

Attributes of God 4 – Love

Reading: 1 John 4:8 “.... for God is love ¹.....”

Introduction:

This is the fourth lesson in the series, “Attributes of God”. In the first lesson, we saw that God is Spirit – He is invisible, although we can see His handiwork in the world around us, and the changes that He makes in the lives of people. In the second lesson, we looked at God’s relationship with mankind – that mankind was a distinctly special part of God’s creation, created in the image of God – and that God has always had an ongoing care for us, both physically and spiritually. In the last lesson we looked at God and His holiness – in Him there is no darkness whatsoever.

As we look at the attributes of God and His relationship to mankind, we need to keep in mind the following irrefutable facts. Firstly, all of us are guilty of sin (**Romans 3:23**). That is not what God intended for us (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**), but that is the way we are (**Ephesians 2:3**). Secondly, one day we are all going to have to stand before God in judgement (**2 Corinthians 5:10**), and if that was all there was to it, we would all stand before Him condemned. These facts have a direct bearing on the attribute we will be looking at today – God’s love.

LESSON

1) The biblical definition of the word “love”

When we read about God’s love in the scriptures, it is important that we understand the biblical meaning of the term. Many in this world have their own interpretation of what “God’s love” means. They usually believe (or want to believe) that God is all loving in the sense that He wouldn’t do anything to hurt anyone, that everything is all OK, and that we don’t really need to change our lives because He will save us all in the end anyway.

But is that what God’s love really is? To find the answer, we first need to turn to **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** to see how the bible describe “love”² (or “charity”);

- it suffers long
- is kind
- does not envy
- does not parade itself (*i.e.* boast)
- not puffed up
- does not behave rudely
- does not seek its own
- is not provoked, *i.e.* not easily angered
- thinks no evil
- does not rejoice in iniquity
- rejoices in the truth

While elements of love include kindness, affection (**Romans 12:10**) and compassion (**Matthew 9:36**), it is not the “all touchy-feely”, “never upset anyone” type of love that many in the world consider it to be. It is a sober-

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² In some translations, the word “charity” is used. But whichever word is used in this context, they are drawn from “agape love” – Greek words 25 and 26 in Strong’s Concordance.

Attributes of God 4 – Love

mind³ (**1 Peter 5:8a**) love that seeks what is best for the other person, even if it involves discipline and correction at times (*e.g.* **Hebrews 12:7-11**).

We saw in lesson two of this series that there is a special relationship between God and mankind. We were created in God's image (**Genesis 1:26-27**). We too are spiritual beings, currently living in a physical body (**Matthew 10:28; 2 Corinthians 4:16**). God loves us and wants everybody to be saved eternally (**2 Peter 3:9**), for that is what's best for us. Everything that God has said and done through His word over the passage of time has been done with this aim – to encourage us to live righteously and have eternal life in Him, rather than for us to be lost and spend eternity in Hell.

2) God's love

It would be impossible for anyone to fully describe God's love, least of all in a single lesson. But today, I want us to consider two areas where God shows His love towards us.

a) God's love takes the initiative

Our love for other people often comes after we have known (or known of) them for a while and, as a result, we are attracted to them because of their good qualities. At the same time, we tend to not love (or at least dislike) those who have qualities that are unattractive to us.

But this is not the type of love that God has for us. He loves us, in spite of our failings. He knows that one day we must stand before Him in judgement (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). He also knows that without Him, we would be lost because of our sins (**Isaiah 59:2**), and that we cannot save ourselves (**Proverbs 16:25; Jeremiah 10:23; Ephesians 2:8-9**). Therefore, He has always taken the initiative;

i) Spiritual guidance

From as far back as the time of Adam and Eve, God has given mankind, up front, laws and commands that are designed to protect us spiritually. The command about not eating from the tree of knowledge (**Genesis 2:17**) was to protect Adam and Eve from spiritual death. The Law of Moses was to teach the Hebrews what was right and what was wrong (**Romans 7:7**). It was to guard and protect them spiritually until the coming of Christ (**Psalms 119:105; Galatians 3:19, 23-24**). And we have His word today to equip us for every good work and save our souls (**2 Timothy 3:16; James 1:21**).

Many people view God's law as being restrictive. But the correct way to approach His commandments is to see them as protective. God doesn't want us to be corrupted by the ways of the world, for He knows that in the end, worldliness will do us spiritual harm (**1 John 2:15-17**). And so, because He loves us, He teaches and guides us.

ii) Sending Jesus to enable our sins to be forgiven

God is a just God (**Revelation 15:3**), and therefore He simply can't turn a blind eye to sin or pretend it never happens. Sin has consequences (**Romans 6:23a**), and a penalty has to be paid in order for justice to be served. To illustrate this point, imagine the outrage in

³ *i.e.* rational, sensible (ref: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sober-minded>)

Attributes of God 4 – Love

society if a child molester was brought before the courts and found guilty by the jury, but the judge said, “*Don’t worry about. Let’s forget it ever happened and let the man go free.*” You see, even we humans understand the concept that justice demands a penalty for wrongdoing.

We sin, and so justice demands that our sin carries a penalty. But this is where we see God’s greatest act of love. He would pay the penalty for our sins Himself. In **Romans 5: 7-8** we read;

“⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.

⁸But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

I want us to notice four things from these verses;

- Firstly, being prepared to give your own life to save someone else is no trivial matter. It’s a big and very serious decision.
- Secondly, God’s love was the motivation behind sending Jesus. Remember from **1 Corinthians 13:5**, “*love ... does not seek its own ...*” God was thinking of what is best for us.
- Thirdly, God didn’t wait until we repented before He acted. He acted first.
- And fourthly, God paid a cost – the slow, cruel, agonising death of His only Son. Love sometimes requires the “love-giver” to suffer a loss; to make a sacrifice in order to benefit others. And God made the supreme sacrifice – the death of His own Son.

