

God's Love is Real

One of the most beautiful and yet most simple sentences in the Bible is the one that says "God is love" (1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:16). God's love speaks of His remarkable concern for the human family. And God's love is real; it is not imaginary or pretended; it is genuine and authentic. The hymnwriter says, "God's love is as real as the food that we eat; it is as real as our hands and our feet."

The first songs that children learn to sing in Sunday School classes (when they are still hardly able to carry a tune), are songs about God's love. I have not been blessed with a gift for singing well, but as younger children, we delighted to sing the words of the little chorus, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." And Philip Bliss wrote the words, "I am so glad that our Father in heaven, tells of His love in the Book he has given; wonderful things in the Bible I see, but this is the dearest, that Jesus loves me."

When we speak about **the love of God**, we are talking about the Lord's wonderful concern for the human family. God's love may be defined as the characteristic which causes the Heavenly Father to desire our everlasting welfare. God first loved us when we had no love for Him. Most people categorize us on the basis of how we perform, what we achieve, and how we look. But God says in essence (Luke 12:7) that every human being is worth more than a whole flock of sparrows!

God's love is beyond our powers of understanding. Ephesians 3:19 speaks of "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." God's love staggers the imagination. But not only does God's love for us pass understanding, it also is undeserved. There is nothing **in us** that calls God's love into being. Romans 5:8 says that God's love was demonstrated toward us, in that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God loved us even while we had been selfish, rebellious, and unloving toward Him.

God's love toward us is universal. In the book of Ephesians we read about the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God. God's love is broad enough and deep enough to reach out to the most wretched person on earth—the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the white and the black. But the real question for each of us is this: How can I know that God loves **me**? How does God demonstrate His love? In what ways can we be sure that God loves **each one of us**? We want to note some responses to those questions, and take a more careful look at the evidences of God's love for us.

1. The Giving of Jesus Christ

The gift of Jesus to die for the sins of the world is the supreme evidence of God's love for us. First John 4:9-10 says, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The atoning sacrifice of Jesus (the shedding of His blood) was an act of overwhelming love. God demonstrated His love toward us in that "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The phrase "for us" can be translated "in place of us" or "instead of us." On the cross, something happened to Jesus, and because it happened to Him, it need not happen to us. Jesus became our Substitute.

The death of Jesus was humanly unjust. He never committed a single crime that could be truly charged against Him. Jesus did not deserve to die. The life of Jesus was perfectly holy. He never looked with lust; He never uttered an unkind word; He never entertained an impure thought. Jesus was never accused by conscience; He was never inflamed by wrong passions; He was never out of step with the will of God. Jesus' time was never wasted; His influence was never bad; His judgment was never wrong. He never had to apologize for anything; He never had to retract a single word that He spoke; He was never upset, never shallow, never afraid. The wide consensus of opinion is that Jesus Christ was the only perfect person who ever lived.

Jesus never committed a single crime, and yet they stripped Him, and scourged Him, and spit upon Him, and crowned Him with thorns. They reviled Him and mocked Him and challenged Him and cursed Him. There He is—the Son of God—the Creator of the world, hanging on a cross, His body dripping with blood. Jesus was crucified, and crucifixion is one of the most shameful and excruciating ways to die. It is much worse than hanging, or beheading, or shooting, or the gas chamber, or the electric chair. Those other methods are quick ways to die; crucifixion brings on a slow, lingering, and painful death. And we must remember that our Lord's death was voluntary. Jesus could have called ten thousand angels and very quickly escaped the suffering of the cross. But instead, Jesus hung there—and bled and died—and in doing so, it was God saying to each one of us, "Friend, I love you." The death of Jesus on the cross is the supreme evidence of the love of God for us.

2. The Bestowing of Pardon

Isaiah says, "Thou hast in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isaiah 38:17). God stands ready in His love to pardon the sins of each living human being. He will pardon the most vile sinner when there is genuine repentance. God expects that we forsake our sins, and that we turn to Him in faith and repentance and obedience. He says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord . . . for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

A young man who served in the United States Army during World War II, told how one day scores of enemy soldiers came pouring out of an old building with their hands upraised for surrender. "But," he said, "another soldier and I mowed them off as fast as they came pouring out of the old building. We murdered them in cold blood." And then he said, "Is there any hope for me?" And the answer is, "Yes there is hope, no matter how black or how wicked the sin may have been." God says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

Your heart may be black and as wicked as a human heart can be, but one who proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ is happy to announce that because of the love of God, it can become as white as a newly fallen snow! When we honestly repent, and acknowledge our transgressions—God pardons us, and casts our sins behind His back, and remembers them against us no more. That is a tremendous evidence of God's love for us. Again we quote from Isaiah, "Thou hast in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isaiah 38:17)

You may have profaned God's name, and violated His sabbaths, and fallen into adultery, and trampled under foot the atoning blood of Jesus—but still, like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son—God waits for you, and calls for you, and pleads with you. God loves us and wants to save us from the awful penalty for sin. The old Gospel hymn says, "God loved the world of sinners lost, and ruined by the fall; salvation full at highest cost, He offers free to all." Those words express a great biblical truth.

3. The Good Circumstances of Life

Another evidence of God's love for us is seen in the good events of life. Jesus speaks about God the Father, and says, "For he makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Every blessing of life is really a love-token from God. We read in James 1:17 that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." And since God doesn't change (see the last part of verse 17), every gift God gives is a good gift for us.

