

708 "How Does God Love Us?"

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Today we're asking the question, "How does God love us?" God has such great concern for our welfare. In Matthew 10:29-31 Jesus asked, "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." God cares for His people and gives them the grace or favor they need. God's grace is for your pardon. God's power is for your protection. God's wisdom is for your guidance. God's goodness is for your relief and comfort. God's mercy is for your supply. Yes, God cares and will watch over you. You can count on his love and blessing in every circumstance of life.

The Love of God is shown in His goodness towards us. He is fully devoted to our best interests. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 we have a familiar passage about love: "Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." My friend God fits everyone of these categories. The more we know about God the more we love Him, because He is love personified. We might well say about God, "God is patient, God is kind and is not jealous; God does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; He does not seek His own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. God's love never fails."

God's devotion to us is unlimited. He has unreserved devotion to our best interests. He is deeply concerned with our welfare. God can only be pleased when those He loves find joy, and so He gives us the things we need to have great joy. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." The Lord wants more for us than mere survival; He gives us an abundant life. We are His children, precious to Him. Because of that He invites us to come to Him when we have needs. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" God wants to hear from us and wants to bless us, just as any loving father wants to provide for his children. I love the promise in Romans 8:32. Paul asked the rhetorical question, "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?" If God loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us, will He withhold any thing we need from us? No, a thousand times no.

God's devotion toward us is a committed devotion. It is not fickle or childish but sworn and sure. God's love towards us is covenant love—sworn to us with the utmost seriousness. "Chesed" is an Old Testament term referring to God's love, translated "loving kindness" or "steadfast love." This refers to God's covenant love. Twenty-six times in Psalm 136 the psalmist says his "loving kindness" is everlasting. That is, God has sworn to love us and bless us forever. There is no end to it. Each Sunday we remember God's covenant with us in the blood of Christ: "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28). The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of that

committed devotion found in a covenant ratified in blood. We remember Him as Christians "until He comes" at the end of time. The promises of God, the love of God, is not temporary. It will last longer than this earth will last. When the world ends at the second coming of Jesus, the love of Jesus will simply change from this world to heaven. Jesus is Lord of both the living and the death, and His love extends to the righteous both here and in the hereafter. You can never drift beyond the love of God.

This is why Paul asks in Romans 8:35-39, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 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.' But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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." God's love is the surest thing in the world. No matter what may happen to you or me, we can count on the love of Christ. My friend, there has never been a day, an hour, a minute, or even a second of time, when God has not loved you. Even in those times of heartache, disappointment, and discouragement God loved you. Even when you sinned against Him, He loved you (though He despised the sin). Like the father of the prodigal son, God has always been waiting for you to return if you have left Him. He loves you with an everlasting love—a committed love.

That love is often surprising to me. God loves us even when we don't deserve it. He loves us not because we are so good but because He is so good. Paul said in Romans 5:6-8, "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Though we were helpless, ungodly sinners, Christ died for us. He died to give us an opportunity to be redeemed. He shed His blood to lift us out of our sin and hopeless condition. His grace is greater than our sin; and His blood has the power of forgiveness. What kind of love is it that acts so boldly? What kind of love is it that acts for people who don't understand, deserve, or appreciate it? Jesus took the initiative to make a difference for all humanity. We are so blessed to have such love. Jesus loved us more than He did his own life. Such amazing commitment is hard to grasp, but it is true.

This is why I say about the love of God, that it is lavish devotion. David said in Psalm 86:15, "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and truth." God can be offended, but He is also understanding and compassionate. God hates sin passionately and must punish it, but He loves us so much that He is willing to forgive and remove our sins from us as we repent of them. Psalm 103:11 says, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him." If we could but understand how great His love truly is. Paul prayed that the Ephesians "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19). God's love is above our knowledge, but we can grasp a little of it looking at what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is this realization that makes our confidence in Him so strong and our lives so much full. Paul promises in Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

The love of God leads Him to unending devotion. The psalmist says in Psalm 103:17, "But the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children." God's sworn love is not fickle; God is no "fair-weather" friend. God's love is from everlasting to everlasting. Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 13:7-8 that Divine love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." You and I become weak and fail, we grow weary and quit, we give up and give out; but God never does! God keeps sending his sun and rain. He keeps blessing us, even when we aren't as faithful and loving as we ought to be. James said in James 1:17, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." Whatever we are, whatever we have, we owe it to the kindness and goodness of God the Father. God loves us because God is infinitely good, infinitely kind, and infinitely concerned about our welfare.