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, and God’s mercy, we now have the forgiveness of sins. Those who obey the gospel are no longer condemned, but have eternal life (**Romans 8:1; Colossians 1:21-23a; 1 John 5:13**).

God’s love for us is demonstrated through Him taking the initiative to save and guide us.

b) God’s adopts and treats us as His children

When we were unsaved sinners, we were alienated from God (**Ephesians 4:17-19**). Because of our sins, we had separated ourselves from a close relationship with Him. We were spiritual orphans.

But for those of us who have obeyed the gospel, He has adopted us as His children (**1 John 3:1**). He is our Father (**Galatians 4:6**), a Father who cares for us (**1 Peter 5:7**). We saw earlier in this lesson how God shows His care by giving us spiritual guidance through His word. But there are also other ways in which He shows his care. For example;

i) He disciplines us

God shows His love and care for His children through His discipline⁴. In **Hebrews 12:6-11**, we read that, because God loves us, He chastens (*i.e.* corrects by punishment) us as sons. How this chastening takes

⁴ When we think of the word “discipline”, we often only think of it only in terms of punishment. But discipline also includes training, instruction and guidance, e.g. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**.

Attributes of God 4 – Love

place can be subjective. It may be in the form of unpleasant circumstances, or feelings of guilt, *etc.* God may even allow us to go through times of hardship, just as He did with His children of Israel in the Old Testament (*e.g.* **1 Kings 11:11; 2 Kings 18:11-12; Jeremiah 40:3**).

But whatever form God's chastening takes, as unpleasant as it may be, **Hebrews 12:10** tells us that it is for our profit; our advantage. Verse **11** says us that it "... yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness ...".

Because He loves us, God chastens us so that we learn to become like Him (**Ephesians 4:22-24; Galatians 2:20**). He created us in His image (**Genesis 1:27**), and that is the way we are meant to be.

ii) He wants us to bring our problems to Him in pray

Like any godly father, He is concerned for our welfare, both physical and spiritual. When we have concerns and anxieties, He wants us to bring them to Him through prayer (**Philippians 4:6**). Whether it be physical needs, such as food or sickness (**Luke 11:3; James 5:14**), or whether it be spiritual needs, such as forgiveness or the cleansing of our hearts (**Matthew 6:12; Psalm 51:10**), He wants us to bring them before Him.

And He will answer the prayers offered in faith from a humble heart (**James 1:6-7; 1 Peter 3:12; 5:5**). The answer He gives might not always be what we expect or want. Just as a child doesn't always understand why their parents say "No" sometimes, there will be times when God's answer is "No", or "Not yet", or maybe even something completely different to what we asked for⁵. But one thing that we can be certain of is this: whatever His answer is, it will be the right answer that is best for us (**Romans 8:28**).

I would like to quickly mention one other blessing that we have as His children. We share in His inheritance – a perfect and eternal home in heaven (**Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4**). In **Revelation 21**, the apostle John describes it in earthly terms so that we can start to imagine what it is like. It will be a place where pain and sorrow no longer exist (vs.4). It is a place where the saved shall be forever in the presence of God (vs.3) where only righteousness dwells (**2 Peter 3:13**).

Our God, the one and only true God, is a God of love. His love is a sacrificial love. His love is a fatherly love. His love is a guiding love. His love is a chastening love. His love is a saving love. For God is love (**1 John 4:8b**).

3) Because of God's love for us, so we are to love one another

God's love for us was never meant to be just a "one way" thing. We are required to love others in the way that God loves us for at least the following three reasons;

⁵ Some of the reasons why God's response may not be what we were seeking or expecting may be found in verses such as; **Micah 3:4; Matthew 6:15; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; James 4:3; 1 Peter 3:7, 12b.**

Attributes of God 4 – Love

- as His children, we are to imitate Him (**Ephesians 5:1-2**). God loves, therefore we should love.
- we are commanded to love (**Matthew 5:44-45; 1 John 3:18; 4:21**) – note the reference in Matthew about us being “... *sons of your Father*”
- it should be our natural response when we consider God’s love for us (**1 John 4:11, 19**).

A lot of the time, our approach and attitude towards other people is based on how they look, or on the things that they do or say, *etc.* But God, while not ignoring a person’s sins, looks past the externals and sees the soul within - a soul that needs saving (**Luke 19:10**). That is why He has gone to extraordinary lengths, even to the point of sacrificing His own Son, to make our salvation possible (**John 3:16**).

Like God, our approach to people should be to seek what is best for them, both spiritually and physically. That is why we are called on to do things such as;

- forgiving one another (**Ephesians 4:32**).
- being patient and long-suffering with one another (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**).
- if necessary, being prepared to accept having being wronged by someone in order to keep peace and unity (**1 Corinthians 6:7**).
- being prepared to make a sacrifice in order not to cause another to stumble in their faith (**1 Corinthians 8:13**).
- encouraging the faint hearted (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**)
- teaching and admonishing one another (**Colossians 3:16**)
- warning and rebuking the unruly (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**)
- praying for one another (**1 Thessalonians 5:25**)
- providing material help where we can to those in need (**1 John 3:17-18**).

All these things fit the biblical definition of love, and are designed to help all of us to get to heaven.

We should never cease to give thanks to God for His love (**1 Thessalonians 5:18a**). For without His love, His grace and His mercy, we would all be lost (**Ephesians 2:4-8**). But we should also remember that we are to love others in the same way that He has loved us.