When the sun shines with its warmth and gladness, we need to lift up our heads and say, "This beautiful sunny day is a token of my Father's love." When the snow falls and provides nutriment for the soil, and nourishment for the crops, and its protection from the extreme cold, we need to say, "This is a token of our Father's love." When flowers bloom and the grass grows and the trees bring forth leaves—and the gardens produce their fruits and vegetables we need to say, "All this beauty is a token of God's love." When you feel health and strength flowing through your veins, take time to say, "Thank you Lord for this evidence of your love."

The countless blessings that come to every one of us each day of our lives are tokens of God's great and constant love for us. An unknown poet says:

"I see God's love in simple things,
Enjoyed by common folks, and kings;
I see God's love in the trees and flowers,
In sunlight and the summer showers;
In those who give me loving care,
And those who help my burdens bear.
I see God's love in the mountain peaks,
And hear it when the small child speaks;
I see it in the rainbow's hue—
Green moss, and misty morning dew;
In bird songs at the break of dawn,
In sunrise, at the early morn . . ."

Each blessing of life is a love-token from God. Isaac Watts wrote the words, "My God, how endless is thy love! Thy gifts are every evening new; and morning mercies from above, gently fall like early dew." The blessings of life are evidences of God's love.

4. The Chastening Hand of the Lord

A sobering truth is expressed in Hebrews 12:6, where we read, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” God trains those whom He loves and chastises every son whom He accepts.

It is not always easy for a loving parent to train and discipline a child, but it is necessary. Lack of discipline and training causes us to question a parent’s love, because it shows a lack of concern for the character development of the child. And just so it is not always pleasant to be corrected and trained and disciplined by our heavenly Father—but His discipline is a sign of His love for us. When God disciplines and corrects us, we must look at the scolding as proof of His love, and seek to discover what it is that He is trying to teach us.

God’s love is evident in His sending trial and bereavement and pain and sorrow and sickness and disappointment into our lives. R. A. Torrey describes a situation in his family that happened long ago. He says, “For many years, God spared my wife and me and our family from serious sickness. He had given deliverance again and again. But one day, diphtheria entered our home, and in a few short days, our little daughter was taken away suddenly in death. It was a stunning blow. March 17 never comes around each year without our thinking about it. For the first time, our immediate family circle was broken. The body of our child was carried away from our happy home and laid in a small lonely village cemetery.”

Why did God permit it?

R. A. Torrey said, “Because He loved us.” Torrey continued: “We needed this experience; it led to some deep heart-searching, to a discovery of failures, to a confession of sins, and to a new consecration to God.”

My friends—God’s ways are unsearchable, but they are always wise and loving. Charles Spurgeon was visiting one time with a farmer who had an unusual weather vane on the roof of his barn. On the arrow of the vane were inscribed the simple words, “God is love.” Spurgeon said to the farmer: “What do you mean by that weather vane? Do you think God’s love is changeable, spinning about like that arrow turning in the wind?” The farmer said, “Oh no, I don’t mean that at all. I mean that whichever way the wind blows, God is still love!”

The words—whichever way the wind blows, God is still love—are true. God’s love is manifested in the good gifts that come our way, but there is also a dark side to love.

It was late at night, and a child lay restlessly on her bed. She had awakened with severe stomach pains, something that had been troubling her for several days. In a short time (on that night when she awoke with the sharp pains), her father had rushed her to the hospital. The little girl cried; she didn’t want to go; she sensed that it might be a painful ordeal. But the father took her anyhow. And in less than an hour, she was handed over to the surgeon who performed an emergency operation. He plunged his sharp knife into the vitals of the little girl’s body. When she came from the operating room it appeared as if she was near death—but several weeks later she was happy again, and much stronger.

The event just described is a picture of the dark side of love. Every move which that father had made was an act of tender love and of real concern. He loved the child just as much on the dark night when he rushed her into the hospital and delivered her to the surgeon's knife, as he did a few weeks later when he brought her home and delivered her into the arms of her happy mother. True love looks at the ultimate welfare of the one who is loved, and not at the immediate comforts. Just so, the Great Physician sometimes puts us on the operating table and takes the surgeon's knife, and lets us experience pain—especially when He sees sin and wickedness and spiritual indifference sapping away at our spiritual vitals. We must learn the great truth that God loves us just as much when He puts us on the operating table and uses His knife, as He does when He floods our lives with sunshine and joy.

Jesus spoke about the vine and the branches in John 15, and said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). Even branches that already bear fruit for God, he "prunes" (purgeth), that they may bear more fruit. In other words, God has not promised "skies always blue, flower-strewn pathways all our lives through. God has not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, nor peace without pain. But God **has promised** strength for the day, rest for the labor, light for the way; grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love."

These have been evidences of God's love—proofs that God's love is real: The gift of Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for sin; the bestowing of pardon to all who had fallen deeply into sin; the good circumstances of life; and the chastening and correcting hand of God upon us.

We appeal to those who have never accepted Jesus Christ as the only way to become reconciled to God: Why don't you believe the simple message that He was wounded for our transgressions and that He died for you and me? Why not repent of your sins and turn your life over to Him and let Him take charge? Identify with a body of believers where the Bible is preached and the people are seeking to live according to the truths of the Scriptures, and seek daily to mature in the Christian faith.

-Harold S. Martin

BIBLE HELPS

Robert Lehigh, Editor

PO Box 391

Hanover, PA 17331

United States of America