God's love leads Him to forgive. True devotion forgives. The psalmist said in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." God doesn't just forget our sins. He forgives us. Forgiveness is better than forgetting, because he loves us in spite of our sins. Forgiveness means that He no longer counts our transgressions against us (2 Cor. 5:20). David said in Psalm 103:9-10, "He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Some people never get over being offended. They remain angry forever. One woman I knew said that when someone sinned her, she counted that person as if he/she were dead. God is not like that. When we sin against Him, He longs to restore our friendship and love. He is able to forgive us and to put away His anger so that we can become friends again. Solomon said in Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." That's what God does. He covers over our transgressions and no longer holds them against us. God's love is not blind—it sees more, not less. Because He loves us and sees us as we are, He is able to accept us as we repent and turn away from our sins.

Since God has so lavished His love upon us, why do we grumble and complain? Why do we show discontent, resentment, and ingratitude over the little circumstances of life? Paul admonishes us in Philippians 2:14-15, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." Since God has so loved us, why do we ever become distrustful, fearful or depressed? Peter said in 1 Peter 3:14-15, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. and do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Since God so lavished His love upon us, why would we ever allow our loyalties to be divided and not give Him all my heart? James rebuked the people of his day in James 4:4-5, "do you not know that friendship with the

world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us'?" God wants our hearts, our trust, and our loyalty. If we love Him, we'll show Him these things.

God's love for us ought to lead us to love Him fully and freely. John said in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love" to make an ethical point to us: "let us love one another." God's devotion to us, His willingness to forgive us ought to move us to become more loving. After that marvelous thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul simply said in 1 Corinthians 14:1 "Pursue love." Love is something to pursue, because love is the greatest and highest quality of life. It the most important and valuable thing we can pursue. No prize is greater or nobler. My friend, can people see the love of God in your life. Paul said in Ephesians 5:1-2, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." There is no greater need today that for people not only to realize the love of God but also to live it out in their lives. I pray that you are doing that, my friend.

A thirty-six year old mother discovered she was in the advanced stages of terminal cancer. One doctor advised her to spend her remaining days enjoying herself on a beach in Acapulco. A second physician offered her the hope of living two to four years with the grueling side effects of chemotherapy and radiation treatment. She made her decision and wrote these words to her three young children: "I've chosen to try to survive for you. This has some horrible costs, including pain, loss of my good humor, and moods I won't be able to control. But I must try this, if only on the outside chance that I might live one minute longer. And that minute could be the one you might need me when no one else will do. For this I intend to struggle, tooth and nail, so help me God." Our God is committed like that toward us. He is not vacationing; He is with us 24/7 ready to help, to forgive, to comfort and to guide us. He has struggled to get close to us, to be part of our lives, to hear our prayers, to give us the guidance we need. We should be thankful to have such a God and should be willing to commit ourselves to Him. If God has been so willing to forgive, should we not be just as willing to serve and love Him? This means that everyday we live for Him, show His love in our lives, and stay close to Him by studying His Word, praying to Him, and worshipping Him. Staying close to God means that we become part of God's loving family, the church. To become part of His family we must hear the gospel of Christ (that is the story of His death, burial and resurrection) and obey that gospel by our faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Love leads to keeping the commandments. It doesn't make excuses or try to find some other way. Love is obedient and caring, not forgetful or selfish. Some people think that religion is something we explore individually, but God has His standards for our lives. We do not please God by pursuing some religion of our own making but by conforming to His will. If we love God, let's love Him in the way that pleases Him, in the way that He prescribes. Love wants to please the One it loves, and we must make every effort to please the God whom we love.

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