image. As amazing as it is, we were made to experience God's love. Equally amazing, God gave us His Son to save us from our sins. John wrote, "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:8-10). Love compelled God to offer grace to the world.

4. The loving grace of God is received by faith. Paul explained this theological dynamic when he wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). We can only receive the blessings of grace by faith. Without faith, we cannot experience the grace of God. Being made in the image of God will mean nothing to us without faith. Salvation will never be received without faith in what God did for us through Jesus.

What's the Point?

How can we experience the love of God? By demanding God accept us as we are? By demanding our families approve of our lifestyles? No. We experience the love of God by receiving His grace through faith. To put it another way, we experience God's love by obeying the Gospel.

Love is not whatever we declare it is. Just because someone does not approve of our lifestyle does not mean he or she does not love us. Such thinking is immature in every sense of the word. Love has a definition, standard, and example. Love is affection for the physical and spiritual welfare of people. Love is longing for righteousness. Love causes sadness towards injustice, oppression, and loss. Love is sacrificial, self-giving, and unconditional. Love is perfectly shown in God. Love is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The love of God shown on the cross of Jesus is intended to break our hearts. God's love for us as sinners is designed to humble us and draw us to Him. Using a veiled reference to His cross, Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). Receive the loving grace of God by surrendering your will at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

